



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Template Version 2.0 - 31.05.2017

# Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Programme of Education and Training

## Part 1

<b>Provider name</b>	National College of Ireland
<b>Date of site visit</b>	April 6 – 7, 2017
<b>Date of report</b>	August 2017

## Overall recommendations

<b>Principal programme</b>	<b>Title</b>	Higher Diploma in Business in Finance
	<b>Award</b>	Higher Diploma in Business
	<b>Credit</b>	60
	<b>Duration<sup>1</sup> (years, months, weeks)</b>	1 year
	<b>Recommendation Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions<sup>2</sup> OR Not Satisfactory</b>	Satisfactory

<sup>1</sup> Expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion

<sup>2</sup> Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that the validation process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that a programme virtually meets the validation criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude “Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions” where the special conditions prescribe the defects that require to be corrected.

Further, in exceptional cases the ‘special conditions’ may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. For example, an application might propose a programme to be provided at two locations but the independent evaluation report may find the application satisfactory on condition that it be provided only at one specified location and not at the other. These conditions will not however be used to recommend that QQI can be satisfied with a programme conditional on a different QQI

<b>Embedded programme</b>	<b>Title</b>	N/A
	<b>Award</b>	
	<b>Credit</b>	
	<b>Recommendation</b> <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	

<b>Module<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Title</b>	N/A
	<b>Award</b>	
	<b>Credit</b>	
	<b>Recommendation</b> <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	

## Evaluators

<b>Evaluators</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
<b>Ms Eva Juhl</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Institutional Review Facilitator, Cork IT</b>
<b>Dr Richard Hayes</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Vice President Strategy, Waterford Institute of Technology</b>
Mr Hugh McBride	Subject Expert	Senior Lecturer, GMIT
Dr Cormac O'Keeffe	Subject Expert	Lecturer, WIT
Ms Anna M Murphy	Learner	Cork Institute of Technology
Mr Bruno Doutrelepont	Employer/Sectoral Expert	Managing Partner Even Keel Partners LLP

## Principal Programme

<b>Names of centres where the programmes are to be provided</b>	<b>Maximum number of learners (per centre)</b>	<b>Minimum number of learners</b>
NCI, Mayor Square, IFSC, Dublin 1	400	20 per cohort

<b>Enrolment interval (normally 5 years)</b>	<b>Date of first intake</b>	September 2017
	<b>Date of last intake</b>	September 2021
<b>Maximum number of annual intakes</b>	1	
<b>Maximum total number of learners per intake</b>	30	
<b>Programme duration (months from start to completion)</b>	12 months	

award (e.g. at a lower NFQ level or having a different CAS award title) being sought than the one identified in the application.

<sup>3</sup> Discrete modules are only validated on a stand-alone basis if they are to lead to a QQI award.

<b>Target learner groups</b>	NCI's Higher Diploma in Business in Finance is aimed particularly at those non - cognate degree holders who wish to attain the intellectual rigour and skills appropriate to allow them gain employment within the international financial services sector and/or progress to specialist postgraduate degrees within the field of finance.
<b>Approved countries for provision</b>	Republic of Ireland
<b>Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time</b>	Full-time and Part Time
<b>The teaching and learning modalities</b>	There will be a range of learning approaches including traditional classroom teaching, practicals and computer-based sessions. The learning emphasis regardless of setting is upon problem based learning. Online materials will be used to support learning. Please refer to section 5.6 for an overview of the Programme Teaching and Learning Strategy, as well as individual module descriptors.
<b>Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)</b>	<p>The Higher Diploma in Business in Finance provides a pathway for those students who have a general business, social science or other degree but wish to gain exposure to the domain of Finance and Economics and do not wish to undertake an MSc in these domains.</p> <p>Given the technical/quantitative nature of the NCI MSc Finance, the entry requirements necessitate prospective students to have an honours degree in a cognate field of study such as Finance, Economics or Accounting. For those students, who are from a non-cognate background but who wish to pursue the MSc Finance, the Higher Diploma will provide the necessary articulation path.</p> <p>The programme comprises of six ten-credit modules which together provide a comprehensive understanding of the financial, regulatory and economic components of the financial services sector.</p>
<b>Summary of specifications for teaching staff</b>	Lecturing staff must have a master's qualification in a relevant field of study. Practical experience working in Financial Services is recommended but not mandatory with the exception of Law and Governance, where experience working within these areas in Finance is required
<b>Summary of specifications for the ratio of learners to teaching-staff</b>	1:30

