



Programmatic Review Handbook 2017-2019

February 2017

Foreword

This handbook has been produced by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar. It includes support tools from the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT). The handbook provides clear and essential guidance on undertaking Programmatic Review.

There have been changes in the quality assurance landscape over the past five years at the macro level with the advent of Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) and the European Standards and Guidelines (2015). These changes have impacted the requirements for Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) in evidencing its robust quality assurance procedures in action.

DkIT approaches its Programmatic Review process confident that it will afford an opportunity for the Institute to showcase its good practice, plan to address any shortcomings highlighted and situate DkIT for further academic growth over the coming years.

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Chapter 1

Introduction, Objectives & Structures for Programmatic Review

Dundalk Institute of Technology

Programmatic Review 2017-2019

1.0 Introduction

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) holds a proud and extended tradition of excellence in programme delivery. In order to ensure that the currency of programmes remains relevant in a fast-paced world of work, it is incumbent upon the Institute to regularly review its programme provision. In addition to making sound academic sense, it is a statutory requirement that the cycle of reviews is adhered to.

The Institute holds delegated authority to make its own awards under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 (No. 26) and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (No. 28) and is obliged under these Acts to have regard to Quality Assurance Guidelines issued by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). These guidelines require providers to carry out a review and self-evaluation of quality, including a review of programmes of study, on a regular basis. The purpose of such self-evaluation is to review, evaluate and report on the education, training, research and related services provided and the quality assurance system and procedures which underpin these.

As a Higher Education provider, DkIT is also obliged to comply with the specifications of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area¹ regarding cyclical review.

In DkIT, 5-yearly internal reviews are carried out at the level of the Academic School. A Programmatic Review is a self-study of the Academic School operations and strategy. It provides an opportunity for the School to reflect and analyse what has been achieved in the previous 5 years and plan for what should be done during the next 5 years with a view to the achievement and enhancement of educational quality. The self-critical review should acknowledge the strengths and identify and plan to address the challenges experienced by the School. Development planning is facilitated by an environmental scan resulting in a prioritised School strategy which compliments the Institute's Strategic Plan, detailing DkIT's vision and mission. The study should also analyse the proven ability of the School to respond to the changing needs and demands of all of the Institute's stakeholders. When the review is complete, an opportunity is provided to showcase the work of the Institute in the form of a peer-review panel site visit to the Institute where opportunities for sharing of best practice are provided.

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1. *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015).*
 2. *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (April 2016): Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines.*

1.1 Objectives of the Programmatic Review

In accordance with QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines (2016)², academic programme delivery should be monitored in a way which allows for the identification of needs and modification of the programme and delivery method as appropriate. Periodic reviews of a programme provide an opportunity to evaluate the programme with the benefit of experience of delivery, incorporating feedback from staff, learners and other stakeholders. With the benefit of a cycle of delivery, there is evidence available on the performance of the programme which must be analysed in order to evaluate the programme. This evidence then underpins the achievement of the objectives of programme review, which are to:

1. Ensure that the programme remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective learning environment;
2. Ensure that the programme achieves the objectives set for it and responds to the needs of learners and the changing needs of society;
3. Review the learner workload;
4. Review learner progression and completion rates;
5. Review the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of learners;
6. Inform updates of the programme content, delivery modes, teaching and learning methods, learning supports and resources and information provided to learners;
7. Update third party, industry or other stakeholders relevant to the programme;
8. Review quality assurance arrangements of relevance to the programme.

1.2 Structure

The DkIT programmatic review process for each Academic School is divided into two parts for the purposes of both implementation and evaluation:

1. School self-reflection and compiling School Self Evaluation Report (SER)
2. Review of academic programmes and activities (full time & part time)

The two parts should occur in the order specified above. For practical reasons, however, they may run concurrently to some extent. Decisions made during part 2 of the process (review of programmes) should be informed by and reflect the analysis which has taken place during part 1. The time period between evaluation of part 1 and part 2 should not exceed 12 months. External panel members for evaluation of parts 1 and 2 will have some common membership.

2 Stage Process of Review:

Stage 1: School Self Evaluation Report

Stage 2: Programme Review

Data and other information collected during the ongoing monitoring of programmes (e.g. annual programme board reports, external examiner reports, learner feedback) should be considered during the programmatic review process. The review is expected to consider the following elements:

- Data relating to learner intake and progression
- Requirements of employers, industry, service providers, professional bodies and national and international developments
- National higher education strategy and the needs of society and economy
- Response of the School to market requirements and educational developments
- Feedback mechanisms for learners and processes for responding to feedback
- Physical facilities and resources provided for programmes
- Formal links with industry, service providers, business and the wider community
- Feedback from employers and graduates
- Research activities in the field of learning under review and their impact on learning and teaching
- Projections for the next 5 years in the field of learning under review

Schools may wish to add to the list of objectives or areas for consideration as deemed appropriate to the academic areas under review. The review process should be led by the Head of School in collaboration with Heads of Department and Section. The process should be transparent, inclusive and collegial. Service users should be involved where relevant (e.g. Nursing, Midwifery, Social Care).

Learners should be involved in the review process (e.g. through programme board reps). The European Standards & Guidelines (2015) require that the learner's voice is fully represented in reviews. A learner from another Institute will also participate in the final external panel site visit for the SER.

Stakeholder consultation must include
learners

Chapter 2

School Self Evaluation Report

Part 1: School Self Reflection Process and compiling School Self Evaluation Report (SER)

2.1 Introduction:

The School Self Reflection process provides an opportunity for Schools to critically analyse its objectives, teaching and learning strategies, resources, services and administration as they impact on academic programme provision.

2.2. Structure and Content of the SER document

The Stage 1 SER document will be compiled by the School and signed off by the Head of School for submission to the Registrar's Office.

Some aspects of the document will require information from the Institute and this is outlined in Section 2.2.1.

