QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF REPORTS ON THE ACCREDITATION/ APPROVAL/REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SECTOR IN THE PERIOD 2015-2018

QQI Insights

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List of abbreviations

AIT	Athlone Institute of Technology
CIT	Cork Institute of Technology
CORU	Regulator of health and social care professionals
DAB	Designated Awarding Body
DkIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
EI	Engineers Ireland
ENQA	European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
GMIT	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
HEA	Higher Education Authority
IADT	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
IoT	Institute of Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITB	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
IT Carlow	Institute of Technology Carlow
IT Sligo	Institute of Technology Sligo
IT Tralee	Institute of Technology Tralee
IT Tallaght	Institute of Technology Tallaght
LYIT	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
NUIM	National University of Ireland Maynooth
PHECC	Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council
PSI	The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
QA	Quality Assurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RCSI	The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
RFT	Request for Tender
SCSI	Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TU Dublin	Technological University Dublin
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UL	University of Limerick
UU	University of Ulster

1 Executive Summary

This review was commissioned by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) as part of its responsibilities arising from its membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), to analyse findings of external quality assurance (QA) activities. The report analyses programme validation and review reports in respect of programmes provided by institutes of technology (IoTs). It was preceded by a review of QA reports in respect of programmes for which QQI is the awarding body. It will be followed by a review of the programme validation reports issued by Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) which include universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

The period covered in this report is June 2015 to June 2018 for which the report considers both the initial review process of all programmes (which must be completed before provision of a programme commences) and subsequent reviews, which are usually conducted at five-yearly intervals.

There were 14 IoTs in Ireland during the review period, of which 13 had delegated authority from QQI to make awards (DIT had awarding powers similar to the universities and so is included in the report on DABs). The purpose of the review was to identify practices in all aspects of the evaluation processes, both initial validation and re-evaluation, and thereby facilitate analysis to identify best practices and recurring difficulties. The main source of information for evaluations is the website of each higher education institution; using the descriptions there, it was possible to compare processes with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and QQI Statutory QA Guidelines. The analysis indicates that IoTs are meeting their requirements under ESG and QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

Quality assurance policies and procedures are continuously evolving and accordingly several of the recommendations made in this report may have already been addressed by institutes of technology e.g., learner representatives on panels.

1.1 Initial evaluation of programmes

The reports in respect of the initial validation of 52 programmes (four from each of the 13 IoTs) were reviewed. The programmes reviewed were selected to ensure that different levels of awards (Higher Certificates, Bachelor Degrees, Honours Bachelor Degrees and Master's Degrees) and different disciplines (arts, business, engineering, science) were included. Although individual IoTs were found to have slightly differing approaches, all appointed panels were composed of mainly external members.

A total of 18 programmatic reviews were analysed, chosen to cover as many of the IoTs as possible (two had done no such reviews in the period) and different disciplines.

Although IoTs vary in size, all have a president as chief officer and an academic council with statutory responsibility for academic matters. Each IoT has developed and published its procedures for the validation of new programmes and the re-evaluation of programmes, usually after 5 years. All IoTs involve an External Evaluation Panel which generally includes academics in the relevant discipline and at least one experienced practitioner from industry. The chairperson is usually a senior academic while the registrar (or nominee) of the IoT acts as secretary of the panel.

The analysis of panel membership revealed some facts:

- Very few panels involved a learner representative.
- Very few academics with expertise in learning and teaching were selected as panel members (there was a preponderance of subject experts according to the descriptions of panel members in the reports).
- Only 4% of chairpersons and 30% of panel members were female.

Apart from addressing the facts above, this report recommends that more panel members from outside Ireland be recruited, especially for evaluation of Master's Degrees. Only 17% of the existing academics on panels came from outside the state.

1.1.1 Suggested improvements

Whilst IoTs had their own processes, it would be helpful if a template for all External Evaluation Panel reports were agreed between IoTs. This template should include provision for the panel to record commendations or innovative practices.

Evaluation reports should include the names of panel members, their affiliated organisation and their position

in the organisation (currently this is usually omitted). A statement that there were no conflicts of interest in respect of any panel member's participation in the programme validation and a declaration by panel members of perceived conflicts of interest should also be added. Regrettably, most IoTs do not publish the approved programme schedule.

Learning outcomes are key aspects of all programmes and so they should be included in the evaluation report.

Most IoTs do not publish a signed copy of the panel's report on their website; it is recommended that copies of the report, signed by the chairperson, be published and, in the absence of the signature appearing on the report, a note included to say that it is the final agreed version of the report. The report should name the members of the panel and state the affiliation and role of each.

1.2 Commendations, recommendations and conditions

The 52 reports on new programmes contained 59 commendations, 389 recommendations and 122 conditions. The spread of these across the IoTs, among disciplines and at the various levels of awards was analysed and showed marked differences. For example, the number of conditions attached to business programmes was less than half the average of those attached to other disciplines. The number of conditions was broad in its range and the attachment of conditions may indicate either a deficiency in the proposed programme or a more rigorous approach by the panel.

Some aspects of programmes were much more likely to attract conditions than other aspects. Curriculum and objectives and outcomes clearly headed the list.

Recurring themes were identified and included industrial placements and the assessment of work placements, both of which featured prominently. Many recommendations were made to seek improvements to module learning outcomes.

It was noted that there were many recommendations by panels for additional topics to be covered but very few suggestions of any deletions. It is recommended that areas to be omitted from the programme where appropriate be indicated and that a section for commendations be included in the template for reports. Panels should be required to discuss programme learning outcomes and their alignment to published awards standards.

1.3 Programmatic reviews

Eighteen review reports for programmatic reviews were analysed. These involved very many programmes (one faculty review in Cork Institute of Technology had 49 programmes excluding research and special purpose award programmes).

An analysis of these 18 programmatic reviews indicated that they included 122 commendations, 377 recommendations and 30 conditions. Each of these categories was further analysed to show its frequency of occurrence in different IoTs and the aspects that featured most prominently.

In addition to analysing what has featured in reports, the review identified some omissions. There were very few comments on internationalisation, an absence of data on student numbers or progression and little or no evidence provided in reports to support findings.

It is suggested that commendations, recommendations and conditions be explicitly linked to the institute's validation criteria and to providing evidence in the reports to support findings. It also suggests that panels should be more explicit in describing commendations so that exemplary practice can be considered by other academic units in the IoTs and in other HEIs.

This analysis and the recommendations should prove useful to HEIs and to QQI.

1.4 Membership of programmatic review panels

There were significant differences in the sizes of panels, from 26 members for an Institute of Technology Carlow panel to four for an Institute of Technology Tralee panel. Engineering panels proved to be the largest, but the review of engineering in the Athlone Institute of Technology required only six panel members.

Academic subject matter experts constituted about 50% of panel members while the other 50% comprised chairpersons, panel secretaries, learning and teaching experts, learners, graduates, and industrial experts.

Female members comprised 31% of the total and a somewhat lower percentage of chairpersons.

All but one panel had industry representation.

There were 18 academics from 15 universities outside the state; all but two of the universities were from the UK (Slovakia and Sweden supplied two). There were 23 academics from Irish universities and seven academics from DIT on review panels. Fifteen of the 18 programmatic review panels had one or more representatives from either DIT, an Irish university or a foreign university.

Only 5% of panel members were learner representatives.

The recommendations made in this review included more female representatives on panels, more female chairpersons, more academics from outside Ireland, learner representatives on panels, and the inclusion in the evaluation report of a positive statement that there are no conflicts of interest.

1.5 Summary of suggestions

The report includes suggestions regarding all aspects of the QA process: the development of QA manuals, the evaluation of programme review reports, evaluation panels and review panels for programmatic reviews, addressing commendations, recommendations and conditions and approaches to reviews of academic units.

These suggestions provide guidance to both QQI and the IoTs, and indeed to all HEIs.

The analysis of initial validations and subsequent programmatic reviews shows that the process is contributing to meeting QQI requirements in respect of its ENQA membership.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of this review

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is an independent state agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. It was established in 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. QQI is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). One of the functions of QQI is to regularly review the quality assurance arrangements of higher education institutions. In 2018, QQI commissioned, by way of public tender, a thematic analysis of reports on the accreditation/approval/review of programmes of higher education. The thematic analysis is a process by which QQI publishes reports that describe and analyse findings of external quality assurance activities.

Part 3 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), which is considered the benchmark for quality assurance in higher education in Europe, provides standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies. **Figure 2-1** provides the standard and guidelines for thematic analysis as per ESG 3.4.

3.4 Thematic analysis

Standard: Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Guidelines: In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on, and the improvement of, quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts. A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

Figure 2-1 Extract from ESG 2015 Section 3.4 on thematic analysis

This project involved the thematic analysis of reports related to:

i. The approval (e.g., academic validation, professional accreditation) of new programmes of higher education (programmes);
ii. The re-approval following review and modification of previously approved programmes.

This thematic analysis is focussed on the institutes of technology (IoTs). IoTs are independent awarding bodies (under delegation of authority by QQI to make awards), responsible for their own programmes of education and training, research and related services and for any programmes offered in association with other providers leading to awards made by the institutes. (Ref. Section 5 of Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Institutes of Technology (other than (DIT)).

An overview of the institute of technology regulatory environment is provided in Chapter 13. In December 2018, QQI published "A Thematic Analysis of Reports on the Accreditation/ Approval/Review of Programmes of Higher Education, Stage 1: QQI Validation and Revalidation" which focussed on programmes where QQI made the awards. A further thematic analysis will be undertaken of Designated Awarding Bodies (universities, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)).

QQI has published core "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers April 2016" and sector-specific "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Institutes of Technology (other than DIT) July 2016." While the Core Statutory QA Guidelines specify most of the quality assurance required, these sector-specific guidelines address the particular responsibilities of the institutes of technology as set out in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 and under the residual arrangements for delegation of authority to make awards.

This thematic analysis concentrates on two critical processes for the quality assurance of higher education programmes,

i. the initial validation process;
ii. the programme review process (normally referred to as the programmatic review in IoTs).

The initial validation process must be completed before an IoT can deliver a programme. Once programmes are running, the IoT must review them periodically. Normally, programme reviews occur at five-year intervals.

It is important to note that this thematic review is a review of evaluation reports made to institutes by panels appointed by the appropriate internal decision-making structures, as stated in their quality assurance policies and procedures. This is usually the academic council or the vice president for academic affairs/ registrar of the institute. This is also the case for programme review reports where programme review evaluation panels are appointed by the institute. The panel membership is mainly external to the institute but in some cases may include an academic council member external to the school or faculty under review. In other cases, a learner or learner representative is included.

During the period covered by the review, there were 14 institutes of technology in Ireland. Thirteen of these had delegated authority status and are included in this review. The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)[1] had a different statutory status, similar to the universities, and is not included in this review.

The findings of this analysis can contribute to the enhancement of both the validation and the programmatic review processes. The detailed analysis of the information obtained showed developments, trends, and areas of good practice and identified areas where there were persistent weaknesses.

Recommendations based on the findings are made in relation to improving programmes, improving the relevant reports in terms of their clarity, the usefulness of the information they provide to stakeholders about programmes and improving the evidential supports to be cited in reports in support of conclusions.

Recommendations are made in relation to expert panels, the evaluation process for initial validation by the institute, the programmatic review process and improving reports in terms of their use of evidence to support assertions.

A glossary of the terms used throughout this report is provided in Appendix E.

2.2 Stakeholders who will be interested in this thematic analysis

Figure 2-2 lists the stakeholders who were identified in the tender document and who may find this thematic analysis useful.

Stakeholders include those who require, either directly or indirectly, objective information about the quality of programmes, for example:

a. the academic committees (i.e., the Programme and Awards Executive Committee in the case of the contracting authority) responsible for approving programmes (e.g., information about whether the programme meets the approval/accreditation process requirements and criteria);

b. the programme development teams (e.g., information that will help enhance the programme);

c. prospective students (e.g., information that will help inform student choice);

d. prospective employers of graduates (e.g., information that will help inform expectations of graduates);

e. Government and its agencies (e.g., concerning the quality of the programmes).

Not all these groups typically read (re-) approval/ accreditation reports. Reports are normally addressed directly to (a) and (b). Nevertheless, the reports are expected to be a source of objective evaluation that supports information about the programmes that might be provided to these groups.

Figure 2-2 Extract from the tender document regarding stakeholders

1 The Technological University Dublin or TU Dublin is Ireland's first technological university, established on 1 January 2019, taking over the operations of the three preceding institutes, Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown and the Institute of Technology Tallaght. This thematic analysis project covers the period 2015 to 2018 which predates the formation of TU Dublin. Reports and analysis were undertaken while the three institutes were in existence.

2.3 The quality assurance cycle – from validation to programme review

Each IoT has an established statutory governing body and academic council as per the Institute of Technology Act 2006. Each institute's academic council has established policies and procedures for the design and validation of programmes (ESG 2015 Section 1.2). Policies and procedures have also been developed for the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes (ESG 2015 section 1.9). These normally occur within five years of the first delivery of the programme.

The individual procedures for approval of programmes and those for the programmatic review (periodic review) process vary between institutes. However, the overall generic cycle can be divided into several phases which are outlined in **Figure 2-3.** Each IoT will have its own unique procedure which is often determined by the size of the institute.

Two distinct processes are shown in **Figure 2-3.** The first process is for the initial validation of a new programme of study. Following a successful validation, the IoT can enrol learners for a specified length of time (usually five years) or number of enrolments and deliver the programme.

The second process is the programmatic review which results in the revalidation of the programme(s) for a further period of five years. Normally, the programmatic review process covers all the programmes in a faculty, school or department. This cycle of review and delivery then continues.

There are two separate elements to the programmatic review process:

ii. The strategic planning of a faculty, school or department for its future development;
ii. The revision of programmes for the purpose of revalidation.

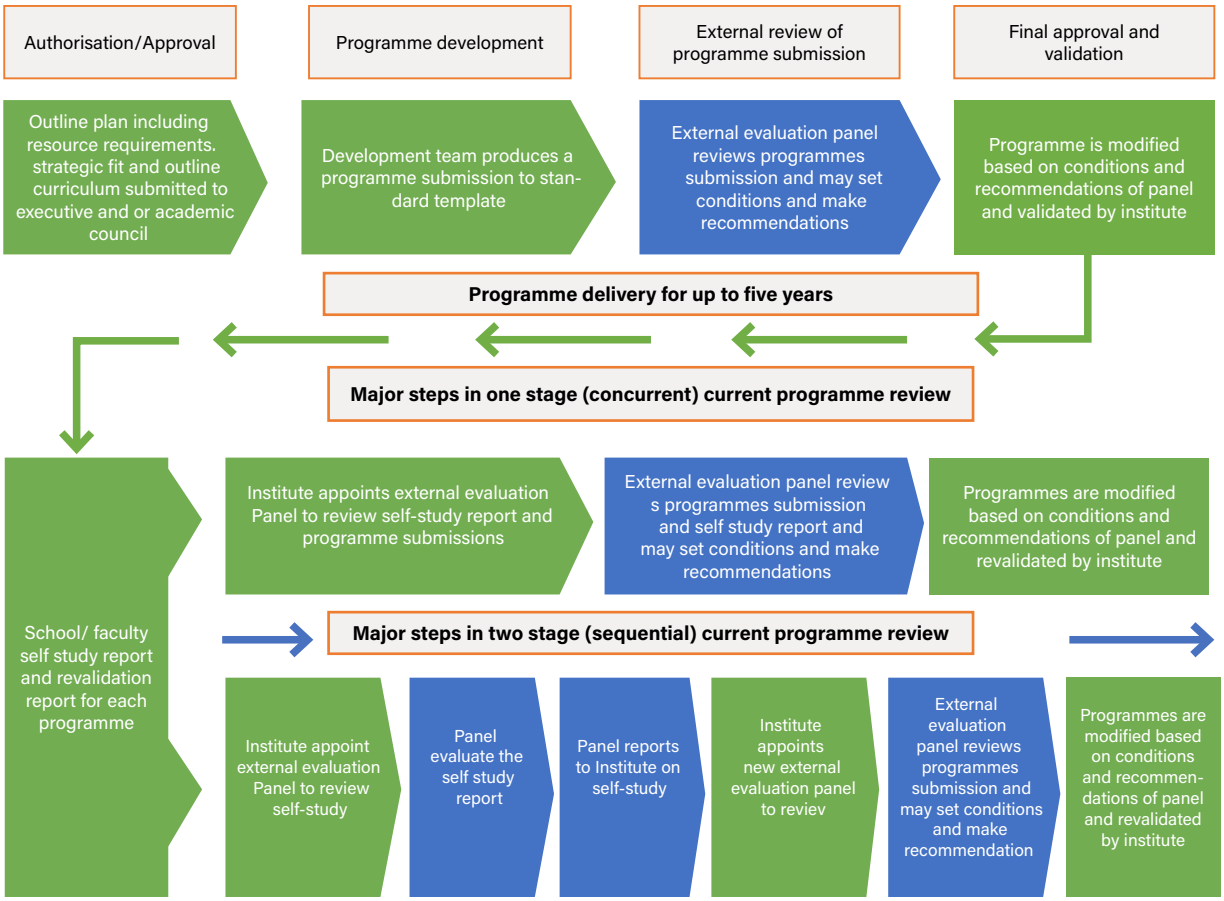


Figure 2-3 Initial programme validation and review processes

Some institutes undertake the two elements concurrently with one external evaluation panel reviewing the submission documents, while others undertake it sequentially with separate evaluation panels reviewing each element separately.

The thematic analysis only covered major awards (excluding research awards). It did not cover minor, special purpose, supplemental and joint awards or linked programmes. The policy and procedures for these awards are normally different from those for major awards.

2.4 Validation and authorisation or approval of new programmes leading to major awards (excluding research awards)

There are usually two separate, but interrelated processes involved in the approval of new programme proposals and in the subsequent approval to run programmes of education and training. These are the validation of the programme and the separate process of authorisation or approval.

Validation is the quality assurance process by which IoTs approve new programmes of education and training leading to awards.

The context for the quality assurance policies and procedures is covered in Chapter 2 and what is meant by validation, revalidation and programmatic review is covered in Section 3.

2.5 Background to this thematic analysis

In May 2018, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published a request for tenders entitled "thematic analysis of reports". The specification required the review of reports produced by evaluation panels published during the period June 2015 to June 2018. These were reports from expert groups examining programmes for initial validation and reports from the programmatic review of programmes. The tender specified the requirements of the Request for Tender (RFT) which is provided in **Figure 2-4.** The analysis required in the tender is included in **Appendix C.**

Detailed Specification of Requirements. Section (4.1) of the RFT

The contracting authority is inviting tenders from competent suppliers to deliver a project involving the thematic analysis of reports related to:

i. the approval (e.g., academic validation, professional accreditation) of new programmes[2] of higher education (programmes) and
ii. the re-approval following review and modification of previously approved programmes.

Such reports include, for example, programme validation reports published by the contracting authority. For convenience, we will sometimes refer to such reports as 'relevant reports' in the remainder.

The project will have two stages with the second stage being contingent on the completion of the first. The first stage (Stage 1) will involve an analysis of relevant reports on programmes where the contracting authority is the awarding body, excluding professional accreditation reports. For the first stage, relevant reports will include programme validation reports published by the contracting authority and programme review related 'independent panel' reports. This stage must be completed no later than 12 October 2018.

The second stage (Stage 2) would be an analysis of approval and re-approval-related reports in respect of programmes provided by universities and institutes of technology (IoTs) and programme accreditation reports by professional recognition bodies (and equivalent kinds of entities) in respect of programmes provided by universities, institutes of technology and providers who rely on the contracting authority for validation.

The contracting authority will, at its sole discretion, decide whether and when the second stage will commence. If it commences, the second stage would be by **Q1 2019**.

The contracting authority also reserves the right that if it decides to progress with Stage 2 it may go outside of any contract awarded under this tender for the procurement of Stage 2.

The project outcomes will be publishable reports (as outlined further on in this document).

Figure 2-4 Detailed specifications of the requirements of the tender

Stage 1 of the thematic analysis was successfully completed in 2018 and is published on the QQI website. QQI is a member agency of ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which issues guidelines to members on good practice. These guidelines include the extract in **Figure 2-1** above.

2 A 'programme of higher education' is a course of study or any other process by which people learn for the purpose of qualifying for a higher educational award such as a degree or diploma.

2.6 Key documents

The following are the key documents relating to the thematic analysis:

- The initial evaluation and programmatic review reports which are published on the institutes of technology websites;
- Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG);
- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all providers April 2016;
- QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by institutes of technology (other than DIT) July 2016.

2.7 Extent and type of programmes reports reviewed

Programme validation and programme review evaluation reports are published on IoTs' websites. They are available, usually, in the section on quality assurance. The reports of interest for this review were those for major awards published between June 2015 and July 2018. These were the major awards at levels six to nine of the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ).

The major awards are Higher Certificates (NFQ Level 6), Ordinary Bachelor Degrees (NFQ Level 7), Honours Bachelor Degrees and Higher Diplomas (NFQ Level 8), Master's Degrees and Postgraduate Diplomas (NFQ Level 9). Research degree programmes at Master's Degree NFQ (Level 9) were excluded from the analysis.

Where embedded programmes are dealt with in the report, only one programme, usually the principal programme, was included in the analysis. Any other approach would involve double counting of aspects of programmes.

A sample of 52 evaluation reports for the initial validation of programmes was analysed as shown in **Table 2-1.** These reports were from the 13 institutes of technology (excluding DIT). They included a range of disciplines and awards at Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree/Higher Diploma and Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma.

Table 2-1 Number of programme reports analysed by type of programme and by discipline

Discipline	Higher Certificate	Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/ HDip	Master's Degree	All
Arts	3	2	5	4	14
Business	1	2	5	2	10
Engineering	0	2	4	2	8
Science	1	5	8	6	20
Grand Total	**5**	**11**	**22**	**14**	**52**

Evaluation reports for 18 programmatic review reports for 11 of the institutes of technology were also analysed. The objective was to analyse at least one evaluation report for each institute undertaken between June 2015 and July 2018. Two institutes did not undertake programmatic reviews within the timeframe concerned. Two institutes who undertook the evaluation in two stages had multiple stage two reports. In both cases two stage two reports from each of the institutes were analysed. A further objective was to analyse evaluation reports across different discipline stems e.g., business, engineering, informatics, humanities, health, social sciences, creative arts, etc. **Table *2–2*** shows the list of programmatic review evaluation reports that were analysed by school/faculty.

Table 2–2 Programme review evaluation reports analysed

	Institute	School/Faculty	Year	Number of reports
1	Athlone Institute of Technology	Engineering	2015	1
2	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	Informatics and Engineering	2015	1
3	Cork Institute of Technology	School of Science and Informatics	2016	3
4	Cork Institute of Technology	Faculty of Business and Humanities	2015	3
5	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology	Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	2018	1
6	Institute of Technology Carlow	School of Engineering	2016	2
7	Institute of Technology Sligo	School of Business and Humanities	2016	1
8	Institute of Technology Tallaght	School of Engineering	2018	1
9	Institute of Technology Tralee	School of Health and Social Sciences	2017	1
10	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	Tourism	2017	1
11	Limerick Institute of Technology	Applied Science and Technology	2016	1
12	Waterford Institute of Technology	Engineering	2017	1
13	Waterford Institute of Technology	School of Health Sciences	June 2016	1

Chapter 14 outlines the methodology used by the authors in undertaking the thematic analysis.

3 Quality Assurance Cycle Validation to Programme Review and Revalidation

3.1 Introduction

Each institute of technology's academic council has established policies and procedures for the design and validation of programmes (ESG 2015 Section 1.2). Policies and procedures have also been developed for the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes (ESG 2015 Section 1.9). This review, referred to as the programmatic review, is normally undertaken within five years of the initial delivery of the programme.

The individual procedures for approval of programmes and those for programmatic review process vary between institutes. However, the overall generic cycle can be divided into several phases which are outlined in **Figure 2-3**. Each IoT has its own unique procedure that suits its requirements which are often determined by the size of the faculty/school.

It should be noted that the thematic analysis was for reports published between June 2015 and June 2018. During this period quality assurance policies, procedures and processes may have changed in institutes. The QA manuals reviewed were those available on institutes' websites at the time of undertaking the current analysis in March 2019.

Two distinct processes are shown in **Figure 2-3**. The first process is for initial validation of a new programme of study. Following a successful validation, the IoT can enrol learners for a specified length of time or number of enrolments (usually five years) and deliver the programme.

3.2 Validation

Validation is the quality assurance process by which IoTs approve new programmes of education and training leading to awards. Specifically, it is the process by which IoTs satisfy themselves that a learner will attain the knowledge, skill or competence required for the purpose of an award made by the institute. Validation is a core function of quality assurance, specified in the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016 and ESG 2015 Section 2.1. It supports public confidence in the quality of programmes and in the standards of awards. It also contributes to the enhancement of the quality of programmes.

A validated programme should not be viewed as a static entity. An institute will make necessary enhancements and adaptations to a programme from year to year. Institutes have policies and procedures for the on-going monitoring of programmes and to update the programme. There are limits to what may be changed before a modified programme must be submitted for validation as a new programme. A substantial change to a programme is one that effectively results in a new programme that must be validated as such. Institutes have guidelines in relation to what constitutes a substantial change.

3.3 Programmatic review

The second process is programmatic review which results in the revalidation of the programme(s) for a further period of five years. Normally the programmatic review process covers all the programmes in a faculty, school or department. This cycle of review and delivery then continues.

