5.3 Policy for Monitoring, Review and Re-validation of Programmes

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

5.3.0 ESG Standard:

ESG Standard 1.9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

ESG Standard 1.10: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

The procedures and guidelines outlined below will guide all staff and learner representatives involved in the ongoing monitoring of programmes. This monitoring process relates to the programme as a whole and not to the progress of individual learners on these programmes.

5.3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out clear principles for ongoing review of programmes, resulting in minor changes and including re-validation as part of its quality assurance mechanism.

5.3.2 Scope

This policy applies to all QQI programmes. It therefore applies to all staff involved in the update and review of programmes within the College.

5.3.3 Policy

It is the policy of the College to carry out regular programme monitoring and review, based on a process of self-evaluation to inform:

- Changes to Validated Programmes
- Review and Re-validation of Programmes

While major programmatic reviews and re-validation occurs normally every 5 years, the College is committed to ongoing and periodic monitoring and review of its programmes and recognises that the environment in which its programmes are delivered is constantly evolving. The College therefore recognises that programme teams may from time to time identify changes that are needed to ensure the ongoing currency and relevance of its programmes.

The Academic Council will adjudicate on requests from Programme Boards to make **minor modifications** to programmes.

5.3.3.0 Minor modifications are defined as follows:

- Changes to content of a programme that do not impact on the module or programme learning outcomes.
- Adjustments to an assessment task/method that are consistent with the approved assessment strategy and learning outcomes, and consistent with the approved programme schedule.
- Other minor changes that do not affect the learning outcomes of modules or programmes.

The College does not allow major modifications to be made to existing programmes, between scheduled quinquennial programme reviews.

5.3.3.1 Major modifications are defined as follows:

- Changes to programme titles or approved programme schedules.
- Changes to module or programme learning outcomes.
- Changes to NFQ level.
- Addition of new modules or awards.

5.3.4 Responsibility

QA is the responsibility of every staff member in the College.

- The **Registrar** is responsible for managing and ensuring the quality of academic delivery and processes in accordance with the College's policies and procedures as approved by the Academic Council.
- The **Programme Lead** has responsibility with the Programme Board for individual programmes.
- The **Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes** is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of programme monitoring processes on a regular and systematic basis.
- The **Head of Quality Assurance and Admissions** is responsible for assisting the Programme Lead to update, as necessary, programme documents or records.

5.3.5 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.

5.4 Procedure for Monitoring, Review and Re-validation of Programmes

QA Area (s)	• Programmes of Education and Training
Applies to	☒ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☐ Staff and learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Monitoring, Review and Re-validation of Programmes

5.4.0 Procedure

These procedures encompass the following:

1. Programme Monitoring
2. Changes to Validated Programmes
3. Review and Re-validation of Programmes
4. QQI Provider Monitoring Process

5.4.1 Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes

The College is committed to the ongoing monitoring of programmes. This is carried out through the Programme Boards and reported to the Academic Council by way of an Annual Programme Report.
The results of this ongoing monitoring inform requests for minor changes to programmes (see Changes to Validated Programmes below) as well as informing the Review and Re-validation of Programmes (see below)
The Programme Board conducts an annual review of the following information:

- Programme admissions data
- External Examiner Reports – reviewed by Registrar
- Anonymised Module data:
    - Registered learners, for the purposes of reconciling data
    - Pass rates and statistics
    - Module Attendance data
    - Submission Data (continuous assessment)
    - Completion rates
- Anonymised Programme Data (per stage):
    - Registered learners
    - Withdrawals/deferrals
    - Stage pass rate
    - Stage completion
    - Retention (progression from stage to stage within programme)

- Award Statistics

- Learner Feedback

Data or reports relating to each agenda item are circulated and discussed at least at one of the three Programme Board meetings held in the academic year; reports are circulated in advance to ensure adequate opportunity for considered feedback by members.
On completion of the academic year, the Annual Programme Report and Programme Action Plan (Ref: QAR 1) are prepared and agreed by the Programme Board. These are sent to the Academic Council for information and approval. The Programme Action Plan is distributed to all relevant staff for information and action; it is maintained and updated by the Programme Lead. The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes has responsibility to ensure that outcomes of the Annual Programme Report inform quality enhancement and improvements in the College.
Programme data such as registration data, completion data and award classification distribution and trends, are prepared by the office of the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes and appended to the External Examiners Form where they can be considered by the External Examiner when preparing their annual report.