Teams should use links to websites where appropriate and detail hyperlinks in the document. The information to be compiled by the School is outlined in Section 2.2.2.

2.2.1. Institute Input: (to be provided by the Registrar's Office)

- Governance and Organisational Structures
- Context and Strategic Development of the Institute
- Institute Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan
- Academic Quality Assurance:
 - Academic Governance (Academic Council, Governing Body, etc)
 - Programme Management
 - Academic Policies and Procedures
 - Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies (including VLEs)
 - Learner support and addressing special needs
 - Student Feedback
- External Engagement (outreach, schools liaison, employers/industry, placement, alumni)
- Research Strategy
- Facilities

2.2.2. Academic School Input (to be completed by the School using the headings below)

2.2.2.1. Background (maximum 10 pages)

Set the context for the review by describing briefly an overview of the School including the following:

- Description, context and strategic development of School (over the past 5 years – direction etc.). Most significant developments over past 5 years (e.g. new departments)
- Organisational Chart (and changes in organisational structure since last review).
- List of current programmes/awards and validation dates, with reference to programmes developed since the last review (full time and part time programmes)
- Feedback from last Programmatic Review and Response of School (how School has actioned findings) (Table)
- School Strategy/Strategic Work Plan for previous 5 years and whether achieved (Table)

- Human Resources of the School (overview not CVs) (academic, administrative, technical support, other)
- Physical facilities of School (summary of learning facilities and large-scale equipment; not room measurements e.g. 14 tiered classrooms ranging from 40-60 capacity; 6 IT labs of capacity 20; 4 Science labs of capacity 18)

2.2.2.2. Environmental Scan (performed by School, can be reported at Department or School level)

Analyse the internal and external environment that the School functions within in order to answer the question “where are we now?” and include the following:

- Background information / Context (brief overview of national policies & predictions on growth and employment, government strategy for the subject area, e.g. FORFAS reports, Government Department publications of relevance)
- Summary of learner statistics for past 5 years (at programme level) (Tables):**
 - Applications (standard, mature, FET, international)
 - CAO cut-off points
 - Withdrawals (where applicable)
 - Progression rates
 - Graduation statistics
- Graduate destination analysis*** (overview for each Department)
- Summary of Research / Innovation activities (brief review of activity highlights)
- Internationalisation – school strategic priorities re international partnerships and staff/student mobility (brief overview)
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategies – include any School or Department–level initiatives or documents (not programme level as this will be included in Part 2)
- Quality Assurance – structures and mechanisms for compliance with Institute Continuous Assessment policies (Programme Directors, Stage Convenors, Programme Boards, Graduate Research Programme Boards, School Faculty Board, Ethics Committees, etc.), summary of 3 or 4 main points raised in annual programme board reports over the past 5 years detailing any outcomes/actions taken as a result of external examiner feedback, learner or faculty feedback. This should be done at Department level for Part 1 SER.
- Staff development - overview of past 5 years, priorities for next 5 years, showing focus on upskilling faculty (e.g. attendance at training, conferences, undertaking research, CPD, Institute training initiatives e.g. MALT, Data Protection)

Additional Information (where relevant)

- SWOT analysis (where Schools wish to undertake)
- Academic Placement activities (e.g. brief overview of how Departments involve employers in assessment of learners on placement)
- Initiatives related to access and transfer (local School-based access/transfer routes)
- Engagement:
 - School-based marketing and promotion activities
 - School-based outreach activities (e.g. Scifest)
 - Links with:
 - Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) providers (e.g. NEFHEA)
 - Employers (e.g. Industry Fora)
 - 2nd level Schools (e.g. Junior Achievement Ireland)

- Professional bodies (e.g. accreditation)
- Collaborative programmes (e.g. Monaghan Institute, Ballyhaise); Quality Assurance relating to collaborative programmes
- Learner supports, including retention initiatives within School/Department e.g. Induction, academic support at Department level e.g. tutorials
- Brief overview of student successes.

Environmental Scan: Where are we now?

**Data to be provided by Registrar's Office

***Data available from Careers Office

2.2.2.3. Informed Reflection and Planning (maximum 10 pages)

This section combines the information gathered above and aims to answer the question “where do we want to be five years from now?” based on an analysis of that information. It includes conclusions which inform:

- School strategy for next 5 years
- Integration with Institute Strategy and alignment with strategic priorities
- Suggested strategic areas: (Objectives, actions, targets and KPIs for each)
 - Academic Programmes (full time and part time)
 - Learning, Teaching and Assessment
 - Learner Experience
 - Staff Empowerment
 - External Engagement
 - Research and Innovation

Informed Reflection: Where do we want to be 5 years from now?

2.3. Submission from School to Registrar's Office

The draft SER from the School is signed off by the Head of School and then submitted in Word format to the Registrar's Office. The document will then be reviewed by the Registrar's Office before it is approved to send to the panel of external peers. The School should submit the draft SER at least four weeks prior to the date of the Registrar's Office sending the final SER to the external panel. This ensures that any edits required can be made and that the agreed timelines can be adhered to.

**Allow a 2 week timeline for processing
in Registrar's Office**

2.4. Evaluation of the SER:

The SER is evaluated by a panel of external peers. These may be nominated by the School and/or the Registrar's Office. The panel is appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar. The panel receives the SER report at least four weeks in advance of a site visit. During the visit the panel evaluates the SER in a constructive and supportive dialogue with School management, staff, learners and other stakeholders. The visit may include tours of both Institute and School learning facilities.

The evaluation panel has the following composition:

1. Chair (with high level of experience in higher education and in programmatic reviews, e.g. Academic Registrar from another HEI).
2. Two external academics with expertise in the broad field of learning within the School.
3. Two industry, service user or professional body representatives with experience and/or expertise of relevance to the field of learning within the School.
4. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar of DkIT (or nominee).
5. Learner in Higher Education, external to DkIT, ideally from the IoT sector.

