5 Programmes of Education and Training

5.1 Policy for Development, Approval and Validation of Programmes

QA Area (s)	• Programmes of Education and Training • Governance and Management of Quality • Documented Approach to QA
Applies to	☒ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☐ Staff and learners
Policy Owner	Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes

5.1.0 ESG Standard: Design and Approval of Programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The College is committed to providing a quality learning experience for its learners, and therefore the quality of its programmes is of fundamental importance. Rigorous processes for programme approval, validation, monitoring and review exist to ensure that programmes are relevant, informed by stakeholder engagement, of an appropriate academic standard, and that they continue in good standing over time.

This Section sets out the policies underpinning all programme development at the College.

5.1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that programmes are developed consistently and in accordance with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) requirements. It also ensures that programmes are developed with appropriate regard to the resources required to deliver them when validated by QQI.

5.1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all programmes developed and delivered by the College.
Programmes may lead to major awards or minor awards or special purpose awards.
Programmes will be developed at levels 5 to 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

5.1.3 Policy

Programmes at the College are designed to satisfy the Council of Europe's four major purposes of higher education:

1. Preparation for the labour market.
2. Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies.
3. Personal development.

4. The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

All programmes will be developed with a view to their validation by QQI.
The steps in the approval process are designed to reinforce the separation of functions between the Board of Directors, the executive (Executive Management Team and Chief Executive) and the academic units of governance (Academic Council and Programme Development Group), while also demonstrating the required interaction between them.
Programmes will be developed to ensure that successful learners will achieve the standard expected at the designated level. This will be measured in achievement of stated Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) appropriate to the level.
All programmes developed by the College, in line with this policy, will be placed on the NFQ.
All programmes are developed for validation in accordance with the quality assurance procedures outlined in this Manual.
Programmes will be designed to ensure that the National Policy on Access Transfer and Progression is adhered to and that there are articulation and progression routes within the College or, alternatively, that arrangements can be made for such routes with named educational institutions and programmes.
In general, all programmes developed shall be in line with the College's Strategic Plan, in place at the time of development. Programme development is informed by consultation with stakeholders such as sectoral interest groups, prospective employers, national and European policy makers and learners.
Programmes will be developed by Programme Development Groups, led by an appropriately qualified academic with oversight from the Head of Quality Assurance and Admissions.
Programmes will be delivered and supported by appropriately qualified staff as outlined in the Section 6 of this Manual.
All programmes as validated by QQI, will fall to be reviewed at least every 5 years and re-validation sought if appropriate.
Project management of the programme development process is the responsibility of the Head of Quality Assurance and Admissions of the College.

5.1.4 Responsibility

- The **Board of Directors** has the following responsibilities:
    - At stage 2 of the development process, for approving the financial investment required by a new programme proposal, , on the advice of the Academic Council,.
    - At stage 3 of the development process, for deciding whether to send the final completed proposal to QQI, seeking validation, on the advice of the Academic Council.
    - Following validation by QQI, and on the advice of the Academic Council, for determining whether and when to commence the programme.
- The **Executive Management Team** is responsible for reviewing the rationale and business case elements for the development of all new programmes proposed, as set out in the Initial Feasibility Stage of new programme development (section 5.2.2). The Executive Management Team is responsible for completing this review prior to the submission of a new programme proposal for approval to the Academic Council. It shall convey its decision in this regard to the Board of Directors.

- The **Academic Council** is responsible for approving new programme proposals, following approval on the rationale and outline business case by the Executive Management Team, making recommendations to the Board of Directors regarding academic resource requirements as needed, appointing Programme Development Groups, monitoring the work of these and approving all final programme documentation prior to their submission to QQI for validation, following approval by the Board of Directors
- The **Head of Teaching & Learning and Learner Support** is responsible for assisting the **Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes** and the Programme Development Group in preparing programme documentation for submission.
- The **Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes** is responsible for communications with QQI, in respect of the operation of this policy and its associated procedures.

5.1.5 Related Legislation, Regulation or Guidelines

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Sector Specific (Independent/Private) Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training 2017 (QQI)
- Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2014 (QQI)
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015).
- Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (QQI).
- Policy for Determining Awards Standards – QQI, 2014
- NFQ Awards Standards
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) User Guide –2015
- International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) – UNESCO, 2011.

5.2 Procedure for Development & Approval of Programmes

QA Area (s)	• Programmes of Education and Training • Governance and Management of Quality • Documented Approach to QA
Applies to	☒ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☐ Staff and learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Development, Approval and Validation of Programmes

5.2.0 Procedure

Programme proposals may emerge from a range of sources within the College. Proposed programmes will be developed over three stages:

1. Initial Programme Feasibility
2. Development to Stage of Pre-external Review
3. Development to Completion and Submission to QQI.