5.4.2 Changes to Validated Programmes

It is the responsibility of the teaching teams to review, on a regular basis, the currency of material delivered in the module. It is the responsibility of the Programme Board to review the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies, the assessment strategy, currency of reading lists etc., and to make recommendations for improvements and recommend changes to modules.
Minor changes to programmes are defined in the policy statement. Proposals for any such changes are made to the Programme Board using the Minor Changes to Programme Approval form (Ref: Associated Form 1) and are subject to the approval of the Academic Council and recorded by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes.
Major Changes to programmes are defined in the policy statement and may only be implemented through a validation process.

5.4.3 Review and Re-validation of Programmes

The College is subject to statutory external review of QA under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 on a cyclical basis. It is required to consider seeking revalidation of programmes in advance of the expiry of the duration of enrolment as indicated on the Certificate of Validation.

5.4.4 Revalidation of Academic Programmes

Revalidation is defined as 'validation by the awarding body of a programme that has emerged or evolved from a programme that had been previously validated'. It is a two-phase process:

1. review and evaluation of the programme as it has been implemented
2. updating and revision of the programme, addressing any identified deficiencies and taking opportunities for improvement

Revalidation benefits from the availability of evidence from historic provision of the programme. There will be quantitative and qualitative information concerning the effectiveness of the programme including the data acquired and analysed over the lifetime of the programme; learner enrolment data; retention and completion data; graduate progression into employment or other educational programmes; and evaluations of the programme by learners, academic staff and employers.

Revalidation must be completed in advance of the expiry of the duration of enrolment as indicated on the Certificate of Validation, which is typically five years. Notwithstanding this, a programme may be revalidated where it has reached a point where it needs to be substantially modified or updated to an extent that the result is effectively a new programme.
Annual programme monitoring and review feeds into preparation for programme revalidation.
The main steps in an application for revalidation are:

1. Self-evaluation of the programme.
2. Revised programme document, showing proposed changes to programme.
3. Application to QQI.
4. Independent evaluation of the self-evaluation process and the revised programme, in consultation with QQI.
5. Determination of the application by QQI.

Preparation for revalidation is the responsibility of the faculty and led by the Programme Lead or Programme Leads where there is more than one programme. Where there is a suite of similar programmes they may be evaluated together for the purpose of revalidation, provided this does not compromise the quality of the self-evaluation or independent evaluation processes.
The revalidation process must demonstrate and provide evidence that the revised programme continues to address the QQI validation criteria.
Programme(s) for revalidation should follow the process used for programme development - the same approval process and associated responsibilities are the same.

5.4.5 Self-Evaluation of the Programme

A Revalidation Team is appointed by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes and led by the Programme Lead. The self-evaluation includes a thorough analysis of the programme structure and content, learning outcomes, learner services and relevant data and stakeholder feedback collected over the lifetime of the programme. Stakeholders are identified and methods for collecting relevant feedback are established, which includes surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc. The data is analysed and informs the self-evaluation.
The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes is responsible for supplying the following information in advance of the self-evaluation:

- Learner enrolment data.
- Attrition and completion data.
- Graduate progression into employment or other educational programmes.
- Evaluation of the programme by learners.
- Evaluation of the programme by lecturers.
- Evaluation of the programme by employers.
- External Examiners' reports.

Self-Evaluation in preparation for revalidation comprises:

- Analysing the effectiveness and efficiency of each validated programme, including details of learner numbers, retention rates and success rates.
- Investigating trends in module pass rates.
- Reviewing the development of the programme in the context of the requirements of employers, industry, professional bodies, the Irish economy and international developments.
- Evaluating the response of the College to market requirements and educational developments.
- Evaluating the feedback mechanisms for learners and the processes for acting on this feedback.
- Evaluating the physical and virtual facilities and resources provided for the provision of the programmes.
- Evaluating the formal links which have been established with industry, business and the wider community in order to maintain the relevance of its programmes.
- Evaluating feedback from employers of graduates of the programme and from those graduates.
- Reviewing any research activities in the field of learning under review and their impact on teaching and learning.
- Evaluating projections for the following five years in the programme(s)/field of learning under review.
- Seeking to provide an appropriate evidence base to facilitate consideration by a QQI panel to revalidate the relevant programmes.