Following the visit, the panel will present its findings in the form of a written report, which may make recommendations for improvements and/or changes. Some recommendations may be conditional. The School will provide a response to this report. Both the report and the response will be presented to Academic Council and, subject to approval, will be published on the Institute website and referenced in the Annual Institutional Quality Report provided to QQI.

**Allow a 4 week timeline for external
panel to read documentation prior to
site visit**

Chapter 3

Review of Programmes

Part 2: Review of Academic Programmes and Activities

3.0 Introduction

During part 2 of the programmatic review process, the reflective analysis carried out in part 1 is applied to the review, revision and re-validation of academic programmes. Normally all programmes within the School (including part-time) are presented for validation, irrespective of whether their validation period has expired or not. It is the policy of DkIT since 2013 to validate all full time programmes for part time delivery at the same time and cognisance should be given to this where possible. Separate Programme Schedules should be produced, where relevant, for part time delivery in programme documents. Guidelines for the development of part time programmes can be viewed at

https://www.dkit.ie/system/files/guidelines_for_design_of_part_time_programmes_0_1.pdf

Exit awards (where desired) must be presented with their parent programmes. Revalidation of programmes following a successful programmatic review is normally for 5 years.

Changes which are extensive or substantial ('major' as defined in part 5.5 of the Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes), are regarded as 'new' programmes and must undergo a separate validation process. Such cases should be communicated to the Registrar's Office well in advance of the programmatic review evaluation so that such validations can be accommodated separately.

The process for the review of programmes should be consistent with the Institute's Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes (<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/policy-design-approval-programmes>).

3.1. Structure and Content of Programme Documents

In order to keep the level of documentation at a manageable level, a submission document should be presented for each programme or group of related programmes. Programmes which link through a ladder system of progression should be presented together (e.g. Higher Certificate, Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree) as should programmes which are closely related (i.e. have a significant number of common modules; or common entry routes). Non-major awards should be presented in conjunction with related parent programmes. The rationale and justification for revalidation of a group of related programmes should address all of the programmes in the suite (e.g. the entry requirements section should cover the different entry requirements for the Higher Certificate, Bachelor Degree and Honours Bachelor Degree if presenting an ab-initio Level 8 Honours Degree group).

Each submission document should contain the following **10 sections**:

- 1. Background:** Short description of rationale for programme with reference to evidence for student demand and strategic relevance (provided in the SER document Part 1).
- 2. Programme structure:** Broad programme structure and summary table showing significant changes to programme since last validation. (e.g. 3 year, semesterised full-time 180 ECTS programme Bachelor degree. Table showing list of old modules and list of new modules)
- 3. Entry requirements:** Entry requirements for programme and opportunities for transfer and/or progression within DkIT or elsewhere. (Include general entry requirements from website which details Mature, CAO, Further Education, RPL, International and Non-Standard routes).
- 4. Graduate Profile:** Description of programme aim, graduate attributes and career opportunities for graduates – refer to evidence provided in the SER document Part 1.
- 5. Learning and Teaching Strategy:** Summary of learning and teaching methodologies employed in the programme. Refer to <https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/documents-policies/learning-teaching-strategy>. Please note that this guidance is currently under review and will be revised mid-2017.
- 6. Programme Assessment strategy** with samples of assessment schedules for each stage. Refer to: <https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/documents-policies/assessment-learning-guidelines-dundalk-institute-technology>. Please note that this guidance is currently under review and will be revised mid-2017.
- 7. Student Experience:** Programme specific management and learner supports to be provided.
- 8. External engagement:** Engagement with external stakeholders specific to the programme, e.g. linkages to external partners through work/clinical placements, professional body accreditation, collaborative delivery, etc.
- 9. Resources:** Summary table of resource requirements for the programme(s). (Staff, placement office, physical facilities, equipment, library, staff development, other significant running costs).
- 10. Transition Arrangements:** Arrangements for transition from existing to new programmes (see 3.3. below). Ideally a school would form a view of this roll-out process in advance of their programme design so that a smooth transition can be effected for learners.
- 11. Appendices: to include the following four elements -**
 - i. Programme Document: It should be noted: Programme schedules and learning outcomes for Exit Awards must be presented in addition to those for the parent programme.
 - Programme Schedule downloaded from Akari programme management tool.
 - Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in Akari format – these should be:
 - 1. programme-specific demonstrating the achievement of the graduate attributes**
 - 2. compliant with the requirements of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for the programme NFQ level** (e.g. Level 6 for Higher Certificate; Level 7 for Ordinary Degree etc).
 - 3. compatible with the relevant subject Award Standards**

<http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Active-NFQ-Standards-for-HE.aspx>

- Matrix showing how Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs) are aligned with Programme Learning Outcomes (in Akari format).
- ii. Module Descriptors (in Akari format).
- iii. Staff Curricula Vitae (template to be circulated by Registrar's Office).
- iv. Other appendices deemed relevant.

The following checklist of information should be reviewed following compilation of the programme document to ensure all relevant programme information has been included under the headings above.

Checklist of programme level information required:

- Evidence of demand for the programme
- Programme Learning Outcomes
- Graduate Profile and Career Opportunities
- Learning and Teaching Strategy and Methodologies
- Assessment Strategy (including assessment schedule)
- Programme Schedule
- Module descriptors
- Matrix showing mapping of module learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes
- Programme management and quality assurance
- Resource requirements
- Staff curricula vitae

Check all programme
level information has
been included

3.2 Implementation arrangements and transition to revised programmes

Once the programme validation process is complete the revised programme schedules will be entered into the Institute Student Management system (Banner). There are then a number of issues that will arise.

1. Roll-out of new programmes

Ideally all Schools will adopt an Institute decision in relation to the roll-out of new programmes following programmatic review (i.e. (i) phased or (ii) 'big-bang' immediate implementation). If special circumstances exist, a School may decide to opt for an alternative approach subject to agreement with the Registrar's Office.

