Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

QQI, an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland

Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

FOREWORD

QQI is a statutory body with express functions including the validation of programmes of education and training and has established these Policies and Criteria pursuant to section 44 (1) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the "2012 Act").

Validation is a regulatory process that in essence determines whether or not a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a provider's programme of education and training.

Currently QQI accepts applications for the validation of programmes of education and training

– leading to QQI awards at all levels in the National Framework of Qualifications
– in a range of educational contexts (e.g. further education and training (FET), higher education and training (HET), professional education and apprenticeship, English language teaching (ELT), and research education and training)
– involving diverse modes (including collaborative, transnational and e-learning)

QQI's new validation policies and criteria are being introduced for a number of reasons:

– They implement a consistent approach to QQI validation across all levels in the NFQ. They are organised and presented in a modular format based on core policies and criteria. All validation is governed by the core policies and criteria which are generalised and can be used for many types of programmes without supplementation. For certain kinds of programmes where there is a need for greater consistency or elaboration, the core policies and criteria are augmented with more specific additional policies or criteria.
– They replace the diverse range of existing validation processes including those derived from QQI's antecedent bodies. This is important because the legacy processes as implemented do not all supply QQI with the same level of evidential support for validation nor are they equally transparent.
– They are developed to work with QQI's new statutory quality assurance (QA) guidelines and its recently published awards and standards related policies.
– They facilitate diverse approaches to validation and aim to ensure that QQI's validation processes efficiently and transparently provide the information required by QQI to satisfy itself reliably that validation is warranted. They should help QQI target its resources to where they are most needed and balance risk.
– They provide for the validation of FET (further educational and training) programmes that do not depend on the Common Awards System (as well as those that do).

QQI's policies and criteria for validation comprise core policies and criteria and specialised policies and criteria. The former are entitled "**Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training**" and apply to **all** programmes. The core is augmented by specialised validation policies and criteria such as "**Policies and Criteria for The Validation of Programmes Leading to Common Awards System (CAS) Awards**" included in this document.

Transitional arrangements are included.

CORE POLICIES AND CRITERIA FOR THE VALIDATION BY QQI OF PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out core policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training (validation[1]) by QQI.

Validation is a regulatory process that determines whether or not a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a **provider's programme of education and training** (programme).

Collateral outcomes of the validation process include the identification of good practice and opportunities for improvement. Applications for QQI validation are made after the prospective programme has been documented and before it is offered to learners for enrolment.

PART 1

2   THE BASIS AND NATURE OF PROGRAMME VALIDATION

The validation of a provider's programme of education and training is a statutory function of QQI. It involves a number of fundamental concepts that are addressed in units[2] (2.1)-(2.4) beginning with the most fundamental concept—namely that of a programme of education and training (a programme).

Unit (2.5) and the following deal with implementation of validation by QQI.

2.1   THE CONCEPT OF A PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A programme of education and training is a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship.

QQI's core validation policies and criteria have been designed to restrict attention to the elements that are intrinsic to all programmes. This is so as to avoid inadvertent bias in favour of any particular type of programme or approach to teaching and learning. In so doing they facilitate diversity and open the way for enhancing innovations.

2.2   THE CONCEPT OF A PROVIDER

A provider is a person who provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training. For example, a provider could be a group of organisations working together under a formal arrangement to provide a validated programme.

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1. *Certain terms in common usage may have different meanings among different groups of providers. This document uses standardised terminology and all readers are therefore urged to be alert to the definitions of terms.*
2. *Elements in this document are referred to as units rather than sections to distinguish them from the frequent section references to the 2012 Act.*

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF A VALIDATED PROGRAMME

A programme of education and training (a programme) is validated where QQI confirms under section 45 of the 2012 Act, *that the provider of the programme has satisfied it that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award of QQI being offered in respect of that programme.*

This implies that completion of a validated programme means that the learner has acquired, and where appropriate, is able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify the award(s) of QQI being offered in respect of that programme.

Further, if completion of a programme is to entitle a learner to a QQI award, the learner must have been assessed (as part of the programme) to have acquired the necessary knowledge, skill or competence; see also unit (9.1)).

For the purpose of QQI's validation policies and criteria, completion of the validated programme means that the learner has been assessed to have acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify the QQI award being made.

Validation applies to a provider's programme rather than to a programme in isolation from a provider. A validated programme is not transferrable from one provider to another; see also unit (2.7).

2.4 THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR PROGRAMME VALIDATION

QQI's functions include validating programmes of education and training, and reviewing and monitoring the validated programmes (section 9(d) of the 2012 Act).

QQI's programme validation function is governed by sections 44-47 of the 2012 Act. The validation policy and criteria are established under section 44 of the 2012 Act.

A provider who falsely claims or represents that the QQI has validated a programme of education and training of the provider commits an offence under the 2012 Act.

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF VALIDATING PROGRAMMES

When a programme of education and training is validated by QQI:

a)   the provider of the validated programme is assured that QQI will, when requested by the provider, make an award to learners who successfully complete the programme;

b)   a prospective learner is assured that the programme will help them achieve the standard required for the corresponding QQI award; and

c)   stakeholders (e.g. funders and employers) investing in the programme are assured that it will adequately prepare learners for the corresponding QQI award.

It must be noted that these assurances are not absolute because, for example, validation of new programmes addresses them in advance of their provision.

2.6   DIFFERENTIAL VALIDATION

This involves QQI validation of a programme that is based on, or a modification or extension of, a QQI validated programme. The QQI validation of the original programme can inform the QQI validation of the derived programme and this can simplify the QQI validation process for the derived programme. QQI validation of a derived programme that relies on the QQI validation of the original programme is referred to as differential validation.

2.7   VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES THAT USE A SHARED CURRICULUM

A shared curriculum is one that is developed for use by two or more providers. It is that part of a provider's programme of education and training that does not depend on that particular provider.

A shared curriculum may be used by a provider when developing a programme of education and training. The resulting programme can be viewed to involve an *instantiation* of the shared curriculum. When QQI validates one provider's programme using a shared curriculum, any other provider (with the permission of the first provider to use that shared curriculum) need only apply for differential validation of its corresponding programme; see unit (2.6).

The term '*shared programme*' has been used by providers and QQI in *programme approval agreements*[3] to describe what is in effect[4] a shared curriculum. The new terminology will facilitate continued collaboration in the development of programmes and clarify what precisely is being shared. QQI will continue to support and encourage the practice of sharing curricula and collaboration in their development.

2.8   COLLABORATIVE PROVISION AND CONSORTIUM PROGRAMMES

A group of providers may form a consortium for the purposes of seeking validation of a collaborative programme (to be provided by members of the consortium).

Specific quality assurance procedures for this kind of collaborative provision require approval by QQI prior to submission of an application for validation.

Specialised validation policies and criteria may apply; see unit (16).

Note that a consortium could seek to become a 'relevant provider' with members of the consortium being secondary providers (see section 44(11) of the 2012 Act).

2.9   JOINT AND PARALLEL VALIDATION

QQI will engage in parallel and joint validation where it considers that the involvement of other awarding bodies may lead to qualifications/ quality assurance related benefits to learners.

Joint validation is normally a requirement where a joint award is to be made. See unit (16). See also QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*.

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3. These were originally established by FETAC with certain FET providers.
4. However, this practice is not to be taken as defining a shared curriculum.

Parallel validation is where two or more awarding bodies independently approve a programme for the purpose of parallel certification that is not the subject of a joint awarding arrangement under (section 51 of the 2012 Act).

2.10 VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION

Providers shall not request certification in respect of learners who have enrolled on but not yet completed a validated programme(though completion may involve an RPL process). If the duration of enrolment expires (see unit (9.2.2)) then learners who have been enrolled on the programme after the expiry of validation may not be presented for certification on the basis of completion of that programme.

