

Preparing for External Quality Assurance Peer-Review Panel Reviews Guidelines

Section 1 - Introduction

Purpose

The aim of this resource is to prepare members of Staff, Faculty and Adjunct Faculty to participate effectively in an external panel review process. This resource is intended to support any external review process within the College, including institutional review (CINNTE), programme validation and programme review. It is informed by QQI's [Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators](#) and other QQI policies and standards.

Section 2 - Panel Context

Panel Members

(1) QQI selects and relies upon individuals of high professional and personal calibre, with required competences and independence, to participate as reviewers or evaluators in External Quality Assurance (EQA) processes. It expects that all reviewers and evaluators will be honest, objective, learner-centred, professional, courteous, respectful, conscientious and diligent in the performance of their functions.

(2) Reviewers and evaluators come from diverse backgrounds, including, but not limited to, learners (e.g. students and apprentices), employers, providers of programmes of education and training, professional regulators and professional practitioners.

(3) The function of panel members includes:

- a. Review and evaluation of the documentation, associated with the process, that has been provided to them by QQI
- b. Discussion of their impressions with their fellow reviewers/evaluators
- c. Questioning findings and evidence to cross-check or corroborate
 - i. It is not sufficient for panel members to accept a proposition on the basis that there is no evidence to the contrary.
- d. Asking questions during meetings in a fair, constructive manner while remaining independently critical
- e. Arrival at a recommendation for QQI's executive regarding the outcome of the review/evaluation process
- f. Providing evidence-based rationale for decisions that must be stated in their written report

The Role of the Chair

(4) To promote a collegiate process, the panel Chair is expected to be understanding and empathetic to the operating context of the provider, to ensure that the views of all participants are valued and considered, and to foster open exchanges of opinions.

(5) On the day of a site visit, their core responsibilities normally include:

- a. Briefing participants on the objectives and method of, and context for, the review or evaluation and their specific session at the beginning of each session
- b. Ensuring that meetings are conducted efficiently and effectively with impartiality and propriety
- c. Ensuring that proceedings remain focused while politely curtailing evasive or circuitous responses
- d. Ensuring that the provider concerned and those fielding questions on behalf of the provider feel comfortable during meetings with the review or evaluation panel
- e. Ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered, fostering open exchanges of opinions
- f. Diffusing disagreement and conflict if it arises
- g. Ensuring that the review or evaluation tasks are completed and that there are no unresolved matters

Panel Secretary

(6) The panel secretary is normally a full member of the panel and is normally an experienced Quality Assurance professional.

(7) Their role is to capture the panel's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and help express them clearly and accurately in the panel report. It is a vital component of their role to ensure that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the panel's recommendation.

Section 3 - Participating in EQA Panel Meetings

Advance Preparation

(8) All invited Staff, Faculty and Adjunct Faculty should prepare in advance of a site visit by:

- a. Acquainting themselves with the documentation submitted by the College to QQI for the purposes of the evaluation, including ensuring they have a detailed knowledge of the information submitted which relates to their area of responsibility
- b. Attending any requisite preparatory events, which could include a mock panel event
- c. Preparing to answer panel questions (the sample questions outlined in [Appendix A](#) can be used to prepare for a programme validation panel)
- d. Preparing a succinct overview of the critical work related to their role and department in the context of the evaluation being undertaken.
 - i. Examples of excellent practice can be showcased, where possible and relevant.
- e. Considering if there are any areas of potential weakness within the documentation submitted to QQI and preparing any appropriate mitigations in advance of the meeting

Availability and Flexibility

(9) All Staff, Faculty and Adjunct Faculty should make themselves available for the sessions indicated by the Quality Assurance, Enhancement and Registration Manager, or nominee, in line with the agreed schedule.

(10) Flexibility is requested of all Staff, Faculty and Adjunct Faculty members during site visits as timetables are often subject to change.

Responding to Panel Questions

(11) Panels are peer processes in which dialogue and transparency are valued.

- a. Panels ask questions because they require evidence to complete their report. Therefore, responses should aim

to provide supporting evidence, such as that outlined in the programme document, Annual Quality Report or another specific College resource, such as a policy in the HCQF.

- b. Questions are intended to be clear and focused; therefore, responses should be formulated in the same way. Clarification can be sought when the question being asked appears to be unclear. If in doubt, participants can provide a succinct answer and follow up with a clarifying question, such as 'Does that answer your question?'
- c. Responses should thoughtfully explain why a particular approach is the most relevant rather than appearing defensive.

Section 4 - Face-to-Face Panel Visit Logistics

Welcoming Environment

(12) A welcoming and comfortable environment should be provided. This will include arrangement of:

- a. Guest passes and Wi-Fi code
- b. Refreshments for arrival, break(s) and lunch
- c. Bottled water and glasses

Room Bookings

(13) Book the required rooms on the internal room booking system as soon as dates are known.

Preparing Attendees

(14) Make a list: Make a detailed list of all required College attendees.

(15) Calendar invite: Send a 'save the date' invitation with an attached calendar invite with as much advance notice as possible.

(16) Two weeks before panel: Circulate briefing information to all attendees, highlighting any particular areas for preparation. Arrange preparatory meetings with attendees.

Panel Member Logistics/Requirements

(17) Travel information: Send travel information to panel members (directions if driving, taking Dart or bus).

(18) Parking: Ask panel members if they require parking and book as required. Send instructions for parking including the code for barriers.

(19) Dietary requirements: Check in advance if panel members have any special dietary requirements.

Additional Preparation

(20) Prepare materials to facilitate the effective operation of the panel in liaison with the DLD and/or the Marketing and Business Development team, including:

- a. Nameplates for panel members and attendees
- b. Presentation(s) and/or demonstrations
- c. Panel stationary
- d. Hard-copy documentation
- e. Appropriate signage, e.g. 'Quiet Please'

Section 5 - Preparatory Questions: Programme Validation or Revalidation Process

(21) The independent evaluation report must address whether the programme meets the validation criteria as set out by QQI. Possible questions are identified in the [linked resource](#) under each of the twelve criteria. These questions are indicative only and are provided to support preparation for a panel visit.

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

"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.

"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)

"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.