Programmatic review is the self-study process whereby a faculty/school/department conducts a critical evaluation of its own activities and programmes and produces a programmatic review report for subsequent peer review. The programmatic review process is used not only to review existing programmes but to examine the strategic direction of the faculty/school/department in which the programme(s) is/are running. The positive outcome of the programmatic review is the revalidation of programmes for a set period of time, which is typically five years.

The programmatic review process is not used for the validation of new programmes. In cases where there are significant changes to a programme leading to a new programme, the initial validation process would be used to validate the programme leading to an award rather than through the programmatic review process.

For the purposes of this report the academic unit will, where appropriate, refer to a faculty, school or department.

3.4 Revalidation

Revalidation is validation of a programme that has evolved from a programme previously validated by an institute.

The procedures for validating minor, special purpose and supplemental awards are different to those for major awards and are not covered in this report. Typically, the programmatic review of minor, special purpose and supplemental awards is covered as part of the programmatic review process[3].

3.5 Authorisation

Authorisation is approval, normally from the institute's executive, to proceed with the development of a proposed programme and subsequently to offer the programme following a successful validation.

3.6 New programme validation

Each IoT has documented their policies and procedures in relation to the initial validation of programmes. These policies and procedures are available on the IoTs' websites. They are similar, but the procedures, guidelines, checklists and templates have been developed individually by each institute.

The authors of this report reviewed extensive information from each institute in relation to initial validation. This information was available on the institutes' websites either within the QA manual of the institute or in supporting documentation.

3.7 Stages in programme validation

Before a programme is offered to potential students it is validated. For validation to occur, the programme must first pass several evaluation stages. Each institute has its own specific evaluation stages which can be summarised as follows:

- Stage 1 Initiation and preliminary authorisation to proceed with the development of the programme;
- Stage 2 Development of the programme;
- Stage 3 Internal evaluation of the proposed programme submission document;
- Stage 4 External evaluation by peer review panel of the programme submission;
- Stage 5 Validation and authorisation to offer the programme.

3.7.1 Stage 1 Initiation and preliminary authorisation

While any individual or academic unit can normally propose a programme, a specific unit such as a department or school or faculty must support the proposal. The executive of the Institute, normally, has to approve (authorise) the development of the programme at this stage. The academic council of the institute or one of its sub-committees may also be involved in authorising the formation of a programme development team to develop the proposed programme.

An analysis of IoTs QA manuals indicates that the main requirements to be met at this stage are:

- The rationale for the proposed programme and related award;
- The need for the proposed programme as well as the projected demand;
- Consistency with the institute's mission, strategy and academic plan;
- Business case including resourcing requirements, business and financial evaluation and potential viability of the programme and any other budgetary considerations;
- Potential impact on programmes currently offered by the institute;
- Award stem, NFQ level, and proposed programme outline.

The academic council or, in some institutes, a sub-committee of academic council or the executive can refuse to authorise the development of the programme. This can happen where the programme is

3 Minor award types provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right. Special purpose award types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes. Supplemental award-types are for learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development. Ref: QQI Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Award-Types National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

not a strategic fit for the school/department or would impact negatively on a programme already running or the necessary resources to deliver the programme cannot be provided. If authorised to proceed, a programme development team is established.

3.7.2 Stage 2 Programme development

The programme development team consisting of academic staff, develops the programme in accordance with institute requirements and, normally, as per an agreed institute template. This phase in practice will often be completed in an iterative rather than a linear manner.

The final submission document includes elements already covered in Stage 1 of the process, but these elements are further developed at this stage. Examples include how the programme fits with the strategic plan of the proposing faculty/school/department, the rationale for the programme, estimated demand, enrolment targets, employment opportunities, and support from potential employers.

Details are required in relation to programme aims and objectives, programme-intended learning outcomes, module-intended learning outcomes, indicative structure and content, as well as assessment strategy, and a mapping of assessment to module learning outcomes, details of resource requirements including staffing, IT, laboratory, library and any other requirements specific to the course including work placement, if it is an element of the proposed programme. Details of the entry requirements, transfer and progression opportunities are specified at this stage. The management requirements for the programme are also specified in the submission document. In some cases, opportunities for Erasmus and other international exchanges are required to be specified, together with an enrolment plan for a specified number of years.

There are some variations in the approach adopted by institutes at this stage. The following are some examples:

- Athlone Institute of Technology. At the programme development phase assistance is sought from the learning and teaching unit when drafting the programme submission document; and
- Cork Institute of Technology. In an approach recently adopted, the development of modules has to be approved and moderated prior to submission of the programme submission document for external peer review.

3.7.3 Stage 3 Internal evaluation of the programme submission document

The purpose of an institute's internal evaluation is to provide a quality assurance evaluation of programme documentation prior to its submission to the registrar or vice president of academic affairs/registrar for external review. Each institute has its own procedures in relation to how the programme is internally reviewed.

Normally, the final programme submission document is reviewed and signed-off by the head of faculty/school/department prior to submitting for internal review. Institutes have individual processes for carrying out an internal review. Some institutes submit the proposed programme document directly to the registrar of the institute or vice president of academic affairs/registrar who reviews the documentation in consultation with the quality unit or teaching and learning centre unit. In other cases, such as in AIT, this is undertaken by the academic strategy and quality committee. In others, for example in IT Tallaght, the head of school organises an internal review with a panel consisting of the registrar or nominee, a head of school or department from outside the sponsoring school, one or two academics, and in some cases with an external member from outside the institute.

Following modification and resubmission by the programme team, if required, and approval by the registrar or vice president for academic affairs/registrar, the programme submission can proceed to Stage 4.

3.7.4 Stage 4 External evaluation by peer review panel of the programme submission

All programmes in the IoT sector leading to major awards are evaluated by external panels. In some institutes an academic council member from the institute is included as a member of the panel.

A significant amount of detail is provided in QA manuals in relation to what information must be provided in the programme submission for the panel to evaluate.

Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of resource requirements, viability of the proposed programme, impact of the programme on current offerings and the

possibility of sharing modules is often undertaken by institutes at this stage. This process is separate from the external evaluation.

An external evaluation panel is appointed by the institute to undertake an evaluation of the programme in accordance with institute procedures. Guidelines are provided to the external evaluation panel and in some cases a report template is provided for the panel to complete.

Requirements in respect of the composition of the external review panel for a programme submitted for validation is provided in either the quality manual or in supporting quality assurance procedures in relation to programme design and validation. The composition of panels is usually different for major awards, minor awards, special purpose and supplemental awards, joint awards and for the differential validations of a programme. The information below relates only to major awards.

Typically, the composition proposed consists of:

(i) Chairperson – a senior academic from either the IoT or university sector or a senior individual from industry/services/professions;

(ii) At least two academics in the relevant discipline areas; an experienced practitioner with the necessary knowledge and expertise from industry, services sector or the professional sector; the registrar, or the registrar's nominee, as secretary to the panel.

Attempts are made to ensure gender balance on panels.

Additional specialists may be added to panels at the discretion of the institute.

Panel members are asked to inform the institute of any conflict of interest. This is normally stated in the section detailing the composition of panels. Institutes require panel members to sign declaration of interest forms prior to appointment.

Some examples of the variation in the membership of review panels are provided below:

- Dundalk Institute of Technology specifies that for level 9 programmes (Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma) panels must include one academic from outside the State;
- Institute of Technology Sligo appoints the assistant registrar or a nominee as rapporteur;
- Waterford Institute of Technology includes a member of the academic council as a panel member in addition to those listed above as well as giving one member of the panel specific responsibility for reviewing the student learning experience aspects of the programme;
- Institute of Technology Carlow includes a learner representative with appropriate experience in a similar learning environment.

An example from the Institute of Technology Carlow is provided in **Figure 3-1.**

Figure 3-1 Extract from Section 4.1 Institute of Technology Carlow, Quality Manual

> Chairperson: A senior educationalist or business/ industry leader;
>
> Secretary: The Institute of Technology Carlow vice president for academic affairs and registrar or their nominee;
>
> Recording secretary: a designated administrator from the vice president for academic affairs and registrar's office;
>
> Learner representative with appropriate experience in a similar learning environment;
>
> At least four other members to be present on the panel with at least one member drawn from the higher education sector and at least one member drawn from business, industry or the relevant professions;
>
> Additional members as may be proposed to provide specialist expertise.

In all cases the external evaluation panel members review the documentation individually and a site visit is organised to meet with the management of the institute, programme development team and the academic staff who will deliver the programme.

The external evaluation panel report must address whether the programme meets the validation criteria in general and in detail. It must include one of the following overall conclusions in light of the applicable validation policies and criteria:

a) Satisfactory

b) Satisfactory subject to conditions

c) Not satisfactory

The report may also include recommendations for consideration by the institute.

The programme development team addresses the external evaluation panel conditions and recommendations[4].

The final amended programme development document is sent to the registrar or vice president of academic affairs/registrar.

In some institutes, a template is provided to the external evaluation panel to evaluate against the validation criteria with a section for the response of the faculty. An example of such a template is provided in Appendix 10 of the QA manual of the Institute of Technology Carlow, which is available on their website.

3.7.5 Stage 5 Validation and approval

The validation of the proposed programme is based on the completion of Stage 3. The external evaluation panel report, the response of the programme development team to the conditions and recommendations of the external evaluation panel report, and the amended programme submission are normally submitted to the registrar or vice president for academic affairs/registrar. Institutes have slightly different processes in relation to who approves the final validation and who authorises the offering of the programme:

(i) It can be the academic council or a sub-committee of academic council;

(ii) The outcome of the validation process is recorded at academic council with the reports available for reviewing with the governing body approving the programme;

(iii) In one institute it is stated in the QA manual that only when funding approval, if necessary, has been obtained from the HEA, will the registrar, in conjunction with the appropriate head of school/ department, prepare a final request to governing body. This submission will certify that all necessary approval has been received. No offer of places will be made on a new programme without the approval of the governing body. The academic council will review adherence to the conditions of programme approval up to the completion of the new programme by the first cohort of learners.

In addition, programme boards can engage in a desk-based review of a newly validated programme during an initial 18-month period.

A certificate of validation is issued in several institutes following final approval.

The president or executive will authorise the delivery of the programme subject to resource availability and demand for the programme.

The external evaluation panel report is published on the institute website. In some cases, an abridged version of the report is published.

3.8 Validation criteria

The criteria used in the validation process are provided in the QA manual of the institute. They are usually provided in the section detailing what must be included in a programme submission document. In many cases reference is made to QQI e.g., "Core validation criteria as provided in QQI policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training April 2016." They often include reference to other criteria such as compatibility with the strategic plan, impact on the programmes currently offered by the institute, and ethical perspectives covered within the programme syllabi and clearly evidenced in the submission document.

An example is provided in **Figure 3-3** from Letterkenny Institute of Technology. "*The Programme team should review QQI's Core Validation Criteria and ensure the submission adheres to the template provided.* Section 3.1.5 Letterkenny Quality Assurance Handbook September 2018."

The twelve current QQI validation criteria, as stated in the policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training, are provided in **Figure 3-2** and the additional validation criteria for Letterkenny Institute of Technology are shown in **Figure 3-3**.

4 A condition requires a mandatory change to some aspect of the submission. A recommendation should be considered by the programme team and implemented where appropriate.

i. The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme[5].

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

iii. The programme concept, implementation strategy and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based.

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

v. The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit for purpose.

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

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

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

ix. There are sound teaching and learning strategies.

x. There are sound assessment strategies.

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

xii. The programme is well managed.

Figure 3-2 Core Validation Criteria from QQI Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

The additional validation criteria for Letterkenny Institute of Technology are shown in **Figure 3-3**.

Further Validation Criteria

In addition, the following points should be addressed in the design of new programmes:

- Compatibility with LYIT's strategic planning and mission;
- Impact on the programmes currently offered by LYIT;
- The support for the programme from industry; government agencies; and professional bodies;
- Demand by employers for a sufficient cohort of appropriately qualified learners;
- The development of the curriculum – imposing increasing demands on the learner as they progress;
- The resources necessary and available to run the programmes;
- An appropriate balance in regard to the breadth and depth of individual curricula and the academic and practical requirements of the programme.

Figure 3-3 Section 3.1.5 Letterkenny Institute of Technology QA manual

Templates are provided in institutes' QA manuals for submitting initial programme proposals to the executive and/or academic council. Templates are normally provided for programme submissions and guidelines or a template provided to external evaluation panels for the evaluation report.

3.9 Programmatic review process / Periodic quality review of academic units

3.9.1 Introduction

All IoTs have detailed QA policies and procedures for the ongoing monitoring of existing validated programmes and for the periodic review of existing programmes.

The quality assurance manuals provide detailed information on the policies, procedures, guidelines and templates used in the ongoing monitoring of programmes. Institutes monitor each programme on an ongoing basis to ensure:

5 In relation to criterion 1, all institutes of technology have delegated authority to make awards.

- the programme intended learning outcomes are being attained by students;
- the continuing appropriateness of the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes;
- programmes remain current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline and practice;
- programmes are modified if new facilities and/or equipment are introduced;
- programmes meet, where applicable, professional body requirements;
- issues that may arise in the delivery of the programme are addressed.

While each individual academic has a responsibility for the module they deliver, heads of academic units have a responsibility in relation to the ongoing monitoring of programmes within the unit.

Programme boards which consist of academics, support staff representatives and learner representatives meet during the academic year to monitor performance, retention, feedback on the programme and external examiners' reports. Programme modifications and quality enhancement activities are also considered. Various reporting methods are in place including an annual programme board report. The implementation of the initiatives and allocation of resources would normally be the responsibility of the head of the academic unit.

The quality assurance manuals provide information on roles and responsibilities in relation to the ongoing monitoring and reporting lines. The reports produced are inputted into the programmatic review process.

The programmatic review process applies to all taught programmes of higher education and training offered by an institute. It is one of the means by which the academic council of an IoT is assured that its programmes achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and the changing needs of society. It is also one of the guidelines in the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016 and Section 1.9 ESG 2015. It provides an opportunity for the academic unit to evaluate the programme(s) with the benefit of the experience of programme delivery incorporating feedback from staff, students, graduates and employers of graduates. Evidence is reflected in data on enrolment and completion rates, feedback from learners, staff, employer and/or industry and evaluations of the programme. The review should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. **Figure 3-4** is an extract from Section 3.3 of QQI's *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* April 2016.

3.9.2 Programme monitoring and review

Programme delivery is monitored in a way which allows for the identification of needs and the modification and adjustment of the programme and the delivery method, as appropriate. The ongoing monitoring and programmatic review of a programme is used as an opportunity to evaluate that programme with the benefit of the experience of programme delivery.

Programme monitoring and review

Programme monitoring and review is taken as an opportunity to:

- ensure the programme remains appropriate, and to create a supportive and effective learning environment;
- ensure the programme achieves the objectives set for it and responds to the needs of learners and the changing needs of society;
- review the learner workload;
- review learner progression and completion rates;
- review the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of learners;
- inform updates of the programme content; delivery modes; teaching and learning methods; learning supports and resources; and information provided to learners;
- update third party, industry or other stakeholders relevant to the programme(s);
- review quality assurance arrangements that are specific to that programme.

Figure 3-4 Programme monitoring and review. Extract from Section 3.3 of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016

The regular monitoring of programmes can provide information which when analysed can enable academic units to adapt the programme during the programmatic review to ensure that it is up to date. This can lead to a revised programme schedule.

A positive outcome of the programmatic review enables revalidation of the respective programmes by the institute.

The programmatic review is a quality process in which peer evaluators analyse the effectiveness of a suite of programmes in an academic unit, with an emphasis on quality, standards and related services. The evaluation seeks the views of learners and independent evaluators who can make comparisons with other similar programmes offered elsewhere. The adaptability of the academic unit to the challenges and opportunities that are likely to arise in the next five years is explored. Programmes are analysed and necessary modifications proposed.

3.10 The programmatic review process

The review process consists of the following phases:

(i) A self-evaluation by the academic unit leading to a self-evaluation report(s) followed by an internal review of the report.

(ii) A review of the self-evaluation report by an external programmatic review panel of experts, including a site visit, meeting with management, academic and support staff, learners, and other stakeholders.

(iii) A report on the findings and recommendations by the external programmatic review panel that is made public.

(iv) The executive considers any recommendation that may have system-wide implications. The academic unit develops an action plan to address the recommendations of the external programmatic review panel report which is also considered by the executive. The responses are normally sent to the chairperson of the programmatic review panel.

(v) On successful completion of the process, the academic council and governing body are normally notified, and the programmes are validated.

The programmatic review process is not only concerned with the review of programmes for the purposes of revalidation but also with the future development of plans of the academic unit in line with the strategic plan of the institute. In some institutes, the process is referred to as the periodic quality review of an academic unit.

The process normally takes place once every five years as stated previously and can be for a programme or several programmes within a department, school or faculty. In some cases, the review could take place earlier in particular circumstances such as changes to professional body registration requirements or in advance of proposed mergers of institutes. Guidelines and templates are provided in QA manuals to ensure that a thorough review is undertaken.

3.11 The objectives of a programmatic review/ periodic quality review of academic units

An analysis undertaken of the institutes' quality assurance manuals showed that the objectives of the programmatic review generally covered the areas listed below. Each institute stated the objectives differently in its QA manual. Most of the objectives listed below are provided as objectives in QA manuals:

- The academic unit must take cognisance of the institute's strategic plan in the area of study under review and its contribution towards the development of the institute and the wider community;
- The impact of demographics on student enrolment and the programme viability is analysed. Projections are made in the area of study under review. Possible areas for development of programmes and potential strategic links with other third-level institutions both nationally and internationally are identified;
- Conduct an analysis of the effectiveness and the efficiency of each of the approved programmes;
- Review the development of the suite of programmes under delegation of awarding authority having regard to current QQI validation criteria;
- Ensure that the programme outcomes correctly describe the knowledge, skill and competence that graduates should have attained on completion of the programme, and are in line with the appropriate award standard;
- Review the development of the suite of programmes delivered by the academic unit

taking account of the views of education interests, students, employers, professional bodies and the wider community;

- Review what has been learned about the programme during delivery in the past five years and consider how it is regarded by stakeholders (learners, graduates, staff, funding agency, professional bodies, regulatory bodies, employers and collaborators both nationally and internationally);
- Evaluate the formal links established with industry/ business and the wider community to maintain the relevance of its programmes;
- Review the human and physical resources required for the provision of the programmes;
- Review research, development and consultancy activities;
- Evaluate the faculty/campus flexibility in responding to market requirements and educational developments;
- Evaluate access, transfer and progression;
- Evaluate the programme's effectiveness in meeting the needs of lifelong learning;
- Review the development and use of assessment, teaching and learning strategies.

Other areas highlighted were:

- evaluation of feedback mechanisms for students, and the process for acting on this feedback;
- review of feedback from students relating to student experience of the programmes;
- review of feedback from external examiners.

3.12 Follow-up reports or quality enhancement plan

In all cases follow-up reports are required to address the findings, along with the academic unit implementation plan for any conditions attached and recommendations made in relation to both. The report is normally required to be produced within a specified time. Several institutes published the follow-up reports on their websites or included the responses within the published evaluation report (see **Figure 8-1**).

3.13 Programmatic review processes and practices

Two processes take place during the programmatic review.

(i) The planning of the future development of an academic unit;

(ii) The revision of programmes for the purpose of revalidation.

Institutes either run these processes sequentially or concurrently. When run sequentially it is normally a faculty/school that is reviewed as an academic unit. The programme review is normally undertaken by a department. **Figure 3-5** shows the institutes where both stages are run concurrently, and those institutes where the two stages are run sequentially with separate panels at each stage.

Stage 1 and 2 run concurrently	Stage 1 and 2 run sequentially with separate evaluation panels for each stage
Athlone Institute of Technology	Cork Institute of Technology
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	Dundalk Institute of Technology
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	Institute of Technology Carlow
Institute of Technology Tallaght	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Institute of Technology Tralee	Sligo Institute of Technology
Limerick Institute of Technology	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Waterford Institute of Technology	

Figure 3-5 Institute of Technology programme review processes

When run concurrently one external panel is appointed to systematically review the submission documentation in relation to strategy issues facing the academic unit and provide feedback on each programme within the academic unit. The academic unit will be required to produce a response in the form of a quality enhancement plan based on the findings of the self-assessment report and the recommendations of the external evaluation panel.

When run as two separate processes, an external evaluation panel is appointed to review the strategy and operations of the academic unit and evaluate achievements against established and agreed key performance indicators. This is referred to as Stage

1. As above, the academic unit will be required to produce a response in the form of a quality enhancement plan based on the findings of the self-assessment report and the recommendations of the external evaluation panel.

Stage 2 is concerned with a detailed programme-by-programme review and revalidation of these programmes for a further five years. A separate external review panel is appointed to review the programmes. In some cases, normally due to the size of the institute, more than one panel is appointed for the Stage 2 process. Panels can be appointed for individual departments within a school or faculty. The evaluation panels provide reports on their findings including any conditions and/or recommendations. Similar to initial validation, the programme board must address conditions/requirements and recommendations prior to revalidation of the programme.

A typical example of the two stages is provided in **Figure 3-6.**

> Stage 1 Self-study by the faculty/campus/joint award programme board of all its operations and strategy and an evaluation of achievements against established and agreed key performance indicators (KPIs).
>
> Stage 2 Review and, where necessary, revision of its programmes of education and training to ensure that the programmes continue to be informed by advances in knowledge and practice, and remain relevant to the needs of learners, employers, and the wider community.
>
> Evaluation of the resources related to programmes, including human, physical and financial resources.

Figure 3-6 Extract from Institute of Technology Carlow quality manual – Elements of a programmatic review

The Institute of Technology Carlow specifies an interval not exceeding one year between the two stages.

Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology uses the twelve QQI programme review criteria including the programme revalidation criteria for the programmatic review process.

Waterford Institute of Technology requires three separate documents to be produced:

- Volume 1: School overall strategic review
- Volume 2: Review of modules
- Volume 3: Review of programmes

3.14 Composition of external programmatic review panels/ academic unit review panels

All IoTs appoint external review panels as part of the programmatic review process/review of academic units. The composition is normally:

(i) An independent chairperson (who is experienced in higher education and training or a senior individual from industry/business/professions) familiar with programmatic reviews;

(ii) Two academics – normally senior academics in the IoT sector or university sector;

(iii) Normally two representatives from industry/ business/professions;

(iv) Some institutes include a learner from another HEI;

(v) Some institutes include an alumni representative;

(vi) It is specified in QA manuals that other specialists can be added as required. Every effort will be made to ensure gender balance. Where possible a specialist from another country will be included.

The academics and industry representatives should have expertise and experience specific/relevant to the broad discipline area under consideration by the panel.

For institutes that have a two stage process some examples of further requirements are provided below:

- Letterkenny Institute of Technology specifies that one member of the external evaluation panel for Stage 1 will be involved in the external evaluation for Stage 2;
- Institute of Technology Carlow states that in so far as possible/practicable both panels shall have common membership to conduct both stages of the review;
- Cork Institute of Technology for phase 1 stipulates that the panel will normally consist of four, but

no less than three, external peer experts and a representative of the CIT Registrar's Office. The number and size of the phase 2 programme panels depends on the overall number and nature of programmes under review and the diversity of fields of study represented. The guiding principle will be to achieve, within the given logistical constraints, an adequate breadth of subject expertise for detailed programme reviews.

Guidelines are provided in the quality assurance manuals of the institutes in relation to each element of the programmatic review process as well as guidelines for the external evaluation panel. Sample templates are provided in several institute quality manuals. Information is also provided on panel membership which consists of a chairperson, academics, industry/ professional body representatives or members of the community, and a learner representative.

In the case of those with a two-stage approach to the process, the membership of the stage 1 and stage 2 panels can be different depending on the institute.

As per initial validation, the academic unit must address the conditions/requirements and recommendations.

The final programmatic review report of the evaluation panel is published on the institute website. In some cases, the programmatic review documentation is also published.

3.15 Findings

- IoTs have documented QA policies and procedures available on their websites with details of the policies, procedures and guidelines on programme validation for new programmes and the periodic review of programmes commonly referred to within IoTs as the programmatic review.
- The documented policies and procedures are mainly consistent with Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all providers, April 2016.
- All new programme proposals must be approved prior to the development of the programme by the institute management to ensure they are in line with the strategic plan of the proposing school/faculty and that there is both an identifiable need and demand for the proposed programme.
- All programmes leading to major awards must be evaluated by independent external panels consisting of academics from other institutes and universities as well as members for business, industry, and the professions.
- The academic council and, in some cases, the governing body of the institute are involved in the validation process.
- There are some slight variations in the approaches adopted by institutes at the programme development stage of the validation process.
- Authorisation to run a programme is an executive decision.
- Institutes of technology publish the external evaluation report for initial validation of programmes on their websites.
- Institutes of technology publish the independent external programme review report on their websites.
- The criteria for validating a programme of education and training are provided in the QA manuals of institutes of technology. The criteria are similar across the sector.
- There are some differences in the initial validation processes and the programmatic review processes leading to revalidation of a programme between the institutes.
- Programmatic review consists of a strategic review of the academic unit and plan in line with the strategic plan of the institute. It also consists of a review of the programmes and modifications to those programmes taking account of changing requirements and inputs from external stakeholders.
- Programmes may only be revalidated following a programmatic review if they have previously been validated. If there are substantial changes made to a programme following a programmatic review, the programme must go through the initial validation process.

