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OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AFFAIRS (OVPA)  
OIFIG AN LEAS-UACHTARÁN DO GHNÓTHAÍ ACADÚLA (OVPA)

# Guidelines For Accreditation Board Members

## Introduction

We are very grateful to you for agreeing to participate in the accreditation process for one of our proposed programmes. Your expert advice forms a very important part of our quality assurance systems and is much appreciated.

Together with this document, you are being sent a copy of the accreditation documentation and a number of other relevant documents.

## What we are asking of you

In facilitating the development and the subsequent academic approval of such programmes, the University has in place a system of validation and accreditation to which all programme proposals are subjected. With respect to the enclosed proposed programme, the final evaluation stage, namely accreditation, has been reached. This stage involves the establishment of an Accreditation Board, comprised of external experts, to assist the University in assessing the academic standards of the proposed programme. You are being asked to participate in this Accreditation Board.

## Background to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), established in 2003, is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ, are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence.

The Irish Framework can be mapped to European and other frameworks, notably Scotland, England and Northern Ireland and Wales. To learn more about the NFQ, please visit [nfq.qqi.ie](http://nfq.qqi.ie)

# Overview of DCU's Validation and Accreditation Process

## Validation

The University is committed to ensuring, on the one hand, that all proposals have a clear strategic focus which relate to the University's strategic plan and component strategic plans and, on the other, that programme proposers have at their disposal a set of procedures designed to maintain the highest possible quality in terms of the preparation of proposals.

Prior to the writing of an accreditation proposal by those responsible for the development of the programme, a number of steps will already have been taken as detailed here:

- The proposal is approved in principle by the sponsoring Faculty or Faculties.
- The proposal is submitted for validation to the University's Education Committee. (Validation is the internal approval process which involves Education Committee assessing new programme proposals with a view to ascertaining both their relationship to the University's strategic plan and their likely viability).
- If the proposal is approved by Education Committee and subsequently by Academic Council, the accreditation proposal is then prepared.



## Accreditation

The accreditation process differs considerably from the validation process in that it involves the analysis by a group of subject specialists external to the University of a document describing the proposed programme in detail.

The role of the Accreditation Board is to consider whether the programme meets the nationally and internationally accepted requirements for the award(s) to which it is designed to lead. The Board may also make recommendations aligned to the assessment criteria by which the programme should be assessed as set out below:

- 1** The likelihood that the proposed programme will meet the needs which the proposal indicates it is intended to meet
- 2** The appropriateness of the entry requirements and exit routes
- 3** The validity of the purpose and underpinning educational philosophy of the proposed programme
- 4** The linkage of the programme learning outcomes with the purpose and the underpinning educational philosophy
- 5** The consistency and coherence of the proposed modules in the context of the underpinning educational philosophy and the programme learning outcomes
- 6** The reasonableness of achieving the programme learning outcomes, in the time specified, by the majority of students
- 7** The appropriateness and mix of learning and assessment methodologies
- 8** The coherence between assessment methodologies, per module, and the module learning outcomes
- 9** The coherence of the group of skills and competencies that the student would be expected to have at the end of the programme
- 10** The appropriateness of the quality assurance procedures to be used in relation to the programme
- 11** The qualifications and experience of the programme team and the module co-ordinators

## New and Existing Modules

Where a proposed new programme incorporates both new and existing modules, the latter are not of themselves deemed due for accreditation (as they have already been accredited in a previous context).

What is due for accreditation is (a) the new modules, and (b) the programme as a whole, including the appropriateness of the relationship between the new and the existing modules. The members of the Accreditation Board need not necessarily comment on existing modules per se, though it is open to them to make suggestions for improvements to them where they consider it appropriate to do this. Detailed module descriptors are provided by the programme proposers in all cases.

## The Accreditation Proposal

An accreditation proposal consists of the following:

1	Summary description of the background to and development of the proposal
2	Entry, progression and exit routes
3	Purpose of the programme
4	Programme learning outcomes
5	Aptitudes and proficiencies
6	Outline structure of programme
7	Marks and Standards and programme-specific regulations
8	Alignment matrix
9	Quality assurance and programme evaluation
10	Module descriptors
11	Curricula vitae of the members of the programme team
12	Any necessary appendices (but these should be kept to a minimum)

Where the Education Committee has made recommendations of its own in the context of the validation process, these are included for information with the documentation; however, such recommendations are not necessarily made in all cases.

## Accreditation Board Meeting

The objective of the Accreditation Board is to thoroughly review the proposed programme and to make a recommendation to Academic Council.