5.2.1 Stage 1 - Initial Programme Feasibility

This stage of development is carried out by the programme proposer(s). It examines the feasibility of the programme, paying particular attention to its strategic fit and the education and training rationale for the proposed programme. This stage also checks that the proposed programme is viable, both academically and financially.
In this phase, outline programme learning outcomes are developed, and a benchmarking process undertaken. This information is captured in a New Programme Proposal Template with the following structure:

1. Table of Contents
2. Programme details (NFQ Level, Total ECTS Credits and Standards Used)
3. Rationale for the Proposed Programme
4. Fit with Innopharma's Strategic Plan
5. Details of Benchmarking Exercise Conducted
6. Stakeholder Engagement
7. Outline Teaching and Learning Strategy, inclusive of Blended Learning
8. Access, Transfer and Progression
9. Outline Programme Learning Outcomes
10. Details of projected resource requirements.

The completed template is submitted to the Executive Management Team together with an indicative timetable for development. The Executive Management Team shall consider the rationale and business case and associated risk and mitigation measures for the proposed programme and decide **either**:

- to approve it to be sent to the Academic Council (AC) for consideration

  or

- refer it back to the proposer seeking further information/amendments

  or

- decline to approve it.

Should the Executive Management Team approve the proposal to be sent to the Academic Council, it shall attach a commentary on the completed template with that approval.

The Executive Management Team shall inform the Board of Directors of its decision.

5.2.2 Stage 2 - Development to Pre-external Review

Following approval by the Executive Management Team, the Academic Council shall consider the proposal and following approval, it shall establish a Programme Development Group, with advice from the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes. During this phase, the Programme Development Group will further develop the proposal in line with the appropriate QQI template and guidelines, referred to in the policy document above. This development phase will include refined programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs), curriculum structure with module learning outcomes (MIMLOs) and teaching, learning and assessment strategy, as outlined in QQI's Core Validation Criteria

The Programme Development Group should also consider the viability of all modes of study and of delivery at this point.

The programme at this stage should also have indicative costs associated with delivering the programme, in terms of equipment, materials and human resources.

This stage culminates in the production of a fully developed draft programme document.

The Programme Development Group shall also update the original New Programme Development Template, with the following revised structure:

1. Table of Contents
2. Programme details (NFQ Level, Credits, Standards Used and delivery mode)
3. Rationale for the Proposed Programme
4. Fit with Innopharma's Strategic Plan
5. Details of Benchmarking Exercise Conducted
6. Stakeholder Engagement
7. Teaching and Learning Strategy, inclusive of Blended Learning
8. Access, Transfer and Progression
9. Developed Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs)
10. Module Learning Outcomes (MIMLOs)

11. MIPLOs mapped to particular level on NFQ and chosen Standards
12. Reference to Section of programme document where MIMLOs are mapped to MIPLOs
13. Module details and Syllabi
14. Assessment Strategy and Indicative Schedule
15. Indicative Costs including capital, materials and human resources.

The completed draft programme document, accompanied by this document, is referred to the Programme Development Committee of the Academic Council, which shall review the proposal and report to the Academic Council in a meeting of that body.
The Academic Council shall review the proposal and decide **either**:

- to approve it to be sent to the Board of Directors for funding approval

  or

- refer it back to the Programme Development Group for further development

In the case of a proposal being submitted to the Board of Directors for outline funding approval that body shall consult with the Executive Management Team.
Following funding approval, the final stage of development shall be commenced.

5.2.3 Stage 3 - Development to Completion and Submission to QQI

The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes, acting on behalf of the Academic Council, shall commission a report on the proposed programme from an external independent subject matter expert. This person will examine the proposal draft programme document and complete a report in accordance with a template with the following structure:

5.2.3.0 External Subject Matter Expert's Report

Proposed Programme Title:
Name and Institution of the Subject Matter External Specialist:
Please provide detailed feedback under the following headings:

1. Demand from Employers and support from industry and other stakeholders
2. Demand from Learners
3. Appropriateness of the Award title/level
4. Overall Balance of Learner Workload
5. Appropriateness of Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes
6. Appropriateness of Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes
7. Appropriateness of Teaching and Learning methodologies, inclusive of Blended Learning
8. Appropriateness of proposed delivery mode(s)
9. Appropriateness of the Assessment Strategies

The completed report will be sent by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes to the Programme Development Group for its consideration and any appropriate amendments to the programme shall be made by that group, in accordance with

the recommendation in the report. A document showing how the Subject Matter Expert's recommendations have been addressed should also be prepared and together with the Subject Matter Expert's report, included as an appendix to the programme document.
The Programme Development Group will also refine the indicative costs estimated in the earlier stage of development.
The following documentation will then be forwarded to the Programme development Committee of the Academic Council for review:

- Final revised programme document, including the report from the SME and the response of the Programme Development Group to this.
- The final cost estimates.

That Committee shall make a recommendation to the Academic Council.
The Academic Council shall review the proposal and decide **either**:

- to approve the final submission and to resolve that it be sent to the Board of Directors for approval to apply to QQI for validation.

