

**QQI**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. Provider details

Provider name	Hibernia College (in collaboration with The Institute of Child Education and Psychology, ICEP)
Date of site visit	20 th June 2022
Date of report	27 th June 2022

Section A. Overall recommendations

Principal programme	Title	Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education
	Award	Master of Arts
	Credit	90
	Recommendation <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions.

Embedded programme 1	Title	Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education
	Award	Postgraduate Diploma in Arts
	Credit	60
	Recommendation <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions.

Section B. Expert Panel

Name	Role	Affiliation
Dr. Michael Hannon	Chair	Atlantic Technological University
Dr. Miriam Twomey	Subject Matter Expert	Trinity College Dublin
Dr. Michele Dunleavy	Subject Matter Expert	Mary Immaculate College
Ms. Kim O'Mahony	Secretary	University Of Limerick
Ms. Anna Frayne	Learner Representative	Saint Nicholas Montessori College (recent graduate)
Ms. Éilís Dillon	Employer Representative	St. Cecilia's Special School

Section C. Principal Programme

Names of centre(s) where the programme(s) is to be provided	Maximum number of learners (FT)	Maximum number of learners (PT)
Hibernia College	0	500

Proposed Duration and Enrolment					
	First Intake Date	Duration	Intakes per Annum	Enrolment i.e. learners per Intake	
			Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Full-Time	12 Sep 2022	0	0	0	0
Part-Time	12 Sep 2022	24	2	10	500
Intake Schedule e.g. January September					

Panel Commentary on proposed enrolment:

With two intakes per annum, with a proposed minimum intake of 10 and maximum intake of 500, the panel are of the view that an initial intake of 500 would be unrealistic. During panel discussions with Hibernia staff, however, a more realistic proposed initial intake of 100 was proposed.

Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)

The MA in Inclusive and Special Education is a two-year, part-time blended programme designed to meet the growing demand for flexible postgraduate training in the area of special and inclusive education. It is relevant to teachers and allied professionals working in a range of educational settings, including both primary and post primary contexts. The aim of the programme is to develop and enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, values and competencies in support of providing inclusive and quality education for all. The programme enables educators to acquire deep understanding and expertise and develop their skills in carrying out educational research relevant to inclusion and learners with diverse special or additional needs. The award facilitates career progression and further studies at doctoral level.

This blended programme will be delivered mainly online, providing a flexible route to specialist training for educators, thereby addressing gaps in existing provision and facilitating wider

participation and capacity-building within the education system. The MA in Inclusive and Special Education and its embedded programme (PgDip in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education) is modular in structure and comprises four modules (15 ECTS each), and a research and dissertation component (30 ECTS).

The programme will be offered on a modular, part-time basis over 2–3 years, offering maximum flexibility. The maximum break allowable between modules will be 2 years.

Target learner groups

The MA in Inclusive and Special Education programme is designed to meet the professional and personal needs of teachers and other professionals working with pupils with special and additional learning needs in diverse educational settings. This programme will appeal to those wishing to deepen and develop their professional and theoretical knowledge, skills and qualifications; it will be of particular interest to special education teachers and those who may wish to take on coordinating or leadership roles in a range of educational contexts relevant to inclusion and special education. The modular structure and online model of delivery also makes it particularly suitable to those teachers seeking a more flexible postgraduate option due to personal circumstances, work or other commitments.

Approved countries for provision

Ireland

Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time

Part time.

The teaching and learning modalities

Blended learning

Summary of specifications for teaching staff

Role	Profile	WTE
Module Lead/ Tutors	Master's qualification (NFQ Level 9) or equivalent Minimum 3 years' experience in education	3
Academic/Programme Lead	Doctoral qualification (NFQ Level 10) Proven experience in the sector/equivalent; experience in higher education desirable; evidence of engagement in research and publication of research desirable	1
Programme administrator	Bachelor's degree (NFQ Level 8) Minimum 3 years' student/higher education administration experience	0.5
Librarian	Master's (NFQ Level 9) in Library and Information Management or equivalent	0.1

Learning Activity

Ratio of learners to teaching staff

Asynchronous tutor support

50:1

Face-to-face (F2F) lecture

50:1

Live online classes	50:1
Research supervision and one-to-one support	1:1
Learning activities	500:1
Online directed learning	500:1
Online group discussion forums	50:1

Panel Commentary on programme outline and staffing:

Programme staff have comprehensive and internationally renowned knowledge in relation to the programme and are very capable of delivery of this programme based on CV information provided to the panel, level of qualification in addition to expertise and relevant experience. Clearly outlined role descriptors were also provided to the panel.

