![QQI logo] Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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

## Part 1 A

| Provider name | Dublin Business School |
|---|---|
| Date of site visit | 21 May 2019 |
| Date of report | 29 August 2019 |
| Is this a re-validation report (Yes/No) | Yes |

## Overall recommendations

| Principal programme | Title | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing |
|---|---|---|
| | Award | Higher Diploma in Science |
| | Credit[1] | 60 |
| | **Recommendation** *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions[2] OR Not Satisfactory* | Satisfactory |

| Embedded programme[3] | Title | Certificate in Information Technology |
|---|---|---|
| | Award | Certificate in Science |

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[1] Specify the credit units because more than one system of units is in use. E.g. 20 (ECTS).

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

[3] Copy this panel for each embedded programme.

| | Exit award (Yes/No) | Yes |
|---|---|---|
| | **Credit** | 15 |
| | **Recommendation** *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory* | Satisfactory |

| Module[4] | Title | N/a |
|---|---|---|
| | **Award** | N/a |
| | **Credit** | N/a |
| | **Recommendation** *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory* | N/a |

## Evaluators

| Evaluators | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Role** | **Principal occupation** |
| Dr Marion Palmer | Chair | Former Head of Department of Technology and Psychology, Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dún Laoghaire |
| Dr Brendan Ryder | Academic in Subject area | Head of Department of Visual and Human Centred Computing, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) |
| Dr Simon Caton | Academic in Subject area | Assistant Professor, School of Computer Science, University College Dublin |
| Deirdre Casey | Academic in Subject area | Lecturer of Mathematics and Effective Learning and Development, Griffith College Cork |
| Thomas Dowling | Academic in Subject area | Head of Department of Computing, Letterkenny IT |
| Catherine Sweeney | Professional/ Employer Representative | Manager Production Engineering, Facebook Ireland, Dublin |
| Joshua Cassidy | Learner representative on the panel | BSc in Computing, National College of Ireland, Mayor Square, Dublin |
| Mary Doyle | Secretary | Independent Academic QA Consultant |

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[4] A module leading to a QQI award is a special case of an embedded programme. Discrete modules are only validated on a stand-alone basis if they are to lead to a QQI award.

# Part 1 B

## Principal Programme - Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

| Names of centres where the programmes are to be provided | Maximum number of learners*(per centre)* | Minimum number of learners |
|---|---|---|
| DBS: Dublin Campus | 300 | 10 |

| Enrolment interval *(normally 5 years)* | Date of first intake | September 2019 |
|---|---|---|
| | Date of last intake | August 2024 |
| **Maximum number of annual intakes** | Two intakes (September and January) | |
| **Maximum total number of learners per intake (over all centres)** | 100 | |
| **Programme duration (<u>months</u> from start to completion)** | Full-time: 1 year (2 semesters of 12 weeks each) <br> Part-time: 2 years (4 semesters of 12 weeks each) | |
| **Target learner groups** | The Higher Diploma in Science in Computing is aimed at learners with the following entry qualifications: <br> ● Level 8 primary honours Bachelors degree at least pass level in any discipline from a recognised third level institution or equivalent qualification. <br> ● Candidates will ideally be able to demonstrate technical or mathematical problem-solving skills as part of previous programme learning. Typically, holders of more technical, numerate degrees are likely to gain a higher ranking in any order of merit in selection for the programme. <br> ● For candidates who do not have a Level 8 qualification the college operates a Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) scheme meaning applicants who do not meet the normal academic 13 entry requirements may be considered based on relevant work or other experience. <br><br> The Higher Diploma in Science in Computing is a conversion course for non-computing graduates who wish to acquire core ICT skills and computing expertise which will enable graduates play an active role in Software Development, Mobile Applications Development, Web and Cloud, IT Infrastructure and Networking or DevOps. <br><br> Graduates will, upon completion of this programme, will have the skills necessary to carry out industry-level computations and information processing, system and application development, support modern IT infrastructures and participate in ICT projects and pursue a career path in the technology-driven world. <br><br> The Higher Diploma in Science in Computing creates graduates capable of dealing with diverse intrinsic and extrinsic technological realities in a creative manner to ensure sustainability and career growth. In this way, this | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | programme is aimed at those who wish to specialise in the field of ICT with a view to entering industry, progressing professionally or to undertake postgraduate studies in a related field |
| **Approved countries for provision** | Ireland |
| **Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time** | Full-time and part-time |
| **The teaching and learning modalities** | • Classroom lectures<br>• Case-based learning<br>• Practical skills sessions<br>• Workshops<br>• Tutorials<br>• Individual and group work<br>• Online synchronous and asynchronous classes |
| **Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)** | Ireland has an exceptionally strong ICT services sector with a highly creative and talented workforce, an open economy and a competitive corporate tax environment. As a result, there is a continuing need for well-educated staff that have skills and competencies in a wide range of ICT management, innovation and operational areas. Ireland is a very profitable location for ICT services, due to the combination of high productivity and a cost base that is very competitive with other locations, which have similarly sophisticated ecosystems.<br><br>Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Expert Group on Future Skills Need 2019 identify a need for further education in this area to fill the skills gap, which arises in start-up, indigenous and multinational companies. The shortage of ICT talent is potentially significant for a number of sectors where ICT professionals (e.g. programmers, software engineers, web designers and others), ICT managers and ICT technicians are required.<br><br>The programme is aimed at both domestic and international learners who seek an underpinning in key ICT theories, concepts as well as ICT processes and skills. The programme accommodates a wide audience of learners whose specific interests in Computing and specific ICT areas, such as Software Development, Mobile Technologies, Web and Cloud, IT Infrastructure and Networking or DevOps. This ensures learners acquire an integrated, balanced, and dynamic ICT education enabling the development of ICT knowledge, including previously acquired knowledge and experience. The programme engenders an awareness of the importance of transferable and cross enterprise skills required of competitive organisations and which stimulate sustainable and diverse careers in ICT. This programme is a 1-year full-time or 2-year part-time programme. |
| **Summary of specifications for** | Lecturing staff will have a minimum of a Level 9 |

| teaching staff | Postgraduate Diploma or Masters and/or PhD in the following areas: |
|---|---|
| | • Software Engineering & Development |
| | • IT Infrastructure and Networking |
| | • Cloud Computing |
| | • Web Development |
| | • Data Management & Analytics |
| | • Information Security |
| | Individuals with Level 8 honours bachelor degrees in the above disciplines, who are exceptionally qualified by virtue of significant senior industry experience may also be considered. |

| Summary of specifications for the ratio of learners to teaching-staff | Staff to learner ratio | Learning activity type |
|---|---|---|
| | 1/50 | Classroom sessions |
| | 1/25 | Workshops |
| | 1/25 | Practical sessions |
| Overall WTE staff/learner ratio.[5] | 1.97/ (50 max students per intake)= 0.04:1 | |

## Programmes being replaced by the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

| Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation) | | | Arrangement for enrolled learners | Date when replaced programme is planned to cease completely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Code | Title | Last enrolment date | Indicate whether "Teach out" or "Transfer to replacement programme" | |
| **PG22785** | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing | January 2019 | Transfer to replacement programme | September 2019 |
| | | | | |

## Embedded programme[6] - Certificate in Information Technology

| Names of centres where the programmes are to be provided | Maximum number of learners(per centre) | Minimum number of learners |
|---|---|---|
| DBS: Dublin Campus | N/a | N/a |

| Enrolment interval (normally 5 years) | Date of first intake | September 2019 |
|---|---|---|

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[5] This is the total wholetime equivalent number of staff dedicated exclusively to this programme divided by the maximum number of learners that can be enrolled with that complement of staff.
[6]This only needs to be completed where embedded programmes may be offered independently of the principal programme. Add more subsections if there are more than one embedded programmes proposed to lead to QQI awards.

