



DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

**PROGRAMME APPROVAL
MECHANISMS AND CRITERIA**

(VALIDATION, ACCREDITATION AND REVISED ACADEMIC OFFERINGS)

**APPROVED BY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 The purpose of this document	3
1.2 Overview of procedures	4
1.2.1 Validation and Accreditation	4
1.2.2 Revised Academic Offerings	4
1.2.3 Re-accreditation	4
1.2.4 Annual and Periodic Programme Review	5
2. Validation	5
2.1 Validation: approval mechanism	5
2.2 Validation proposal: criteria for evaluation	5
2.3 Validation proposal: structure	6
2.3.1 Standard validation (DCU Delivery and Award), no partner	6
2.3.2 Validation of collaborative programmes (i.e .Partner Involvement)	6
3. Accreditation	6
3.1 Accreditation: approval mechanism	6
3.2 Accreditation proposal: criteria for evaluation	7
3.3 Accreditation proposal: structure	8
4. Consultation and timing	8
4.1 Importance of timing	8
4.2 Consultation within the School and Faculty	9
4.3 Collaboration with an external organisation	9
4.4 Discussions with the Academic Secretariat	9
4.5 Consultation with the range of other relevant offices	9
Appendix 1: Flowchart of the Validation and Accreditation Process	11

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this document

This document sets out the criteria and approval mechanisms that govern the approval of new programmes of study (including those involving collaborative partnerships), the re-approval of existing programmes of study and approval of substantial revisions to an existing programme of study. These processes are part of the broader academic quality assurance and enhancement structure of the University.

The document focuses, in the main, on the process of preparing and submitting proposals for new programmes of study which must undergo University approval (validation and accreditation).

This document should be read in conjunction with the following:

Such Faculty-specific regulations, and/or Open Education regulations, and/or regulations in linked colleges, as may pertain with respect to validation and accreditation. This is to ensure that all Faculty and Open Education and linked colleges' regulations and procedures are followed.

Information for Programme Proposers at <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Validation-and-Accreditation-of-Programmes.shtml>. This document provides operational information on the management of the validation and accreditation processes.

The University schedule of meetings at <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Academic-Council-Sub-Committees.shtml-0> as well as schedules of relevant Faculty meetings¹.

A flowchart of the process is available as Appendix 1 to this document.

¹ It is **essential** that documentation be submitted in a timely manner; failure to take account of the need for this may result in a programme not gaining approval, and therefore not being offered, within the schedule originally envisaged by the proposers. (It should be noted that submission dates for documentation, for both University and Faculty meetings, are earlier than the dates of the meetings themselves.)

1.2 Overview of Academic Approval Procedures

1.2.1 New Programme Approval

When the University wishes to facilitate the establishment of new programmes, it uses procedures referred to as validation and accreditation. These are defined further in section 2 and 3 of this document.

The University is committed to ensuring, on the one hand, that all proposals have a clear strategic focus which relates 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. Hence the processes of validation and accreditation are designed to ensure, *inter alia*, that:

- each proposal meets the requirements of Academic Council for the relevant award, and the standards and learning outcomes set are appropriate to that award
- individuals and groups are facilitated in creating new programmes of study within the University and its linked colleges and/or in partnership with other institutions or organisations as appropriate
- the necessary human, financial and physical resources are available.

1.2.2 Revision of Existing Programmes

Where changes to programmes are made which do not require validation and accreditation, different procedures are followed. These are outlined at <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Validation-and-Accreditation-of-Programmes.shtml> under 'Revised Academic Offerings'. Please refer to the schedule of types of changes in the 'Revised Academic Offerings' form, and the associated required actions.

1.2.3 Re-accreditation

In some cases, the outcome of the review of a programme within the University may involve a recommendation that it be re-accredited. Where such a need arises, standard accreditation procedures are normally followed. In certain circumstances, the procedures may be carried out electronically. A recommendation on the desirability, or otherwise, of electronic accreditation may be made by the Faculty Teaching and Learning/Education Committee to the Office of the Vice-President Academic Affairs (Registrar). The final decision rests with the Vice-President Academic Affairs (Registrar).

A need for re-accreditation may also arise on the basis of recommendations from an external professional accrediting organisation (often following a review visit) and/or significant changes which such an organisation may make to its requirements in terms of recognising the programme.

