

Chapter 2 New Programmes and Modification to Programmes

2.1 Scope

Chapter 2 outlines the academic policies, procedures, work practices and guidelines used in the Institute for the validation of all Higher Education academic programmes and the approval process for delivery of these programmes together with the on-going maintenance of their quality. The following are included:

- Proposal seeking approval to proceed to develop a new programme of learning – EAP 1
- Proposal for Validation of a new programme of Learning – EAP 2
- Guidelines for the Panel of Assessors to Validate a new Programme of Learning – EAP 3
- Proposal for Validation and Approval of Modifications to an existing Programme of Learning – EAP 4

The process of preparing, submitting, academically validating and attaining approval for the delivery of a new programme is outlined in figure 1.

Figure 1



FLOWCHART FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW PROGRAMMES

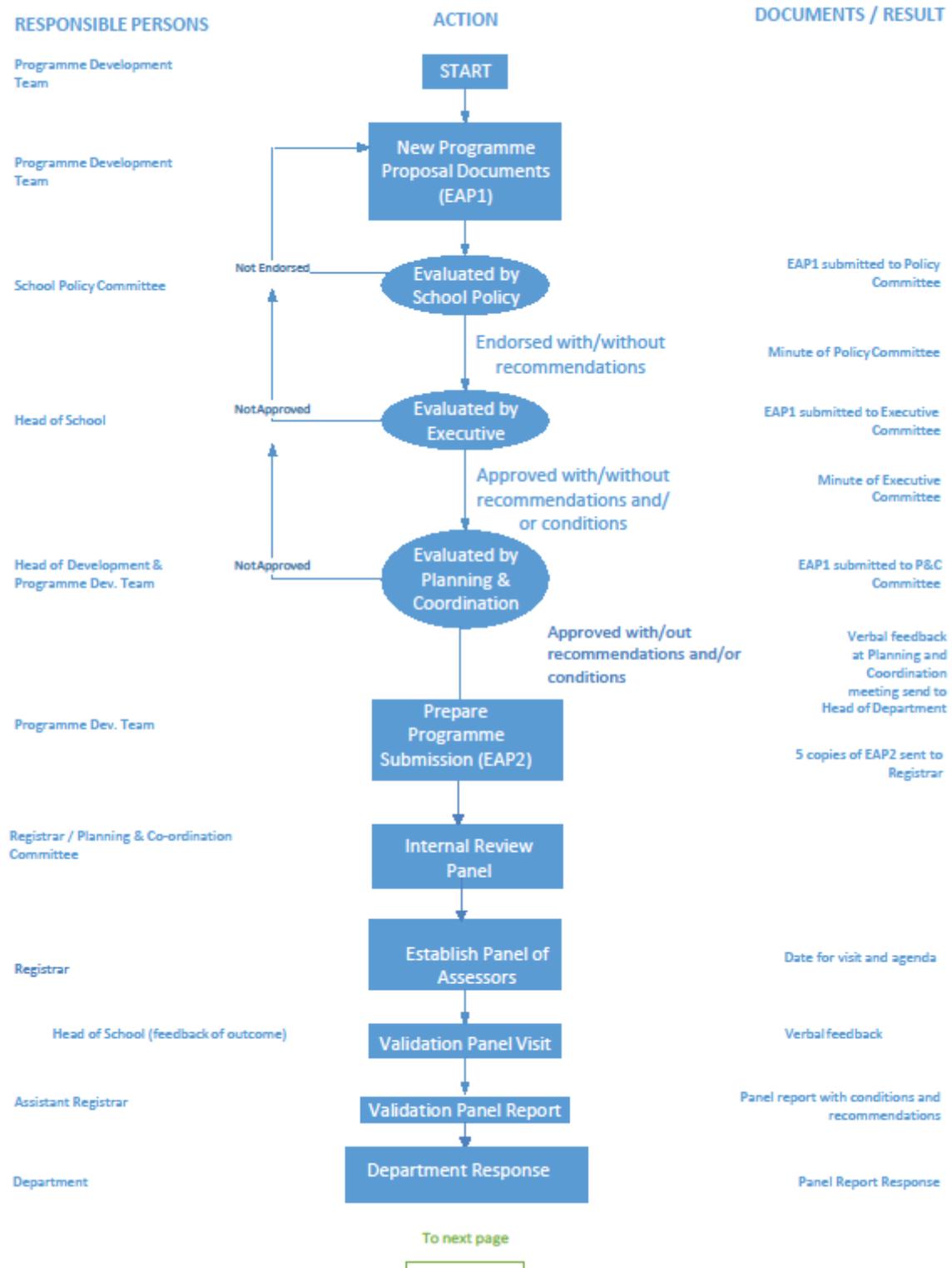
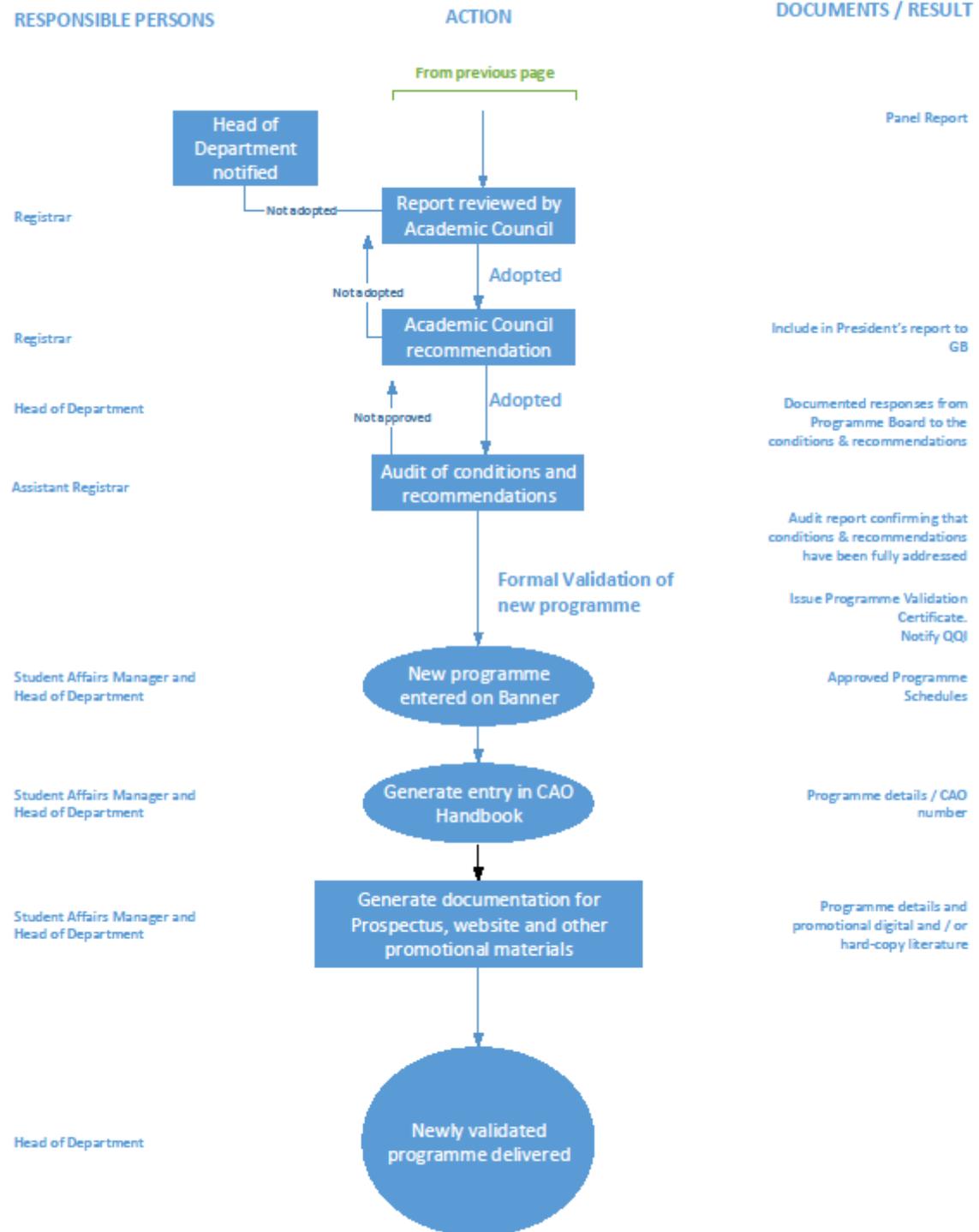


Figure 1 continued



FLOWCHART FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW PROGRAMMES



The Institute is also recognised as a provider of further education awards and may submit modules or programmes for validation. This process, currently under revision by QQI, is different for that described in the chapter and consists of a submission by the Institute to QQI which is then evaluated by externally.