| | Date of last intake | August 2024 |
|---|---|---|
| **Maximum number of annual intakes** | Two intakes (September and January) | |
| **Maximum total number of learners per intake (over all centres)** | 100 | |
| **Programme duration (months from start to completion)** | Full-time: 1 block of 6 weeks<br>Part-time: 2 blocks of 12 and 6 weeks | |
| **Target learner groups** | The Certificate in Information Technology is aimed at learners with the following entry qualifications:<br>● Level 8 primary honours Bachelors degree at least pass level in any discipline from a recognised third level institution or equivalent qualification.<br>● Candidates will ideally be able to demonstrate technical or mathematical problem-solving skills as part of previous programme learning. Typically, holders of more technical, numerate degrees are likely to gain a higher ranking in any order of merit in selection for the programme.<br>● For candidates who do not have a Level 8 qualification the college operates a Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) scheme meaning applicants who do not meet the normal academic 13 entry requirements may be considered based on relevant work or other experience.<br><br>The Certificate in Information Technology is an embedded award within the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing which is a conversion course for non-computing graduates who wish to acquire core ICT Skills and computing expertise which will enable graduates play an active role in Software Development, Mobile Applications Development, Web and Cloud, It Infrastructure and Networking or DevOps.<br><br>The Certificate comprises of Principles of Programming, Information Systems Development and Management, Database Design and Development, offering learners skills in development of Information Systems in a modern computing environment, database knowledge and the fundamentals of object-oriented programming.<br><br>Graduates will, upon completion of this programme, will have the skills necessary to carry out industry-level computations and information processing, system and application development, support modern IT 18 infrastructures and participate in ICT projects and pursue a career path in the technology-driven world.<br><br>The Certificate in Information Technology graduates will have the skills to design and develop structured programs in a modern programming environment utilising appropriate languages, design and implement a robust database system, and understand the software development life cycle across the ICT industry. | |

| Approved countries for provision | Ireland |
|---|---|
| **Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time** | Full-time and part-time |
| **The teaching and learning modalities** | <ul><li>Classroom lectures</li><li>Case-based learning</li><li>Practical skills sessions</li><li>Workshops</li><li>Tutorials</li><li>Individual and group work</li><li>Online synchronous and asynchronous classes</li></ul> |
| **Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)** | Ireland has an exceptionally strong ICT services sector with a highly creative and talented workforce, an open economy and a competitive corporate tax environment. As a result, there is a continuing need for well-educated staff that have skills and competencies in a wide range of ICT management, innovation and operational areas. Ireland is a very profitable location for ICT services, due to the combination of high productivity and a cost base that is very competitive with other locations, which have similarly sophisticated ecosystems.<br><br>Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Expert Group on Future Skills Need 2019 identify a need for further education in this area to fill the skills gap, which arises in start-up, indigenous and multinational companies. The shortage of ICT talent is potentially significant for a number of sectors where ICT professionals (e.g. programmers, software engineers, web designers and others), ICT managers and ICT technicians are required.<br><br>This programme accommodates a wide audience of learners who wish to upskill in ICT and Computing, but who find the specialised and advanced technical content of the streams provided too challenging, or who need to withdraw from the programme for personal reasons. The cert will not directly enrol any students. |
| **Summary of specifications for teaching staff** | Lecturing staff will have a minimum of a Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma or Masters and/or PhD in the following areas:<ul><li>Software Engineering & Development</li><li>IT Infrastructure and Networking</li><li>Cloud Computing</li><li>Web Development</li><li>Data Management & Analytics</li><li>Information Security</li></ul>Individuals with Level 8 honours bachelor degrees in the above disciplines, who are exceptionally qualified by virtue of significant senior industry experience may also be considered. |
| **Summary of specifications for the** | Staff to learner ratio       Learning activity type |

| ratio of learners to teaching-staff | 1/50 | Classroom sessions |
|---|---|---|
| | 1/25 | Workshops |
| | 1/25 | Practical sessions |
| **Overall WTE staff/learner ratio.[7]** | 0.48/60 = 0.008:1 | |

## Programmes being replaced by theCertificate in Information Technology

| Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation) | | | Arrangement for enrolled learners | Date when replaced programme is planned to cease completely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Code** | **Title** | **Last enrolment date** | **Indicate whether "Teach out" or "Transfer to replacement programme"** | |
| N/a | N/a | N/a | N/a | N/a |
| | | | | |

# Other noteworthy features of the application

The panel evaluated the observations, comments and suggestions from internal and external stakeholders and these were duly factored into the review process. Internal stakeholders consisted of students and staff (academic, support and administrative).

In the review and design of the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing for re-validation (and the proposal for the introduction of an embedded exit award of Certificate in Information Technology), the Programme Team, carried out consultations on the programme design and module content with relevant employers and a range of key industry stakeholders and utilised strategic as well as academic sources and comparator analysis. They have engaged with the professional bodies as well as within industry to ensure the programme is appropriate for graduates who wish to pursue a variety of paths. In addition, an extensive consultation with graduates of the programme was also carried out for the review.

The panel found that the consultation process had been comprehensive and it was concluded that the proposed programmes were fit for purpose. In general, the panel found that the documents provided were well structured, clear in the presentation of facts and easy to read.

A summary and quantitative analysis of the recruitment, learner enrolment, application and performance statistics for the existing programme over the past five years was provided for the existing programme covering the areas specified in the Programme Review Manual 2016/2017 Section 3. At the time of the review, enrolments and applications were at their highest level since 2014.

However, in terms of benchmarking grades and QQI Award Classifications the panel concluded that the analysis provided for the programme for review was not comprehensive. The panel now notes

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[7] This is the total wholetime equivalent number of staff dedicated exclusively to this programme divided by the maximum number of learners that can be enrolled with that complement of staff.

that QQI has recently produced a draft report on award classification distributions across higher education institutions and access to this will allow DBS to better address this piece of analysis going forward.

Commentary was provided on the teaching strategy, the use of guest speakers, the use of Moodle as a virtual learning environment and the current and planned developments for the blended learning elements of the programme.

Programme-specific arrangements for monitoring progress and guiding, informing and caring for learners were also discussed. A tour, including a short presentation of the facilities and services, was provided, and the panel concluded that the learning environment was consistent with the needs of the learners.

The panel explored the staffing of the programme and the various roles held/ performed by staff engaging with learners on the programme, across the College.

Evidentiary documentation of the implementation of the programme quality assurance arrangements were provided for the panel in the documentation pack. The panel concluded that the quality assurance arrangements applied to the programmes are generally effective, however, the College needs to ensure that it is taking all the steps to close the quality assurance loop and address the issues identified through the application of the quality assurance feedback processes.

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

N/a

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

| N/a |
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## Part 2A Evaluation against the validation criteria

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

## Criterion 1

| **The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme** | |
|---|---|
| a) | The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme. |
| 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. |
| c) | The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.[8] |

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

### Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
### Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

As an established provider of higher education programmes, DBS has met the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of these programmes. It was noted that DBS has in place procedures for access, transfer and progression. DBS has also established arrangements for the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) which have been approved by QQI.

DBS participated in the Pilot Re-Engagement process for re-approval of QA procedures with QQI in 2017/18 and has submitted an application for full Re-Engagement to QQI in early 2019. Process, policies and procedures were reviewed as part of the re-engagement application and self-evaluation process.

Within the programme documentation provided, DBS provided a copy of the letter to be submitted to QQI with the application for the revalidation of the programmes. The letter contained the signature and declaration required under sub-criteria 1b) and 1c).

