

National College of Ireland Quality Assurance Handbook



Chapter 3: Programme Development, Delivery, Evaluation and Review

July 2011

Version	Updated By	Comment
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1 Introduction

This section outlines NCI's policies on programme development, delivery, evaluation & review. These processes do not exist in isolation and where appropriate, cross reference will be made to policies within this chapter and in other chapters of the handbook.

2 Policy for Programme Development, Delivery, Evaluation & Review

Programmes will be developed to ensure that graduates will be competent in a specific discipline. This competency will be measured in achievement of stated minimum intended learning outcomes which are based on the knowledge, skills and competence framework of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Except where approved by Academic Council, all programmes developed by National College of Ireland will be placed on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and according to the award standards and criteria for validation of the appropriate awarding body.

Programmes will be developed to ensure that there is a simple articulation and progression route within the National College of Ireland or, that arrangements can be made for such routes with named educational institutions and programmes.

Programmes will be developed that are consistent with NCI's mission and current strategic plan and where there are appropriate resources to deliver and support those programmes.

Programmes will be developed and delivered using the principles of universal design to ensure that all learners can access the programme and its curriculum

Programmes and their delivery will be annually evaluated by their Programme Team to ensure that they are being delivered according to their approval, that minor amendments informed by learners and faculty can be incorporated and that their minimum intended learning outcomes are being met.

Programmes will be reviewed every 5 years

3 Programme Structure

3.1 General Principles

- Programmes are developed as Major, Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental Awards¹. The size of the programme will determine the award type. Programme size is expressed in terms of credit.
- There are national and European guides to the use of credit, which should be applied to the development of programmes at National College of Ireland.

¹ See NQAI: Determinations for the outline National Framework of Qualifications <http://www.nqai.ie/docs/publications/12.pdf>

- Modules on higher education programmes should be expressed in credit sizes of a minimum of 5 and thereafter in multiples of 5 where 1 credit = 25 effort hours² (ECTS)
- Modules on further education programmes should be expressed in credit sizes of 10 or a multiple of 10 where 1 credit = 10 effort hours³. (CATS) See 4.2.3 for more detail.
- Undergraduate programmes at level 6 of the NFO and above, will normally be developed using a configuration of 2 x 10 credit and 2 x 5 credit modules per 30 credit semester.
- Programmes are developed and delivered in Stages. For undergraduate major awards, a stage is normally complete when 60 credits of learning has been completed⁴. This stage may be delivered over more than 1 academic year in the case of part-time programmes.
- Where programmes are developed to be delivered in semesters, semesters consist of 15 weeks during which teaching, independent learning and assessment is completed.
- Semesters may not be appropriate for programmes at lower levels of the NFO, or for smaller volume minor and special purpose awards.
- Off-campus locations should be chosen where possible, so that they can support the semesterised delivery of programmes to coincide with on campus delivery.
- Programmes being developed or delivered with other organisations are required to follow the Collaborative Provision policy outlined in Section 5 below
- These programmes and any programmes which require variation in approval e.g an off-campus centre, another jurisdiction or blended learning may also require Differential Validation as outlined in Section 6 below.

Table 1 outlines the nationally agreed structure of awards as appropriate to their level and size.

NFO Level	Award Type	Awarding Body	Credit Range/Min Credits		Award Title
			ECTS	CATS	
6	Major	HETAC	120		Higher Certificate
6	Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental	HETAC	>=10		
7	Major	HETAC	180		BA (Ord) BSc (Ord)
7	Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental	HETAC	>=10		Certificate <60 credits Diploma >=60 credits
8	Major	HETAC	180-240		BA(Hons) BSc (Hons)
8	Major	HETAC	60		Higher Diploma
8	Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental	HETAC	10		Certificate <60 credits Diploma >=60 credits
9	Major	HETAC	60-90		Postgraduate Diploma Masters Degree

² See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf for guidance on the use of ECTS

³ See <http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/cats2010.pdf> for guidance on FETAC credits

⁴ See HETAC(2009) Assessment & Standards for discussion on stages

NQF Level	Award Type	Awarding Body	Credit Range/Min Credits		Award Title
			ECTS	CATS	
9	Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental	HETAC	10		Certificate <60 credits Diploma >=60 credits
10	Major	HETAC	360		

Table 1: Structure of Education Awards

4 Programme Development

4.1 HETAC awards⁵

Programmes for validation by HETAC should be developed according to the following validation criteria:

4.1.1 Development & Publication of Explicit Intended Learning Outcomes

- The target learners prerequisite learning and other relevant assumptions e.g. work experience are specified
- The minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLO) and any other educational consequences of the programme are specified
- The MIPLOs are consistent with the appropriate discipline award standards for the proposed level of the award on the National Framework of Qualifications
- MIPLOs should emphasise profound learning outcomes more than transient learning outcomes (i.e. outcomes that are easily acquired and can date more quickly)

4.1.2 Attention to Curriculum & Programme Design and Content

In keeping with the European Standards & Guidelines on Quality Assurance, evidence of the following should be demonstrated in the development of a programme.

- **The programme's content and learning environment are appropriate to the programme's intended learning outcomes**
- **The programme's staff are competent to enable learners to achieve the MILPOs and to assess learners according to current assessment principles and regulations**
- The programme's learning environment – physical, social, intellectual – is consistent with the MILPOs. This includes access to appropriate information services, information technology and other learning supports
- Programme content – including reading lists, lecture notes and any other material should be supported
- The programme should make reasonable accommodation for learners with disabilities
- For international learners, appropriate provision should be made

The programme involves authentic learning opportunities to enable achievement of the intended programme learning outcomes

⁵ HETAC (2010) Core Validation Policy & Criteria

- **The programme's strategy for enabling learners to move from entry to the MIPLO** should be explicit, realistic and viable. It should be provided in such a way to ensure that learners can reliably and efficiently attain the MIPLOs with reasonable effort **whilst complying with the programme's conditions of participation**
- The programme and module assessment strategy are both clear and appropriate. They should provide for the verification of the attainment of MILPOs – i.e. it must be clear that the programme learning outcomes have been assessed and that the learner has passed that assessment.
- In the case of a module programme, the pool of modules and pathway toward completion should be explicit and appropriate in the light of the MILPOs. Guidance should be available to learners on how to choose appropriate pathways through elective selection etc.

The programme should compare well against benchmarks where appropriate

- The programme should be comparable with other programmes at the same level and in similar fields of learning. Comparison should be made between programmes at a level below and above of the NQF or equivalent.

The programme information and its procedures for access, transfer and progression should be consistent with national policies

- The presentation of the programme should not lead learners to assume entry into a particular profession or another programme unless this is the case.
- In the case of regulated professions or professional bodies, the requirements should be explicitly stated e.g. pass marks may be higher, it may be necessary to take a particular module etc.
- **The programme's credit and provisions for prior learning should be consistent with nationality policy**

The programme should meet genuine education & training needs

- **The programme as a process and the MILPO's should be informed by the views of stakeholders** such as learners, graduates, lecturers, employers, professional bodies, advisory bodies, community groups etc.
- Where a programme is publicly funded, due regard should be made to relevant public policy

The programme should be viable

- A viable delivery and business plan should be available for the programme. This will be developed through the feasibility and development stages of the process. Due regard should be given to minimum and maximum cohort sizes, resource capacity and consistency with the College mission and current strategy
- Contingency arrangements should be in place to adapt to changing arrangements or the failure of the programme.

The programme should procedures for assessment that are consistent with Assessment & Standards 2009 (See Chapter 4 of the Quality Assurance Handbook)

Arrangements for the protection of learners are in place should the programme cease

Appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place for the programme. Any new procedures required for newly developed or amended programmes should be agreed with HETAC.

4.1.3 Specific needs of different modes of delivery & types of higher education

Programmes should take into account specific modes of delivery required for differing cohorts of learner. Where appropriate, validation should seek to ensure that off-campus, and blended learning are included. Programmes may also seek to use work based learning, experiential learning and other methods to support differing contexts.

Whilst module learning outcomes may be the same, faculty are encouraged to ensure that content exemplars used in class are appropriate to the context and that in the case of mature and part-time learners, their experience is used in the classroom.

4.1.4 Internal Validation Process

There are 3 processes require to support the internal validation process:

1. Initial programme feasibility study
2. Phase 1 Development
3. Development to Completion

Figure 1 represents this process

4.1.4.1 Initial Programme Feasibility

This stage outlines the feasibility stage of the programme. The programme proposal form outlines to Executive Board and Academic Council, the strategic and academic rationale for the proposed programme. Whilst the programme being proposed may have been agreed during the strategic planning process, this form must be completed to ensure that the programme still has relevance to the strategic direction of the College and is viable.

A critical part of this stage is the market analysis. This stage is carried out by the Marketing department in conjunction with the programme proposer. The purpose of this stage is to review existing provision in the programme/subject area and to provide information on which the proposed programme can be benchmarked. The outcome of the market analysis will inform the decision of the School to propose a programme for development.

The proposal template should be completed as completely as possible as completion of this stage allows programme development to commence. An outline project plan with target delivery dates based on the intended programme commencement date should be provided. The paperwork to be submitted for this process is Form: QASS-3.PD.PPF1

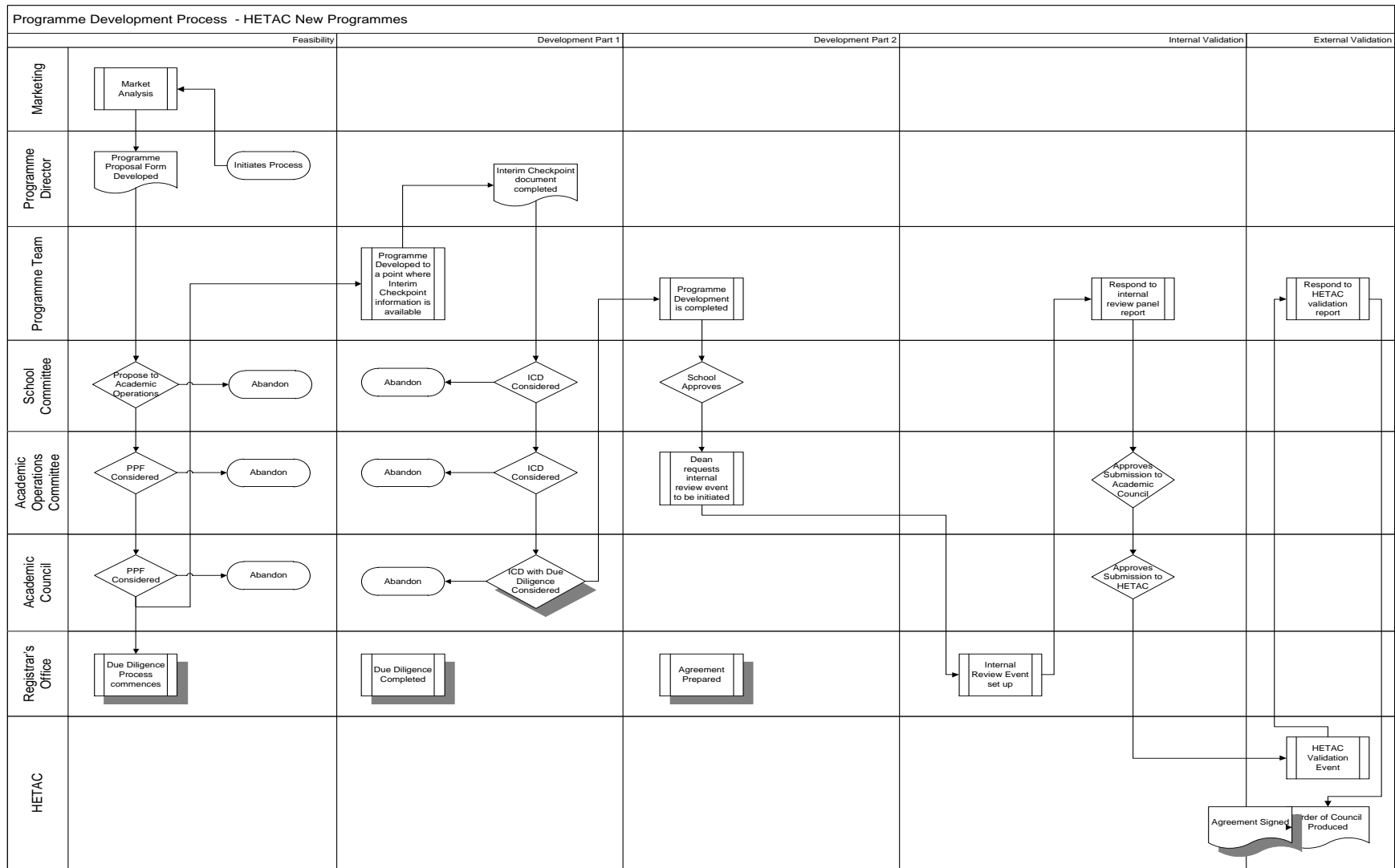


Figure 1: Programme Development Process – HETAC programmes (Shaded areas required for Collaborative Provision Only)

4.1.4.2 Phase 1 Development

This stage is an interim checkpoint in the programme development process which will allow further review of the viability of the proposal. It is expected that this will be at a time where sufficient development will have taken place for the programme team to provide indicative costs associated with running the programme and enable support services to commence planning for delivery of the programme. As a result of the development process, it may result in the programme team recommending that development is ceased or postponed due to changing priorities, unforeseen costs or other issues affecting the academic and economic viability of the programme. .