The above information must be fully and effectively used in the self-evaluation of the proposed (revised) programme against QQI's validation criteria. Findings from the self-evaluation process inform the review of the programme. The outcome may be that the programme is no longer relevant and should be retired or that the programme remains relevant and competitive and that it should be updated and submitted for revalidation.

5.4.6 Application for Revalidation to the Awarding Body

The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes is responsible for coordinating the revalidation process and the Programme Lead is responsible for preparing the self-evaluation report.
The process is outlined in Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training – QQI Nov 2017, Section 13.
All applications for revalidation must provide the information required for new programme validation using the QQI validation template together with:

- Proposed terms of reference for the independent evaluation report.
- Documentation demonstrating that the prerequisites are established i.e.
    - Established procedures for QA under Section 28 of the 2012 Act
    - Established procedures for access, transfer and progression under Section 56 of the 2012 Act

    - Compliance with Section 65 in respect of arrangements for the protection of learners in the 2012 Act.
- The updated Programme Document and supporting documentation.
- The College's evaluation report (using the evidence collected and analysed during the lifetime of the programme).
- Evidence of PEL arrangements.

It is important to note that the programme documentation, the College's evaluation report, and where applicable, the independent evaluation report, must address the applicable validation criteria and use and include evidence acquired from providing the programme.

5.4.7 Independent Evaluation of the Programme

An independent Peer Review Group is established by the College, in consultation with QQI, comprising experts from relevant fields of learning. These experts should be capable of making national and international comparisons having regard to the specific suite of programmes. At a minimum, it comprises the following:

- Chair – experienced in higher education and training, preferably with knowledge of revalidation.
- A secretary.
- Academics (minimum two) experts in relevant field of learning.
- Representatives from industry or a relevant profession.
- A learner representative.

It is essential that the panel members are free from any real or apparent conflicts of interest. Refer to 'Considerations for independent evaluators in QQI Validation Processes (including conflicts of interest matters)' – QQI May 2017. QQI will agree, in consultation with the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes, the composition of the independent panel, and the terms of reference for the revalidation. The panel is supplied with the 'Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators' – QQI and an Independent Evaluation Report (Independent Evaluation Report) template.
The functions of the Peer Review Group include:

- Studying the Self-Evaluation Report.
- Visiting the provider to meet with teaching staff, learners (past and present where possible), administrative staff, employers and any other category of internal and external stakeholders.
- Clarification and verification of details in the Self-Evaluation Report.
- Considering how well the identified aims and objectives of the College are being met.
- Consideration of the proposed revised programme in the context of all other information provided and recommending acceptance or otherwise of the proposals.
- Considering the QA arrangements which affect the programmes under review.
- Presenting its findings at the end of the visit.

- Preparing an Independent Evaluation Report on the findings of the Peer Review Group, to include recommendations for the provider in respect of the programme or suite of programmes under review.
- Providing a separate re-validation report, for each programme under consideration, in accordance with the QQI standard programme validation report.

The Independent Evaluation Report, produced by the Peer Review Group, addresses the quality of the provision, and makes recommendations for improvement and/or change based on a combination of the Self-Evaluation Report and findings during the site visit and meetings with relevant stakeholders.
The Independent Evaluation Report and the Revalidation Report together with a formal response and an implementation plan is prepared by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes and Head of Academic Programmes. The implementation plan addresses the findings and recommendations in the Independent Evaluation Report. It should contain specific achievable actions with measurable outcomes and the date by which outcomes should be realised.
Where necessary, specific detail on the phasing in of changes proposed and where transitional issues arise, how these should be addressed.
The process of decision making by the Academic Council and the Board of Directors will mirror the procedures outlined in the latter stages of Section 5.2, Procedure for Development & Approval of Programmes.
The Independent Evaluation Report, implementation plan and a formal request for validation is forwarded to QQI for consideration. The Self-Evaluation Report and Independent Evaluation Report reports, together with the related implementation plans are published at this stage.

5.4.8 Determination of the Application by QQI

QQI will make a determination based on the findings of the process, the Independent Evaluation Report and the College response. The programme may be revalidated, revalidated with conditions or not revalidated.