<b>Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Last enrolment date</b>
PG20047	Higher Diploma in Business in Finance	September 2016

## Other noteworthy features of the application

The panel would like to highlight two recommendations which have been very well addressed in the revised programme materials; these are the recommendations on transferable skills (Section 5.12 of the *Programme Submission*) and on the range of teaching practices documented (Section 5.6 of the *Submission*). The panel commends the programme team on its successful engagement with these recommendations in a short space of time.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluators completing this report are expected to understand **Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training 2016**.

Note that in making its determination QQI

- Will consider the findings of the validation process including the **independent evaluation report** along with the applicant's response to this report;
- May consider any other information received in respect of the process;
- May consider an account of the conduct of the process and its context noting any concerns or complaints expressed by the applicant.

**The independent evaluation report must address whether the programme meets the validation criteria in general and in detail.**

The independent evaluation report must, for each programme, embedded programme and module that leads to a QQI award:

- (1) Outline the salient characteristics of the proposed programmes (Part 1);
- (2) Outline whether and how the QQI validation criteria and sub-criteria are addressed by the application for validation citing evidence from the application documentation and other findings (e.g. from the site visit);
- (3) Address whether the principal programme, and any embedded programme, and any module proposed to lead to a minor award, meets the validation criteria in general and in detail. (Part 2 and Part 3)
- (4) Include one of the following overall conclusions in light of the applicable validation policies and criteria:
  - Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3 of **Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training**);
  - Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
  - Not satisfactory.
- (5) Give precise reasons for the conclusions organised under each of the 12 criteria (for the programme and each embedded programme and any modules proposed to lead to QQI awards) citing supporting evidence. **If any criteria or sub-criteria are not met by the application this must be stated explicitly giving precise reasons with evidence.** A "Not Satisfactory" recommendation may be justified if any one of the applicable criteria or sub-criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

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

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

Part 1A Evaluation of the Case for an Extension of the Approved Scope of Provision (where applicable).

1 Comment on the case for extending the applicant's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision of this programme.

Not applicable

## Part 2 Evaluation against the validation criteria

QQI's validation criteria and sub-criteria are copied here in grey panels.

### Criterion 1

<b>The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.</li> <li>b) The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.</li> <li>c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>	
Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	

#### Principal programme

NCI meets the prerequisites of Section 44(7) of the 2012 Act for validation of the programme.

### Criterion 2

<b>The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.</li> <li>b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).</li> <li>d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's <i>Policy and Criteria for Making Awards</i>.</li> <li>e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.</li> <li>f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.</li> <li>(ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>g) For each programme and embedded programme               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The <b>minimum intended programme learning outcomes</b> and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>(ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are <b>consistent with</b> the relevant QQI awards standards.</li> </ul> </li> <li>h) Where applicable, the <b>minimum intended module learning outcomes</b> are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.</li> <li>i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.</li> </ul> <p>For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.<sup>6</sup></p>	

<sup>4</sup> This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration or enforcing such requirements.

<sup>5</sup> Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	

### Principal programme

The panel commends the detailed work that the programme team has engaged in to align the programme learning outcomes to award standards and module outcomes to programme outcomes.

### Criterion 3

#### **The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)**

- a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.<sup>7</sup>
- b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.
  - (i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.
  - (ii) The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.
  - (iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
  - (iv) There is evidence<sup>8</sup> of learner demand for the programme.
  - (v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant<sup>9</sup>.
  - (vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.<sup>10</sup>
- c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
- d) Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
- e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	

<sup>6</sup> Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

<sup>7</sup> Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

<sup>8</sup> This might be predictive or indirect.