The date of this checkpoint will depend on the nature of the programme being developed and therefore will be indicated by the programme development team in its outline project plan which will be developed in Stage 1. The paperwork to be submitted is Form : QASS-3.PD.PD1

4.1.4.3 Development to Completion

Once phase 1 of development has completed and approved, the programme will proceed to final completion. The programme development and documentation should be completed with reference to the above validation criteria and templates for submission which are available on the staff portal at

https://myncistaff.ncirl.ie/policies/academic/Quality%20Documents/prog_dev.aspx

When deemed appropriate by the School, an internal review will be scheduled to critically and reflexively assess if the programme is ready for formal submission to HETAC.

4.1.4.4 Internal Review Panel

A Internal Review is carried out by an Internal Review Panel. The Internal Review Panel is required to make an impartial judgement on the standard, content and conduct of the proposed programme. **The term 'internal' refers to the ownership of the process. The panel will have members external to NCI.**

The Internal Review Panel must satisfy itself that the validation criteria laid out above are met.

4.1.4.5 Composition of Internal Review Panel

The School proposing the programme is responsible for constituting the Internal Review Panel. The Panel should include members familiar with current practice and developments in the relevant discipline.

Industry, Academia and the College shall be represented on the Internal Review Panel.

The Internal Review Panel comprises not less than four persons nominated by the School as follows:

- A chairperson, generally the Registrar or a senior academic from a School not involved in offering the programme;
- A member or a nominee of the Academic Standards and Policy Committee;
- Director of Quality Assurance and Statistical Services
- At least one external academic in the proposed programme discipline
- An external Industry representative in the area of the proposed programme
- Additional members may be added to the Panel where this is deemed necessary by to address to address the specific aspects of the Programme Submission Document.
- The Registrar shall formally consult with Nominees before they are nominated, to ascertain their willingness and availability to act on the Internal Review Panel.
- The Internal Review Panel shall use as its agenda the Outline Timetable and Content of a Typical Internal Review Event as outlined in Appendix 1
- The Quality Assurance & Statistical Services office will provide secretarial support to the panel.

4.1.4.6 Conflict of Interest

Members of the internal review panel will be required to provide details in writing of any conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest.

4.1.4.7 Report of Internal Review Panel

1. Where an Internal Review Panel is satisfied that the criteria above have been met the Registrar shall prepare an Internal Review Report to be sent to the Dean of School for consideration by the Provisional Programme Committee
2. The report of the Internal Review Panel and response from the School shall be circulated to the Academic Standards and Policy Committee for approval
3. Where an Internal review Panel is not satisfied that the criteria above have been met, the Programme Committee will be requested to resubmit the programme to the Academic Quality Committee
4. Following this consideration and, if necessary, amendments to the Programme Submission Document, then copies of the Programme Submission Document will be sent to the Registrar. The accompanying letter from the Dean shall confirm that amendments set out in the Internal Review Report have been completed.
5. The report forms part of the submission documents to HETAC

4.1.4.8 Self Assessment Report

Prior to submitting a programme to HETAC for validation, the programme team should prepare a self assessment report of how the programme meets the validation criteria outlined above. This self assessment should be evaluative noting areas that will require monitoring to ensure that the quality and standards of the proposed programme can be maintained.

4.1.4.9 Approval by Academic Council

Academic Council will approve submission to HETAC on receipt of the recommendation of the Academic Policy and Standards Committee. Academic Council should receive the following documentation:

- A brief overview of the programme outlining the rationale, intended audience, programme level learning outcomes and the proposed course schedule
- A copy of the internal review report and the School response to that report
- A copy of the programme team's self assessment report

4.1.5 External Validation Process

4.1.5.1 Submission to HETAC

The School provides all documentation to be submitted to HETAC. This documentation **should be provided to the Registrar's office together with a signed declaration from the Dean of School** that it has undergone the internal validation process above.

The Registrar is responsible for submitting the documentation to HETAC.

4.1.5.2 HETAC validation process

The validation process commences with a desk review by HETAC. This desk review may require additional information to be provided prior to HETAC constituting a panel.

HETAC is responsible for constituting the review panel.

4.1.5.3 Communication with HETAC

All communication takes place from the Registrar's Office only.

4.1.5.4 Preparation for External Validation Event

The External Validation Event, which includes the visit by the External Validation Panel to the College is organised by **the Registrar's Office, in co-operation** with the Dean of School.

The Registrar's Office agrees a date and location for the external Validation Event with HETAC and notifies the Dean of School of the agreed arrangements.

4.1.5.5 Preparation within School/Centre for External Validation Event

The Chairperson of the Programme Committee undertakes the following duties in preparation for the External Validating Event:

- (a) Ensures that copies of the Programme Submission Document are distributed to the members of the Programme Committee in adequate time prior to the Validation event;
- (b) Ensures that members of the Programme Committee have copies of all briefing documents (Industry Survey etc);
- (c) Organises meetings of the Programme Committee to prepare to present the Programme Submission Document in the best way possible to the External Validation Panel;

4.1.5.6 Validation Panel

A typical timetable for an External Validation Event is given in Appendix 2

4.1.5.7 Approval to run Programme

At the end of the External Validation Event, the Chairperson of the External Validation Panel normally makes an oral presentation of the findings and conclusion of the Panel to the President, the Registrar, the Dean of School and Chairperson of the Programme Committee.

The External Validation Panel prepares a written report that is sent to the Registrar of the College.

- The Report is forwarded by the Registrar to the Dean of School for response by the Programme Committee.
- If the report from the External Validation Panel sets conditions or makes recommendations requiring the proposed programme to be modified, the Dean of School arranges for the Programme Committee to be reconvened and additional work to be carried out in response to the findings of the validation process. This process should take no longer than 6 weeks. Any additional documentation is forwarded to HETAC via the Registrar
- When the proposed programme has received the final endorsement of the External Validation Panel, the Programme Committee and the Academic Council are informed.
- A copy of the signed Certificate of Programme Approval is issued by the Registrar to the Dean of School.
- The Programme Committee is appointed
- The programme is updated on the College MIS system (QuercusPlus) . The title, duration, mode, award, curriculum and assessment structure are cross checked against the approved course schedule by the **Registrar's Office.**
- The Registrar will, within 6 months of course approval, independently verify that the programme delivered corresponds to that approved by the Awarding Body

4.1.5.8 Programme Commencement

Executive Board approves the commencement of a programme. See Section 5 of this document. A programme may not commence until receipt of the Certificate of Approval from HETAC.

4.1.5.9 Approved Programme Document

- The Approved Programme Document consists of a revised and up-to-date version of the Programme Submission Document, and includes the Approved Course Schedules..
- A copy of this documentation will be held on the college document management system (MyNCIStaff) as the definitive approved document
- A copy of the formal approval from the Awarding Body will be held on the college document management system (MyNCIStaff)
- Any changes undertaken under Programme Delivery and Evaluation as outlined below will be added to this record.

4.2 FETAC awards

FETAC awards are developed using the Common Awards System. . It is a coherent and structured way of developing awards, which is consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications. It is outcomes based. By 2014 every FETAC award will be part of this system. This means that all awards will share common characteristics including:

- a common format. Awards Specifications make it easy to see the requirements and the standards for each award
- explicit reference to the award types and level indicators of the National Framework of Qualifications
- breadth and balance within the structure so that learners achieve specific expertise alongside general knowledge, skill and competence in line with the National Skills Strategy
- a focus on outcomes of learning - what learners will be able to do on achievement of the award. Standards of knowledge, skill and competence are expressed as learning outcomes, facilitating flexibility for providers and programmes
- a credit system, reflecting the typical amount of learning required, which enables learners to accumulate recognition over time
- a clear relationship with other FETAC awards to help plan access, transfer and progression
- a unique six digit code, signaling the level and award type
- accessibility for all registered providers

4.2.1 Award Types

There are four types of Common Award - major, minor, special purpose and supplemental.

Minor awards recognise small volumes of learning that are coherent and relevant in their own right, but also link to one of these award types. Minor awards are the building blocks for FETAC awards. Minor awards are also known as components.

4.2.2 Award Specifications

The requirements of common awards are outlined in award specifications. Specifications outline:

- how an award is structured
- the purpose of an award
- the learning outcomes for the award and
- the appropriate assessment techniques

Award specifications will be available for all major, minor, supplemental and special purpose common awards.

- certificate specifications, special purpose specifications and supplemental specifications set out the requirements for awards, including the named minor awards
- component specifications set out the requirements for a minor award

4.2.3 Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)

- common awards each have a credit value. Major, special purpose and supplemental awards each state the overall volume of credit that is required; credit is accumulated through the achievement of minor awards
- credits reflect the amount of learning that is required, based on a notional learning time for typical learners relevant to each level. Notional time includes directed, self-directed learning and effort. One Credit reflects a notional 10 hours of learner effort. Credits are consistently applied at each level. This assists the practical planning and management of programmes
- credits can be accumulated over time, through the achievement of minor awards. The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) creates new opportunities for learners to make all their achievements count more easily across the growing range of transfer and progression opportunities. Providers will be able to improve access arrangements to programmes because for the first time, all further education and training providers in Ireland will use a common credit system to describe achievement
- for detailed information on credits at each level, view www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/cats2010.pdf
- the Common Awards System is also compatible with ECVET. ECVET is a European initiative promoting mobility for learners, using credit as a common currency. It makes learning achieved abroad count in Ireland, and our achievements more easily understood in other countries
- any CAS major award at level 5 or 6 can be used as a basis for progression to higher education through the Central Admissions Office (CAO) on the basis of a consistent scoring mechanism. For detailed information view www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/casl56score2010.pdf

4.2.4 Programme Validation

Any programme leading to a common award must be validated by FETAC, prior to commencement of the programme. Only registered providers, who have agreed quality assurance systems with FETAC may submit programmes for validation. Consult [Awards for Validation at Level 1 and Level 2](#) and [Awards for Validation at Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6](#).

4.2.5 Internal Validation Process

Proposals for developing FETAC programmes should follow the internal validation procedure as outlined in Section 4.1.4.1-4.1.4.4 above

4.2.6 FETAC validation process

There are five key points in the validation process; submission, evaluation, decision, appeal and review.

4.2.6.1 Submission

Programmes must be submitted using an application form for programme validation. Providers are required to attend a briefing prior to applying for validation of their programme. Once the briefing has been attended an application form can be requested from validation@fetac.ie

On receipt of a completed application form for programme validation, from a provider, FETAC will perform an initial screening to ensure that all required information has been included in the application.

4.2.6.2 Evaluation

Following initial screening, submissions will be evaluated. Applications will be evaluated by experienced and trained programme evaluators. Evaluation involves comparing the application received with the published evaluation criteria. Programmes will be evaluated by programme evaluators who will recommend a decision to validate or not to validate to the FETAC Policies Committee. During this phase the provider may be contacted by FETAC with a Request for Further Information and given an opportunity to provide additional detail or clarify any issues arising.

4.2.6.3 Decision

The FETAC Policies Committee, on the basis of the evaluators' recommendations, will make the decision to validate a programme or to refuse validation. FETAC will endeavour to reach a decision in relation to the programme validation within 12 weeks of receiving the completed application.

Validated programmes:

Where a programme is validated the programme will be placed on the FETAC register of validated programmes. Formal notification of the validation will be sent to the provider along with terms and conditions attaching to validation. A programme code will be issued for use in all future communication. Summary details of the validated programme will be posted on the FETAC website.

Programmes that are refused validation:

Formal notification of the validation decision will be sent to the provider. In addition, providers will receive detailed feedback from the evaluation process and information in relation to appeal.

4.2.6.4 Appeal

Where a programme is refused validation the provider may appeal the decision of the Policies Committee. An appeal can be made in the first instance to the Council and subsequently to the Authority (NQAI). The appeals process will also operate for providers where a decision has been taken, following review, to withdraw validation.

4.2.6.5 Review (by FETAC)

FETAC may at any time review the validation of a programme. In practice, review of validation will be conducted through ongoing monitoring activity.

Providers submitting programmes for validation must attend a briefing session. For levels 1 and 2, briefing sessions are organised by the [Further Education Support Service](#). For levels 3-6, briefing sessions are organised by FETAC. See [Briefings](#) for details of the next available briefing session.

Following attendance at the briefings, applications must be made by using the appropriate application form.

If a major award is being offered then the [Major Application Form](#) is appropriate.

If a Special Purpose, Supplemental or Minor award is being offered, then the [Express Application Form](#) is appropriate.

These forms are provided for information purposes only. Actual application forms are only issued directly to providers on request. This is because applications for validation are made at provider level only. Following attendance at a briefing, a provider may request an application form directly from FETAC by sending an email to validation@fetac.ie

FETAC has developed guidelines for providers to assist in preparing for programme validation. These are:

[Programme Validation Levels 1 and 2: Provider Guidelines](#)
[Guidelines for Preparing Programme Descriptors](#)

4.3 Professional Body Awards

4.3.1 CIPD

Applications for CIPD recognition should be made using the required templates of the CIPD.

All documentation should be prepared by the Programme or Subject team involved and approved by the Dean of School.

The Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services will review documentation prior to submission

Documentation should be submitted to the CIPD from the Registrar's office

4.3.2 ICM

Applications for ICM approval should be made using the required templates of ICM.

All documentation should be prepared by the Programme or Subject team involved and approved by the Dean of School.

The Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services will review documentation prior to submission

Documentation should be submitted to ICM **from the Registrar's office**

4.3.3 Professional Body Exemption Applications

Professional Body exemption applications should be made using the required documentation of the professional body. All documentation should be prepared by the Programme or Subject group involved and approved by the Dean of School.

The Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services will review documentation prior to submission

Documentation should be submitted to the professional body from the Registrar's office

4.4 Programmes that do not lead to awards

In exceptional circumstances a programme may be proposed for which no credit or award is sought. These may be short programmes of training, seminars etc. Before presenting the programme to the Executive Board for processing, the proposer must normally seek the approval of the Dean of School from which the proposal originates and should also seek the approval of the School Committee for the proposal.