3.16 Suggestions

- The validation criteria detailing the programme submission documentation requirements are embedded in some QA manuals within the QA section. It is recommended that the validation criteria be provided in a separate dedicated section within the QA manual.
- The full external evaluation panel report should be published on the institute's website. As this is the

only report in relation to the programme validation that is published, it should take account of the fact that the report will be read by audiences external to the institute who will not in all cases be familiar with the validation process. Accordingly, some additional high-level information in relation to the institute/faculty/school/department should be provided.

- Specific guidelines in relation to the involvement of learners in the design of the proposed programme, as per Section 3.1 QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016, should be included in QA manuals. The same applies to the programme review process.
- Specific guidelines should be provided in QA manuals on how to ensure the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are consistent with the relevant awards standards or in cases where there is no award standard to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) award type descriptors.
- Guidance through the office of the registrar or vice president for academic affairs/registrar should be provided to programme development teams developing interdisciplinary programmes on linking the minimum intended programme learning outcomes to more than one award standard.
- Guidance and criteria on choosing the award to be made for interdisciplinary programmes should be provided.
- Templates to enable external evaluation panels to record their findings against each of the institute's stated validation criteria should be developed. Any conditions and/or recommendations must be substantiated by reference to the validation criteria. The template should provide a section for the external evaluation panel to note commendations or innovative approaches to any aspect of the programme.
- It should be stated clearly in the QA manual which committee approves the validation of a programme and the revalidation following a programmatic review.

4 Structure of Evaluation Reports for Initial Validation of Programmes

4.1 Introduction

Evaluation reports for the initial validation of programmes for the institute of technology sector are the outcome of the validation process and are public documents available on institutional websites.

This section analyses the structure of the evaluation reports and examines the way in which institutes of technology produce the reports. It lists the various stakeholders who would have an interest in the reports and suggests the information that these various stakeholders would require. It assesses the practice of the institutes against these requirements and suggests best practice.

4.2 Report production process

Evaluation reports are produced by institutes of technology for internal and regulatory purposes. The list of stakeholders considered in this analysis is broader than many institutes would consider.

The external evaluation reports for an institute normally use a template which ensures a consistent approach for reporting purposes. There is some variation in the evaluation reports between institutes as each has developed its own template for use by evaluation panels.

There was some variation in the detail provided in evaluation reports published by the individual institutes. For example, some reports had very brief descriptions of the programme while other reports from the same institute had much fuller descriptions.

Some institutes used heads of department from other faculties of the institute as secretary to the evaluation panel and to draft the report. This resulted in different approaches by different persons to the reports. Other institutes used registrars or assistant registrars. This resulted in a more consistent approach.

Table 4–1 Structure of evaluation reports

Institute	Approved programme schedule	Commen-dations	Description of programme	Discussion of salient features of programme	Intended programme outcomes	Rationale of programme stated and discussed	Response of institute to report included	Report follows an institute set structure	Validation Criteria stated	Standards discussed and stated
Athlone	No	Some	Brief*	No	No	Brief	No	No	No	No
Blanchardstown	No	Some	Substantial**	Some brief	No	Substantial	No	Yes	No	Yes
Cork	Yes	Some	Substantial	Some substantial	Yes	Brief	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Carlow	No	Most	Some Brief	Some brief	No	Substantial	No	Most	Most	Yes
Dundalk	No	No	No	Some brief	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dún Laoghaire	No	Some	Mostly Brief	Substantial	No	Substantial	Most	Some	No	No
Galway-Mayo	No	No	Substantial	Substantial	No	Substantial	No	Yes	No	No
Limerick	No	Most	Some	Some Substantial	No	Some brief	No	Yes	No	No
Letterkenny	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Sligo	No	No	Usually	Substantial	No	Some	No	Some	No	No
Tallaght	No	Usually	Some brief	Substantial	No	Some brief	Some	Most	No	Yes
Tralee	No	Some	Brief	Substantial	No	Some brief	No	Yes	No	Yes
Waterford	No	Some	No	No	No	No	Some	No	No	No

Where all reports have a particular feature, this is indicated by "Yes". Where no reports have a feature, this is indicated by "No". If one or two reports have this feature this is indicated by "Some". If three reports have a feature this is indicated by "Most".

**Brief normally means a few sentences. ** Substantial means a more developed description.*

All institutes publish evaluation reports on their websites. In some cases, including the Institute of Technology Carlow and Limerick Institute of Technology, a redacted version consisting of the overall decision, the commendations, the conditions, and the recommendations is published.

Most institutes use a standard template for their reports. The template is used to structure the discussions and to record the decisions of the panel.

4.3 Details of the institutes' evaluation reports

Table 4–1 provides information on various elements of reports from institutes.

Four reports were examined from each institute. The reports were produced in the period between June 2015 and June 2018.

The features in **Table 4–1** are those that may be of interest to the stakeholders mentioned in **Figure 4-1**.

4.4 Requirements of stakeholders

Figure 4-1 is an extract from the requirements of this thematic analysis of reports. It outlines categories of stakeholders who may have an interest in the evaluation reports and describes their major concerns. By examining particular features of reports as in **Table 4–1** the reports can be analysed to determine whether they fulfil the requirements of the various stakeholders.

Recurring strengths, and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement of the relevant reports in terms of their clarity, the usefulness of the information they provide stakeholders about programmes and the evidential supports cited in reports in support of conclusions. Stakeholders include those who require, either directly or indirectly, objective information about the quality of programmes, for example:

1. the academic committees (i.e., the programme and awards executive committee in the case of the contracting authority) responsible for approving programmes (e.g., information about whether the programme meets the approval/accreditation process requirements and criteria);
2. the programme development teams (e.g., information that will help enhance the programme);
3. prospective students (e.g., information that will help inform student choice);
4. prospective employers of graduates (e.g., information that will help inform expectations concerning graduates);
5. Government and its agencies (e.g., concerning the quality of the programmes).

Not all these groups typically read (re-) approval/accreditation reports. Reports are normally addressed directly to (a) and (b). Nevertheless, the reports are expected to be a source of objective evaluation that supports information about the programmes that might be provided to these groups.

Figure 4-1 Extract from the requirements of the thematic analysis

In addition to the stakeholders listed in **Figure 4-1**, one could add education agencies of foreign states, which may also have an interest in providing funds for international learners and those in other higher education institutes to which graduates may be progressing. External stakeholders are those listed in 3, 4 and 5 of **Figure 4-1** as well as foreign educational agencies and other higher education institutes.

4.5 Features of evaluation reports

Figure 4-2 lists desirable features of an evaluation report and to whom reports may be of interest. All stakeholders may be interested in all of these features, but they will be of particular interest to those indicated in the rightmost column.

External stakeholders require contextual information that is usually available in the programme submission. As the programme submission is not usually publicly available some material that is normally in the submission could be included in the evaluation report. These elements include a brief description of the programme and rationale, the awards standards, and the agreed programme schedule.

It should be noted that institutes do not necessarily produce evaluation reports with the intention of satisfying all the stakeholders mentioned above. The normal intention is to assure themselves of the quality of the proposed programme and to fulfil the requirements of their agreed quality assurances procedures. The analysis below should be read with that in mind.

a) Award details

All evaluation reports that were analysed from all institutes contained basic information about the proposed programme. This included award and programme titles and credits. It also included exit and embedded awards. The validation period was not always included. No institutes included the corresponding EQF award level.

b) Awards standards

Institutes with delegated authority are required to take cognisance of the QQI Awards Standards for specific fields of learning where they generally relate to the programme being developed. These standards are defined for a range of discipline areas such as engineering, science, business, etc.

There are different standards at different levels of the NFQ. In the absence of an award standard the programme must align to the NFQ award-type descriptors.

The award title is an indication of the level and standard to which the programme conforms. The standards for specific fields of learning should be used as reference points in the design of programmes. Where a programme is multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary in nature, the use of more than one standard may be necessary.

A critical part of the validation process is the determination of whether the programme team has selected the appropriate award standard against which to map the programme and its intended learning outcomes. The determination can be made by comparing the minimum intended programme learning outcomes with the award standard and its strands/sub-strands under the headings of knowledge, skill, and competence and assessing whether the intended programme learning outcomes are sufficiently well aligned with these.

By recommending the validation of a programme with a particular title, the evaluation panel is confirming that completion of a validated programme means that the learner has acquired, and where appropriate, is able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify the award being offered in respect of the programme.

The approach to awards standards varied between institutes. In six of the 13 institutes the awards standards were detailed under a separate heading in the evaluation report. In some of these cases an anodyne statement was included, stating that the appropriate award standard was attained. None of the reports reviewed contained discussion of the alignment or mapping of the programme to the standards included in the report. The remaining seven institutes did not have a separate heading for awards standards.

Feature	Suggested guidelines	Of interest to
Award details	This should contain award title and programme title, duration in stages and ECTS credits, NFQ and EQF levels, faculty and providing department.	All stakeholders
Standards used in the determination of the award	It must be demonstrated that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are consistent with the relevant QQI awards standards.	Regulatory agencies, academic board, foreign agencies
Rationale for the provision of the programme	The objectives of the programme and how its fits with the overall strategy of the faculty/institute.	External stakeholders
Discussion of features of note in the programme	A broad discussion of the programme that situates it among programmes with similar titles or in the suite of programmes in the institute.	External stakeholders
Details of the external panel members	Sufficient detail to show that the panel is independent and has the range of skills and experience necessary to make a judgement on the programme e.g., job title, affiliation, role on panel.	All stakeholders
Statement on conflicts of interest	Positive statement that there are no material conflicts of interest and include any declarations made in respect of perceived conflicts of interest.	All stakeholders
Validation criteria	The validation criteria utilised by the institute should be listed and each criterion discussed. Conditions to enable the programme to meet the criteria should be listed against the criteria as should the recommendations.	Academic council, programme development team
Programme learning outcomes	The minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) should be explicitly stated and mapped to the awards standards used.	Learners, employers
Approved programme schedule	The approved programme schedule is in effect a contract with the students. It states the teaching input from the institute, the curriculum and assessment regime.	Learners, employers, other HEIs, internal stakeholders
Commendations	Where there is evidence of exemplary practice in design, delivery, assessment or content this should be stated.	Programme development team, academic council
Recommendations	Recommendations for the improvement of the programme along with a description of how they would improve the programme.	Programme development team, academic council
Conditions	Where conditions are attached by the panel, they should be accompanied by evidence to show that they are necessary. Conditions should be confined to those measures necessary to allow the programme to satisfy the validation criteria.	Programme development team, academic council
Response of the institute to the report	The providing department should indicate how it intends to meet/has met the conditions, and what actions it intends to take in response to the recommendations.	All external stakeholders
Acknowledgements	This should acknowledge any elements of the validation process that the evaluation panel found helpful.	All internal stakeholders
Sign off	Published versions of the report should contain the signature of the chairperson of the evaluation panel and the date. The response should be affirmed by the relevant authorities in the institute.	All stakeholders

Figure 4-2 Desirable features of an evaluation report

c) Rationale for the provision of the programme and description of the programme

Institutes dealt with this in different ways. In some cases, there was a substantial description and in other cases it was brief. Some institutes included the rationale for the programme e.g., Athlone, Blanchardstown, Cork, Galway-Mayo Institutes of Technology and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology. Others did not include the rationale or a description e.g., Dundalk, Waterford, and Letterkenny Institutes of Technology. The remainder of the institutes provided a rationale on some occasions.

d) Details of the panel

All evaluation reports provided the names of the panel members and their affiliated organisations. In 45 of the 52 cases the position held in the affiliated organisation was not listed. In 31 of these the panel member was an industry expert. Practices in naming the secretary to the panel varied. Thirty-four of the 52 programme evaluation reports named secretaries. These were usually registrars or assistant registrars. Letterkenny Institute of Technology used heads of department as secretaries.

Cork, Galway-Mayo and Waterford Institutes of Technology included internal members on some of their panels. This was in addition to the secretary to the panel. In some cases, they were described as academic council members.

e) Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest appeared as a section only in the case of Institute of Technology Sligo. In those reports it was recorded that there were no conflicts of interest.

f) Validation criteria

Institutes of technology with delegated authority to make awards have agreed their quality assurance processes with QQI. These include the validation criteria for their own programmes. These criteria differ in detail between institutes. An important function of validation processes is to ensure that the programmes being validated conform to the validation criteria.

In some cases, (Cork, Carlow and Dundalk Institutes of Technology) the evaluation report template contained a statement of the criteria and the reports commented on each. For example, Cork Institute of Technology's practice is to comment on each criterion. Where the programme is seen as deficient, a condition of validation is imposed. This allows for a transparent process by which any stakeholder can see that the criteria have been considered in detail.

All but two of the remaining institutes structured the report around headings that stand in for criteria, e.g., staffing, assessment, resources, etc. These headings do not include any threshold that must be reached for the programme to be validated. The extent of the commentary under these headings varies from institute to institute. In many cases, the comments were general without any clear reference to the programme under discussion. In one institute, the entries were not specific to the programme and were identical general statements on all four programmes examined.

Two institutes did not structure the reports around criteria or headings as above.

g) Approved programme schedule

Approved programme schedules can be considered to be an agreement between the institute and the learner. They indicate, in outline form, the modules to be delivered, the staff input to the modules and the assessment regime. Once a schedule is approved through the validation process it cannot be changed in any substantial way without further external evaluation.

Proposed course schedules are a necessary part of the programme submission to the evaluation panel. Only two of the institutes, Cork Institute of Technology and Letterkenny Institute of Technology, published the approved programme schedule with the evaluation report. The absence of the programme schedules from other institutes means that learners have no indication of what has been agreed with respect to the programme input.

h) Programme learning outcomes

Programme learning outcomes can be considered part of an agreement with learners. They indicate the knowledge, skills and competencies that will be acquired by the learner who successfully completes the programme.

The validation process confirms that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes will have been achieved by a graduate on successfully completing the programme. The programme learning outcomes are not normally changed without external input.

Only one institute, Cork Institute of Technology, publishes the programme learning outcomes with the evaluation report.

i) Commendations, recommendations and conditions

All institutes record the recommendations of the evaluation panel for improving the programme. The conditions that must be met for the programme to be validated are also listed.

In most reports the recommendations and conditions are listed together. In some, for example Cork Institute of Technology, the conditions (requirements) and recommendations are listed under the validation criteria to which they refer. This places them in the context of the broader discussion of the programme. In many cases the commendations do not refer to the programme but to the evaluation process itself. These might be better placed under "Acknowledgements".

j) Response of the institute to the evaluation report

Where conditions are attached to a programme, it is expected that, insofar as possible, these conditions will be met prior to the programme being finally validated. Three institutes, CIT, LYIT and IADT, include the response of the department to the report with the validation report. This response indicates how the conditions will be or have been met. It also usually includes the institutional response to the non-mandatory recommendations.

k) Acknowledgements

The panel should acknowledge any aspect of the validation process or the documentation that warrants it. This would allow the commendations section to refer solely to the aspects of the programme under consideration.

l) Signed versions of the evaluation report

Many institutes do not include a signed version of the panel report on their website. This leaves the question of whether the version published is the agreed version or an earlier draft. In the absence of a signature a note that the published report is the final and agreed version of the report is warranted.

4.6 Commentary

4.6.1 Structure of evaluation reports

- All institutes used an institutional standard template for the evaluation reports. All reports contain details of the programme, the external panel and the commendations, recommendations, and conditions of the panel.
- It was not always evident who the secretary to the panel was. Only 34 of the 52 reports had a named secretary. All were internal post-holders in academic positions in the institutes.
- There are four different approaches to the remaining elements of the validation event.
  - a) Some institutes do not publish any details of the discussion between the panel and representatives of the institute beyond the basic elements described above. Athlone, Limerick and Waterford Institutes of Technology are in this category. This has the advantage of brevity but does not disclose the context of the discussions. The discussion can provide evidence for commendations, recommendations, and conditions.
  - b) Dundalk and Cork Institutes of Technology structure the reports around a set of explicit validation criteria. Recommendations and conditions are introduced under the criterion that they address.

c) Many institutes structure the report around headings. However, these headings do not specify the requirements that the programme must fulfil for the validation criteria to be satisfied. Tralee, Tallaght, Letterkenny, Galway-Mayo, Dún Laoghaire and Blanchardstown Institutes take this approach. In some cases, the headings are broad, in others they are precise and correspond to validation criteria.

For example, the heading "Staffing" is used where a more expanded title might be "Is there enough academic, technical and administrative staff with the range and depth of skills available to deliver this programme?".

d) The report from the Institute of Technology Sligo is in the form of minutes of the meetings that took place.

4.6.2 Stakeholders

The following is a discussion of issues that concern stakeholders and comments on how the reports address these.

a) Academic councils: In evaluation reports, evaluation panels make a recommendation to the institute that the programme should or should not be validated. It is recommended that evaluation reports give clear recommendations, supported by evidence, that the panel was thorough in arriving at its recommendation. This requires that the report confirms that the panel considered the criteria set by the institute to have been met – or considered that they would be met if the conditions attached by the panel were implemented. The practice in Cork Institute of Technology allows this to be fulfilled in a structured way.

b) Programme development teams: Programme development teams have an interest in evidence that the programme was thoroughly reviewed. If conditions are attached, it should be clearly stated what deficiency is being addressed by the condition. Similarly, the improvements that would be the result of implementing any key recommendations included by the panel should be clear. Where there is evidence of exemplary practice in the programme this should be highlighted by the use of commendations. In some templates there is no heading for commendations.

c) Learners: The proposed programme schedules are a central part of the evaluation. The absence of these from the reports of 11 of the 13 institutes is a significant deficit. The programme schedule indicates to the learner what inputs they can expect and the assessment regime that they will be subject to. In order to ensure that evaluation reports address the interests of learners, it is recommended that programme schedules be appended to all reports. The same applies to programme learning outcomes. Of all IoTs, only Cork Institute of Technology publishes the programme learning outcomes with the evaluation report. Where the programme schedule or the programme learning outcomes are required to be modified, the modified version should be published.

d) Employers: Employers may require some indication of the strengths or features of a programme that differentiate it from other programmes. This requirement could be met by including in the report the objectives and salient features of the programme as well as the rationale for the programme. Programme schedules and programme learning outcomes can also provide this information. Only some evaluation reports included the rationale for the programme.

e) Government agencies require evidence that the evaluation of the programme was conducted by competent persons who can offer objective and informed opinions on the education and training and related services, as well as the activities and processes being evaluated. For statistical and reporting purposes government agencies may require an internationally recognised code to describe the precise discipline area of the programme. Award titles such as B.Sc. or M.A. are used across a range of areas of study and are not an accurate indication of the discipline area. Similarly, programme titles are not always a good indicator of discipline area.

f) Foreign government agencies may require information on where the programme is mapped

to the European Quality Framework (EQF). They would also require evidence as stated in (e) above.

4.7 Suggestions

- Institutes should consider carefully the various stakeholders that have an interest in the evaluation reports of their programmes and adapt their evaluation report structures accordingly.
- The areas of expertise of the external panel members should be provided together with their affiliation and function on the panel, e.g., subject expert, teaching and learning expert, chairperson, industry expert etc.
- Internal staff who are full members of the panel should be identified together with their positions, e.g., academic council member, head of faculty.
- The secretary to the panel should be named and their position, for example, registrar, assistant registrar, head of department stated.
- Conflicts of interest should be included as a heading on all reports and where there are no conflicts of interest this should be stated.
- A brief introduction to the programme should be provided in the evaluation report including the rationale for the programme, salient features, and objectives.
- The discussion of the programme should be structured to follow the validation criteria. Comments relevant to the programme should be included under each criterion and conditions and recommendations relevant to a criterion should be included under that criterion.
- Awards standards should receive particular attention. Where appropriate, a positive statement should be made that the programme maps to the (named) award standard. Where there are deficiencies, the area of deficiency should be identified together with the remedial action necessary.
- Where exemplary practice is identified by the evaluation panel this should be noted under commendations.
- Programme schedules that are agreed with the panel should be included as an appendix to the report.
- The programme learning outcomes, following revision if required, should be included in the evaluation report.
- Both the full evaluation report and the follow-up report should be published.
- The final agreed version of the evaluation report, as signed off by the chairperson, should be published.
- A brief outline describing the proposing department and school would be beneficial to an external stakeholder.
- Programme descriptors and programme evaluation reports should include the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) code together with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level indicator. These codes and indicators should also be included on the programme management system.

5 Embedded Exits and Awards

5.1 Introduction

This thematic analysis examined 52 separate reports of evaluation panels. In considering the issues raised in the reports, the main award was usually considered to be the programme at the highest NFQ level. In many cases, the reports also included subsidiary awards. This section examines the extent to which these awards were considered by panels and the approach of institutes to these awards.

5.2 Award Structure and Terminology

Major awards in the IoT sector have specified entry requirements and a specified number of credits. Ab initio awards are those that allow direct entry without requiring any other higher education award as a prerequisite. "Add-on" awards are those that require a major award as a prerequisite for entry. The structure of award types is shown in **Table 5-1.**

This award structure allows institutes to construct programmes of varying lengths, with varying entry and graduation points. There are three major structural models leading to a 240-credit Honours Bachelor Degree currently in use.

1. The add-on model: This is a ladder system of awards. A Higher Certificate is designed with particular aims and objectives, entry requirements and programme learning outcomes. A 60- credit Bachelor Degree is designed with a Higher Certificate as an entry requirement, with aims, objectives and programme learning outcomes covering the 60 credits. Finally, a 60- credit Honours Bachelor Degree is designed with aims, objectives and programme learning outcomes covering those 60 credits and with a Bachelor Degree as an entry requirement. This is often referred to as a 2+1+1 or ladder structure.

2. The ab initio model: In this case the programme is designed as a four-year 240-credit programme leading to an Honours Bachelor Degree. The programme outcomes cover the full four years and the entry requirements are different from those for Ordinary Bachelor Degree. The first 120 credits may be specified as an "embedded" or "exit" award at Higher Certificate. This award has separate programme learning outcomes associated with it. Learners may opt to graduate with this award if they are leaving the programme. Similarly, an Ordinary Bachelor Degree comprising the first 180 credits of the programme can be embedded in the 240-credit programme. This requires separate programme outcomes, aims and objectives. This model is commonly referred to as a 4-1-1 model.

3. Combined structure: This is an approach that some institutes adopt.

4. Embedded or exit awards are specified for those wishing to exit after 120 or 180 credits have been achieved. This leads to two cohorts of learners with different entry requirements obtaining the same award.

Table 5–1 Structure of awards in the IoT sector

Award Type	Credit No.	Award level	Structure
Higher Certificate	120	6	Ab initio
Bachelor Degree	180	7	Ab initio
Bachelor Degree	60	7	Add on to 120 credit Higher Certificate
Honours Bachelor Degree	240	8	Ab initio
Honours Bachelor Degree	60	8	Add on to 180 credit Bachelor Degree or 120 credit Higher Certificate plus 60 credit Bachelor Degree
Higher Diploma	60	8	Normally requires prior level 8 award in cognate area.
Master's Degree	90	9	Requires prior level 8 award in cognate area
Postgraduate Diploma	60	9	Requires prior level 8 award in cognate area

The terminology used by institutes is inconsistent. "Exit" and "Embedded" are used interchangeably. In some cases, the award titles do not distinguish between the ab-initio programme and the add-on programme, between a 60-credit award and a 240-credit award.

The combined structure has the effect of introducing confusion to the meaning of award titles and effectively reduces the entry level of Honours Bachelor Degree programmes to that of the Bachelor Degree. The higher entry requirement for Honours Bachelor Degree programmes is a higher education system requirement. It was introduced over 50 years ago following a recommendation of the Commission on Higher Education in 1967. The combined structure does have the benefit of allowing transfer pathways between the two programmes.

The structure of postgraduate taught awards is consistent across the sector. A 90-credit Master's Degree typically has a 60-credit Postgraduate Diploma embedded within it.

5.3 Validation of embedded awards

Table 5–2 shows the number of embedded programmes in the sample selected for analysis. The programmes shown exclude minor awards.

The reports show different approaches to the treatment of embedded awards. In none of the cases analysed were separate reports generated for the embedded awards. In some cases, all of the awards, both primary and embedded, are listed with credits, award title, and programme title. In other cases, the evaluation report title refers only to the primary award.

Only an examination of the full report indicates the presence of the embedded awards.

Many evaluation panels do not appear to consider the embedded award separately from the primary award.

In nine evaluation reports there is no mention of the embedded awards except in the list provided of the awards. In 15 reports the embedded awards are mentioned. In eight of these cases the evaluation panel required that separate programme learning outcomes be written for the embedded awards and in some cases separate graduate attributes.

- In no report were separate commendations, conditions or recommendations made in relation to the embedded award.
- In one case the evaluation panel refused to validate the embedded programme as no documentation was supplied. (TA03)

  "Only the Level 8 Programme is being approved on the day. The Panel is satisfied that the academic content of the Higher Certificate and BEng (Ord) are worthy of awards but until the necessary appendices dealing with Awards Standards Mapping are provided (via email), the panel cannot make the necessary recommendations. "

5.4 Findings

- A majority of evaluation reports deal with more than one major award.
- Evaluation reports deal with the primary award with little reporting on the embedded awards.
- The absence of separate programme outcomes, aims and objectives for the embedded awards is a recurring issue.

