

Development and Approval of Programmes for a Blended or Fully Online Environment Policy

Section 1 - Introduction

Purpose

(1) This policy sets out the principles and criteria by which the College will approve a programme. This policy dovetails with the [Design of Programmes and Curricula for a Blended or Fully Online Environment Policy](#).

Scope

To whom does the policy apply?

(2) This policy applies to Hibernia College Staff and Faculty who are designing new programmes. These individuals are referred to as programme developers in this policy.

(3) It also applies to the Academic Board and Executive Management Team (EMT) when approving a programme or a proposal to develop a programme.

In what situations does the Policy apply?

(4) The policy applies in the design and development of programmes being prepared for provision by Hibernia College.

(5) The policy applies where the programme is intended to lead to:

- a. An award by QQI
- b. An award of a professional, regulatory or other statutory body (PRSB)
- c. An award of a body recognised as providing State qualifications leading to awards in another jurisdiction
- d. Any non-formal award made by Hibernia College

(6) This policy applies to all programmes regardless of location of provision, mode of provision or disciplinary area.

Who is responsible for implementing the policy?

(7) The Academic Board is ultimately responsible for the implementation of this policy.

Definitions

(8) Programme

(9) Curriculum and Pedagogy

(10) Module

(11) Blended Learning

(12) Online Learning

- (13) Programme Board
- (14) Types of Provision
- (15) Articulation Arrangement
- (16) Collaborative Provision
- (17) Franchising
- (18) Transnational Provision
- (19) Due Diligence
- (20) Validation

Section 2 - Context

Legal or Regulatory Context

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

(21) This policy is cognisant of the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#) and its definitions and provisions around the principles underpinning the validation of programmes of education leading to awards on the Irish [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#).

Quality Assurance Guidelines

(22) This policy has been designed with regard to the [European Standards and Guidelines](#) and QQI [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#), [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers](#), all of which specify and guide on the need for Hibernia College to implement policy and procedure to support the design and approval of programmes.

Guidelines for programme development and approval (3.1), as well as programme monitoring and review (3.3), are clearly laid out in the [Core QA Guidelines](#), and should be considered when developing and providing programmes of education and training regardless of the mode of delivery. The [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) also include guidelines on Staff recruitment (4.1) and Staff development (4.3).

Validation Policies and Criteria

(23) Where a programme is being developed for submission to QQI for accreditation as a programme leading to an award on the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#), it is developed in line with QQI's [validation policies and criteria](#).

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes

(24) The [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#) are a supplement to the QQI [Core Statutory QA Guidelines](#) and [Sector-Specific QA Guidelines](#). As a provider delivering blended learning programmes, Hibernia College shall 'have regard to' the [Core QA Guidelines](#), and the [Sector-Specific guidelines](#).

Transnational Provision and Collaborative Provision

(25) Where the programme being developed is intended to be delivered as a collaborative or transnational provision, the development and approval takes place in line with:

- a. The College [Framework on Collaborative and Transnational Provision](#)
- b. The College [Framework for International Student Support](#)
- c. QQI [policies for transnational and collaborative provision](#) in addition to the usual regulatory requirements for new programmes
- d. IHEQN document [Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision](#)

International Good Practice and Standards

(26) The College shall have due regard to the following policy instruments as relevant to a particular programme.

- a. [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area \(ESG\) \(2014\)](#)
- b. [ACODE - Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning](#)
 - i. The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-learning, referred to as ACODE, developed benchmarks in 2014 for technology-enhanced learning and teaching. This policy, and associated procedures, have been designed to at a minimum meet these benchmarks.
- c. [EADTU - Quality Assessment for E-learning: a Benchmarking Approach](#)
 - i. The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), a leading European institutional association in online, open and flexible higher education, has also established benchmarks for good practice. This policy, and associated procedures, has also been designed to at a minimum meet these benchmarks.
- d. [Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher education in the European region, Lisbon \(1997\)](#)
- e. [Committee of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Recommendation the Recognition of Joint Degrees, Strasbourg \(2004\)](#)
- f. OECD/UNESCO [Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education \(2005\)](#)
- g. UNESCO/COUNCIL OF EUROPE [Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education \(2007\)](#)
- h. BFUG, [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, \(2014\)](#)
- i. [UNESCO-Asia Pacific Quality Network Toolkit: Regulating the quality of cross-border education \(2006\)](#)
- j. Ministers of Education, European Higher Education Area - [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes 2015](#)
 - i. A policy around the European accreditation approach for joint programmes, which should be applied to all those joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level

Section 3 - Policy Statements

Part A - Principles and Criteria

(27) The design and development of all programmes within Hibernia College must be conducted in line with the following principles, which are to be used as programme approval criteria. These are equivalent to validation criteria, and these are based on, and include extracts from, the QQI [Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training](#).