<sup>9</sup> It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

<sup>10</sup> There is clear evidence that the programme meets the **target learners'** education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

## Principal programme

The Expert Panel is satisfied that this criterion has been met.

### Criterion 4

#### **The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory**

- a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied<sup>11</sup>.
- b) Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.
- c) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR<sup>12</sup>) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.
- d) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).
- e) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.
- f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-
  - (i) Reflects the *core intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
  - (ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
  - (iii) Has long-lasting significance.
- g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	

## Principal programme

The Expert Panel is satisfied that the interview process, interview selection criteria, and other entry processes are clearly documented.

<sup>11</sup> Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria are (QQI, restated 2015) arranged under the headings

- Progression and transfer routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf) (accessed 26/09/2015)



## Criterion 5

### The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose

- a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.
- b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.
- c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.
- d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.
- e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles<sup>13</sup>.
- f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.
- g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.
- h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.
- i) Elements such as practice placement and work based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.
- j) The programme **duration** (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its **fulltime equivalent contact time** (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.<sup>14</sup>

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	

### Principal programme

The modules presented were, in general, very well put-together.

## Criterion 6

### There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned

- a) The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also unit (**Error! Reference source not found.c**).
- b) The programme has an identified complement of staff<sup>15</sup> (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.

<sup>13</sup> This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion.

In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.

<sup>14</sup> If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

<sup>15</sup> Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme's provider, it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c) The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.</li> <li>d) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development<sup>16</sup> opportunities<sup>17</sup>.</li> <li>e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.</li> <li>f) Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.</li> </ul>	
<b>Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	

### Principal programme

The panel commends the quality of staff associated with the programme, evident both from the CVs presented in the documentation and the site visit undertaken at the programme review stage. The support for staff and faculty training and development provided by the College is also commendable.

### Criterion 7

#### **There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned**

- a) The specification of the programme's physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also (**Error! Reference source not found.**d).
- b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:
  - (i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme's learning environments including the workplace learning environment)
  - (ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided)
  - (iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment
  - (iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable
  - (v) technical support
  - (vi) administrative support
  - (vii) company placements/internships – if applicable
- c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example

<sup>16</sup> Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.

<sup>17</sup> Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.

<p>staffing, resources and the learning environment).</p> <p>d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address</p> <p>(i) Planned intake (first five years) and</p> <p>(ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.</p> <p>e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.</p>	
<b>Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	

### Principal programme

The panel noted the student numbers enrolled on the programme in the past and also the projected growth in numbers for the coming five years, based on a projected upturn in the financial services sector during that period. The panel further notes the College's expressed willingness to continue to resource delivery of the programme. The panel encourages the College to continue to explore different means to guarantee the future sustainability of the programme. This might include sharing modules with other programmes where appropriate.

### Criterion 8

<b>The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners</b>	
<p>a) The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.</p> <p>c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.</p>	
<b>Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	

### Principal programme

The Expert Panel is satisfied that this criterion is met.

### Criterion 9

<b>There are sound teaching and learning strategies</b>	
<p>a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).</p>	

<p>d) Learning is monitored/supervised.</p> <p>e) Individualised guidance, support<sup>18</sup> and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.</p>	
<b>Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	

## Principal programme

There was evidence in the site visit of an excellent team-based approach to the design, delivery and assessment of the programme. The integration of the programme in terms of design, delivery and assessment should continue to be reviewed. A detailed narrative now precedes the transferable skills matrix which gives the rationale for the transferable skills complement delivered as well as linking each skill to the programme aims and outcomes and tracing their development through the modules.

The panel notes and encourages the ongoing exploration of online delivery options.

The College's commitment to access finds expression in the provision of an extensive set of support services in the evenings and at weekends. This is highly commendable.

The College-wide and non-programme specific supports are noted and are excellent.