## Criterion 2

| **The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought** | |
|---|---|
| a) | The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly. |
| b) | A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme. |
| | (i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme. |
| c) | There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s). |

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[8]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 of enforcing such requirements.

d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards.*

e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
   (i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.
   (ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.

g) For each programme and embedded programme
   (i) The **minimumintended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.[9]
   (ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are **consistent with** the relevant QQI awards standards.

h) Where applicable, the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.

i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.

For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.[10]

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The panel found that the aims, objectives and rationale for the programmes were expressed clearly in the context of the QQI award (s) being sought. The rationale for the embedded exit award (15 ECTS) is not clear as there is little (obvious) discussion in the documentation of the frequency of its use as an exit award, however, the learners and graduates particularly praised it existence and formal the recognition of effort for those not completing the full award.

The MIPLOs were informed by the QQI aligned to Science Award Standard, while also mapped to the Computing Standard. **The panel strongly recommended that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, the assessment instruments, and the indicative content, to facilitate deep learning and to ensure there is sufficient differentiation between the modules**.The programme titles are appropriate.

The panelqueriedthe absence of a Mathematics-related module, in the context of the QQI awards standards - computing for level 8 which requires that learners have knowledge of "Mathematical Foundations and Techniques". There is currently no requirement for a previously obtained qualification in a technical or numerate discipline and no minimum entry expectation of mathematics. If it is intended that appropriate mathematics is embedded in other modules it needs

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[9]Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

[10]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.

to be more explicit in the programme documentation. The restatement of 'no specific mathematics prerequisite' has been in the programme document.

There appears to be a heavy reliance on knowledge and skills, with lesser indication of the achievement of competence/insight. This is evident in the mapping which is identified in the programme document. A skills map, identifying the modules which support particular soft-skills' graduate attributes has been included in the programme documentation.

## 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.[11]

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[12] of learner demand for the programme.
   (v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant[13].
   (vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.[14]

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 | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing |
|  | Certificate in Information Technology |

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[11]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.

[12] This might be predictive or indirect.

[13] It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

[14]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.

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The Higher Diploma in Science in Computing programme was originally developed for, and is still predominantly funded through, the Springboard+ initiative. Overall the programme seems to meet a current need in Irish society. The modules included seem relevant and the overall award should be of great value to learners.

The learner, employment-related and educational demands are well-evidenced within the programme documentation, and the programme seems to address a need within the market for such skills conversion courses which should offer graduates good employment opportunities. Within the programme documentation, the graduate destination surveys for the 2018 graduates indicated that 100% of graduates surveyed were in employment within 6 months of course completion.

In the meeting with learners and graduates, they described their time at DBS on this programme as an 'Amazing experience – an opportunity!'. This reflects the impact that the Springboard+ programmes, in general, and this programme specifically makes on an individual's life!

A review process appears to be in place to keep the course current and up to date. The programme appears to be well-informed by research on the needs of relevant stakeholders and stakeholders' opinions have been sought and commented on. Where applicable their suggestions are mostly taken on board. The suggestions around pace, and reviewability of assessments by learners and the external examiner (s) could be better addressed. There seem to be some concerns raised by stakeholders over the block structure of the programme, and this was further explored by the panel in terms of the delivery structure of the programme.

**The panel stated that the programme team needs to revise and develop the Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) how the programme goals identified in the document are realised.**

The QQI award standards for both Science and Computing standards have been used in reviewing the programme. MIMLOs as well as MIPLOs are mapped. The panel stated that some modules (e.g. 2-6, 8, 10, and 13) appear to not be mapped to at least 3 of the 7 areas of the standards, and there also seems to be a slight imbalance with regard to the quantity of MIMLOs mapped. **The panel recommend that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, and their mapping.**

Some consideration is made with other providers' comparable programmes.

There has been feedback from employers regarding the requirement of programmes in the area of DevOps. In addition, feedback from employers confirms the ongoing requirements for soft skills in graduates. **The embedding of soft skills in individual modules rather than having a specific stand-alone module was recognised as an institutional decision but where these skills are currently developed cannot be vague within the impacted modules – the panel recommended that the development of these skills within the modules need to reflect back to the mapping (of MIMLOs) against the framework (competence and insight).** The impact on student workload – with assignments, exams, and workshops needs to be considered.

## 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[15].

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 (CEFRL[16]) 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 | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

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[15] 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

[16]http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

The panel were of the opinion that the programme information provided to learners is appropriate, and the MIPLOs and title convey an accurate reflection of the programme, its content, and the outcomes for graduates.

The access, transfer, progression, RPL, and entry requirements are documented and appropriate. However, it is not clear whether applicants with an NFQ level 8 Computing (or similar) qualification would be admitted. Regarding entry requirements, the programme document states that any level8 degree is accepted. However there is also mention of how candidates would 'ideally be able to demonstrate technical or mathematical problem-solving skills as part of previous programme learning'. **The panel recommended that Admission requirements for the programme be revisited to ensure that appropriate Mathematics and prior learning, knowledge and skills requirements are identified for applicants; and that RPL decisions are appropriate, fair and consistently applied.**In response to this, the programme team stated that Mathematics material is covered in the modules, and additional support is provided for learners through the DBS Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU).

The establishment of the Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU), as a multidisciplinary intervention to support non-engaging students, was considered a very positive move by DBS to support learner engagement, retention and progression. The student supports available within DBS, including career development, academic writing, and mathematics workshops, and the commitment of module leaders to academic process and student development were particularly remarked upon.

The panel were advised that when recruiting staff, the Faculty manager identifies new staff to the academic appointments sub-committee. The establishment and role of this committee was particularly commended in terms of assuring that sufficient qualified and capable programme staff are available to implement the programme as planned. The committee also identifies the requirements for each newly appointed member of staff to be supported through their orientation at the College.

Of note is the change in mode of delivery; from exclusively full-time in 2015/16 to exclusively part-time in 2018/19. The number of full-time learners had dropped, based on the 2017/18 reduction in Springboard+ funding for full-time ICT Learners as the economy was so buoyant. Programme pass rates fell somewhat with the change to PT, as the course is considered to be very intense, with the focus for many learners on employment alongside studies, which may put pressure on or compromise their academic performance.The programme learners and graduates particularly praised the existence of the (15 ECTS) exit award option which provided an opportunity for learners to recognise their efforts, even/especially if not completing the full award.

DBS currently do not undertake of analysis of learner performance against entry qualifications. The panel noted that with the planned introduction of a new Student Information System in November 2019 this type of analysis will be possible and should be undertaken for the 2018/19 intake onwards. **The panel recommended that analysis of learner performance versus their entry profile should be conducted particularly, as in this case, for programmes where non-standard and RPL admissions are permitted.**

With the programmes transition to part-time delivery only, there is a growing international learner cohort i.e. those whose first language may not be English. **The panel recommended that the basics for each topic could be prepared and made available on Moodle to learners in advance of their**

**lectures, rather than having to research programme content themselves.** This would be particularly supportive of learners whose first language was not English in engaging with class material.

Progression opportunities for programme graduates seem good, and clear examples are given.

## 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[17].

    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.[18]

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing Certificate in Information Technology |

### Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
### Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The panel was generally satisfied that the programmes and their modules were appropriately structured and scheduled. The rational for the inclusion of new modules, and the stakeholder engagement which informed their content and that of the revised modules, was discussed with the programme team. The programme team outlined how the programme was reviewed and developed.

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[17] 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.

[18] If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

There appeared to be a heavy relianceon /deference to the material in the previously approved programme.

The panel indicated that it got little sense of the programme team's cohesiveness, and recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened – there appeared to be a disconnect between the lecturer, the programme and the college. **The panel recommended that the programme team meet to review and 'personalise' their modules (recognising the ownership of the module by the lecturer), which would also reinforce the coherence/cohesiveness of the modules within the programme. In addition, clarity is required on the specific programme management roles of Course Director and Programme Leader.**

Notwithstanding, the panel commended the lecturer commitment to the programme and its learners, and the technical expertise of the team. The support of learners and accessibility of the programme staff to learners was evident in the documentation, in the engagement with both the staff and the learners at the panel.