Validation does not oblige a provider to seek QQI certification, however, where the provider has offered the programme as a QQI validated programme, the provider must facilitate access to QQI certification where a learner who has successfully completed the programme requests it.

2.11 PROVIDERS WHO MUST SUBMIT THEIR PROGRAMMES TO QQI FOR VALIDATION

Certain providers are obliged under the 2012 Act to submit their programmes to QQI for validation. These are identified in section 44, subsections 9-12 of the 2012 Act.

2.12 VALIDATION FEES

The schedule of fees is published separately. QQI will not accept an application for validation unless the applicable fee has been received.

2.13 RETROSPECTIVE VALIDATION

QQI will not retrospectively validate programmes. Note unit (2.4).

3 PREREQUISITES FOR PROGRAMME VALIDATION

Before a provider of a programme of education and training may apply under section 44 of the 2012 Act to QQI for validation of a programme it must have:

a) **established procedures for quality assurance under section 28 of the 2012 Act**. The quality assurance procedures must comprehend the programme submitted for validation and they must be fit-for-purpose in the context of the proposed programme;

b) **established procedures for access, transfer and progression under section 56**;

c)   **complied with section 65 in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners; and**

Providers should refer to the QQI document *Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL): Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act Guidelines for Providers.*

Essentially, a provider of a programme subject to section 65(1) of the 2012 Act is required to submit details, in writing, of the arrangements the provider has in place with section 65(4) of the 2012 Act to QQI when making an application for validation.

If the programme is validated, the written record of the details of the arrangements must be published.

QQI will not accept an application for validation if it considers that the arrangements do not comply with the arrangements required by section 65. Acceptance of an application may not be interpreted to imply that QQI confirms the efficacy of the arrangements required by section 65.

d)   **consulted with the person referred to in section 44 subsection (11), if that subsection applies to the provider.**

A provider must consult with any other provider who wholly or partly provides the programme (section 44 subsection (11)).

The involvement of any such second provider must be declared by the provider in its application for validation.

Specialised validation policies and criteria for collaborative programmes may apply if two or more providers are involved in the collaborative provision of a programme; see unit (2.8).

NOTE: Applications will not be accepted from providers who do not meet these 4 prereqisites.

4   VALIDATION IN THE CONTEXT OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDER

4.1   VALIDATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

A programme submitted for validation must always interface with the provider's approved quality assurance procedures. Any incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures should be developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. This is one of the reasons that validation does not translate from one provider to another; see unit (2.3). A programme will include intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that must functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures. If the programme is a collaborative one where the provider is a virtual one (e.g. a consortium of providers) the arrangements are more complex but the principles are similar.

Specialised policies and criteria for the validation of collaborative programmes may apply; see unit (2.8).

4.2   FIRST-TIME QQI VALIDATION AND SCOPE OF PROVISION

Access to validation for all providers is limited by the approved scope of provision. The approved scope of provision is established for new providers following application to access validation.

For providers who already have a current relationship with QQI, the approved scope of provision is taken to be the scope of their currently validated programmes at the time of the commencement of this policy unless otherwise determined by QQI.

4.3   EXTENDING THE APPROVED SCOPE OF PROVISION

After a provider has had a programme validated it may seek to extend the approved scope of provision by applying for validation of a programme that extends the scope. A more elaborate evaluation process may be required when scope is to be extended. This may require the provider to first modify its quality assurance procedures to extend their scope and have these approved by QQI.

Validation alone may extend the scope to a limited extent (e.g. within the provider's existing approved QA procedures).

4.4   VALIDATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

A standard validation process may recommend approval of incrementally modified QA procedures. This does not extend to the approval of major modifications such as those that address sector-specific or topic-specific QA guidelines that did not previously apply.

Providers should consult the suite of QQI's statutory QA guidelines concerning the sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines that may apply and note the requirement to have corresponding procedures approved before applying for validation.

It may be efficient in certain instances to integrate the approval of QA procedures and validation. The same evaluation process might look at the evidence for both in parallel (i.e. use the same provider self-evaluation report and site visit). However, QQI's approval of the QA procedures and its determination of the application for validation are sequential. In particular, the QA procedures must be approved before (see unit (3)) a formal application for validation can be made.

4.5   VALIDATION OF A PROGRAMME PROVIDED AT MULTIPLE CENTRES

Providers who offer programmes at multiple locations (centres) must have QQI approved quality assurance procedures that cover all of the centres.

When such a provider applies for validation of a particular programme, it must specify the centres involved with that programme and the specific nature and extent of the involvement (e.g. roles, responsibilities and accountabilities), and may specify precise criteria for enabling any additional centres to be added to the list of centres involved with that programme. The involved centres are considered intrinsic to the programme.

The QA procedures are expected to ensure that the conditions of validation of a particular programme must be satisfied as regards each centre involved with that programme.

4.6   FLEXIBLE AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING (FDL)

QQI may validate a programme that involves arrangements for flexible or distributed learning (FDL). This would, for example, include an online programme or a blend of e-learning and centre-based learning. Unless otherwise indicated on the certificate of validation (see unit (7.1)), validation does not allow for the use of flexible or distributed learning arrangements not considered during the validation process. This restriction does not apply to the use of teaching and learning technology supports in the context of centre-based programmes.

If a programme is to introduce such technology the modified programme requires validation.

4.7   TRANSNATIONAL

A programme is validated for provision in specific jurisdictions. Unless otherwise indicated on the certificate of validation, validation is restricted to programmes provided from within Ireland to learners based in the State. If a new jurisdiction is to be added to this set, the modified programme requires validation unless the validated programme explicitly includes arrangements for extension.

Specialised validation policy and criteria for transnational programmes may be provided separately; see unit (16).

4.8   LANGUAGE

A programme is validated for provision through a particular language or set of languages, e.g. a programme may be validated for provision through Irish exclusively or through Irish, German and English. Unless otherwise indicated on the certificate of validation, validation is restricted to provision through the English language. If a new language is to be added to this set, the modified programme requires validation unless the validated programme explicitly includes arrangements for extension.

5 PREPARING AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

This unit outlines the steps required in making an application for validation. More detailed guidelines may be issued to help providers prepare their applications.

5.1 PRELIMINARY MATTERS

A provider should ensure that the prerequisites set out in unit (3) have been met before making an application for validation.

An application for validation must comply with all the requirements of QQI's validation policies and criteria.

Submission of an application by a provider to QQI shall not imply that any of QQI's validation requirements have been met.

An application for validation must be accompanied by the prescribed fee, which is non-refundable.

5.2 PROGRAMMES OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Providers of FET programmes (for validation by QQI) are expected to use the Common Awards System unless they have approved QA procedures that enable them to develop intended programme learning outcomes using broader standards or NFQ award-type descriptors.

5.3 PROGRAMME AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The programme-related documentation must include sufficient information to address the applicable validation criteria for example:

− An outline of the programme and identification of the QQI award(s) to which it designed to lead;

− The documented programme (including for example what is taught, how it is taught, by what means and in which modes it is taught, by whom is it taught, where it is taught, when it is taught, how it is assessed, to whom it is taught in general terms, who owns the programme, and how the programme is managed and quality assured and by whom) should incorporate or be supported by, for example (note - this is indicative and not a check list):

  o The programme's assessment strategies and procedures;

  o The programme's teaching and learning strategies (this covers education and training);

  o Precise specifications of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) and an identified complement of staff (or potential staff);

  o CVs for the programme's key staff (e.g. the programme leadership);

- o Precise specifications of the programme's physical resource requirements (required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) and an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources);

- o Comprehensive listing of the programme's key physical resources;

- o Documented procedures for the operation and management of the programme;

- o Five-year plan for the programme;

- Samples of the material to be provided to prospective learners;

- Samples of the material to be provided to enrolled learners;

- Samples of assessment tasks, model answers[5] and marking schemes for each award stage.