## Criterion 10

### There are sound assessment strategies

- All assessment is undertaken consistently with *Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*<sup>19</sup>
- The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
- The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.<sup>20</sup>
- The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.
- There is a satisfactory written **programme assessment strategy** for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.<sup>21</sup>
- Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.
- There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.
- The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.

<sup>19</sup> See the section on transitional arrangements.

<sup>20</sup> This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

<sup>21</sup> The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Satisfactory	

### Principal programme

The Expert Panel is satisfied that this criterion is met.

### Criterion 11

#### Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

- a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.
- b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.
- c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.
- d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.
- e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.
- f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.
- g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.
- h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities<sup>23</sup>.
- i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*<sup>24</sup> and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.
- j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Satisfactory	

### Principal programme

The panel commends the approach to induction taken by the team.

<sup>22</sup> If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

<sup>23</sup> For more information on making reasonable accommodations see [www.AHEAD.ie](http://www.AHEAD.ie) and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).

<sup>24</sup> See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

The panel saw evidence of a learner-centred approach from across the team and the wider College. This was excellent.

## Criterion 12

### The programme is well managed

- a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.
- b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.
- c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.
- d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.
- e) Quality assurance<sup>25</sup> is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.
- f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.
- g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.
- h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

### Principal programme

The Expert Panel is satisfied that this criterion is met.

## Overall recommendation to QQI

### Principal programme

Select one	
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed ( <b>minor</b> ) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination); <sup>26</sup>
	Not satisfactory.

<sup>25</sup> See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

<sup>26</sup> Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that the validation process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that a programme virtually meets the validation criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude "Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions" where the special conditions prescribe the defects that require to be corrected.

## Reasons<sup>27</sup> for the overall recommendation

Between March and May 2017, the expert panel conducted a comprehensive review of the Higher Diploma in Business in Finance proposed for revalidation by the National College of Ireland under the new QQI programme revalidation process.

This review comprised three stages:

- a desk review of the self-evaluation report on the internal programme review undertaken by NCI in late 2016 in advance of external peer review and a desk review of the initial version of the resulting programme revalidation submission, together with the relevant appendices;
- a site visit involving series of meetings with academic and administrative staff engaged in programme delivery and support, which took place on 6 – 7 April 2017; and
- a follow-up desk review of the revised documentation addressing the panel conditions and recommendations.

The revised documentation considered encompassed three documents:

- NCI, Submission for Revalidation, School of Business, *Higher Diploma in Business in Finance Programme Submission Document*, May 2017 (hereafter *Programme Submission*);
- NCI, Programme Review & Revalidation, *Higher Diploma in Business in Finance Self-Evaluation Report*, May 2017 (hereafter *SER*); and
- *Programme Team Response to the Report on the Evaluation of the Higher Diploma in Business in Finance* (hereafter *Team Response*).

Based on the site visit and the revised programme documentation, the expert evaluation panel has concluded that the Higher Diploma in Business in Finance as presented to QQI for revalidation satisfies the core policies and criteria for validation by QQI of programmes of education and training.

Specifically, the panel is satisfied that:

- Under **Criterion 1**: the National College of Ireland meets the prerequisites of Section 44(7) of the 2012 Act and is eligible to apply for validation of the programme, as evidenced in Sections 1 and 2 of the *SER* (most especially 2.1 and 2.2; QA and Protection of Enrolled Learners) and Section 4 of the *Programme Submission* (ATP).
- Under **Criterion 2**: the programme objectives and seven programme outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought. In fact, the Panel commends the detailed alignment of the programme learning outcomes to award standards and module outcomes to programme outcomes presented in the *Programme Submission*, Sections 2.4 – 2.6.
- Under **Criterion 3**: the programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based, taking into consideration social,

---

<sup>27</sup> Give precise reasons for the conclusions organised under each of the 12 criteria (for the programme and each embedded programme and any modules proposed to lead to QQI awards) citing supporting evidence. If any criteria or sub-criteria are not met by the application this must be stated explicitly giving precise reasons with evidence. A “Not Satisfactory” recommendation may be justified if any one of the applicable criteria or sub-criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives. This is evidenced in Sections 2, 3 and 5 – 7 of the *SER*.

