



# **Academic Quality Enhancement Framework**

## **Quality Enhancement of Programmes Leading to External Awards**

**Approved by Academic Council**

**1 December 2021**

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## 1. Context

1.1. It is a principle of TU Dublin that all programmes delivered in whole or in part by TU Dublin lead to a TU Dublin award. This applies to programmes that also lead to external award (see also policy and process in relation to Joint, Dual and Multiple awards). In some circumstances it may not be possible/appropriate for a TU Dublin award to be made, for example, where national agreements apply, as in the case of craft apprenticeships, or where the programme assessment is carried out by the external organisation.

This document sets out the University's processes for the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes leading to awards from external bodies.

Just as the University is committed to quality assurance and enhancement in programmes which lead to TU Dublin awards, it is equally committed to ensuring quality and continually enhancing the student learning experience in programmes, which it delivers on a full-time or part-time basis, to students in preparation for the examinations and awards of external bodies.

1.2. The University recognises that the responsibilities for some aspects of quality assurance and enhancement on such externally validated programmes rests with the external bodies who are responsible for developing and maintaining the syllabuses and associated regulations and for monitoring and implementing their assessment systems. However, the Annual Academic Quality Enhancement process and related quality enhancement procedures also apply to the provision of these programmes.

## 2. Purpose

2.1. The purpose of the procedures set out in this document is to ensure all academic programmes delivered by the University, regardless of the awarding body, are included in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.2. The oversight of the application of the quality framework within these programmes will be managed by the relevant Discipline Programmes Board, School and Faculty.

### 3. Scope

3.1. In addition to the programmes leading to TU Dublin awards, the University delivers programmes that lead to awards from other Degree Awarding Bodies, such as the craft apprenticeship programmes that lead to QQI awards. This document describes the quality assurance and enhancement processes that apply to those programmes.

3.2. The programmes delivered can lead to:

- Major awards, which are the main class of award made at an NFQ level;
- Minor awards, which provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. These awards allow learners to accumulate ECTS credits at their own pace and needs. Minor awards are normally a sub-set of other larger awards;
- Special-purpose awards, which are made for very narrow fields of study and for specific purposes;
- Supplemental awards, which are designed for learning that is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.

### 4. Approval to offer a new Externally Validated Programme

4.1. The procedures for obtaining approval to deliver a new externally validated programme are broadly similar to the procedures that apply to the approval of programmes that lead to TU Dublin awards.

4.2. The process, as shown in [Section 8.1](#), starts with the submission of a [Programme Proposal Form](#).

4.3. Although these programmes do not lead to a TU Dublin award, the approval process still ensures that they are:

- Compliant with the University mission, policies and [Strategic Plan](#);
- Aligned to the [NFQ](#) at appropriate levels;
- Fulfilling an identifiable industry and/or society need;

- Designed to have the appropriate academic breadth and depth, and with learning outcomes that are consistent with the levels of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences as prescribed in the relevant [NFQ](#) award descriptor;
- Providing pathways to qualifications that maximise opportunities for access, transfer and progression, as per the [University Access, Transfer & Progression policy](#);
- Delivered via a process that is consistent across the University and identifies the academic, physical, human and other resources required for successful delivery;
- Cognisant of [QQI guidelines on Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement](#), and the [European Standards and Guidelines](#) (ESG).

4.4. The School completes the [Programme Proposal Form](#) and liaises with the Faculty Finance Business Partner, to ensure that the resource analysis is compliant with the University's Finance Policies and Procedures. By signing the form, the Finance Business Partner is confirming that:

- The programme can be delivered within the University's existing resources or the proposed additional income from the programme justifies the allocation of additional resources;
- The proposed fee rate is consistent with the University's fees and income policy and collaborative provision costing model.

4.5. The School submits the completed form to the Faculty Board for approval. If approved, the School establishes a [Programme Planning Committee](#) to examine the programme syllabus and the external body requirements. The approved Programme Proposal Form will be noted at the University Programmes Board.

4.6. The School should consult with Academic Affairs to identify any issues relating to differences in the University and external organisation policies, regulations or procedures. If required, the School should arrange a meeting of the Programme Planning Committee, Academic Affairs and appropriate representatives from the external organisation (and where necessary the awarding body) to discuss and resolve any issues.

4.7. When agreement has been reached in relation to any identified issues, the Programme Planning Committee prepares [Programme Documentation](#) which sets out what is

required of the University, Faculty and School to deliver the programme effectively, including such matters as staffing, timetables, resources, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and any deviations from University policies or regulations.

- 4.8. The Faculty Board, or its Academic Quality Enhancement Committee, reviews the programme documentation and if considered necessary can establish a panel, with external representation, where applicable, similar to the panel described in the [Programme Validation Process](#).
- 4.9. Where the programme has already been validated by a Degree Awarding Body, as in the case of craft apprenticeships, the panel's role is to review the programme documentation and comment on its level, standard and suitability, and make a recommendation to the Faculty Board regarding granting the School approval to deliver the programme. The Panel can request further documentation and/or meetings with the Programme Planning Committee. In the absence of a panel, the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee will take on this role.
- 4.10. The Panel, or members of the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee, can visit the School and meet with the Programme Planning Committee and prepares a report on its findings using the [Template](#) provided. The Panel will include a representative from Academic Affairs who will draft the report.
- 4.11. The report and recommendations of the panel will be considered by the Faculty Board and if approved will be submitted to the University Programmes Board for noting.