The proposal is then brought to Academic Operations Committee for approval to proceed. The originating School prepares the programme document

Issues for Consideration by the Academic Operations Committee

- Market demand
- Entry Requirements
- Ability of the School to resource the programme
- Learning Outcomes
- Course Content
- Learning Modes
- Assessment Strategies, if any
- Duration

4.4.1.1 Programme Review

Short Courses are subject to the same annual review process as all other programmes. Tailored learner satisfaction surveys will be adopted.

4.4.1.2 Programme Evaluation

Short Courses are subject to the same programmatic review process as all other programmes

5 Policy and procedures for the design, approval and quality management of collaborative provision & transnational education

This section of the Quality Assurance Handbook details the policy and procedures which should be followed for the design, approval and ongoing quality management of taught or research programmes operated in collaboration with other organisations in Ireland or

internationally.

This document is based on HETACs Policy for collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and joint awards –Accreditation, Quality Assurance, and Delegation of Authority (2008) as a key external reference point, but also is interdependent with other College policies and procedures relating to programme development, teaching, learning and assessment.

These should be read in conjunction with this document when relevant.

It also draws on the UNESCO (2005) Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, experiences of HEIs⁶ and best practice developed by the QAA (2004) in the UK.

NCI's academic Schools who are considering the development of a proposal for collaborative provision should contact the following at the earliest possible opportunity prior to developing a formalised relationship with a potential partner, to receive guidance and advice on the feasibility of developing such a proposal and the process for doing so:

- The relevant Dean of School (where not directly involved in development of the initiative) .
- Registrar
- Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services
- Where a proposal involves an overseas institution, Schools are also required to contact the International Office.

This policy should also be consulted when reviewing applications for admission under advanced entry from prospective partner Colleges from other jurisdictions and where agreements are being made to guarantee places on NCI programmes under advanced entry.

5.1 College policy on collaborative provision

Collaboration with other HEIs, industry and community organisations was identified as being one of the critical aspects of achieving the goals of the strategic plan. The College recognises the benefits of further developments in this area, but also the costs and potential risks, and therefore it considers proposals for collaborative provision on a case by case basis according to their merits.

Underpinning collaborative activity is a set of key principles which form the College's policy on collaborative provision. All activities

- **must be consistent with the College's** strategic plans, (ideally) arise from School plans and be congruent with the School's academic provision, bringing clear benefits to all those involved;
- should only be with other organisations,
 - which have the academic OR professional standing to successfully deliver programmes of study to appropriate academic standards,
 - the financial standing to sustain them,
 - adequate infrastructure facilities and resources (including appropriate

⁶ E.g. <http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/quality/collaboration/Policies/newcollabprov.html>
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/pandpcp.pdf>
<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/cpo/collaborative-partnerships.php>

- staffing) to support them and
 - o the legal standing to contract to their delivery;
- should be equivalent in quality and standards to comparable programmes delivered solely by the College,
- should be comparable in student learning, support and experiences to those programmes based at the College;
- should give adequate opportunity for student representation and feedback;
- should be financially viable and feasible, and be fully costed and priced accordingly;
- should not be over-reliant on an individual member of staff, either within the National College of Ireland or the other organisation;
- should be compliant with internal and national (Irish or EU) legislative requirements and adhere to the principles of the Charter on inclusive teaching (AHEAD 2010) and guidelines for the teaching of international students (IHEQN, 2009)

The due diligence activities of the process should test each of these principles.

Except where the subject matter of the course is a language, English is the primary language of instruction and assessment.

5.2 Defining collaborative provision

Building on the **definition of collaborative provision given in HETAC's Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and joint awards – Accreditation, Quality Assurance, and Delegation of Authority**, the College defines collaborative provision as:

Any programme directly leading to an award (HETAC, FETAC or professional body) which is delivered in part or in whole through an arrangement with a partner organisation. A partner organisation may be another education provider, professional body, business or community organisation.

In this context 'delivered' includes any combination of one or more of the following activities: admissions decisions, teaching, programme design, preparation of learning materials, and assessment.

Activities which fulfil this definition fall into the following categories:

- The application for validation of programmes designed and delivered jointly with the partner institution where that institution
 - o is not an education provider or
 - o is one which does not have degree awarding powers e.g. another HETAC provider who does not have delegated authority)
- Collaboration on research projects (See 1.6.1 below)

Other types of arrangements with Partner Institutions which are felt to fall short (to a greater or lesser extent) of true collaborative provision include:

- Off campus/in company delivery
- Recruitment arrangements (entry to the start of a programme)
- Student exchange and study abroad arrangements
- Placement/Service learning

- Articulation arrangements (direct entry to an advanced point in a College programme)

These arrangements will not normally be subject to the full in depth approval process which applies to collaborative provision arrangements, but are still subject to appropriate approval processes. In the case of all articulation arrangements, a partner profile is required to be completed (Appendix part 3) . These arrangements can be requested to undergo the full approval process at the discretion of the Vice President, Academic Administration or the Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services (QASS). This is particularly true of due diligence of the partner organisation. This must be completed where articulation **(progression) is being guaranteed from a partner's programme of study to the NCI programme of study.**

Specific College policies exist for the establishment of articulation and progression agreements. For any other arrangements , the QASS Office should be consulted for advice on how to proceed. (See College admissions policies)

Transnational education for the purpose of this document is the provision or partial provision of a programme of education in one country by a provider which is based in **another country. The term 'transnational' for the purpose of this document may be construed as cross-border or cross-jurisdictional.**

Joint Awards are not included in this policy at this time (Jun 2011) Should the occasion arise, this policy will be expanded to include the requirements of joint awards. This will take place in consultation with HETAC and with reference to its policies on joint awards.

5.3 Quality Assurance Framework for Collaborative Provision

Any programmes developed or delivered with a collaborative partner are subject to the **College's quality assurance framework as laid out in the Quality Assurance Handbook.** (http://www.ncirl.ie/Current_Students/Registrar's_Office/Academic-Policies-&-Procedures).

Where the existing quality assurance arrangements require amendment to facilitate the collaborative arrangement, these changes will be submitted to the awarding body with the proposal for validation or differential validation of the programme. Figure 1 illustrates the **College's academic governance structure. Differential validation** occurs where significant change to a programme results in a new programme that must be revalidated. However, the change may be such that the findings of the original validation can be re-used and the **elements of difference become the subject of a 'differential validation'.** Procedures for differential validation are outlined in Chapter 3 of the Quality Assurance Handbook.

5.3.1 Approval of Collaborative Provision

The Governing Body constitutes the Board of Directors of the National College of Ireland Ltd (**'the College'**) and, **as such, its members have all of the responsibilities of Directors under the Companies Acts and at common law.**

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association the Governing Body is responsible for managing the affairs of the College and delegates day to day management to the College President. The President of the College is responsible for planning in conjunction with the Governing Body, and for the implementation of the strategy, policy and administrative decisions of the Governing Body. S/he plays a proactive role as a member of

the Governing Body, as well as chairing the Executive Board of the College and Academic Council and other committees as appropriate.

The Academic Council assists the Governors in planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing the educational work of the College. As Chair of Academic Council and Chief Executive, the College President signs all memoranda of understanding and/or legal agreements on behalf of the College. The risks associated with these collaborative agreements are identified and reflected in the risk register

The Governing Body is responsible for the implementation of appropriate risk management policies. The implementation of these policies is monitored through the operation of a risk register which is reviewed periodically by a sub-committee of the Governing Body. This risk register identifies how key risks are monitored and what actions are taken to mitigate these risks. Proposals for collaborative agreements are subject to review by Academic Council which must approve all collaborative provision proposals.

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5.3.2 Responsibility for Quality and Standards

The arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of programmes delivered in collaboration with other institutions must be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided wholly within the responsibility of the College.

The College always retains responsibility for the ensuring that the standard of the award as defined by the awarding body and the quality of the programme are maintained, although it will be necessary for it to delegate certain quality management functions to its partner(s). Award standards and programme quality will be maintained through programme committees, annual review and quinquennial review of programmes, as well as through normal academic good practices in the provision of collaborative programmes on an ongoing basis. Reviews conducted will remain the responsibility of NCI. This introduces an additional element of risk, which must be countered by rigorous quality management and reporting processes.

Where areas of quality management are delegated to the partner organisation, these arrangements will form part of the agreement reached between NCI, the partner organisation and the awarding body as appropriate. Where the partner institution is not an academic institution, NCI will always retain responsibility for ensuring the quality and standards summative assessment, appointment of external examiners and learner feedback. Notwithstanding this, it is expected that all involved in teaching will be involved in the setting of assessment.

5.3.3 Responsibility for managing the relationship

The overall responsibility for managing the collaborative relationship lies with the Dean of the School involved in the relationship.

5.3.4 On-going Programme management and monitoring

The School has responsibility for the day to day management of all elements of the collaborative programme. The Programme Director is the Chair of the Programme Committee who is responsible for ensuring that the programme is delivered as approved and for ensuring that the curriculum is maintained. In the case of a differentially validated

programme, the Programme should either be brought under the aegis of an existing Programme Committee or, if felt necessary, a new Programme Committee created to provide oversight. It is recognised that a programme delivered under differential validation or in another jurisdiction may require a dedicated programme director to manage the variations and/or issues that may arise in such contexts. However, if a separate programme committee is created, it must be seen as a sub-committee of the overall programme committee, in order to ensure that the academic integrity of the programme is maintained.

Figure 1 outlines the monitoring cycle.

5.3.5 Responsibility for Due Diligence

The Registrar & Company Secretary is responsible for the due diligence process. (See 1.5 below)

5.3.6 Monitoring collaborative provision

Programmes are subject to the College's existing processes for programme monitoring. The annual School and programme report reviews the outcomes of these processes i.e. Programme Committee Meetings, Class representative meetings, external examiner reports, learner feedback surveys etc. The School annual report will contain an evaluation of all collaborative provision provided by the School.

Programmes validated for collaborative provision are subject to revalidation every 5 years using the programmatic review process. Should a programme have been differentially validated out of sequence with its parent programme, the differentially validated programme should be included in its next programmatic review.

Collaborative arrangements with an overseas institution or organisation will normally require a greater level of initial scrutiny, on-going monitoring and review than would be the case with Irish institutions, due to the different educational culture and context that the programme will be operating within and the difficulties caused by geographical location. Academic Council may request more frequent use of the mechanisms above in order to mitigate this issue.

The contents of all material relating to collaborative provision is brought together and analysed annually in an overview report, compiled by the QASS office. It is an opportunity to highlight good practice and identify any problems or issues that might have wider relevance beyond the individual programme.

These reports will be shared with the partner organisation and the awarding body and will form part of any decision making process to continue or terminate a relationship.

5.3.7 Responsibility for Agreement preparation

The Registrar & Company Secretary is responsible for the preparation of the memorandum of understanding and/or agreement on behalf of the College. This is informed by the programme development team and the Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services. **Agreements should be reviewed by the College's legal advisors prior to submitting to the awarding body.**

5.3.8 Decision to Terminate Agreements

Each collaborative agreement shall have specific conditions regarding the termination of a programme or collaborative provision. Agreements should outline circumstances in which a programme may not run e.g. insufficient numbers, **availability of resources**. **NCI's policy on**

the cessation of programmes states that once a programme has commenced, NCI will not terminate the programme until all learners currently enrolled have completed the

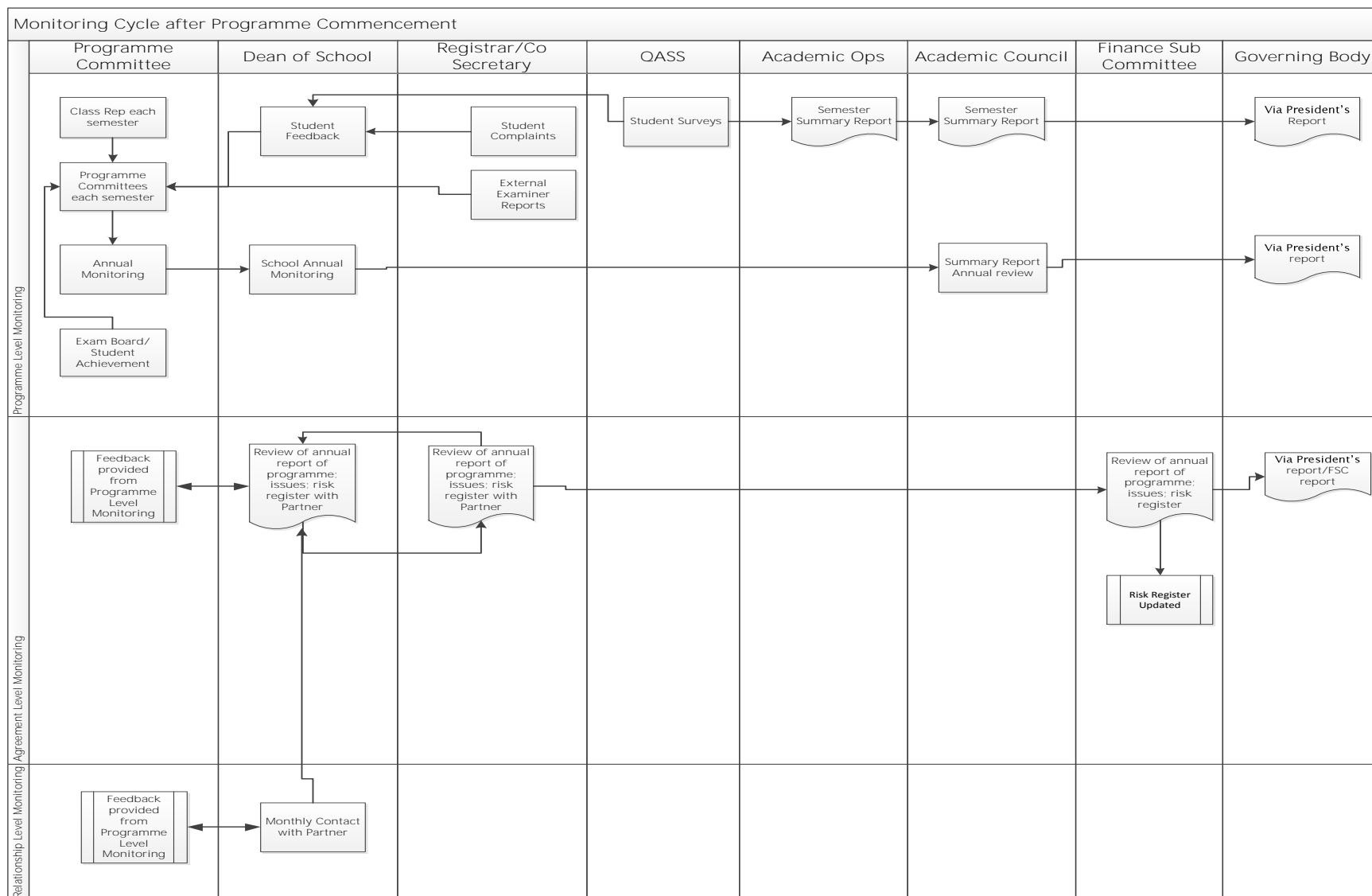


Figure 1: Collaborative agreement and programme monitoring cycle.