Table 5–2 Major embedded awards by parent award

Primary or parent award type where a major embedded award is	Total number of programmes	Number of programmes with embedded awards (%)	Embedded Higher Certificates	Embedded Bachelor Degrees	Embedded Postgraduate Diplomas
Bachelor Degree (180 credits)	11	3 (27%)	3	n/a	n/a
Honours Bachelor Degree (240 credits)	21	12 (57%)	6	10	n/a
Master's Degree	14	9 (65%)	n/a	n/a	9
All	46	24 (57%)	n/a	n/a	n/a

- There is a lack of agreement within the sector on the terminology or practice in the implementation of progression and/or exit pathways.

5.5 Suggestions

- Institutes should ensure that embedded awards are considered separately at evaluation events and that separate aims, objectives and programme outcomes are written for them. This could be achieved by having a template that clearly differentiates between principal and embedded awards; providing evaluation panels with a clear description of their remit, which would emphasise that embedded awards are to be considered along with the principal award.
- QQI should establish sectoral best practice with regard to embedded and exit awards.

6 Recurring commendations, recommendations and conditions in external evaluation reports of initial validations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the commendations, recommendations and conditions made by all external evaluation panels in respect of initial validation in the sample of programmes chosen. It separates them by the criteria to which they are related and examines trends depending on the institute, the discipline, or the award type. It provides examples of commendations, recommendations, and conditions. Finally, it identifies the most recurring issues in each category and comments on the findings. The reports from any programmes that were refused validation are not made publicly available in all cases although some do publish them, e.g., CIT. No reports where validation had been refused were analysed.

Validation is a critical quality assurance process. It also includes elements of quality enhancement. The purpose of the external evaluation panel is to scrutinise the programme proposal to ensure that it matches the criteria for validation set by the institution.

When examining the programme proposals, external evaluation panels discuss the proposal and the intended implementation of the programme with the programme development team. Where an external evaluation panel believes that the proposed programme does not meet some of the relevant criteria, it can recommend validation subject to certain conditions being met. These conditions, when met, are designed to allow the programme to meet the validation criteria. These conditions must be accepted and implemented for the programme to be validated.

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of this analysis. Differences between programmes can arise from a variety of causes. The number of conditions varies by discipline, award level and importantly by evaluation panel. Generally, large panels tend to attach more conditions and recommendations than those with fewer members. The programmes represent a proportion of the programmes validated by institutes in the period of the thematic analysis.

Where the external evaluation panel believes that there are opportunities for improvements to be made to the programme, they can make recommendations to improve or enhance the programme. These recommendations are not binding but the programme development team is required to consider them. These recommendations serve the purpose of quality enhancement.

The external evaluation panel, where it sees distinctive strengths in the programme, can formally commend those aspects it finds noteworthy. This can be used to promote good practice in programme design and delivery.

This chapter examines the commendations, recommendations and conditions made by all external evaluation panels in the sample of programmes chosen. It separates them by the criteria to which they are related and examines trends depending on the institute, the discipline or the award type. It provides examples of commendations, recommendations, and conditions. Finally, it identifies the most recurring issues in each category and comments on the findings.

6.2 Sample of evaluation reports analysed

A sample of four initial evaluation reports from each of the 13 institutes of technology was analysed for the period June 2015 to June 2018. A further 18 programmatic review reports were analysed, and the findings are provided in **Section 8.** Approximately 300 evaluation reports either for initial validation or for programmatic review are available on institute of technology websites for this period.

The sample reports covered a range of disciplines i.e., arts, business, engineering and science. It was also

necessary that the full range of taught programme types be represented i.e., Higher Certificate, Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree/ Higher Diploma and Master's Degree. The number of programmes chosen within each discipline and award type reflected the number in each type available on IoT websites.

Table 6–1 shows the number of evaluation reports analysed by discipline and award type.

Appendix A contains a list of the evaluation reports examined including the discipline, award title, programme title and institute.

Table 6–1 Evaluation reports analysed by award standard and level

Discipline	Higher Certif-icate	Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/ HDip	Master's Degree	All
Arts	3	2	5	4	14
Business	1	2	5	2	10
Engineering	0	2	4	2	8
Science	1	5	8	6	20
Grand Total	**5**	**11**	**22**	**14**	52

6.3 Occurrences of commendations, recommendations, and conditions

6.3.1 Number of occurrences of commendations, recommendations, and conditions in all reports

The total occurrences of commendations, recommendations, and conditions that appeared in the 52 programmes are presented in **Table 6–2.** In this report the word "mention" is used to signify a commendation, recommendation, or a condition. This table also provides the average number of commendations, recommendations, and conditions per programme, the maximum and minimum number and the number of programmes with no occurrence.

- There were 511 commendations, recommendations, and conditions in the 52 programmes.
- As can be seen from the table the number of commendations is far less than the number of recommendations or conditions.
- All programmes had recommendations attached with a wide range from 26 recommendations to one.
- The number and range of conditions were less than that of recommendations. Twenty-six programme reports had conditions attached, with a maximum of 14 and a minimum of one.
- Commendations were less common than recommendations or conditions. Twenty-nine of the 52 programmes had no commendations. However, one programme had seven commendations.

Table 6–2 Commendations, recommendations and conditions in all institutes

All institutes	Commendations	Recommendations	Conditions
Occurrences in all 52 programmes	59	389	122
Average per programme	1.1	7.5	2.4
Average per programme excluding those with none	2.6	7.5	4.7
Maximum	7	26	14
Minimum	1	1	1
Number with none (%)	29 (56%)	0 (0%)	26 (50%)

6.3.2 Commendations, recommendations, and conditions by institute

Table 6–3 lists the commendations, recommendations, and conditions by institute. It gives the number for the four programmes from each institute's programme and the average.

Table 6–3 Commendations, recommendations and conditions by institute

Institute	No.	No. per prog.	No.	No. per prog.	No.	No. per prog.	No.	No. per prog.
Athlone	6	1.5	24	6	9	2.25	39	9.75
Blanchardstown	2	0.5	24	6	14	3.5	42	10.5
Cork	2	0.5	47	11.75	20	5	69	17.25
Carlow	5	1.25	37	9.25	8	2	50	12.5
Dundalk	3	0.75	35	8.75	6	1.5	44	11
Dún Laoghaire	4	1	44	11	0	0	48	12
Galway-Mayo	0	0	23	5.75	10	2.5	33	8.25
Limerick	21	5.25	45	11.3	10	2.5	76	19
Letterkenny	3	0.75	20	5	3	0.75	26	6.5
Sligo	0	0	18	4.5	3	0.75	21	5.25
Tallaght	7	1.75	24	6	11	2.75	42	10.5
Tralee	0	0	22	5.5	1	0.25	23	5.75
Waterford	6	1.5	26	6.5	27	6.75	59	14.75

Table 6–4 Commendations, recommendations and conditions

Award Level	Number of programmes	Programmes with none (%)	Average number	Maximum Number	Range
Commendations					
Master's Degrees	14	5 (36%)	1.2	6	1-6
Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma	22	13 (59%)	1.3	7	1-7
Bachelor Degree	11	8 (73%)	1	5	1-5
Higher Certificate	5	3 605)	0.8	3	1-3
All	**52**	**29 (56%)**	**1.1**	**7**	**1-7**
Recommendations					
Master's Degrees	14	0 (0%)	6.8	13	1-13
Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma	22	0 (0%)	7.9	26	1-26
Bachelor Degree	11	0 (0%)	8	15	1-15
Higher Certificate	5	0 (0%)	8	12	3-12
All	**52**	**0 (0%)**	**7.5**	**26**	**1-26**
Conditions					
Master's Degrees	14	7 (50%)	3	14	Feb-14
Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma	22	10 (45%)	2.4	13	0-13
Bachelor Degree	11	6 (55%)	1.9	9	0-9
Higher Certificate	5	3(60%)	3.2	7	3-Jul
All	**52**	**26 (50%)**	**2.5**	**14**	**0-14**

a) Commendations

- On average each programme had 2.6 commendations, excluding those programmes with no commendations.
- Three institutes, Galway-Mayo, Sligo and Tralee, had no commendations for the evaluation reports analysed. Limerick Institute of Technology, on the other hand, had 21 commendations between the four evaluation reports analysed.
- Some report structures e.g., IT Sligo, did not include commendations, but positive statements were included in the discussion of the programme. Only formally designated commendations were counted.

b) Recommendations

- On average each programme had 7.5 recommendations. Cork, Limerick and Dún Laoghaire Institutes had the maximum number of recommendations with 11 recommendations per programme. Sligo, Tralee and Tallaght each had less than six recommendations per programme.

c) Conditions

- There were no conditions attached to any programme of Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.
- The evaluation reports analysed for Waterford Institute of Technology had the largest number of conditions.

6.3.3 Commendations, recommendations, and conditions by level of award

Table 6–4 shows the number of commendations, recommendations, and conditions for each award level. It also shows the total number of evaluation reports examined at each award level. It gives the number of programmes that received no commendations, recommendations, or conditions. The average number of mentions and the minimum number is given.

Table 6–5 Commendations, recommendations and conditions by discipline

Discipline	Number of programmes	Programmes with none (%)	Average number	Maximum Number	Range
Commendations					
Arts	14	7 (50%)	1.3	6	0-6
Business	10	4 (40%)	2.1	7	0-7
Engineering	8	6 (75%)	1	5	0-5
Science	20	12 (60%)	0.6	3	0-3
All	**52**	**29 (59%)**	**1.1**	**7**	**0-7**
Recommendations					
Arts	14	0	7.9	14	2-14
Business	10	0	8.7	26	2-26
Engineering	8	0	11.4	15	1-15
Science	20	0	6.5	15	1-15
All	**52**	**0**	**7.5**	**26**	**1-26**
Conditions					
Arts	14	7 (50%)	2.3	10	0-10
Business	10	6 (60%)	0.9	3	0-3
Engineering	8	3 (28%)	2.9	6	0-6
Science	20	10 (50%)	3.2	14	0-14
All	**52**	**26 (50%)**	**2.5**	**14**	**0-14**

a) Commendations

- Forty per cent of the evaluation reports for all levels analysed had commendations. Bachelor Degree-level evaluation reports were most likely to record commendations and Master's Degree-level evaluation reports were least likely.
- Bachelor Degree evaluation reports had the most commendations with an average of 3.7. Master's Degree evaluation reports, in contrast, averaged 1.9 commendations.

b) Recommendations

- There were recommendations for improvements to be made to all programmes with 7.5 recommendations made per programme on average.
- The number of recommendations ranged between one and 26.

c) Conditions

- Only half of the evaluation reports had conditions attached. This proportion was consistent across all award levels.
- The average number of conditions for those programmes with conditions was approximately five.
- Higher Certificates and Master's Degree-level programmes attracted most conditions with an average of 8.0 and 6.1 respectively for those programmes with conditions attached.

6.3.4 Commendations, recommendations and conditions by discipline

Table 6-5 analyses the commendations, recommendations and conditions by discipline. All programmes were categorised by the award type as being either in arts, business, engineering or science. Arts awards include those in social sciences and the creative and performance disciplines. The science awards extend beyond the experimental sciences to other technical and numerate specialities, especially at Master's Degree level.

a) Commendations

- Business and engineering evaluation reports were less likely to have commendations stated for programmes. However, when business programmes are commended, they have on average 3.5 commendations per programme. One Higher Diploma in a business programme received seven commendations, the highest number of commendations received by any programme. Two out of eight engineering programmes received commendations.
- Science programmes received significantly fewer commendations than other disciplines. The range of commendations in science programmes was from one to three.

b) Recommendations

- All evaluation reports recommended improvements to programmes, with reports in respect of engineering programmes including significantly more recommendations than other disciplines.
- The range of numbers of recommendations was similar in arts, science and engineering. The range in business was from two to 26. Without this outlier the range in business would be from two to 10.

c) Conditions

- Fifty percent of the evaluation reports had no conditions attached to programmes
- Science programmes attracted the most conditions with an average of 6.3 conditions in those programmes that had conditions.

6.4 Analysis of issues raised in the evaluation reports

6.4.1 Categorising the issues

The categorisation of commendations, recommendations and conditions is based on the categories used in the current QQI validation criteria as provided in **Section 3.8** of the report. In addition to these areas, engagement of staff with the evaluation panel is often commented on, as is the quality of documentation. The categories are set out in **Table 6-6** below.

The criteria listed in Table 6-6 correspond to 11 of the 12 QQI validation criteria as published by QQI in "Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training November 2017". The first criterion does not apply to taught programmes in the institutes of technology as they have delegated authority to make awards.

6.4.2 Analysis of commendations, recommendations, and conditions across categories

Table 6-7 shows the analysis of the commendations, recommendations, and conditions against the

validation criteria. In cases where the commendations, recommendations, and conditions were not stated against the criteria the authors assigned the finding to a category.

- As would be expected, the categories with the highest proportion of recommendations and the highest proportion of conditions were similar, with curricular issues predominating.
- Changes to programme and module outcomes constituted 23% of conditions and 11% of recommendations.
- The area most likely to be commended was the concept of the programme.
- The level of engagement of staff with the external evaluation panel was frequently commended.

Chart 6-1 Distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category

- This chart shows that recommendations are more frequent than commendations and there were conditions in all categories except for teaching and learning, engagement, staff, miscellaneous, and learner protection.

Chart 6-2 displays the same data but as a percentage of each of the commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category.

- Within the commendations nearly 50% were for the concept of the programme.
- Conditions were imposed most frequently on the curriculum and on the objectives and outcomes.

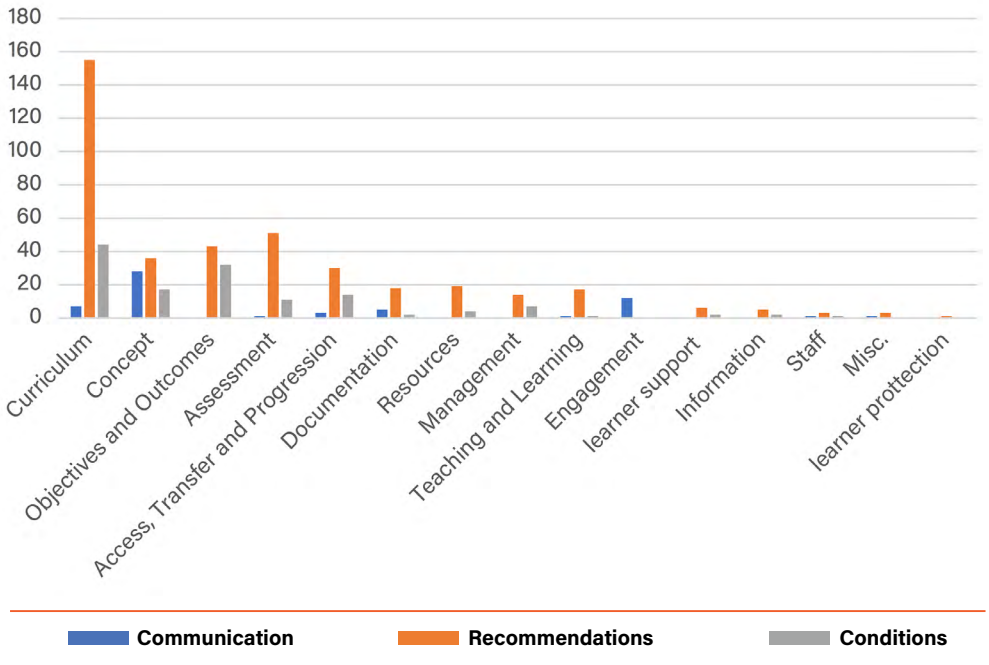
Table 6–6 Categories of issues raised in evaluation reports

Criterion	Content
Access, transfer and progression	Entry requirements, pathways for transfer from programmes and articulation to further higher-level programmes.
Assessment	This covers assessment strategy, assessment instruments and the alignment of assessments with modules outcomes.
Concept	This covers the rationale for the programme, its purpose, involvement and impact of stakeholders, comparison with and differentiation from similar programmes.
Curriculum	This covers the set of modules, the content of the modules and the modules outcomes. It also covers issues to do with structure of the programme and the overall coherence of the learning experience.
Information	Information to learners and prospective learners about the programme.
Learner protection	This does not normally apply to public institutions.
Management	Management of the programme and quality management generally.
Objectives and Outcomes	Objectives of the programme, the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and the minimum intended module learning outcomes.
Resources	Physical and IT resources as well as the learning resources specified for each module.
Staffing	Level and skills set of staff delivering the programme and supervising learners. It includes staff support and staff management.
Teaching and learning	Teaching processes and expected learning processes. Directed, supervised and independent learning, blended learning, and online learning.
Common additional issues not covered by QQI criteria	
Documentation	This refers to the quality and comprehensiveness of the documentation describing the programme.
Engagement	This refers to the level of engagement of institutional staff with the external evaluation panel.
Miscellaneous	This covers some issues that are not included above e.g. funding of new developments, alumni, organisation of the evaluation event, engagement with 2nd level schools.

Table 6–7 Commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category

QQI criteria	Commendations		Recommendations		Conditions	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Access, transfer and progression	3	5%	30	8%	14	10%
Assessment	1	2%	51	13%	11	8%
Concept	28	47%	36	9%	17	12%
Curriculum	7	12%	154	39%	44	32%
Information	-	-	5	1%	2	1%
Learner protection	-	-	1	<1%	-	-
Learning environment	-	-	6	2%	2	1%
Management	-	-	14	4%	7	5%
Objectives and outcomes	-	-	43	11%	32	23%
Resources	-	-	19	5%	4	3%
Staffing	1	2%	3	1%	1	1%
Teaching and learning	1	2%	17	4%	1	1%
Common additional issues not covered by QQI criteria						
Documentation	5	8%	9	2%	2	1%
Engagement	12	20%	-	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	1	2%	4	1%	-	-
Grand Total	**59**	**100%**	**392**	**100%**	**137**	**100%**

Chart 6-1 Distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category



6.4.3 Analysis of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by discipline

Table 6–8 shows how the commendations, recommendations, and conditions are distributed across the disciplines. The percentage of mentions within each discipline is also given. The data in **Table 6–8** is shown in a chart format in **Chart 6-3**.

- Under most categories there is no significant difference between the disciplines.
- Business programmes are more likely to attract attention for the concept of the programme.
- The disciplines of engineering and science attract more curricular recommendations and conditions than the arts and business disciplines. This may be due to the nature of the disciplines and the level of specialism of the programmes.

Chart 6-2 Percentage distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category

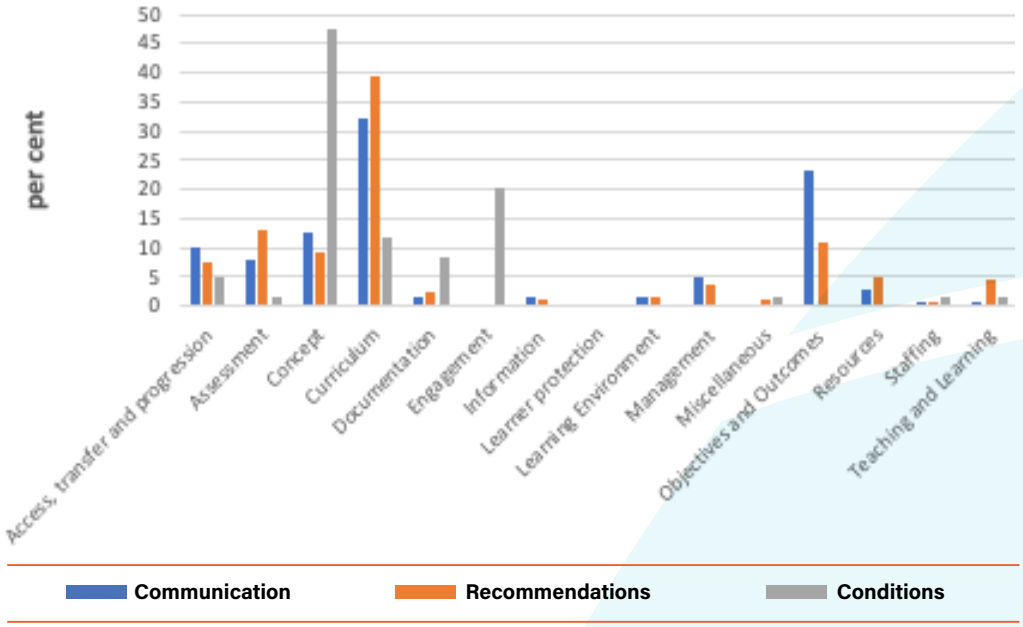


Table 6–8 Distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category and discipline

Discipline	Arts		Business		Engineering		Science	
Number of programmes	13		10		7		22	
Category	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Access, transfer and progression	12	8%	7	5%	5	6%	23	10%
Assessment	19	13%	14	11%	6	7%	24	11%
Concept	21	14%	25	19%	9	11%	26	12%
Curriculum	48	32%	40	30%	36	43%	81	37%
Information	2	1%	1	1%	1	1%	3	1%
Learning environment	2	1%	4	3%	2	2%	0	0%
Management	5	3%	4	3%	3	4%	9	4%
Objectives and outcomes	20	13%	16	12%	13	15%	26	12%
Resources	8	5%	3	2%	1	1%	11	5%
Staffing	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
Teaching and learning	5	3%	9	7%	1	1%	4	2%
Common additional issues not covered by QQI criteria								
Documentation	1	1%	7	5%	3	4%	5	2%
Engagement	5	3%	2	2%	2	2%	3	1%
Miscellaneous	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%	4	2%
Grand Total	**150**	**100%**	**133**	**100%**	**84**	**100%**	**221**	**100%**

Chart 6-3 Distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by discipline

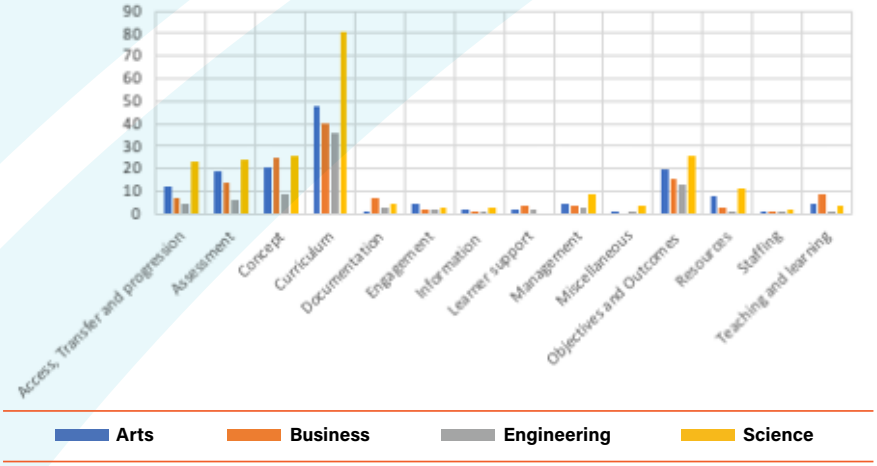


Chart 6-4 Percentage distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category

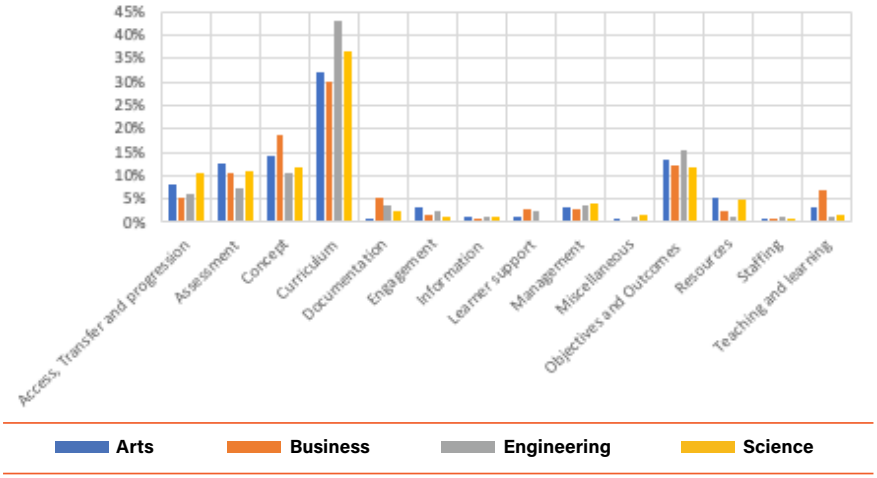


Chart 6-5 Percentage commendations, recommendations, and conditions by category and type of award

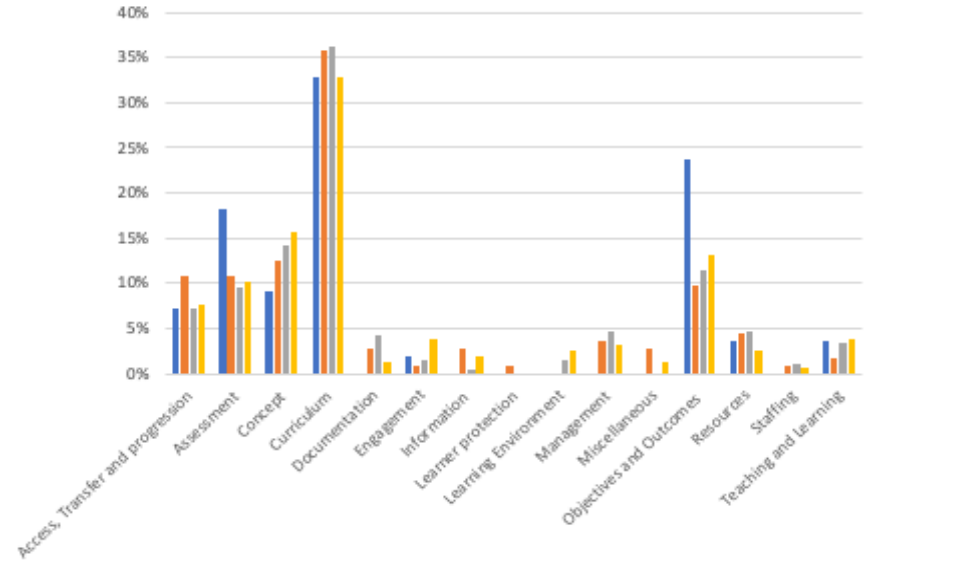


Chart 6-3 displays the numbers of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by discipline. This data is redisplayed as percentages in **Chart 6-4**.