Where an Accreditation Board meets, the membership consists of:

- a Dean of Faculty or other senior member of the University who acts as chair,
- a member of the Academic Secretariat who acts as rapporteur,
- and a number of external experts whom the programme proposers have nominated to the Education Committee.

Accreditation Boards typically take place over a half-day on one of the DCU campuses starting at either 9.30am or 12.30pm. The indicative schedule for an accreditation board meeting is as follows:

<b>Session 1: Private Meeting of the Accreditation Board</b>	During the first private meeting of the Accreditation Board the members agree on the issues to be raised with the Dean of Faculty or senior academic Faculty representative, the principal programme proposer(s) and others closely associated with the development of the proposal. These are normally high-level relating to the programme as a whole rather than module-specific issues.
<b>Session 2: Meeting with the Dean, principal programme proposer and others closely associated with the proposal</b>	During this meeting any issues discussed in Session 1 are raised by the Board with the senior team.
<b>Coffee</b>	Coffee is provided in the room. All those associated with the programme are invited to attend, including module coordinators.
<b>Session 3: Meeting with module co-ordinators</b>	Session 3 is intended to allow detailed discussion of individual modules (including academic content and other programme-related matters) with the module co-ordinators.
<b>Session 4: Private meeting of the Accreditation Board</b>	This session is to allow the Accreditation Board to review the outcome of discussions and formulate recommendations based on the discussions held with the senior team and module co-ordinators. Recommendations can be made at both programme and modular level.
<b>Session 5: Meeting with the Dean, principal programme proposer and others closely associated with the proposal</b>	This is the final meeting with the Dean, principal programme proposer(s) and others closely associated with the proposal. At this time, the Chair of the Accreditation Board summarises verbally the main recommendation to be made, as well as the main sub-recommendations (where relevant) or the reasons for a negative recommendation (where relevant). Recommendations to be made at module level are not outlined but will be captured in the Accreditation Report.
<b>Lunch</b>	Lunch will be provided after the meeting for members of the Accreditation Board. Please note where Accreditation Boards are held in the afternoon, lunch will be provided in advance of the meeting.

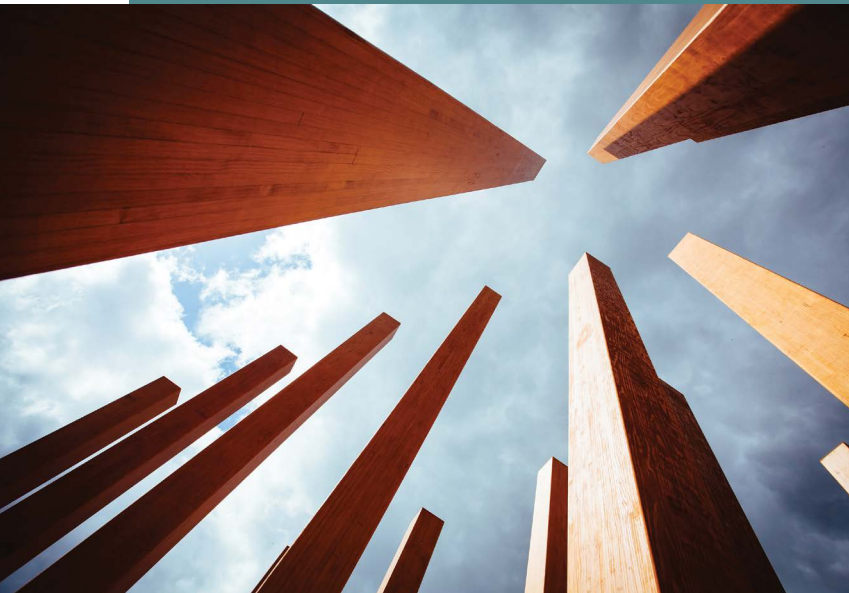
## Following the Meeting

Following the Board meeting, a report is drafted by the rapporteur outlining the recommendations of the Board and it is forwarded to Board members for approval. The report is normally written and agreed within two weeks of the Board taking place. Once approved, the report is sent to the programme proposers.

In the event of a successful accreditation, the report is submitted to Academic Council with a request for approval. In the event of an unsuccessful accreditation, the report is not submitted to Academic Council (because there is no proposed new programme to approve), and the programme proposers are asked to take whatever action emerges from the recommendations made by the Board.

## Further questions

We hope that you find the enclosed guidance useful in preparation for the Accreditation Board Meeting. We look forward to meeting you in DCU on the day. Should you have any further questions regarding the accreditation process please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Academic Secretariat. Contact details are found on the back page of this guide.





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