With regard to future programme development, a commitment by the School of Business to establish an industry advisory board is set out in Section 6.7 of the *SER* (see also *Team Response* p. 2). The programme team is also committed to an ongoing interrogation of its assumptions concerning the programme's purpose and market space, and will put greater emphasis on the value of the programme as a standalone conversion programme, rather than predominantly a Masters pathway (*Team Response*, pp. 1-2, and Section 3.1.2 of the *Programme Submission*). Finally, benchmarking undertaken by the team suggests that there is no obvious comparator of this programme in Ireland. This gives the programme a USP which can be emphasised in future marketing materials (see *Team Response* p. 3).

- Under **Criterion 4**: the programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory, and the interview process, interview selection criteria, and other entry processes are clearly documented, as per Section 4 of the *Programme Submission* (see also *Team Response* p. 4).
- Under **Criterion 5**: the programme's written curriculum is well-structured and fit for purpose, and the modules in general are very well put together. This is evidenced in Sections 5.10, 5.11 and 6 of the *Programme Submission*.
- Under **Criterion 6**: there are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned. The expert panel commends the quality of the staff associated with this programme, as evident from the CVs presented in Section 7 of the *Programme Submission* as well as Section 6.9 of the *SER* and the meetings with programme staff. The support for staff training and development provided by the College, which was also obvious from the panel meetings, was further deemed commendable.
- Under **Criterion 7**: there are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned, as set out in Section 8 of the *Programme Submission*.

In this context, the panel notes the number of students enrolled in the programme in the past (as per *SER*, Sections 3.1 and 3.3, and *Programme Submission*, Section 3.12) vis-à-vis the projected growth in intakes for the coming five years (*Programme Submission*, Section 1.2), which is based on a projected upturn in the financial services sector (*Programme Submission*, Section 3.3). The panel welcomes the School's expressed willingness to continue to resource delivery of the programme, as per Section 7.2 of the *Programme Submission*. The panel also notes that the College has indicated it will continue to explore different means of guaranteeing the future sustainability of the programme (see *Team Response*, p. 5), which might include sharing modules with other programmes as appropriate.

- Under **Criterion 8**: the learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners. This is evidenced in Sections 2.5, 3.6.3 and 5 of the *SER* and Sections 5.8, 5.9 and 8, plus Appendix 2, of the *Programme Submission*.
- Under **Criterion 9**: there are sound teaching and learning strategies. These are outlined in Sections 5 and 6 of the *Programme Submission* and also evidenced in Sections 5 and 6 of the *SER*. There was evidence in the site visit of an excellent team-based approach to the design, delivery and assessment of the programme.



In response to a panel recommendation, Section 5.12 of the *Programme Submission* presents a revised matrix of transferable skills, together with a rationale for their inclusion, an indication of how these skills link to the programme aims and learning outcomes, and a summary of transferable skills delivery across the modules. The quality of the redeveloped transferable skills matrix and supporting narrative is commendable.

With regard to future programme development, the panel notes and encourages the ongoing exploration of online delivery options, as outlined in Section 5.8 of the *Programme Submission*.

The College-wide and non-programme-specific supports are noted and are excellent. In particular, the College's extensive set of support services in the evenings and at weekends, for which evidence was obtained during the site visit, is highly commendable.

- Under **Criterion 10**: there are sound assessment strategies. These are evidenced in Sections 5.10 and 6 of the *Programme Submission*, with supporting evidence in Sections 3.5, 5.1 and 5.2 of the *SER*.
- Under **Criterion 11**: learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for, as shown amongst others in Sections 4.1, 5.8 and 5.9 of the *Programme Submission*, with supporting evidence in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the *SER*. Based on the meetings with staff, the panel particularly commends the approach to induction taken by the team. During the site visit the panel saw evidence of a learner-centred approach from across the team and the wider College staff. This was excellent.
- Under **Criterion 12**: the programme is well managed. Programme management arrangements are evidenced in Sections 7.1, 7.4, 7.5 and 9 of the *Programme Submission* and Section 4 of the *SER*, with some supporting evidence for their appropriateness to be derived from Sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the *SER*.

