

Policy/Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in the Recognised Colleges

November 2017



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



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1. Overview

Under its 1908 Charter, the National University of Ireland (NUI) is empowered to recognise colleges of higher education and award degrees and other qualifications in those colleges subject to the University being satisfied that the colleges so recognised and the courses they provide meet appropriate quality standards. This is further embedded under recent legislation - the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 – where NUI, as a designated awarding body (DAB), has the authority to accredit taught and research programmes leading to NUI qualifications in the recognised colleges. Under the Act recognised colleges are referred to as *linked providers*¹.

Under the Act, NUI recognised colleges, referred to as linked providers, have responsibility to:

establish procedures in writing, for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides (section 28 (1)),

and before establishing these procedures, they are required to:

submit a draft of the proposed procedures to the relevant designated awarding body for approval (section 33 (1)).

2. Purpose

The purpose of these procedures is to outline the process by which NUI will fulfil its responsibilities under section 33 (2) of the Act whereby the University may:

- a) approve the proposed quality assurance procedures;
- b) refuse to approve the proposed quality assurance procedures but make recommendations to the recognised college, as it thinks appropriate; or
- c) refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

This policy also outlines the process by which NUI will continue to review and approve updated or revised procedures of the recognised colleges following initial approval by Senate.

¹ Where a recognised college is also a designated awarding body under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the responsibility for approval of its quality assurance procedures will lie directly with QQI.

3. Scope

This policy applies to (i) current recognised colleges of NUI and (ii) other institutions that may seek recognised college status with the University that intend to provide taught and research programmes leading to NUI qualifications.

4. Benefit

The following procedures clearly indicate the process undertaken by NUI to review the quality assurance procedures of recognised colleges (both existing and potential) and to have them approved by Senate.

5. Definition

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Part 1 (3) defines *linked providers* as higher education providers that do not have the power to award degrees, but provide a programme of study that satisfies all or part of the conditions for an award of the designated awarding body through specific arrangements.

NUI has identified three categories that apply to institutions granted, or seeking, recognised college and accordingly, Linked Provider status:

- a) Where the University, as the designated awarding body, accredits existing and future programmes offered directly by the recognised college and leading to NUI qualifications;
- b) Where a new Institution applies to NUI for recognised college status so that its programmes of study will lead to NUI qualifications.
- c) Where the University, as the designated awarding body, accredits the overall programme leading to an NUI qualification but where a range of partner institutions shares the delivery of the programme and/or modules;

6. Principles

- 6.1** Quality and its assurance are primarily the responsibility of the recognised college; this involves planning, defining, assessing and improving practice in all activities relating to educational provision.
- 6.2** Successful quality assurance systems are efficient, clearly communicated and well integrated into the normal activities of the recognised college.

7. Procedures for the initial and subsequent approval of the quality assurance procedures of the recognised colleges

7.1 Notification

7.1.1 Notification for initial approval

NUI will notify an institution, from which Senate has received an application for recognised college status, of the requirement to submit draft quality assurance procedures for approval as part of the overall review process.

An appropriate timeframe for the submission of quality assurance procedures will be agreed between the NUI Registrar and the institution concerned, having regard for scheduled Senate meetings, the formal due diligence process to be undertaken by the University, the terms of reference of the proposed review for recognised college status and other possible influencing factors such as the proposed International Education Mark (IEM).

7.1.2 Notification for subsequent approval

Where there is a change to the original arrangements with a recognised college, NUI will request that updated quality assurance procedures be submitted for approval and these may form part of the revised arrangements with the recognised college.

7.2 Submission

7.2.1 The institution will submit hard and soft copies of their quality assurance procedures in the first instance to the Registrar, who will acknowledge receipt within three working days.

7.2.2 The quality assurance procedures submitted are required but not limited to have regard for the following:

- a) *Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*;
- b) *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (April 2016);

- c) *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, May 2015);*
- d) Relevant QQI policies regarding the *Protection of Enrolled Learners; Access, Transfer & Progression; and Recognition of Prior Learning;*
- e) In addition for existing recognised colleges: memoranda of understanding or contracts that form the basis for the arrangements with NUI;
- f) NUI policies upon which the recognised college procedures are reliant on for their full enactment e.g. Extern Examiner Policy for the Recognised Colleges; Procedures and Regulations for the Approval of New Programmes and changes to existing Programmes;
- g) In addition, for institutions seeking recognised college status consideration should be given to the relevant quality assurance guidelines under which current programmes are currently validated e.g. *QQI Independent and Private Providers Quality Assurance Guidelines;*
- h) Where applicable (to be confirmed at the time of notification) the institution's quality assurance procedures may also need to demonstrate alignment with:
 - ▶ QQI Professional and Statutory Body standards and curriculum requirements for validated programmes of education;
 - ▶ QQI *Policy Code of Practice for the provision of programmes of education and training to international learners;*
 - ▶ QQI topic-specific quality assurance guidelines e.g. *Research Degree Programmes.*

7.3 Assessment for Approval

7.3.1 In assessing an institution's quality assurance procedures, NUI will apply the following criteria:

a) Compliance:

- ▶ the institution's proposed quality assurance policies and procedures should demonstrate that they have regard for the requirements of source documents outlined in section 7.2.2;
- ▶ the institution must submit a plan to publish its proposed policies and procedures as specified under section 33 (3) to ensure access and availability to staff, students and stakeholders, as appropriate.

b) Governance

- ▶ the institution must meet legal, reputation and compliance requirements as an established HEI in Ireland and in all jurisdictions in which it operates including third party arrangements e.g. parent organisations, subsidiaries, collaborations and partnerships nationally and internationally.²
- ▶ the institution should demonstrate that the necessary resource, governance and structural arrangements are in place to show that it is in good financial standing, has fit-for-purpose governance, management, decision-making and reporting structures (internally and externally), has sufficient and sustainable resources, i.e. human infrastructure and financial, to support good quality educational provision including appropriately qualified staff, facilities, equipment and learning resources – library and IT.
- ▶ the institution should demonstrate that the development and approval of documented procedures has been conducted under the authority of its governing council, board or equivalent executive committee; and where applicable in consultation with internal and external stakeholders;

2 Appendix A includes a checklist of areas that an institution should consider before making an application for recognised college status. These indicative areas will also apply to institutions engaged in any collaborative arrangement with another third party to offer programmes of study.

