

Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Microcredential Programme

# Provider details

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| **Provider name** | National College of Ireland (NCI) |
| **Date of report** | 12 May 2021 |

1. Overall recommendations

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| **Programme**  | **Title** | Certificate in Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-Tech |
| **Award** | Special Purpose Award |
| **Credit** | 10 |
| **NFQ Level** | Level 9 |
| **Recommendation***Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory* | *Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions* |

1. Expert Panel

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| **Name** | **Role** | **Affiliation** |
| Ms Lori Johnston | Chair | Registrar, Dublin Business School |
| Dr Gerry Jeffers | Subject Matter Expert | Lecturer, Maynooth University |
| Dr Gina Noonan | Subject Matter Expert | Head of Centre for Learning and Teaching, IT Carlow |

1. Programme Profile Information (as supplied by provider)

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| **Brief synopsis of the programme**  |
| Mirroring the structure and learning outcomes of the existing ‘Strategies of Learning and Teaching’ module in the *MA in Educational Practice*, this programme provides the context for learners to engage with and reflect on the use of a wide range of instructional strategies. The programme is structured around three core areas of professional development: theoretical foundations; professional studies; and educational practice. Reflective practice and critical engagement with theory, practice and context are key features of the module as participants will need to be able to adapt, evaluate and innovate their teaching and assessment strategies to their teaching context.The curriculum provides a rich and varied set of teaching, learning and assessment experiences to enable participants to develop the knowledge, skills and competences required to teach and assess P-TECH modules at senior cycle in the post-primary setting. The programme introduces a range of pedagogic strategies, assessment approaches and theoretical foundations appropriate to teaching P-TECH modules and introduces learners to the P-TECH ‘Abilities Framework’ which provides an important structure for the learning, achievements and assessment of P-TECH students. It furthermore outlines the specific values and ethos underpinning the delivery of P-TECH modules where a strong emphasis is placed on building P-TECH students’ confidence and self-belief through authentic workplace experiences and project work as well as supporting opportunities for students’ future learning and career pathways. While the programme is a stand-alone micro-credential, learners are encouraged to progress to the Certificate in Educational Practice for P-TECH by completing the practise-based module. This will enhance students’ learning and provide a key opportunity to implement their learning and engage in continued reflection on their practice and the impact of the modules on the P-TECH students. |
| **Target learner groups** |
| The target group for the *Certificate in Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-TECH* are post-primary teachers that have been identified as ‘P-TECH teachers’ in their schools. The target group will teach two new P-TECH modules in the senior cycle of school. These modules will provide new opportunities for post-primary students to gain valuable workplace experiences as well as opportunities to engage in authentic workplace projects. The first P-TECH module, ‘Skills for Business and Employment’, will prepare students to engage in a variety of business and employment activities including, but not limited to, teamwork; collaboration; problem-solving; career development skills and business etiquette. The second P-TECH module, ‘Skills for a Digital World’, will prepare students to develop a range of digital specialist and business-related skills involving working with digital platforms and mobile technologies as well as other competencies such as creativity and problem-solving.The *Certificate in Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-TECH* will provide learners with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to undertake teaching and assessment of the P-TECH modules. The programme replicates the structure, learning outcomes and assessment strategy of the ‘Strategies of Learning and Teaching’ module validated as part of the MA in Educational Practice but will take account of the different needs of the target learners who will be teaching at Level 6 in a post-primary context as part of the P-Tech initiative. In addition, the programme will develop content and learning activities for participants that relate to the new P-TECH modules’ values, curriculum, the ‘Abilities Framework’ and authentic assessment approaches. The programme includes a range of components that include a large emphasis on students’ personal development and growth as well as skills to manage change, work collaboratively, learn from challenges etc. These skills do not solely sit within the fields of Business and IT and therefore, the teachers recruited will be from across a variety of subject disciplines. This will further support the sustainability of resourcing in schools, as well as allowing more equitable provision of CPD to staff, and leverage teachers’ existing specialised knowledge and strengths ( e.g. across English, Art etc. ).Target learners for this programme will be working teachers initially from the north Dublin area but eventually from a range of schools nationally as the P-TECH modules are rolled out. The needs of working teaching professionals, the contexts in which they work, the ease of access to study and balancing required to undertake part-time study have been taken into consideration in the development of the programme. The option for blended delivery provides a flexible and feasible opportunity for further study for target learners and will facilitate a national delivery of the module in the future. This option, which can be readily adapted to a wholly online offering, also mitigates risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. |
| **Rationale for Programme** |
| In November 2018, an Taoiseach, the Minster for Education and Skills and the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform announced the piloting of the P-TECH (Pathways in Technology) School Model in Dublin’s North East Inner City. This new 6-year education model seeks to integrate workplace experiences alongside second-level schooling with the aim of enabling students to develop workplace skills such as collaboration, communication, and creativity as well as professional and technical skills that will build their confidence and enhance their studies. The P-TECH modules are underpinned by specific values relating to the development of students’ confidence, self-belief, self-efficacy, and employability. Supporting and empowering students’ success will be key tenets of the teaching qualification and the curriculum will have a distinct focus on supporting the empowerment and achievement of the P-TECH students in a positive and encouraging learning environment which takes account of their distinctive needs as post-primary students. The choice of award name indicates the crossover with the existing ‘Strategies of Learning and Teaching’ module in the MA in Educational Practice and the specialised focus on supporting teachers to deliver the P-TECH modules. The choice of award at Level 9 provides a CPD opportunity for post-primary teachers that will enhance their professional development and create additional opportunities to continue their own studies at postgraduate or master’s level should they wish to do so at a later stage. The programme will be delivered as a standalone micro-credential, but it is envisaged that learners will also have the opportunity to enhance their learning and professional development by progressing to the related Certificate in Teaching Practice for P-TECH (20 Credits) programme where they can implement their learning and engage in reflection on their practice. The programme has been designed as a blended delivery offering to facilitate a national rollout and maximise the ease of access for teachers. In response to current restrictions, the module can also be delivered using a 100% online model, which mitigates future risks to classroom provision potentially arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. |