programme. In order to assure the protection of learners, this agreement should outline how learners would be accommodated by NCI should the agreement be terminated. Agreements must contain a provision for ***'Force Majeure'***

5.4 Timing

Schools should note that developing a collaborative programme will necessarily require involved, and often complex and lengthy, discussions with staff at both partner institutions and within the College. Such discussions should take part prior to the programme being submitted for the interim checkpoint stage of development. See 1.6.4 below.

The dates of committee meetings, such as Academic Council, are set prior to the commencement of the Academic Year, however, and Schools should consider these dates when establishing their timetable.

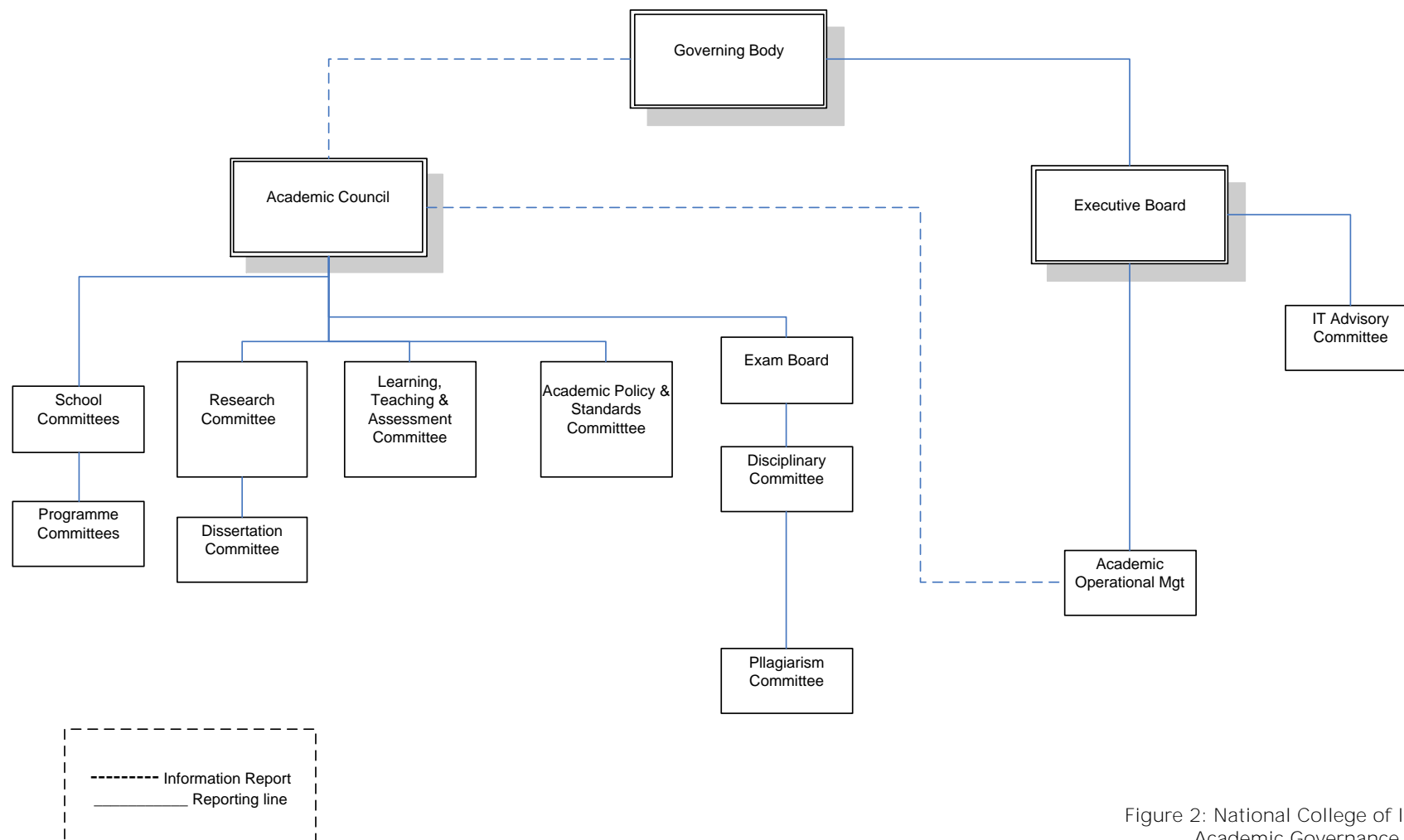


Figure 2: National College of Ireland Academic Governance

5.5 Due Diligence Process

In addition to consideration of the academic suitability and business viability of the collaborative arrangement the College will need to be assured that any proposed new partner institution is of an appropriate standing. This involves several integrated processes:

- a **'Due Diligence' investigation of a range of relevant** information relating to the partner institution.
- a visit to the prospective partner institution by relevant staff;
- a review of the socio-political environment in the case of transnational provision
- **'internal due diligence' i.e. the strategic fit and benefit to the College of the** collaborative partnership and any associated programmes.

This strategic fit of the partnership and programme is carried out by the School and programme team prior to submitting the initial programme proposal as outlined in section 1.6 below

5.5.1 Due Diligence investigations of prospective Partner Institutions

As part of the process of considering whether to work with a partner institution, the College **will carry out a 'Due Diligence' investigation in order to assure itself that the proposed** partner is one with which it would be happy to collaborate. The purpose of this visit and process is to satisfy the College that the partner has the requisite legal standing, financial and academic resources with which to engage in partnership with NCI. This investigation should include the legal status of the prospective partner or agent, and its capacity in law to contract with the College and the awarding body.

The Registrar's/Company Secretary's Office will ask prospective partners to supply the following documentation:

- **An Annual Report (akin to the College's Annual Review);**
- A set of Annual Accounts;
- Details of Professional Indemnity insurance cover, such as a letter from the partner **Institution's brokers confirming this cover and its extent;**
- CVs of staff who will be teaching on relevant programmes (where relevant) .
- To support and substantiate this information, other sources of information will be investigated as follows:
 - The QASS Office will undertake a review of the proposed partner institutional website, including investigation of institutional mission;
 - The QASS Office will undertake a review of FETAC, HETAC, QAA (in the UK) and appropriate other websites to investigate whether there have been any reports relating to the proposed partner;
 - Where applicable, the International Office will seek information from appropriate organisations in Ireland and abroad about the standing of the proposed partner and whether they have any existing collaborations with other Irish HEIs;
 - A review of the information systems provided by the partner (where appropriate) to ensure that required data on learners can be held securely and exchanged with NCI

- A review of data protection legislation and arrangements to ensure that learner data can be released to NCI for submission to required regulatory and awarding bodies
- Where applicable, the **Registrar's Office** will seek information from appropriate organisations about the legal standing of the proposed partner and its ability to operate within its national legislative and cultural requirements.

5.5.2 Partner approval

Visits to prospective Partner Institutions

The visit to the prospective partner institution will normally be undertaken by an appropriate member of staff of the relevant School or Department and also by a member of the QASS office. Other staff, may from time to time, accompany them. Many of the items outlined below can be reviewed using documentary evidence. The visit should be used to explore in more depth and/or provide clarity if required.

The visit to the prospective partner institution will involve the following:

- Consideration of the quality of the teaching and learning facilities in relation to the proposed programme(s), including library and IT resources. The member of staff of the relevant School or Department will have a particular responsibility in this area;
- meeting key teaching and other staff of the proposed partner, where relevant;
- consideration and discussion of a range of academic issues relating to the partnership including:
- **the Partner Institution's existing quality assurance arrangements;**
- arrangements for managing the partnership (including the committee structure);
- proposed quality assurance arrangements for the programme(s), including Annual Programme Reports and future Periodic Review and Revalidation;
- arrangements for seeking the views of student (representation and evaluation);
- assessment arrangements, including External Examiners;
- student complaints and appeals procedures;
- student welfare support and facilities;
- admissions arrangements, including admissions criteria, English language provision (where appropriate) and the minimum and maximum size of a cohort;
- arrangements for marketing of and recruitment to the programme (including website and publicity material);
- staff training and development, and staff appraisal;
- discussion of a draft Memorandum of Agreement (based, particularly, on discussions related to issues set out in (c) above);
- where appropriate, an observation of teaching;
- Where appropriate, meeting a group of existing students.

Following the visit, the representative of the QASS office will produce an agreed report for consideration by Academic Council

5.5.3 Due Diligence of the Socio-political & Educational Environment

Where collaborative provision involves provision outside of the Republic of Ireland, a full analysis of the socio-political and educational environment of the country involved should

be undertaken. This will inform the risk analysis of any proposed project. This analysis will include contact with appropriate Quality Assurance agencies, ministries of education and other sources in order to ascertain the operating environment. Evidence of this analysis may be

- Legislation governing right to operate commercially and/or academically in a jurisdiction
- Reports from international organisations e.g. OECD, Economic Intelligence Unit
- Reports available from the Department of Education, Department of Foreign Affairs, HETAC, etc.

5.5.4 Consideration and approval of Due Diligence information

On receipt of the relevant documentation and other pieces of evidence, these will be considered as follows:

The Finance Office will consider the set of Annual Accounts and provide a brief report to the **Registrar's Office indicating whether these are satisfactory;**

Where applicable, the International Office will provide a report to the Registrar's Office relating to its findings;

The Registrar's Office will confirm whether the partner Institution's Professional Indemnity insurance cover is appropriate;

The Registrar's Office will produce a summary report on the complete Due Diligence process, including the Academic due diligence process (1.5.1; 1.5.2) for consideration by the Academic Council and also, in relation to the financial aspects of due diligence, Executive Board. This report will form part of the documentation required for the interim checkpoint of the Development phase as described above.

5.5.5 Timing of Due Diligence investigations

Whilst there is the potential for the Due Diligence process to take a little time, the College will seek to ensure that this does not stop innovation and proposals for partnership coming forward. The Due Diligence process is intended to run in parallel with the development of a Business Plan and with the programme approval process for a partnership and can begin as soon as approval has been granted at the feasibility phase.

5.5.6 Reciprocal Due Diligence

The College is aware that the Due Diligence process is sensitive, both politically and culturally. The investigation will therefore be conducted with appropriate tact and diplomacy, particularly as it is the expectation that any future partner will be a well-established institution with an excellent reputation. Nevertheless, a Due Diligence investigation is something which the College is obliged to carry out and this should be made clear to prospective partner institutions at the outset. However, in order to act in a transparent way and to encourage the development of a partnership, the College will provide the following documents to a proposed partner on a reciprocal basis:

- The Annual Report
- The Annual Accounts (Financial Statements);

- The College Prospectus;
- A copy of the College's most recent Institutional Review report (or equivalent) ;
- Confirmation of the College's Professional Indemnity insurance;
- A standard note setting out the legal standing of the College and its relationship with awarding bodies

5.6 Approval process

The approval process required for collaborative provision depends on the nature of the activity. Prior to developing specific initiatives, the College must be satisfied that the partner organisation is an appropriate partner and that the legal and financial requirements of a particular jurisdiction do not prohibit activity in that geographical area. In order to proceed with the process of due diligence the School must apply for initial approval to commence the process.

The information required by this approval process will differ depending on the activity.

5.6.1 Research:

All research proposals involving collaboration must have the approval of the Research Committee and Academic Council prior to them being submitted to an external body for funding. If the proposal is approved by Academic Council, any suggested revisions should be made and a final copy of the application documentation submitted in good time to the **Registrar's Office. It will then be submitted for signature by the President as appropriate.**

Application documents should under no circumstances be submitted to the President's office directly. It is up to proposing School to ensure that enough time is allowed for the initial approval process to take place before any external funding deadline.

It should be noted that should NCI wish to undertake collaborative research programmes i.e. Research Masters and PhD degrees, this section of the policy will require further consultation and approval with HETAC

5.6.2 Taught Programmes

Table 1 outlines the four phases of programme development at National College of Ireland and the associated outputs associated with those phases for collaborative provision activities. A full description of this process is outlined in the quality assurance handbook, which is graphically represented in Figure 2. Where new programmes are being proposed or existing programmes are being put forward for differential validation, the programme team will comprise representatives from NCI and from the partner organisation.