The inclusion of other professions such as Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist would add to the level of expertise required for this programme, thus providing a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)		
Code	Title	Last enrolment date
N/A	N/A	N/A

Section D. Other noteworthy features of the application

This was a well-written submission with lots of supporting documentation. Clear rationale outlined for the programme. The programme is differentiated by its flexible, blended mode of delivery and modular structure. It enables continued professional development in a structured and inclusive way, addressing the needs of a wider constituency of learners. Both providers have a strong history in education provision for the educational community and are well positioned to deliver this programme.

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

Having examined appropriate QA / Governance procedures, comment on the case for extending the applicant's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision of this programme. (Especially relevant for move to online delivery / assessment)

N/A

Part 2. Evaluation against the validation criteria

Criterion 1. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme

<p>a) The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.¹</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Partially	Concerns were raised by the panel in relation to the collaborative agreement between Hibernia College and The Institute of Child Education and Psychology (ICEP). Section 7.1 of the draft agreement stated that all intellectual property pertaining to the programme remained with ICEP. As Hibernia College were submitting the application for validation, this posed as a significant challenge to the application process.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Partially	As above

The panel have evaluated the programme having regard to the criterion and sub-criterion and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme partially meets this criterion. The deficiencies identified are in relation to programme governance, in particular ownership of the programme intellectual property.

The panel met with senior management of both Hibernia College and ICEP to discuss governance of the programme. Agreement was reached that the Collaborative Agreement would be re-drafted in relation to intellectual property of the programme.

Condition 1

In the context of the collaborative agreement, Section 7.1 needs to be redrafted to confirm the programme is owned by Hibernia College.

¹This 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.

Criterion 2. The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought

<p>a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.</p> <p>b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.</p> <p>(i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.</p> <p>c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).</p> <p>d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's <i>Policy and Criteria for Making Awards</i>.</p> <p>e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.</p> <p>f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are</p> <p>(i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.</p> <p>(ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.</p> <p>g) For each programme and embedded programme</p> <p>(i) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.²</p> <p>(ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are consistent with the relevant QQI awards standards.</p> <p>h) Where applicable, the minimum intended module learning outcomes are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.</p> <p>i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.</p> <p>For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.³</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Programme objectives are clearly outlined and the programme is mapped to QQI's Generic Awards Standards.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

Programme objectives have been clearly outlined, including the legislative perspective. The programme is mapped to QQI's Generic Awards Standards. The minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) and programme learning outcomes (PLOs) are clearly stated and are based on a sound rationale for the programme to be delivered. The clarity of the programme objectives and outcomes are consistent with QQI award sought.

² Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.

³ 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.

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)

<p>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.⁴</p> <p>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.</p> <p>(i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).</p> <p>(iv) There is evidence⁵ of learner demand for the programme.</p> <p>(v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant⁶.</p> <p>(vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.⁷</p> <p>c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	The programme is well designed, practical and linked to QQI standards and meets the growing demand for special education needs (SEN) programmes.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	

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

From the conceptual stage, the programme is well designed, practical and linked to QQI standards. The applicants have based their course on a very sound rationale. Special education needs (SEN) has become a primary focus for teachers, driven by policy initiatives both nationally and internationally and the increasing number of pupils with additional educational requirements.

⁴ 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.

⁵ This might be predictive or indirect.

⁶ It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

⁷ 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.

The programme has drawn from the expertise of both staff and stakeholders. The blended mode of delivery is suitable for a wide range of participants and allows them to complete the course while working full-time or engaged in other commitments.

The panel commends Hibernia on the concept and rationale for this programme.

However, the targeted cohort should include a wider range of educators to fulfil QQI standards and awards. The focus in the documentation is heavily weighted towards teachers while the content has relevance and appeal to a much broader cohort. There is an opportunity to market and promote this programme to a wider cohort of applicants beyond the cohort referenced in the documentation.