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| **Evidence of learner demand**  |
| To facilitate the delivery of the P-TECH modules in schools, the *Certificate in Strategies of Learning and Teaching for P-TECH* has been designed to provide the appropriate knowledge, skills and competences for post-primary teachers to deliver the P-TECH modules. While the programme will initially be delivered to teachers in the three P-Tech pilot schools, the objective is to scale-up delivery of the programme relative to the expansion of the P-Tech programme in post-primary schools across the country.  |

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| **Duration and Enrolment** |
|  | **First Intake Date** | **Duration (months)** | **Cohorts / Intakes per Annum** | **Enrolment i.e. learners per Intake** |
| **Maximum** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| **Part-Time** | 1st July 2021 | 12 Weeks | 3 | 5 | 50 |

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| **Panel Commentary on Section C: Programme Profile Information***This should set out the panel’s views on the adequacy of the case made by the provider for the approval of this programme as a viable, stand alone offering for the target learner group. The panel should take into account the proposed rationale, evidence of market demand, learner numbers, entry criteria, and marketing information. The information on objectives, MIPLO’s and marketing information, rationale, should also be checked.**The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind, while also recognising that the programme of which this microcredential is a module, has already been deemed to have met these criteria.****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)****Criterion 2:*** *The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought****Criterion 11:*** *Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.****Criterion 12****: The programme is well managed****The headings below are indicative only and can be removed*** |
| **Rationale, Learner Demand, Viability:**The rationale for the programme is clearly linked to the national pilot of the P-TECH School Model, and the need to provide support for delivery of these modules by upskiling post-primary teachers with the knowledge, skills and competencies to deliver the modules, ‘*Skills for Business and Employment*’, and ‘*Skills for a Digital World*’, in their schools. In reviewing the documentation, the panel was of the view that supporting teachers to re-engage with their pedagogical development in the context of the P-TECH modules, by way of accredited CPD, will inevitably enhance the overall learning experience for those post-primary students pursuing the P-TECH modules which, in turn, will further support the future rollout of the P-TECH initiative. The programme, by embracing a praxis approach, is supporting the integration of theory and practice into the classroom. The panel is supportive of the ambition to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to facilitate an exciting innovation, and therefore at pains to carry out due diligence to ensure full scrutiny of all aspects of the programme.In terms of learner demand for the programme, the programme is a prerequisite for all teachers who will be delivering the P-TECH modules. The pilot will initially be delivered by three schools in North-East Inner City Dublin, with a requirement for six teachers to be trained in each school. Teachers will be recruited on to the programme across all subject areas, as while the P-Tech modules relate to Business and Digital Skills, the focus for students is on personal growth as well as skills to manage change, work collaboratively and learn from challenges. As such, teachers may come from different disciplines. This wil further support susainability of the initaitve for schools, as well as allowing more equitable provision of CPD to staff, and leverage teachers’ existing specialised knowledge and strengths ( e.g. across English, Art etc.)Further information was requested by the panel as part of the desk review process, and it was clarified that the programme will commence in August 2021, with overlap in this first roll-out whereby the learners will still be in the process of completeing the award while teaching the Level 6 programme in schools. The panel felt it is important that NCI consider how an increase in numbers will be managed if the P-TECH pilot is further rolled out nationally. In particular, although it may be possible to scale up given the blended learning approach of the programme, it is worth considering the inherent danger that aspects of the peer learning and collaborative discussion which form an integral part of the programme, may be lost if the participant numbers increase significantly. The panel noted that the Programme Schedule allows for 3 intakes per annum up to a maximum of 140 learners in total. Classroom ratios are detailed as 1:35 so the College should remain cognisant of the ratios if unequal numbers are recruited across intakes resulting in a larger group or groups in one cohort. Recommendation: As a key strength of the programme is the high level of support, including 1:1 sessions, the provider is strongly recommended to consider how proposed increasing enrolment numbers of up to 140 learners over time will be managed, to ensure that appropriate resouring is in place to maintain these supports.