- **Table 6-8** shows that there is no significant difference between the disciplines in the distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions.

6.4.4 Analysis of commendations, recommendations, and conditions category and by type of award

Table 6-9 shows the number of mentions by category and award type. It also gives the percentage within each award type.

- Based on sample size only two areas are significantly different between levels of programme. These are assessment, and objectives and outcomes in the higher certificates. Both figures are higher because of the number of recommendations in both categories.
- The average number of mentions per programme is remarkably constant across the four award types.

6.5 Detailed discussion of recurring issues raised by evaluation panels

6.5.1 Introduction

The discussion below examines those criteria that accounted for the greater part of the commendations, recommendations, and conditions. Access, transfer and progression; assessment; programme concept; curriculum; and objectives and outcomes between them accounted for 66% of commendations, 80% of recommendations and 85 % of conditions. The other criteria are dealt with in **Appendix D.**

6.5.2 Access, transfer and progression

Under this criterion access issues predominated. There were 31 mentions of access and 12 mentions of progression. Transfer received four mentions.

a) Access

Access issues relate to the processes by which prospective learners gain entry to the programme. They also involve the eligibility criteria that

Table 6-9 Commendations, recommendations and conditions by type of award

Award type	Higher Certificate		Bachelor Degree		Honours Bachelor Degree/ HDip		Master's Degree	
Number of programmes	5		11		22		14	
Category	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Access, transfer and progression	4	7%	12	11%	19	7%	12	8%
Assessment	10	18%	12	11%	25	10%	16	10%
Concept	5	9%	14	13%	37	14%	25	16%
Curriculum	18	33%	40	36%	95	36%	52	33%
Information	0	0%	3	3%	1	0%	3	2%
Learner protection	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Learning environment	0	0%	0	0%	4	2%	4	3%
Management	0	0%	4	4%	12	5%	5	3%
Objectives and outcomes	13	24%	11	10%	30	11%	21	13%
Resources	2	4%	5	4%	12	5%	4	3%
Staffing	0	0%	1	1%	3	1%	1	1%
Teaching and learning	2	4%	2	2%	9	3%	6	4%
Common additional issues not covered by QQI criteria								
Engagement	1	2%	1	1%	4	2%	6	4%
Information	0	0%	3	3%	1	0%	3	2%
Miscellaneous	0	0%	3	3%	0	0%	2	1%
Grand Total	55	100%	112	100%	262	100%	159	100%
Average per programme	11		10		12		11	

determine the suitability of applicants. There were recommendations that access be widened for further education graduates and commendations when this was achieved, e.g.,

"Pleased to see advanced entry is available to candidates who have completed QQI qualifications in the FE sector."
AL01 Commendation Bachelor of Business

Recognition of prior learning was mentioned in three cases.

"Clarify further the specific RPL arrangements for those working in the industry."
CW02 Recommendation Bachelor of Science

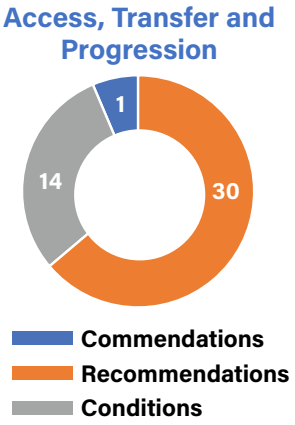
Conditions were also attached requiring clarity and consistency on entry requirements, e.g.,

"That the programme documentation and information made available to learners and the public be revised in connection with minimum entry requirements, and to include further education awards, alternative qualifications, awards from other jurisdictions, etc. in order to fully satisfy the institute' s legal obligations in terms of access, transfer and progression."
ALO3 Condition Bachelor of Science

b) Transfer
There were no conditions or commendations related to the transfer of learners. The recommendations suggested that pathways within the faculty be developed for learners:

"It is recommended that transfer opportunities for students to change from this programme to another engineering programme should be outlined in the document."
TA03 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering

c) Progression
Progression tended to arise in the recommendations to the institute to develop progression pathways for its graduates. One program me attracted recommendations on both access and progression:



"Examine progression opportunities to the Institute's engineering programmes in aerospace and aircraft Systems."
And

"Clarify further the specific RPL arrangements for those working in the industry."
CW02 Recommendation Bachelor of Science

Institutes were encouraged to create pathways for access to postgraduate programmes. This was occasionally done through the development of minor awards. The following recommendation was made in a report on a nursing programme.

"The panel recommends that the 30 ECTS credits Certificate in Nursing in Leadership and Quality Healthcare (Level 9) be offered as a standalone Minor Award, but with a modified title, Postgraduate Certificate in Nursing in Leadership and Quality Healthcare (to reflect a Level 9 offering on the NFQ Framework), thereby allowing three separate entry points for applicants, each with its own individual Approved Programme Schedule and associated set of Programme Learning Outcomes to be inserted into Module Manager in the final, revised submission."
AL04 Recommendation Master of Science

Articulation between Ordinary Bachelor Degrees and Honours Bachelor Degrees was encouraged as was progression to postgraduate programmes:

"Examine progression opportunities to the Institute's engineering programmes in aerospace and aircraft systems."
CW02 Recommendation Bachelor of Science

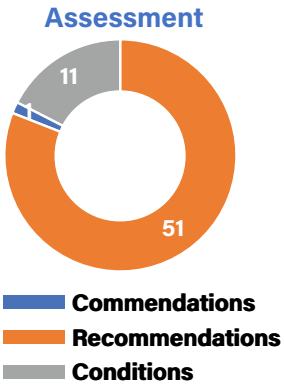
One institute was urged to facilitate links to other institutions.

"Build on the relationship between GMIT and NUIG to encourage postgraduate progression."
GM03 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Science

6.5.3 Assessment

Assessment was an issue identified by many external evaluation panels and conditions were imposed relating to assessment in respect of eight programmes. Changes in assessment were recommended in a further 28 programmes, in some cases there were multiple recommendations. Only one programme was commended for its assessment regime. One recurring issue was the provision of repeat opportunities for learners, e.g.,

"Review the repeat assessment strategies and clarify in further detail the strategy with respect to continuous assessment."
LK02 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering



The provision of a matrix to show the total assessment load on students was recommended several times.

"Provide an assessment schedule for the programme to show how assessment student workload is managed"
DK04 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering

The amount of assessment and the types of assessment were of concern to external evaluation panels. In some cases, programme teams were directed to avoid over-assessment.

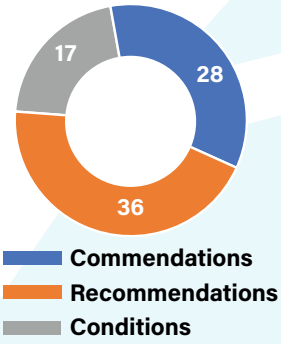
"The panel requires that the assessment matrix for the add-on Level 8 programme be reviewed prior to final sign-off so as to ensure that there is no over-assessment. In this regard, it is important to consider the shortened delivery time in Semester 1, due to the 15 credit Industry Internship module."
CK01 Condition Honours Bachelor of Business

In other cases, the external evaluation panels suggested integrated assessment and cross-modular assessment.

"The panel would recommend that the full Programme Team delivering the modules would explore the possibility of using integrated, cross-modular assessments to try to reduce the overall number of assessments for learners registered on the three programmes."
AL04 Recommendation M.Sc. in Nursing in Leadership in Quality Healthcare

6.5.4 Concept

This covers a range of areas. These include, the development process, the impact of external stakeholders on the development of the programme, the rationale for the programme and demand from learners and employers.



This was the area that had the largest number of commendations. Eighteen programmes received commendation for concept. A recurring aspect worthy of praise was the level of industry / employer engagement in the development process:

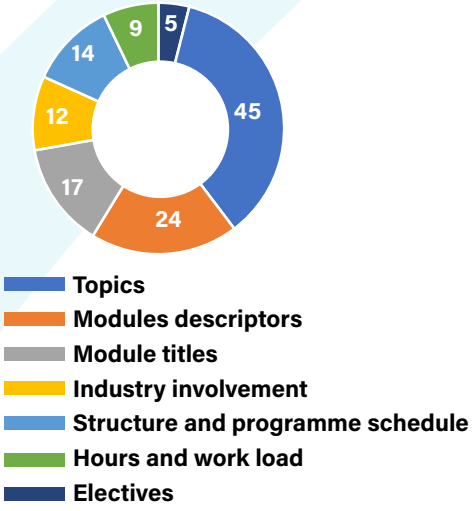
"The panel very strongly commended this initiative by Limerick Institute of Technology and noted that the Institute was taking a lead in developing the new employer-led national model for apprenticeship training."
LK01 Commendation Bachelor of Engineering

Innovation was also praised by external evaluation panels:

"The panel commend the Institute of Technology Carlow on the development of this niche, innovative, sound programme linking to a growing industry aligning to the national, regional and Institute strategic priorities."
CW01 Commendation Honours Bachelor of Science

Eleven programmes had conditions attached relating to concept. These ranged from a requirement to engage more closely with industry, to changes in programme title to better reflect the objectives of the programme.

Common Curricular Issues



Twenty-two programmes had a total of 28 recommendations attached to them. One recurring issue was industry engagement, e.g.,

"The initial partnership with IBM should be expanded to include a wider diversity of links across industry. A larger choice will ensure IADT retains its independent profile without being linked to one specific partner."
DL06 Recommendation Master of Arts

Promotion of programmes and the generation of demand from learners also figured among the recommendations, e.g.,

"The panel recommends the team give real consideration to the gender profile of the programme for future recruitment campaigns. Consider the visibility factor in publicity material, staff profiles, and outreach programmes to secondary school students."
DL01 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Arts

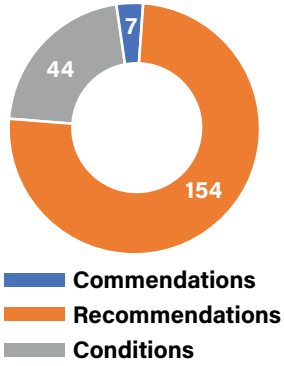
Other issues included the provision of exit and embedded awards, the provision of graduate profiles and the development of online delivery.

6.5.5 Curriculum

External evaluation panels paid the most attention to curricular issues. A total of 205 mentions of curricular issues were made in the reports. Forty-seven of the reports contained commendations, recommendations or conditions associated with curriculum. There was an average of 4.4 mentions per programme.

The most common issues identified within curriculum are shown in the chart below.

Curriculum



The most prevalent theme was the inclusion of additional elements or topics in the modules. This may reflect the preponderance of subject experts on the external evaluation panels. Of the 40 recommendations that suggested additional topics to be included in the modules, in no case did the external evaluation panels suggest what should be left out of the curriculum:

"Review module content to ensure that industry and technology trends are visibly and specifically covered in an appropriate module."
TA02 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering

"Review the delivery of law over the course of the programme, with an emphasis on principles of law in the earlier part and media law in the later stages. Include guidelines and best practice and ethics."
DL02 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Arts

External evaluation panels also recommended changing the titles of modules in 17 programmes. Typically, the concern cited was that the title should clearly indicate the module content:

"Revise the title food production control module to better reflect the module content. The module

outline should better express the course content e.g., Commercial awareness"
LY02 Recommendation Bachelor of Science

A recurring theme was the inclusion of more work placements in programmes. This theme also occurs under the concept and the assessment heading. Programmes including work placement were commended.

"The panel particularly commend the support for the work placement element of the programme with the accompanying documentation and protocols and assessment strategy, which was well presented".
DK02 Commendation Higher Certificate in Business

Where work placement was an element of a programme, external evaluation panels required that its operation be strengthened, e.g.,

"Expand the duration of the work placement to 16 weeks minimum of placement activity (at least 12 weeks must be in industry). An alternate to achieve the learning outcomes of the work placement module must be specified. Additionally, the operation of work placement and the expectations of the employer, institute and student must be clearly addressed."
CW01 Condition Honours Bachelor of Science

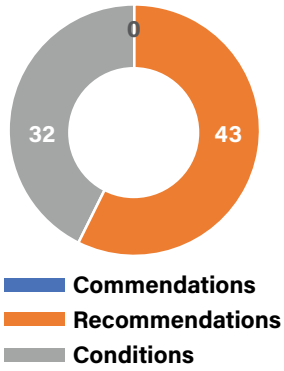
Besides the work placement element of programmes, links to industry were encouraged:

"Where possible ensure the applied research project is industry based and review as part of annual programme review the potential of converting this to a full work placement in line with the requirements of the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018 - 2020."
LK02 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering

It is noticeable that there are few commendations under this heading. The seven commendations praised flexibility, innovation and creativity, as well as the work placement mentioned above.

6.5.6 Objectives and Outcomes

This criterion covers the aims and objectives of the programme and seeks to ensure that they are expressed clearly and plainly. It covers the minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) and any other educational and training objective. Finally, it deals with the minimum intended module learning outcomes (MIMLOs).



This was the second most mentioned criterion. It attracted 32 conditions which was the second highest number of conditions after curriculum issues. It also attracted 43 recommendations. There were no commendations of the objectives or outcomes of programmes. Twelve of the conditions required changes to MIPLOs or the explicit alignment of the MIPLOs with the standards or with the MIMLOs. Panels felt that although the programmes were at the appropriate level this should be explicitly established by MIPLOs being restated and aligned with the awards standards. There was little evidence in the evaluation reports of explicit discussion of the standards applied to the programmes.

External evaluation panels had consistent views of the need for MIPLOs that mapped the programme to the appropriate awards standards. Two examples where evaluation panels recommended conditions are provided below:

"A table mapping the programme learning outcomes and the module learning outcomes should be produced to ensure full alignment throughout the programme. The table should be included in the programme documentation"
LK03 Condition Master of Arts

This was particularly important when two sets of standards had to be met by the same programme, e.g..

"The institute, in addition to the standards mapping already carried out, inserts a column in the relevant table to match the programme learning outcomes to the professional award type designed by QQI to cater for new apprenticeship awards at Levels 5 to 9. This will clearly demonstrate that the programme, as well as meeting the standards set for academic awards in science, also meets the standards set in respect of this new method of delivery."
AL03 Condition Bachelor of Science

MIMLOs were mentioned in conditions when external evaluation panels felt that the language used, particularly verbs, was not appropriate to the level of the programme. MIMLOs were required to be aligned to MIPLOs and to assessments. In some cases, the number of MIMLOs was to be reduced:

"Learning outcomes in modules are reviewed to ensure all are appropriate and assessment is fully and accurately described."
TA02 Condition Honours Bachelor of Engineering

"Whilst it is accepted that streams such as mathematics have significant numbers of learning outcomes, it is recommended that the programme board consider reducing some of the numbers of learning outcomes per module."
TA03 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Engineering

6.6 Commentary

6.6.1 Distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions

The number of commendations was low compared to recommendations and conditions. In some cases, the report template has no place for commendations which might indicate why the number of commendations was low. Only 40 per cent of the reports examined contained commendations. The area most likely to attract commendations was the innovative concept for the programme.

There were recommendations for improvement in respect of all programmes in the sample analysed. The recommendations covered all the validation criteria. Curricular issues dominated the recommendations with evaluation panels suggesting changes to modules. Improvements in assessment also figured, as did a recommendation that module outcomes be rephrased to reflect more clearly the level of the learning.

Fifty per cent of the sample evaluation reports analysed had no conditions attached. Of those that did there was an average of 4.7 conditions, with a range from one to 14 conditions. The criteria that attracted most conditions mirrored those that attracted the most recommendations.

The average number of commendations, recommendations or conditions was approximately 10 per programme. This indicates the level of attention paid by external evaluation panels to the programmes under evaluation. The larger external evaluation panels tended to provide many commendations, recommendations or conditions. The average of the total of commendations, recommendations and conditions between institutes ranged from a low of 5.75 to a high of 19 (see **Table 6-3**).

The analysis of the differences between different award levels shows that there was little difference in the occurrence of recommendations per programme between the award levels. However, both Master's Degree-level and Higher Certificate-level programmes attracted the least commendations and the most conditions.

Table 6-5 analyses the number of commendations, recommendations, and conditions by discipline area. The proportion of programmes that attracted commendations and conditions did not differ greatly between the disciplines. Science programmes were most likely to attract conditions. Engineering programmes had a significantly greater number of recommendations attached and the greatest number of commendations.

6.6.2 Recurring issues in evaluation reports

The commendations, recommendations, and conditions made by external evaluation panels cover a wide range of areas. All aspects of the programme are covered. This is particularly true of the recommendations. As many of the panel members are subject experts it is not surprising that attention is paid to module content and assessment. Similarly, the presence on all but one panel of an industry representative ensures that the level of industry engagement is considered in many programmes.

In evaluation panel reports for some programmes, conditions requiring the school or department to adhere to institute policies were attached.

Industry placement and the level of contact with industry is a recurring element in evaluation reports. It figures in commendations where it occurs, in conditions where it is needed and in recommendations where it is to be encouraged. Industry engagement as an ongoing process in programme maintenance is recommended. The level of involvement of industry or employers in programme design is commended where present.

The assessment of work placement is also a concern of evaluation panels, expressed either as a condition

or recommendation. Evaluation panels highlighted the following as areas for consideration by programme development teams (a) consistency of assessment between work experience and the other elements of the programme, (b) the level of staff involvement in work placement and (c) the support given to learners on work placement.

Modular outcomes was an area that panels felt could be improved and many made recommendations to that effect.

The discussion of awards standards was not evidenced in the reports. There was no evidence of detailed matching of programme learning outcomes to the appropriate standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Programme outcomes were frequently the subject of conditions where panels felt that they did not adequately reflect the level of the programme or did not align sufficiently with the standards. These conditions were general and did not point to specific deficiencies in the knowledge, skill and competence outcomes.

Innovation and creativity, where it was found, was commended. This was particularly true of programmes that were designed for specialist roles in the labour market.

6.7 Findings

- Evaluation panels engaged in detailed consideration of the programmes submitted to them. All programmes had recommendations attached. Fifty per cent of programmes had conditions attached and where there were conditions the average was 4.7 per programme.
- There was little difference between the disciplines of arts, business, engineering and science in the distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions.
- There was little difference between the Bachelor, Honours Bachelor and Master's Degrees in the distribution of commendations, recommendations, and conditions. The small number of Higher Certificates had higher numbers of mentions of assessment and outcomes.
- There were significant differences among the numbers of commendations, recommendations and conditions depending on the institute.
- Curricular and outcomes issues predominated in recommendations and conditions. The concept of the programme was the aspect of the programme most likely to be commended.
- Panels often recommended additional topics to be covered in the programme. They rarely suggested material that could be deleted from the programme.
- Panels often required that programme outcomes be rewritten. This was usually done without any indication of the specific deficiencies in the programme outcomes that were presented. Likewise, there was little evidence in the reports of detailed consideration of the knowledge, skills and competencies that the programme was intended to produce in the learner.

6.8 Suggestions

- Where conditions are imposed on a programme, the deficiency to be addressed should be clearly indicated and evidence of the deficiency stated.
- Where additional topics are suggested, possible areas for removal should be indicated by panels.
- Institutes should ensure through prior processes that programmes conform to institutional policies and practices and adhere to the validation criteria.
- All evaluation report templates should have a section to record aspects of the programme that demonstrate exemplary practice. A separate section should record any acknowledgements that the panel wishes to make.
- Evaluation panels should be required to discuss MIPLOs and MIMLOs explicitly and to comment on them. Where necessary, programme development teams should be given support in the formulation of the programme outcomes. This should be undertaken at an early stage of the programme development cycle by the institute.
- Evaluation reports should include the programme learning outcomes of each programme evaluated.
- Institutes should consider in detail at least once a year (i) how to cascade good practice, (ii) what policies and strategies merit review at institutional level based on validation and programme review reports, and (iii) how all of the above feeds into staff development activity. These could be reported in the annual institutional quality assurance report to QQI.

7 External evaluation panels for initial validation of programmes

7.1 Introduction

This section analyses the composition of external evaluation panels in the case of 52 evaluation reports on new programme validations that were analysed from the 13 institutes of technology (excluding DIT). It analyses the membership of panels, looks at gender diversity in the evaluation panel reports and the diversity within each panel role. It examines the institutes the panel members are affiliated with.

External evaluation panels for initial validation of a programme are appointed by the institutes. The composition of panels varies depending on the quality assurance policy requirements of the institute. Evaluation panels do not validate or revalidate programmes. They recommend to the institute whether a programme should be validated or refused validation. Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Section 52, QQI has delegated authority to make awards to the institutes of technology.

Evaluation panels usually consist of academics, industry representatives/employers and learners who have a knowledge of the discipline covered by the programme to be evaluated. Panel members would normally have experience in the development and provision of similar programmes or of employing graduates from similar programmes. Panels will also have internal members from the institute. Panels are usually chaired by external senior academics or retired senior academics who have experience of quality assurance policy and processes.

Evaluation reports do not specify the roles of the internal members of the panel. In many cases they act as secretaries to the panel and in an advisory capacity. They act to ensure that institutional policy is adhered to in the design and delivery of programmes. Sometimes, the secretary to the panel is not listed. As a result, it was decided in this analysis to show both the total membership and the external membership of the evaluation panels.

Table 7-1 shows that the average size of panels for the IoT sector does not vary between Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree and Master's Degree. The smallest panels had two members and the largest had nine.

Table 7-1 Panel size for Higher Certificate, Ordinary Degree, Honours Degree and Master's Degree.

Sector	Higher Certificate	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/Hdip	Master's Degree/PGDip	All
Number of programmes	**5**	**11**	**22**	**14**	**52**
Average panel size	5	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.6
Average external membership	4.2	4.9	4.7	4.7	4.6
Maximum panel size exc. Internal members	6	7	6	7	7
Minimum panel size exc. Internal members	2	2	3	3	2

Panel membership did vary by institute. **Table 7–2** shows the panel membership for individual institutes. There is a significant difference in the approach of institutes to panel membership. Some IoTs, for example Tralee, Athlone, Cork, and Galway-Mayo have small panel membership of three or four external members usually with an additional internal member. Other IoTs such as Blanchardstown, Sligo, Limerick, and Waterford have larger panels. This group, typically, uses panels of six members supported by one or two internal members.

Table 7–2 Panel size by institute

Sector	Higher Certificate	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	8.3	6.3
Sligo Institute of Technology	6.5	6.0
Limerick Institute of Technology	5.8	5.8
Waterford Institute of Technology	7.3	5.8
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	6.0	5.3
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	4.5	4.5
Institute of Technology Carlow	5.8	4.3
Dundalk Institute of Technology	5.3	4.3
Institute of Technology Tallaght	5.3	4.3
Athlone Institute of Technology	4.8	4.0
Cork Institute of Technology	4.8	4.0
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	5.8	4.0
Institute of Technology Tralee	3.5	3.0
All	**5.6**	**4.7**

7.1.1 QQI policy on external evaluation panels

QQI is a member agency of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). QQI guidelines are underpinned by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Institutes of technology will also have regard to any European standards, guidelines, directives, policies or political commitments adopted nationally (Ref. Section 3 QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Institutes of Technology (other than DIT) July 2016). ESG 2015 is its latest set of these guidelines. It contains guidelines for the composition of evaluation panels as stated in **Figure 7-1**

Standard

"External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s)."

Guidelines:

At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they

- are carefully selected
- have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task
- are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.

The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no conflict of interest. The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

Figure 7-1 Extract from ESG 2015 "2.4 Peer review experts"

QQI "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers April 2016" also provides guidelines in Section 10.3 on expert panellists as stated in **Figure 7-2.**

10.3 Expert panellists, examiners and authenticators

The quality assurance procedures include explicit criteria and procedures for the recruitment and engagement of external, independent, national, and international experts (where appropriate), including the selection and recruitment of expert panel members. Ethical guidelines relating to the selection and participation of such external experts are provided to the experts. These require a declaration by the external expert of any interests that could conflict, or might appear to conflict, with the role or responsibilities proposed by the provider. Independence and expertise are reviewed each time a person is engaged because both are subject to change. The names and affiliations of expert panellists, examiners and authenticators and other external experts associated with the provider are collated and monitored by the provider.

Figure 7-2 Extract from QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed for use by all Providers April 2016

7.1.2 Overall assessment of evaluation panels

External evaluation panels provide an independent and objective view of the quality of the proposal and draw on wider experience of provision elsewhere which can counter any inward-looking tendencies. The composition and membership of the evaluation panels can be judged against a number of criteria as outlined in **Figure 7-3**. These criteria were adopted for the purpose of this review. The desirable features of evaluation panels are shown in **Figure 7-3** and are discussed in the following sections.