Recommendation 1:

Market and promote this programme to a wider cohort of applicants beyond the cohort referenced in the documentation.

Criterion 4. The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory

<p>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 satisfied⁸.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 (CEFR⁹) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Reflects the core <i>intended programme learning outcomes</i>, 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. <p>g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Procedures for access, transfer and progression are clearly outlined and in line with QQI policy.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above.

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

Procedures for access, transfer and progression are clearly outlined and in line with QQI policy. Entry requirements are defined. Application is open to all qualified learners, not just those currently working in a teaching role. Progression and transfer routes are clearly articulated. Supporting policies and procedures are available as part of Hibernia Quality Assurance Framework. The applicant has demonstrated that this programme has a strategic fit with other relative courses in Ireland. The programme will be of interest to educators

⁸ 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

⁹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

working with pupils with special education and additional learning needs in diverse primary and post-primary educational settings. In addition, it will appeal to other professionals working in the fields of inclusion and special needs in education, health and community settings.

A discussion ensued during the review visit as to the merit of accepting potential applicants onto the programme who currently hold a level 7 award. Concern was expressed as to how any potential gaps in knowledge, skills and attributes would be bridged. The panel therefore recommend that the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy, is rigorously enforced, to ensure that level 8 outcomes are achieved for potential level 7 applicants.

Recommendation 2

Review the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy in relation to the programme, to ensure that level 8 outcomes are achieved for potential level 7 applicants.

Criterion 5. The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose

<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended <i>programme</i> learning outcomes.</p> <p>d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.</p> <p>e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles¹⁰.</p> <p>f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.</p> <p>g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.</p> <p>i) Elements such as practice placement and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.</p> <p>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.¹¹</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	<p>Very clear rationale for the programme structure was outlined. Indicative timetable and formative assessment strategy presented.</p> <p>The panel were of the opinion that the name 'Thesis 1' in the module title had the potential to lead to confusion among learners, as there is only one thesis. This needs to be reconsidered.</p>
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Very clear rationale for the programme structure was outlined. Indicative timetable and formative assessment strategy presented.

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

The programme content and the learning outcomes were developed following wide consultation, research, and review of market needs in teacher professional development. It is evident that the team of expert educators in the field of inclusive education worked collaboratively to develop the modules to the highest specification and requirements. All developments were guided by a programme board and advised on changes at different

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

iterations. The programme board is comprised of an academic team with international expertise in special needs, inclusion and psychology, in addition to blended pedagogy. The programme addresses the growing demand for more flexible access to postgraduate training in the area of special and inclusive education among educators in Ireland.

The panel commends Hibernia on the explicit use of up-to-date research methods when developing the modules. The structure of the modules is also commendable, with the module on inclusivity coming first. This forms the foundation for theoretical learning for the remainder of the modules. All of the modules are well structured with an excellent choice of electives.

During panel meetings with staff at the review visit, the inclusion of the word 'Thesis 1' was discussed. There was general consensus among the panel that the naming of the module including 'thesis 1' had the potential to lead to confusion among learners. The panel recommends removing 'thesis 1' from the title.

Recommendation 3

Revisit the naming of the module to remove 'Thesis 1' as this has the potential to lead to confusion among learners.

Criterion 6. There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned

<p>a) The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).</p> <p>b) The programme has an identified complement of staff¹² (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 development¹³ opportunities¹⁴.</p> <p>e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.</p> <p>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.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Programme staff have comprehensive and internationally renowned knowledge in relation to the programme and are very capable to deliver the programme.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

During the review visit, the panel met a range of staff from both Hibernia College and ICEP. All staff were enthusiastic in their support for this programme and displayed a strong passion for the subject matter. CVs of programme staff were provided to the panel as part of the review self-evaluation process. Processes and procedures are in place for staff development and performance review.

Initially there was a degree of concern among panel members regarding the use of professionals such as multi-disciplinary therapists in the programme design and delivery. This was not clearly

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

outlined in the self-evaluation documentation. However, discussions during the review visit clarified that therapists were, indeed, involved in the programme design.

Recommendation 4

Modify programme documentation to clarify the use of multi-disciplinary therapists in programme design and delivery.