The programme aligns to the Strategy of the College.

(28) New programmes must conform to the College's mission, vision, values and strategic objectives as determined by the Board of Directors and managed by the Chief Executive Officer.

The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the awards sought.

(29) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly and an award is specified for those who complete the programme.

(30) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's [Policy and Criteria for Making Awards](#) and complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

(31) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are:

- a. Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought
- b. Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders

(32) For each programme and embedded programme, the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified and they are consistent with the relevant QQI awards standards.

(33) Where a programme is intended for transnational delivery the objectives and outcomes should align with similar programmes in relevant countries.

The programme concept, implementation strategy and its interpretation of awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives).

(34) Hibernia College programmes are developed on the basis of rigorous investigation into the following where relevant:

- a. Market demand and societal need
- b. Educational need and impact
- c. Disciplinary research
- d. Capacity to provide appropriate pastoral support to Learners enrolled in the programme
- e. Any local context as it relates to the right of those involved in the programme and the ethical considerations of local working or learning environments
- f. The business case for the programme
- g. Stakeholder perspectives – both internal within Hibernia College and externally (e.g. potential employers)
- h. Similar programmes delivered elsewhere

The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory.

(35) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's [policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression](#) in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training.

(36) Programme information for prospective learners and learners is provided in plain language providing detail on what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme, in particular what is necessary for learners to succeed on the programme. There should be procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.

(37) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.

The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit for purpose and has been devised in accordance with the HCQF Design of Programme's and Curricula for a Blended or Fully Online Environment Policy.

(38) The College's policy on programme design is of critical importance and must guide programme designers and developers in the process of creating a new programme.

There are sufficient qualified and capable programme Staff available to implement the programme as planned.

(39) The specification of the programme's staffing requirements, to include professional and educational qualifications, licences to practise where applicable, experience and the Staff/learner ratio requirements is precise, rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose.

(40) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's Staff to be managed, irrespective of location ensuring continuing capability to fulfil their roles.

(41) There are Staff development opportunities, and those who support learning (including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.

There are sufficient resources to implement the programme as planned.

(42) Programme developers must consider the resource implications for the programme, including:

- a. Developing the programme
- b. Providing and maintaining the programme from both an academic and administrative perspective
- c. Supporting the learners on the programme

(43) In particular explicit consideration must be given where the programme is intended for transnational or fully online provision and what additional resource demands this may have.

(44) New programmes must have a clear business justification that demonstrates viability and sustainability.

The blended or fully online learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's prospective learners.

(45) The proposed programme will be supportive and foster the development of a learning community through social, teaching and cognitive presence, irrespective of learner location.

(46) The programme will be accessible and will incorporate principles of universal design for learning.

Strategies for Teaching, Learning and Assessment Excellence

(47) The proposed programme will:

- a. Incorporate a range of inclusive teaching and assessment methods
- b. Provide opportunities for discussion and interaction
- c. Promote and support reflective practice
- d. Promote and support a research culture
- e. Support the integration of theory and practice through simulation or professional practice placement where relevant
- f. Have strong ethical underpinnings and be considerate of local cultures and heritages

Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.

(48) Programme handbooks will detail relevant curriculum and assessment detail.

(49) In the case of collaborative and/or transnational programmes, learners must:

- a. Have an equivalent learning experience to that of learners attending elements of their programme in Ireland
- b. Receive information on the recognition of their qualification in the country in which they are based
- c. Have clear information on what is expected in terms of engagement and what is required of learners to successfully complete the programme

The programme is well managed.

(50) Programmes approved are governed within the College's existing governance structures as set out in the [Governance and Management Policy](#).

(51) There is a designated programme leader with clearly defined responsibilities.

(52) A Programme Board is established in keeping the [Programme Board Terms of Reference](#).

(53) Any supplementary governance considerations (for example, joint Programme Committees) must be specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the programme document.

