Approval of Higher Education Institutions Quality Assurance Procedures

1. Context
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin as a Designated Awarding Body (DAB) has prescribed responsibilities under the Qualifications & Quality Assurance Act 2012 and QQI Sector Specific Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies with respect to arrangements with higher education institutions 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 before establishing procedures under §28(1) of the Act “a linked provider shall submit a draft of the proposed procedures\(^1\) to the relevant designated awarding body for approval”.

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

- approve the proposed quality assurance procedures;
- refuse to approve the proposed quality assurance procedures but make recommendations to the provider as Trinity considers appropriate; or
- refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

3. Scope
This procedure applies to new and existing linked providers which whom Trinity is planning to or has entered into arrangements with in respect of programmes of education.

4. Benefits
The benefits of this procedure is that it provides clear direction to linked providers as to the scope of policies and procedures required and the criteria upon which policies and procedures will be assessed and the expected outcome of that assessment and required actions following same.

\(^1\) The term procedure is understood to refer to policy and procedure (QQI 2016).
5. Definition
Linked providers are 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.

6. Principles
6.1.1 Quality and its assurance is the primary responsibility of the provider, it involves planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice.

6.1.2 Successful quality assurance systems are efficient, well communicated and integrated into the normal activities of the provider and are fit for context and purpose.

7. Procedure
7.1 Notification

7.1.1 Trinity will notify linked providers with whom it has formal memoranda of understanding governing education provision, of the requirement to submit draft quality assurance procedures for approval, upon release by QQI of the relevant quality assurance guidelines.

    Trinity will negotiate a timeframe for submission with each linked provider given their individual context, their strategy with respect to an application for the proposed International Education Mark and the Trinity schedule for quality reviews.

7.1.2 Education providers requesting that Trinity act as a validating body for programme of education provided by them will be asked to submit their quality assurance procedures for approval as part of the formal due diligence undertaken prior to signing a new Memoranda of Understanding.

    Where an MOU is pre-existing and the validating arrangement is a change to the existing arrangement, the request to submit quality assurance procedures for approval will form part of either a revised MOU or a formal contract.

7.2 Submission

7.2.1 Linked providers will submit hard and soft copies of their quality assurance procedures in the first instance to the Trinity College Quality Officer, who will acknowledge receipt within three working days.

7.3 Assessment for Approval

7.3.1 Quality assurance policies and procedures are required to give regard to the following documents:

    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 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (May 2015);
 iii. For existing Linked Providers:
- the Memoranda of Understanding or contract that forms the basis for the arrangement(s) with Trinity;
- Trinity policies which intersect with linked provider’s policies e.g. External Examiner Policy, New Programme Design and Approval Policy

iv. For higher education providers requesting that Trinity act as a validating body for programme of education, the relevant QQI QA guidelines under which their programmes of education are currently validated e.g. Independent and Private Providers Quality Assurance Guidelines

v. Relevant QQI Policies e.g. Protection of Enrolled Learners Policy, Access, Transfer & Progression Policy, and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy;

The following regulations if they apply to the scope of education provision and the strategy of the higher education institution are to be confirmed at the time of notification:

vi. Professional and Statutory Body standards and curriculum requirements for validated programmes of education, training and research subject to accreditation;

vii. QQI Policy Code of Practice for the provision of programmes of education and training to international learners, if the higher education provider strategy is to apply for authority to use the proposed International Education Mark;


7.3.2 Criteria for assessment include:

  i. Compliance
  - the linked provider’s draft quality assurance policies and procedures demonstrates that they have regard to the requirements of source documents outlined in 7.3.1 above;
  - the linked provider meets legal, reputation and compliance requirements as an established HEI in Ireland and in all jurisdictions in which it operates through third party arrangements e.g. parent organisations, subsidiaries, collaborations and partnerships nationally and internationally.

  ii. Governance
  - the linked provider demonstrates that the development and approval of documented policies and procedures has been undertaken under the prescribed authority of its governing council, board or equivalent executive committee; and in consultation with internal and external stakeholders relevant to the context of the policy and procedure;
  - the linked provider demonstrates the necessary resource, governance and structural arrangements in place to show that it is in good financial standing, has fit-for-purpose governance, management, decision-making and reporting structures (internally and externally), has sufficient and sustainable resources i.e. human, infrastructure and financial to support good quality educational provision including appropriately qualified staff, facilities, equipment and learning resources – library and IT.
iii. Document Control  
- designated responsibility for oversight of implementation of the policy or procedure is visible in quality assurance policies and procedures;
- the date on which the policy and procedure gained initial approval and the date of next review is clearly visible in quality assurance policies and procedures;
- a plan to publish proposed policies and procedures as specified under §33(3) to ensure access and availability to staff, students and stakeholders, as appropriate.

7.3.3. Process for approval

i. Upon receipt of the draft quality assurance policies and procedures, the Quality Office will conduct a preliminary desktop assessment to ensure completeness of the received documentation against 7.3.1 above;

ii. The Trinity Registrar will establish a working group specific to each linked provider which will include the following:
- Trinity Registrar;
- Academic Secretary;
- Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Graduate Studies as appropriate;
- Representative(s) from the School or Department on the respective Associated Colleges Degree Committee or Management Committee;
- Other subject matter expertise as required/appropriate to the context e.g. financial, legal, risk and/or compliance;
- Nominee(s) from the Quality Committee;
- Quality Officer (Secretary).

iii. This working group is expected to meet within three weeks from the time of acknowledgement of receipt to conduct the assessment for approval and complete a report on their recommendations to:
- approve the proposed procedures;
- refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations;
- refuse to approve the procedures.

iv. The report of the working group will be communicated in writing to the linked provider within a further three weeks to agree:
- the proposed procedures will proceed to Quality Committee and University Council for approval; or
- if the linked provider is invited to address recommendations /gaps in their procedures, a proposed timeframe for resubmission to Trinity College. In which case the process outlined above is repeated.
- the proposed procedures are to be refused approval.

v. The submission of documentation for approval by University Council will only be made when all recommendations have been addressed and during the statutory term when meetings of the University Council are scheduled.
7.4. Outcomes of the Approvals Process

7.4.1. The linked provider will be informed in writing within four weeks of the decision by University Council that the:
- proposed procedures are approved;
- recommendation is to refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations;
- recommendation is to refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

7.4.2. Whereupon Trinity approves the proposed procedures of the linked provider, the 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 the Trinity College Quality Office and to QQI.

7.4.3. 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 College Quality Office and to QQI.

8. Responsibility

The responsibility for this procedure lies with the Quality Officer, Trinity College Dublin.

9. Legislation and Regulation

9.3. Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Designated Awarding bodies
9.4. Sector specific quality assurance guidelines for Independent / Private Providers
9.5. Code of Practice for provision of programmes of education and training to international learners
9.6. Research Degree Programme - Policy and Criteria
9.7. Required Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression of Learners
9.8. Principals and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning
9.9. European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning CEDEFOP 2015

10. Related Documents

10.1. Appeal Procedure
10.2. Quality Review Procedures for Linked Providers

11. Document Control

Date approved 1 June 2016. Date of next review: 1 June 2019.