Criterion 7. There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned

<p>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).</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(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 <p>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).</p> <p>d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Planned intake (first five years) and(ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake. <p>e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Blended programme with limited requirement for physical resources. IT resources outlined. Policy in place in Hibernia to oversee quality of physical resources where required.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

As this programme is planned for blended delivery, there is limited requirement for physical resources. However, where these will be required, Hibernia College have a policy in place to oversee the quality of physical resources, and to ensure, where possible, that premises are selected with due consideration to the geographical location of learners. This policy is published as part of the Hibernia Quality Assurance Framework.

Both Hibernia College and ICEP have a long history of implementing similar courses and have established a track record in terms of building the physical resources to deliver this type of programme.

The panel are satisfied that IT processes, procedures and resources are sufficient for programme delivery, with much emphasis given to digital delivery.

Panel members felt that programme documentation may perhaps have been slightly misleading in their descriptor of the blended approach, as the programme has very limited face-to-face delivery. There is a need to be more specific in the marketing of the programme, particularly in relation to the percentage of the programme that is face-to-face vs. on-line delivery. It was also perceived that face-to-face learning opportunities should be considered beyond induction as appropriate.

All programme documentation needs to be specific in relation to the percentage of the programme that will be delivered on-line vs. face-to-face.

Recommendation 5

Consider scheduling face-to-face learning opportunities beyond the planned induction session, as appropriate.

Recommendation 6

Ensure all programme documentation is specific in relation to the percentage of the programme that will be delivered on-line vs. face-to-face.

Criterion 8. The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners

<p>a) The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.</p> <p>c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.</p>		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	The blended delivery incorporates on-line and face-to-face elements. Learners are supported through a range of online resources and tools in the VLE which is enhanced by in-person support where required.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

The blended delivery model for this programme incorporates on-line and face-to-face elements which are pedagogically sound and infrastructurally supported.

The panel commends Hibernia College for progress to date in support of the online environment. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is a rich environment for all kinds of educational content. It was noted during panel discussions that Hibernia College were recent winners of the Irish Education Award for the VLE.

The digital library facilities and support were also highly noteworthy of commendation. Databases are provided through the VLE, with online, telephone and in-person support for both faculty and staff. Regular usage statistics enables the content to be kept up-to-date and relevant.

Criterion 9. There are sound teaching and learning strategies

<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.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).d) Learning is monitored/supervised.e) Individualised guidance, support¹⁵ and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	The multiple modes of delivery facilitate active learning. The teaching, learning and assessment strategy is aligned to the MIPLOS and the programme is mapped to QQI Generic Awards Standards. The teaching and learning environment provides significant opportunities for the integration of learning.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

From a pedagogical perspective, the multiple modes of delivery facilitate active learning. The programme is underpinned by an inclusive philosophy for programme delivery. Themes were clearly interspersed across modules. Cross-modular themes, such as inclusive pedagogy or the evaluation of evidence-based interventions, facilitate the integration and consolidation of learning and the application of knowledge and skills to new contexts.

Formative feedback is systematically provided throughout the programme, including feedback on summative assessment, in class forums and in on-line moderation.

The teaching and learning environment provides significant opportunities for the integration of learning, through independent and directed learning, embedded reflection tasks, interactive learning activities, peer collaboration, discussion and feedback, as well as formative and summative assessment. The panel commends the numerous options available to learners for engagement.

There was some uncertainty among panel members as to the exact staff/student ratio for the delivery of lectures and tutorials. The panel recommends an update of programme documentation to clearly articulate the staff/student ratio for both all programme elements.

¹⁵ 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.

Recommendation 7

Update programme documentation to clearly articulate the staff/student ratio for all programme elements.

Criterion 10. There are sound assessment strategies

<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) All assessment is undertaken consistently with <i>Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards</i>¹⁶b) 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.¹⁷d) The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.e) There is a satisfactory written <i>programme assessment strategy</i> for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.¹⁸f) 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.¹⁹		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Partially	There is a mix of summative and formative assessment strategies, which is in line with Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. It also aligns with similar programmes offered in other institutions. However, there was some ambiguity regarding final assessment.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Partially	As above

The panel has evaluated the programme having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme partially meets this criterion. The minor deficiencies relate to the outline of clear and concise assessment strategies.