2.2 Modules and Programmes of Learning

2.2.1 Definitions and Context

A module is a coherent and self-contained unit of learning, teaching and assessment, which comprises a defined volume of learning activity, expressed in terms of learning outcomes, which are in turn linked to assessment tasks that are capable of assessing the learning attained for each learning outcome.

Typically, a module is designed to be combined with other modules into one or more larger programme/s. A module can be shared by different programmes. It is sufficient, for the purpose of describing the educational formation provided by an independent module, to specify (i) the learning outcome and (ii) the assumed (i.e. minimum) prior learning. Sometimes assumed prior learning is specified by listing prerequisite modules.

A programme is a planned and coherent learning opportunity leading to the award of a qualification registered on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It consists of a combination of core, cognate and elective modules designed to achieve specific learning outcomes that meet national standards. The modules may have prerequisite and co-requisite requirements and may be fully prescribed (e.g., engineering) or be more learner based (e.g., arts or business).

While each module will have its own set of learning outcomes and associated assessments, a programme also has a set of programme learning outcomes. In writing a new programme, it is important, therefore, to ensure that the learning outcomes for the set of modules selected deliver the learning outcomes for the programme. The programme learning outcomes in turn, need to map against the QQI national standards for knowledge, skill and competence, in that discipline and the appropriate NFQ level to enable the learner achieve an award.

Each module must be fully validated in its own right. A student who successfully completes the module may be formally awarded a certificate for that module (under the Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects – or ACCS- policy of QQI); or award of single module certification may be deferred in the context of a named award on the NFQ. In either case, successful completion of the module entitles a student to the award of all associated credits. When a student has accumulated a sufficient number of module credits, and where the set of modules that they have taken meets the learning outcomes of a programme, the student is issued with a full award.

Learning is validated mostly in the context of pre-determined and validated major programmes. The award titles associated with such programmes are Higher Certificate (Level 6, with a minimum of 120 credits), Ordinary Bachelor Degree (Level 7, with a minimum of 180 credits) and Honours Bachelor (Level 8, with a minimum of 180 credits - but more normally 240 credits).

Notwithstanding this, the Institute also validates smaller programmes, leading to Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental awards. These awards are typically classified as Certificates or Diplomas, depending on the Level and the number of credits awarded. In some cases, such awards may in fact comprise a single module (say, 10 credits at Level 6).

The processes of validation and approval of single modules or whole programmes must be consistent and ensure that the learning is fully recognised and accredited.

The web-based modular management system Academic Module Manager (AMM), developed by IT Sligo, is available to facilitate the module design and validation process. Using this facility, the description of a new module is brought, on-line, through the stages of the validation process outlined below. The Academic Programme Manager (APM) permits the creation of a programme made up of a set of already validated modules, or comprising a set of combined validated and not-yet validated modules. In either case, the validation of the programme follows the same set of stages.

2.2.2 Guidelines for the Design of Programmes

- In the design of undergraduate programmes, programme boards should develop learning content that addresses the problems of transition into third level within the programme. The programme will also cater for issues in careers, further studies and professional development.
- Programmes may include a fixed list of elective modules.
- Building programmes of study that are interdisciplinary in nature is to be encouraged.
- Where possible opportunities for students to transfer out of, and into, a programme should be identified at the design stage and identified by means of pre-requisite requirements or equivalents.
- In designing a programme from a set of modules, care should be taken to ensure that the assessment workload for both students and/or academic staff is realistic and manageable.
- The use of a flexible suite of assessment strategies, rather than reliance on formal written end of semester examinations is encouraged.
- All programmes should have exit/embedded awards to facilitate exit to the workplace and return to education.
- All programmes should meet the requirements of statutory educational bodies and, in as far as possible, professional bodies.

2.3 Validation and Approval of Learning

Validation refers to the process by which the Academic Council of the Institute, following a recommendation from an External Peer Review Panel, formally recognises a module or a programme as constituting a body of learning leading to a specified award in a designated discipline area.

Approval of a programme refers to the process by which the Governing Body of the Institute, with a recommendation from the Executive Committee formally agrees to provide the resources to deliver a programme of learning.

In exceptional circumstances, a newly validated programme may not be approved for delivery where circumstances have materially changed within the Institute since the programme was submitted to the External Peer Review Group for validation.