2. Transition modules

Programme development teams must consider, in advance of evaluation of programmes, whether the introduction of the new approved programme schedules will result in some transition issues which may require contingencies to be put in place. For example, movement of modules from one stage to another may leave repeat students in a situation where their total ECTS credits do not allow them to progress/graduate. Students cannot be awarded credits twice for completing the same module twice (i.e. two modules with the same learning outcomes). A general rule of thumb to identify when modules are too similar is when they share 50% or more of the Module Learning Outcomes.

In such cases, a contingency for providing students with an opportunity to gain these credits should be put in place and validated as part of the Programmatic Review. The use of **generic modules** such as 'Research Skills', 'Communications' or 'Academic Skills' modules can be useful in this regard and offer a range of credit weighting (e.g. 5, 10 ECTS). When preparing the Programme Schedule, Programme Teams must decide on which 'transition module' to include at the appropriate NFQ level. This module should be designated 'Optional' status on the Programme Schedule in Akari. In the 'Special Regulations' section it should be noted that "this module will only be used in exceptional circumstances to facilitate transition". This will allow the School to include the module for students who are 'short' of credits due to implementation of new programmes.

Where '**transition**' modules are to be used to fill gaps in credits, students must be able to achieve all of the learning outcomes for the programme (PLOs) through completion of other modules.

3.3 Centralised Provision of Data and Information required for the review

The following information will be provided by the Registrar's Office to Schools during the review:

Data from 2012/13 to 2016/17 (2013/15 to 2017/18 in the case of the Schools commencing in 2018) on:

- Student intake statistics – numbers per programme, profile (mature/FET/standard/international), CAO cut-off and median points.
- Intake data for International students
- Programme pass rates and progression rates
- Module pass rates and retention rates on request
- Graduation Statistics
- Graduate Destination Surveys (2012-2016 and possibly 2017)*

*Schools may also have their own data from programme development activities and this can also be included.

3.4 Institute academic policies to consider when reviewing programmes

3.4.1. Programme Structure and Learning Outcomes:

All programmes at DkIT are modularised and semesterised. Modules form the building blocks of programmes and have specific learning outcomes which are constructively aligned to the relevant award standards, to indicative content and to assessment. Credits are awarded for each module studied and learners accumulate credits to achieve an award. There are 60 credits in each academic year or programme stage.

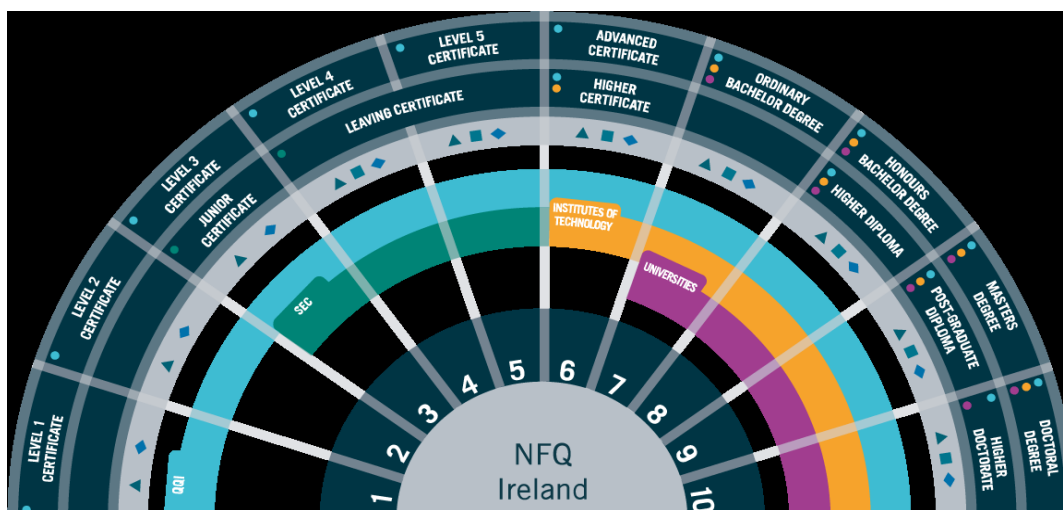
It is essential that the programme validation process agrees the level at which the award is placed on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (See Figure 1). Major awards are those on the NQF framework with 60 ECTS credits or more, which in the case of taught programmes at DkIT include the Higher Certificate (NQF level 6), Ordinary Bachelor Degree (NQF level 7), Honours Bachelor Degree (NQF level 8), Higher Diploma (NQF level 8), Postgraduate Diploma (NQF level 9) and Taught Master's Degree (NQF level 9).

In addition to these major awards, there are a range of other awards (often gained through part-time study) made at each of the NQF levels (6 to 9), known as minor, supplemental or special purpose awards. These awards normally have at least 10 ECTS credits and less than 90 credits. All non-major awards at level 6 are termed 'Certificate'. Non-major awards at levels 7 or above with less than 60 credits are also termed 'Certificate', those with or in excess of 60 credits are termed 'Diploma'.

The NFQ level descriptors of the framework are divided into three different types of learning outcomes, knowledge, skill and competence. These strands are further subdivided into sub-strands (e.g. knowledge-breath, competence-context, etc.). In a major award it is important to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes under each sub-strand although some may be more important than others, depending on the type of programme and its purpose. In the case of major awards consisting of more than one stage, progression of complexity in knowledge, skills and competencies should occur within each sub-strand over the duration of the programme. It is usual, therefore, to have Basic modules in the first stage, progressing through Intermediate modules to more Advanced modules in the final stage. In accordance with academic council policy all credits in the award stage of the programme must be at the level of the award.

Major and minor awards can be differentiated from major awards by both the volume of the learning outcomes and comprehensiveness of the sub-strands. In the case of most minor, special purpose and supplementary awards, the focus is narrow and only a small number of learning outcome sub-strands over one or a number of NFQ levels will be met. Non-major awards do not require the full completion of all 8 strands of knowledge, skills and competencies defined for any of the NQF levels. The learning outcomes for a non-major award should be mapped to outcomes achieved from the learning outcomes of the modules undertaken.