All assessment is conducted and managed in line with Hibernia College's Assessment, Grading and Certification Policy, which forms part of their overall QA Framework. It includes a range of both summative and formative assessment. These are aligned with Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards.

Initial review of the self-evaluation documentation led to some unclarity among panel members as to the exact nature of the assessment strategy, particularly in relation to the thesis element. Clarification was sought during the review meetings. In order to avoid any

¹⁶ See the section on transitional arrangements.

¹⁷ This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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).

ambiguity among learners, it is imperative that assessment strategies are clear and concise in all programme documentation.

Condition 2

Assessment strategies must be clear and concise in order to avoid any ambiguity for the learner. Module descriptors must be updated to reflect this.

Criterion 11. Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

<ul style="list-style-type: none">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 disabilities²⁰.i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the <i>Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students</i>²¹ 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).		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	Throughout the programme, learners are informed and supported through a range of online resources and tools in the VLE and also through the dedicated Student Support Officer.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

There is a full-time Student Support Officer in Hibernia in addition to a comprehensive VLE, which acts as a central repository for all student-related information and activities. Academic and pastoral supports are sign-posted to learners via on-line orientation and through the VLE. ICEP Europe provide academic advisory and pastor support services through individual tutors or the academic advisor system. Email and telephone support are also available. Policies and procedures for appeals and complaints are published through the Quality Assurance Framework.

²⁰ 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).

²¹ See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

During our meetings with college staff, the panel was informed of measures in place to ensure reasonable accommodation for all learners. This is supported by an overarching Reasonable Accommodation Policy as part of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Criterion 12. The programme is well managed

<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.e) Quality assurance²² is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.		
Programme	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Reason(s) for finding
Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	There is a comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework in place in support of this programme, which has been formally approved by QQI. The Framework outlines specific programme management arrangements in relation to governance.
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education	Yes	As above

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

The programme is supported by Hibernia's approved Quality Assurance Framework which is published on a dedicated platform on the website and is very comprehensive in content and structure. The programme has been designed in accordance with the QA Framework and the operational and management arrangements are clearly articulated. The programme has also been mapped to the applicable QQI Generic Awards Standards. Rationale for the programme is underpinned by policy and legislative requirements.

The panel commends the fact that the Programme Board is co-chaired, with members from both Hibernia College and ICEP. There is strong expertise in both providers for the delivery of this programme.

²² See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

Part 3. Overall recommendation to QQI

3.1 Principal programme: Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education

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;
X	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

1. The programme meets (or partially, in two cases) all of the evaluation criteria. The programme submission was well-written and supported with relevant documentation. The programme is mapped to QQI's Generic Awards Standards and is governed and managed according to Hibernia's Quality Assurance Framework. Rational for the programme is underpinned by policy and legislative requirements. The programme also addresses the growing demand for more flexible access to postgraduate training in the area of special and inclusive education among educators in Ireland.

Commendations

1. The panel commends Hibernia on the concept and rationale for this programme.
2. The panel commends Hibernia on the explicit use of up-to-date research methods when developing the modules. The structure of the modules is also commendable, with the module on inclusivity coming first. This forms the foundation for theoretical learning for the remainder of the modules. All of the modules are well structured with an excellent choice of electives.
3. The panel commends Hibernia College for progress to date in support of the online environment. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is a rich environment for all kinds of educational content. It was noted during panel discussions that Hibernia College were recent winners of the Irish Education Award for the VLE.
4. The digital library facilities and support were also highly noteworthy of commendation. Databases are provided through the VLE, with online, telephone and in-person support for both faculty and staff. Regular usage statistics enables the content to be kept up-to-date and relevant.
5. The panel commends the numerous options available to learners for engagement.
6. The panel commends the fact that the Programme Board is co-chaired, with members from both Hibernia College and ICEP. There is strong expertise in both providers for the delivery of this programme.

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

1. In the context of the collaborative agreement, Section 7.1 needs to be redrafted to confirm the programme is owned by Hibernia College.
2. Assessment strategies must be clear and concise in order to avoid any ambiguity for the learner. Module descriptors must be updated to reflect this.

