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Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

NUI Protocol on Transitioning to Permanent Online Delivery for the 2022-23 Session in the Recognised Colleges

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NUI protocol on transitioning to permanent online delivery for the 2022-2023 session

1. Purpose of this protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to set out NUI's procedures for the re-validation of existing RCSI and IPA programmes transitioning from temporarily approved online delivery modes¹ to permanent online modes of delivery starting in the academic year 2022-23. This protocol does not apply to proposals for new, fully online academic programmes in the Recognised colleges, which should continue to follow NUI's published regulations for new programme approvals², until further notice.

2. Background

COVID-19 restrictions caused a sharp increase in the volume of online learning provision in all NUI member institutions, with most higher education programmes moving fully online under COVID-19 emergency provisions. All programme content, bar specified laboratory and clinical work, was re-configured for delivery using online platforms during the final semester of the 2019-20 session and the full 2020-21 session.

NUI Senate noted this change in the mode of programme delivery in the Recognised colleges and was assured that the Recognised colleges had taken all necessary steps to ensure the maintenance of high-quality standards for student learning, notwithstanding the emergency situation facing all academic programme coordinators and their wider teams.

With the return of students to campuses in Semester I 2021-22, academic institutions began to emerge from the COVID-19 emergency, however restrictions and constraints remain in terms of health and safety for students and staff on campus. NUI is aware that recognised colleges are continuing to offer some programmes fully online while others have changed or will change to multi-modal delivery (with a combination of blended, hybrid and hyflex engagement models).

In circumstances where recognised colleges wish to propose that some programmes are offered online on a more permanent basis, post-COVID-19 emergency provisions, NUI

¹ Recognised college programmes moved to online delivery as part of COVID-19 emergency response measures during the final semester of the 2019-20 session and the full 2020-21 session.

² See: http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Programme_Approval_Regs.pdf.

requires further assurances that academic quality and standards will be upheld, and that the student learning experience has been fully considered and safeguarded.

3. Relevant policy and procedures

This protocol is an interim measure, applicable for programme changes that will take effect in the 2022-2023 academic year and subject to review prior to any extension of that timeframe. It broadly follows NUI's existing policy and regulations governing changes existing programmes that lead to major and non-major NUI qualifications³, with some modifications. This protocol should be considered as interim, until it is superseded by formal NUI policy and regulations to govern NUI approval of online academic programmes leading to qualifications of the University in the Recognised colleges. NUI's policy in this area will be developed in consultation with the Recognised colleges and will be aligned with good practice in the constituent universities and with sectoral guidelines to be published by QQI.

4. Procedures

Major or non-major awards transitioning from temporary to permanent online delivery

NUI will seek assurance from at least one senior academic in the discipline, who is external to and independent of the recognised college, that in their opinion the proposed permanent change to fully online delivery has been carefully and thoroughly designed by the recognised college so as to ensure the continuation of high-quality academic standards and student experience.

In respect of major awards, there are two categories of change, each requiring a different level of external, independent scrutiny and evaluation:

Category A: Major changes to programme design, delivery and assessment;

Category B: Changes in assessment strategy and methodology only.

Category A: Major changes to programme design, delivery and assessment

Where a programme will permanently change one or more of the following attributes, *as well as* a change to the assessment strategy and methodology for the programme, NUI will require an evaluation by an external, independent academic assessor. This assessor may be appointed by the recognised college in consultation with NUI and should not have

³ See: http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Programme_Approval_Regs.pdf.

served as an extern examiner in any subject in the recognised college within the previous five years.

Types of change include:

- i. A change to the overall programme **learning outcomes** and associated changes to curriculum structure, content and/or duration, such as: module title(s); module learning outcomes and curriculum content; module size(s) (total hours student effort expressed as ECTS); the ratio of taught to research components in a programme (particularly relevant to research degrees, including professional research programmes)
- ii. A change to **admissions requirements** and/or progression rules for the programme
- iii. The **addition** of a new exit pathway from the programme, or the **withdrawal** of an existing pathway

Category B: Changes in assessment strategy and methodology only

During this interim period, where a programme moving to permanent online delivery does not propose any of the major changes listed in Category A but does propose to change the assessment strategy and methodology for the programme, NUI will require an evaluation of the proposed changes by an existing NUI-appointed external examiner. The recognised college will consult the current extern examiner for the programme where they have experienced the transition from pre-COVID-19 delivery to temporary online delivery. In the case of a more recent appointment where the extern examiner as only experienced temporary online delivery, the current extern examiner's review of proposed changes to assessment strategy and methodology should be supplemented by consultation with the most recent previous extern examiner for the programme.

Typical changes to assessment strategy/methods associated with fully online programme delivery include, but are not limited to:

- i. a recalibration of the balance of continuous assessment methods (formative or summative) and terminal examinations, in favour of the former;
- ii. the introduction of online assessment tools such as MCQs and/or proctored, remote assessments;
- iii. the introduction of online student discussion forums that form part of the graded components of modules.