Figure 1: National Framework of Qualifications (<http://www.nfq-qqi.com/>)



3.4.2 Module Structure:

The size of a module is specified in units of credits using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which equates one ECTS credit to 20-25 hours of notional student effort (i.e. including lectures, tutorials, practical classes, independent study, online learning, work-based learning, directed reading and assignments). Modules should have 5 or 7.5 credits or multiples thereof. Modules of 2.5 credits should be only used in exceptional circumstances. A maximum of 10 modules per stage is allowed and modules should normally be of one semester duration.

Up to two modules of 2- semester duration (year-long) are allowable per stage on each programme. ‘Year-long’ modules should, however, be used sparingly and considered carefully. For example, the inclusion of year-long modules can interfere with learners’ opportunities for Erasmus participation and for attend repeating. Modules are associated with NFQ levels which define their level of complexity and most appropriate stage on a programme. In DkIT, module levels are described using the same NQF system used to indicate the standard of an award.

In order to address the issues with Professional Body accreditation which can be linked to achieving modules at specific NFQ levels, DkIT will adopt the following designation for internal use:

NFQ Level	DkIT Designation
6	Basic (B)
7	Intermediate (I)
8	Advanced (A)
9	Postgraduate (P)

In order to ensure compliance with NFQ programme design, all programmes should adhere to the following design at a modular level where possible. (It is noted that this issue will be reviewed in relation to programmes requiring Professional Body accreditation.)

Award	NFQ Level	Total ECTS Credits	Structure of Full Time Programme (normally*)
Higher Certificate	6	120	Years 1 & 2 modules at Level 6
Ordinary Degree	7	180	Years 1 & 2 modules at Level 6; Year 3 modules at Level 7
Add-on Honours Degree	8	60	All modules at Level 8
Honours Degree (180 Credits)	8	180 (3 year)	Year 1 modules at Level 6 Year 2 modules at Level 7 Year 3 modules at Level 8
Honours Degree (240 Credits)	8	240 (4 year)	Year 1 modules at Level 6 Year 2 modules at Level 6 Year 3 modules at Level 7 Year 4 modules at Level 8
Higher Diploma	8	60	All modules at Level 8
Post Graduate Diploma	9	60	All modules at Level 9
Master's Degree (Taught)	9	75-120	All modules at Level 9

*As all credits contributing to the award must be at the level of the award, this may not be appropriate where the award grade is made up of a combination of credits from the final and penultimate stages. Such cases should be discussed with the Registrar's Office.

Both new and currently approved modules may be used in any programme where relevant. At programmatic review all modules must be reviewed by the programme development team to ensure continued relevance.

Decisions in relation to pre- and co-requisite modules are a matter for the individual programme development team. It should be noted, though, that learners may not be prevented from progressing from one semester to another within a stage, so prerequisites cannot apply within a stage.

Successful completion of a module relates to the achievement of a pass grade across all the learning outcomes. If programme teams require individual module learning outcomes to be achieved in order for learners to progress, this must be done through a 'Failed Element' process and presented in the programme documentation as a Special Regulation. It is advised that this option only be used where essential.

3.4.2.1 Electives

Use of elective modules should be considered carefully with due consideration given to resource and timetabling constraints. Ideally each stage of a programme would seek to offer no more than three elective choices.

3.4.3 Assessment:

It is important to consider assessment at the level of the programme and stage and programme boards should be careful to avoid 'over-assessment' of students. During programme design, the development team should consider the volume, nature and purpose of assessment at each stage (assessment strategy) in the first instance and subsequently agree on how to allocate the assessments to modules, ensuring constructive alignment with module learning outcomes.

All of the learning outcomes for a module must be assessed. There should be a mixture of assessment types (e.g. presentation, exam, essay, project, lab report, practical skill, etc.). Integrated assessments can be used, where possible, between modules (i.e. the assessment for one module may represent demonstration of learning outcomes from another module within the same stage). It should be noted that modules from a different stage or from a different semester cannot be used for integrated assessment purposes.

Student group-work as a form of assessment should be considered carefully and should only be used where the process or product is aligned with a module learning outcome. The programme team should consider the role of assessed group work in the programme. This should inform the nature of the group work, where it sits in the programme and how it is supported and scaffolded across the programme. Please see Assessed Group Work Framework: https://www.dkit.ie/system/files/groupwork_framework_guidelines_2016.pdf

3.5. Use of Akari Curriculum Management Tool:

All programmes and modules must be authored using Akari Curriculum Management Software. Training on the use of this software will be provided in advance of part 2 of the programmatic review and guidelines will be issued on protocols to be applied in the entry of information. The software allows both programme and module documents to be downloaded in PDF format and included as appendices to the part 2 submission documents.

The link to Akari software is available in the staff portal of the DkIT website at: <https://www.dkit.ie/staff-portal/akari-curriculum-management>

3.6. Evaluation of Programmes by External Panel:

3.6.1. Panel Selection and Composition

The programme submission documents are evaluated by a panel of external peers. These may be nominated by the School and/or the Registrar's Department. The panel is appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar.

The evaluation panel has the following composition:

1. The Chair will be the same as that for the SER (or in exceptional circumstances a nominee).
2. One external academic for each of the specific disciplinary areas under review. Some of these academic members will be the same as those on the SER panel.
3. Two industry, service user or professional body representatives with experience and/or expertise of relevance to the field of learning within the School. One or both of these may be the same as those on the SER panel.
4. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar of DkIT (or nominee).

3.6.2 Submission from School to Registrar's Office

The Programme Documents from the School are signed off by the Head of School and then submitted in Word format to the Registrar's Office. The documents will then be reviewed by the Registrar's Office before they are approved to send to the panel of external peers. The School should submit the documents at least four weeks prior to the date of the Registrar's Office sending the documents to the external panel. This ensures that any edits required can be made and that the agreed timelines can be adhered to.

