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## Approval of Linked Providers' Quality Assurance Procedures

### 1. Context

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, herein referred to as Trinity, as a Designated Awarding Body (DAB) has prescribed responsibilities under the Quality & Qualifications Act 2012 (QQI Act 2012) and QQI Sector Specific Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies with respect to arrangements with higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking or receiving validation of programmes of education and/or research leading to Trinity Awards. Under the Act these providers are referred to as *linked providers*.

Linked providers are responsible under §28(1) of the Act to “establish procedures in writing, for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the provider provides”. §33 (1) of the Act requires that in establishing procedures under §28(1) of the Act “a linked provider shall submit a draft of the proposed procedures to the relevant designated awarding body for approval”.

The QQI Act 2012 and the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines places the responsibility with the provider for the mechanisms and procedures adopted to achieve and maintain a desired level of quality. The onus is on the the provider at all times to ensure procedures are fit-for-purpose and compliant with legislation, regulation and good practice in each jurisdiction in which it operates.

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the process by which Trinity will fulfil its responsibilities under §33 (1) of the Act to:

- a. approve the proposed quality assurance procedures;
- b. refuse to approve the proposed quality assurance procedures but make recommendations to the linked provider, as Trinity considers appropriate;
- c. refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

This initial approval process is a ‘once-off’ requirement under the Act.

This policy also outlines the process by which Trinity will on an ongoing basis, review and approve linked providers’ new and revised procedures subsequent to initial approval.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to linked providers with whom Trinity has entered into formal arrangements in respect of validated programmes of education.

- 3.1. Trinity College will quality assure the linked provider's quality procedures in relation to validated academic programmes, the quality of teaching and learning, and the student experience of teaching and learning on these programmes.
- 3.2. Trinity College requires that linked providers self-certify the quality of non-academic procedures which fall within the legal and corporate responsibility of the linked provider as separate legal entities and provide to Trinity a signed checklist detailing those procedures and where any such procedures have a statutory basis, linked providers are also asked to provide evidence of external review and assurance of those procedures.
- 3.3. Trinity reserves the right to audit any or all of the Linked Providers quality assurance policies and procedures.
- 3.4. The effectiveness review of approved quality assurance procedures required under §37 (1) (a) of the Act is out of scope of this policy i.e. an external Quality Review.
- 3.5. Education programmes leading to Trinity College or University of Dublin Awards can only be provided by the linked provider under formal arrangements in other jurisdictions by prior arrangement with Trinity and are outside the scope of this policy.

### 4. Benefits

- 4.1. The policy provides direction on the roles, responsibilities and timelines associated with the process for approval by Trinity of linked provider quality assurance procedures as they relate to the above scope.
- 4.2. It recognises that quality and its assurance is the primary responsibility of the linked provider.
- 4.3. It mitigates the risk of non-compliance in areas of corporate, legislative, and regulatory compliance by requiring linked providers to seek external review and assurance that quality procedures are fit-for-purpose and comply with current national legislation in Ireland.

### 5. Definition

- 5.1 QQI defines linked providers as higher education providers that do not have the power to award degrees, but provide a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body through arrangements with a designated awarding body.
- 5.2 Trinity identifies linked providers as non-awarding institutions where Trinity is typically the only designating awarding body with formal arrangements in respect of validated programmes of education delivered by the linked provider on the National Framework of Qualifications.
- 5.3 Trinity identifies as collaborative education partners:
  - i. non-awarding institutions with whom Trinity has a formal agreement to co- deliver a programme of education where Trinity's quality assurance policies and procedures apply to the quality assurance of the programme delivered by the

provider and awarded by Trinity College Dublin or The University of Dublin on the National Framework of Qualifications;

- ii. designated awarding bodies in Ireland and internationally with whom Trinity has formal arrangement to co-deliver programmes of education under the Trinity's 'Collaborative and Transnational Education Policy or Dual and Joint Awards Policy.