The panel were of the opinion that the choice offered to learners seems to be good, and that the balance between covering the basics and allowing choice of modules seems to be well considered. While learners register on a named stream, Block 1 is common to facilitate their changing programme after Block 1 if the wish to change their area of focus.

The panel considered the mapping of the MIMLOs to the MIPLOs for the programme is unclear and very broadly grouped. It is difficult to see vertical alignment from the documentation provided.**The panel strongly recommended that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, the assessment instruments, and the indicative content, to facilitate deep learning and to ensure there is sufficient differentiation between the modules.**

Learners are afforded significant choice of streams, and some detail on supports for how learners are guided through the elective stream choice is needed in the documentation (currently noting only advice from course director and programme lead). **The panel recommended that a diagram of programme structure (with regard to the streams) would be very helpful in programme documents to fully appreciate the overall programme structure and schedule.**The overview of programme modules provided in the programme document would be very useful for the students in the Student Handbook.

The module descriptors provide clear information regarding the syllabus and learning outcomes. The panel were concerned that the programme team may have chased the technology rather than competence and depth.The learning required to successfully progress from intake to completion is substantial, but this is in keeping with the type of conversion course that this is.

**The programme team needs to revise and develop Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) how the programme goals identified in the document are realised –with particular reference to the module class contact time (versus ECTS), the eLearning content, the Workshop requirements, placement, project, etc.**

In the module descriptors, the e-learning it states that "c*ontact hours are therefore defined to mean either the traditional class-room setting or synchronous live online classes…with the opportunity for questions, discussion and break-out activities*". The programme document in its breakdown of the contact hours for students also describes "*class or equivalent contact*". However in the teaching and

learning strategy there is no evidence of consideration of the large differences (and breakdown) between face to face contact and online/blended learning, or how formative feedback is facilitatedin an online setting. **The panel require the programme team to revise and develop the Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) – how are the programme goals identified in the document realised - the eLearning content, the module class contact time, the Workshop requirements.**

**The panel recommended that staff training be developed and provided to support teaching, learning and assessment objective**s. This would serve to support staff in module design and address issues such as what's a fair workload both for staff and learners. In reviewing the programme structure the panel noted that DBS have recently recruited a Learning Technologist and are intending to recruit an Instructional Designer to support lecturers' teaching and learning strategies.

The panel noted the strong focus on practice and experiential development, which is appropriate as this is a conversion programme (there are 24 hours contact per week).The embedding of soft skills in individual modules rather than having a specific stand-alone module is an institutional policy, with supplementary workshops. The additional workshops and their impact on student workload, in light of contact time, assignments and exams, needsto be considered. **A Workshop List of the relevant support resources available is needed by the programme team, and required by the learners, and should be part of the development of the teaching and learning strategy.**

Module ECTS credit allocation seems appropriate. **However in some instances contact time needs to be restated to ensure its accuracy and consistency in relation to ECTS versus total expended time**.

There are several modules that seem quite similar to modules on the MSc in Information Systems and Computing programme, which was also under review by the panel, and these similarities were explored in discussion of the individual modules. In particular the panel queried the depth of the specialisation of the Web Technologies specialisation of the programme with regard to the level of the programme (level 8).

The embedding of soft skills in individual modules rather than having a specific stand-alone module was recognised as an institutional decision but where these skills are currently developed cannot be vague within the impacted modules – **the development of these skills within the modules need to reflect back to the mapping (of MIMLOs) against the framework (competence and insight). The impact on student workload – with assignments, exams, and workshops needs to be considered.**

The different programming languages utilised across the modules to develop learners programming knowledge and skills within the programme was discussed (in general). Of particular merit is the degree of programming learners will be exposed to - many of the programming modules emphasise C#, Intro to Programming notes Python, C# and (possibly) Java in its descriptor. OOP is C#. *Advanced Programming* is C#. However, *Mobile App Development* is Java, whilst the similarities between Java and C# are high, a novice learner may not cope with this transition. Clarity around the rationalisation for such choices was provided by the programme team.

The Block structure was explored. There are some concerns over pace, stemming from the six-week block structure, and the module assessments, which could be better justified in the documentation, and reflect on lessons learned from previous cohorts to substantiate this structure. **Clarity around the scheduling of blocks,and when their relevant examinations take place, would be beneficial. In general, the block structure is not the issue, but rather the corresponding assessment strategy.**

Many of the sample assessments provided in the programme documentation pack are terminal examinations. **More samples of (group) continuous assessment material would be welcomed, to better delineate individual vs. group assessments as well as give an impression of individual projects**.

**Clarity around the strategy for continuous assessment for the programme is required. The assessment schedule for the programme needs to be developed to identify the learner assessment burden.** In addition, **the opportunities for students to receive feedback in a timely fashion to improve their work within that module should be identified and adhered to by the programme team.**

In managing learner assessment workload, and supporting programme cohesiveness, there seems to be a missed opportunity with regard to implementing integrated assessments within the blocks, and across modules.

**The panel requires that the full programme team come together to develop an Assessment Strategy for the Programme, which would incorporate all modules, their CA deadlines, reassessment mechanisms, etc. to facilitate management of the learner workload.** This document should provide clarity regarding the preference for written examinations over practical laboratory-based exams for the programming modules, examination duration, etc. It would also identify in which modules is group assessment undertaken, and what structures are in place to ensure individually appropriate grades - group project guidelines should be developed. The review of CA material by the extern (in advance) should be considered. **In addition, in developing the Strategy, the programme team should review lecturer workload in terms of assessment workload, to facilitate provision of formative and constructive feedback to learners in a timely fashion during the academic year to allow learners to manage their assessmentperformance.** The output of this activity should also include **an assessment schedule to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year.**

**The panel recommended that the reading list for each module be reviewed to ensure they are up to date.**

Some module-related specific comments were also included and some suggestions for improvement and/or clarity were provided to the programme team.

In particular, the panel noted that **there is also a requirement for information regarding how the college prepares the learner for, and subsequently manages, the placement.** With 4 hours contact, and an extensive workload to be completed by the learner following that time, assurance is required as to whether it is possible for the learner to achieve all necessary knowledge and facilitation in the allocated time.

# 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

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| | practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c). <br> b) The programme has an identified complement of staff[19] (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments. <br> 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. <br> 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[20] opportunities[21]. <br> e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance. <br> 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. |
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing <br> Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

Specifications for programme staffing requirements seem appropriate and realistic.

The necessary qualification profile for academic staff is identified within the modules, and is appropriate.The staff CVs provided show excellent qualifications and experience to provide such a programme, with staff also showing plenty of experience in lecturing.

While the staff scholarship scheme was outlined in the documentation, there is little evidence of staff engagement with research.

**The programme team needs to revise and develop the Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) how the programme goals identified in the document are realised.**There is an opportunity to focus on **the development of teaching and learning-related qualifications within the programme team**. This would support staff in the engagement with programme management, the teaching and learning strategy, the assessment strategy and the

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[19] 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.

[20] 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.

[21] 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.

organisation of both learner and staff workload. In addition, a **Workshop List of the relevant support resources available is needed by the programme team, and required by the learners**, and should be part of the development of the teaching and learning strategy.

The specific contract s arrangement (hours and teaching requirements) of academic staff were outlined for the panel. Specific contractual arrangements are in place to facilitate academic staff supervising learners' projects. [Reference Special Consideration of Programme Review]

**The panel recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened – there appeared to be a disconnect between the lecturer, the programme and the college. This would require the programme team to meet to review and 'personalise' their modules (recognising the ownership of the module by the lecturer).** The programme team meetings would reinforce the coherence/cohesiveness of the modules within the programme. In addition, **clarity is required on the specific programme management roles of Course Director and Programme Leader**.

