

Obtaining Initial Approval to Develop a New Programme Procedure

Section 1 - Introduction

Purpose and Parent Policy

(1) This procedure sets out the steps for the initial approval of programmes to be provided by Hibernia College in a blended learning or online learning mode.

The [Development and Approval of Programmes for a Blended or Online Environment Policy](#) and the [Design of Programmes and Curricula for a Blended or Online Environment Policy](#) are the parent policies.

Responsibilities

Staff Responsibilities

(2) The Executive Management Team (EMT) is responsible for resourcing programmes and for the approval to commence the development of a programme from a strategic perspective, considering all risks and opportunities.

Academic Board

(3) The Academic Board is responsible for the approval of programmes prior to submission to accrediting bodies for consideration.

Faculty Responsibilities

(4) The Head of School/Programme Director or nominee is responsible for approving the initial development of a programme proposal and its presentation to the EMT and, on subsequent approval, the development of the programme and the preparation of the Validation Documentation.

Section 2 - Procedure to Obtain Initial Approval to Develop a Programme

Part A - First Step

Departmental Approval

(5) The College Faculty or Staff member (the proposer) wishing to propose a new programme for development discusses the proposal with their Head of Department and gains permission to undertake initial research.

(6) Initial research is then undertaken in line with the new programme proposal form, which must be completed and submitted for consideration by the Registrar.

(7) Where the programme is to be a collaborative and/or transnational programme, appropriate preliminary due diligence must also be completed, i.e. clarity obtained on the legalities surrounding the proposal.

Part B - Second Step

Review by the Registrar

(8) The Registrar undertakes an initial review of the written proposal to ensure all necessary information is provided. This includes the provision of all relevant information to demonstrate the potential demand for the programme and its potential financial viability.

(9) If the Registrar is satisfied that the proposal is complete, he/she presents it to the EMT with a request for approval to design and develop the programme.

Part C - Third Step

Approval by the EMT

(10) The EMT assesses the proposal against the following criteria:

- a. The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity.
- b. There is a solid rationale for the development of the programme.
- c. There is a clearly identified target market and there is sufficient evidence of demand.
 - i. Examples of evidence of demand may include CAO numbers, Government publications on skills shortages as well as various public policy instruments, employer reports, reports of professional bodies, guidance counsellors and so on.
- d. Where the target market and/or country of provision is other than Ireland, there is legal entitlement of the College to offer a programme there and it will be recognised within that country.
- e. The programme development costs are reasonable.
- f. There is an indicative programme fee and the target market has ability to pay.
- g. Preliminary due diligence has been conducted in respect of any potential partnerships/collaborations and any potential collaborator is in good standing with all professional, regulatory and statutory bodies in their country.
- h. There is clarity on any professional and statutory body validation/recognition/accreditation required.
- i. There is clarity on facilities and support services required to support students.
- j. The lecturing and authoring expertise required has been indicatively identified.
- k. The College is in a position to fully resource the programme as initially described and do so on an ongoing basis in light of the information provided.

Decisions of the EMT

(11) The outcome of the EMT consideration is one of:

- a. Approval granted
- b. Further information required
- c. Approval denied

(12) Where the intention is to collaborate with another education provider and/or to provide the programme in another country, the EMT will, at this stage:

- a. Approve the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by the Chief Executive Officer and order further investigation of the proposal in the form of detailed financial, legal and academic due diligence as well as a risk and opportunity assessment

- b. Seek to implement a timeline for this whilst also incorporating the requirements of the collaborating partner(s)
- c. Appoint a due diligence team, which will normally include a member of the Finance Department and a member of the Department of the Registrar, as well as any other party deemed appropriate.

(13) The Registrar will liaise with QQI on any specific approval requirements and acts as primary liaison in this regard. It is understood that QQI may require additional information to that provided to date and, in addition, may wish to interact with representatives of the collaborating partners before reaching a decision.

Communication of Decisions

(14) Where an initial recommendation to proceed to develop a programme is made, the Chief Executive Officer will report to the Board of Directors on the EMT's decision to allow for approval.

(15) The Registrar communicates the outcome of the EMT to the proposer and their Head of Department.

Part D - Step Four: Academic Board

Process Steps

(16) Where approval is granted, the proposer and their Head of Department present the proposal to the Academic Board to seek advice on the proposal.

The Academic Board Assesses the Proposal Against the Following Criteria

(17) The proposal reflects a genuine education opportunity for potential learners and social need.

(18) The proposed programme has been described by providing a broad structure with the identification of a framework level and award type and flexible entry and exit routes.

(19) The proposed programme is innovative and reflects good educational practice in online or blended learning.

(20) The proposal aligns to the strategic goals of the College and presents a genuine opportunity.

(21) 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.

Declarations of Interest

(22) Where a member of the Academic Board, for example, a member of Adjunct Faculty who works in more than one higher education institution, has a conflict or potential conflict of interest in a decision being taken, that person must:

- a. Formally declare the interest
- b. If appropriate, recuse themselves from the decision before the Academic Board

Additional Provisions for Approval of Collaborative and Transnational Programmes

(23) In addition to the above, these steps apply where the programme has a collaborative or transnational nature:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding
 - i. A Memorandum of Understanding is signed with the potential partner(s) following approval by the EMT.
 - ii. The Memorandum of Understanding serves primarily to put in place a formal mechanism for the exchange of information between the parties to enable dialogue relating to the development of the

proposed programme and collaboration.

- iii. The Memorandum of Understanding facilitates permission for due diligence searches and risk assessment exercises.
- iv. The signatory of the Memorandum of Understanding is the Chief Executive Officer of the College or his/her nominee, normally the Academic Dean.
- v. The Memorandum of Understanding is a formal non-binding document that sets out the broad parameters of the proposed collaboration between the parties. It will contain a legally binding non-disclosure agreement and will usually provide a brief outline of:
 - The shared interests of the parties to the Memorandum of Understanding
 - The purpose and potential benefits of the proposed collaboration
 - The nature of the proposed relationship between the parties
 - Intended collaborative arrangements
 - The expected timeframe for development and implementation

Due Diligence and Risk and Opportunity Assessment

(24) As part of the development of the programme, a full Due Diligence and Risk and Opportunity Assessment is undertaken.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	2nd November 2020
Review Date	2nd November 2023
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	23rd September 2020
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Enquiries Contact	Quality Assurance

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"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.

"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

"Online Learning" - 'Online learning' is where a whole programme is provided online. Notwithstanding the shared view of Chew, Jones and Turner (2008) that the Jones' Continuum cannot be expressed in percentage terms, Hibernia College has adopted the concept deriving from the 2015 joint UNESCO publication Distance Education in European Higher Education - the Potential, Report 3 (of 3) of the IDEAL (Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning) project that an online programme shall be deemed to notionally mean where greater than 80% is taught online. Notwithstanding the conceptual challenges in this definition, it shall be used pragmatically by the College in the context of developing programmes which are intended to be validated to lead to a QQI award.

"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)