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Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim
Education and Training Board

Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board

MSLETB FET New Programme Delivery, Development & Validation Procedure

QQI Programmes

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2 Glossary of Terms

Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship is defined as a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre. It is a dual system, a blended combination of on-the-job employer-based training and off-the-job training. The national apprenticeship system is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act. The legislation sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for as well as the responsibilities of apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. The National Apprenticeship Alliance oversees apprenticeship. The Further Education and Training Authority, SOLAS is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeship on behalf of Government, working in close partnership with the Education and Training Boards, Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, industry and education and training providers across further and higher education. SOLAS' responsibility includes maintenance of a national register of employers approved to take on apprentices and a national register of apprentices. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act underpins apprenticeship, supporting validation and quality assurance arrangements for programmes nationally.
Awarding Body	In Ireland, QQI is the national awarding body that has the power to certify learners.
Blended Learning	"A type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of online and on- site learning with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination." This definition has been adopted by QQI (2023, p6) in the Topic-Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes.
Common Award System Awards	<p>This group of QQI award standards was first developed by FETAC and has been continued by QQI. This is a national system, open to all FET providers to use as the basis for development of programmes which will be certified by a CAS award(s). It is a unitised system i.e. it comprises Certificates (major, special purpose and supplemental awards), each of which is made up of minor awards, also termed Components. To achieve a Certificate, a learner must achieve a defined combination of components specific to that certificate. Being unitised, it supports achievement of the certificate either 'all at once' or as an accumulation of units over time and even across providers and programmes.</p> <p>The Common Awards System is made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certificate specifications for compound awards (major, supplemental or special purpose awards), and • component specifications (for minor awards). • where the award standards and the programmes are quite distinct from each other
Collaborating Provider	This is a provider who is formally involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme and accountable in this respect to the Coordinating Provider.
Differential Validation	QQI validation of a derived programme that relies on the QQI validation of the original programme is referred to as differential validation.

Programme	A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence.
Programme Feasibility Group	The MSLETB FET Programme Feasibility Group provides initial approval for all MSLETB proposed programme development applications. FET centre submissions for programme development will be reviewed by this group. It is important to note that all new programme development must still then be approved by Programme Approval Committee (PAC).
Programme Approval Committee (PAC)	This group was set up to provide management oversight of MSLETB FET centre submissions for programme delivery, development, evaluation and submissions for validation. It will also provide oversight for the delivery and inclusion of new programmes and/or additional modules relating to existing validated programmes. All new programmes must be approved by PAC
Programme Board	A programme board is responsible for the effective management, operation, monitoring and review of a programme.
Programme Derived Award Standards	<p>Programme Derived Award Standards where the award standard is developed through validation by QQI of a provider's programme.</p> <p>CAS is not the only way that FET award standards are set by QQI. There are many areas of education and training for which there are no suitable CAS award standards. A provider who sees the need for such a new standard may propose it through submission of a programme for validation. If the programme is validated, its programme learning outcomes become the de facto standard of a new certificate, specific to that programme, i.e. the awards standards are determined at programme validation.</p>
Major Award	A major award is the main class of award made at each level. It represents a significant number of learning outcomes. Major awards usually consist of eight minor awards or modules.
Minor Award	Minor awards are also commonly referred to as component certificates. These awards are single modules which can be completed and certificated individually. All minor awards are linked to a major award which allows learners the opportunity to build on their minor awards and work towards gaining a major award. It is important to note that minor awards are achievements in their own right.
Micro credential	<p>Micro credentials refer to a qualification (award) arising from a 'small' package of learning, where 'small' refers to the credit associated with the award. "Micro-credentials are said to have the potential to address the lifelong learning needs of the workforce allowing institutions to provide focussed courses to address the rapidly changing needs" (QQI, 2021, p.4)</p> <p>QQI early exploration into Micro-credentials in Higher Education, 2014–2020</p>
Micro qualification	A micro qualification is the same as a micro credential. This is a term used by SOLAS.
National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)	A 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system. The NFQ lists the main qualifications awarded at each level and pathways from one NFQ level to the next. The NFQ shows how general education, further education and training, and higher education awards are mapped against the 10 levels of the framework.
SOLAS	SOLAS are responsible for the provision of further education and training in the country. SOLAS operates under the supervision of the Irish Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Its primary role is to coordinate and fund further education and training programs in Ireland. SOLAS works in collaboration with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to deliver a wide range of training and education initiatives.