The establishment and role of the academic appointments sub-committee was particularly commended in terms of assuring that sufficient qualified and capable programme staff are available to implement the programme as planned. The committee also identifies the requirements for each newly appointed member of staff to be supported through their orientation and professional development at the College. However, the panel cautioned that sourcing staff primarily through referrals and recommendations may not be a sustainable method of assuring externality and a challenging and supportive academic environment.

## 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 criterion 12 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 staffing, resources and the learning environment).

    d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address
        (i) Planned intake (first five years) and
        (ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.

    e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| property, premises, materials and equipment) required. | |
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The panel noted that a five year plan had been provided for each of the programmes under review.

From the documentation provided, there appears to be sufficient and appropriate physical resources available within DBS to support delivery of the programme. The support of learners and accessibility of the programme staff to learners was evident in the documentation, in the engagement with both the staff and the learners at the panel.

A tour of the library facilities in the Aungier Street Campus was undertaken, and the open meeting and study areas throughout the campus to facilitate group work and peer study-support were acknowledged.**The panel recommended that the reading list for each module be reviewed to ensure they are up to date.**

The panel were advised of the mobile IT laboratory facility, whereby charged laptops are available within classrooms to provide a flexible, responsive computer laboratory option.

To support their course work, each learner is provided with their own cloud space, and specific software availability is provided here. The appointment of a Learning Technologist and the recent recruitment of an Instructional Designer to support the college's ambitions in relation to blended and e-learning, and support staff in its implementation, was commended by the Panel.

In the meeting with learners and graduates there were some resource issues identified, predominantly in relation to the technology set-up, and specific issues identified included as projectors not working, laptops for computer based exams not charged, Moodle not able to take assessment file (file size too large), and the timing of Moodle update in reading week (when learner access to class material required). Learners indicated that this is an area where improvement could be helpful.

The student experience and student contribution to the processes within DBS were particularly remarked upon by the panel.

## Criterion 8

**The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners**
   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

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| | support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.<br>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.<br>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. |
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

From the documentation provided, support systems for learners appear to be sufficient to support delivery of the programme and meet learner needs. The programme team is strong and supportive.Notwithstanding, **the panel recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened – there appeared to be a disconnect between the lecturer, the programme and the college. This would require the programme team to meet to review and 'personalise' their modules (recognising the ownership of the module by the lecturer).**

The panel noted that a five-year plan had been provided for the programme under review. The panel also noted the recent update of the DBS strategic plan, and were advised that the development of eLearning/blended learning programmes is a strategic objective of the College.

A tour of the physical facilities in the Aungier Street Campus, particularly the library, was undertaken. To support their course work, each learner is provided with their own cloud space, and had access to the necessary software required to engage with the programme.

The workload created by the implementation of the assessment strategy, for both lecturers and students was highlighted within the sessions with the panel. **An Assessment Strategy for the Programme, which would require the full programme team coming together to schedule their individual assessment requirements, to incorporate all modules, CA deadlines (to prevent deadlines falling on examination dates), group project guidelines, reassessment mechanisms, reference /citation system used in the programme,etc. is essential to facilitate management of the learner workload**. This Strategy should also provide clarity regarding examination duration. Its preparation should also necessitate a review of lecturer workload in terms of the assessment workload (and feedback provision).**The output should include an assessment schedule to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year.**

The panelqueried if there is scope for reducing some of the programme content and/or assessment elements?**The panel strongly recommended that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, the assessment instruments, and the indicative content, to facilitate deep learning and to ensure there is sufficient differentiation between the modules.**

The embedding of soft skills in individual modules rather than having a specific stand-alone module was recognised by the panel as an institutional decision, but where these skills are currently

developed cannot be vague within the impacted modules – **the development of these skills within the modules need to reflect back to the mapping (of MIMLOs) against the framework (competence and insight). The impact on student workload – with assignments, exams, and workshops needs to be considered.**

In meetings with students and graduates, the panel were advised that the HDip requires an enormous amount of knowledge to be developed, and that sometimes it can feels a bit rushed and as if pushing through material to get it covered. **The panel recommended that the basics for each topic could be prepared and made available on Moodle to them in advance of their lectures, rather than having to research programme content themselves.** This was particularly requested by learners whose first language was not English, as a support to their engaging with material on delivery in class.

The panel found that the students and graduates were very positive about the level of support received from lecturers and other staff. They appreciated the easy access to teaching staff who were generally very responsive to requests for support. However, it was also noted that in some instances, issues raised at meetings between the learners and the College may not be resolved in a timely manner, and also that some learners were reluctant to approach lecturers for fear of imposing on their time (as they always seemed to be under pressure to get work done).

The level of feedback provided on assignments appeared to be very helpful when received, but several incidents were cited where this was not provided in a timely fashion – this was particularly challenging for learners in the context of the short delivery block. Learners appeared satisfied that they could meet with lecturers for further feedback if they so desired. **As far as possible, the panel recommended that learners received feedback on assignments within the recommended four week timeframe.** This is especially important where there is an assignment component and a written exam – learners should be made aware of their results in an assignment prior to sitting their exam.

**The panel also recommended that learners receive an assessment deadlines' schedule for the programme modules at the commencement of the semester/stage.**

In addition, **the panel recommended that the programme team consider clarifying the re-assessment strategy for the modules in the programme document into clearly articulated and standard format** to ensure consistency.

The panel noted that additional classes (Workshops and tutorials) are held to support learners' engagement with learning material during the academic year**. A Workshop List of the relevant support resources available is needed by the programme team, and required by the learners, and should be part of the development of the teaching and learning strategy.**

The existence of the (15 ECTS) exit award option to provide an opportunity to recognise the effort of learners, even/especially if they are not completing the full award, was particularly praised by the learners and graduates.

# Criterion 9

**There are sound teaching and learning strategies**
   a)   Theteaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| | outcomes. <br> b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes. <br> 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). <br> d) Learning is monitored/supervised. <br> e) Individualised guidance, support[22] and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme. |
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing <br> Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The College has developed a Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy which was provided in the documentation pack for the panel, and appropriate extracts and references were included in the programme documentation. The purpose of this strategy is to support the enhancement of learning and teaching at DBS by establishing a framework, aligned with the overall College Strategy.

The module descriptors provide clear information regarding the syllabus and learning outcomes. Teaching and learning strategies are also provided within each of the module descriptors. Many modules, however, appear to use the same base text, and there is little individualisation at the module or stream level, this could be improved, specifically how each module will apply directed e-learning. **The panel recommended that the reading list for each module be reviewed to ensure they are up to date.**

The learning required to successfully progress from intake to completion is substantial, but this is in keeping with the type of conversion course that this is.

In the teaching and learning strategy there is no evidence of consideration of the large differences (and breakdown) between face to face contact and online/blended learning, or how formative feedback is facilitated in an online setting. **The panel require the programme team to revise and develop the Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) – how are the programme goals identified in the document realised - the eLearning content, the module class contact time, the Workshop requirements.**

**The panel recommended that staff training be developed and provided to support teaching and learning objectives.** This would serve to support staff in module design and address issues such as what's a fair workload both for staff and learners, and problem based learning. In reviewing the programme structure the panel noted that DBS have recently recruited a Learning Technologist and

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[22] 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.

are intending to appoint an Instructional Designer to support DBS and the lecturers' teaching and learning strategies. **The panel recommended that the programme team define the e-learning element of each module within the module descriptor for clarity. This need not be identical for each module.**

It was stated that the team is well practiced in supporting a diverse collection of learners within the programme through the use of practically-focused videos (YouTube). There is a strong culture of collaborative learning and supportive practice within the programme team.