Additional documentation may be required to address the applicable validation criteria. For example, any incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures should be documented and provided with the application.

The programme is expected to be developed to the point that it is ready to be offered to learners. Detailed information is required, not just an outline. The validation criteria must be addressed.

Additional or alternative requirements may be set out in the relevant specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

5.4   EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME BY THE PROVIDER

Prior to making an application for validation of a programme, a provider is required to conduct, and prepare a report on, an evaluation of the relevant programme against the applicable validation policies and criteria. This process is expected to be conducted in accordance with the applicant's QQI approved quality assurance procedures and not to be confused with the independent evaluation defined in unit (6).

5.5   ASSEMBLING AND MAKING THE APPLICATION

All applications for validation must include:

- Documentation demonstrating that the Preliminary Matters (5.1) have been attended to, and in particular that the Prerequisites (3) have been satisfactorily complied with;

- Any rationale required under unit (5.2);

- The programme and supporting documentation (5.3);

- The provider's evaluation report (5.4);

- The applicable fee (the application is incomplete if the fee has not been received by QQI).

5. These are required for the purpose of illustration.

The programme documentation and provider's evaluation report must address the applicable validation criteria. QQI may refuse validation on the grounds that the application does not address the applicable validation criteria. **The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case**.

Additional or elaborated requirements may be set out in the specialised validation policies and criteria documents and in QQI's operational procedures for validation (including software systems).

QQI may, at its discretion, allow the provider to first submit the first four items and request to be invoiced for the applicable fee. QQI will then confirm that the application fee identified by the provider is correct and may screen the documentation. QQI will then invoice the provider if all seems in order. The application is considered made when the application fee is received by QQI. Passing this screening check is no guarantee that the documentation will be found complete when independently evaluated.

5.6 WITHDRAWAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

Applications for the validation of new programmes may be withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. A partial refund of fees (up to 50% of the fees received in respect of the application) may be made if the application is withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. After the independent evaluation stage has started, QQI will normally progress to a determination and publish the independent evaluation report.

5.7 CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

The documentation (including that covered by unit (5.5)) relating to an application for validation will be made available confidentially to QQI staff and persons and organisations involved in their evaluation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that QQI is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation and QQI records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

6 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

All applications for validation will be independently evaluated against the validation criteria. This approach is outlined below. Elaborated requirements may be set out in specialised validation policies and criteria and in QQI's operational procedures for validation (including software systems).

As considered necessary by QQI and by arrangement with QQI, evaluators may undertake site-visits as part of the evaluation. They may interview the provider's leadership, the programme personnel and other relevant stakeholders including any relevant learners. The evaluation group may provide informal feedback to the provider at the conclusion of a site visit. Any such feedback will not be comprehensive and will be given without prejudice to the final independent evaluation report. The independent evaluation of applications for the validation of programmes leading to higher education and training awards will normally involve a site visit.

The independent evaluation report must address whether the programme meets the validation criteria in general and in detail. It must include one of the following overall conclusions in light of the applicable validation policies and criteria:

– Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3);

– Satisfactory subject to proposed special[6] conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);

– Not satisfactory.

Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that the validation process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that a programme virtually meets the validation criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude "Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions" where the special conditions prescribe the defects that require to be corrected.

Further, in exceptional cases the 'special conditions' may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. For example, an application might propose a programme to be provided at two locations but the independent evaluation report may find the application satisfactory on condition that it be provided only at one specified location and not at the other. These conditions will not however be used to recommend that QQI can be satisfied with a programme conditional on a different QQI award (e.g. at a lower NFQ level or having a different CAS award title) being sought than the one identified in the application.

The report may also propose recommendations for consideration by the provider.

All independent evaluation reports are required to provide a rationale for any proposed special conditions and recommendations to the provider as well as the overall conclusion.

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6. Special here means additional to selections from the conditions described in unit (9.2).

The report must outline the independent evaluation process and identify the evaluators and any interests that they declared (this relates to avoidance of conflicts of interest).

6.1   INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS

Evaluators will be objective and independent of the programme and its providers e.g. free of conflicting interests.

Any related interests must be declared in the independent evaluation report and will be published.

Independent evaluators must be competent to make a recommendation on whether or not the programme should be validated (see the introduction for unit (6)). Competence means the capacity to make judgements against the applicable QQI validation criteria. Specifically, an evaluator or an evaluation group will be selected to have the competence to justify their recommendation whatever it may be (see the introduction for unit (6)).

Typically, evaluation groups (panels) will have expertise in the programme's discipline-area and in generic areas including pedagogy, assessment, quality assurance and all the other areas indicated by QQI's validation criteria.

QQI will exercise its judgment as to the number of evaluators that may be required in respect of the programme in question and the competences required having regard to the particular programme and the relevant QQI awards standards. For certain programmes one or two evaluators may be sufficient, however a group of three or more evaluators is likely to be required where the applicable QQI awards standards are broadly determined (i.e. the expected learning outcomes are not determined in detail by QQI leaving a lot of room for interpretation as is normally the case for HET awards standards). For the independent evaluation of applications for the validation of programmes leading to higher education and training awards, the groups of evaluators will include (a) student member(s) and will be composed in compliance with ESG standard 2.4.

Training will be provided to independent evaluators where QQI considers this necessary.

An evaluator who feels that they do not have the competence to evaluate an application should not accept an invitation to act or if this realisation, or a conflict of interest, occurs following acceptance should inform QQI without delay.

6.2   DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARRANGING AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

QQI may devolve some responsibility to the provider concerned for arranging the independent evaluation report. QQI must be confident that the provider is competent, resourced and sufficiently trustworthy and reliable to manage such a process objectively and that it has the new programme development throughput to justify the establishment of the necessary procedures. Such arrangements must be established formally through a signed memorandum of agreement between QQI and the provider.

Applicants will have no part in making validation decisions concerning their own programmes under any circumstances.

6.3 COMMISSIONING AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT (IER)

Similarly to unit 6.2, QQI may assign responsibility to independent persons or organisations (who are free from conflicting interests) to arrange the independent evaluation report.

6.4 PROVIDER'S RESPONSE AND IER FINALISATION

After QQI has received the independent evaluation report, it will make this available to the provider. The provider will be invited to:

- Comment on the factual accuracy of the independent evaluation report;

- Respond briefly to the overall findings (e.g. whether they are accepted by the provider);

- Submit any modified documentation and plans addressing any pre-validation conditions proposed in the IER.

The independent evaluator (group) may be invited by QQI to make a supplementary statement on the provider's response that would be included as an addendum to the report. Following this, the independent evaluation report will be finalised (where necessary in consultation with the independent evaluator (group) and the provider).

Where a validation determined by QQI involves special conditions and recommendations, providers will generally be expected to provide QQI with plans for addressing these along with modified programme documentation. These do <u>not</u> need to be provided with the brief response mentioned at the start of this sub-unit except where the provider wishes to address proposed pre-validation conditions.

6.5 DISREGARDING BY QQI OF AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT (IER)

QQI may disregard or reject an independent evaluation report *at any stage* if it is not satisfied that the report is consistent with QQI's validation policy and criteria or if QQI lacks confidence in any aspect of the independent evaluation process.

As a general rule, QQI will instigate a new independent evaluation process in these circumstances.

QQI may require that the applicant instigates a completely new independent evaluation if the process was managed by the applicant under unit (6.2). Alternatively QQI may in exceptional circumstances manage a new independent evaluation process itself.

7   DETERMINATION OF AN APPLICATION FOR VALIDATION

QQI aims to determine applications for validation within 25 weeks of receiving a complete application assuming no supplementary documentary information is required to determine the application.

The principles of natural justice apply to the determination by QQI of an application for validation.

In making its determination QQI

– Will consider the findings of the validation process including the independent evaluation report along with the applicant's response to this report;

– May consider any other information received in respect of the process;

– May consider an account of the conduct of the process and its context noting any concerns or complaints expressed by the applicant.