## **6. Principles**

- 6.1 Quality and its assurance is the primary responsibility of the linked provider, it involves planning, defining, assessing and improving practice.
- 6.2. Successful quality assurance systems are efficient, well communicated and integrated into the normal activities of the linked provider's operations and are fit for context and purpose.

## **7. Procedure for Initial Approval of Linked Providers' Quality Assurance Procedures**

### **7.1 Notification**

- 7.1.1. Trinity will notify its linked providers of the requirement to submit as outlined under 3.1 and 3.2 above:
  - 7.1.1.1 proposed quality assurance procedures for approval in respect of academic programmes, the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience of teaching and learning on those programmes;
  - 7.1.1.2 a checklist certified by the authorised signatory within the linked provider institution detailing the non-academic and related services quality assurance procedures which fall within their legal and corporate responsibility as a separate legal entity; and where those procedures have a statutory basis, evidence of the required external review and assurance that they are fit-for-purpose and comply with current national legislation in Ireland;
  - 7.1.1.3 a signed declaration by the Chair of the Governing Authority to accompany the certified checklist (refer attached template to this Policy)
- 7.1.2. Trinity will negotiate a timeframe for submission with each linked provider given its individual context and strategy with respect to an application for the proposed International Education Mark and Trinity's schedule for quality reviews.

### **7.2 Submission**

- 7.2.1. The submission will be accepted during statutory term and should be directed to Trinity's Quality Officer, who will acknowledge receipt within three working days. The submission will be in three parts:

Part 1 - hard and soft copies of quality assurance procedures in respect of academic programmes, the quality of teaching and learning, and the student experience on those programmes.

Part 2 - certified checklist of quality assurance procedures in respect of non-academic and related services procedures that fall within the legal and corporate responsibility of the linked provider as a separate legal entity.

Part 3 – a signed declaration that:

- quality assurance procedures have been approved by the linked provider's governance and management in accordance with internal quality assurance procedures;
- quality assurance procedures are fit-for-purpose and comply with current national legislation in Ireland

7.2.2. Linked Providers will be required to provide evidence of external review of quality assurance in respect of policies and procedures with a statutory basis. The external review may be conducted by an individual with the appropriate qualifications or a body that is a recognised authority. The standard of evidence required is a formal letter e. g. Auditor's Letter, Legal Advice or equivalent e.g. current Health and Safety Certificate. The letter should list the policies reviewed by title and provide the necessary sign-off that those procedures are 'fit for purpose and compliant with national legislation.

### 7.3. Assessment for Approval

In assessing the linked provider's quality assurance procedures, Trinity will apply the following criteria:

#### 7.3.1. Compliance

- a. All parts of the submission comply with the requirements under 7.2.1
- b. All quality assurance procedures demonstrate they have regard to the following as they apply to the scope of education provision on the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ levels 6-10): foundation, undergraduate; postgraduate taught and postgraduate research:
  - i. *Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*;
  - ii. *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (April 2016), applicable to all Higher Education Institutions and incorporating the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG May 2015);
  - iii. Relevant QQI Policies, e.g. *Protection of Enrolled Learners Policy, Access, Transfer & Progression Policy, and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy*;
  - iv. In addition, for existing linked providers:
    - Memoranda of Understanding or contracts that form the basis for the arrangements with Trinity;
    - Trinity policies upon which the linked providers procedures are contingent for their full enactment, e.g. External Examiner Policy, New Programme Design and Approval Policy, Plagiarism Policy.
  - v. In addition, for aspirant linked providers:

- the relevant Quality Assurance guidelines under which their programmes of education are currently validated, e.g. *QQI Independent and Private Providers Quality Assurance Guidelines*
- vi. Where applicable (to be confirmed at the time of notification) the linked providers' quality assurance procedures may also need to demonstrate alignment with:
  - Professional and Statutory Body standards and curriculum requirements for validated programmes of education;
  - QQI *Policy Code of Practice for the provision of programmes of education and training to international learners*;
  - QQI topic-specific quality assurance guidelines, e.g. *Research Degree Programmes (March 2017)*, *Blended Learning Guidelines (March 2018)*.
- vii. The linked provider submits a plan to publish its proposed policies and procedures as specified under §33(3) to ensure access and availability to staff, students and stakeholders, as appropriate.