- ▶ the institution's proposed quality assurance procedures demonstrate appropriate document control as evidenced on each procedure; (i) the position with designated responsibility for oversight of implementation of the procedure; and (ii) the date on which the policy and procedure gained initial approval and (iii) the date of next review.

7.4 Process for Approval

7.4.1 Upon receipt of the draft quality assurance procedures, designated NUI staff will conduct a preliminary desktop assessment to ensure completeness of the received documentation against 7.2.2 above;

7.4.2 The NUI Registrar will establish a review panel to consider the quality assurance procedures and make a recommendation to Senate. Membership of the panel will include the following:

- ▶ NUI Registrar (Chair);
- ▶ A senior representative from the NUI constituent universities;
- ▶ Appropriately qualified expert(s) in quality assurance;
- ▶ Independent subject experts may also be invited as appropriate in the context of specialist areas such financial, legal, risk and/or compliance where required.

7.4.3 The review panel will take no longer than 3 months to meet and conduct the assessment for approval of the linked provider's submission, and to complete a report to Senate recommending either:

- ▶ to approve the proposed procedures of a linked provider;
- ▶ to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations;
- ▶ to refuse to approve the procedures.

7.4.4 The report of the review panel will be communicated in writing to the institution to advise:

- ▶ that the proposed procedures will proceed to Senate for approval; or
- ▶ a proposed timeframe for resubmission to NUI if the linked provider is invited to address recommendations/gaps in their procedures; or
- ▶ that the proposed procedures are refused approval.

7.5 Outcomes of the Approval Process by Senate

7.5.1 The institution will be informed in writing of the decision by Senate that:

- ▶ the proposed procedures are approved;
- ▶ the recommendation is to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations;
- ▶ the recommendation is to refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

7.5.2 Following approval by Senate of the quality assurance procedures, the institution must under section 33 (3) of the Act publish its procedures in a format to be agreed with NUI and provide a copy of these procedures to NUI.

7.5.3 Where Senate adopts recommendations for changes to the proposed procedures, the institution will resubmit the draft procedures for approval by Senate, as per section 33 (4) of the Act. Following approval, the institution will publish these procedures in a format to be agreed with NUI and provide a copy to NUI.

8. Changes to quality assurance procedures in the recognised colleges

- 8.1 It is expected that a recognised college will update or revise procedures from time to time. These changes may be in response to changes in the educational provision within the institution; the recognised college status of the institution; the QQI Act 2012; new QQI Quality Assurance Procedures, other codes or policies; or Professional Accreditation Body requirements as appropriate.
- 8.2 Updated/revised procedures will require renewed approval by Senate. A review process, with similar timeframes, as outlined in section 7.4 above will apply.

9. Legislation and Regulations and guidelines

- 9.1 [Quality & Qualifications \(Education & Training\) Act 2012](#)
- 9.2 [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016](#)
- 9.3 [Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies](#)
- 9.4 [Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Independent/Private Providers](#)
- 9.5 [Code of Practice for provision of programmes of education and training to international learners](#)
- 9.6 [Topic-Specific QA Guidelines: Statutory Guidelines for the QA of Research Degree Programmes, 2016 \(*White Paper – under consultation*\)](#)
- 9.7 [Topic-Specific QA Guidelines: Statutory Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers, 2016](#)
- 9.8 [Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training, 2015](#)
- 9.9 [A Current Overview of Recognition of Prior Learning](#)
- 9.10 [European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning CEDEFOP 2015](#)
- 9.11 [European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area, 2015](#)

Appendix A: Criteria for Recognised College Status

The following is a checklist of areas that an institution should consider before making an application for recognised college status. These indicative areas will also apply to institutions engaged in any collaborative arrangement with another third party.

Legal, reputation and compliance requirements

- ▶ Is the institution a legal entity, with education and training as a principal function?
- ▶ Is the legal entity a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law?
- ▶ Has the institution clearly specified its dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries?
- ▶ Has the institution declared any third-party relationships and partnerships?
- ▶ Does the institution comply with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates?
- ▶ Is the institution in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any jurisdictions in which it operates (or in which its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrolls learners, or in which it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators?

Resource, governance and structural requirements

- ▶ Is the institution stable and in good financial standing?
- ▶ Does the institution have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?
- ▶ Does the institution have fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures?
- ▶ Does the institution have arrangements for and appropriate mechanisms in place for providing required information?
- ▶ Does the institution have the capacity, demonstrated through experience and track record, to provide education and training programmes?
- ▶ Does the institution have sufficient resources, as well as corporate, structural and internal quality assurance systems in place, to sustainably provide education and training programmes?

Programme development and provision requirements

- ▶ Does the institution have appropriately qualified staff that can complement and support the programmes of education and training offered?
- ▶ Does the institution have fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources?
- ▶ Does the institution have structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learner achievement?
- ▶ Does the provider have arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners?





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