(54) Collaborations must be formalised in a memorandum of agreement between Hibernia College and any collaborating partners.

All potential risks are assessed, and appropriate due diligence is undertaken.

(55) The College monitors risk to ensure continued success and prevent any potential harm to itself and its students. The College monitors risk in the following ways:

- a. New programmes inevitably present new risks to the College. Programme developers must (at a minimum) identify these during development of the programme.
- b. Due diligence checks and a risk assessment are undertaken in respect of all new collaborative and/or transnational programmes being proposed. In particular, transnational and collaborative programmes must be legal and comply with all regulatory requirements in jurisdictions where they operate, as well as in Ireland.
- c. Collaborative and/or transnational programmes under consideration for revalidation must be subject to review and updating of their due diligence and risk assessments.

In respect of Management and Governance in respect of Collaborations

(56) Governance

- a. Programmes approved are governed within the College's existing governance structures as set out in the [Governance and Management Policy](#).
- b. Any supplementary governance considerations (for example, joint Programme Committees) must be specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the programme document and in any associated memorandum of agreement.

(57) Regulatory landscape

- a. Programme developers consider and seek advice on how to address the accreditation context for the programme as well as the accreditation for any potential graduates.

(58) Quality Assurance

- a. Policies and procedures for the Quality Assurance of the programme are set out in the Hibernia College Quality Framework.
- b. Any supplementary Quality Assurance policies and procedures (programme specific rules, for example) are specified in the programme proposal and ultimately in the relevant programme document.
- c. For collaborative and transnational programmes, all policies and procedures governing the programme will be agreed in advance between Hibernia College and all collaborating partners and documented in a formal legal agreement.

Where relevant, the relationships and programme's governance and Quality Assurance arrangements are clearly documented in an appropriate formal agreement. On this point:

(59) Collaborations must be formalised in a memorandum of agreement between Hibernia College and any collaborating partners.

(60) Hibernia College does not participate in:

- a. Serial collaborations or serial franchising arrangements
- b. Any collaboration or provision that is in opposition to the mission and vision of the College, is outside its validated authority or where it is unlikely that College standards or quality assurance policies and procedures will be satisfied

Where relevant, have due regard to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention 1997 and relevant national and international legislation by:

(61) Ensuring appropriate credit and qualification recognition in all relevant jurisdictions

(62) Ensuring the provision of full and clear information on the nature of the proposed programme, and all local regulation on the recognition of blended or fully online learning

Part B - Principles and Criteria for the Approval Process

A Formal Approval Process

(63) There shall be a comprehensive approval process in which:

- a. Corporate decisions and academic decisions are made distinctly
- b. Decisions are made with the appropriate level of authority
- c. Decisions incorporate both independence and externality

Stages in the Approval Process

(64) There shall be four key stages in approval process.

- a. The first stage, the approval to develop a detailed programme proposal by the EMT, is based on the following criteria:
 - i. The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity.
 - ii. There is a solid rationale for the development of the programme.
 - iii. There is a clearly identified target market and there is evidence of demand.
 - iv. Where the target market and/or country of provision is other than Ireland, there is legal entitlement and regulatory scope of the College to offer a programme there and it will be recognised within that country.
 - v. The programme development costs are appropriate.
 - vi. There is an indicative programme fee and the target market has ability to pay.
 - vii. Preliminary due diligence has been conducted in respect of any potential partnerships/collaborations. Any potential collaborator is in good standing with all professional, regulatory and statutory bodies in their country.
 - viii. There is clarity on any professional and statutory body validation/recognition/accreditation required.
 - ix. There is clarity on facilities and support services required to support students.
 - x. The lecturing and authoring expertise required has been indicatively identified.
- b. The second stage, the approval to develop a detailed programme proposal by the Academic Board, is based on the following criteria:
 - i. The proposal reflects a genuine education opportunity for potential learners and social need.
 - ii. The proposed programme has been described by providing a broad structure with the identification of a framework level and award type and entry and exit routes are appropriate.
 - iii. The proposed programme is innovative and reflects good educational practice in fully online or blended learning.
 - iv. The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity.
 - v. Where the proposed programme is being developed for submission to QQI for accreditation as a programme leading to an award on the [NFQ](#), it is developed in line with QQI's validation policies and procedures.
- c. The third stage is the approval by the Academic Board of a developed programme.
- d. The fourth and final stage is the approval by the EMT to proceed with the provision of an academically validated programme.