Criteria	Comment
The members of the panel are independent of the institute and can be seen to be so.	All institute evaluation panels consisted mainly of external members. The panel members were drawn from all public higher education institutions in Ireland, from employers, industry, professions, learners, and universities from inside and outside the state. Their independence would have been better recorded if more relevant biographical detail had been provided in the evaluation report. Eighty-nine per cent of the academic members of panels were from institutions from within the state. Only 11 per cent were from outside the state.
There should be no conflicts of interest.	None of the evaluation reports contained any statement with respect to conflicts of interest.
They should be competent in the discipline areas of the programme and in the other areas of quality assurance, assessment, programme design and teaching and learning.	There were external subject matter experts on all panels. There was a minimum of one and a maximum of four subject matter experts appointed to the panels. The chairpersons were normally drawn from senior academic management from Irish public higher education institutions with quality assurance responsibilities. There were very few teaching and learning experts noted on the panels.
They should have, among their members, some who are conversant with the national qualification framework and with the criteria for validation.	The chairpersons of the panels were usually drawn from registrars or retired registrars of institutes of technology. Registrars have responsibility for quality assurance policies and procedures within the national qualification framework.
They should include industry or community expertise as the programmes are expected to lead to employment opportunities for the graduates.	This criterion is met by inclusion of experts drawn from industry or from organisations that employ graduates of similar programmes. Two of the 52 programme evaluation reports had no representatives from employers listed. Typically, there was one person from industry and in some cases up to four.
Learners' experience should be available to panels.	Only six of the 52 programmes had learner representatives on them. Three of those were from Waterford Institute of Technology.
Gender diversity.	There were both male and female panel members on all but one evaluation panel. However, 30% of programmes did not have any external female representative.

Figure 7-3 Desirable features of external valuation panels

7.2 Information on panel membership

The composition of panels is important for the efficient and effective evaluation of new programmes and the review of existing ones. The figures shown in this section indicate the overall membership of panels. Thus, a person who chaired six panels is counted as six panel members. Details of the members of panels is provided in the following section.

7.3 Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest arise when the independence of external panel members is in doubt. This can happen when external panel members have a prior relationship with the institute e.g., as a former staff member or as an external examiner. In none of the 54 programmes was the issue of conflicts of interest referred to. A statement referring to conflicts of interest was not included in any of the templates for the evaluation reports nor was it stated that any perceived conflicts of interest declared are published in the report. It may be the case that a separate document deals with this issue.

It would be appropriate for the evaluation reports to contain a positive statement that there are no conflicts of interest where this is the case. This would indicate to the reader that the issue had been dealt with.

7.4 Panel membership

There were 291 members on the 52 initial evaluation panels. A total of 241 different people served on the 54 panels. Fifty of those were recorded as internal members or as secretaries to the panel.

Table 7–3 shows the affiliation of the external members of the evaluation panels. The institute of technology sector provided the greatest number of panel members. These members were mainly subject matter experts. Furthermore, the chairpersons of panels were also mainly from the IoT sector.

Table 7–3 External members of evaluation panels

Sector	Number
Institute of technology excluding DIT	92
Industry/Employer	73
Universities in the state	30
Academic institutions outside the state	18
Dublin Institute of Technology	10
Further Education Colleges	3
Student unions	2
Independent providers	1
Not recorded	12
Grand Total	**241**

All universities in the state contributed to the membership of the panels as did nine universities and three institutions outside the state. The universities were:

- Napier University, University of Ulster, Queen's University Belfast, University of Bath, Heriot Watt University, Goldsmith University, Umea University (Sweden), Pennsylvania State University, and Bournemouth University.

The institutions were:

- College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland), Academy of Aviation (UK) and Institute Superieur De Plasturgie D'Alencon.

Seventy-one organisations representing employers or industry contributed 73 members of panels.

7.4.1 Subject Matter Experts

Independent evaluation panels had subject matter experts from a wide range of public institutions in the state**. Table 7–4** shows the affiliation of subject panel members for the evaluation reports analysed. If a person served on two panels they are counted twice.

Table 7–4 Affiliation of subject experts on evaluation panels

Institute	Female	% Female	Male	% Male	ALL
Foreign academic institutions	8	44%	10	56%	18
Independent provider	0	0%	1	100%	1
Athlone Institute of Technology	0	0%	7	100%	7
Cork Institute of Technology	5	71%	2	29%	7
Dundalk Institute of Technology	2	40%	3	60%	5
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	1	17%	5	83%	6
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	0	0%	1	100%	1
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	0	0%	3	100%	3
Institute of Technology Carlow	0	0%	2	100%	2
Institute of Technology Tallaght	0	0%	3	100%	3
Institute of Technology Tralee	2	100%	0	0%	2
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	2	67%	1	33%	3
Limerick Institute of Technology	3	38%	5	63%	8
Institute of Technology Sligo	2	50%	2	50%	4
Waterford Institute of Technology	0	0%	2	100%	2
Dublin City University	1	25%	3	75%	4
National University of Ireland, Galway	3	43%	4	57%	7
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	1	33%	2	67%	3
Trinity College Dublin	1	50%	1	50%	2
University College Cork	1	100%	0	0%	1
University College Dublin	1	33%	2	67%	3
University of Limerick	0	0%	5	100%	5
Dublin Institute of Technology	2	29%	5	71%	7
Institutes of Technology (exc. DIT)	17	32%	36	68%	53
All universities	8	32%	17	68%	25
Grand Total	**35**	**34%**	**69**	**66%**	**104**

Table 7–5 Affiliation of subject experts on evaluation panels by NFQ level

Sector	Higher Certificate	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/Hdip	Master's Degree/PGDip	All
Dublin Institute of Technology	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	6 (14%)	0 (0%)	7
Foreign academic institutions	1 (10%)	7 (30%)	3 (7%)	7 (23%)	18
Independent providers	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1
Institutes of technology	7 (70%)	11 (48%)	20 (45%)	15 (50%)	53
University	2 (20%)	4 (17%)	11 (25%)	8 (27%)	25
Grand total	**10 (100%)**	**23 (100%)**	**44 (100%)**	**30 (100%)**	**107**

Table 7-4 shows the affiliation of subject experts on evaluation panels.

Table 7–4 shows that:

- All public third-level institutions in Ireland were represented on evaluation panels;
- The institute of technology sector (excluding DIT) accounted for 51% of the subject experts;
- Irish universities accounted for 24% of members;
- Eighteen per cent of members were from academic institutions outside the state; these were universities in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Sweden, United States of America and France.

Table 7–5 shows the membership of panels for programmes at Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree/ Postgraduate Diploma.

Table 7–5 shows that:

- At Master's Degree and Postgraduate degree level, 50% of the panellists were from the institute of technology sector and 27% from the Irish university sector. There were seven academics from outside the state;
- At Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma level (NFQ Level 8), 45% were from institutes of technology, 14% from DIT, 25% from Irish universities and 7% from academic institutions outside the state;
- At Ordinary Bachelor Degree level, 48% of panel members were from institutes of technology, 17% from Irish universities and 30% per cent from academic institutions outside the state;
- At Higher Certificate level, the institutes of technology contributed 70% of subject matter experts.

7.4.2 Expertise from outside the institute of technology sector

Table 7–6 shows the number of panels at Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma levels with representation from the university sector in Ireland and from academic institutions outside the state.

What is of particular interest is the composition of the panellists for Honours Bachelor Degree/Higher Diploma and Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma. As programmes at this level are provided by the universities, greater representation from this sector would be expected on evaluation panels for these levels.

Table 7–6 shows that:

- Nine of 22 Honours Bachelor Degree/Higher Diplomas evaluation panels did not have any representatives from the university sector;
- Five of the 14 Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma evaluation panels did not have representation from the university sector;
- Eight of the 14 Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma evaluation panels' programmes did not have representation from academic institutions outside the state.

7.4.3 Experts in teaching and learning, assessment and in programme design

Only one panel member was identifiable as an expert in teaching and learning. This is to be compared to 104 subject matter experts. It may be the case that some of the subject experts have additional qualifications and skills in this area that were not documented. The relative lack of attention to teaching and learning issues in the evaluation reports does not support this. This can be seen in **Section 5** where it is shown that curricular issues are ten times more numerous than

Table 7–6 Number of panels with members affiliated to universities in Ireland or outside the state

	Higher Certificate	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/ Hdip	Master's Degree/ PGDip	All
Total number of programmes	5	11	22	14	52
Number with representation from foreign academic institutions	1(20%)	5 (46%)	4	6	16
Number with representation from Irish universities	2 (40%)	5 (46%)	13	12	32
Number with neither university nor foreign representation.	3 (60%)	4 (36%)	9	5	21

Table 7–7 Industry/Employer representation on evaluation panels

	Higher Certificate	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Honours Bachelor Degree/ Hdip	Master's Degree/ PGDip	All
Number of programmes	5	11	22	14	52
Average number of Industry/ Employer	1	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.5
Maximum	2	4	3	3	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Number with no Industry/ Employer representation	1	0	1	1	3

Table 7–8 Affiliation of chairpersons of panels by gender

Institute	Female	Male
Dublin Institute of Technology		2
HETAC (retired)		3
Athlone Institute of Technology		5
Cork Institute of Technology		6
Dundalk Institute of Technology	1	0
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology		3
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology		0
Institute of Technology Carlow		4
Institute of Technology Tallaght		3
Institute of Technology Tralee		4
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown		3
Letterkenny Institute of Technology		2
Limerick Institute of Technology		4
Sligo Institute of Technology		4
Waterford Institute of Technology		3
University College Dublin		1
Industry	1	0
One panel had no chairperson recorded		
Total	**2**	**49**

those in teaching and learning. Panels should provide greater information on their findings in evaluation reports in relation to teaching and learning.

7.4.4 Industry/Employers

Table 7–7 shows the industry/employer representation on evaluation panels for Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma. Industry or employer representatives were represented on all but three panels. The 73 industry/employer experts were from 71 different enterprises. All these enterprises were based in Ireland, but some were Irish branches of global corporations.

7.4.5 Learners / Graduates

It was also found that most panels did not have a learner representative as a panel member. Only six of the 52 panels had learner members on them. Also:

- Waterford Institute of Technology had learners on all of its panels;
- Sligo Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology had one learner on one of their panels;
- Where identified in the evaluation reports, the learners were from the university sector.

7.4.6 Chairpersons

All but one of the panels had designated chairpersons. The one panel without a chairperson was a small one with two members. **Table 7–8** gives the affiliation of the chairperson of panels. It also shows that:

- Only two of the 51 chairpersons were female;
- Only seven of the 51 chairpersons were from outside the IoT sector and of those two were from the Dublin Institute of Technology, one from industry and one from University College Dublin;
- Of the 40 chairpersons from the IoT sector, 31 were senior academic managers with responsibility for quality assurance.

This concentration of quality assurance personnel has obvious benefits but chairpersons from the discipline areas or from teaching and learning departments might change the focus of panels towards delivery and assessment processes.

7.5 Gender diversity in panels

The Government target is to achieve a minimum of 40 per cent representation of women on state boards. This target is not met in the external membership of any panels or in the total membership of panels including internal members.

Table 7–9 shows the breakdown of the number and percentage of females and males by function on the panels. It shows that:

- Only 4% of chairpersons were female;
- Thirty-three percent of industry/employer representatives were female;
- Thirty-five percent of subject experts were female;
- Overall, only 27% of external members were female;
- Forty-two percent of the internal members of panels were female.

7.5.1 Findings on evaluation panels

The analysis shows that:

- All evaluation panels had a majority of external members;
- All public higher education institutions in Ireland were represented on evaluation panels. Seventy per cent of the subject experts came from IoTs, eight per cent from DIT and 23% from Irish universities;

Table 7–9 External panel membership by function and gender

Function	Female	% Female	Male	% Male	Total
Chairperson	2	4%	49	96%	51
Industry Expert	25	33%	51	67%	76
Learner Representative	1	17%	5	83%	6
Subject Expert	37	35%	70	65%	107
Teaching and Learning Expert	0	0%	1	100%	1
Total external members	65	27%	176	73%	241
Internal members	21	42%	29	58%	50
Grand Total	**86**	**30%**	**205**	**70%**	**291**

- Panels usually have four or five external members and there is normally an internal member present also;
- Some institutes, such as Waterford Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, have larger panels with six or more external members;
- Size of panel does not vary significantly between Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree/Higher Diploma and Master's Degree/Postgraduate Diploma;
- Nine of the evaluation panels for Honours Bachelor Degrees and Higher Diplomas had no academic representation from outside the institute of technology sector;
- Five of the Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma panels had no representative from outside the institute of technology sector. The remaining nine programmes of this type had an average of two members either from an Irish university or a university outside the state;
- There were industry/ employer representatives on all but two of the panels;
- There was only one panel with an accredited teaching and learning expert recorded as a panel member. This compares with the panels from independent providers where 17% of the panels included this expertise;
- Forty-nine of the 51 panels had male chairs.. Only two had female chairs;
- Seventy-three per cent of external panel members were male;
- Learners were represented on only six of the 52 panels. All panels from Waterford Institute of Technology had learner representatives.

7.5.2 Comments on evaluation panels

The aim of conducting a review with a panel is to have an independent evaluation group with expertise in the programme discipline area, quality assurance, teaching and learning, student engagement, student support and the student voice. As stated in ESG 2015, at the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts. They contribute to the design of programmes through input from various perspectives, including those of academics, learners, employers/professional and practitioners.

Evaluation panels are a key part of the validation process. The composition of panels and the quality of their membership is an important aspect in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the validation and review process. Each review panel is unique and, as such, requires different competencies – panels should have an appropriate mix and balance of expertise (Ref QQI Participating on Evaluation Panels as a Peer Reviewer (April 2015)).

The preponderance of panel membership from the Irish higher educational system is striking. Only 17% (18 out of 107) of the academic members came from outside the state.

External panellists from outside the state can add to the evaluation by contributing their knowledge of developments in other jurisdictions and comparing the proposed programme and its delivery with other educational qualifications and approaches. In some highly specialised areas, such as on Master's programmes, expertise from outside the state would be particularly useful.

Whereas the panels conform to the requirement that they be independent of the institute, the preponderance of academic members from the IoT sector has implications for the transparency and possible effectiveness of the external evaluation. IoTs have similar structures, histories and cultures. The IoT sector is a small network characterised by frequent personal and professional contacts between people working in the different institutes. They have common strengths and common challenges. The predominance of IoT academic personnel on panels, reinforced by existing or retired IoT registrars acting as chairpersons, may have the effect of viewing some challenges as aspects of the IoT system and unamenable to resolution. It also could have the effect of acting as a barrier to new approaches and ideas. It may allow existing practices and policies to be normalised and best practice that involves change may not be actively encouraged.

The chairpersons of panels should have a view of higher education processes that is broader than the IoT sector itself while also having an appreciation of the unique characteristics of the sector. The external evaluation of programmes by subject experts is a professional responsibility and should be carried out by experienced professionals with suitable training and exposure to best practices in higher education.

Panels would benefit from membership by those

with specific expertise in the development of programmes, programme delivery and assessment. Higher education, as a process, is becoming increasingly professionalised. The higher education system and institutional level policies, processes and procedures are increasingly the focus of research and of government attention. Most, if not all, Irish HE institutions have departments dealing with teaching quality and with the development of pedagogic competences. Increasingly, staff from these areas are represented at senior level in institutions. The lack of explicit representation from these experts on panels may hinder the development of innovative teaching and learning processes.

Female panelists are underrepresented. . They constitute 35% of subject matter experts. HEA figures for the public higher education system for 2016 indicated that 44% of academic staff was female.

The information on panel membership provided in the reports is sparse. Stakeholder confidence in the ability of the panel to carry out the evaluation competently and independently would be enhanced if the information provided gave a fuller picture of the qualifications and experience of the members of the panel. Similarly, providers and programme development teams should be confident that decisions made in relation to their programmes are well founded.

Much of this confidence will arise from the provision of details of the panel membership, their position in their affiliated institution, and their academic experience. Industry experts should be capable of speaking authoritatively about the industry.

Qualifications are not recorded for panel members and their position in their organisations is often left unclear. The specialities of the subject experts are not recorded and their position in their organisations is rarely given.

This situation could be remedied if the biographical details of the panels included their relevant qualifications, their area of expertise and their position in their existing or relevant former organisation.

7.5.3 Suggestions

- The representation of female panelists as well as the number of female chairpersons should be increased.
- A broader representation of academics and industry experts from outside the state would help to underpin the quality of the system and its comparability with other educational qualifications systems within the EU. This is especially important at the higher levels of programmes, in Master's Degree, and Postgraduate Diploma programmes.
- Chairpersons should preferably have a wide experience of higher education sectors and systems and be conversant with international best practice and norms.
- Panel members should be trained nationally and be aware of developing issues in higher education. This training should include best practice programme design methodologies, assessment and delivery techniques. One way to achieve this is for the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to provide suitable seminars.
- Teaching and learning professionals from the higher education system should be appointed to panels with a specific remit to promote best practice.
- Each institute should have personnel tasked with writing draft reports to be approved by the evaluation panel. These panel secretaries should be provided with specialist training in writing evaluation reports and be capable of advising evaluation panels on institutional requirements for evaluation reports. It is further recommended that a pool of report writers for the IoT sector be established. The panel secretaries should be external to the institute to ensure independence requirements are fulfilled.
- Qualifications and appropriate biographical details of panel members should be included in the independent evaluation report and programme review report.
- All panels for Honours Bachelor Degrees or Higher Diplomas should have representatives from both the universities and the institutes of technology. All panels for Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diplomas should have a representative from a university outside the state.
- There should be learner representation on all panels as required by ESG Standard 2.4 2015.
- Consideration of teaching and learning strategy should be a formal part of all evaluations of new programmes. If necessary, panels should include members with specific expertise and responsibilities in this area.

8 Analysis of external evaluation reports for programmatic reviews

8.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the external evaluation reports for programmatic reviews. The outcome of a programmatic review is the revalidation of programmes, normally for a period of five years. The institute's validation criteria apply to all programmes – new programme submissions as well as programme revalidations. The analysis undertaken covers the following:

1. scope of the analysis undertaken;
2. the identification of recurring strengths, opportunities for improvement and weaknesses as identified in independent evaluation panel reports;
3. the meetings that took place during the site visit;
4. the themes addressed in the evaluation report;
5. quality enhancement plans;
6. structure of the evaluation reports.

Chapter 3 provided information on the programmatic review process and the objectives of the review. There are as stated in **Section 3.11.** Normally two major aspects of the programmatic review are:

(i) Strategic high-level issues for the academic unit;

(ii) Detailed programme-by-programme review leading to the revalidation of the modified programme.

8.2 Scope of the review

Eighteen evaluation reports for programmatic reviews for 11 of the institutes of technology were analysed. The plan was to analyse one report for each of the 13 institutes but two institutes, Dundalk Institute of Technology and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, did not undertake programmatic reviews for the period of the thematic analysis June 2015 to June 2018. The evaluation reports analysed also represented a broad spectrum of the discipline areas in which programmes are offered in institutes of technology. Each institute is unique and the way in which discipline-specific programmes are grouped within a faculty or school is determined by the institute. A range of discipline-area evaluation reports was analysed, as shown in **Table 8–1.**

Six evaluation reports from the Cork Institute of Technology were analysed, two phase 1 evaluation reports that covered the strategic level matters and two phase 2 evaluation reports for each of two of the departments within the faculty. Cork Institute of Technology is the largest of the institutes excluding DIT which was dissolved on the establishment of Technological University Dublin. Two evaluation reports from Waterford Institute of Technology, the second largest institute of technology, were analysed, as well as two evaluation reports from the Institute of Technology Carlow – one phase 1 report and the linked phase 2 evaluation report.

Table 8–1 Number of reports per discipline area

Discipline	Number of reports
Business and Humanities	4
Engineering	5
Engineering and Informatics	1
Science and Informatics	3
Science, Engineering and Technology	1
Health Science	1
Health and Social Science	1
Tourism	1
Film, Art and Creative Technologies	1

A list of the 18 evaluation reports analysed is shown in **Figure 8-1.** The figure shows the following:

- name of the institute, the faculty, school or department (referred to as the academic unit);
- number of departments involved in the review as well as the number of programmes reviewed (where these details were provided);
- the number of commendations, recommendations and conditions set out in the evaluation report;
- the meetings that took place as part of the site visit to the institute by the evaluation panel;

Institute Faculty School/Year	Departments/ number of programmes	Commen-dations	Recommen-dations	Conditions	Meetings	Follow on reports
Athlone Institute of Technology – Engineering 2015	Three departments, 43 distinct programmes and 481 modules List of programmes not provided	2	9	0	Management Staff including support, research, learners, and external stakeholders	Not on website
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown – Informatics and Engineering 2015	Two departments 27 programmes List of programmes provided	2	19	6	Management Staff	Not on website
Cork Institute of Technology – Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 1 2015	Two schools Seven departments 40 programmes List of programmes provided	7	6	1	Management Staff Students Employers	Not on website
Institute of Technology Carlow – School of Engineering Stage 1 2015	Two departments List of programmes not provided. The follow-on stage 2 did contain a list of programmes	9	13	1	Management Staff Learners	Yes
Cork Institute of Technology –Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 2 Department of Accounting and Information Systems 2016	Two major awards and one minor List of programmes provided	6	11	3	Management Staff Learners Graduates External stakeholders	Not on website
Cork Institute of Technology – Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 2 Department of Applied Social Studies 2016	Five major awards List of programmes provided	2	9	6	Head of Department Staff Learners, graduates, and external stakeholders	Not on website
Cork Institute of Technology – School of Science and Informatics Phase 1 2016	Four departments 49 major award programmes and 17 special purpose programmes List of programmes provided	5	6	0	Management Staff Students External stakeholders	Not on website
Institute of Technology Carlow – Engineering Stage 2 2016	26 major awards plus minor and special purpose programmes List of programmes provided	15	67	1	Management Staff.	Yes
Institute of Technology Sligo – School of Business and Social Science 2016	Three departments 37 programmes including embedded and add-on programmes List of programmes provided	16	47	5	Management Staff Learners External stakeholders including graduates and employers	Not on website
Limerick Institute of Technology – Faculty of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology, 2016	Department Information Technology 15 programmes List of programmes provided	12	23	3	Management Staff Learners Employers/Alumni	Not on website
Waterford Institute of Technology – School of Health Sciences 2016	Two departments Nursing and Health Care Health, Sport and Exercise Science 20 programmes across the two departments List of programmes provided	7	26	0	Management Staff Learners External stakeholders	Not on website
Cork Institute of Technology – School of Science and Informatics Phase 2 Department of Computer Science 2017	Department of Computer Science Four programmes List of programmes provided	5	6	1	Management Staff Students Graduates Employers	Yes
Cork Institute of Technology – School of Science and Informatics Phase 2 Department of Biological Sciences 2017	One department Three programmes List of programmes provided	9	53	0	Management Staff Students Graduates Employers	Yes
Institute of Technology Tralee School of Health and Social Sciences 2017	One department Six programmes List of programmes provided	2	15	0	Management Staff	Not on website
Letterkenny Institute of Technology – School of Tourism 2017	Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts Programmes not listed	8	17	0	Management Staff	Yes
Waterford Institute of Technology – School of Engineering 2017	Three departments Eight discipline areas 27 programmes 917 Modules List of programmes provided	3	35	0	Management Staff Learners Graduates External stakeholders	Not on website
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology – Faculty of Film, Art, and Creative Technologies 2018	Seven programmes with embedded programmes List of programmes provided	9	12	0	Management Staff	yes
Institute of Technology Tallaght – School of Engineering 2018	Two departments 15 Major Award programmes List of programmes provided	3	3	0	Management Staff	Not on website

Figure 8-1 Shows analysis of the information provided on evaluation reports

- whether a quality enhancement plan (follow-up report) was attached to the evaluation report or provided on the institute website.

8.3 Departments and number of programmes

The number of departments that were part of the programmatic review is shown in **Figure 8-1** (second column). The number of departments ranges from 1 to 7 with an average of 2 per academic unit. The number shown is for departments that took part in the programmatic review process and not the number of departments within the school or faculty. Some of the programmatic reviews were undertaken only for individual departments while others were for all the departments within the school or faculty. For example, Limerick Institute of Technology – Faculty of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology has five departments but the programmatic review concerned only the Department of Information Technology. Both Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow operate a two stage (phase) process. In both cases the stage 1 process covered all of the departments within the faculty or school but phase 2 operated differently in both institutes. Institute of Technology Carlow produced one stage 2 evaluation report covering all departments within the school. Cork Institute of Technology produced individual programmatic reviews for each department within the faculty. It also split up the programme portfolio of each department amongst several review panels in phase 2. Only two reports covering two departments within the Faculty of Science and Informatics and the Faculty of Business and Humanities were analysed. Thus, three panels each reviewed the programmes of the Department of Accounting and Information Technology, the Department of Biological Sciences and the Department of Computer Science respectively. The programmes of the Department of Applied Social Studies were reviewed by two panels in total.

The number of programmes reviewed as part of the programmatic review process varies considerably and, in some cases, there is a lack of information provided. The numbers are shown in **Figure 8-1** (second column). Some institutes refer to awards, others to programmes. Some institutes include only the number or list of principal programmes while others include embedded programmes and programmes leading to special purpose awards.

Institutes that have a two-stage (phase) process included many programmes in their reviews e.g., Phase 1 Cork Institute of Technology School of Business and Humanities 2015 listed 85 programmes including research degree programmes in the evaluation report. The corresponding phase 2 in respect of the department of accounting and information systems reviewed two major award programmes and one minor award programme.

Sixteen (89%) of the evaluation reports listed the programmes that were to be revalidated.