Phase	Feasibility	Development		Internal Validation	External Validation	
		Interim	Final			
Outputs	Programme Proposal Form	Interim Checkpoint form	Programme Submission Document	Internal Report	Review	Awarding body report
	Partner Profile	Due Diligence Report	Draft Agreement (As agreed by partner and NCI)	Programme response	team	Signed Agreement between NCI & partner Signed Agreement between awarding body and partner
	Initial Risk Analysis		Self Assessment	Final Submission Document		Order of Council (HETAC/FETAC) or equivalent

Table 1: Programme Development Process & Outputs

In developing or amending programmes for collaborative provision, the following general principles apply:

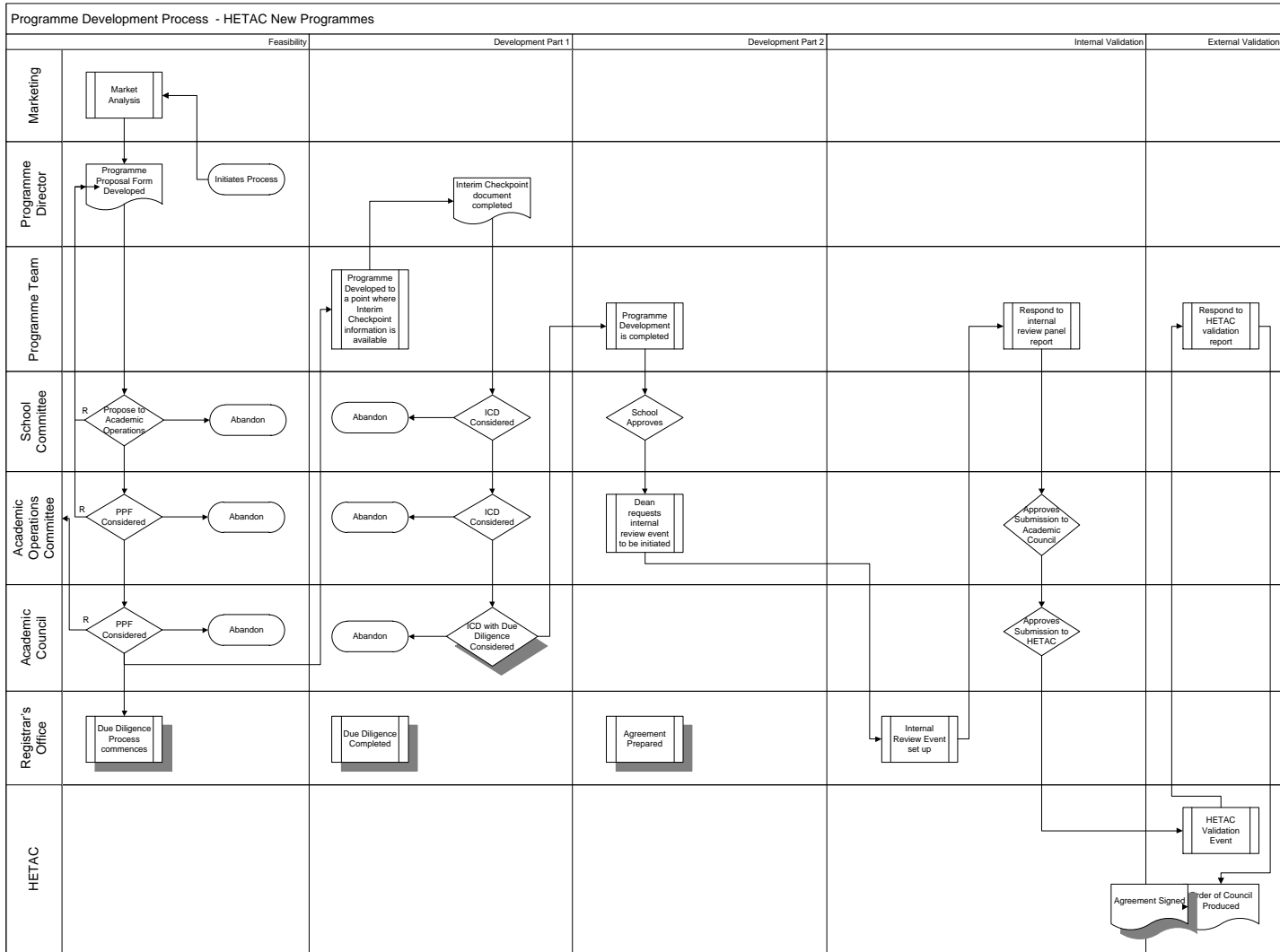


Figure 2: Programme Development Process for Collaborative Provision

New Programmes

Schools must ensure that:

- The Programme is placed at the appropriate level of the National Framework of Qualifications and that academic standards are equivalent to programmes delivered at the College. (ie. HETAC or FETAC award standards; CIPD professional standards etc.)
- **Arrangements for admission comply with the College's admissions regulations** (Chapter 6)
- **Arrangements for assessment comply with the College's assessment regulations** (Chapter 4)
- **Procedures for external examining align with the College's regulations on external examining** (Chapter 4)
- Schools will be required to prepare a Programme and Module Handbook, developed **in line with the College's template.**

Existing Programmes

Where existing programmes are to be delivered in conjunction with a partner, Schools must ensure that

- Where the programme is accredited by HETAC, FETAC or a professional body (CIPD, ICM etc) the programme delivery in conjunction with a partner, is approved by and fulfils requirements of those bodies. This is done via the differential validation process in the case of HETAC awards or through a revised business case in the case of CIPD.
- **Arrangements for admission comply with the College's admissions regulations** (Chapter 6)
- **Arrangements for assessment comply with the College's assessment regulations** (Chapter 4)
- **Procedures for external examining align with the College's regulations on external examining** (Chapter 4)
- Schools will be required to prepare a tailored Programme and Module Handbook, **developed in line with the College's template.**

5.6.3 Feasibility

The Feasibility phase examines the overall merits of the proposed collaboration and/or programme so that a decision can be taken whether to further the development of the proposal. Programmes that are considered at this stage in the process will have been approved as part of the overall strategic plan of the College but it is at this point that these plans can be implemented or reviewed should the environment warrant it. The information provided at this stage is outlined in the document programme proposal form. An output of this process is the completion of the initial risk analysis form (see Appendix) and will contribute to the decision of Academic Council to proceed with programme development or applications for differential validation. A more comprehensive description of this process is **contained in the College's programme development process (Chapter 3, QA Handbook)**

In the case of collaborative provision, once approved, the due diligence process described in 1.5 above will be commenced by the Registrar.

5.6.4 Development

The development phase is divided into 2 parts. At the end of part 1, the programme team completes the interim checkpoint document. In the case of collaborative provision a detailed risk analysis will be undertaken. This risk analysis will include the results of the complete due diligence process. The purpose of the interim checkpoint is to ensure that the assumptions made regarding the financial and academic viability of the partnership and/or programme in the feasibility phase hold true and that any issues raised in the development of the programme with regard to its viability can be addressed by the College. The programme development or collaborative arrangement may be abandoned at this point.

Phase 2 of development allows development of the programme to be completed and the detail of the agreement to be completed. It will also allow the programme team, in collaboration with the QASS office, consider how quality assurance arrangements for the proposed programme are to be handled, paying particular attention to the monitoring of those quality management functions which have been delegated to the partner institution and which need to be outlined in the agreement (and provided in more detail in the Programme Handbook, see below). This will include arrangements for:

- the operation of the Programme Committee and Examinations Board, and the provision of annual reports to the School on an equivalent basis to that for programmes delivered at NCI;
- regular monitoring of the programme and related learning facilities, including frequency and purpose of visits to the partner institution by the School;
- mechanisms for students to provide feedback and to make complaints/appeals;
- on-going and regular contact between the College and its partner, and the management of operational issues;
- periodic review and revalidation (in line with the policy for programmatic review and revalidation of programmes).

The programme team must submit for internal validation:

- the programme submission document using the template provided
- the agreement
- **its self assessment of the programme against the awarding body's validation criteria and the collaborative arrangements.**

The length of the development phase is dictated by the type of programme and whether validation is for a new programme or is an existing programme which requires a differential validation due to the collaborative activity.

5.6.5 Internal Validation

The internal validation process will evaluate the programme and collaborative arrangements as submitted. Whilst an internal process, the evaluation panel has representation from external academic and industry providers. Normally, these external members will have experience of collaborative provision in order to inform the process.

5.6.6 External Validation

This process managed by the awarding body results in the approval of the programme and the collaborative agreements.

5.7 The Agreement

NCI and the partner organisation will establish a formal agreement to be known as the **'Consortium Agreement'**. **Academic Council will approve such agreements on advice from the Company Secretary/Executive Board.**

The Consortium Agreement will assure that education and training provision and associated services are provided in a streamlined manner and in compliance with the relevant awarding body policy and in accordance with its guidelines and with any other legitimate requirements; and will normally

- Establish and specify the consortium (indicating the partner providers and the designated address for communication);
- Establish the rights and obligations of all partner providers;
- Establish the nature of the services to be performed by each partner provider; specify the scope of the agreement and the relevant programme(s) and the award(s) that each will lead to;
- Establish the period of the agreement;
- Establish the conditions under which the agreement will be reviewed and under which it will be renewed;
- Provide for the amendment of the agreement;
- Establish the entity (normally the consortium) that learners can hold legally liable for any deficiencies in the provision of education and training;
- Specify any limitations on liability and provide for mutual indemnification;
- Provide for the resolution of disputes arising in respect of the agreement;
- Provide for the termination or suspension of the agreement (setting out the conditions under which this can be done) having regard for learners concerned;
- Make appropriate arrangements for the protection of learners as stipulated in Section 43 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and in all cases for residual obligations to learners on termination of the agreement;
- Name the jurisdiction within which the agreement is enacted and should be interpreted; establish a process for addressing disputes in respect of the agreement including any perceived breaches of the agreement and grievances by learners and involved employees;

5.7.1 Financial arrangements

- State financial arrangements

- That address the distribution of any income arising from services provided by each of the partner providers;
- **That assure each partner provider's capacity to account for income and expenditure** involving the consortium;
- That meet all legal requirements in all of the involved jurisdictions;
- That make adequate provision for protection for learners as described above

5.7.2 Specific Programme Requirements

Specific arrangements in respect of each of the programmes covered by the agreement **specify the programme's essential parameters** including prior learning and other admission requirements, programme assessment strategy and intended learning outcomes; They will also

- specify the awarding body or bodies and including the necessary awarding agreements;
- oblige partner providers to participate in the collaborative programme review/accreditation/validation process required by the relevant awarding bodies and to comply with any conditions that are attached to review/accreditation/validation;
- establish quality assurance procedures for the collaborative programme and require **partner providers to cooperate and participate in each other's quality assurance** procedures and in related quality evaluations whether internal or externally organised, while ensuring that quality assurance procedures applying to the collaborative programme should be recognised as meeting the national requirements **in each partner provider's country**;
- provide for the relevant awarding bodies to monitor the quality and standards of the programme and associated services;
- require, and provide for, the partner providers as appropriate to jointly contribute to the provision of the programme;
- specify the regulations (recruitment, access and admission, academic standard, transfer, progression, assessment, appeals, complaints etc.) that apply to learners or prospective learners concerned while ensuring that the procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland are implemented;
- specify in detail the rights and entitlements of learners (including necessary learner support services) at each of the partner provider sites and how the relevant services will be delivered and how access to same by learners should be assured;
- deal explicitly with the provision of, and access by learners to, human and material resources;
- specify in detail (with explicit rationale based on the learning outcome standards required by the awarding body or bodies and any other requirements needed for approval) the programme assessment strategy and learner assessment procedures for the programme and the conditions under which an award will be recommended and provide for the appointment of external examiners;
- collect and maintain the information required by external quality assurance agencies and produce a Europass Certificate/ Diploma Supplement with complete information about the ECTS credits earned on the collaborative programme;
- require that partner providers will encourage and make provision for cooperation between their staff in respect of the programme;
- deal with intellectual property rights relevant to the collaboration;

5.8 Programme Information

5.8.1 Advertising and recruitment

Programme recruitment, publicity and marketing materials for collaborative programme may be produced by the College or by the Partner Institution, or both, subject to the conditions in the agreement. Advertising and recruitment for the programme should not, however, formally begin until the agreement has been finalised and signed by the President and Partner Institution.

The Student Recruitment & Marketing Department has a responsibility to maintain oversight of the advertisement of collaborative programmes. At regular intervals relevant websites and printed material will be checked

5.8.2 **Provider's Handbook**

The QASS office will work in consultation with the School and the partner institution to devise an operational handbook which will detail all operational and quality assurance procedures, and forms part of the formal Agreement.

This should ideally be completed before recruitment begins but should be in place before **the first students are enrolled. The Provider's Handbook should be reviewed annually.**

5.9 References

AHEAD(2010) '*Charter for Inclusive Teaching & Learning*', Dublin, AHEAD

HETAC(2008) *Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and joint awards – Accreditation, Quality Assurance, and Delegation of Authority*, Dublin, HETAC

IHEQN (2009) *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions*. Dublin IHEQN

QAA (2004) *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality in Higher Education: Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (including eLearning*. Gloucester, QAA

UNESCO (2005) *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*. Paris, UNESCO

Other Sources

VanGalen, A ed.(2010) Internationalisation and Quality Assurance. *EAIE Professional Development Series for International Educators Vol 4*. Amsterdam, European Association for International Education.