Embedded programme: Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education

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;
X	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

1. The programme meets (or partially, in two cases) all of the evaluation criteria. The programme submission was well-written and supported with relevant documentation. The programme is mapped to QQIs Generic Awards Standards and is governed and managed according to Hibernia's Quality Assurance Framework. Rational for the programme is underpinned by policy and legislative requirements. The programme also addresses the growing demand for more flexible access to postgraduate training in the area of special and inclusive education among educators in Ireland.

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4. The digital library facilities and support were also highly noteworthy of commendation. Databases are provided through the VLE, with online, telephone and in-person support for both faculty and staff. Regular usage statistics enables the content to be kept up-to-date and relevant.
5. The panel commends the numerous options available to learners for engagement.
6. The panel commends the fact that the Programme Board is co-chaired, with members from both Hibernia College and ICEP. There is strong expertise in both providers for the delivery of this programme.

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2. Assessment strategies must be clear and concise in order to avoid any ambiguity for the learner. Module descriptors must be updated to reflect this.

Summary of recommended special conditions of validation

1. In the context of the collaborative agreement, Section 7.1 needs to be redrafted to confirm the programme is owned by Hibernia College.
2. Assessment strategies must be clear and concise in order to avoid any ambiguity for the learner. Module descriptors must be updated to reflect this.

Summary of recommendations to the provider

1. Market and promote this programme to a wider cohort of applicants beyond the cohort referenced in the documentation.
2. Review the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy in relation to the programme, to ensure that level 8 outcomes are achieved for potential level 7 applicants.
3. Revisit the naming of the module to remove 'Thesis 1' as this has the potential to lead to confusion among learners.
4. Modify programme documentation to clarify the use of multi-disciplinary therapists in programme design and delivery.
5. Consider scheduling face-to-face learning opportunities beyond the planned induction session, as appropriate.
6. Ensure all project documentation is specific when marketing the percentage of the programme which is face-to-face vs. on-line.
7. Update programme documentation to clearly articulate the staff/student ratio for all programme elements.

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

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

Panel chairperson:

Date:

Signed:

3.2 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.

Proposed programme schedules

PG24863 Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education

Name of Provider		Hibernia College													
Programme Title		PG24863 Master of Arts in Inclusive and Special Education													
Award Title		Master of Arts							Exit Award		N/A				
Teaching and learning modalities		E-learning (directed); E-learning (self-directed); Group Discussions; Lectures / Classes; One-on-One Sessions; Self Directed Learning; Tutorials/One on one supported learning; Webinars													
Delivery Modes	Award Class	Award NFQ Level	Award EQF Level		Stage		Stage NFQ Level		Stage Credits		First Intake		ISCED Code		
Part time	Major	9	7		Stage 1		7		60		12 Sep 2022		01.1.4		
Module					Total Student Effort Module (Hours)					Allocation of Marks					
Title			Semester	Status	Credit	Total Hours	Class Contact Hours	Direct e-learning	Hours of independent learning	Work-based learning efforts	C.A. %	Project %	Skills demonstration %	Exam %	Work based %
Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs			Not Applicable	M	15	375	52	70	253	0	100	0	0	0	0
General Learning Disabilities			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Dyslexia and Literacy			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Understanding Autism			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Understanding Behaviour as Communication			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Research Methods and Thesis			Not Applicable	M	30	750	54	140	556	0	0	100	00		0

Name of Provider		Hibernia College													
Programme Title		PG24865 Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Inclusive and Special Education													
Award Title		Postgraduate Diploma in Arts							Exit Award		No				
Teaching and learning modalities		E-learning (directed); E-learning (self-directed); Group Discussions; Lectures / Classes; Self Directed Learning; Tutorials/One on one supported learning; Webinars													
Delivery Modes	Award Class	Award NFQ Level	Award EQF Level	Stage		Stage NFQ Level		Stage Credits		First Intake		ISCED Code			
Part time	Major	9	7	Award Stage		7		60		12 Sep 2022		01.1.4			
Module					Total Student Effort Module (Hours)					Allocation of Marks					
Title			Semester	Status	Credit	Total Hours	Class Contact Hours	Direct e-learning	Hours of independent learning	Work-based learning efforts	C.A. %	Project %	Skills demonstration %	Exam %	Work based %
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General Learning Disabilities			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Dyslexia and Literacy			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Understanding Autism			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0
Understanding Behaviour as Communication			Not Applicable	E	15	375	45	70	260	0	100	0	0	0	0