8.4 Commendations, recommendations, and conditions

The thematic analysis of the commendations, recommendations, for improvement and conditions contained in programmatic review evaluation reports, followed a similar methodology to that used by CIT[6], *"involved qualitative judgments on correlations"* based on the QQI validation criteria and other institute headings. These "*headings were derived largely from programmatic review criteria"* set generally by institutes with the addition of some topics raised by evaluation panels e.g., industry or professional body engagement. In several cases where a commendation and recommendation were made at the same time regarding an aspect of the programme or academic unit, this was recorded only under commendations. The authors of the report determined to which category a specific commendation, recommendation or condition should be assigned unless the evaluation panel had done so.

Figure 8-1 (3rd, 4th and 5th columns) shows the number of commendations, recommendations for improvement and conditions for the 18 evaluation reports analysed:

- Commendations 122 (23%)
- Recommendations 377 (71%)
- Conditions 30 (6%)

Ratio of commendations to recommendations and conditions was approximately **1:3.**

A thematic analysis undertaken by Cork Institute of Technology of programmatic review reports within the institute for the period 2005-2017 found a similar ratio of 1:3 for commendations to recommendations or requirements (conditions). However, their analysis excluded commendations on "the quality of the

documentation submitted" or similar comments were neither counted nor included in the analysis. They were included in this analysis as they identify strengths within the academic unit. (A Thematic Analysis of Reports on the Accreditation/ Approval/ Review of Programmes of Higher Education, Stage 1: QQI Validation and Revalidation)

The corresponding percentages for the stage 1 analysis of evaluation reports for programmatic reviews where QQI made awards (Ref. QQI Validation and Revalidation: A Thematic Analysis of Reports on the Accreditation/Approval/Review of Programmes of Higher Education) were:

- Commendations 20%
- Recommendations 61%
- Conditions 19%

Ratio of commendations to recommendations and conditions was approximately 1:4.

The current analysis shows the following:

- Evaluation panels made commendations in relation to all of the programmatic reviews;
- The highest number of commendations (16) was made for the Stage 2 Faculty of Business and Social Science, Institute of Technology Carlow;
- The highest number of recommendations (67) was made for the Stage 2 Faculty of Engineering, Institute of Technology Carlow. Note that stage 2 consisted of a review of all 26 programmes;
- Nine evaluation reports had no conditions attached;
- No conditions were imposed by evaluation panels for those reports analysed in 2018 and only one for those analysed in 2017;
- The highest number of conditions (9) imposed by an evaluation panel was for the Cork Institute of Technology Faculty of Business and Humanities programmatic review Phase 2 of the Department of Applied Social Studies.

8.4.1 Commentary

The thematic analysis was only undertaken of the commendations, recommendations, and conditions as provided in evaluation panel reports. The number of commendations, recommendations, and conditions needs to take account of the following:

- The number of programmes which were reviewed e.g., Waterford Institute of Technology School of Engineering 2017 programmatic review covered three departments including eight discipline areas, 27 programmes and 917 modules whereas the Institute of Technology Tralee 2017 programmatic review considered six programmes;
- The focus of the evaluation report, i.e., whether the emphasis of the evaluation report focused on the strategic elements of the programmatic review or on the review of programmes and individual modules;
- Stage 1 evaluation reports in two of the three cases have fewer mentions whereas stage 2 in two of the three cases had large numbers of mentions. For example, the Cork Institute of Technology School of Science and Informatics Stage 1 had five commendations, six recommendations and no conditions. One of the follow-on Stage 2 programmatic reviews for the Department of Biological Sciences had nine commendations but 53 recommendations and no conditions. Not all of the follow-on Stage 2 evaluation reports for Cork Institute of Technology were analysed as part of this report. Cork Institute of Technology splits up the programme portfolio of each department amongst panels in Phase 2 of programmatic reviews;
- Neither a list of programmes nor the number of programmes reviewed was provided in the evaluation report for the School of Tourism, Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

A detailed analysis of the commendations, recommendations, and conditions is provided in Chapter 8.

8.5 Meetings of the evaluation panel with management, staff, learners, graduates, and external stakeholders

The purpose of the evaluation panel meeting with different groups is to discuss the documentation, the review process, and to seek clarification and further detail where required. The meetings with management, where recorded, tended to focus on strategy and the alignment of the academic unit strategy with institution strategy. The meetings with academic staff focussed on individual programmes. **Figure 8-1** (6th column) provides information on the groups that the evaluation panel met as part of the site visit. The analysis shows that:

- All evaluation panels met with management and academic staff;
- Twelve (67%) evaluation panels met with learners;
- Eleven (61%) evaluation panels met with either graduates or employers or both.

8.6 Follow-Up Action: Quality Enhancement Plan

The Quality Enhancement Plan is important as it shows how the academic unit intends to address the recommendations made by the evaluation panel. Normally, conditions specified by evaluation panels arising from the programmatic review must be met unless otherwise determined by the institute. The conditions may have to be implemented prior to the introduction of the revised programme or within a specified time agreed with the evaluation panel through the chairperson.

Recommendations have to be considered by the academic unit, and the action taken included in the quality enhancement plan or a rationale provided as to why it was not adopted. The majority of the recommendations were adopted by the academic unit concerned. In cases where they were not adopted a rationale was provided.

The analysis shows that only five (28%) of the evaluation reports had follow-up quality enhancement plans available on their website. Some of the follow-up responses were embedded in the published evaluation report whereas others were published as separate reports.

8.7 Topics covered in the programmatic review evaluation reports

A considerable number of topics was covered in the 18 programmatic review evaluation reports analysed. Several of the topics had conditions and/or recommendations associated with them while others did not. The strengths, opportunities for improvement and the conditions are covered in Chapter 10 of the report. In this section some of the topics noted in evaluation reports are covered.

Below is a list of the recurring strategic topics that were noted in evaluation reports:

- Developments since and lessons learned from the last programmatic review;
- Strategic vision and strategy for the academic unit;
- Funding;
- Structures, staffing, staff development and the impact of the Employment Control Framework;
- Research;
- Engagement with industry and communities and other stakeholders;
- Engagement with professional bodies;
- Student recruitment, progression and retention;
- Institutional mergers – Technological University projects.

8.7.1 Developments and lessons learned from the last programmatic review

When included in the evaluation report, it was noted that recommendations made by the previous evaluation panel were referred to in the main review document submitted by the academic unit and often dealt with in one of the presentations made at the evaluation meetings. It was recommended in one evaluation report that a summary of the recommendations and how they were addressed and progressed be included in future programmatic review documentation.

8.7.2 Strategic vision and strategy for the academic unit

The head of school often presented the academic unit strategic vision and plan for the future. The evaluation reports provided minimal information on these strategies. Some evaluation reports outlined specific activities that were covered such as student recruitment, teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The need for measurable KPIs and a clear implementation plan and lines of responsibility was suggested. The inclusion of a SWOT (or equivalent) and the strategic positioning of the school for the future is also noteworthy.

8.7.3 Funding

Lack of funding was highlighted on occasions in evaluation reports. It had been expected that more evaluation reports would have highlighted the ongoing concerns within HEIs about the negative impact of the current funding and funding allocation model on institutes. It was stated in the Athlone Institute of Technology evaluation report that the President's major concerns were how Athlone Institute of Technology might maintain quality given the financial pressures facing the institute. In other reports, the

ongoing investment in equipment and infrastructure was commended.

8.7.4 Structures, staffing, staff development and the Impact of the Employment Control Framework

The restructuring of schools and departments was noted in some evaluation reports. Waterford Institute of Technology School of Engineering reduced the number of departments from four to three. Some evaluation reports provided information on staffing levels and the recruitment of staff. In one case, 26 staff retired over several years and only 14 were replaced due to the constraints of the Government's Employment Control Framework (ECF). The impact of the ECF on the development of new programmes was highlighted as well as the high proportion of part-time staff which can place a significant additional administrative burden on full-time staff and add to their workload. Staff development was commended in some evaluation reports in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. Staff development took place in discipline-specific ongoing professional development and a significant number of staff had completed or were nearing completion of Master's and PhD qualifications.

8.7.5 Research

The evaluation reports noted the high-level research activity within schools and the growth in postgraduate research activity. The difficulty for early-stage researchers in obtaining research funding was highlighted. Recommendations were made in relation to providing some funding to support early-stage researchers. Evaluation panels questioned how teaching had been informed by research and examples were provided. The evaluation reports highlighted the supportive environment and the positive research culture within institutes. In some cases, the library did not always have access to international journals in the discipline areas. The success in obtaining national and international funding was noted as well.

8.7.6 Engagement with industry and communities and other stakeholders

Evidence was provided in evaluation reports on the level of engagement with key stakeholders from industry, public bodies, and the wider community. The importance of this activity was highlighted in evaluation reports. This consisted of the following in relation to industry engagement:

- upskilling of existing industry staff via flexible lifelong learning opportunities;
- industry advisory panels;
- work placement opportunities for students;
- input from industry on programmes.

The breadth and variety of community engagement including school liaison, open days, summer camps, parent tours, primary and secondary school student projects, upskilling secondary school teachers, initiatives in mathematics with local schools and links with further education providers was noted.

8.7.7 Engagement with professional bodies

Engagement with professional bodies was noted in several evaluation reports. It was not discussed under any one heading. It was stated that some programmatic reviews were undertaken subsequent to professional body reviews.

- The programmatic review for the Institute of Technology Tralee Department of Nursing and Health Care Sciences, School of Health and Social Sciences 2017 had to take account of the standards and requirements for nurse registration programmes, which were published in November 2015 and launched by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland in February 2016. The Bachelor of Science (Honours) General and Psychiatric Nursing contains the new curricula set out in these standards.
- Institute of Technology Carlow School of Engineering 2015 programmatic review evaluation report stated that the recent emphasis within the school was on external accreditation of programmes. The additional work involved was noted.
- Institute of Technology Tallaght School of Engineering 2018 evaluation report stated that "*the review of engineering programmes is in the context that all programmes were recently reviewed and accredited by Engineers Ireland*."

- Athlone Institute of Technology School of Engineering 2015 evaluation report stated that "*11 programmes were accredited at some level by Engineers Ireland*."
- A recommendation from the evaluation panel for Waterford Institute of Technology School of Engineering 2017 stated that the "school should engage in formal dialogue with Engineers Ireland, and/or other accrediting bodies, to explore how accreditation might be achieved, particularly for Level 8 programmes."
- Cork Institute of Technology School of Science and Informatics 2017 evaluation panel for the Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Nutrition and Health Science recommended that the programme board seek accreditation from the UK-based Association for Nutrition (AFN) for the proposed programme. This would have required modifications to the programme and would also have required the institute to have two fully registered nutritionists teaching on the programme.

There is no doubt that additional work is involved in external accreditation of programmes and efforts should be made by representatives of the IoTs and universities to develop a structure to reduce the duplication of work involved in programmatic and faculty reviews and meeting accreditation requirements for professional bodies. In some cases, the professional bodies' accreditation standards/ criteria may not meet the requirements of the providers e.g., interdisciplinary programmes and programmes leading to special purpose awards.

8.7.8 Student recruitment, progression and retention

Although it was commented on, very little information was provided in the evaluation reports in relation to student recruitment and progression. It was reported that policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression and supports for learners were in place. The comments were not informative on occasions e.g., "*The progression rates for the Faculty are in line with national norms",* Institute of Technology Carlow Phase 2 School of Engineering 2016.

The information provided by Cork Institute of Technology School of Science and Informatics Phase 1 2016 was informative as was Phase 2 in respect of the Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Nutrition and Health Science. The report provided information in relation to actual enrolments and progression rates. It was noted that there was a 12.1% increase in student retention. The initiatives implemented should be disseminated to other institutes.

8.7.9 Institutional mergers – Technological University projects

The formation of technological universities was mentioned in evaluation reports, but little information was provided. This may have been due to discussions in relation to mergers being at an early stage.

8.7.10 Evaluation report format

There is no standard format for the evaluation report for programmatic reviews throughout the IoT sector. There are many report formats such as:

- abridged reports;
- notes of the meetings that took place;
- summaries of topics discussed;
- some reports provided information on the programme;
- some reports provided information on the department.

8.7.11 Commentary

The evaluation reports in most cases are produced mainly for internal purposes and to show compliance with institutional quality assurance procedures.

The evaluation reports do not capture adequately the scope of the programmatic review process.

Consideration needs to be given by the IoT sector as to what should be included in the evaluation report. Some reports provide information on the school or faculty, which in the view of the authors of this report is good practice as it provides the context in which the programmatic review took place. A good example is provided in **Figure 8-2** for Cork Institute of Technology Phase 1 School of Science and Informatics programmatic review where data is provided on the school.

"At a glance:

There are 130.66 staff in the school, accounting for 13% of overall CIT staff.

There are 1,665 students in the school accounting for 18% of overall CIT students.

Female students make up 38.9% of the student cohort.

International students make up 14% of the student cohort.

73.21% of students come from the Cork City or county area.

The School of Science and Informatics has 2 of the 3 strategic research clusters within CIT, winning in excess of €2 million in research grants annually.

The school has the highest number of research postgraduates (45, MSc/PhD) in CIT.

In the school, a total of 60 programmes across Level 6 to 10 are offered."

Figure 8-2 Extract Programmatic Review of the School of Science and Informatics Phase 1 2016

Further information was provided on student enrolments and progression.

The phase 2 follow on evaluation reports covered the following:

(i) Programme summary;

(ii) Major changes proposed;

(iii) General matters including engagement with the programmatic review, quality of the documentation, identification of new modules, graduate and industry surveys, alignment of the methodologies for teaching, learning and assessment, staff-student engagement and assessment schemata in programme descriptors;

(iv) Entrant and graduate profile, awards and professional environment;

(v) Programme operation and progression rates;

(vi) Proposed programme specification including delivery and assessment;

(vii) Review of modules.

Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies' approach was to use a template that evaluated the programmes under each of the QQI validation criteria, which is also an example of good practice.

The evaluation reports also reveal a differing emphasis on the academic unit of review, with some institutes focussing on individual programmes and modules and others on specific areas such as engagement (community and industry), research, assessment strategies, retention and work placement. Institutes that have two stages (phases) tend to review individual programmes and modules separately to the faculty/ school review.

From the review of the sample of evaluation reports, it was clear to the authors that evaluation reports are written to provide feedback to the school or faculty. Evaluation panels tend to commend specific aspects of a programme without providing further information which would help in disseminating good practice between faculties or schools. This is a missed opportunity for institutional learning. One hundred and twenty-two commendations were made by evaluation panels covering a broad range of activities as shown in **Table 9–1** and it is unfortunate that good practice initiatives cannot be disseminated to other institutes, universities and third level providers.

Quality Within Higher Education 2018 A Summary Report, which was published by QQI and which summarises the Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Reports (AIQRs), revealed a differing emphasis on the unit review between institutes of technology and designated awarding bodies (DABs) as stated in **Figure 8-3.**

The AIQRs also reveal a differing emphasis on the unit of review in each sector; with DABs focusing on departments and schools, and IoTs conducting programmatic reviews. Previously, within internal institutional quality assurance frameworks, the concept of programmatic review was embedded in the delegated authority process. However, as the IoT sector matures in terms of quality assurance, and with the advent of autonomous technological universities, a move towards a wider understanding of quality assurance and a more holistic approach to its implementation is needed. As internal quality assurance systems mature, institutions may take advantage of the opportunity to move away from solely following the processes for which delegated authority was granted. Different approaches can be taken to internal review and a number of different modalities of quality assurance review are available to institutions, such as thematic review, school review, etc. The QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines do not require that HEI internal reviews are confined to one specific modality.

Figure 8-3 Extract Quality Within Higher Education 2018

The two-phase approach adopted by a number of institutes may well provide the solution to ensuring that a strategic approach is taken in relation to faculties and schools, and programmes are reviewed with a view to adopting best practice as per ESG 1.9 "on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes" where it states "*Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up to date. Revised programme specifications are published.*"

The ESG 1.9 guideline is specific in relation to what should be undertaken to ensure programmes are up to date. The programmatic review meets this requirement with both a review of the programmes and modules undertaken, and inputs from external peer reviewers, including those from academic institutions, business/industry and the professions.

Programme review is not an isolated event as institutes have documented procedures for the ongoing monitoring of programmes. Opportunities for change may be identified at any time but the programmatic review process does provide an opportunity for the academic unit to reflect on its portfolio of programmes and determine whether changes are required to enhance learning opportunities for students. The process provides assurance and identifies problems that need to be resolved. It also allows good practice to be identified.

The programmatic review process enables inputs from stakeholders including learners on the programme; academic staff who have delivered and are delivering the programme; and graduates of the programme who can provide feedback on how the programme prepared them for employment – what they perceived to be its strengths, and what areas they would like to see improved. Input from employers of the graduates can also provide important feedback in particular with respect to comparisons with graduates from other higher educational institutes.

8.8 Findings

- There is variation in the size of the academic unit undertaking a programmatic review ranging from one department to seven departments.
- The number of programmes reviewed varies considerably and depends on whether the programmatic review involves a one or two stage (phase) process. The number reviewed in stage 1 can be large (up to 85 programmes) but the follow-on stage 2 will review smaller numbers of programmes in greater detail.
- Eighty-nine per cent of evaluation reports listed the programmes that were to be revalidated.
- The ratio of commendations to recommendations and conditions was 1:3
- Evaluation panels made commendations in relation to all the programmatic reviews analysed.
- Nine (50%) evaluation reports had no conditions attached.
- No conditions were attached by evaluation panels to evaluation reports published in 2018; conditions were attached to one report only in 2017.
- All evaluation panels met with management of the academic unit and staff.
- Sixty-seven per cent of evaluation panels met with learners.
- Thirty-nine per cent of evaluation panels did not

meet with either graduates or employers.

- A variety of topics were covered in evaluation reports – programme and module review and assessment, research, engagement, work placement, staffing and staff development.
- A variety of report formats are in use.
- Only 25 per cent of evaluation reports had a follow-up report (quality enhancement plan).
- There is, in some disciplines, duplication of effort in producing both programmatic review and submissions for accreditation from professional bodies.

8.9 Suggestions

These suggestions are the considered views of the authors of the report. They are provided to enhance the quality of the evaluation reports. They are based on the findings on the analysis undertaken.

- A brief description of the academic unit and of the programmes reviewed should be included in the evaluation report.
- A list of all programmes to be revalidated should be attached to the evaluation report.
- The main changes to programmes should be highlighted.
- Where feasible, a two stage (phase) approach should be considered in order to separate the strategic element of the review and the quality assurance process of programme review and revalidation.
- Meeting with learners, graduates, and employers as part of the site visit is recommended.
- The evaluation report should include a section on the ongoing monitoring of the programme.
- External partnerships, including international collaborations, were seldom dealt with as part of the evaluations, which was surprising. The quality assurance of collaborations is an important aspect of the QQI Core Guidelines.
- The quality enhancement plan arising out of the review process/the panel's conditions and recommendations should be attached to the evaluation report.
- Institutes and professional bodies should consider reducing the duplication of effort in producing reports to meet both of their accreditation requirements. This could be achieved by having the review panel appointed by both the institute and professional body.
- Evaluation panels should comment on how the curriculum has been informed by research.

9 Recurring strengths, opportunities for improvement and weaknesses of programmes following programmatic review

This chapter analyses recurring strengths (commendations), opportunities for improvement (recommendations), and weaknesses (conditions). Examples of commendations, recommendations, and conditions are provided from evaluation reports.

9.1 Analysis of strengths (commendations)

9.1.1 Overview

Evaluation panels made commendations in all 18 evaluation reports. **Figure 8-1** shows the number of commendations made for each of the reports. The total number of commendations was 122. The mean was 6.8 and the range from 2 to 16. A wide range of individual strengths was identified. These strengths were grouped into broad categories covering the quality and extent of the programmatic review including the documentation submitted, validation criteria, research, engagement with industry/ professional bodies etc. **Table 9–1** analyses the commendation under categories as shown and the chart shows the distribution of commendations. The top six recurring strengths identified in the evaluation reports accounting for 65% of commendations were:

(1) Quality and extent of the programmatic review including the submitted documentation;

(2) Information, guidance and caring for students;

(3) Curriculum;

(4) Teaching and learning;

(5) Engagement with industry/professional bodies;

(6) Research.

9.1.2 Quality and extent of the programmatic review and the submitted documentation

Table 9–1 shows that 32 commendations, the highest percentage of commendations made (26% of the total number of commendation), were in relation to the quality and scope of the programmatic review and the submitted documentation. All evaluation panels commended the academic unit on some aspect of the programmatic review. This was either in relation to staff engagement, the quality of the documentation, or the analysis undertaken.

Examples of commendations:

"The panel commends the school team on their open engagement with the review panel and their comprehensive and transparent documentation. Staff displayed a strong commitment to their students, their discipline, and to research. There was strong evidence of progress and development in the school since its last review but the inclusion of a summary of the requirements of the previous SAR and an indication of how the recommendations were addressed and achieved would have assisted the current review."
Waterford Institute of Technology School of Health Sciences 2016

"The panel commend the institute policy on the two-stage process of a strategic review in advance of a programmatic review and on the entire institute strategic review process."
Institute of Technology Carlow, Stage1 School of Engineering 2015

Table 9–1 analysis of the commendations made by evaluation panels

Commendations (Strengths)	Number	%
Quality and extent of the programmatic review including the submitted documentation	32	26%
Information, guidance and caring for students	11	9%
Curriculum	10	8%
Teaching and learning	10	8%
Engagement with industry/ professional bodies	9	7%
Research	8	7%
Programme concept, implementation strategy and interpretation of QQI awards standards	7	6%
Learning environment	6	5%
Management of the programme	5	4%
Assess, transfer and progression	5	4%
Physical resources	4	3%
Staffing and staff development	2	2%
Engagement with primary and secondary level	2	2%
Transitions	2	2%
Assessment	1	1%
Programme objectives and outcomes	1	1%
Feedback from industry	1	1%
Merger	1	1%
Misc.	1	1%
Quality assurance	1	1%
Quality of the graduates	1	1%
Retention	1	1%
Strategic plan	1	1%
Total	**122**	

9.1.3 Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

Eleven commendations (9%), which was the second highest percentage of commendations made, were made in relation to this validation criterion. This criterion covers several areas including but not limited to:

- Retention initiatives;
- Supports;
- Learner focus and engagement initiatives;
- Formal and informal communications with students;
- Supportive approach from academic and support staff;
- Supportive approach while on work placement.

Examples of commendations

"The panel commends the retention initiatives undertaken by the institute, school and departments in fostering and supporting student engagement. The panel were impressed with the range of initiatives in this area undertaken since the last programmatic review. In particular, the panel would like to commend the obvious partnership model in place between departments and the Institute's Student Engagement and Retention Initiative."
Cork institute of Technology Phase 1 School of Science and Informatics 2016

"Placement: a very supportive approach is provided throughout the placement process for students."
Letterkenny Institute of Technology School of Tourism 2017

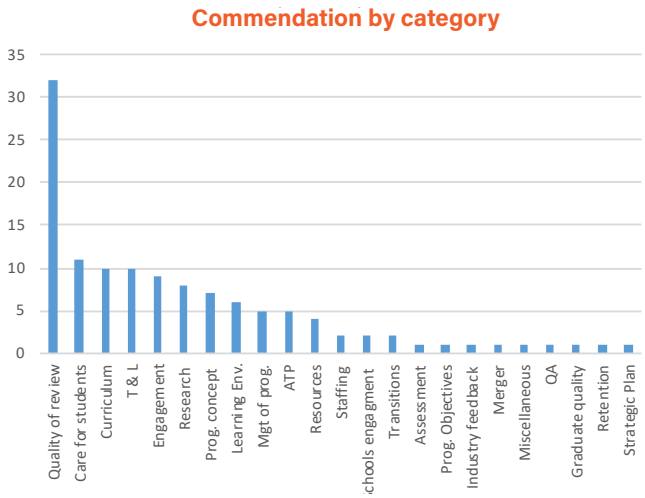


Figure 9-1 Distributions of commendations by category

9.1.4 Curriculum

There were 10 commendations (8%) in relation to the curriculum which was the third highest percentage of commendations made. This category covers many areas including but not limited to:

- Providing choice to learners – elective modules;
- Embedded certification within programmes;
- Creative practice;
- E-modules;
- Diversity and quality of the module catalogues;
- Curriculum innovation;
- Modules (specific aspects related to individual modules).

Example of a commendation

"The panel commends the range of curriculum innovations introduced by the faculty including for example broadening modules that build and accredit professional and personal skills development, entrepreneurship and employability. The range of assessment methodologies employed across its programmes which are relevant to the workplace is also to be commended."
Cork Institute of Technology Phase 1 Faculty of Business and Humanities 2015

9.1.5 Teaching and learning strategies

There were 10 commendations (8%) in relation to teaching and learning. This category included:

- Formative feedback;
- Reflective practice;
- Diverse pedagogic approaches;
- Practical and active learning;
- Blended approach to teaching and learning;
- Communities of practice around specific discipline themes.

Example of a commendation

"The Institute's commitment to diverse pedagogic approaches, which are grounded in industry practices, was commended."
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies

9.1.6 Engagement with industry/professional bodies

There were nine commendations (7%) in relation to engagement with industry/professional bodies. The extensive engagement academic units had with industry and professional bodies was also noted in the findings in evaluation reports. This category was often linked to applied research where research was undertaken in collaboration with industry. The extensive engagement with industry across a broad spectrum of activities was noted. The activities included engagement in relation to undergraduate projects, programme and module development, and programmes for industry. In relation to professional bodies, commendations related to exemptions or ensuring that modules were updated to ensure graduates would meet registration requirements.