6 Differential Validation

Programmes are validated in their entirety. Significant change to a programme results in a new programme that must be revalidated. However, the change may be such that the findings of the original validation can be re-used and the elements of difference become the **subject of a 'differential validation'**. An application to HETAC for differential validation must outline the difference and rationale for difference from the validated programme. Differential validation frequently arises in the context of delivery of off-campus programmes, collaborative provision or blended learning.

Applications for Differential Validation must be approved by Executive Board, Academic Operations Committee and Academic Council.

6.1 Quality Assurance

Modification of a programme may have implications for the quality assurance procedures of the College. Should any amendment be required to existing quality assurance procedures, details of this amendment **and the College's approval of those procedures** should be included in the validation application to the awarding body.

6.2 Differences from the Original Programme

The application for differential validation should describe all of the difference between the proposed programme and the original programme. The programme submission template should be used in order to ensure that all criteria are met and differences are described.

The original programme validation document should be included in the application documentation.

6.3 Self-assessment

The implications of providing a modified programme should be addressed in the self assessment report accompanying the validation application.

6.4 Differential Validation events

Due the varying types of differential validation, there is no standard differential validation event. The event may be e.g. a desk review, site visit to a new location or a full validation event.

6.5 Off Campus Provision

Approval by the Awarding Body to run a programme in an off-campus location should be sought at the point of original validation. An off-campus location must be an appropriate learning environment with access to appropriately qualified faculty, appropriate technology and learning materials. Audits of locations will take place annually and may be subject to a spot-check during the academic year.

The awarding body must be consulted prior to delivering a programme in an off-campus location if that location has not been approved at validation. This will be approved via the differential validation process which is outlined in section 4.5.

6.6 Blended Learning

NCI's E-Learning Strategy defines, "Blended Learning" as: *the integrated combination of a number of pedagogic approaches – usually traditional learning with e-learning approaches.* In this definition the important words are integrated combination - this means that blended learning is not a collection or mixture of pedagogic approaches - it is the planned and appropriate use of different media, learning environments and teaching scenarios to deliver more engaging and effective learning experiences

All or components of a programme may be delivered in Blended Learning mode and where **this is the case NCI's Blended Learning Standards will be applied**

The rationale for incorporating blended learning into the teaching, learning and assessment practices of College includes:

- **Flexible and adaptive learning to suit students' needs**
- Expanded collaboration and goal-oriented activities
- Promoting self-directed and autonomous learners
- Catering for individual learners through engagement and multiple modes of learning (e.g. visualization, animation, simulation, narrative and interactivity).
- Supporting effective teaching strategies such as problem based learning, meaningful contexts and case studies, learner collaboration, open and continuous assessments, simulations, learning by doing and many others.

Programmes and that are delivered in Blended Learning Mode utilise the College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE⁷) and virtual classroom technology⁸ platform to present, organise and manage student learning activities.

Instructional settings to be used in the delivery of a blended learning programme:

- Traditional Class
- On-line Class - fixed time schedule with opportunities for student interaction (uses virtual classroom technology)
- Flexible Activities
 - Digital Actions - online activities that are time flexible
 - Independent Learning - **students' self**-directed learning using on-line, print and other sources
 - Collaboration - student collaborating with others.

6.6.1 **NCI's Standards for Blended Learning**

- Students on blended learning programmes are full students of NCI and entitled to similar access to library, college supports, school and administrative structures.
- Students are advised in advance of commencement of the course of the technical requirements and pre-requisite skills for effective participation on the course.
- Students are provided with support during course induction on how to use the learning technologies associated with the course.
- NCI provides technical support for College systems (e.g. VLE, virtual class room, Student Portal etc.).

⁷ This is currently the Moodle platform

⁸ This is currently the Wimba virtual classroom environment

- It is the responsibility of students to ensure they have the required local access and technical facilities when they are participating off-campus.
- Programme and module learning outcomes and associated assessments are the same for all modes of delivery except where specifically specified and approved.
- Lecturers are encouraged to apply good pedagogic design to their production and planning of student learning activities – this is achieved by mapping such activities against specific learning outcomes.
- Support and ongoing professional development is provided to college staff in the design, production and use of new technologies in teaching and learning.
- Where possible, the amount of student contact hours should be the same – in a **Blended Learning context “contact hours” are designated as:**
 - Learning events (e.g. Class, On-line class) where students have opportunities to ask questions contiguously (immediately following on).
 - Guided learning activities (e.g. interactive exercises that are pedagogically designed to enable the student to achieve a specific learning outcome)
- Students should be provided with opportunities to review archived instructional sequences for revision and assignment purposes.
- Student assignments are to be submitted electronically through the LMS and Turnitin software unless otherwise specified.

6.6.2 Validation of Blended Learning Programmes

Blended learning programmes are subject to the programme development, validation, evaluation and review processes outlined above.

Where a programme has already been validated by an awarding body, the addition of this mode of delivery will require a differential validation as outlined in section 4.5 by the awarding body.

Programmes may not be delivered in this mode of delivery until approval to do so is received from the awarding body.

6.7 Delivery of Transnational Programmes

Transnational education for the purpose of this document is the provision or partial provision of a programme of education in one country by a provider which is based in another country. **The term ‘transnational’ for the purpose of this document may be construed as cross-border or cross-jurisdictional.**

Transnational programmes are subject to the policies and procedures of National College of Ireland and/or as laid down in a Consortium Agreement as above where appropriate.

The delivery of transnational programmes must be agreed by Academic Council prior to entering into an agreement.

The delivery of transnational programmes must be agreed by the appropriate awarding body, including in the case where the programme is already accredited by the awarding body.

Prior to a proposal commencing the cycle of approval, the proposing school should investigate any legal obligations that NCI must fulfil prior to commencing the programme. E.g. permission to offer programmes.

Contact should also be made with the appropriate Quality Assurance agency in Ireland and in the other country.

7 Programme Delivery

7.1 Publication of Programme Information

7.1.1 Full-Time Programmes

Full-time programme information is made available for the production of marketing material 18 months prior to the intake date. Any programmes that are not yet approved should not be advertised in the prospectus unless the programme submission document has been submitted to the awarding body using the processes described above. If this is the case, all materials for this programme should prominently and clearly specify that programme validation is pending using the phrase **'Subject to HETAC validation'**. If the programme is not yet approved only a broad indicative outline of the curriculum should be included in any pre-publicity materials. Detailed curricula should not be published until validated.

7.1.2 Part-time Programmes

Part-time programme information is made available for the production of marketing material 9 months prior to the expected intake date. Any programmes that are not yet approved should not be advertised in the prospectus unless the programme submission document has been submitted to the awarding body using the processes described above. If this is the case, all materials for this programme should prominently and clearly specify that programme validation is pending **using the phrase 'Subject to HETAC validation'**. If the programme is not yet approved only a broad indicative outline of the curriculum should be included in any pre-publicity materials. Detailed curricula should not be published until validated.

7.2 Admission & Registration

Learners may not be admitted or registered on a programme that has not been through the validation process as outlined above. The Order of Council or equivalent documentation must be received prior to admission and registration unless permission is received from the awarding body.

Offers may be made to applicants pending validation of the programme. Offers should not be made unless the programme has been submitted to the awarding body for validation.

7.3 Agreement of Schedule of Programme Delivery

The schedule of programme delivery is agreed by Executive Board. This will be based on the strategic plan of the College and operational considerations such as availability of location, expected market demand etc.

7.3.1 Full-time Programmes

The schedule for full-time programme delivery is set 18 months ahead of the expected intake date. It should be available by mid March. Executive Board may opt to remove a programme from the advertised set of programmes based on application information made available in March preceding the intake date. Due to the impact on the CAO process, this decision must be taken in time for the change of mind process in July. All applicants to this programme should be contacted.

7.3.2 Part-time Programmes

The schedule for part-time programme delivery is set 9 months ahead of the expected intake date. This schedule will include indicative days, timeframes, locations and expected intake per cohort

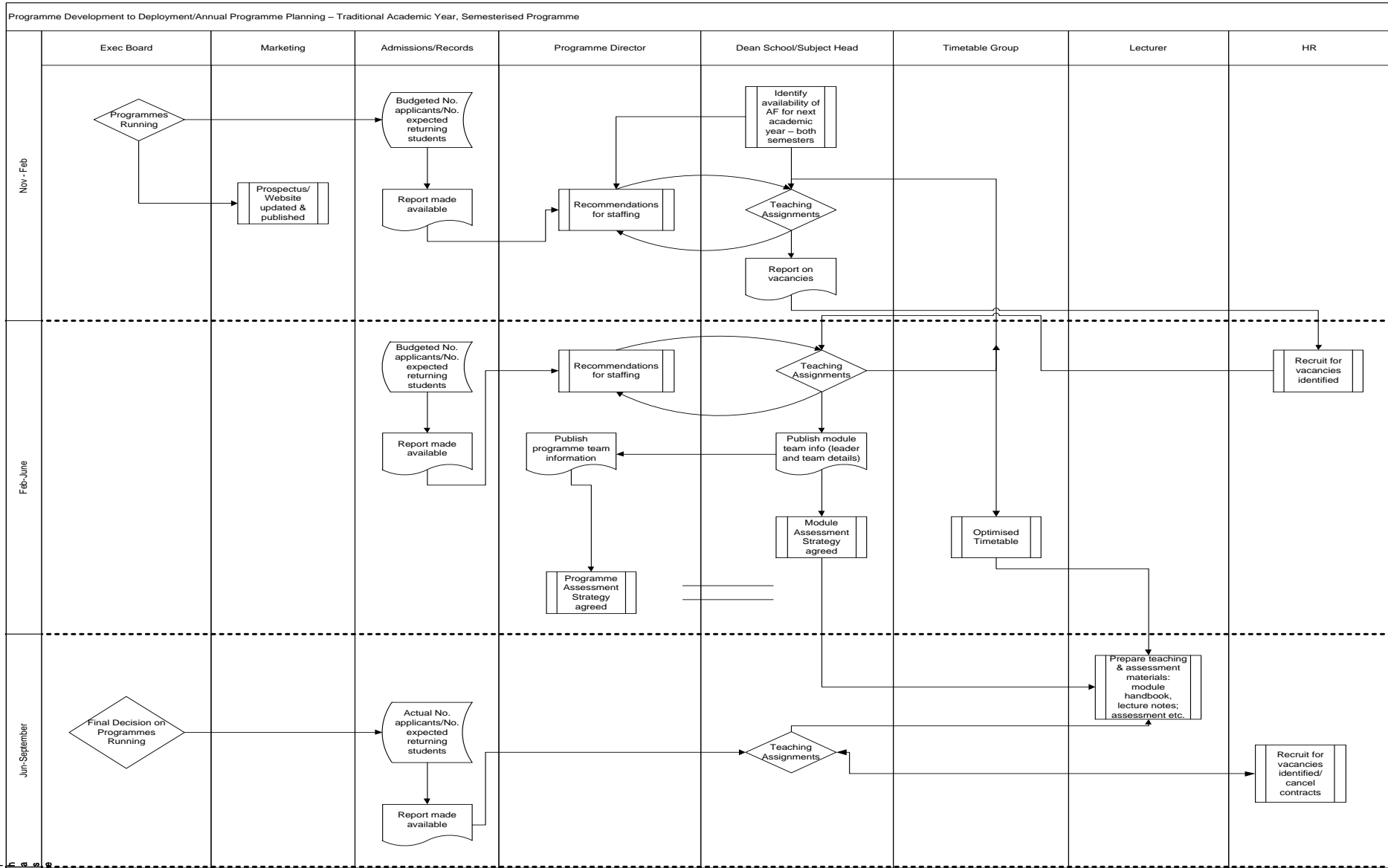


Figure 3: Programme Delivery Planning Process

7.3.3 Decisions to Cease Delivery of a Programme

7.3.3.1 Cessation of an Approved Programme

Where an Approved Programme does not operate for two years or more due to lack of learner demand, the Programme Committee may decide not to include the Programme in the next Programmatic Review for revalidation.

The decision to withdraw a programme from CAO or not to offer a programme in a particular year due to lack of demand is taken by Executive Board, having consulted with the Dean of School concerned.

It is National College of Ireland's policy that should a programme commence, it will be offered to completion for the specific intake of students.

7.3.4 Non Commencement of an Offered Programme

In cases where an offered programme may not run for reasons such as non-viable numbers, unsuitability of location or unavailability of appropriate teaching staff, learners are offered the following.

Transfer to the same programme at another NCI location if appropriate

Or

Full refund on fees paid for that academic year and appropriate guidance as to other education options.

In such cases, the decision to not run a programme in such cases as above is made at least 5 working days prior to the proposed start date for programmes at levels 5-6 of the National Qualifications Framework. For all other programmes, the decision is made at least 10 working days prior to the proposed start date.

Refunds are made to those persons or organisations that originally paid the programme fee.

Prospective Learners are notified in all correspondence and publications that programmes may not commence for reasons such as those outlined above.

7.3.5 Cessation of a Programme that has Commenced

In exceptional cases where a programme is terminated after it has commenced and prior to the normal completion of the programme for reasons such as non-viable numbers, unsuitability of location or unavailability of appropriate teaching staff, learners will be offered the following options

Transfer to the same course at another NCI location if appropriate

Or

Endeavour to facilitate transfer to a similar programme with another provider

Or

Full refund on fees paid for that academic year and appropriate guidance as to other education options

Where appropriate, certification will be provided for successful completion of modules.

Refunds are made to those persons or organisations that originally paid the fee.

7.4 Teaching assignment & timetables

Teaching assignments for the following year (all semesters) should be made by 28th February (for September – May delivery) or 30th September (February-December delivery). This is completed by the Dean of School or Subject Head as appropriate.