Validation by QQI is always subject to conditions (see unit 9). It may be subject to special conditions as defined in unit (6). QQI will validate a programme where a provider (the applicant) has satisfied it (QQI) *that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award of QQI being offered in respect of that programme.* **Similarly, QQI will refuse to validate a programme where a provider has not satisfied it of this. If validation is refused QQI will give reasons for the refusal.**

In respect of a particular application, QQI will either

1)   validate the proposed programme subject to conditions;

2)   validate the proposed programme or a stand-alone part of it that is a programme, subject to conditions including special conditions;

3)   refuse validation of the proposed programme.

The provider will be notified of QQI's determination in writing as soon as practicable.

Providers may appeal a refusal of validation 3) or a partial refusal 2); see unit (11).

A provider who falsely claims or represents that QQI has validated a programme of education and training of the provider commits an offence (section 45(5) of the 2012 Act).

However, proposed programmes may be marketed to learners before validation following completed application as long as it is made clear that the programmes are offered subject to being validated by QQI.

7.1   CERTIFICATE OF VALIDATION

Validation is communicated to the provider by the issue of a certificate of validation.

The certificate of validation will include salient characteristics of the validated programme such as:

1. Provider name

2. Programme title

3. Commencement and expiry of the interval during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme

4. Programme ID

5. Outline of the programme

6. The QQI awards available (award titles and codes)

7. The applicable QQI awards standards and awards specifications

8. Centres for provision (with maximum and minimum numbers of learners)

9. Jurisdictions for provision

10. The target learner groups

11. The teaching and learning modalities

12. **Approved programme schedule**[7]

13. Conditions of validation (the sole and definitive statement of all of the conditions applying to the validation of the particular programme)

QQI will retain an electronic copy of the original validation submission and any amendments to the programme made prior to validation.

A provider may not commence the programme until in possession of the certificate of validation.

A provider must not assume that the programme as described in the application has been validated because, for example, QQI may validate subject to special conditions (see unit (6) and the introduction to unit (7)). What is not explicitly included in the certificate of validation is not validated (i.e. validation is refused) even if it was part of the provider's application.

7.2 PUBLICATION OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

The independent evaluation report alongside the validation determination by QQI is, together with the certificate of validation, a substantive product of the validation process.

It will be published after closure of the appeal period unless the refusal of validation determination is appealed in which case the report will be published if the appeal is unsuccessful.

In some cases, the provider's self-evaluation report may be published subject to the provider granting permission especially if it demonstrates exemplary practice.

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7. This is a plan for how the programme will be provided at the module level. Each module is characterised in broad terms including its, title, credit allocation, NFQ level if applicable, stage in the programme, whether it is mandatory or an elective, and such like. A more precise definition will be communicated separately in guidelines for applicants.

7.3 PUBLICATION OF DESCRIPTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Certain administrative information will also be published including information about determination of the validation application, the programme and the applicable PEL arrangements.

8 CHANGES THAT CAN BE MADE TO A VALIDATED PROGRAMME

A validated programme is not a static entity, frozen in time. It is expected that the provider will make necessary enhancements and adaptations to programmes from year to year (see also units (9) and (10)).

There are limits to what may be changed before a modified programme must be submitted to QQI for validation as a new programme.

These limits depend on the scope of the provider's quality assurance procedures as approved by QQI. For example, providers who have sufficiently robust quality assurance procedures for handling the introduction of new centres for provision might not need to reapply to QQI for the differential validation of a modified programme to enable it to be provided at such a new centre or new arrangements for delivery because such extensions would have been foreseen when the programme was originally validated. See unit (17.12).

An extensive (i.e. very substantial) change to a programme is one that effectively results in a new programme that must be validated as such. Any change must be consistent with the applicable award-standard(s) against which the programme was validated. The interpretation of what does or does not constitute an 'extensive change' is a matter to be informed by expert judgement.

Examples of 'extensive change' would be:

– Undermining anything that was essential to support the original validation decision.

– Elimination of any core intended programme learning outcomes.

– A change in the pre-requisite learning requirements for a given programme.

Validation of the modified programme would focus on what has changed with respect to the validated programme from which it is derived. This type of validation is called **differential validation** see unit (2.6).

More detailed regulation concerning changes that may be made to validated programmes may be provided in applicable specialised validation policy and criteria documents.

Note: QQI should be consulted in case of any doubt about whether or not validation would extend to a modified programme.

9   CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

Validation is always determined conditionally (see below). Validation may be reviewed at any time under section 46 of the 2012 Act and then may be withdrawn under section 47 of the 2012 Act if the conditions of validation are not being complied with.

9.1   THE STATUTORY CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

The statutory (section 45(3) of the 2012 Act) conditions of validation are that the provider of the programme shall:

1. co-operate with and assist QQI in the performance of QQI's functions in so far as those functions relate to the functions of the provider,

2. establish procedures which are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by QQI under section 49 (1) are acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners,

3. continue to comply with section 65 of the 2012 Act in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable, and

4. provide to QQI such information as QQI may from time to time require for the purposes of the performance of its functions, including information in respect of completion rates.

9.2   CONDITIONS ESTABLISHED UNDER 45(4)(b)

The validation of a programme may be subject to one or more of the following general conditions in relation to that programme, or to any other conditions, general or specific, that QQI in the exercise of its functions deems appropriate to impose.

9.2.1 Condition of Validation Concerning A Change in the QQI Award or Award Standard

Where QQI changes an award title, an award specification or an award standard that a programme depends upon, the provider shall not enrol any further learners on the affected programmes unless informed otherwise in writing by QQI (e.g. by the issue of a revised certificate of validation). The programme is considered validated for learners already enrolled on the affected programme.

9.2.2 The Duration of Enrolment

The duration of enrolment is the **interval** during which learners *may be enrolled* on the validated programme.

Validation is determined by QQI for **a specified number of years of enrolment** appropriate to the particular programme as indicated **on the certificate of validation** subject to unit 9.2.1. It is a condition of validation that the programme does not enrol any new learners outside this interval. A typical duration would be five years.

If a provider wishes to continue to enrol learners to the programme beyond this interval the provider must arrange in good time for it to be validated again by QQI, or exceptionally the provider may apply for **extension of the duration of enrolment** (unit (14)). In this context the provider may apply for validation of the programme from first

principles or, alternatively, the provider may avail of the process for **revalidation** (unit (13)) by QQI.

9.2.3 General Conditions

The provider of the programme shall

1. Ensure that the programme as implemented does not differ in a material way from the programme as validated; differing in a material way is defined as differing in any aspect of the programme or its implementation that was material to QQI's validation criteria.

2. Ensure that the programme is provided with the appropriate staff and physical resources as validated.

3. Implement in respect of the programme its written quality assurance procedures (as approved by QQI).

4. Make no significant change to the programme without the prior approval of QQI. (See unit (8)).

5. Unless otherwise agreed by QQI in writing, start implementing the programme as validated and enrol learners within 18 months of validation.

6. Continue in respect of the validated programme to comply with section 56 of the 2012 Act in respect of procedures for access, transfer and progression.

7. Implement the programme and procedures for assessment of learners in accordance with the **Approved Programme Schedule** and notify QQI in writing of any amendments to this arising from changes to the programme; see unit (9).

8. When advertising and promoting the programme and awards, use the programme title as validated, and the correct QQI award title(s), award type(s) and award class(es) indicating the level of the award(s) on the National Framework of Qualifications.

9. Adhere to QQI regulations and procedures for certification.

10. Notify QQI in writing without delay of:

    a. any material change to the programme;

    b. anything that impacts on the integrity or reputation of the programme or the corresponding QQI awards;

    c. anything that infringes the conditions of validation; or

    d. anything that would be likely to cause QQI to consider reviewing the validation.