In meetings with students and graduates, the panel found that they were very positive about the level of support received from lecturers and other staff. However, it was also noted that in some instances, issues raised at meetings between the learners and the College may not be resolved in a timely manner, and also that some learners were reluctant to approach lecturers for fear of imposing on their time (as they always seemed to be under pressure to get work done).

In addition, the level of feedback provided on assignments appeared to be very helpful when received, but several incidents were cited where this was not provided in a timely fashion – this was particularly challenging for learners in the context of the short delivery block. **The panel recommended that staff training be developed and provided to support teaching, learning and assessment objectives. This would serve to support staff in module design and address issues such as what's a fair workload both for staff and learners.**

The strategy for the Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU) is also aligned with the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The establishment of the SESU, as a multidisciplinary intervention to support non-engaging students, was considered a very positive move by DBS to support learner engagement, retention and progression.

Feedback from students and graduates also confirmed that the workload was appropriate but that more structure and communication around this workload was required. **The panel were of the opinion that this could be further supported by the creation of an assessment schedule, to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year, which would be visible/accessible to all.**

The panel further noted the feedback from students confirmed the willingness of teaching staff to address any issues brought to them.

## Criterion 10

**There are sound assessment strategies**

    a) All assessment is undertaken consistently with *Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*[23]

    b) The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.

    c) 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.[24]

[23] See the section on transitional arrangements.
[24] This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

| | |
|---|---|
| d) | The programme includes formative assessment to support learning. |
| e) | 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.[25] |
| f) | 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. |
| g) | There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results. |
| h) | 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.[26] |

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The panel was advised that all assessment for the programmes conforms to the DBS Assessment Regulations which are informed by QQI's Assessment and Standards, revised2013, and QQI's Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining, revised February 2015.

While the programme teaching and learning strategy is briefly articulated in the programme document. There is little detail on the mention of the overall programme assessment strategy. **An Assessment Strategy for the Programme, which would require the full programme team coming together to schedule their individual assessment requirements, to incorporate all modules, CA deadlines, group project guidelines, reassessment mechanisms, etc. is essential to facilitate management of the learner workload.** This Strategy should also provide clarity regarding examination duration. Its preparation should necessitate a review of lecturer workload in terms of the assessment workload (and feedback provision). **The output should include an assessment schedule to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year**.

**The panel are of the opinion that it is imperative that learner workload is appropriately managed, particularly in the context of assessment scheduling and cross-offered electives**. With 24 hours of scheduled class contact time, there are in essence only 16 hours available for assessment work, etc. The programme team stated that a large proportion of supported CA is undertaken within the class/laboratory sessions.

The programme team stated that there is little overlap between assessment components – integrated assessment is not a feature of the programme. **The panel considered that there may be opportunities in the programme to have integrated and serial assessments between core modules,**

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[25] 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.
[26]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).

**e.g. progressing projects from one block to another for additional augmentation and further, deepen learning.**

According to feedback from students, thelevel of feedback provided on assignments appeared to be very helpful when received, and learners appeared satisfied that they could meet with lecturers for further feedback if they so desired, but several incidents were cited where feedback was not provided in a timely fashion – this is particularly challenging for learners in the context of the programme's short delivery block and being able to improve their performance within the module. As far as possible, **the panel recommended that learners received feedback on assignments within the recommended four week timeframe.** This is especially important where there is an assignment component and a written exam – learners should be made aware of their results in an assignment prior to sitting their exam.

In addition, **the panel recommended that the programme team considers clarifying the re-assessment strategy for each of the modules in the programme document into clearly articulated and standard format to ensure consistency**. They need not be the same for each module. The re-assessment strategy should be reflected in the programme assessment strategy.

With extensive CA/project work involved in the programme, the panel explored how the programme team ensured that the work is the learners own. DBS utilises plagiarism detection software, but also employs a number of initiatives to support learners to prevent their engaging in academic impropriety, such as the new library website with resources to assist students with the essay writing process; referencing, avoiding plagiarism etc.

The CA material (and descriptor) is only provided to the extern post-assessment completion. **The panel recommended that the module specification could be provided to the external examiner at the commencement of the academic year.** Feedback can be obtained and utilised to improve the assessment in the current or subsequent block/semester/year. A new mechanism for processing external examiners comments was identified to the panel– this is being introduced in academic year 2019/20 – this process will serve to close the loop on addressing the issues identified during the process.

The establishment and role of the academic appointments sub-committee was particularly commended in terms of assuring that sufficient qualified and capable programme staff are available to implement the programme as planned (including assessment). The committee also identifies the requirements for each staff to be supported through their orientation and professional development at the College.

## 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[27]. |
| i) | If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*[28] 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 |
|---|---|
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The panel noted that the Student Handbooks and website contain information on the supports and services available to students. **The panel recommended that a diagram of programme structure (with regard to the streams) would be very helpful in programme documents to fully appreciate the overall programme structure and schedule.** The overview of programme modules provided in the programme document would be very useful for the students in the Student Handbook.

In the meeting with learners and graduates, they described their time at DBS on this programme as an 'Amazing experience – an opportunity!'. This reflects the impact that the Springboard+ programmes, in general, and this programme specifically makes on an individual's life!

Owing to the nature of the programme and the second intake, those in part-time mode indicated that they are currently scheduled for classes every single week to December – some vacation time would be good. **The overall scheduling and workload of the learners and academic staff should be considered as part of the programme management**.

Following feedback from the learners and graduates, **the panel recommended that the basics for each topic could be prepared and made available on Moodle to learners in advance of their**

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[27]For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).
[28]See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

**lectures,** rather than having to research programme content themselves. This would be particularly supportive of learners whose first language was not English in engaging with class material.

However, it also noted that where learners are required to complete continuous assessment assignments, **the programme team should develop an Assessment Strategy for the Programme, which would require the full programme team coming together to schedule their individual assessment requirements, to incorporate all modules, CA deadlines, group project guidelines, reassessment mechanisms, etc. is essential to facilitate management of the learner workload. This Strategy should also provide clarity regarding examination duration**. Its preparation should necessitate a review of lecturer workload in terms of the assessment workload (and feedback provision**). The output should include an assessment schedule to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year.**

The panel considered the establishment of the Student Engagement and Success Unit (SESU) a very positive move by DBS to support learner engagement, retention and progression.

The learners and graduates that met with the panel spoke extremely positively and impressively about the programme. It appeared they were well informed of what was required of them in class and for assessments, and they praised their lecturers highly. The positive employment prospects of the programme'sgraduates were a significant driver of learners' satisfaction with the programme.

Learners are provided with Career Search Support through workshops, which cover development of CVs, relevant job sites, etc. These workshops run twice per week over the academic year. In addition the College hosts two careers weeks per year – these consist of subject-specific recruitment events to optimise learners, graduates and employers time and efforts.

**The quality assurance of the placement requires further clarity within the programme documents, the student handbook and in the Work Placement Handbook itself** (particularly in the context of the indication of the company placement resources being N/A in the programme document**).A Workshop List of the relevant support resources available is needed by the programme team, and required by the learners**, and should be part of the development of the teaching and learning strategy. This is particularly relevant within the context of the career development requirements in advance of placement engagement/commencement.

It appeared that the lecturers were very dedicated to lecturing on the programme, and to the learning of their students.


## 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-the-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.

| Satisfactory (yes, no, partially) | Comment |
|---|---|
| | 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.<br><br>e) Quality assurance[29] is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.<br><br>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.<br><br>g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.<br><br>h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification. |
| Yes | Higher Diploma in Science in Computing<br>Certificate in Information Technology |

## Higher Diploma in Science in Computing

## Certificate in Information Technology

*The panel has evaluated the programmes having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommended that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.*

The documentation suggests a well-conceived programme management strategy and structure.**The panel recommended that a diagram of programme structure (with regard to the streams) would be very helpful in programme documents to fully appreciate the overall programme structure and schedule. The overview of programme modules provided in the programme document would be very useful for the students in the Student Handbook.**

The programme development team have completed an extensive review of the programme in accordance with the programmatic review terms of reference and QQI programme validation criteria.