#### 7.3.2. Governance

- a. the linked provider's proposed quality assurance procedures demonstrate appropriate document control as evidenced on each procedure by the:
  - use of a standard template bearing the logo of the HEI;
  - position with designated responsibility for oversight of implementation of the procedure;
  - date on which the policy and procedure gained initial approval;
  - date of next review.

### 7.4 Process for Approval

- 7.4.1. Upon receipt of the draft quality assurance procedures, the Quality Officer will conduct a preliminary desktop assessment to ensure completeness of the received documentation against 7.2.1 and alignment with source documents outlined in 7.3.1 above;
- 7.4.2. The Trinity College Registrar will establish a working group (Linked Provider Quality Assurance LPQA) specific to each linked provider to include the following *ex officio* membership:
  - a. Trinity Registrar (Chair);
  - b. Academic Secretary;
  - c. Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and/or Dean of Graduate Studies as appropriate;
  - d. Representatives from the relevant Trinity School(s) on the respective Associated College Degrees Committee e.g. Head of School or their nominee;
  - e. Nominee(s) from the Quality Committee;
  - f. Quality Officer (Secretary).
- 7.4.3. Each LPQA working group is separate to and independent from the linked provider's respective governance Associated College Degrees Committee.
- 7.4.4. The LPQA working group is expected to meet within three weeks from the time of acknowledgement of receipt to conduct the assessment for approval of the linked provider's submission, and to recommend as per §33 (1) (a) of the Act to:

- a. approve the proposed procedures of a linked provider;
  - b. refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make such recommendations as Trinity considers appropriate;
  - c. refuse to approve the procedures.
- 7.4.5. The report of the LPQA working group will be communicated in writing to the linked provider within a further three week period to advise:
  - a. if the recommendation of the LPQA is either **a.** to approve or **c.** to refuse to approve the proposed procedures, the report of the LPQA will proceed in the first instance to the Quality Committee, where if endorsed, the report will be submitted to the University Council for final approval of the recommended outcome;
  - b. if the recommendation of the LPQA is **b.** to refuse to approve the proposed quality assurance procedures and make recommendations, the LPQA will invite the linked provider to address recommendations/gaps in the draft procedures and propose a timeframe for resubmission to Trinity, where the revised/new procedures will be considered by the LPQA prior to the submission to Quality Committee and University Council;
- 7.4.6. The linked provider is advised that it falls within the remit of the Quality Committee to endorse the LPQA recommended outcome and progress the recommendation to University Council or to revert back to the LPQA for further consideration.
- 7.4.7. Where the outcome of the Quality Committee is **b.** to refuse to approve and makes recommendations, the linked provider will be invited to resubmit the revised/new draft procedures as required under §33 (4) of the Act for consideration at a subsequent meeting of the LPQA and Quality Committee
- 7.4.8. The submission of documentation for approval by the University Council will only be made upon receipt by Trinity of any procedures where recommendation to address recommendations/gaps have been responded to.
- 7.4.9. The submission of documentation for approval by the University Council will only be made during the statutory term when meetings of the University Council are scheduled.
- 7.4.10. The linked provider is advised that it falls within the remit of the University Council to accept the recommendation from the Quality Committee or make further recommendations, it considers appropriate.

## 7.5 Outcomes of the Approval Process by the University Council

- 7.5.1. The linked provider will be informed in writing of the decision by the University Council as per §33 (1) of the Act to:
  - a. the proposed procedures are approved;
  - b. refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations as Trinity considers appropriate;
  - c. refuse to approve the proposed procedures.
- 7.5.2. Upon approval of the proposed procedures, the linked provider must under §33 (3) of the Act publish the procedures in such form and manner as Trinity directs and shall provide a copy of the procedures as published to Trinity's Quality Office and to the QQI.