Suspension of Approval: A programme that has been academically validated might not have its approval for delivery renewed. This situation can arise because, the Institute determines that it does not have the human or physical resources at that time, or the Higher Education Authority does not consider it appropriate for the Institute to continue to deliver such a programme.

The decision making process in both categories above is based on the information provided in the submission documentation. Key information in such documentation is the Approved Programme Schedule (APS) which provides details, of the award title, duration of the programme, module titles and the breakdown of credits, contact hours and assessment marks for each module and each stage of the programme. A School is responsible for ensuring that a programme is subsequently delivered in accordance with the APS.

It is the policy of IT Sligo that no programme may commence delivery without having been

- (i) academically validated (and received an Order of Council from the Academic Council) and
- (ii) approved for delivery by IT Sligo.

2.4 Academic Validation of new Modules and Programmes

The academic validation of a **module** is the process by which a proposed module is formally recognised by the Institute as comprising a body of learning in a designated discipline, with defined credits and at a specified Level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). From time to time the Institute will validate these modules, however they will be considered as 'single subjects' only.

The academic validation of a **programme** is the process by which a proposed programme, and each of its constituent models is formally recognised by the Institute as comprising a body of learning in a designated discipline, with defined credits and at a specified Level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

To validate a programme it is necessary to consider all of its modules together. Piecemeal validation (in isolation) of constituent modules of a larger programme, cannot accomplish the validation of the larger programme because the validation process is blind to the joint effect of the modules and to the 'integration learning and teaching' that may be required for the programme. However, the validation of the programme also results in the validation of each of its constituent modules, which may then find utility in other programmes where they may also be adjudged to satisfy particular learning outcomes.

Validation of a programme means that the detailed documentation required by Form **EAP 2** has been assessed by a Panel of peers external to the Institute. Following the recommendations of the Panel the Title, Level and Programme Schedule is validated by the Academic Council. The validated programme is that version described in the final programme documentation (where the conditions of the validation Panel have been carried out and recommendations addressed) and which has been entered on the order of Council. QQI is informed of the validation decision so that the programme can be placed on the national framework of Qualifications.

2.5 Validation Times Scales

The Institute validates new modules and programmes throughout the academic year. There is no specific time period or time scale for the development of, and validation of new programmes. However, as noted above, it is Institute policy that a programme may not commence delivery without having first been academically validated and approved for delivery.

The policy of the Academic Council is that any new programme should not be promoted or offered for application prior to validation and approval for delivery of the programme.

In the case of new full time programmes intended for direct entry post Leaving Certificate, validation and approval is normally required before the programme is notified to the Central Applications Office (CAO). It is necessary to inform the CAO by 31st March in the year proceeding the calendar year of commencement of the programme. So, for example, a new full time programme commencing in September of a given year should be validated by March of the preceding year to ensure that the programme is properly included in the CAO Handbook for the intended year of commencement.

The policy of IT Sligo is that by 31st of March each year, all programmes must be approved and validated, and all supporting documentation must be with the Registrar.

If a newly developed programme cannot meet this time scale, once validated it may be added to the CAO's list on newly approved programmes, which it continuously updates and makes available to schools after 31st March.

The Institute regularly develops new programmes in response to specific community or business demands – these are referred to as 'bespoke' programmes. Such programmes may have a shorter or longer development time depending on the complexity or specialisation of the learning required and the composition of and rate of progress of the programme development team. In all such instances, the Institute will endeavour to complete required processes in as timely a fashion as possible, commensurate with its obligations to learners and to the standing of national awards.

2.6 The Validation route for a new Module Learning

As described in Section 2.3, a descriptor for a single module may be submitted to the Academic Council for validation. Alternatively, a single module, or a set of modules may be presented as an award recognised on the NFQ– i.e. as a Minor, a Special Purpose or a Supplemental Award. In the case of the latter, the route to validation and approval is identical to that explained in the following section.

2.7 The Validation route for a new Programme of Learning

2.7.1 Outline Approval for a new Programme of Learning

A new programme may be proposed by an individual staff member, a group of staff members, Head of Department/School, or a pan-Departmental interdisciplinary group. Before embarking on a new programme proposal, the team should take into account the time it takes to achieve full validation of a new programme, as explained in section 2.5 above.

The first step in the process is for the programme development team to present a proposed new academic programme to the School Policy Committee. This is submitted using the Proposal seeking approval to proceed to develop a new programme of learning (Form EAP 1). The School Policy Committee will evaluate the proposal in reference to the achievement of the School plan, collaboration opportunities with strategic partners and available resources.