**Allow a 2 week timeline for processing in
Registrar's Office**

3.6.3 Evaluation of the Programme Documents:

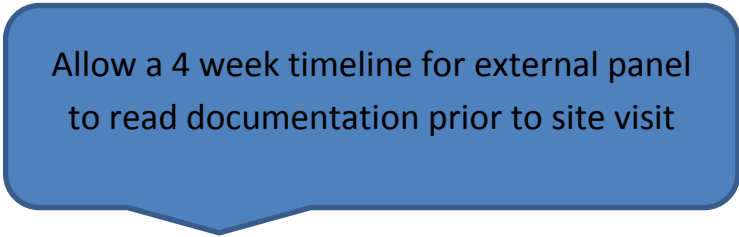
The panel receives the programme documents in advance of a site visit. During the visit the panel evaluates the programmes in a constructive and supportive dialogue with School management, staff, learners and other stakeholders (e.g. service providers). The visit will include tours of learning facilities of relevance to the programmes under consideration.

Panels will also request a meeting with current learners on the programme so Programme Teams should arrange for representative students to be available.

The first step will involve the Head of School making a brief presentation (10 minutes) to the external panel outlining the outcomes from Part 1 of the Review Process. This presentation sets the scene for the programme level review and clarifies many decisions taken in advance of the evaluation of individual programmes.

At the end of the visit, the panel will present its preliminary oral findings. At a later stage, the panel will present more detailed findings in the form of a written report, which will make recommendations regarding the re-validation of the programmes presented. Recommendations may be provided on areas for improvement and some of these may be conditional. The School will provide a response to this report which will then be signed off by the Chair of the panel. Both the report and the response will be presented to Academic

Council and, subject to approval, will be published on the Institute website and referenced in the Annual Institutional Quality Report provided to QQI.



Allow a 4 week timeline for external panel
to read documentation prior to site visit

Appendix 1: Guidelines for writing a Programme Assessment Strategy

Curriculum and assessment are inseparable. The development and evaluation of programme and module assessment strategies should be substantial parts of programme design and programme validation and should form a substantial part of the documentation to be considered by a validation or review panel.

A programme assessment strategy is aimed at teachers, learners and assessors involved with the programme.

See DKIT Assessment guidelines adopted by Academic Council in 2010:

<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/assessment-learning>

And more recent policy regarding student group work:

https://www.dkit.ie/system/files/groupwork_framework_guidelines_2016.pdf

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/information-staff/documents-policies>

Link the minimum (and any other) intended programme's assessment instruments (summative and formative, including continuous assessment and repeat assessment) to programme learning outcomes as well as to intended module and stage learning outcomes.

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

1. Detail the formative and summative assessments utilised on a modular level.
2. Demonstrate the links between the programme's assessment strategy and the modular assessment strategy
3. Detail marks earned through formative and summative assessment.
4. Note: Akari Curriculum Management Software should be used to link module learning outcomes to assessment instruments. This is called constructive alignment.

Good practice would suggest that:

Formative assessment is acknowledged as being part of the learning process, and so is used to monitor and thus help improve student learning *while that learning is taking place*. Examples include classroom assessment techniques (CATs) such as the one-minute paper, and e-learning assessment techniques including online quizzes and multiple-choice questions (MCQs) (e-assessment). It can also include staged assessment, whereby students submit a draft or work-in-progress for feedback that that then be applied to enhance the final piece of summative assessed work.

Summative assessment, on the other hand, measures learning at fixed points in time against agreed standards or criteria, and includes, for example, mid-semester and/or end of-semester essays or examinations. While both assessment forms are valued, it is acknowledged, however, that formative assessment is assessment for learning, and summative, the assessment of learning. In the context of formative assessment, particular emphasis is placed on tutor feedback, peer review and student self-assessment, all known to promote 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning.

Describe and provide a rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures. Ensure that the programme's continuous assessment is appropriately balanced.

Regulate, build upon and integrate the module assessment strategies and (where used) stage assessment and strategies.

To address these sections of the programme's assessment strategy:

Provide an overview given of the assessment tasks chosen in the programme. Include a rationale for the choice of the assessment tasks and map to the graduate skills.

Detail specific approaches to the first semester of the first year of the programme.

Demonstrate, where applicable, how assessment is integrated across modules. Detail the rationale and marking criteria for integrated assessment.

Demonstrate how assessment is inclusive and culturally sensitive.

Where group assessment is used, the Institute's policy on group assessment should be referenced.

Good practice would suggest that:

Assessment strategies should aim to develop the key graduate attributes associated with each programme. Due care should therefore be taken to identify and incorporate methods of assessment best capable of developing the graduate skills and qualities identified at the Programme and Module level. For example, group projects, peer teaching, poster exhibitions and presentations (individual and/or group) would be appropriate in developing self- initiative, resourcefulness and good communication skills, while case studies, critical incident analyses, research-based projects and student- led seminars should prove relevant in developing enterprise, problem-solving capabilities, critical thinking and research skills. The design of certain media, such as screencasts, podcasts or an animation, will help develop artistic, visual, organisational and communication skills.

In the interest of learner-centred approaches to assessment, and optimisation of the learning experience, it is necessary to be mindful of the need to ensure that students have sufficient time to complete their assessments and are not over-assessed. Moreover at the beginning of every module, all students should receive their marking schemes, assessment criteria and semester-based assessment plans indicating when assessments are due. This should be presented in the form of a module handbook. It is good practice for teaching staff to peer review module handbooks to ensure best practice. Best practice approaches highlight the importance and value of providing students, at the beginning of a module, with a Module Handbook in which relevant details pertaining to assessment are clearly set out.

To address the issue of learning preferences, and therefore diversity within the student body, an element of choice should be provided in the assessment requirements at the module level (for example a choice of essay titles could be given, or students encouraged to research a relevant area of their own choosing). During first year, more specifically, tasks should be designed to become progressively more challenging. The marks awarded would reflect this progression. Particularly during the first 6-8 weeks of the first semester, students in their

first year should have opportunities to work on collaborative projects rather than in isolation.