	Not satisfactory.
--	-------------------

Reasons<sup>28</sup> for the overall recommendation

N/a

## Summary of recommended special conditions of validation

None

---

<sup>28</sup> Give precise reasons for the conclusions organised under each of the 12 criteria (for the programme and each embedded programme and any modules proposed to lead to QQI awards) citing supporting evidence. If any criteria or sub-criteria are not met by the application this must be stated explicitly giving precise reasons with evidence. A "Not Satisfactory" recommendation may be justified if any one of the applicable criteria or sub-criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

## Summary of recommendations to the provider

None

## Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

All panel members have declared they are independent of NCI and have no conflict of interest.

While the panel chair was employed as a Teaching Assistant / Language Website Developer with the (then) National College of Industrial Relations for one academic year in 1997/98, she has had no further connections, professional or private, with the college since, and does not consider that any conflict of interest arises with regard to the present review.

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson:

**Eva Juhl**

Date:

**30 August 2017**

Signed:



### 1.1 Disclaimer

The Report of the External Review Panel contains no assurances, warranties or representations express or implied, regarding the aforesaid issues, or any other issues outside the Terms of Reference.

While QQI has endeavoured to ensure that the information contained in the Report is correct, complete and up-to-date, any reliance placed on such information is strictly at the reader's own risk, and in no event will QQI be liable for any loss or damage (including without limitation, indirect or consequential loss or damage) arising from, or in connection with, the use of the information contained in the Report of the External Evaluation Panel.

### Part 3: Proposed programme schedules

<b>Name of Provider:</b>		National College of Ireland													
<b>Programme Title</b>		Higher Diploma in Business in Finance													
<b>Award Title</b>		Higher Diploma in Business in Finance													
<b>Stage Exit Award Title</b>		n/a													
<b>Modes of Delivery (FT/PT):</b>		FT, PT													
<b>Teaching and learning modalities</b>															
<b>Award Class</b>	<b>Award NFQ level</b>	<b>Award EQF Level</b>	<b>Stage (1, 2, 3, 4, ..., or Award Stage):</b>		<b>Stage NFQ Level</b>	<b>Stage EQF Level</b>	<b>Stage Credit (ECTS)</b>	<b>Date Effective</b>	<b>ISCED Subject code</b>						
Higher Diploma	8	8	Award		8	8	60								
<b>Module Title</b> (Up to 70 characters including spaces)		<b>Semester no where applicable. (Semester 1 or Semester 2)</b>	<b>Module</b>		<b>Credit Number</b>	<b>Total Student Effort Module (hours)</b>					<b>Allocation of Marks (from the module assessment strategy)</b>				
			<b>Status</b>	<b>NFQ Level where specified</b>	<b>Credit Units</b>	<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>Class (or equiv) Contact Hours</b>	<b>Directed e-learning</b>	<b>Hours of Independent Learning</b>	<b>Work-based learning effort</b>	<b>C.A. %</b>	<b>Supervised Project %</b>	<b>practical demonstration</b>	<b>Proctored written exam %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
					ECTS										
Financial Markets and Institutions		Semester 1	M	8	10	250	39		211			40		60	100
Economics		Semester 1	M	8	10	250	39		211			40		60	100
Statistical Methods for Finance		Semester 1	M	8	10	250	52		198		50	50			100
Financial Accounting and Reporting		Semester 2	M	8	10	250	52		198		30			70	100
Law and Governance		Semester 2	M	8	10	250	39		211		40			60	100
Corporate Finance		Semester 2	M	8	10	250	52		198		30			70	100
<b>Special Regulations</b> (Up to 280 characters)															

## Part 4: Detailed evaluation of the programme's modules and stages that do not directly lead to QQI awards

None