The panel were satisfied that there are effective structures in place for the governance and management of the programmes under review. The QAH contains the governance structures for the College and procedures for access, transfer and progression, learner assessments and supports, and teaching and learning.

With that in mind, the panel indicated that it got little sense of the programme team cohesiveness, and **recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened** – there appeared to be a disconnect between the lecturer, the programme and the college. This would require the programme team to meet to review and 'personalise' their modules (recognising the ownership of the module by the lecturer). The programme team meetings would reinforce the coherence/cohesiveness of the modules within the programme. In addition, clarity is required on the specific programme management roles of Course Director and Programme Leader.

Notwithstanding, the panel commended the lecturer commitment to the programme and its learners, and the technical expertise of the team. The support of learners and accessibility of the

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[29]See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

programme staff to learners was evident in the documentation, in the engagement with both the staff and the learners at the panel.

Owing to the nature of the programme and the second intake, those in part-time mode indicated that they are currently scheduled for classes every single week to December – some vacation time would be good. **The panel recommended that staff training be developed and provided to support teaching, learning and assessment objectives**. This would serve to support staff in module design and address issues such as what's a fair workload both for staff and learners. **The overall scheduling and workload of the learners and academic staff should be considered as part of the programme management.**

It was noted that the QAH and associated policies and procedures have been developed in line with QQI statutory guidelines, and that DBS have submitted an application to QQI for reengagement. The process for interim programme change was outlined to the panel by the programme team. The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are outlined in Section 3.8 of this report. There is an extensive cohort of staff in place to manage the quality assurance and enhancement aspects of the programme which appears to be well managed in terms of staffing and quality assurance.

In relation to areas for improvement, the conditions and recommendations identified in this report capture the feedback from the panel.

The identified commendations provide areas of enhancement that serve to continuously enhance the College's activities.

## Part 2B Overall recommendation to QQI

### Higher Diploma in Science in Computing
### Certificate in Information Technology

| Select one | |
|---|---|
| X | Satisfactory (meaning that it recommended 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);[30] |
| | Not satisfactory. |

[30]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[31] for the overall recommendation

The panel carried out a comprehensive review of the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing, with its embedded Certificate in Information TechnologyEXIT award, between May and August 2019.

The Higher Diplomaprogramme was due for review under the QQI requirement for periodic monitoring and review, and also require review to conform with recent policies, including QQI Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (QQI, 2016), Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines (QQI, 2016) and in accordance with the QQI Programme Review Manual 2016/2017. The Certificate in Information Technologyis a newly developed award.

The review comprised six stages:
- A desk review by the panel of the self-evaluation report on the internal programme review prepared by the Programme Leaders and Programme Team, and a review of the initial/revised proposed Higher Diploma in Science in Computing programme documentation to be submitted for revalidation.
- A site visit on 21 May 2019 involving a series of meeting with academic staff and administrative staff engaged in programme delivery and support, a meeting with recent graduates and current learners on the programme, and a tour of the DBS campus (and College Library) to review facilities.
- The preparation of a panel report, outlining the process and evidence pursued, and a series of conditions and recommendations.
- A follow-up desk review of revised documentation provided by DBS addressing the panel's conditions and recommendations.
- Further feedback from the panel to DBS in relation to necessary action required to close-out on the identified conditions.
- A follow-up desk review of further revised and developed documentation provided by DBS which address the panel's conditions.

The revised documentation provided consisted of:
- DBS Programme Review Document for the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing (and embedded Certificate programme) – referred to as Programme Document hereafter
- DBS Appendix 5 Module Descriptors for Higher Diploma in Science in Computing (and embedded Certificate programme) – referred to as Module Descriptors hereafter
- Programme Team's response to the Independent Programme Review Report – referred to as Team Response hereafter
- Proposed Assessment Schedule for the programme
- Extensive supporting documentation which included DBS Teaching and Learning Strategy for the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing; DBS Assessment Strategy for the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing; Terms of Reference for the Programme Board and Programme Team meetings; Work Placement Handbook.

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[31]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.

Based on the site visit and the revised documentation received, the panel concluded that the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing, as presented to QQI for revalidation, satisfies the core policies and criteria for revalidation by QQI of programmes of education and training, specifically as follows:

**Criterion1:** DBS meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of these programmes. The panel was informed DBS is currently taking part in the re-engagement process with QQI. QA policies and procedures are therefore under review. Access, transfer and progression procedures are detailed in Section 4 of Programme Document and Chapter 6 of the current DBS Quality Assurance Handbook.
The panel noted that DBS has arrangements in place for Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL), documentation for which is provided to QQI with every submission for revalidation of a programme.

**Criterion2:** the programme objectives and programme outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI award sought. They are set out in Sections 2.1 and 2.4 of the Programme Document. The Interpretation of the awards standards and research supporting the programme's aims, objectives and the MIPLOs is provided in section 3.6.
MIPLOS are mapped against the QQI Generic Awards Standards as set out in Section 13 of the Programme Document, and are compared with those of comparable programmes in section 2.7. The panel stated that some modules (e.g. 2-6, 8, 10, and 13) appear to not be mapped to at least 3 of the 7 areas of the standards, and there also seems to be a slight imbalance with regard to the quantity of MIMLOs mapped. The panel recommend that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, and their mapping. This was completed in the programme documentation prior to the programme team's response to the panel.

**Criterion3**: the panel found that the programme concept, implementation strategy and interpretation of QQI awards are well informed, taking into consideration social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives. Extensive consultation with ICT stakeholders, as well as students and graduates, was evidenced in Section 3.4 and 3.7 of the Programme Document and had informed the evolution of the programme.
Feedback from employers confirmed the requirement of programmes in the area of DevOps, and the ongoing requirements for soft skills in graduates. The embedding of soft skills in individual modules cannot be vague within the impacted modules, and the panel recommended that the development of these skills within the modules need to reflect back to the mapping (of MIMLOs) against the framework (competence and insight).Updated module descriptors and a soft-skills' matrix were provided with the response documentation.

**Criterion4:** the programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory. Entry criteria and progression options, including the concept of how a non-cognate primary discipline in the context of the minimum of a L8 requirement, versus how RPL consideration works, were explored, and are now clearly documented, as per section 3.2 and chapter 4 of the Programme Document, in relation to the specific technical or mathematical problem-solving skills that target learners are expected to possess before enrolment.
The extension of the last permitted intake date, to include the full academic year (second intake), has been implemented in the programme documentation under guidance from QQI.

**Criterion5:** the programme's written curriculum and modules are well structured and fit-for-purpose. The panel recommended that the programme team meet to conduct the overall annual oversight, evaluation and review of the programme, to enhance overall programme cohesiveness. In

its response the programme team took the recommendation on board and provided evidence of greater clarity and cohesion in the structure and the terms of reference for the course boards and programme team meetings. The panel is satisfied that these responses have addressed the recommendations.

Specific comments were identified in relation to a number of Modules on the programme. The issues identified have been closed out as identified in the programme team response to the panel. Programme-specific Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategies have been prepared for the programme, and embedded in the programme documentation and module descriptors.

**Criterion 6:** there are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned. The panel noted that teaching staff are qualified to a minimum of NFQ Level 9 with a number qualified to doctoral level, and that a cohort of experienced library practitioners (current DBS library staff and others) is involved in the delivery of the programme. This is evidenced in the suite of staff CVs [Appendix 2 Programme Staff CVs] which set out the qualifications of staff. Other staffing matters are set out in section 1.2 and chapter 7 of the Programme Document.