Special Purpose Award	A special purpose award is an award type developed for specific areas of learning that have a narrow scope. All special purpose awards comprise one or more components.
Steering Group	<p>Programme Steering Group: Is a group including providers, Employer/Enterprise, Professional/regulatory, Quality Assurance office representatives etc, that provide oversight, planning, coordination, development of a programme. It ensures the relevance and integrity of the curriculum and programme and it is a mechanism to review feedback and other inputs from key stakeholders in the management of programme development and delivery</p> <p>Consortium Steering Group (CSG): The CSG is a group, normally led by employers and including providers, involved in the development and provision of an apprenticeship programme.</p>
Supplemental Awards	A supplemental award is an award that recognises learning concerned with updating, upskilling or continuing education and training. They are occupation related awards, and they consist of one or more components.
Validation	Validation is a regulatory process that in essence determines whether a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a provider's programme of education and training. QQI's programme validation process ensures that any new programme proposed by a provider to lead to a QQI award has been fully evaluated and approved before it is offered to learners.
Work Based Learning	Work-based learning is an educational approach that integrates academic instruction with real-world work experiences. It provides students with opportunities to apply their classroom knowledge and skills in practical work settings, giving them hands-on experience and preparing them for future careers. Work-based learning programmes can take various forms, including internships, apprenticeships, co-operative education, and mentorship programmes. These programmes typically involve students working alongside professionals in a specific industry or occupation, allowing them to gain valuable industry-specific knowledge, develop technical skills, and acquire professional competencies.

3 Context

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that new programmes are developed consistently and following Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) requirements. It also ensures that programmes are developed with appropriate regard to the resources required to deliver them when validated by QQI. QQI's programme validation process ensures that any new programme proposed by a provider to for a QQI award has been fully evaluated and approved before it is offered to learners.

The development of new programmes is fundamental to the growth and development of Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Education and Training Board (MSLETB) and its ability to provide an appropriate and relevant experience for learners in the region. MSLETB is committed to academic standards and good practice in programme design and delivery. Proposals for new programmes must be evidence-based and collated from sectoral and industry developments and future skills needs. This research is used to inform the development of new programmes. MSLETB draws on the experience and expertise of its employees, subject matter experts, internal staff, peers and various stakeholders to engage in this process. Programme development is central to our strategic organisational goals, particularly, Goal 2: Development and Innovation. We are committed to innovating and enhancing our offerings to meet both current and future needs, with a specific

focus on piloting, developing, and offering new courses, programmes, and apprenticeships to address identified and emerging needs.

A programme developed may be validated for the sole use of a centre within MSLETB or for use by a group of named centres. It is also noted that a programme may be developed jointly by a number of ETBs in which the programme's curriculum is identified as a shared curriculum. One ETB takes the lead in having the programme validated with the partner/s requesting Differential Validation (DV) by QQI based on the shared curriculum. Programmes developed via Innovation Fund, Core Funding or Skills to Advance include Differential Validation for all ETBs.

In addition to regular consultation with key stakeholders, MSLETB utilises the SOLAS Labour Market Research Unit to provide critical labour market intelligence. The reports from the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs (EGFSN) and the National and Regional Labour Market Bulletins provide critical labour market data and analysis to MSLETB in support of the joint SOLAS/ETB annual business planning exercise and influence the ongoing provision of programmes by the Board.

All applications must include references to local/national data in support of the proposal. Centres must demonstrate that they have or can access the resources, facilities and staff expertise to deliver the programme. To avoid unintentional oversupply or duplication of provision in MSLETB, when making applications, centres are also advised to consider whether programmes are already available to their target group within the immediate catchment area.

The MSLETB FET Programme Feasibility Group provides initial approval for all MSLETB proposed programme development applications. FET centre submissions for programme development will be reviewed by this group. It is important to note that the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) must still then approve all new programme development. Application to MSLETB FET Programme Development Feasibility Group is available [here](#).

3.1.1 Scope

This procedure applies to all programmes developed and validated by MSLETB. This procedure applies to MSLETB staff who are designing new programmes. All programmes will be developed with a view to their validation by QQI. Programmes include those that lead to Common Award System Awards, non-Common Award System Awards and new Apprenticeship programmes.

- Programmes may lead to major awards or minor awards or special purpose and supplemental awards.
- Programmes will be developed at levels 1 to 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

It is noted that Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental awards may be incorporated into new programme validations and may be validated together with the Major awards from which they are derived. Regardless of award type, the same development and validation process applies.

3.1.1.1 Process

The steps in the approval process are designed to reinforce the separation of functions between the executive (FET Management Team and Chief Executive Officer) and the quality assurance governance structure (Quality Council and Programme Approval Committee), while also demonstrating the required interaction between them.