These assignments will be made based on decisions made regarding programme delivery for the following year and expected intakes as per section 4.9 above. Expected intake should be **calculated based on previous years' trends of intake/retention and/or completion.**

The Dean of School will provide detail of any resourcing requirements to the HR Department by 28th February (for September – May delivery) or 30th September (February-December delivery).

Teaching assignment, capacity requirements and arrangements for tutorials should be provided to the Commercial Office by 28th February (for September – May delivery) or 30th September (February-December delivery).

7.4.1 Subject Teams and Module Owners

For modules that are shared across multiple programmes, module owners must be identified by each School.

7.4.2 Notification of Module Teams

Arising from the assignment of teaching loads, module teams will be identified for modules that are shared by several programmes. Details of the module teams will be provided to all faculty via the staff portal

7.4.3 Notification of Programme Teams

Arising from the assignment of teaching loads, programme teams will be identified and details provided to all faculty via the staff portal

7.5 Assessment

NCI policy and process for assessment is detailed in Chapter 4 of the QA Handbook. Assessment should be carried out in accordance with this policy and process.

7.5.1 Annual agreement of module & programme assessment strategy

The Programme team (current and those assigned to teach in the following year) will meet in the final semester of the programme to review the current programme and module assessment strategy. The assessment strategy for the following year should be agreed no later than the 30th of June (for September – May delivery) or 31st October for (Feb – December delivery).

This will allow time for faculty to prepare and for the support services (e.g. disability support, IT) to ensure that the assessment strategy can be supported.

This annual review refers only to the nature of the assessment instrument or the number of coursework elements. Proposals to change the overall assessment structure and/or the weighting of assessment must be processed through the module modification process as outlined in section 8.5

Consideration will be required for the co-ordination of the inputs of module teams in agreeing assessment strategies for shared modules.

7.5.2 Variation in Assessment

It is College policy that the assessment strategy for shared modules will be the same for the purposes of consistency and quality assurance. However, it is recognised under the principles of assessment that in some circumstances a variation in assessment may be required e.g. to allow for blended delivery, international delivery, learners with specific learning needs or other pedagogical reasons. Such variation should be approved at the original validation or through differential validation as appropriate. If a validation process is not being undertaken, proposals for variation in assessment should be submitted to the module owner. This will then be reviewed at subject team level from which a recommendation will be made to the School Committee.

This recommendation will be approved at the Academic Standards & Policy Committee.

7.6 Programme & Module Handbook

7.6.1 The Programme Handbook

7.6.1.1 Purpose

The programme handbook provides information to the student on his/her programme. Generally speaking the programme handbook will refer to common information for the programme, e.g. programme learning outcomes, award information, contact details for key services policy for late submission, policy for extensions, deferrals etc. In order to ensure that learners are fully aware of requirements, it is good practice to cross reference the module guide to the programme guide and/or to the student portal.

7.6.1.2 Approval of the Programme Handbook

The programme handbook is approved by the Programme Director. In the case of programmes that may have more than 1 person dealing with different cohorts of learner on the same programme, the School will appoint the director who should take responsibility for the completion on the handbook.

7.6.1.3 Publication of the Programme Handbook

The programme guide should be published electronically on the student portal. It should be available prior to the commencement of teaching and at orientation/induction.

A template for completion of the Programme Handbook is available in Appendix 3 document reference QASS-3.PDDRXX

7.6.2 The Module Handbook

7.6.2.1 Purpose:

In accordance with best practice, European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Assessment & Standards (2009), the module handbook has been created to supplement the approved module descriptor. The guide gives more specific guidance to learners about what they can expect from class, the basis of their assessment and what is expected of them in terms of class participation and wider reading etc. as appropriate to their module. In many cases this information already exists and individual lecturers have been provided it in a number of ways. This handbook brings these practices together into one common template for use by all.

The module guide is closely linked to the programme handbook.

Whilst all sections of the outline will be appropriate to all modules, there will be variance in the detail required to ensure full information is provided to learners. Technical and numerate modules may not require much guidance as to readings. However, learners should be referred to appropriate examples of computing codes, mathematical models etc.

7.6.2.2 Variations in assessment of common/shared modules

Where a module is delivered over multiple programmes or delivery modes, it is recognised that there will be variances in the specific weeks that a subject is dealt with, submission dates of assignments or under approved circumstances the assessment structure or assignment brief may vary. Where a module falls into this category, lecturers are encouraged to collaborate on the module guide and agree variations to ensure that learners are provided with the correct information.

7.6.2.3 Approval of the Module Handbook

The module handbook is approved by the module owner. The module owner is appointed by the School to ensure the academic integrity of the module as it is taught across the College.

7.6.2.4 Publication of the Module Handbook

The module handbook may be made available in hard copy, on Moodle or on the student portal. Whilst it is preferable that a common place is used e.g. Moodle, it is recognised that this may not be feasible for this initial implementation. The information on the handbook may be placed on Moodle as a document download or the Moodle week by week schedule can be used to provide the same information.

A template for completion of the Module Handbook is available in Appendix XXX, document reference QASS-3.PDDRXX

7.7 Use of Moodle

It is expected that all faculty will make use of Moodle as a single point of contact for module information. Faculty may opt to use Moodle in different ways but at a minimum, the following information should be made available:

- Link to programme handbook
- Link to programme and module details on Coursebuilder

7.8 Induction & Orientation

7.8.1 First year students

At orientation, students should be brought through the information in the Programme Handbook. Information regarding their programme, award, exemptions for professional bodies should be explained. This is normally carried out by the Programme Director

7.8.2 Continuing Students

Continuing students should be made aware of any changes to the programme that may have been approved in the preceding academic year.

7.9 Postponement of Lecture/Late Start

Classes should be postponed only in the case of emergency and missed lectures must be made up. In the case of known non-attendance, faculty should arrange to swop with colleagues and/or arrange alternative sessions with students. These alternative arrangements must be made known to the Programme Co-ordinator and Subject Head/Dean

To allow effective communication to students, in the case of emergency, illness and unavoidable delays etc. non-attendance should be notified as follows

- Teaching between 9 and 1: asap and before 9.30
- Teaching between 1 and 5: asap and before 11.30
- Teaching between 5 and 9.30: asap and before 1pm

Notwithstanding these requirements, faculty who may be travelling and are unavoidably delayed should contact the College as soon as it becomes clear that the class will be late commencing.

The Programme Co-ordinator should then contact

- Students
- Head of School
- Subject Head
- Attempts with Subject Head to re-organise lectures on the day in question

7.10 Feedback to learners

Faculty should identify the date that feedback will be provided on all formative and summative assessment. This will normally be within 3 weeks of the assessment in the case of coursework. If for unforeseen circumstances the published date cannot be met, faculty should inform learners in good time.

The feedback provided to learners should be detailed and constructive.

Formal feedback days are available for end of semester examinations. These dates should be agreed as part of the academic calendar and published. A student may request formal feedback of examination scripts at the end of each semester (or assessment period in the case of non semesterised programmes). This should not be confused with requests for review or recheck which take place at the end of the second semester.

7.11 Use of email/SMS texting

Learners should be emailed using the contact functionality within QuercusPlus. This ensures a record of the correspondence with the learner/class group is maintained.

7.11.1 Use.

1. Broadcast SMS texting or emailing of current students is to be used in the following circumstances only
 - a. Notification of a cancelled class
 - b. Notification of a change in class time
 - c. Reminder of critical deadline eg closing date for Careers events, graduation deadlines
 - d. Reminder of student services/learning development seminars
 - e. Notification that examination results are published
 - f. Notification that the publication of examinations results has been delayed
 - g. Notification of registration dates
 - h. Notification of change in library opening hours
2. Broadcast SMS texting or emailing of applicants is to be used in the following circumstance only
 - a. Notification of interview
 - b. Notification of interview change

- c. Reminder of deadline for acceptance of offers
 - d. Notification of registration dates
-
3. Broadcast SMS texting or emailing of prospective students is to be used in the following circumstance only
 - a. Invitation to open days
 - b. Invitation to recruitment events
 - c. Invitation to revision events
 4. Broadcast SMS texting or emailing of graduates/alumni is to be used in the following circumstance only
 - a. Invitation to alumni/graduate seminars
 - b. Invitation to alumni/graduate reunions
-
5. The use of Broadcast SMS or email facility should not be used for any other reason. The Registrar must approve use of this facility and the student/prospective student/ phone number/email address for any other reason

7.11.2 Source of Telephone Number and email address

7.11.2.1 Current Students/Applicants

1. The telephone number used will be that as stated in the student record held on QuercusPlus
2. The email address used will be the student's current NCI email address or in the case of applicants, the email address provided by the applicant
3. The student will be automatically enrolled on the above services at registration or application. (this will be actioned using the Application/Registration Checks option on QuercusPlus – true = opt in; false = opt out. Acceptance of the service is to be incorporated into the Registration /Application form
4. During the year or the recruitment process, the student/applicant may opt out of these services and must do so at the Academic Affairs office by filling in the withdrawal of SMS service form
5. It is the duty of the Director of Student Services to ensure that this is actioned on NCI systems

7.11.2.2 Prospective Students

1. The contact number or email address used will be that as provided by the prospective student for the particular service that the contact number was sent for
2. The prospective students may opt out of the service at any point using an unsubscribe text or form (to be clarified)
3. It is the duty of the Director of Marketing to ensure that processes are in place to ensure that this opt out is actioned on NCI systems
4. The record of numbers is to be stripped at the end of each recruitment season

7.11.2.3 Graduates/Alumni

6. The telephone number/email address used will be that as stated in the alumni record held on QuercusPlus /Alumni office system
7. The graduate will be enrolled on these services if they opt to do so
8. The graduate must opt out of these services and must do so at the Alumni office by filling in the withdrawal of SMS service form
9. It is the duty of the Alumni Officer to ensure that this is actioned on NCI systems

7.11.3 Content

The content of any text or email will comply with normal business practices and data protection/freedom of information legislation.

7.11.4 Methodology

7.11.4.1 Email:

Faculty should use the messaging functionality for classes in QuercusPlus. Administrative staff should use the distribution lists provided by the IT department

7.11.4.2 SMS

All staff should use the information supplied by reports from the MIS system and the XIAM texting service. Note, that SMS messages should only be sent to those students who have agreed to be contacted in this manner.

This policy applies to the use of Email and SMS in the context of general information being provided to a group of students. When corresponding with an individual student, normal business rules apply

7.12 Attendance

Whilst recognising the correlation between attendance and achievement of learning outcomes, monitoring of attendance is not a requirement of National College of Ireland. However, there may be circumstances where attendance is required to be monitored:

- It is a requirement of a client company e.g. FAS
- Individual lecturers may wish to take attendance for lectures and/or tutorials
- Individual school policies may require attendance to be taken

Where attendance is taken, it should not be used as an assessment mechanism, unless attendance can be proven as a mechanism for assessing a learning outcome

Attendance should be monitored using the College's information systems

8 Programme Evaluation

In order to provide regular academic quality assurance on each programme, Programme Reporting is carried out by the College as follows

8.1 Programme Committee

The Programme Committee meets at least 3 times per year in order to review the academic operation of the programme. The programme committee is chaired by the Programme Director and meetings should be attended by all faculty teaching on all stages and instances of the programme and the programme co-ordinator. Attendance may be facilitated by conference call, web meetings etc.

It is recognised where programmes are offered in several locations, it may not be possible to have a combined meeting. Programmes of this nature should have at least 1 meeting per year where all faculty come together to discuss experiences.

The terms of reference of the Programme Committee is in Appendix xxx

8.2 Learner Feedback

8.2.1 Class Representative Meetings

Meetings between the programme director and class representatives take place once per semester. This is a formal opportunity for Class Representatives to provide feedback to the Programme Committee on matters affecting the programme and learners on the programme. Representatives from the Support Services also attend these meetings.

Schools may arrange meetings in subject groupings etc. to facilitate meaningful discussion. Actions arising from these meetings should be reported to the Programme Committee meeting.

8.2.2 Module Evaluation (Form QASS1)

This is carried out in Week 8 of the Semester by the School. The survey is anonymous. The primary objective of this survey is to obtain the views of Learners on their experience in the module delivered. The learner is invited to assign a rating to a range of issues relating to the presentation of a module or module component as he/she experienced it. The completed questionnaires and analysis are returned to the Dean of School and to the individual lecturer. The Dean of School reviews the results of the survey with the individual lecturer.

Results of the survey are communicated to Associate Faculty by post.

8.2.3 Services Evaluation (Form QASS2 (A and B))

This is carried out in week 3 of the 2nd Semester by the Services Departments. The survey is anonymous. The primary objective of this survey is to obtain the views of Learners on their **experience of the College's administrative and Learner Supports. This includes** but is not limited to Student Services, Library and Information Services, Information Technology, Catering and Facilities. Due to the nature of delivery, the Services Evaluation for Off-Campus learners is tailored accordingly (QASS2B)

The outcome of these surveys is used to prepare consequent action plans by the Schools and Service departments. These are formally reported in the programme annual report and **in the service departments' annual reports.**

8.3 Learner Retention, Completion & Achievement

A set of key statistics is provided to the programme committee at the end of each academic year. This includes in year retention, progression, programme & module pass rates, completion and award classification information.

This information should be used by programme committees in the review of programmes and to provide information for reflection in the programme annual report.

8.4 External Examiners Reports

External Examiners reports are circulated to the Deans of School by the 30th September. A response to these reports is expected to the Academic Standards & Policy Committee by the 31st October. Programme Directors should respond to any observations by external examiners to external examiners individually.