- 7.5.3. Where the University Council makes recommendations, the linked provider will resubmit the draft procedures as required under §33 (4) of the Act for approval at a subsequent meeting of the University Council before publishing the procedures in such form and manner as Trinity directs, and provide a copy of the procedures as published to Trinity's Quality Office and to the QQI.

## **8. Costs associated with initial approval of HEI (Linked Provider) Quality Assurance Procedures**

- 7.1.1. The initial approval of proposed quality assurance procedures is a once - only requirement. There is no charge levied by Trinity in terms of the quality assurance of proposed quality assurance procedures in respect of academic programmes, the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience of teaching and learning on those programmes;
- 7.1.2. The linked provider is expected to meet all costs associated with its own internal quality assurance and the required external review and assurance of procedures in respect of non-academic and related services procedures which fall within the legal and corporate responsibility of the linked provider as a separate legal entity and which have a statutory basis.

## **9. Ongoing Approval of Linked Providers' Quality Assurance Procedures**

- 9.1. Following initial approval of a linked provider's quality assurance procedures under §7 of this policy it is expected that new or revised procedures will arise in response to changes in, for example, linked provider's educational provision; the formal arrangement with Trinity; revisions to the QQI Act 2012; new QQI Quality Assurance Procedures, codes or policies; or Professional Accreditation Body requirements.
- 9.2. New procedures will require the re-establishment of the LPQA working party (outlined under 7.4.2 above) on an ad-hoc basis, to approve new or revised linked provider's quality assurance procedures.
- 9.3. Once submitted the timeframes and process for approval outlined for initial approval in §7.3 - §7.5 above, will apply.

## **9. Responsibility**

The responsibility for this procedure lies with Trinity's Quality Officer.

## **10. Legislation and Regulation**

- 10.1. [Quality & Qualifications \(Education & Training\) Act 2012](#)
- 10.2. [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016](#)
- 10.3. [Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Designated Awarding bodies](#)
- 10.4. [Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Independent / Private Providers](#)
- 10.5. [Code of Practice for provision of programmes of education and training to international learners](#)
- 10.6. [Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes](#)
- 10.7. [Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes](#)

- 10.8. [Research Degree Programme - Policy and Criteria](#)
- 10.9. [Required Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression of Learners](#)
- 10.10. [Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning](#)
- 10.11. [European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning CEDEFOP 2015](#)

## **11. Related Documents**

- 11.1. Appeal Procedure
- 11.2. Quality Review Procedures for Linked Providers (TBD)

## **12. Document Control**

Date of initial approval by Council: January 2017

Date of revised Policy approval by Board: June 2018

Version 2.1 published in June 2019 (updates to 7.2.2 only)

Date of next review Academic Year: 2021/22





**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

<LOGO/Letterhead>

Registrar

Trinity College Dublin

West Theatre

College Green

Dublin 2

Date:

Dear Registrar

**Self-Certification of Non - Academic Quality Assurance Procedures**

On behalf of the Board of <name of Linked Provider Institution> I hereby certify in my capacity as <Title> of < name of Linked Provider Institution> that the institutions quality assurance policies and procedures that relate to non -academic and related services listed in the attached signed checklist that accompany this submission:

1. Have regard to the requirements of the *Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, other QQI Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines, Policies and Codes, Trinity Agreements and Policies and those of any professional statutory accreditation body as apply to the scope of education provision as outlined under §7.3.1 of the approved Trinity Policy.
2. Have been approved by governance and management in accordance with < name of linked provider Institution> internal governance quality assurance procedures.
3. Are continuously reviewed to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose and comply with relevant legislation in Ireland and in other jurisdictions in which education is provided through third party arrangements, e.g. parent organisations, subsidiaries, collaborations and partnerships nationally and internationally.
4. Will be provided to Trinity College Dublin on request, at any time.

Yours sincerely

Signed

Title

*Encls:* (i) Signed checklist of non-academic and related services quality assurance policies and procedures in place; (ii) Evidence of required external review and assurance in respect of those policies and procedures with a statutory basis.