11. Notify QQI in writing to determine the implications for the provider's validated programmes, where the provider is likely to, or planning to, merge (amalgamate) with another entity or to acquire, or be acquired by, another entity (see unit (12.5)).

12. Report to QQI, when required or requested, on its implementation of the programme and compliance with the conditions of validation.

9.2.4 Conditions Arising from Specialised Validation Policy and Criteria

Specialised validation policy and criteria may specify conditions that augment the list of general conditions set out in this document.

9.2.5 Special Conditions

The independent evaluation report may propose **special conditions** to be attached to validation. QQI may attach special conditions to its validation determination.

10 MONITORING THE CONDITIONS OF VALIDATION

QQI monitors validated programmes (section 9(d) of the 2012 Act).

Monitoring focuses on satisfactory implementation of the conditions of validation; see unit (9) together with any special conditions imposed by QQI on foot of the independent evaluation report.

The approach to monitoring will be based on

- The level of uncertainty involved;

- Risk equalisation across programmes validated by QQI; and

- QQI's Policy on Monitoring.

Reviews of validation under section 46 of the 2012 Act may be triggered by monitoring.

11 REFUSAL OF VALIDATION AND APPEAL

Where QQI refuses to validate a programme of education and training it will give reasons for the refusal. The provider of the programme may appeal against the refusal to the **Appeals Panel** (section 45(4) of the 2012 Act).

Information on the appeal process is available on the QQI website.

QQI will if requested meet with an unsuccessful applicant following refusal in order to provide feedback as to the reasons for refusal.

12 REVIEW AND WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION

12.1 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION FOLLOWING A REVIEW OF A PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

QQI may, at any time, review a programme of education and training which it has validated (section 46 of the 2012 Act).

Withdrawal of validation following a review under section 46 of the 2012 Act will be conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in section 47 of the 2012 Act.

Where QQI withdraws validation of a provider's programme of education and training under subsection (3) of section 47 of the 2012 Act, the provider of the programme may appeal against the refusal to the **Appeals Panel** (section 45(4) of the 2012 Act).

Information on how to appeal withdrawal of validation under section 47 of the 2012 Act is available on the QQI website.

12.2 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION ON ACCOUNT OF WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF A PROVIDER'S QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

QQI may withdraw approval of a provider's quality assurance procedures under subsection (4) of section 36 of the 2012 Act. In such event, QQI will also by notice in writing addressed to the provider withdraw, in the precise manner prescribed by section 36(7), validation of any programmes validated under section 45 of the 2012 Act. The provider may appeal such withdrawal to the Appeals Panel (section 36(6) of the 2012 Act).

12.3 WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION ON ACCOUNT OF WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF A PROVIDER'S ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION PROCEDURES

QQI may withdraw approval of a provider's procedures for access, transfer and progression under subsection (4) of section 59 of the 2012 Act. In such event, QQI will also by notice in writing addressed to the provider withdraw, in the precise manner prescribed by section 59(7), validation of any programmes validated under section 45 of the 2012 Act. The provider may appeal such withdrawal to the Appeals Panel (section 59(6) of the 2012 Act).

12.4 FACILITATING LEARNERS TO COMPLETE A PROGRAMME (PEL)

Where QQI requests the assistance of a relevant provider under section 66(2) of the 2012 Act, it may with the agreement of the original provider facilitate the transfer of the residue of any programme concerned from the original provider to that provider for the purpose of enabling learners to achieve the qualification they would have received had the original provider not ceased or failed to provide the programme.

Once it has made the arrangements to establish a programme for the purpose of assisting QQI under section 66(3) of the 2012 Act, the receiving provider is required to apply for validation.

Evaluation of the arrangements will be expedited by QQI and validation determined by executive decision in order to facilitate prompt resumption of the programmes for affected learners. This application for validation will in such circumstances be exempt from an application fee. Providers with delegated authority or designated awarding bodies would not need to apply for validation if willing to make the award themselves.

Validation would be subject to conditions and would apply only to the affected learners.

12.5   MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Where a provider whose programmes are validated by QQI is likely to, or planning to, merge (amalgamate) with another entity or to acquire, or be acquired by, another entity, QQI should be notified in writing to enable it to assess the implications for the provider's validated programmes.

13   REVALIDATION

Programmes are always validated conditionally. Furthermore, all validation determinations are subject to a duration of enrolment condition; this is typically five years. The duration of enrolment is variable and defined to be the interval during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme; see unit (9.2.2).

Validation may be reviewed at any time under section 46 of the 2012 Act and then may be withdrawn under section 47 of the 2012 Act if the conditions of validation are not being complied with.

Revalidation is validation by QQI of a programme that has emerged or evolved from a programme that had been previously validated by QQI (the original programme may have reached a point where, for example, it needs to be substantially modified or updated such that the end result is a new programme). Revalidation is also required for any programme that is to continue to enrol learners following expiry of the duration of enrolment. It results in a validated programme, which is substantially based on the previously validated programme. QQI, therefore, does not require the provider to make a de novo validation application in respect of such programmes. Preparations for revalidation should be planned by the provider well in advance of the expiry of the specified period during which learners may be enrolled (duration of enrolment condition) to ensure continuity of offering to learners.

The main steps in an application for revalidation are:

A.   Self-evaluation by the provider of their programme

B.   Application to QQI

C.   Independent evaluation of the programme

D.   Determination of the application by QQI

Similar programmes may be evaluated together for the purpose of revalidation provided this does not compromise the quality of the self-evaluation or independent evaluation processes.

Revalidation provides an opportunity to substantially update and modify the original programme. Revalidation benefits from the availability of evidence from historic provision of the programme (on which the proposed programme is based). For example, there will be quantitative and qualitative information concerning the effectiveness of the programme. This might include learner enrolment data; attrition and completion data; graduate progression into employment or other educational programmes; and evaluations of the programme by learners, teachers, trainers and employers. This additional evidence must be fully and effectively used in the provider's evaluation of the proposed (revised) programme against the QQI validation criteria.

QQI may refuse revalidation on the grounds that the application does not address the applicable validation criteria. The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case, and evaluation of an application for revalidation is no less stringent than an application for a new programme.

A coordinated approach is recommended for programmes using shared curricula as in the case where such programmes are presented for first-time validation e.g. one provider may submit an application for revalidation and following successful completion of the process, other providers who share the updated curriculum may focus their revalidation applications on the provider-specific factors.

13.1   MAKING THE APPLICATION FOR REVALIDATION

All applications for re-validation must provide the information required for new programme validation (unit 5.5) together with:

− Documentation demonstrating that the prerequisites are established; see unit (5.1)

− The updated programme and supporting documentation; see unit (5.3)

− The provider's evaluation report (using the evidence gleaned from providing the programme; see unit (5.4) and (13));

− The applicable revalidation fees;

− Where applicable, the proposed terms of reference for the independent evaluation report; see unit (13.2).

The programme documentation and provider's evaluation report and, where applicable, the independent evaluation report must address the applicable validation criteria and use and include the evidence gleaned from providing the programme.

Additional or elaborated requirements may be set out in the **specialised validation policy and criteria** documents, in QQI guidelines and operational procedures (including software systems).

13.2   REVALIDATION PROVISIONS IN APPROVED QA PROCEDURES

QQI may issue quality assurance guidelines concerning the revalidation of programmes leading to QQI awards.

Unless the specialised validation policy and criteria documents stipulate otherwise, the revalidation of a programme may, subject to advance **written agreement** between QQI and the provider concerned, be determined by QQI (as described in unit (7)) considering an independent evaluation report (IER) prepared in accordance with units (6) and (13) <u>and</u> the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.

The **written agreement** referred to above will include the **terms of reference** for the production of the independent evaluation report.

This arrangement is a variant form of devolved responsibility arranging the independent evaluation report (unit (6.2)). The independent evaluation report production process described here is not for the validation of new programmes.