- Programmes will be developed to ensure that successful learners will achieve the standard expected at the designated level. This will be measured in achievement of stated Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) appropriate to the level.
- All programmes developed by MSLETB, in line with this procedure, will be placed on the NFQ. All programmes are developed for validation in accordance with the quality assurance procedures outlined in here.
- Programmes will be designed to ensure that the [QQI Procedure on Access Transfer and Progression](#) (currently under review) is adhered to and that there are access and progression routes within MSLETB or, alternatively, that arrangements can be made for such routes with named educational institutions and programmes.
- All programmes developed shall be in line with [MSLETB's Strategic Plan](#) in place at the time of development. Programme development is informed by consultation with stakeholders such as sectoral interest groups, prospective employers, national policy makers and learners.
- Programmes will be developed by the Programme Development Officer/QA Assurance Staff or Programme Development Groups, led by an appropriately qualified teacher/instructor/tutor, namely a Programme Development lead, with oversight from the Programme Development Officer/QA Assurance Staff.

4 New Programme Development

4.1 Step 1: MSLETB FET Programme Feasibility Group and Programme Approval Process

The MSLETB FET Programme Feasibility Group provides initial approval for all MSLETB proposed programme development applications. FET centre submissions for programme development will be reviewed by this group. It is important to note that all new programme development must still then be approved by Programme Approval Committee (PAC). Application to MSLETB

FET Programme Development Feasibility Group is available [here](#).

- Where the FET Programme Feasibility Group reaches consensus a recommendation for approval/refusal will be made and notifications issued by the Programme Development /Quality Assurance Officer.
- This will be followed up by a scoping meeting with the FET centre.
- Following this a recommendation will be made for the FET centre to submit a request to the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) via the Quality Assurance Officer.

4.1.1 Proposed Programme Approval Process

- A FET centre representative must make a formal request to the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) via the Quality Assurance Officer using the standard [Programme Proposal Form](#)
 - a. where it plans to develop new programmes/modules for validation with a view to their delivery
 - b. identification of awards for which programme/programme module(s) will be developed

- c. outline the reasons for proposing the development of a programme/programme module leading to the award(s) listed
- To avoid unintentional oversupply or duplication of provision in MSLETB, FET centre representative when making the application must ensure that no similar programmes are already available to the target group.
- The PAC considers the new proposal to determine its suitability and feasibility in the context of:
 - a. The rationale for the development of the programme
 - b. The target learner audience
 - c. Comparative analysis nationally (does a similar award exist nationally)
 - b. Is the programme consistent with MSLETBs Strategic Plan and contributing to achieving its aims and objective
 - d. Delivery mode and locations (if know)
 - e. Industry demand for such a programme
 - j. Awarding body or internal quality assurance requirements, including the scope of the provision
- Where the PAC reaches consensus a recommendation for approval/refusal will be made and notifications issued by the Quality Assurance Officer.
- Should the FET Centre wish to appeal the decision, a notification will be made to the Quality Assurance Officer who in turn will notify the programme subgroup.
- The PAC Subgroup consisting of the PAC Chair/Secretary/Quality Assurance Officer will issue a Request for Further Information (RFI) and where necessary a meeting request. The RFI will outline the areas where more information is required.
- Following receipt of information and/or a meeting, the Programme Subgroup will then make a recommendation to the PAC around approval/refusal of programme(s) which will be considered at the next scheduled PAC Meeting.
- Where the PAC reaches consensus a recommendation for approval/refusal will be made and notifications issued.
- Where the PAC does not reach consensus, the matter will be escalated up to the CE/EO for decision.

4.2 Step 2: Commencement of New Programme Development

- Where the PAC approve a programme proposal a programme development team is identified to work under the direction of the Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff
- Programme development will commence by the appointment of a Steering Committee, which comprises of subject and industry experts whose role is to guide and advise the development team as appropriate. Research will be conducted by the Steering Committee, to identify the target learner profile, rationale for the new award, evidence of learner demand for the programme and a benchmark of similar awards currently available.