(65) Detailed guidance on the approval steps and process are within the [Framework for Collaborative and Transnational Provision](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	5th March 2025
Review Date	5th March 2028
Approval Authority	Quality Assurance Administrator
Approval Date	5th March 2025
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Enquiries Contact	Eoin Crossen Quality Assurance Administrator <hr/> Quality Assurance

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Articulation Arrangement" - A process whereby students who satisfy academic criteria on one programme are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted to an advanced stage of a different programme of study leading to an award

"Blended Learning" - QQI adopted a Garrison and Kanuka (2004) definition of blended learning, which defines it as 'the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences'. Hibernia College complements this broad definition by an understanding that blended learning should be characterised as falling along a continuum as proposed by Jones (2006). Such a conception can accommodate a range of blended learning approaches.

"Collaborative Provision" - This refers to two or more providers being involved by formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training.

"Curriculum and Pedagogy" - An article of Michael Young's in 2014 discussed the concepts of curriculum and pedagogy. This extract has been used to present a way of thinking about curriculum and pedagogy when designing a programme: '...in designing curricula...an analytical distinction between the two concepts... [curriculum/pedagogy dichotomy] may be useful. ...[T]he concept "curriculum" refers to the knowledge that it is hoped [learners] will acquire by the end of a course. In contrast, pedagogy refers to the activities that teachers devise for their [learners] to enable them to acquire the knowledge specified by the curriculum.' (Michael Young (2014) What is a curriculum and what can it do?, The Curriculum Journal, 25(1), pp.7-13. DOI: 10.1080/09585176.2014.902526?)

"Due Diligence" - Undertaking enquiries about a proposed programme's regulatory context and viability, particularly in the context of a prospective collaborative and/or transnational arrangement to inform a decision whether to proceed or not

"Franchising" - The process by which a degree-awarding institution agrees to authorise another organisation to deliver (and sometimes assess) part or all of one or more of its own approved programmes

"Module" - A programme of education and training of small volume. It is designed to be capable of being integrated with other modules into larger programmes. A module can be shared by different programmes. Some modules are designed to lead to minor or special-purpose awards. In describing the educational formation provided by an independent module, it is sufficient to specify the learning outcome and (the assumed (i.e. minimum) prior learning (prerequisite learning). Assumed prior learning is sometimes specified by listing prerequisite modules.

"Online Learning" - Online Learning refers to a type of programme where all teaching occurs entirely online, either

synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination. Learners can complete their programme of study from a distance with no in-person or on-site requirements.

"Policy" - Policies are principled statements adopted by the College at a high level to enable decisions about actions and desired outcomes to which the College is committed. They clearly articulate the formal position of the College on specific issues in order to guide internal decision-making. Policies set out 'what to do' on a given issue. They have a medium- to long-term review cycle.

"Procedure" - Procedures are the broad actions that must be carried out to implement a policy. They set out 'how to do' what the policy specifies must be done.

"Programme" - A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment. A programme offers learners the learning opportunities by which they may attain educational goals (expressed as the intended programme learning outcome) by learning activities in a learning environment. A programme is normally comprised of modules. A programme leading to a major award will normally require a 'cohesion generating' process which integrates constituent modules so that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the programme. It should also coordinate alignment of activities with the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and introduce learners to the broader community of practice to which they aspire. (QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards Revised)

"Recognition of Prior Learning" - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as a process whereby prior learning is given a value (European Commission, 2008; NQAI, 2005; OECD, 2004). RPL can operate to provide recognition for advanced entry and non-standard admissions to educational pathways and is also used to award credit for elements within programmes.

"Strategy" - Strategies are time-bound, specific statements of objectives the College sets to meet high-level goals. They are specific action plans to achieve key goals. There is always an overarching College strategy in place. It can be complemented with diverse topic-specific strategies, such as a strategy for teaching, learning and assessment. Strategies are established for no more than a five-year period.

"Transnational Provision" - The provision or partial provision of a programme of education in one country by a provider that is based in another country (In the absence of State policy relating to the provision of blended learning and online learning, Hibernia College also applies the term transnational provision to accessing from one country a programme of education offered by a provider based in another country.)

"Validation" - The process by which it is confirmed that a programme of higher education will enable a registered learner who completes that programme to acquire and where appropriate be able to demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify the award being made in respect of that programme in line with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.