Assessment during this period should also be mostly formative and diagnostic, with an emphasis on the giving of timely and encouraging feedback. Throughout all years, in fact, giving such feedback to students should be prioritised. In some cases this will be instantaneous (as in online MCQs or quizzes); in most other cases, it will be School policy to return work with marks and comments within 2-3 weeks of submission. In their feedback comments, tutors would focus particularly on (i) the extent to which the module learning outcomes have been met and (ii) action points for improvement. Marking should be criteria-referenced rather than norm-referenced.

The Assessment Strategy should also address fairness and consistency, and specifically validity, reliability and authenticity.

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

Provide details of how the above are addressed should be documented by providing information on the marking and grading procedures utilised.

Provide information on the procedures which the Programme development team will utilise to ensure that the assessment workload is appropriately balanced. This information should detail specific arrangements for balancing the assessment workload and show how at the beginning of every module, students receive their marking schemes, assessment criteria and semester-based assessment plans indicating when assessments are due. This information would normally be presented in the form of a module handbook and an exemplar might be attached in an appendix to the programme submission document.

Good practice would suggest that;

Assessment should be valid, reliable and fair. With regard to validity there should be:

- 1. Face validity:** the assessment methods employed in the School are all recognised methods; they are 'fit for purpose' and are an appropriate way of assessing content and the learning outcomes associated with it. All learners are able to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.
- 2. Content validity:** the assessment methods, module learning outcomes and content have been constructively aligned.
- 3. Predictive validity:** the assessment methods that are used provide reliable evidence of suitability (for example, for a particular career pathway) and levels of competence.

Reliability is enhanced through external moderation and, for example, double-marking. There is understanding on the part of students and tutors of the Institute's policies on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.

Fairness in assessment processes is addressed by ensuring that no students are disadvantaged, tasks set are achievable by all and marking conducted using explicit criteria/rubrics that students have had explained to them. By so doing, the School

acknowledges that a key purpose of assessment is to enable *all* students to develop and achieve their potential under fair and equitable conditions. Thus highlighted, is the importance of having an assessment strategy that is inclusive. Inclusive assessment refers to the design and composition of an assessment task, so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, gender, background or disability. The School's assessment strategy should demonstrate that there are in place alternative ways in which a student with a specific disability may be assessed. See <https://www.ahead.ie/index>

Assessment tasks should be culturally sensitive. Moreover, assessment can be one of the tools used to require students to recognise intercultural issues relevant to professional practice. Assessment tasks can require students to consider issues from a variety of cultural perspectives. For further detail on internationalising the curriculum, visit the 'Internationalisation of the Curriculum in Action Website at: <https://www.ieaa.org.au/special-interest-groups/internationalisation-of-the-curriculum>

The Assessment Strategy should relate to the programme's teaching and learning strategy

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

The submission document should identify the links between teaching and learning and assessment strategies.

Good practice would suggest that:

The assessment strategy for a programme should be closely linked to the programme's teaching and learning strategies. A learner-centred curriculum should have learner centred assessment.

The Assessment Strategy should describe any special regulations (e.g. learners may be required to pass some key modules outright and not rely on pass by compensation.)

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

The Approved Programme Schedule (formerly known as the 'ACS' or Approved Course Schedule) should detail any special regulations pertaining to the assessment of the programme. This might include requirements to repeat failed elements; instances where eligibility to progress carrying a failed module (the AP rule) does not apply; block on the number of repeat attempts possible etc.

The Assessment Strategy should provide contingent strategy for cases where learners claim exemption from modules, including the recognition of prior learning (RPL)

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

The programme submission should reference the Institute's policy document 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Practice' (2012), available at: <https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/recognition-prior-learning-rpl-policy-practice>

Careful consideration of this policy should be evident in the programme submission document, so that it is clear to learners, teachers and assessors where and how RPL policy is applied, and if further interpretation is required.

The Assessment Strategy should match the programme's assessment instruments to the requirements of the Institute's grading system, particularly concerning the recording and combination of module marks

To address this section of the programme's assessment strategy:

Marking should be criteria-referenced rather than norm-referenced. Explicit, appropriate and differentiated criteria should be developed for marking purposes.

Appendix 2: Writing Programme and Module Learning Outcomes

The adoption of a learning outcomes approach to teaching and learning in Higher Education forms a critical part of the Bologna Process and at international level, it contributes to the mobility of students by facilitating recognition of qualifications. Designing programmes using learning outcomes leads to a more student-centred approach and marks a shift from a focus on the content of a module or programme towards the learning achieved.

Programme learning outcomes express the expected attainment of knowledge, skill and competence by a learner on successful completion of a programme. Programme learning outcomes must be defined at a given level and mapped to the awards' standards for the discipline in which the programme fits. A range of award standards have been published by QQI. For this reason, the first step in writing a Programme begins with the awards' standards and the development team must consider how the programme and module learning outcomes can deliver to these appropriately. Programme Learning Outcomes should also consider professional body requirements where applicable.

It can be useful for programme learning outcomes to be broken down by level to ensure incremental attainment of skills and knowledge over the duration of the programme. (This can also be useful information for assessing RPL applications). Outcomes for each level are achieved through module learning outcomes, the attainment of which is verified through module assessment.

Learning Outcomes and Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956):

Learning outcomes are statements of what one **should be able to do** as a result of a learning activity. Usually, they are written within the framework of Benjamin Bloom's '*Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*' (1956), which has three domains, the Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor. The Cognitive, which is widely used in programme and module design, has six levels, as set out below, with 1.0 (Knowledge) being at the lowest level and 6.0 (Evaluation) at the highest level of cognition:

1.0 Knowledge

2.0 Comprehension

3.0 Application

4.0 Analysis

5.0 Synthesis

6.0 Evaluation

1.0 Knowledge is concerned with memorising and remembering. A student should be able to:

Recall, define, identify, label, recognise, repeat, relate, match, describe

2.0 Comprehension involves understanding the meaning of something. One is able, among other things, to *summarise, translate, restate or discuss*.