The second step is for the Head of School to submit a revised EAP 1 to the Executive Committee, who will review the proposed resource requirements and the increased effective use of existing resources arising from the proposal. In evaluating such a proposal, the Executive Committee will be informed by the following criteria:

- Is the programme aligned across the suite of programmes provided by the Institute? Does the proposal cover the resource requirements for all years of delivery – i.e. beyond the first year?
- What internal resources will be released to support the new programme and what existing programmes will cease delivery in order to facilitate delivery within existing resources or effect a saving in resources?
- What is the request, if any, for the Institute to provide some or all of additional staff and/or physical resources needed by the programme?
- What additional resources will be forthcoming from the Institutes own resources, from the HEA, from other external agency and/or from any partners in deliver?
- What processes are in place to ensure the selection and suitability of any lecturers external to the Institute who may be teaching on the programme?
- What staff training, if any, is required to deliver the programme?
- What is the fee structure and the cost recovery model including any state grant aid (e.g. Springboard, International fee income)?

The Head of School reports back to the programme development team on the decision of the Executive Committee.

The third step is for the Head of Department, together with the Development team to submit the EAP 1 to the Planning & Coordination Committee of the Academic Council. This submission should be made on the Form EAP1, with changes made following the two stages identified above.

In evaluating the proposal the Planning & Coordination Committee is informed by the following guidelines, that:

- The proposal is aligned with the Institute's Mission and Strategic Plan.
- The proposal is contributing to the delivery of the School Plan and has it been approved by the appropriate Department, the School Policy Committee and the Executive Committee.
- The proposal in harmony with national and regional policy, in particular the proposed new programme is aligned with, or replaces existing programmes in the Institute and the CU Alliance and any programmes that will be merged into this one or will no longer be delivered are identified, and in compliance with the National strategy for Higher Education.
- A programme development team is in place to develop the programme
- Any external conditions will be met by the programme, such as additional requirements of professional bodies, of the HEA or the need to establish formal links with employers for student projects or placement
- The indicated demand is sufficient to justify the work involved in validating the programme and the resource allocation.

The Registrar sends the minutes from the Planning and Coordination Committee meeting to the Head of Department who will report back to the programme development team.

2.7.2 Validation of a new Programme of Learning

Following the granting of approval to proceed by the Policy, Executive and Planning & Coordination Committees, the programme development team prepares the full submission document using the template Proposal for validation of a new programme of Learning (Form EAP2) . This may take some months to compile into a final submission document as the process may require the coordination of a

wide staff grouping and external stakeholders, the collation of national statistical data and the agreement on the details, for example, of the learning programme.

2.7.3 Internal Review Panel

A New Programme Internal Review is carried out by an Internal Review Panel. The Internal Review Panel is required to make an impartial judgement on the standard, content and conduct of the proposed programme.

The Internal Review Panel must satisfy itself that:

1. The New Programme fits within the Strategic Plan and Mission of the Institute.
2. There is demand for the New Programme within the region (Industry Survey / Endorsement).
3. The staffing and resources for the New Programme will be available.
4. The structure and learning outcomes of the New Programme are clear and appropriate.
5. The teaching philosophy, curriculum and methods and content of the New Programme address the needs of the student target group and the Learning Outcomes of the New Programme.
6. The Provisional Programme Board has the level and range of competencies necessary to deliver the New Programme.

New Programme Internal Review meetings should be minuted as per the agenda.

2.7.4 Composition of Internal Review Panel

The Academic Council Committee on Planning and Coordination, on behalf of Academic Council is responsible for constituting the Internal Review Panel. This Panel should include members familiar with current practice and developments in the relevant discipline.

The Registrar shall formally consult with nominees before they are nominated, to ascertain their willingness and availability to act on the Internal Review Panel.

The Internal Review Panel shall use as its agenda the Outline Timetable and Content of a Typical Internal Review Event. (Section 7)

The relevant Faculty/School Administrator acts as Secretary to the Internal Review Panel.

2.7.5 Report of Internal Review Panel

Where an Internal Review Panel is satisfied that the criteria in 2.7.3 above have been met the Internal Review Panel Chair shall prepare an Internal Review Report to be sent to the Head of Faculty/School for consideration by the Provisional Programme Board.

