

Policy and Procedures for the Approval  
of Quality Assurance Procedures in  
Recognised Colleges that are Linked  
Providers of NUI



**Ollscoil na hÉireann**  
National University of Ireland



# Policy and Procedures for the Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures in Recognised Colleges that are Linked Providers of NUI

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# 1. Scope

This policy applies to

- i. current recognised colleges of the National University of Ireland (NUI), that are linked providers and
- ii. other institutions that may seek recognised college status with NUI that intend to provide taught and research programmes leading to NUI qualifications.

# 2. Definition

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

- i. Where NUI, as the designated awarding body, accredits programmes offered directly by the recognised college and leading to NUI qualifications.
- ii. Where NUI, 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 modules.
- iii. Where an institution applies to NUI for recognised college status so that its programmes of study will lead to NUI qualifications.

# 3. Principles

- 3.1** 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.
- 3.2** Successful quality assurance systems are efficient, clearly communicated and well-integrated into the normal activities of the recognised college.
- 3.3** Quality assurance systems, policies and procedures in NUI recognised colleges comply with relevant legislation and align with regulatory standards set by QQI in addition to referencing any relevant European or international standards, such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs)*. An indicative list of statutory and regulatory documents is provided in Appendix 1.

## 4. Procedures for the initial and subsequent approval of the quality assurance procedures of recognised colleges that are linked providers of NUI

### 4.1 Notification

#### 4.1.1 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 NUI, the terms of reference of the proposed review for recognised college status and other regulatory developments, if appropriate.

#### 4.1.2 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.

#### 4.1.3 Notification for re-approval

The quality assurance procedures of a recognised college that is a linked provider will be reviewed on a regular basis under NUI's institutional review policy; the first review will usually take place seven years after initial approval. NUI will notify and involve the recognised college in scheduling their institutional review.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent stages of the re-approval process are governed by NUI (2023) *Policy and Procedures for the Institutional Review of Quality Assurance Effectiveness in the Recognised Colleges that are Linked Providers*.

## 4.2 Submission

**4.2.1** The institution will submit their quality assurance procedures to the Registrar, who will acknowledge receipt within three working days.

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

- i. *Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.*
- ii. *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016).*
- iii. *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, May 2015).*
- iv. Relevant QQI policies regarding the *Protection of Enrolled Learners; Access, Transfer & Progression; and Recognition of Prior Learning.*
- v. In addition, for existing recognised colleges: memoranda of agreement/understanding or contracts that form the basis for the arrangements with NUI.
- vi. NUI policies upon which the recognised college procedures are reliant 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.*
- vii. 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.*
- viii. 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 Code of *Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners;*
  - ▶ QQI topic-specific quality assurance guidelines, e.g. *QQI Topic-specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes.*

## 4.3 Assessment for Approval

**4.3.1** In assessing an institution's quality assurance procedures, NUI will apply the following criteria (please see Appendix 2 for more detailed guidance):

**a) Quality Assurance System:**

- ▶ There is a system of quality assurance governance and management in place.
- ▶ The quality assurance system, policies and procedures are aligned with QQI's *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*.
- ▶ Quality assurance is embedded and maintained across the institution.
- ▶ Quality assurance policies and procedures are documented and accessible, and their effectiveness periodically reviewed.

**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.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ The institution should demonstrate that the necessary resource, governance and structural arrangements are in place. It must 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 (human infrastructure and financial systems) to support good quality educational provision, including appropriately qualified staff, facilities, equipment and learning resources, i.e. 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2 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.

## 4.4 Process for Approval

**4.4.1** Upon receipt of the draft quality assurance procedures, designated NUI staff will conduct a preliminary desktop assessment to ensure completeness of the received documentation.

**4.4.2** 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, and
- ▶ Independent subject experts such as financial, legal, risk and/or compliance, where required.

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

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

**4.4.4** The report of the review panel will be communicated 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
- ▶ the proposed procedures are refused approval.

In the case of refusal, NUI will provide feedback from the panel to inform any future submission.



## 4.5 Outcomes of the Approval Process by Senate

**4.5.1** The institution will be informed of the decision by Senate that:

- ▶ the proposed procedures are approved; or
- ▶ the proposed procedures are approved subject to recommended amendments; or
- ▶ the proposed procedures are not approved.