13.3   INDEPENDENT EVALUATION MANAGED BY QQI

If the preparation of the independent evaluation report is not managed by the provider it will be managed by QQI. This may have implications for the fee that applies.

13.4   OTHER ASPECTS OF THE REVALIDATION PROCESS

All the other steps in the process are those for validation because revalidation is validation. This includes (*inter alia*) the arrangements for determination of the application for revalidation and for review, withdrawal, and appeal.

The independent evaluation report will be published by QQI.

14   EXTENSION OF THE DURATION ENROLMENT OF A VALIDATION DETERMINATION

The duration of enrolment is the interval during which learners may be enrolled on the validated programme; see unit (9.2.2).

Exceptionally and where there are unusual and compelling grounds, a provider may request an extension of the duration of enrolment. As such a request would be for variation of one of the conditions of validation, the granting of an extension would be entirely at the discretion of QQI, and subject to such conditions as QQI deems fit in the particular circumstances.

15   COMPLAINTS

Complaints may be made in accordance with the procedures set out in the QQI Customer Charter and Complaints of Service documents.

16 TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The validation policies and criteria envisaged herein will when commenced replace existing validation policy and criteria which will then be phased out depending on precise scheduling of commencement for different programmes or classes of programmes[8].

Scheduling of commencement will be published in advance on the QQI website allowing sufficient time for providers to transition. Particular attention will be given to ensuring a smooth well-coordinated transition for those sectors where the change is greatest.

16.1 THE PLANNED ORGANISATION OF QQI'S NEW VALIDATION POLICY AND CRITERIA

Core validation policies and criteria

− Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training (this is common to all and is sufficient for many FET and HET programmes leading to QQI awards where broad awards standards apply)

For a given programme this may be augmented by one or more of the following **specialised validation policies and criteria** (and related) documents:

− Policies and criteria for the validation of programme leading to Common Awards System (CAS) awards (appended to this document)

− Policies and criteria for the validation of language-proficiency oriented programmes

− Policies and criteria for the validation of collaborative and transnational programmes and for programmes leading to joint awards

− Policies and criteria for the validation of research degree programmes

Other anticipated QQI documents that would be closely associated with validation policy and criteria might address:

− Guidelines concerning the preparations for revalidation of programmes leading to QQI awards

− Assessment guidelines, conventions and protocols for programmes leading to QQI awards

− Guidelines on the moderation of assessment

− Evaluator conventions and protocols

− Credit accumulation conventions and protocols

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8. Section 44(3) of the 2012 Act states: The Authority may establish different policies and criteria for the validation of different programmes or different classes of programme of education and training.

PART 2

17   THE CORE VALIDATION CRITERIA[9]

Using the criteria

The criteria are written as statements that are expected to be true if the *provider's programme of education and training* (**programme**) is to be validated and implemented. The term programme here applies to the entire programme submitted for validation.

Programmes may be divided into partial programmes with a lesser award available to those who only complete part of the programme.

A **partial programme** leading to a major (or any non-minor) award may be embedded in a programme. Such a programme is called an **embedded programme**. Such an award is called an **embedded award**[10].

Embedding major award programmes is complicated if the full programme is targeted at widely mixed ability cohorts. This is because the average learning rates of the groups aiming for different embedded awards may be significantly different. If all the groups are required to progress at the same rate then either (i) attrition rates will increase, or (ii) the abler students will be able to progress with significantly less effort than the weaker students (and may become bored or distracted), or (iii) standards will fall. Programmes with embedded awards may need to be longer than those without them.

Programmes and embedded programmes may be subdivided into small partial programmes called **modules**. Completion of a modules may warrant a QQI **minor award** but it should be noted that the volume of learning required for a minor award increases significantly with NFQ level and minor awards are not available at all at doctoral level. Minor awards are widely used in further education and training.

The criteria referring to programmes apply also to embedded programmes. This will not be made explicit everywhere because it would overcomplicate the presentation of the criteria. A few of the earlier criteria do spell out the approach for illustrative purposes.

The criteria footnotes provide further explanatory support for specific criteria.

The validation criteria here along with augmented criteria from applicable specialised validation policy and criteria documents must always be addressed by:

– provider's evaluation report and the

– independent evaluation report.

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9. The criteria are not original and have been informed by multiple sources, including the "Handbook for VET providers: Supporting internal quality management and quality culture" and the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)"
10. An embedded award is a QQI award that may be offered in respect of an embedded programme.

Generalised, non-programme-specific, vague, ambiguous, contradictory or evasive responses to the criteria by the provider or evaluators are unacceptable and may result in

– the refusal of validation if they appear in the provider's evaluation report and

– the rejection by QQI of an independent evaluation report.

These reports should take each of the 12 criterion statements in turn and explain how the programme meets that criterion. They should also address the sub-criterion statements where applicable.

Applicants should note that validation may be refused if any one of the applicable criteria or sub-criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

Some larger providers may offer a programme in multiple centres. Such providers will be expected to have QA procedures for determining which centres have the capacity and capability to provide the programme. The application for validation need not address the criteria for each and every centre independently but should select some representative centres to make the case for validation against the full set of criteria.

17.1   THE PROVIDER IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR VALIDATION OF THE PROGRAMME

a. The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.

b. The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.

c. The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.[11]

17.2   THE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES ARE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT WITH THE QQI AWARDS SOUGHT

a. The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.

b. A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.

  i.   Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.

c. There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).

d. The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*.

e. The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

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11. *This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.*

f. The programme title and any embedded programme titles are

i. Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.

ii. Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.

g. For each programme and embedded programme

i. The **minimum intended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.[12]

ii. The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are **consistent with** the relevant QQI awards standards.

h. Where applicable, the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.

i. Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.

i. For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.[13]

17.3 THE PROGRAMME CONCEPT, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY, AND ITS INTERPRETATION OF QQI AWARDS STANDARDS ARE WELL INFORMED AND SOUNDLY BASED (CONSIDERING SOCIAL, CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT OBJECTIVES)

a. The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.[14]

b. The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes

i. There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.

ii. The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.

iii. There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).

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12. Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.
13. Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.
14. Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

    iv. There is evidence[15] of learner demand for the programme.

    v. There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant[16].

    vi. The programme meets genuine education and training needs. [17]

c. There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

d. Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

e. The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

17.4   THE PROGRAMME'S ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION ARRANGEMENTS ARE SATISFACTORY

a. 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. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied[18].

b. Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.

c. If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL[19]) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.

d. The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).

e. 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.

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15. This might be predictive or indirect.
16 It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
17. There is clear evidence that the programme meets the target learners' education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.
18. Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria (as restated by QQI in 2015) are arranged under the headings:
  - Progression and transfer routes
  - Entry arrangements
  - Information provision
19. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

f. The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-

   i. Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).

   ii. Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;

   iii. Has long-lasting significance.

g. The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

17.5   THE PROGRAMME'S WRITTEN CURRICULUM IS WELL STRUCTURED AND FIT-FOR-PURPOSE

a. The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.

b. In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.

c. Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.

d. The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.

e. The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles[20].

f. The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.

g. The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.

h. The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.

i. Elements such as practice placement and work based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.

j. The programme **duration** (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its **fulltime equivalent contact time** (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.[21]

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20. This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion. In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.
21. If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified.

17.6 THERE ARE SUFFICIENT QUALIFIED AND CAPABLE PROGRAMME STAFF AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

a. The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also unit (17.12c).

b. The programme has an identified complement of staff[22] (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.

c. The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (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.

d. There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development[23] opportunities[24].

e. There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.

f. Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.

17.7 THERE ARE SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME AS PLANNED

a. The specification of the programme's physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also (17.12d).

b. The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:

i. suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme's learning environments including the workplace learning environment)

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22. *Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme's provider, it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.*
23. *Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.*
24. *Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.*

    ii. suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided)

    iii. printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment

    iv. suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable

    v. technical support

    vi. administrative support

    vii. company placements/internships – if applicable

c. If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).

d. There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address

    i. Planned intake (first five years) and

    ii. The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.

e. The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.