2.7.6 External Review Panel Preparation

Following this consideration and, if necessary, amendments to the Programme Submission Document, five copies of the Programme Submission Document will be sent to the Registrar. The accompanying letter from the Head of Department through the Head of School shall confirm that amendments set out in the Internal Review Report have been completed

The Registrar establishes a Panel of experts to consider the validation of the programme. The Validation Panel comprises:

- A Chairperson (normally a senior academic from another Institute of Technology or University or a suitably qualified person from the world of work);

- Two senior academics with relevant qualifications and experience in the area under evaluation (typically one member from an Institute of Technology and another member from a University); and
- A representative from the world of work, preferably with state-of-the-art experience in the discipline area under consideration.
- The Assistant Registrar or nominee as rapporteur.

All of the Panel members are external to the Institute and there should be a balance of gender on the Panel. The submission documents are circulated to the Panel no less than three weeks before they visit the Institute to conduct an oral validation meeting with the programme development team and staff (See Guidelines for the Panel of Assessors to Validate a new Programme of learning Form EAP3). The panel reviews the EAP1 to ensure all conditions have been implemented and that recommendation have been considered. The Assistant Registrar or a nominee acts as rapporteur and compiles the draft Panel report following this meeting. Typically it takes three weeks for a report to issue from the time the programme documentation is submitted to the Registrar's Office.

2.7.6.1 Non Major Programme Validation Panel

The composition of the non-major Programme Validation Panel (i.e. Minor and Special Purpose Awards) will include:

- Chair of the Planning and Coordination Committee (as Panel Chair)
- The Innovation Manager
- An external specialist
- The Assistant Registrar or nominee as rapporteur.

The report of the Validation Panel consists of a summary of the discussion that took place during the visit, the overall findings of the Panel and the overall conditions and recommendations regarding validation (or not) of the Programme. Typically, there is a list of conditions and recommendations attached to any validation.

The Registrar brings the findings of the Validation Panel to the Academic Council who, if they adopt the findings, will make a recommendation to the Governing Body. Following approval of the programme, the Programme development team are required to document their response to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel, within three months of receiving the report from the Registrar

2.7.7 Conditions and Recommendations of the Validation Report

The Panel of Assessors typically specify conditions of validation or make recommendations concerning a programme that they validate. The programme development team will respond to the validation report by detailing how they have met the conditions and what they propose in relation to the recommendations. This response is sent to the Chairman of the Validation Panel who will confirm the validation panel are recommending validation.

The Policy of IT Sligo is that a programme will not be validated, or may not progress to delivery until the conditions have been met and actions, where possible, are (at least) underway to address the recommendations.

2.7.8 Audit of Conditions and Recommendations of the Validation Report

Within 3 months the Assistant Registrar conducts an audit. This allows adequate time for the necessary changes to be discussed by the Programme Board and for their implementation in the final Approved Programme Schedule. The audit is based on a document submitted by the Head of Department that sets out how the conditions and recommendations have been met. The Head of Department and programme leader typically attend the audit hearing and present the actions taken on the conditions and recommendations to date. This process is intended to ensure that the changes are made (and, if necessary, to identify blockages to the changes), rather than a 'fault-finding' exercise.

2.7.9 Final Validation Process

Following confirmation that the conditions and recommendations have been addressed, the Academic Council instructs the Registrar to issue the Programme Validation Certificate (or, as some Institutions call it an 'Order in Council') and advises QQI that a new programme has been validated.

The Approved Programme Schedule (APS) is then entered on the Banner Management Information System and all necessary programme details and promotional materials are prepared by the Head of Department. The Student Affairs Manager notifies the CAO of the new programme and updates the website and prospectus, based on information provided by the Department. Where necessary, the President/Secretary/ Financial Controller will seek sanction from HEA to run the new programme. Following written sanction from the HEA, the Registrar will advise the Student Affairs Manager that the programme has been approved for delivery.

The practice of including a new programme in the Institute Prospectus which has not been sanctioned by the HEA will continue (because of the lead-time required in producing a new prospectus). However, in any case a programme will only be delivered when the Programme Validate Certificate is issued, and approval of HEA granted, where appropriate.