3.0 Application: knowledge is used to solve problems, experiment or classify, and also to:

Modify, exemplify, organise, dramatise, select, sketch, explain, compute

4.0 Analysis involves inferring, comparing and categorising, as well as:

Recognising, examining, selecting, differentiating, concluding, relating

At the next level, **Synthesis (5.0)**, one can:

Synthesise, modify, create, design, generalise, reconstruct, compose, manage

6.0 Evaluation ‘... involves the use of criteria as well as standards for appraising the extent to which particulars are accurate, effective, economical, or satisfying (Bloom, p. 185). One should be able to:

Evaluate, support, verify, generalise, assess, argue, compare, contrast, appraise

But note:

‘Verbs relating to knowledge outcomes – “know”, “understand”, “appreciate” – tend to be rather vague, or to focus on the process students have gone through rather than the final outcome of that process and should not be used at module level (Kennedy, 2007).

See: <https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/information-staff/learning/writing-learning-outcomes-designing-modules-learning>

Table A: Bloom's (1956) Cognitive Levels and examples of aligned action verbs used in the writing of Learning Outcomes.

LEVEL Appropriate Action Verbs (Examples)

Cognitive Level	Action Verbs (Generally only use one per Learning Outcome)	NFQ Level**
1.0 KNOWLEDGE	list recognise define label relate recall identify repeat match memorise state	6
2.0 COMPREHENSION	summarise translate restate communicate discuss interpret assimilate extrapolate	6
3.0 APPLICATION	experiment clarify modify sketch operate dramatise use choose discuss practise find select explain how grasp exemplify	6
4.0 ANALYSIS	analyse compare contrast categorise infer test criticise distinguish recognise examine select conclude categorise differentiate	7
5.0 SYNTHESIS	evaluate assess support verify compare judge generalise argue contrast appraise	8
6.0 EVALUATION	synthesise modify compare design create reconstruct organise generalise manage	9

****Module writers may find it helpful to correlate (but not prescriptively) the six levels of the Cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy with the programme award level as follows:**

Level 6	Knowledge, Comprehension and Application
Level 7	Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis
Level 8	Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis and Synthesis
Level 9	Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and

Writing Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes should be 'SMART', that is:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Realistic

Time-bound

The process involved in writing learning outcomes has been greatly facilitated by Bloom's Taxonomy, a hierarchical framework consisting of the six graduated levels of cognition referred to earlier. Here are some examples for each of Bloom's levels, beginning with:

1.0 Knowledge *(The student should be able to).*

Describe how and why laws change and the consequences of such changes for society.

Identify key ethical issues associated with research involving vulnerable groups.

2.0 Comprehension *(The student should be able to).*

Discuss the causes of World War 1 with specific reference to social and economic factors.

Classify reactions as exothermic and endothermic.

3.0 Application *(The student should be able to):*

Apply key principles of reflective practice to analysis of their teaching and student learning.

Construct a timeline of significant events in the history of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century.

4.0 Analysis *(The student should be able to).*

Analyse the environmental and economic effects of energy conversion processes.

Compare and Contrast two models of entrepreneurship in the context of business management effectiveness.

5.0 Synthesis *(The student should be able to).*

Summarise the main causes and consequences of the French Revolution of 1789.

Create a business plan for (state context).

Organise a patient education programme for patients with (state focus/context).

6.0 Evaluation *(The student should be able to).*

Assess the importance of 'Theory X' in developing understanding of children's cognitive processes.

Re-design the learning outcomes and assessment strategy for 'Module A' using Biggs's principle of constructive alignment.

Critically evaluate marketing strategies for different electronic business models.

Constructive Alignment Template for the Design of Modules and Programmes

Constructive alignment is the strategic linking within modules and programmes of aims, learning outcomes, content, assessment methods and learning and teaching methods, ‘...so that all aspects of the system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning’ (Biggs, 1999).

Learning Outcomes (L.O.)	Aligned Content	Aligned Assessment and Teaching Method(s)	Aligned to the Awards’ Standards
Learning Outcome: State the L.O. in this space and in the next column state the aligned content.	State the aligned content here and in the next column, state both the teaching methods that will be used and how the learning outcome will be assessed.	State the assessment and teaching methods here (see Assessment and Learning Guidelines for assessment examples).	State which Awards’ standards are addressed.
Next Learning Outcome: the above process is repeated.	State the aligned content here.	State assessment and teaching methods here.	As above
Next Learning Outcome: as above.	As above	As above	As above

Note 1: Learning outcomes may be assessed in combination (where appropriate).

Note 2: If there are too many learning outcomes, it is probable that there will be both content and assessment overload.

Note 3: As a ‘rule of thumb’ there should be no more than 4-5 Learning Outcomes for a standard 5 credit module.

Note 4: Remember: your assessment methods can be summative and/or formative.

Appendix 3: Resources

- *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015).
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (April 2016): *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines*.
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council (2009): *Assessment and Standards*.
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013): *Quality Assuring Assessment – Guidelines for Providers*.
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2014): *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*

Learning, Teaching and Assessment:

<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/assessment-learning>

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/information-staff/documents-policies>

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/documents-policies/learning-teaching-strategy>

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/documents-policies/assessment-learning-guidelines-dundalk-institute-technology>

Learning Outcomes:

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/information-staff/learning/writing-learning-outcomes-designing-modules-learning>

DkIT Policies:

<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/recognition-prior-learning-rpl-policy-practice>

<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/policy-design-approval-programmes>

National Framework of Qualifications:

<http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Active-NFQ-Standards-for-HE.aspx>

[http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-\(NFQ\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx)

Useful external tools for programme design:

<http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLP0069.pdf>