It should be noted, however, that re-accreditations, especially electronic re-accreditations, are relatively rare.

1.2.4 Annual and Periodic Programme Review

Where programmes are to be reviewed on an ongoing basis, the procedures relating to Annual Programme Review (APR) and Periodic Programme Review (PPR) are used. Advice on these should be sought from the Faculty Office and the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning/Education in the Faculty.²

2. Validation

2.1 Validation: approval mechanism

Validation is the process which involves the Education Committee (EC) in assessing new programme proposals with a view to ascertaining both their relationship to strategy and their likely viability. The EC itself normally gives only outline consideration to new proposals and refers them, as appropriate, to the Education Committee Standing Committee (ECSC) for detailed consideration. The ECSC's recommendations must be endorsed by the EC.

Where the EC is of the view that a proposal should proceed to accreditation, it makes a recommendation to Academic Council to this effect. This recommendation incorporates sub-recommendations relating to the members of the Accreditation Board and may also incorporate sub-recommendations to modify the programme proposal as initially submitted to it. Academic Council may accept or reject the recommendation from the EC, or accept it with modifications. In the event of rejection, Academic Council will advise on the appropriate next steps for the proposal. In all cases, the decision (and recommendations, if any) of Academic Council will be communicated to stakeholders by a member of the Academic Secretariat team.

Before a programme can proceed to accreditation, the Executive Dean of Faculty must confirm that all the recommendations of the Education Committee Standing Committee/Education Committee, and any recommendations from Academic Council have been implemented.

2.2 Validation proposal: criteria for evaluation

Each validation proposal will be assessed on a number of criteria, which include:

evidence of alignment with the University strategic plan and its component strategies
evidence of alignment with the strategic plans of the relevant Faculty/Faculties and School(s) , as outlined in the validation proposal
evidence of a place for the proposal within higher education in Ireland generally, taking into account programmes offered in other institutions

² In the case of Open Education, advice should be sought from the Chair of the Open Education Teaching and Learning Committee.

evidence of the likely demand for the proposed programme, and the likelihood of achieving the appropriate student intake
coherence of the statement of programme purpose and underpinning educational philosophy
appropriateness of the programme learning outcomes , and coherence of their relationship to the purpose and educational philosophy
reasonableness of the estimate of the resources needed to offer the programme
reasonableness of the proposed launch date
appropriateness of the proposed development team
appropriateness of the proposed members of the Accreditation Board in light of the regulations for the appointment of such members.

2.3 Validation proposal: structure

2.3.1 Standard validation (DCU Delivery and Award), no partner

A standard validation is one in which the proposed taught programme **does not** involve working with a proposed partner or institution (i.e. the programme will be delivered and awarded by DCU alone).

The AA1 validation form is used in such instances and is available at: <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Validation-and-Accreditation-of-Programmes.shtml>.

Further information on completing the Validation (AA1) form can be found in the *Information for Programme Proposers*.

2.3.2 Validation of collaborative programmes, (i.e. Partner Involvement)

Where a proposed programme of study involves single or multiple partner institutions an alternative AA form is required. These alternative validation forms contain much of the same detail as the AA1 form, but also require additional information in regards to the proposed partner, the partnership context and the justification for partner delivery/assessment/award.

The correct AA form to be used is dependent on the proposed collaborative arrangements. All forms can be accessed at: <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Collaborative-Provision.shtml>

3. Accreditation

3.1 Accreditation: approval mechanism

Accreditation is the process which involves the submission of a detailed programme proposal to an Accreditation Board. The Accreditation Board includes a group of academic and, as appropriate, other professional experts from outside the University.

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.

Where the Accreditation Board is of the view that this is the case, it makes a recommendation to Academic Council to this effect. This recommendation may incorporate sub-recommendations to modify the programme proposal as initially submitted to it. Academic Council may accept or reject the recommendation from the Accreditation Board, or accept it with modifications. In the event of rejection, Academic Council will advise on the appropriate next steps for the proposal. In all cases, the decision (and recommendations, if any) of Academic Council will be communicated to stakeholders by the Secretary of Academic Council.

The Board may also make recommendations aligned to the assessment criteria by which the programme should be assessed, as set out in 3.2 below.