17.8 THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE NEEDS OF THE PROGRAMME'S LEARNERS

a. The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.

b. Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.

c. The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.

17.9 THERE ARE SOUND TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

a. The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.

b. The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.

c. The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).

d. Learning is monitored/supervised.

e. Individualised guidance, support[25] and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.

17.10   THERE ARE SOUND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

a. All assessment is undertaken consistently with **Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards**[26]

b. The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.

c. The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/ module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.[27]

d. The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.

e. There is a satisfactory written **programme assessment strategy** for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.[28]

f. Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.

g. There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.

h. The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.[29]

17.11   LEARNERS ENROLLED ON THE PROGRAMME ARE WELL INFORMED, GUIDED AND CARED FOR

a. There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.

b. Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.

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25. Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.
26. See the section on transitional arrangements.
27. This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.
28. The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.
29. If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

c. Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.

d. If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.

e. The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.

f. There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.

g. The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.

h. The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities[30].

i. If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*[31] and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.

j. The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).

17.12   THE PROGRAMME IS WELL MANAGED

a. The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.

b. The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-the-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.

c. There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.

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30. For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).
31. Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners (QQI, 2015)

d. There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.

e. Quality assurance[32] is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.

f. The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.

g. The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.

h. There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

32. See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes leading to Common Awards System (CAS) awards

1   INTRODUCTION

This document augments the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training* for providers submitting applications for programmes leading to CAS (Common Awards System) awards. It must be read in conjunction with the 'core'.

This document applies to programmes that lead to CAS awards. Providers wishing to apply for validation of programmes leading to other kinds of FET awards should use the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

The *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training* indicate what is required when applying for QQI validation of a programme of education and training. The requirement to include the **provider's evaluation report** is new to the validation of further education and training programmes leading to CAS awards. The requirement to include programme and supporting documentation is not new but the scope and presentation of this documentation is new.

Owing to the complexity of the CAS, *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes Leading to Common Awards System (CAS) Awards* should be read in conjunction with **QQI's Policy for Determining Awards Standards**.

2   THE COMMON AWARDS SYSTEM

The CAS's **Certificate/Component Specification Syntax** is set out in detail in *QQI's Policy for Determining Awards Standards*. The following headings are involved

i.   Award Title

ii.   Framework Level

iii. Purpose Statement

iv.   Credit Value

v.   Field of Learning

vi.   Expected Learning Outcomes

vii. Certificate Requirements (specifying **component awards** (a type of **minor award**))

viii. Assessment Requirements

ix.   Grading

x.   Special Validation Requirements

xi.   Supporting Documentation

xii. Access Statement

The expected learning outcomes (vi) constitute the statutory award standard. The other parts are other QQI determinations (including subsidiary awards standards under the heading **certificate requirements**) that are conveniently linked with the award standard. Each impacts upon the design of programmes leading to CAS awards.

Note that a CAS **certificate specification** (a CAS certificate specification is for a **non-minor award**, typically a **major**, **special purpose** or **supplemental award**) may be determined without prescribing any component awards.

3 TYPES OF PROGRAMMES

3.1 PROGRAMMES

Programmes in the context of the Common Awards System typically lead to multiple awards. A single programme could, for example, be designed to lead to several minor awards and a major award.

3.2 COMPOUND PROGRAMMES AND MODULES

Compound programmes, for the purposes of this document, are **modularised** integrated programmes leading, for example, to major, special purpose or supplemental awards.

Compound programmes normally contain **modules** (small programmes within programmes) that frequently (but not always) lead to minor awards (component awards)—this is influenced by the relevant QQI certificate specification.

The CAS as originally conceived and implemented made no FET credit allowance for the work required to integrate learning achieved through discrete modules and certified using minor awards, towards the achievement of the requirements for a non-minor award. *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes Leading to Common Awards System (CAS)* include a number of mitigating measures.

3.3 MINOR PROGRAMMES

Minor programmes, for the purposes of this document, are programmes that lead to one or more minor awards where the provider **does not provide**[33] a corresponding **compound programme** that leads to a CAS award.

Further, a minor programme leading to a particular minor award is always linked with an active QQI certificate specification that includes the minor award in its certificate requirements. This is called the **linked certificate specification**. A minor programme might be designed to lead, upon completion, to more than one minor award and the same principle applies.

Note: A provider may propose a programme leading to a **non-CAS award** and one or more embedded CAS minor awards and in this case the minors can be drawn from different compound specifications. Such a programme is **not** considered to be a minor programme.

33. As noted in section (3.2), the term **module** is used for sub-programmes leading to minor awards in the case where the provider **does provide** the corresponding compound programme.

3.4   PROGRAMMES USING A SHARED CURRICULUM

The validation of programmes using a shared curriculum is addressed in *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

3.5   PROGRAMMES USING A MANDATORY CURRICULUM

QQI does not mandate curricula. Certain regulators have been involved in approving 'mandatory curricula' as part of the procedures for recognising certain CAS awards. Generally, providers must obtain the permission of the relevant regulator before providing a programme leading to such an award. QQI does not validate 'mandatory curricula' but the efficiencies applying to the validation of programmes using shared curricula apply to mandatory curricula.

4   THE QBS APPLICATION PROCESS FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

Applications for validation are governed by requirements specified by the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

QQI provides an online interface for the upload of the information required for validation of a programme leading to a QQI CAS award. The online interface enables the

I.   Completion of an online application form that provides summary information relating to the **compound programme** with its **modules** and the CAS awards to which it leads; **OR**

II. Completion of an online application form that provides summary information relating to a **minor programme** and the CAS minor award(s) to which it leads and the **linked certificate specification; AND**

III. Uploading the documentation supporting the application (as specified by the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*).

Providers are responsible for tracking their applications and ensuring that the necessary information is provided within the allowed timescales.

4.1   INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

The independent evaluation report will be prepared and ultimately published in accordance with the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

Two frequently occurring approaches to the evaluation of CAS programmes will be:

• evaluation by one or more persons without site visits

• evaluation by one or more persons with site visits

QQI will select the approach for each application for validation. However, QQI will alter the approach to the evaluation of a particular application should it consider that this is required for the purpose of effective evaluation.

4.1.1 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION BY ONE OR MORE EVALUATORS WITHOUT SITE VISITS

This process is facilitated by the QQI Business System (**QBS**).

The application is evaluated by at least two evaluators who will agree an **independent evaluation report**. In the unlikely event that agreement cannot be achieved by two evaluators a third evaluator will be engaged to resolve the matter. Alternatively, at QQI's discretion, the application may be referred to a different group of evaluators selected by QQI.

The evaluators may make one **request for additional information** (**RFI**)—this is done through QBS—this will be visible to the provider within QBS who is expected to upload a response within a specified time. RFIs are for the purpose of informing the evaluators and resolving uncertainty and <u>not</u> for the purpose of modifying the application. If the RFI does not resolve the uncertainty then, at QQI's discretion, a meeting with the applicant and/or a site visit may be arranged.

4.1.2 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION BY AN EVALUATOR GROUP (PANEL) WITH SITE VISIT

Complicated or highly important programmes are particularly likely to be validated by groups of evaluators with site visits.

From time to time some other types of applications will also be selected by QQI for more detailed evaluation by an independent evaluator group. Such a group will likely visit the provider to meet with the provider's staff and other stakeholders and view the facilities related to the programme.

4.2 VALIDATION AND REVIEW OF AWARDS STANDARDS

FET programmes leading to CAS awards may be validated while the relevant awards standards are indicated as being **under review** provided learners can complete the validated programme and have their awards made before the scheduled **deactivation date** for the affected award(s).