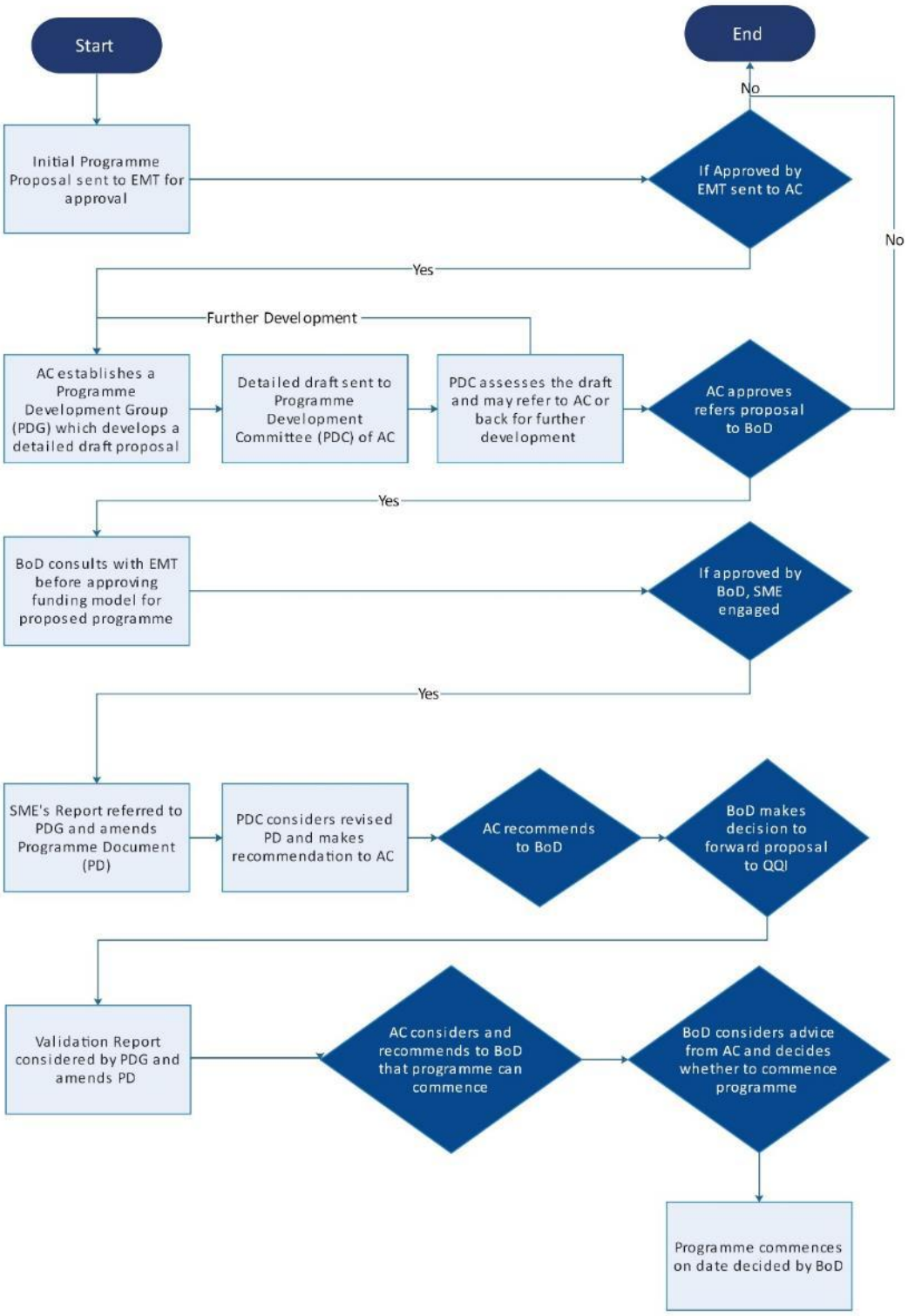
  or

- refer it back to the Programme Development Group for further development

Having reviewed the proposal, and the recommendation of the Academic Council, the Board of Directors shall decide whether to send the proposal to QQI seeking validation
If the Board of Directors approve sending the proposal to QQI, the Board of Directors shall arrange for the payment of the appropriate fee and direct that all required documentation be forwarded to QQI, following which that body's processes will be initiated and a validation event arranged.
Should the Board of Directors not approve sending the proposal to QQI, it shall outline its reasons for this decision to the Academic Council.
The College may decide to convene a 'mock panel' in advance of the site visit by the QQI panel of assessors.

5.2.4 Response to QQI Validation Report and Conditions/Recommendations

Following receipt of the QQI Validation Report, it shall be referred to the PDG for action. The PDG shall amend the programme document to comply with any conditions and shall consider any recommendations in the Report.
Following this, the amended programme document, together with details of how the conditions and recommendations have been addressed, shall be forwarded to the Academic Council for consideration.
Following its review, the Academic Council will decide whether to make a recommendation to the Board of Directors to commence the programme and at what time.
It shall also forward the revised programme document, and any further information required, to QQI.
The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes is responsible for communications with QQI in relation to programme validation and for ensuring that Certificates of Programme Validation are received.



Flow Chart of Programme Development Process

5.2.6 Criteria for Blended Learning (Synchronous and Asynchronous Only)

For specific criteria to be addressed in the development of blended learning programmes (including synchronous and asynchronous modes), see **Appendix 1: Criteria for Blended Learning.**