3.2 Accreditation proposal: criteria for evaluation

Each accreditation proposal will be assessed on a number of criteria, which include:

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

3.3 Accreditation proposal: structure

The accreditation proposal document is a detailed document aimed at describing the proposed programme fully. It also includes module descriptors and a *curriculum vitae* for each programme proposer. Therefore, it is normally longer than the validation proposal. Certain sections of each of the two types of document can, in principle, be the same as, or similar to, each other³.

Where recommendations have been made at the validation stage, these must be incorporated into the accreditation proposal, with concomitant changes as necessary. In addition, the information in the accreditation proposal may sometimes need to be more detailed than that in the validation proposal.

4. Consultation and timing

4.1 Importance of timing

It is **essential** that documentation be submitted in a timely manner; failure to take account of the need for this may result in a programme not gaining approval, and therefore not being offered, within the schedule originally envisaged by the proposers. It is necessary therefore, in this connection, to take cognisance of the University's schedule of meetings and the schedules of relevant Faculty meetings. (It should be noted that submission dates for documentation, for both University and Faculty meetings, are earlier than the dates of the meetings themselves.)

Early planning is of particular importance for programmes which are intended for offer through the CAO. Further information on timing considerations is available in the *Guide for Programme Proposers*.

It is very important to be aware that engagement in due diligence with respect to a proposed external partner organisation must be undertaken before, rather than at same time as, the validation process.

Consideration may also need to be given to the possibility that a derogation from Marks and Standards (to meet the requirements of external bodies only) may be needed and, if so, that a request will have to be submitted, in due course, to the University Standards Committee.

³ Further information on completing the accreditation documentation is available in the *Information for Programme Proposers*.

4.2 Consultation within the School and Faculty

A validation proposal may be submitted to the Education Committee only after it has gone through the appropriate discussion and consultation in the relevant School(s) and the appropriate approval procedures in the relevant Faculty or Faculties. The Head(s) of School must be satisfied that all relevant consultation takes place at School level. Where approval has not been given by all relevant Faculties, the EC will not consider a proposal. Advice on approval procedures within a Faculty should be sought from the Faculty Office and the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning.

4.3 Collaboration with an external organisation

Where it is proposed to offer a programme in conjunction with an external organisation (i.e. an organisation other than any linked college or and any other approved partner institution) reference must be made, as appropriate, to the University's policy on due diligence and the procedures for drawing up Memoranda of Understanding and related documentation. It is very important to be aware that engagement in due diligence must be undertaken before, rather than at same time as, the validation process. For further information on the development of collaborative programmes see: <https://www.dcu.ie/ovpaa/Collaborative-Provision.shtml>

4.4 Discussions with the Academic Secretariat

As early as possible in the process, to facilitate planning, discussions should take place between the Academic Secretariat and the Faculty/Faculties about the likely timeline involved in the following processes:

- approval within Faculty/Faculties
- due diligence process, and establishment of an MOU/MOA, where appropriate
- validation (through the EC/ECSC)
- approval of validation recommendations by Academic Council
- accreditation
- approval of accreditation by Academic Council
- finalisation of accreditation documentation to take account of the recommendations of the Accreditation Board
- preparation for launch.

4.5 Consultation with the range of other relevant offices

Consultation must also take place, as appropriate, with relevant offices, which may include those listed below (the list is not exhaustive). Consultation must take place through the responsible committee or designated staff member in the relevant offices, where appropriate.

- Registry, with particular reference to:

- application and admissions processes and timelines including the CAO and Postgraduate Applications Centre (PAC) processes and systems
- the submission deadlines for academic structure information for the proposed new programme
- academic structures for the proposed new programme which cannot be accommodated by means of the existing functionality of the ITS student records system
- liaison between the Registry and school Guidance Counsellors, where relevant
- Finance Office
- Office of the Chief Operating Officer (Space requirements)
- Information Systems and Services
- Estates Office
- Library
- Communications and Marketing (especially Student Recruitment)
- International Office
- Student Support and Development (including the Careers Service and the INTRA Office – taking account of the fact that it is very important to plan well in advance for any proposed work placement)
- Heads of Schools from which service teaching will be requested
- Partner organisations in which it is proposed that students will spend time (e.g. on study abroad or clinical placements).

Appendix 1: Flowchart of the Validation and Accreditation Process