The panel recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened through the programme team meeting to review and 'personalise' their 'own' modules, which would reinforce the coherence/cohesiveness of the modules within the programme. In addition, clarity is required on the specific programme management roles of Course Director and Programme Leader.In its response the programme team took the recommendation on board and provided evidence of greater clarity and cohesion in the structure and the terms of reference for the course boards and programme team meetings (and also the roles of Course Director and Programme Leader). The panel is satisfied that these responses have addressed the recommendations.

**Criterion7: t**here are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned, as set out in chapter 8 of the Programme Document. The wide range of resources utilised to support learners, and support their progression and retention, was noted.

The panel noted that a five-year plan had been provided for the programme under review as evidenced in Section 3.13 of the Programme Document. The extension of the last intake to include the full academic year has been implemented in programme documentation under guidance from QQI.

**Criterion8**: the learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners. The panel was advised that DBS uses a number of mechanisms to develop and implement supports for students as set out in sections 5.8 and 5.9 of the Programme Document.

The processes and procedures for the student's work placement have been clarified in the Student Placement Handbook.

Programme-specific Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategies have been prepared for the programme, and embedded in the programme documentation and module descriptors.

**Criterion9**: there are sound teaching and learning strategies. These are outlined in chapter 5 of the Programme Document. In meetings with students and graduates at the site visit, the panel noted that they were very positive about the support they received from staff.

The panel recommended that the e-learning element of each module is defined within the module descriptor for clarity. Programme-specific Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategies have been prepared for the programme, and embedded in the programme documentation and module descriptors.

The panel found that the lists of texts within the programme documentation required a review to reflect on essential vs recommended. The reading lists have been updated in the Module Descriptor document provided.

**Criterion 10:** there are sound assessment strategies. The panel was advised that all assessment for the programmes conform to the DBS Assessment Regulations which are informed by QQI Assessment and Standards Revised 2013 as set out in section 5.10 of the Programme Document, and within the individual modules.

The panel recommended that an assessment schedule be prepared for the programme and that a hardcopy be provided to learners at the commencement of the semester/stage., and are satisfied that appropriate measures have been put in place to provide this. The programme team has also clarified the re-assessment strategy for each of the modules within the programme.

**Criterion 11:** learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for. Students and graduates with whom the panel met confirmed that support services are well publicised.  Supports for learners are detailed in sections 5.9 and 8.2 of the programme document.

**Criterion 12:** the programme is well managed. The panel were satisfied that there are effective structures in place for the governance and management of the programmes under review. The College is enhancing its processes to ensure that the lecturers on the programme are more closely involved in the overall annual oversight, evaluation and review of the programme, and participate effectively in programme boards.

The Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) contains the governance structures for the College and procedures for access, transfer and progression, learner assessments and supports, and teaching and learning. It was noted that the QAH and associated policies and procedures have been developed in line with QQI statutory guidelines, and have been redrafted as part of DBS's reengagement process with QQI.


## Summary of recommended special conditions of validation

The conditions identified by the panel were as follows:

1. Revise and develop Teaching and Learning Strategy required for the programme, to clarify (as a group) how the programme goals identified in the document are realised –with particular reference to the module class contact time (versus ECTS), the eLearning content, the Workshop requirements, placement, project, etc.

2. The embedding of soft skills in individual modules rather than having a specific stand-alone module was recognised as an institutional decision but where these skills are currently developed cannot be vague within the impacted modules – the development of these skills within the modules need to reflect back to the mapping (of MIMLOs) against the framework (competence and insight). The impact on student workload – with assignments, exams, and workshops needs to be considered.

3. An Assessment Strategy for the Programme, which would require the full programme team coming together to schedule their individual assessment requirements, to incorporate all modules, CA deadlines, group project guidelines, reassessment mechanisms, etc. is essential to facilitate management of the learner workload. This Strategy should also provide clarity regarding examination duration. Its preparation should necessitate a review of lecturer

workload in terms of the assessment workload (and feedback provision). The output should include an assessment schedule to be provided to learners at commencement of the block/semester/year.

## Summary of recommendations to the provider

1. The panel strongly recommended that the programme team revisit all of the programme modules to review MIMLOs, the assessment instruments, and the indicative content, to facilitate deep learning and to ensure there is sufficient differentiation between the modules.

2. The panel recommended that Admission requirements for the programme be revisited to ensure that appropriate Mathematics and prior learning, knowledge and skills requirements are identified for applicants; and that RPL decisions are appropriate, fair and consistently applied.

3. The panel recommended that analysis of learner assessment performance versus their entry profile should be conducted particularly, as in this case, for programmes where non-standard and RPL admissions are permitted.

4. The panel recommended that the basics for each topic could be prepared and made available on Moodle to learners in advance of their lectures, rather than having to research programme content themselves. This would be particularly supportive of learners whose first language was not English in engaging with class material.

5. The panel recommended that the management of the programme be strengthened – there appeared to be a disconnect between the lecturer, the programme and the college. This would require the programme team to meet to review and 'personalise' their modules (recognising the ownership of the module by the lecturer). The programme team meetings would reinforce the coherence/cohesiveness of the modules within the programme. In addition, clarity is required on the specific programme management roles of Course Director and Programme Leader.

6. The panel recommended that a diagram of programme structure (with regard to the streams) would be very helpful in programme documents to fully appreciate the overall programme structure and schedule. The overview of programme modules provided in the programme document would be very useful for the students in the Student Handbook.

7. Module ECTS credit allocation – the panel recommended that in some instances contact time needs to be restated to ensure its accuracy and consistency in relation to ECTS versus total expended time.

8. The panel recommended that staff training be developed and provided to support teaching, learning and assessment objectives. This would serve to support staff in module design and address issues such as what's a fair workload both for staff and learners.

9. A Workshop List of the relevant support resources available is needed by the programme team, and required by the learners, and should be part of the development of the teaching and learning strategy.

10. The panel recommended that the reading list for each module be reviewed to ensure they are up to date.

## Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

Panel secretary, Mary Doyle has previously held the role of position of Registrar at Dublin Business School. Since leaving this role, in 2009, she has not engaged in any professional relationship with the College and/or its staff. In addition, there have been extensive changes at senior/middle management within DBS in the interim and Ms Doyle has not had any professional relationship with the incumbents, during or prior to their taking up their roles at DBS.
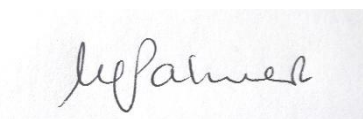
Panel member, Dr Simon Caton was a lecturer at the National College of Ireland (NCI) from 2014 to 2019, during which time he was a member of the PhD programme staff. Course Director, Mr David Williams is currently registered on a part-time PhD programme at NCI. Dr Caton is/was not his principal supervisor.

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

Panel chairperson:      Dr Marion Palmer             Date: 29 August 2019

Signed:

## Addendum

N/a

## 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 4: Appendices

**Revalidation of the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing with the embedded exit award Certificate in Information Technology provided by Dublin Business School - 2019**

In its original independent evaluation report dated 11th June 2019, the independent panel specified 3 conditions and 10 recommendations regarding the above programmes.  Dublin Business School formally responded to the report on 19th August 2019 and has addressed each of the conditions and recommendations to the satisfaction of the independent panel members.

The panel confirmed that it recommended the Higher Diploma in Science in Computing programme with the embedded exit award Certificate in Information Technology to QQI for revalidation.

QQI is satisfied that each condition made by the independent panel has been met and each recommendation has been taken on board and the recommended action has been taken or is scheduled to be taken.


Signed:

Carmel Kelly - Validation Manager, Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Date: 18 November 2019