The conditions of validation of a programme leading to an award that is under review may result in a duration of enrolment that is shorter than would otherwise be the case.

5 PROGRAMME AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

This is addressed in unit (5.3) of *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

More detailed CAS-specific guidelines may be issued to help providers prepare their applications.

6   CHANGE TO A VALIDATED PROGRAMME

This is addressed generally in unit (8) of *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

A validated programme leading to a CAS compound award may be modified by the addition of elective modules leading to minor awards specified in the compound award's certificate requirements and involving up to 20% of the compound's credit value, provided these elective modules are part of one of the provider's other validated programmes.

If the proposed elective modules are not part of one of the provider's other validated programmes, the provider would need to apply for differential validation of the modified compound award programme or for the validation of the electives (minor programmes).

The 20% calculation must be made with respect to the programme as originally validated by QQI. The rule may not be invoked successively to exceed the 20% change with respect to the original programme.

Changes that would involve in excess of 20% would require that the modified compound award programme be submitted for validation (differential validation may be appropriate).

7   ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

The *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training* apply to programmes leading to CAS awards. **All of the criteria must be addressed when applying for validation of a programme of education and training leading to a CAS award**.

This unit provides some augmenting criteria that **must also** be addressed when applying for the validation of programmes leading to CAS awards.

Here, the criteria are organised under the headings used in the CAS's awards specifications (see *QQI's Policy for Determining Awards Standards*).

Some criteria will not apply in all cases, for example, a criterion concerning a compound programme will only apply if the application is for the validation of a compound programme.

A programme leading to a CAS award will be subject to a **compound award specification** as well as the applicable **component award specifications**. This applies even to the case where a provider is submitting a **minor programme** leading to a single minor award because even in that case the programme must be designed in the context of a particular compound award. This does not necessarily mean the minor award so obtained can only be used to meet the certification requirements of the specified compound award but in some cases it does mean this, for example, where the minor programme and its associated minor award are strongly differentiated by the compound.

7.1   LINKED CERTIFICATE SPECIFICATION

a.   The minor programme prepares a learner to meet the relevant part of the requirements for the **linked certificate specification**.

7.2   PURPOSE STATEMENT

a.   The compound programme is consistent with the relevant award specification's purpose statement.

b.   The minor programme is consistent with the relevant minor award(s) specification's purpose statement and that of the linked certificate specification.

7.3   FIELD OF LEARNING

a.   The provider's **approved scope of provision** must encompass the programme's field of learning subject to units (4.2) and (4.3) of *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training*.

7.4   EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

a.   The minimum intended **compound programme** learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable award standard (non-minor award) and the minimum intended module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable minor awards standards.

b.   The minimum intended **minor programme** learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable award standard.

c.   The **minor programme**'s minimum intended programme learning outcomes must also be consistent with the **linked certificate specification**.

d.   The programme leading to a compound award cannot be completed unless the learner has acquired, and where appropriate, is able to demonstrate, its expected learning outcomes (those of the compound award itself in addition to those of the required minor awards). The demonstration of the acquisition of minimum intended outcomes defined in a), b) and c) as applicable should suffice for this.

7.5   CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS[34]

a.   The **compound programme** ensures the certificate requirements are satisfied for each learner before the (non-minor) certificate is requested in respect of a learner on the basis of completion of the programme.

b.   The satisfaction of the certificate requirements is a **necessary but insufficient** condition for the (non-minor) certificate to be requested.[35]

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34. *Certificate requirements are a necessary but insufficient requirement for the recommendation to QQI that a compound award be made. A particular component award may appear in the certificate requirements of more than one compound. For example, the Level 5 minor award 'work experience' appears in the certificate requirements of dozens of major awards. Achievement of this such a minor award in the context of one programme does not automatically imply that it can be used to meet the certificate requirements of a different programme. For example, work experience in 'Engineering Technology' will not be useful for 'Early Childhood Care and Education'. It is the responsibility of the provider of a programme leading to a compound award to determine whether or not an enrolled learner's prior CAS awards can be used to meet the compound award's certificate requirements. CAS minor awards cannot be taken at face value in this regard especially general ones that can be achieved in significantly different ways.*

35. *A learner who meets the certificate requirements may not be entitled to the certificate if they have not demonstrated achievement consistent with the certificate's expected learning outcomes.*

7.6   ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

a.   The programme only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award if they have been specifically assessed against the standard determined by QQI for that award—this applies separately to each award including minor, major and special purpose awards.[36] Assessment of the achievement of minimum intended outcomes defined in 7.4 a), b) and c) as applicable should suffice.

7.7   SPECIAL VALIDATION REQUIREMENTS

a.   The programme complies with the **special validation requirements** from the relevant certificate/component specifications.

b.   Where special validation requirements relate to facilities or staff or other factors that vary with centre, there are arrangements to ensure that the conditions are met as necessary at each centre involved with the programme.

7.8   SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

a.   Where the expected learning outcomes require compliance with supporting standards (e.g. occupational standards or competence standards) this compliance is systematically demonstrated in the application for validation.

7.9   ACCESS STATEMENT[37]

a.   Where the award specification specifies access requirements these are enforced by the programme.

7.10   OTHER CAS CRITERIA

a.   The programme complies with the **87.5% Rule**

There is a lower limit to the volume of learning at the award's NFQ level involved in a programme leading to a CAS compound award. The lower limit is **87.5%** of the minimum credit requirements for the compound award. For example, if the minimum credit requirement is 120 FET credits then at least 105 FET credits must be at the award's NFQ level.

b.   The minor programme complies with the **Compound Award Rule**

The compound award rule concerns the threshold beyond which an application for the validation of a programme leading to a compound award (e.g. a major award) must be made.

A provider applying for validation of one or more minor programmes must ensure that the set of minor awards accessible through the proposed minor programmes

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36. *It is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).*

37. *CAS awards are designed to enable people to qualify in stages. The credit allocation for an NFQ level N award assume that a person has qualified with a major award at NFQ level N-1 in the field.*

together with those accessible through its QQI validated minor programmes does not overlap with the certification requirements of any QQI compound award by more than the FET credit limits below.

The limits for major awards are:

* NFQ level 3: 45 FET credits

* NFQ level 4: 70 FET credits

* NFQ level 5: 90 FET credits

* NFQ level 6: 90 FET credits

Limits for other compound awards are not automatic but QQI may require a provider to apply for the validation of a programme leading to a particular compound award where the provider wishes to access compound award components that amount to more than 75% of the compound award's credit allocation.

8 DISCIPLINE-AREA BASED APPROACH TO VALIDATION FOR PROVIDERS OF PROGRAMMES LEADING TO CAS AWARDS

The following arrangement is a special case of *devolved responsibility for arranging an independent evaluation report* (unit (6.2)).

Providers of programmes leading to CAS awards with the necessary capacity, specialised QA procedures, validation throughput, and trust relationship with QQI may have their CAS award programmes in a specified discipline-area validated by QQI largely on the basis of a periodic **discipline-area**-level and/or **class-of-programmes**-level evaluation of (i) the provider's procedures for undertaking devolved responsibility for preparing independent evaluation reports and (ii) their programmes. The periodic evaluation will involve an independent evaluation process including a site visit.

All programmes leading to CAS awards in that discipline-area would be validated by this process for the duration of the arrangement (normally five years). Further, for the duration of the arrangement, the provider may propose new programmes leading to CAS awards in the discipline-area and/or class-of-programmes and these will be validated by QQI subject to administrative checks without additional evaluation.

Under this arrangement a provider will have to upload the same material to QBS as it would have had to, had it applied for validation using the standard approach. They will also have to arrange an independent evaluation report for each proposed new programme and send this to QQI with the formal application for validation. QQI will then validate the programme subject to administrative checks (e.g. the independent evaluation report must support the application) without additional evaluation and publish the independent evaluation report.

Providers availing of this procedure will require sophisticated QA and governance arrangements.

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