**4.5.2** Following approval by Senate of the quality assurance procedures, the institution must publish its procedures in a format to be agreed with NUI and provide a copy of these procedures to NUI.

**4.5.3** Where Senate adopts recommendations for amendments to the proposed procedures, the institution will resubmit the draft procedures for approval by Senate taking account of the recommended amendments. Following approval, the institution will publish these procedures in a format to be agreed with NUI and provide a copy to NUI.

## 5. Changes to quality assurance procedures in the recognised colleges

**5.1** 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.

**5.2** Updated/revised procedures will require renewed approval by Senate. A review process, with similar timeframes, as outlined in section 4.4 above will apply.

## Appendix 1 – Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Guidelines

Below is a list of relevant legislation, regulations and guidelines, which is indicative rather than exhaustive:

Quality & Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 2012

QQI (2016) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

QQI (2016) Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies

QQI (2016) Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers

QQI (2017) Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for the Providers of Research Degree Programmes.

QQI (2015) Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training. Policy Restatement of NQAI 2003 Policy.

Goggin, D. et al (2015) A Current Overview of Recognition of Prior Learning. Focused Research Report No.2. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education.

CEDEFOP (2015) European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning

European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015) Brussels, Belgium.

QQI (2021) Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval.

## Appendix 2 – Preparing to Apply for NUI 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. An institution applying for recognised college status will need to provide documentary evidence to support their application.

### 1. Legal, reputation and compliance requirements

- The institution is a legal entity, with education and training as a principal function.
- The legal entity is a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law.
- The institution has clearly specified its dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries (where applicable).
- The institution has declared any third-party relationships and partnerships.
- The institution complies with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates.
- The institution is 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.
- The institution has a comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion policy.
- The institution has a sustainability policy appropriate to its size and purpose.

### 2. Resource, governance and structural requirements

- The institution is stable and in good financial standing.
- The institution has a reasonable business case for sustainable provision.
- The institution has fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures.

- The institution has arrangements for and appropriate mechanisms in place for providing required information.
- The institution has the capacity, demonstrated through experience and track record, to provide education and training programmes.
- The institution has sufficient resources, as well as corporate, structural and internal quality assurance systems in place, to sustainably provide education and training programmes.

### **3. Quality assurance and enhancement system requirements**

- There is a system of quality assurance governance and management in place.
- The quality assurance system is embedded and maintained across the institution.
- The quality assurance system, policies and procedures are robust. (Indicate how this is demonstrated.)
- The quality assurance policies and procedures are documented and accessible. The effectiveness of QA policies and procedures is periodically reviewed. (Provide documented evidence of periodic review.)
- The QA system supports public confidence in the provider institution and its capacity to provide programmes to NUI's standards. (Provide evidence for this.)
- The quality assurance findings are systematically analysed and used to drive enhancement across the institution. (Provide evidence of this process.)
- The procedures for quality assurance include appropriate opportunities for student participation and independent external representation. (Provide a list of committees/review panels/structural mechanisms involving student and external representatives.)
- There is a systematic approach to the development of new programmes of learning aligned with the NFQ and a system for periodic review of programmes, which includes all relevant stakeholders. (Provide a 'workflow' diagram or other documentary evidence of the process.)
- There are policies regarding access, transfer and progression (including policies on recognition of prior learning) that align with NUI's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and QQI guidelines.

- There is a system for the ongoing monitoring of the learner experience that reflects different cohorts and modes of engagement that are available.
- There is a comprehensive assessment framework covering the administration of assessment, policy on institutional marks and standards, policies regarding security and integrity of assessment, procedures for appeals and record of learner achievement.
- There are comprehensive and integrated learner supports (academic, pastoral, career guidance) available in a manner that aligns with the learner's mode of engagement (whether online or in person).
- There is a robust and secure approach to information and data management that complies with data protection and freedom of information legislation.
- The approach to staff recruitment, management and development is supportive and transparent. (Provide evidence of this, e.g. policies, documents outlining processes etc.)

#### **4. Programme development and provision requirements**

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







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