Any accompanying letters to these reports or letters, emails etc , sent by the External Examiner, during the course of assessment approval should be brought to the attention of the Programme Director and Dean of School. The content of these should be included in the consideration of the External Examiner report. Any immediate action required as a result of these should be acted on by the Programme Director and the External Examiner responded to.

8.5 Programme Modification

8.5.1 Modifications to a Programme Before a Programmatic Review

As a result of the Programme Reporting above, modifications to a programme may be proposed by the Programme Committee.

8.5.2 Material Modifications to Existing Programmes

Changes which involve new delivery modes e.g.

- full-time to Online/Web delivery or
- a reduction in the duration of a programme from say 1 calendar year to an academic year
- A reduction in contact hours greater than 20%
- Change in the breakdown of assessment

which are material require to be formally referred to the Academic Standards & Policy Committee and thereafter to Academic Council and the Awarding Body for approval before they may be implemented.

In instances where additional resources are required to implement the material change the approval of the Executive Board is necessary

All proposed modifications of any subject curriculum and/or Approved Programme Schedule, must be fully documented as set out below and submitted by the Dean of School

to the Academic (via the Registrar) in sufficient time for implementation for the next teaching cycle of that module within a programme.

Any material changes to a programme may not be implemented by NCI until clearance of such changes has been received from the Awarding/Validating body

On receipt of authorisation from Awarding Body the Registrar will formally confirm Councils decision to the Chair of the Academic Council, to the appropriate Dean of School and to the Programme Coordinator.

Documentation relating to the approved change and the record of approval will be stored on the College MIS system. The programme details, curriculum and assessment structures amended accordingly

Annually not later than 31st October the Registrar will independently verify that the programmes delivered and the modules assessed correspond in detail to those approved by Awarding Body as recorded in the Approved Course Schedules.

8.5.2.1 Documentation Required for a Material Modification

Change Request Documentation from the Programme Committee shall consist of:

- (a) List of changes requested
- (b) Amended Programme Document (including Programme Schedules)
- (c) Additional set of Amended Programme Schedules. .

8.5.2.2 Revalidation

If the programme modifications are substantial, it may decide that a Programme Revalidation is necessary and the Dean of School will be required to initiate such a process. Such major modifications outside of the programmatic review process will occur in exceptional cases e.g. due to a professional body change or a significant and/or unexpected market/sectoral change

8.5.3 Minor Changes to Existing Programmes

Changes of less than 20% to a module are deemed to be of a minor nature and, as such, do not require the approval of the Awarding Body to be brought into effect be adopted by the National College of Ireland. Such changes would normally comprise:

- The introduction of new topics into a syllabus and the removal of outdated material or less important topics
- Change in assessment techniques e.g. the introduction of an essay or assignment instead of a time controlled class test
- The balance as between lectures, tutorials and practicals
- Increase or decrease in class contact hours for a subject or module not exceeding 20% of annual class contact hours

Changes such as those outlined above will be formally recorded in the Programme Monitoring Report and would not normally require referral to the Quality Committee of the Academic Council.

These reports will be acted on by the Registrar's Office to ensure that the appropriate College systems are updated.

8.6 Annual Report

Each programme team will provide a Programme Annual Monitoring report which should be issued by 30th October for the preceding year.

The Dean of School shall report annually to Academic Council based on the Quality Assurance information gathered above and within the Programme Reports. This shall be known as the School Annual Report.

9 Programmatic Review

Programmatic Review is a quality assurance process which affords the College an opportunity for the Programme Committees to fundamentally and critically re-appraise programmes and to make major modifications where considered appropriate. It also allows the College and/or School to streamline provision and to inform the ongoing strategic development of the School and College. Programmatic Reviews should be undertaken by School or major subjects of learning.

Each programme conducted within the College is subject to a periodic review, normally on a five yearly cycle as part of a Programmatic Review of a School

In some cases as a result of the Programmatic Review, because of the extensive nature of proposed modifications with serious resource implications, it may be necessary for the Dean of School to seek full programme validation.

9.1 Objectives of the Programmatic Review

The Programmatic review confirms that the promise evidenced at validation has been realised. Alternatively, it recognises whether or not a programme has adapted appropriately to circumstances unforeseen at validation.

The objective of the programmatic review is to

- Analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of each validated programme, including details of learner numbers, retention rates and success rates
- Review the development of the programmes in the context of the requirements of employers, industry, professional bodies, the Irish economy and international developments
- Evaluate the response of the College/school/department to market requirements and educational developments
- Evaluate the feedback mechanisms for learners and the processes for acting on this feedback
- Evaluate the physical facilities and resources provided for the provision of the programme(s)
- Evaluate the formal links which have been established with industry, business and the wider community in order to maintain the relevance of its programmes
- **Evaluate feedback from employers of the programmes' graduates and from those graduates**
- Review any research activities in the field of learning under review and their impact on teaching and learning (notwithstanding that the reviews of the research degree programmes may be undertaken separately)
- Evaluate projections for the following five years in the programme(s)/field of learning under review.
 - Proposals and decisions in relation to updating programmes and modules, discontinuing programmes or parts of programmes, together with proposals to develop new programmes, should be part of such a review

process.

- o Where there is cross-departmental and modular provision, the programmatic review should review how cooperation is managed and standards are maintained.

9.2 Terms of Reference for the Programmatic Review

The terms of reference for the programmatic review are agreed between the College and HETAC in advance of the commencement of the review process. These terms allow for any special considerations for programmes e.g Differentially validated programmes, programmes offered under Collaborative Provision et.c

9.3 Implementation of Programmes Post Programmatic Review

In recommending changes to programmes, programme committees should consider the full implications of proposed changes ensuring that the progression of students who may be repeating or taking a programme by ACCS credits is not compromised. Decisions should be **made early in the process as to whether new programmes will be implemented in a 'big bang' approach or 'phased in'. An implementation plan for revised programmes outlining transition issues,** should be included in the programmatic review documentation.

9.4 Critical Self Study of Programmes

The main process involved in the Programmatic Review is a fundamental critical self-study of programmes and re-appraisal of all aspects of every Programme by the Programme Committee. This self-study is designed to help the Programme Committee to improve the programme and presents an opportunity for those delivering the programme to improve its quality and delivery.

It should not be regarded merely as a new description of the programme but rather as a systemic root-and-branch evaluation. The review should also reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of the quality assurance mechanisms affecting programmes.

In preparing the self-study, the Programme Committee will consult with current learners, graduates of the programme, industrialists and business people, and other external organisations, as appropriate.

Programmes should be reviewed in the context of core validation criteria outlined in Section 4 above.

The Programmatic Review Process should be preceded by an Interim Preparative Review (dry run). The Preparative Review is an internal process and the panel should consist of at least two senior academics from within the College not involved in the review, and an external expert representative from industry. Where internal academic representation is not available, external academic representation should be sought.

9.5 Documentation Required for Programmatic Review Event

The documentation required for the Programmatic Review event comprises two parts –

Part A – The written critical self-evaluation of programmes by Programme Committees. This will include the implementation plan and consideration of any transition issues.

Part B – The Revised Programme Documents – in accordance with issues that have arisen during the self-study process.

9.5.1 Self Evaluation Report

The SER should contain wide ranging information on the School and the programme(s) being evaluated, including:

- A statement of its strategic objectives
- A review and critical analysis of the quality systems and processes which are in place to enable the achievement of its objectives
- The views of teaching staff, past and current learners, administrative staff servicing the programme, views of other staff that have any association with the programme or those involved with/on the programme
- An analysis of its strengths and weaknesses
- The identification of potential opportunities and threats, together with the possible actions to be taken
- An analysis of the success of the programme to date, including access statistics, performance of learners at each stage (including grade profiles and trends), completion rates by stage, graduate performance, etc.
- The identification of resources required for the delivery of its programmes
- A review of reports from programme committees and student feedback forms
- A review of employment/advancement opportunities for learners
- A review of the teaching, assessment and learning strategy of the provider in the relevant field
- A review of the assessment strategies for each programme
- An analysis of all research activity within the unit and future plans in that regard (note that there are specific requirements for reviews of research degree programmes;).
- A review of its links with employers, industry, professions, the business and wider community
- Detail of programme changes proposed and the rationale for same
- A review of all modules included in the programme(s) under review
- Draft programme schedules, incorporating the proposed changes.

- The review of the assessment strategies for each programme should ensure validity, reliability, consistency and fairness of the assessment methods employed. It should also ensure assessment is used to support effective learning (see *Assessment and Standards* 2009).
- The enrolment/entry policy for each programme should be monitored and reviewed to ensure their appropriateness.
- All aspects of resourcing and services required/provided for should be considered. This should include centres of delivery other than the main campus.
- The SER should be considered by the Academic Council which has responsibility for the implementation of all recommendations arising from the review.
- The SER should be published, together with the peer review report, provider response and implementation plan.

9.5.2 Revised Programme Documents

Revised programme documents should follow the programme document template available on the staff portal.

9.6 Consideration of Programmatic Review Documentation by School Committee

The School Committee reviews the Programmatic Review Documentation.

When the Committee approves the Programmatic Review Documentation, it requests of the Registrar that a Programmatic Review Panel be formed and that a Programmatic Review Event be organised.

All documentation for Panel Review members must be forwarded to them at least two weeks prior to the event. The relevant Dean of School is to be issued with a copy set of all documentation forwarded to the Panel members on the same day.

9.7 Programmatic Review Event

The Programmatic Review Event is organised by the Registrar in consultation with the Dean of School. The Programmatic Review is carried out by a Programmatic Review Panel that is required to make an impartial judgement on the overall standard of the programmes.

In order to make its judgement, the Programmatic Review Panel visits to review the Programmatic Review Documentation, to discuss the programmes with the Programme Committees, learners and graduates of the programmes and to view the facilities available for conducting the programmes.

9.7.1 Formation of the Programmatic Review Panel

The Registrar's office, in consultation with the Dean of School, is responsible for constituting the Programmatic Review Panel.

The peer review group should be independent of the College. Members of the panel should be free from any or apparent conflict of interest.⁹ Members will be asked to formally declare freedom from conflict of interest.

The panel should comprise experts from relevant fields of learning, who are capable of making national and international comparisons with regard to the specific suite of programmes.

The School Committee nominates at least 3 external members (at least 2 academic and one professional/industrial) to the Programmatic Review Panel. A student representative is also required. This may be a student from another institution.

Where the programmatic review contains programmes for different subject groupings, it may be practical to split the event over a number of days allowing for different external members to contribute. The Chair of the panel should preside over all meetings.

The Chair of the Panel should have appropriate experience of programmatic review in the context of HETAC programmes (or other awarding body where programmes are not validated by HETAC)

A candidate for membership of a Programmatic Review Panel who has served as an external examiner on the programmes in the School, must have ended her/his external examinership at least two years before the Programmatic Review Event.

The programmatic review panel is approved by HETAC.

9.7.2 Preparation within the School for the Programmatic Review Event

The Dean of School undertakes the following duties in preparation for the Programmatic Review Event:

- Ensures that copies of the Programmatic Review Documentation are distributed to all members of the Programme Committees in adequate time prior to the Programmatic Review Event;
- Organises meetings of the Programme Committees to discuss the documentation and to prepare to present the Programmatic Review documentation in the best way possible to the Programmatic Review Panel;
- Invites graduates and learners to participate in and contribute to the Programmatic Review Event.

⁹ See HETAC (2009) *Participating in an evaluation panel as an expert assessor: Guidelines*

9.7.3 Issues addressed by the Programmatic Review Panel

The Programmatic Review Panel focuses on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) prepared by the Programme Committees and views the Revised Programme Documents, mainly to ensure that there is correlation between the conclusions of the self-study and the Revised Programme Documents and that any significant changes proposed are appropriate.

The primary purpose of the Programmatic Review Event is to:

- Study the self-evaluation report
- Visit the College and meet with teaching staff, learners (past and present if possible), administrative staff, employers and any other category of internal and external stakeholders
- Clarify and verify details in the SER
- Consider how well the identified aims and objectives of the provider are being met
- Consider programme changes proposed in the context of all other information provided and recommend acceptance or otherwise of the proposals
- Consider the quality assurance arrangements which affect the programmes under review
- Present its findings at the end of the visit
- Prepare a report on the findings of the PRG, to include recommendations for the provider in respect of the suite of programmes under review.

9.7.4 Programmatic Review Panel Report.

At the end of the Programmatic Review visit, the chairperson of the Programmatic Review Panel normally provides an oral presentation of the findings and conclusions of the panel to the President, Dean of School, and Programme Leaders.

This presentation may indicate a recommendation for continuing approval or rejection of the programme(s), and make suggestions for modifying the programmes or outline special conditions for approval.

The Programmatic Review Panel prepares a written report that is forwarded by the **Registrar's office to the Dean of School and the Academic Council.**

The report of the Programmatic Review Panel is the academic judgement of a peer group on the academic standard and quality of the programmes in a School. It confirms to the College the standard of the programmes in a publicly accountable manner.

The report of the Programmatic Review Panel shall be submitted to the appropriate External Awarding/Validating Body.

9.7.5 Programme Approval by the External Awarding/Validating Body

When a Programme has been approved, the Awarding body issues Certificates of Programme Approval to the Registrar, indicating any conditions attached to the approval.

9.7.6 Approved Programme Document

Copies of the Approved Programme Documents, which include amendments resulting from the approval of the awarding body (i.e. updated syllabi, learning outcomes etc) are forwarded by the Dean of School, to the Programme Committees and Office of the Registrar at least four weeks before the start of the next academic year.

This documentation is **held centrally on the College's document management system** (Microsoft Sharepoint Portal) and the programme details, curriculum and assessment structure are updated accordingly for the next session. If the programmatic review has led to a change in programme title, a new programme must be set up **on the College's** information systems to preserve historical data.