## **5. Annual Quality Enhancement Process**

- 5.1. The main aim of the reflective annual quality enhancement process is to identify actions that will lead to improvements in programme delivery and the student learning experience. The objectives of the process are to:
  - Critically evaluate the delivery of the programme and the student learning experience;
  - Consider feedback from students, staff and other stakeholder;

- Reflect on student data and statistics, such as profile, demographics, diversity, engagement, assessment data;
- Identify any issues and problems, and devise corrective actions and appropriate programme modifications;
- Develop an action plan for the development and enhancement of the programme.

5.2. The process and timelines associated with the Annual Academic Quality Enhancement of programmes leading to TU Dublin awards will not necessarily align to programmes leading to an award from an external organisation. The delivery of these programmes may require an amended annual quality enhancement process to ensure the Programme Team and the Discipline Programmes Board can reflect on student learning experience and identify areas that may require enhancement. Academic Affairs will advise the School and Discipline Programmes Board on the specific steps to be following in the Annual Academic Quality Enhancement process.

5.3. It is important to ensure that any issues and actions identified through this reflection are integrated into the Discipline Enhancement Plan, and where necessary are progressed further to the appropriate level through the Faculty or University Enhancement Plans.

5.4. Academic Affairs, working with the School, will amend the standard [Programme Enhancement Report](#) to ensure its suitability for the particular programme, where necessary. However, the [Craft Apprenticeship Programme Enhancement Report](#) can be used to report annually to the Discipline Programme Board in relation to any craft apprenticeship provision.

5.5. The report will be informed by feedback from the Programme Team and from students, using the [Student Feedback](#) process, and will reflect on the programme delivery and student learning experience within all cohorts (Blocks) in the previous academic year. The following steps are taken to complete the report:

- Programme Coordinator downloads the report template from Academic Affairs website, and adds the required statistical information and feedback from the relevant stakeholders, such as students and staff;

- Feedback can also be sought from employers, community and industry partners, where relevant;
- Programme Coordinator circulates the draft report to the Programme Team;
- Programme Coordinator discusses the data with the Programme Team and adds any additional relevant information to the form;
- Programme Coordinator submits report to the *Discipline Programmes Board*.

5.6. The remaining steps in the process are described in Sections 6 to 9 of the [Annual Academic Quality Enhancement](#) process.

## 6. Programme Review

6.1. At any stage after the commencement of the programme, the Discipline Programmes Board or the Faculty Board may initiate a programme review. The purpose of a programme review is to:

- Ensure that the programme maintains appropriate academic standards commensurate with the award and University's standards;
- Ensure that the programme is being delivered as per the programme document and the policies and regulations agreed with the external organisation;
- Provide the opportunity for seeking stakeholder feedback including from staff, students, community, industry and the professions and other external peers, and to use such feedback to revise or amend approaches to teaching and learning, and student supports;
- Ensure adherence to [TU Dublin Policies and Guidelines](#) related to good practice in learning, teaching and assessment (where appropriate);
- Ensure optimal resource allocation for the effective delivery of the programme;
- Monitor the effectiveness of the University's [Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process](#) and the implementation of identified quality enhancement plans;

- Ensure that statutory requirements in relation to access, transfer and progression continue to be met.

6.2. As per the [Programme Review](#) process, two types of programme review can be undertaken:

- Full Programme Review –all aspects of the programme are reviewed;
- Focused Programme Review –focuses on specific aspects of the programme.

6.3. The procedures for the programme review are described in the [Programme Review](#) process. Depending on the nature of the programme and the policies and regulations of the external awarding body, some of the steps within this process may be amended accordingly. The School should consult with Academic Affairs before starting the review to decide on the exact procedures to be followed.

## **7. Approval of Assessment Results**

7.1. Assessment Boards should be convened, managed and operated as per the Assessment Regulations, except in the case where it has been agreed that the external organisation's regulations will be applied. Either way, the outcomes of the Assessment Boards should be approved by the relevant School prior to being sent to the external awarding body.

7.2. Assessment Board decisions should be noted at Faculty Board.

## **8. External Awards not on the National Framework of Qualifications,**

8.1 There may be occasions where TU Dublin in whole or in part delivers a programme that does not lead to a TU Dublin award, where the external organisation making the award and/or professional recognition is not a degree-awarding body and the award is not on the National Framework of Qualifications. Notwithstanding the principle described in 1.1 that programmes delivered in whole or in part by TU Dublin should lead to TU Dublin awards, where it is accepted by TU Dublin that there is a strong reason for a TU Dublin award not to be attached to a programme, the processes outlined above in relation to the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes will apply.

## 9. Process Flow Chart

### 8.1. Approval of a Programme Leading to an External Award