**Proposed Award - consistency with NFQ:** The award of a Level 9 Certificate is consistent with the NFQ and QQI award. The panel queried if the minor adjustments to the Learning Outcomes from the existing modules in the MA programme are sufficient to cover the needs of learners for the post-primary, P-TECH, context. Specifically, in Section 2.1, Synopsis of the Programme, it states that ‘participants will need to be able to adapt, evaluate and innovate their teaching and assessment strategies to their teaching context’. The panel recognises the limitations of changes within the MIPLOs under the microcredential validaiton process, and proposes that this context may be further highlighted in the programme aims and objectives, and consideration given to making this explicit within the curriculum also. A more explicit recognition of the importance of understanding the educational disadvantaged context, and the consequences, should also be included in the documentation. Condition: The context for P-TECH, including as a response to addressing educational disadvanage, and information regarding the approach to delivery to support this context, be further embedded in the validation descriptor under aims and objectives and throughout. **Learner Interests: - (Information, QA, Supports, Benefits / Skills accruing from programme):**It is clear in the programme documentation that the learners will be fully informed on all aspects of the programme in advance. This includes a well-designed and scheduled week-by-week plan. The panel noted the orientation at the outset, as well as provision of 1:1 sessions and further inclusion of peer support sessions. It is suggested this may be further enhanced and supported by a Learner Handbook, if not already provided as part of the programme, which should contain all relevant details relating to the teaching, learning and assessment strategies of the programme, and the development of guidance documentation for learners on the various assessment strategies, e.g. a reflective practice guidance document/resource to further support learners, e-assessment design and evaluation, portfolio design.It is also suggested the team may wish to embed the creation of an Academic Writing Group as part of the overall programme. This would be particularly relevant for those engaging on the programme who may not be familiar with what is expected of them in terms of writing at this level, and to facilitate possible progression to the full Masters programme.Recommendation: As above, given the nature of the programme and the focus on individual development, supports for teachers on the programme and on-going monitoring and evaluation is key. Consideration should be given to further enhancing supports to learners through the above suggestions and ensuring mechanisms to keep these under close review through the lifetime of the programme. |

1. Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment

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| **Summary of specifications for teaching staff** |
| **Role** | **Profile** | **WTE** |
| Lecturer | Lecturing staff should normally hold a PhD in Education or related discipline or, at a minimum, a Level 9 award with relevant professional experience.  | 3 |
| Programme Director | The Programme Director will hold a PhD in Education or related discipline or, at a minimum, a Level 9 award with relevant professional experience. The Programme Director will also be a lecturer on the programme.  | 0.25 |
| Programme Coordinator | The Programme Coordinator will have experience in relationship management and providing administrative support to faculty involved in the delivery in the programme.  | 0.25 |

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| **Mode(s) of Delivery** |
| The programme will be delivered through a blended learning mode, comprising classroom-based (50%) and synchronous online (50%) activities. The programme can also be delivered using a 100% online model, consisting of synchronous online (50%) and directed e-learning (50%) activities, which mitigates future risks to classroom provision potentially arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. |

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| **Assessment Strategy** |
| The assessment strategy for the programme consists of 100% continuous assessment with two staged assignments that balance the workload across the programme and build cumulatively to afford demonstration of the achievement of programme learning outcomes. These assignments comprise of a presentation (40%), which requires learners to design and deliver a mini session on a topic relating to the P-TECH curriculum to their peers, and a theoretical and practical skills demonstration (60%), which requires learners to plan and design a Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy for a P-TECH learning event. |