2.8 Modifications to a Programme of Learning

2.8.1 Context

Material modifications to validated programmes are normally evaluated at the time of a Programmatic Review, which takes place every five years and Chapter 4 addresses this *modus operandi* in detail. (see [Proposal for Validation and Approval of Modifications to an existing Programme of Learning: EAP 4](#))

Such updating of programmes should be encouraged as it is in accordance with the good practice of continuous improvement of programmes and ensuring (i) that they continue to meet the needs of employers and students and (ii) that they optimise the learning. However, it is important that the Schools understand the additional administrative workload associated with requesting and implementing modifications to programmes and allow sufficient time to process the changes.

2.8.2 Distinction between Modification to, and a new Programme

There is a question of scale regarding what constitutes a modification, rather than a new programme. For example, is a proposal to modify the titles and content of two modules on a programme, comprising a total of twenty-four 10 credit modules, a minor adjustment rather than a modification? What if the proposal is to make small changes to all twenty-four modules? Consider the following when determining if a proposed change is a modification to existing validated program, or a minor change.

- Do the proposed modifications alter the validated programme to such an extent that the programme title no longer reflects the programme learning outcomes?
- Is the attainment of the learning outcomes of the validated programme impacted by the proposed modifications?
- Will the modifications change the target market for graduates, as stated in the validated programme documentation – i.e. will the programme no longer provide graduates for the intended market.
- Will the modification have a negative effect on the semester assessment matrix and the spread of workload for students?
- Will the modifications require substantially more or less hours of student learning. Do the learning hours still match the allocation of credits in accordance with the ECT system?
- Are any of the core modules substantially modified and if so, has this altered the discipline focus of the programme.
- Is there any change in the Credits?

In the context of the above, examples of modifications to a validated Programme that require pre-approval by the Planning & Coordination Committee include but are not limited to:

- The change impacts Programme Learning Outcomes.
- The change impacts 25% or more of the learning outcomes of a module.
- A change in the distribution of the marks awarded for the assessments in the majority of modules on a stage of a programme.
- A change in the credits allocated for a module or modules (will require a change in the module descriptor).
- A change in the balance of student learning hours between lectures, tutorials and practical work.
- A third or more minor change to the same module within one programmatic review cycle

Examples of Minor changes to a module or validated programme that require approval by the VP Academic Affairs & Registrar include but are not limited to:

- Correction to grammar, spelling and typographical errors.
- Incorrect information indicated in AMM, e.g. Final Exam indicated where Final assessment was intended.
- Rephrasing of short title in AMM for consistency /clarification on broadsheets etc.
- The introduction of new topic(s) into a syllabus in one or more modules, and the removal of outdated material or less important topic(s).
- Change in assessment techniques in one or more modules e.g. the introduction of an essay or assignment instead of a time-controlled class test or written examination.
- Rebalancing of weighting of assessment and final exam $\pm 20\%$
- Updating of Modules resources, Journal resources, Other resources or Booklist.

Advice should be sought from the Head of Department, where a staff member is uncertain concerning the extent of a modification to a programme.

Where the Planning and Coordination Committee deems a proposed modification of such significance that it would be tantamount to a new programme proposal then it requests the Programme Board to use the procedure for approving new programmes, as detailed in Sections 2.6 and 2.7 above.

Programme Boards have to ensure that they outline the provisions to accommodate repeat students/repeat examinations in the context of modifications of minor changes to programmes.

2.8.3 The route to Validation of Modifications

An Internal Examiner or Programme Board will make proposals for the modification of a validated programme. These are outlined on Form EAP4. Further details on the completion of the form are in QA003 Module Writing and Modification Procedure.

Where these are at the level of minor changes, approval is sought from the VP Academic Affairs & Registrar to be approved and entered onto the official AMM system. A corrected Approved Programme Schedule will be issued. Minor changes can be submitted throughout the year.

Where the proposed changes are at the level of modification, approval is sought from the Planning and Coordination Committee. For the majority of modifications, the Committee will validate the modified programme based on their own evaluation of the documentation. Depending on the extent of the proposed modifications, the Committee may seek an external opinion from a module specialist or specialists on syllabus content and academic standard of the proposed modules/subjects as well as on the assessment system. All modifications should be validated not later than 31st March in the academic year preceding the introduction of the changes.

All such approved modifications will not be considered to be valid until the changes have been (i) updated in the programme record system AMM and (ii) the revised Approved Programme Schedule revised and approved in AMM and published on the Institute's website. It is the responsibility of the Head of Department, in consultation with the Registration Secretary, using AMM to ensure that such changes are implemented by the Programme Board, as approved.

All changes shall be recorded annually in the Programme Monitoring Report (EAP7).