- Before commencing writing the programme it is necessary to check with QQI that the Steering Committee is using the most up to date programme descriptor and other templates required by QQI.
- In addition to this a Curriculum Development Working Group will be appointed to develop the curriculum. Members of this group included SMEs, Industry experts, Quality Assurance staff member(s) and programme development experts whose key role is to develop this programme. Regular meetings with the Steering Committee and consultations with industry representatives will provide the content to inform the programme content. Programme Development Lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Assurance Staff will work closely with the Curriculum Development Working Group to develop a suitable curriculum considering to:
 - a. Award standards (where applicable)
 - b. The intended teaching and learning strategy (Learning outcomes must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, and Inclusive, and adhering to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.
 - c. Indicative content of programme
 - d. Assessment strategy (MSLETB operate a system of criterion-referenced assessment for all accredited programmes. Criterion-referenced assessment is an assessment based on learning outcomes, established, and agreed upon for all modules, stages and programmes accredited by QQI and with regard to the QQI Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022. This system ensures that assessment, in all instances is valid and reliable and applied fairly and consistently, for all learners, across all programmes and assessors. Also adhering to UDL principles.)
 - e. Programme structure and, where applicable, credit allocations
 - f. The delivery structure of the programme; face-face, blended or online
 - g. Comparative analysis of similar programmes
 - h. Rationale for New Award (Explain why a new award is required for the new programme i.e. (i) why a qualification is required and (ii) why no current CAS award could be used)
 - i. Evidence of learner demand for the programme (usually in the form of a primary research survey created and distributed by the Steering Committee)
 - j. Entry requirements
 - k. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for access, exemptions and awards.
- The Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff will discuss a timeframe for programmes seeking validation from QQI (the timeframe will be developed based upon the intended start date of the programme and tracked back from the target QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting).
- The Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff takes responsibility for the completion of the programme description and compilation of all supporting documentation. Resources for Programme Development (FET) can be found at this link [QQI Application for Validation Levels 1 - 6](#).

4.3 Step 3: Internal Review and Evaluation of Proposed Programme Documentation

- The draft programme documentation, including the programme overview, rationale, target audience, learning outcomes, assessment methods, modules, and resources are shared with the Steering Committee for feedback and recommendations.
- Subsequent revisions were made to the programme documentation based on feedback and evaluation results to ensure alignment with the QQI framework, the National Skills Strategy, and industry expectations. Supporting materials such as the learner handbook, tutor guide, and assessment briefs are also considered.
- The Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff will make arrangements for review and an independent evaluation against the QQI core validation criteria. (For short Micro-credentials, this may not be necessary and is at the discretion of the Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff.) This comprises of two stages:
 - A desk review by a QA expert and/or subject matter expert (compulsory)
 - A “mock” validation panel (optional)
- The QQI SER template document must be completed, detailing the chronology of the draft review process. This should outline how the programme documentation was internally checked and approved before being sent for final approval through provider governance structures and be signed by Chair of Programme Approval Committee.
- The application must also include a fee cover note – outlining the associated cost.

4.4 Step 4: Submission and Initial QQI Screening

- Programme application documentation and supporting materials including a completed SER template, fee note document, including the programme descriptor signed by the CE requesting validation are submitted to QQI, via QHUB by the Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff.
- QQI will in turn conduct a preliminary screening review to determine whether all validation criteria are met. Subsequent revisions are then made to the programme documentation based on feedback.
- QQI will notify the Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff of a proposed panel and date. MSLETB are required to confirm that no actual or perceived conflict of interest exists arising from the proposed panel.

4.5 Step 5: Desk Review and Pre Site Visit Arrangements

- Shorter programmes such as micro credentials may not have a site visit. In this case a desk review is conducted by expert panel assigned by QQI.
- The expert panel review the documentation and the Steering Group are requested to be available at a prearranged time should the panel have any questions.
- Following the desk review, a draft expert panel report is issued by QQI to MSLETB.

4.6 Step 6: Site Visit and Independent Panel Evaluation

- Following acceptance of an application, QQI convenes an independent Expert Panel to assess the application and conduct a site visit to the FET Centre.
- The panel may wish to meet a range of stakeholders during this process – senior management, learners, tutors/instructors and the QA team to discuss the validation documentation. For blended learning programmes, the team should be prepared to demonstrate the learner experience using the VLE.
- For collaborative programmes, collaborating partners should also be in attendance.

- On conclusion of the site visit, the panel may offer a provisional indication of their recommendation to QQI. A report of the panel's observations will be disseminated in due course outlining any pre-validation conditions and recommendations.

4.7 Step 7: Panel Report and Response

- Following the site visit, a draft expert panel report is issued by QQI to MSLETB who are invited to:
 - Comment on the factual accuracy of the report
 - Respond to the findings of the report
 - Submit amended documentation addressing pre-validation conditions proposed in the report

4.8 Step 8: Confirmation of Validation

- A programme is not deemed to be validated until such a time as the QQI has confirmed this and a Certificate of Validation has been issued post the QQI Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting.
- The Programme Development lead/Programme Development Officer/QA Staff will review the Certificate of Accreditation and confirm its accuracy with QQI.

4.9 Additional considerations

While developing a programme consideration needs to be given to the following areas to ensure the timely delivery of the validated programme:

- Entry requirements and admissions
- RPL
- Learner registration and induction