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| **Panel Commentary on Section D: Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment***This should set out the panel’s views on the programme content, mode(s) of delivery and assessment, human and ICT resources. If the parent programme is more than a year old, the currency of module content and supporting technology should be checked.**The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind, while also recognising that the programme of which this microcredential is a module, has already been deemed to have met these criteria.* *Criterion 5: The programme’s written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose.**Criterion 6: There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned**Criterion 7:* *There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned**Criterion 8: The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme’s learners**Criterion 10: There are sound assessment strategies**The headings below are indicative only and can be removed* |
| **Currency of content:**The parent programme was validated in 2020. The programme content seems appropriately aligned to the learning outcomes, and offers both theoretical and practical dimensions. However, as above, the panel felt that the programme content should be more explicitly linked to the P-TECH context throughout the validation descriptor.Whilst it is very valuable that learners on the programme will be ‘encouraged to critically engage with a wide range of instructional strategies including technology-enhanced learning tools and to critically reflect on how to utilise and adapt to their teaching context’, it would also be important that they consider the broader use and issues of technology within teaching, rather than focussing exclusively on the learning tools. In that sense, there is scope here for the inclusion of themes such as ‘digital literacy, digital well-being and citizenship’. It would be important for a learner who is planning on facilitating on the P-TECH modules to be exposed to such broader issues within their own CPD. The indicative content is clearly laid out in a weekly plan, and it is suggested that there may be further scope here to conceptualise the structure by way of overarching themes. It is not necessarily clear if the topics explored follow a particular logic, but, for example Weeks 1–3 may be headed ‘Pedagogies to support Student Engagement’ and would encompass an amalgam of the topics under that theme, which could be developed in subsequent weeks and sessions, scaffolding the learning across the programme. Reading lists should be expanded and updated. In particular, consideration of inclusion of Irish publications or articles, and alternative resources such as podcasts. **Delivery mode(s):**The programme’s blended approach is well considered given the nature of the learning outcomes and content of the programme. Not only does it offer a flexible approach to CPD, but it allows learners on the programme to experience different technologies and practices which they may wish to replicate in their own classroom environments. As part of the review process the Programme Team clarified to the panel that 100% online delivery is intended only as a contingency option under any continuing COVID-19 restrictions.The panel noted the addition of additional peer support sessions as detailed in the further information and this is welcomed as a way to allow learners to offer more concrete peer support throughout the programme.Condition: As above, the context for P-TECH should be made explicit throughout the documentation.Recommendation:Reading lists should be updated, and to include relevant Irish publications and other resources.Consideration should be given to structuring the content under themes as well as greater use of collaborative learning tools.**Assessment strategy:**While the assessment type and breakdown is clearly laid out, the panel considered a need for more detail on the assessments presented, e.g. length of presentation/word count/rubric, etc. In terms of the second assessment, learners are being asked to plan and design a teaching, learning and assessment strategy for a specific module or learning event. Could this be considered very similar in nature to the first assessment? The panel would encourage the programme team to continue to consider varied forms of assessment, including via group work, (e.g. poster creation, design and evaluation of a technologically-based teaching and learning intervention, contributions to a discussion board, creation of a video-based teaching resource, evaluation of existing TEL resource), which could be used in future roll-outs of the programme and in building the community of practice through the VLE.Consideration should be given to the feedback strategy, especially given the short duration of the programme, to ensure that learners are aware of how and when they will be give feedback. This is particularly important for formative feedback across the duration of the programme/module.Condition: Further details of assessment requirements are made explicit in the documentation, including indicative length/word count/rubric/feedback mechanisms/timing.Recommendation: On-going consideration is given to include a variety of assessment instruments, including collaborative and group work. **Human and ICT resources:**The panel is satisfied that the programme appears to be appropriately resourced.  |

# Overall recommendation to QQI

## Programme:

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

### Reasons for the overall recommendation

Having reviewed the documentation and further information provided as part of the process, the panel believes that the microcredential programme is constructed appropriately to support teachers to gain the skills and competencies to support the P-TECH model in schools. The panel is supportive of the aim to equip teachers in facilitating an exciting innovation in the sector.

### Any other observations:

The panel thanks the Programme Team for the provision of timely and detailed additional information which was requested as part of the process. It would be useful to include this as Appendices to the main validation descriptor document for completeness.

### Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

### Condition 1: The context for P-TECH, including as a response to addressing educational disadvantage, and information regarding the approach to delivery to support this context, be further embedded in the validation descriptor under aims and objectives and throughout.

### Condition 2: Further details of assessment requirements are made explicit in the documentation, including indicative length/word count/rubric/feedback mechanisms/timing.

### Recommendations

### The provider is strongly recommended to consider how proposed increasing enrolment numbers of up to 140 learners over time will be managed, to ensure that appropriate resourcing is in place to maintain these supports.

### Consideration should be given to further enhancing supports to learners and ensuring mechanisms to keep these under close review through the lifetime of the programme.

### Reading lists should be updated and to include relevant Irish publications and other resources.

### Consideration should be given to structuring the curriculum content under themes and greater use of collaborative learning.

### On-going consideration is given to include a variety of assessment instruments, including collaborative and group work.

## Declarations of Evaluators’ Interests

N/A

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

Panel chairperson: Lori Johnston Date: 12 May 2021

Signed: 

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