Examples of commendations

"The panel commends the extensive engagement by the school with industry. The panel found clear evidence of good practice across a range of engagement activities including work placement, industry-based undergraduate projects, meaningful and ongoing dialogue with industry regarding programme and module content, consultancy and industry-based research programmes."

Cork Institute of Technology Phase 1 School of Science and Informatics 2016

"The school demonstrated overall strong industry engagement and community engagement. The panel commented on the extensive variety of good quality links with different organisations."

Sligo Institute of Technology School of Business and Social Science 2016

9.1.7 Research

Eight commendations (7%) were made in relation to research. A recurring theme in the findings of evaluation panels was the increasing level of research undertaken within academic units. One of the reasons for this is the research requirement in relation to merged institutes obtaining designation as a technological university. For example, it was stated in the evaluation report for Cork Institute of Technology, Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 1, "*that progress by students to PhD level had increased by 92% but admittedly from a low base since the last programmatic review.*" The volume of research activity and funding achievements of staff and the difficulties

of early-stage researchers were noted in findings in evaluation reports.

Examples of commendations

"*Applied research and industry engagement: The panel wishes to commend the school on the applied nature of research and the level of innovation and research activity in collaboration with Industry and how this is incorporated back into teaching, learning and assessment strategies.*"
Institute of Technology Tallaght, School of Engineering 2018

"The panel was very positive about the establishment of CRiSP (Centre for Research in the Social Professions) which supports research activities in the School."
Sligo Institute of Technology School of Business and Social Science 2016

"The panel commends school staff and management on their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, research, and on their collegiate engagement at the review meeting. The school's success in obtaining both national and international funding is impressive, particularly given contractual and financial restrictions in the sector. The school has demonstrated the ability to reconfigure resources to facilitate and support staff undertaking research. The school was commended for its support for staff undertaking doctorates, and its innovative engagement with stakeholders in research to meet the needs of the latter or in clinical practice driven research. The emphasis on building a research culture and capacity in the school has had a positive impact and has provided a basis on which to build further development."
Waterford Institute of Technology School of Health Sciences 2016

9.2 Analysis of opportunities for improvement (recommendations)

9.2.1 Overview

Evaluation panels made recommendations for improvement in all 18 evaluation reports. **Figure 8-1** shows the number of recommendations for each of the reports. The total number of recommendations was 377. The median was 14 and the range from 3 to 67. Two of the phase 2 evaluation reports had significantly high numbers of recommendations. There were 67 recommendations stated in the Stage 2 Institute of Technology Carlow School of Engineering 2016 evaluation report. There were 26 programmes leading to awards covered in this evaluation which approximates to three recommendations per programme. In the case of Cork Institute of Technology Phase 2 Department of Biological Sciences 2017, 53 recommendations were made in relation to three programmes. Thirty-four of these recommendations were made in relation to specific modules and very specific recommendations such as "*adding MCQ-style quizzes to the module to assess the theory associated with the practical element of the module*" or "*updating reading material for the module*".

Table 9–1 analyses the recommendations under categories as shown and the chart shows the distribution of recommendations. The same categorisation used in **Section 9.1.2** was used for the analyses of recommendations.

The top four recurring recommendations identified in the evaluation reports accounting for 52% of recommendations were:

1. Curriculum (29%);
2. Assessment (9%);
3. Programme objectives and outcomes (7%);
4. Engagement with industry/professional bodies (7%).

Table 9–2 Analysis of recommendations made by evaluation panels

Recommendations (Opportunities for improvement)	No.	
Curriculum	109	29%
Assessment	35	9%
Programme objectives and outcomes	27	7%
Industry and/or professional body engagement	25	7%
Teaching and learning strategies	24	6%
Physical resources	21	6%
Management of the programme	20	5%
Access, transfer and progression	17	5%
Quality and extent of the programmatic review including the submitted documentation	16	4%
Research	11	3%
Senior management level matters	11	3%
Miscellaneous	10	3%
Strategies	9	2%
Staffing and staff development	8	2%
Information, guidance and caring for students	7	2%
Awards/programmes	7	2%
Collaboration/integration within the school	4	1%
Programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards	3	1%
Marketing	3	1%
Quality assurance/enhancement	3	1%
Graduate profiles	2	1%
Retention	2	1%
Learning environment	1	1%
Evaluation of initiatives	1	0%
Transitions agenda	1	0%
Total	**377**	

9.2.2 Curriculum

Table 9–2 shows that 109 recommendations, the highest percentage of recommendations made (29% of the total number of recommendations), were in relation to the curriculum. Recommendations appeared in all but two of the evaluation reports – i.e., Cork Institute of Technology Phase 1 of the School of Science and Informatics review 2016 and the corresponding Phase 2 in respect of the Department of Computer Science 2017. The maximum number of recommendations was 30 for the Institute of Technology Carlow Stage 2 for the School of Engineering 2016. The evaluation report covered 26 programmes leading to major awards plus recommendations in relation to minor and special purpose awards.

The recommendations in this category covered but were not limited to the following:

- Reviewing the content and description of modules;
- Including work placement in the curriculum and module titles;
- Contact hours and credits;
- Inclusion of material and developing new modules;
- Eliminating overlap between modules;
- Recommended textbooks.

Examples of recommendations

"Engineering. Revise module descriptors and indicative content to make the mobile content of the programme more explicit"

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown School of Informatics and Engineering 2015

"Given the identification in recent reviews of the importance of work placement in the learning process, the faculty should give serious consideration to the introduction of a mandatory work placement module in all programmes, as appropriate to the programme. This should include mechanisms to include international learners."

Institute of Technology Carlow Engineering Stage 2 2016

"That the teaching contact hours for students be reduced as follows: a maximum of 24 hours per week for year 1, a maximum of 22 hours per week for Year 2, and an appropriate reduction for year 3 and year 4. In addition, blended learning and problem-based learning to be enhanced across all three disciplines within the school. Staff time released should be allocated to specific duties aligned with the implementation of these recommendations."

Athlone Institute of Technology School of Engineering 2015

9.2.3 Assessment

The second highest number of recommendations (35, or 9% of the total number of recommendations) were made in relation to assessment. Thirteen of the 18 (72%) evaluation reports made recommendations in relation to assessment. This criterion covers a number of areas including but not limited to:

- Assessment strategies;

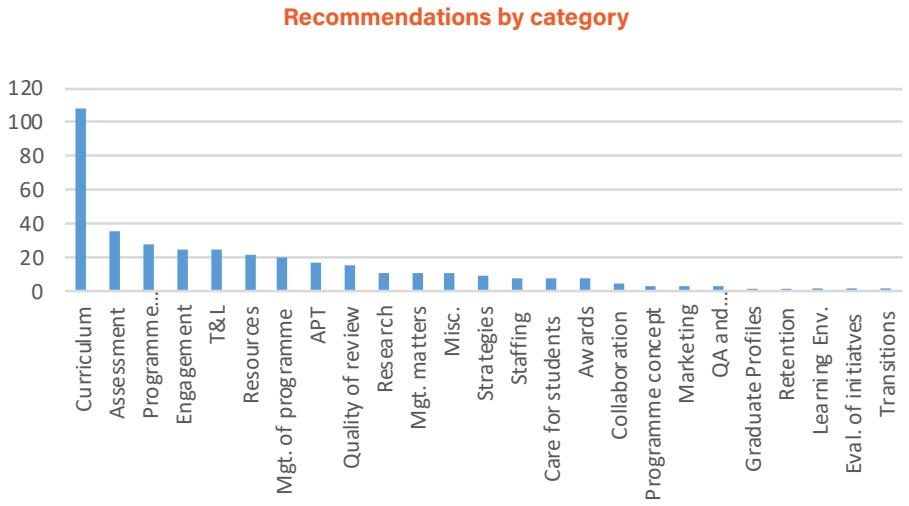


Figure 9-2 Distribution of recommendations per category

- Regulations in relation to assessment;
- Over-assessment of students;
- Reviewing the balance between continuous assessment and written examinations;
- Inclusion of formative assessment;
- Integrated assessment;
- Assessment and attendance.

Example of recommendations

"Department of Business: The assessment matrix should be expanded to give more detail to students. The department would benefit for a review of the variety of assessments and possible over-assessment."
Institute of Technology Sligo School of Busine ss and Humanities 2016

9.2.4 Programme objectives and outcomes

Twenty-seven recommendations (7% of the total number) were made in relation to the programme objectives and outcomes. Ten of the 18 (55%) evaluation reports made recommendations in relation to programme objectives and outcomes, mainly in relation to learning outcomes. Eleven of these recommendations were made in the evaluation report for Cork Institute of Technology School of Science and Informatics Phase 2 Department of Biological Science 2017. This criterion covers several areas including but not limited to:

- Programme learning outcomes;
- Module learning outcomes including the number and wording of outcomes;
- Training in writing outcomes.

Example of recommendation

"The panel agreed that the POs of the BSc in food and health science require some updating, and recommends that the programme team address this as soon as feasible."
Cork Institute of Technology School of Science and Informatics Phase 2 Department of Biological Science 2017 *(POs refer to programme outcomes)

9.2.5 Engagement with industry/professional bodies

Twenty-five recommendations (7% of the total number) were made in relation to engagement activities with industry or professional bodies.

Ten of the 18 (55%) evaluation reports made recommendations in relation to engagement with industry, professional bodies or regulatory bodies. Seven of these recommendations were made in the evaluation report for Institute of Technology Sligo School of Business and Social Science 2016. The activities covered in this category included but were not limited to:

- Industry collaboration and advisory boards;
- Industry accreditation;
- Feedback from industry;
- Professional body recognition and professional exemptions.

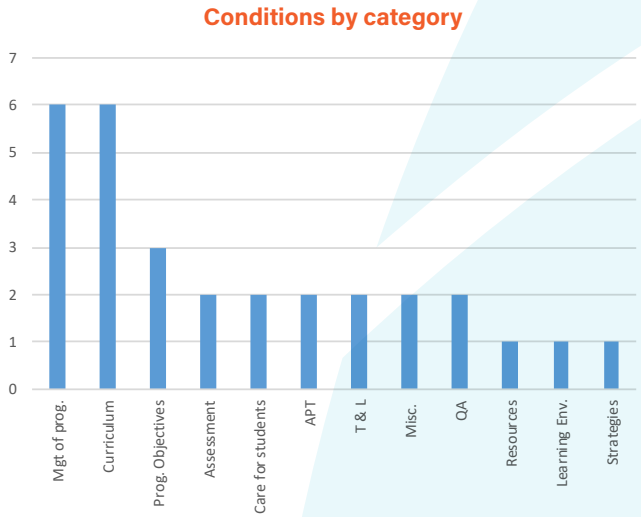


Figure 9-3 Distribution of conditions per category

"It is recommended the school consider formalising an external industry advisory board for each individual discipline."

"Department of Business: The panel encourages the department to seek possible QFA exemptions for the Financial Services Programme."
Institute of Technology Sligo School of Business and Social Science 2016

9.3 Analysis of recurring weaknesses (conditions)

9.3.1 Overview

Evaluation panels proposed conditions in nine of the 18 evaluation reports. **Figure 8-1** showed the number of conditions for each. The total number of conditions was 30. The average was 1.7 and the maximum number was nine for Cork Institute of Technology Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 2 Department of Applied Social Studies 2016.

Table 9–2 analyses the conditions. The categories are shown, and the chart shows the distribution of conditions. The same categorisation used in **Section 9.1.2 and Section 9.2.1** was used for the analyses of conditions. Only the top two categories are commented on below. Both categories had six conditions and accounted for 40% of the conditions between them.

1. Programme management
2. Curriculum

Table 9–3 and its corresponding chart is for the analysis of conditions made by evaluation panels for programmatic reviews

Conditions (Weaknesses)	Number	%
Management of the programme	6	20%
Curriculum	6	20%
Programme objectives and outcomes	3	10%
Assessment	2	7%
Information, guidance and caring for students	2	7%
Access, transfer and progression	2	7%
Teaching and learning	2	7%
Misc.	2	7%
Quality assurance	2	7%
Physical resources	1	3%
Learning environment	1	3%
Strategies	1	3%
Total	**30**	

9.3.2 Programme management

The management of work placement accounted for three of the six conditions.

Example of condition:

"The panel requires that the department put in place a formal contract for work placement between the student–workplace supervisor – the institution to cover minimal standards around:

- Supervisor training;
- Student developmental plan;
- Core competencies / Professional competencies around professional standards;
- Content, purpose and protocol of the three-way meeting (to ensure formative and not summative);
- Extension of placement (if required)."

Cork Institute of Technology Faculty of Business and Humanities Phase 2 Department of Applied Social Studies 2016

9.3.3 Curriculum

This criterion covers the following:

- Industrial placement to be made compulsory
- Duplication of content
- Strengthening numeracy and literacy skills
- Reviewing the content

Example of a condition

"There is a condition attached for the revalidation of the BA in early childcare and education L8 for the programme board to strengthen the numeracy and literacy skills to ensure better employment opportunities and to reflect the programme title."
Institute of Technology Sligo School of Business and Social Science 2016

9.4 Commentary

There is no standardised format for panel evaluation reports. Their main use is to demonstrate compliance with quality assurance procedures and to propose the revalidation of programmes. Evaluation reports provide feedback to the academic unit on commendations, recommendations, and conditions. There is very little data provided in the evaluation reports in relation to student intake, progression, and awards classification. In some evaluation reports, comments in relation to the lack of or the analysis of data were noted. Only in very few cases was it

recommended that in future reviews this aspect of the self-evaluation report be addressed. There are two equally important parts to the current programmatic review process. The review of strategic issues and plans based on the academic unit self-evaluation report, and the review of the programmes, in particular with respect to proposed changes and updating of the programmes. The review of the academic unit and its strategy for the future and the review of programmes need to form two separate processes. The composition of the evaluation panels requires common membership but additional members with difference expertise are required in both cases.

9.5 Findings

- All evaluation panels commended the academic unit on an aspect of the programmatic review.
- Sixty-two of the commendations (51% of the total number of commendation) specified by evaluation panels were in relation to 11 of the current QQI validation criteria. (IoTs have delegated authority to make awards and as a result QQI criterion 1 is not considered by evaluation panels).
- Thirty-two commendations, the highest percentage of commendations made (26% of the total number of commendation), were in relation to the quality and scope of the programmatic review and submitted documentation.
- Two hundred and seventy-eight of the recommendations (74% of the total number of recommendations) specified by evaluation panels were in relation to 11 of the current QQI validation criteria.
- The highest percentage of recommendations (29% of the total number of recommendations) was in relation to the curriculum.
- Sixteen recommendations (4% of the total number of recommendations) were in relation to the quality and scope of the programmatic review and the submitted documentation. These were mainly in relation to the lack of metrics, presentation of statistical information, and the lack of focus on certain aspects of the programmatic review.
- Evaluation panels attached no conditions to the category on the quality and scope of the programmatic review and submitted documentation.
- Forty per cent of the conditions were in relation to either the curriculum (20% of the total number of conditions) or the management of the programmes (20% of the total number of conditions).
- Twenty-seven of the 30 conditions (90%) attached by evaluation panels were in relation to nine of the validation criteria. There were no conditions associated with either criterion 3 ("programme concept, implementation strategy and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based") or criterion 4 ("the programme access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory").
- The evaluation report arising from the programmatic review of Sligo Institute of Technology School of Business and Humanities had the highest number of commendations (16).
- The evaluation report arising from the programmatic review of Institute of Technology Carlow Stage 2 Faculty of Engineering had the highest number of recommendations (67).
- The evaluation report arising from the programmatic review of Cork Institute of Technology Business and Humanities Department of Applied Social Studies had the highest number of conditions (9).
- Very few comments were in relation to internationalisation.
- Work placement was discussed in all but two evaluation reports.
- The issues of the lack of funding, or employment control framework were noted in nine (50%) of the evaluation reports. In commending examples of exemplary practice, evaluation panels did not provide adequate information on the practices in question to be of use to other academic units within the institute or other higher education institutions.
- There is little or no evidence provided in evaluation panel reports to support findings. Reports should cover evidence, analysis and findings and features of good practice demonstrated by the college (ESG 2.6 Reporting 2015).
- There is little or no data provided in the evaluation reports on student numbers, progression rates, success rates in examination and graduate employment information. This information is useful for prospective and current students as well as

for graduates, other stakeholders and the public (ESG 1.8 Public Information 2015). It may well be available in the academic unit programmatic review document.

- There is a wide variety of evaluation report formats. Some panels focus on major issues that were identified in the academic unit self-evaluation report. Others – in particular those evaluation reports arising from stage (phase) 2 – focus solely on individual programmes and modules.

9.6 Suggestions

- Commendations, recommendations, and conditions should be matched to the institute's validation criteria where applicable.
- Evaluation panels should be more explicit in describing commendations so that when good practice is identified it can be considered by other academic units within the institute and by other higher education providers.
- Evaluation reports should include a documented robust review of the evidence to support findings and conclusions.
- Institutes should consider a two-stage approach with one focusing on an academic unit review and the other on programmes.
- Evaluation reports should be standardised to provide brief information on the academic unit and data in relation to student numbers, progression and student performance.
- Institutes should look in detail at least once a year to decide on (i) how to cascade good practice; (ii) which policies and strategies merit review at institutional level based on validation and programme review reports; (ii) how all of the above feed into staff development activity. These could be reported in the annual institutional quality assurance report to QQI.
- The complete evaluation report, not an abridged version, should be published.

10 Evaluation panels for programmatic reviews

10.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the composition of external evaluation panels for the 18 evaluation reports.

It analyses the membership of panels under the following headings:

- Size of evaluation panels;
- Composition of evaluation panels;
- Gender diversity of evaluation panels.

10.2 Size of evaluation panels

Section 8.3 covered the variation in the number of departments and the number of programmes reviewed within each evaluation report analysed. The number of panel members consequently varies depending on whether the evaluation is part of a two-stage process or on the total number of programmes reviewed. As shown in **Figure 8-1,** not all evaluation reports provided a list of the programmes reviewed. **Table 10–1** shows the total external membership of the panels for the reports analysed. The panel membership for both the Cork Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology shows the strategic planning and programme review stage separately (fourth and fifth column).

Table 10–1 External membership of evaluation panels for programmatic reviews

Institute	Faculty / School / Department	All Stages	Stage 1	Stage 2
Cork Institute of Technology	Faculty of Business and Humanities	19	7	12*
Cork Institute of Technology	School of Science and Informatics	11	5	6*
Institute of Technology Carlow	School of Engineering	26	8	18
Athlone Institute of Technology	School of Engineering	6	n/a	n/a
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	7	n/a	n/a
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	School of Engineering and Informatics	21	n/a	n/a
Institute of Technology Sligo	School of Business and Social Sciences	16	n/a	n/a
Institute of Technology Tallaght	School of Engineering	8	n/a	n/a
Institute of Technology Tralee	Department of Nursing and Health Care Sciences	4	n/a	n/a
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	School of Tourism	8	n/a	n/a
Limerick Institute of Technology	Department of Information Technology	10	n/a	n/a
Waterford Institute of Technology	School of Engineering	21	n/a	n/a
Waterford Institute of Technology	School of Health Sciences	20	n/a	n/a

*the number is the total number of external panel members for the two reports analysed.

There is considerable variation in the size of panels. Those institutes that usually have small evaluation panels for initial validation of programmes also have small programmatic review panels- for example, Athlone Institute of Technology, and Institute of Technology Tralee. Institute of Technology Blanchardstown has large programmatic review evaluation panels and large evaluation panels for the initial validation of a programme.

Programmatic review evaluation panels are larger than evaluation panels for initial validation of a programme.

10.3 Composition of programmatic review evaluation panels

Table 10–2 shows the total composition of the panels, their function and gender. Different institutes describe their panel members using different terms. The term 'academic member' covers those from academic institutions. This covers both subject experts and others with expertise relevant to the review. As some programmatic reviews took place in two stages, in some cases there was more than one chairperson named for a programmatic review process.

Table 10–2 Composition of panels by function and gender

Function	Female	Male	Total
Academic member	30	63	93
Industry expert	15	40	55
Chairperson	4	13	17
Learner representative	5	4	9
Secretary	2	6	8
Miscellaneous	2	4	6
Teaching and learning expert	2	0	2
Graduate representative	0	1	1
Internal member	0	1	1
Not recorded	0	2	2
Grand Total	**60**	**134**	**194**

Table 10–2 shows the following:

- Forty-eight per cent (93) of members of panels were academics;
- Twenty-eight per cent (55) were representatives from industry/professions;
- Five per cent (9) were learner representatives;
- Ratio of female members to males was 1:2.2;
- Only four chairpersons were female.

Table 10–3 lists the evaluation reports and the external members of the panels. It shows that:

- There was a wide variation of membership with 27 members on one panel and four on another;
- The number of external academic members varied from one to 14 with an average of seven;
- Industry was represented on all but one panel and had an average membership of three members;
- Graduates were formally represented on only one evaluation panel, which was for Phase 2 of the Faculty of Engineering Institute of Technology Carlow 2016 programmatic review. In a number of cases, the industry representative was also a graduate;
- Eight evaluation panels had learner representatives and five did not. Three of the eight evaluation panels had learners from the university sector and four from the institutes of technology. One had no affiliation stated.
- There may have been cases where the chairperson was a discipline expert. However, panel members were only recorded under one category.

Table 10–4 provides a breakdown of the range of sectors from which the evaluation panel members came. For the purposes of this table foreign universities were a separate category. The table shows that:

- Most evaluation reports had panels with members from the IoT sector, the Irish university sector and from universities outside of the state;
- The average number of external academic institutions represented on evaluation panels was five with four evaluation panels having eight or more represented. Some evaluation panels had only two;
- The Institute of Technology sector provided the largest number of external academic members;
- All Institutes of Technology were represented on the evaluation panels apart from Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology;
- All Irish universities provided members of evaluation panels;
- Nineteen per cent of academics on evaluation panels were from outside of the state;
- Eleven evaluation panels (61%) had academics from foreign universities mainly from the UK. Grouping those evaluations that consisted of two stages together meant that only three institutes did not have an academic panel member from outside of the state;
- The 18 academics from outside the state were affiliated with 14 universities;
- Academics from two private providers, Carlow College and Hibernia College were evaluation panel members.

Table 10–3 Composition of evaluation panels by function

Institute and faculty	All external panel members	Academic subject matter experts	Industry/ employer	Learners and graduates	Others/ Chairs etc.
Cork Institute of Technology					
Faculty of Business and Humanities Stage 1	7	3	2	0	2
Department of Applied Social Studies Stage 2	8	4	4	0	0
Department of Accounting and Information Systems Stage 2	4	2	2	0	0
Faculty of Business and Humanities All stages	19	9	8	0	2
School of Science and Informatics Stage 1	5	2	2	0	1
Department of Biological Sciences Stage 2	3	1	1	0	1
Department of Computer Stage 2 Science	3	1	2	0	0
School of Science and Informatics All Stages	11	4	5	0	2
Institute of Technology Carlow					
Engineering Stage 1	8	3	2	1	2
Engineering Stage 2	18	8	8	1	1
Engineering All Stages	26	11	10	2	3
Athlone Institute of Technology					
School of Engineering	6	3	0	1	2
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology					
Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	7	2	2	1	2
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown					
Informatics and Engineering	21	14	6	0	1
Institute of Technology Sligo					
School of Business and Social Sciences	16	9	5	1	1
Institute of Technology Tallaght					
School of Engineering	8	1	5	1	1
Institute of Technology Tralee					
Department of Nursing and Health Care Sciences	4	1	2	1	0
Letterkenny Institute of Technology					
School of Tourism	8	3	3	1	1
Limerick Institute of Technology					
Department of Information Technology	10	5	3	1	1
Waterford Institute of Technology					
School of Engineering	21	16	1	1	3
School of Health Sciences	20	15	4	0	1
Grand total	**177**	**94**	**53**	**10**	**20**

Table 10–4 Academic members of evaluation panels by Sector

Institute and faculty	Institute of Technology Exc. DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology	Irish Universities	Foreign Universities	Private Providers
Cork Institute of Technology					
Faculty of Business and Humanities Stage 1	2	0	1	1	0
Applied Social Studies Stage 2	2	0	1	0	1
Department of Accounting and Information Systems Stage 2	2	0	0	0	0
Faculty of Business and Humanities All stages	6	0	2	1	1
School of Science and Informatics Stage 1	1	0	1	1	0
Department of Biological Sciences Stage 2	0	0	1	1	0
Department of Computer Science Stage 2	1	0	0	0	0
School of Science and Informatics All Stages	2	0	2	2	0
Institute of Technology Carlow					
Engineering Stage 1	2	0	1	0	0
Engineering Stage 2	5	1	0	1	0
Engineering All Stages	7	1	1	1	0
Athlone Institute of Technology					
School of Engineering	1	0	1	1	0
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology					
Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	0	0	1	1	0
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown					
Informatics and Engineering	8	0	3	4	0
Institute of Technology Sligo					
School of Business and Social Sciences	4	0	3	1	1
Institute of Technology Tallaght					
School of Engineering	1	0	0	0	0
Institute of Technology Tralee					
School of Health and Social Sciences	0	0	1	0	0
Letterkenny Institute of Technology					
School of Tourism	1	1	0	1	0
Limerick Institute of Technology					
Department of Information Technology	4	1	0	0	0
Waterford Institute of Technology					
School of Engineering	8	4	3	1	0
School of Health Sciences	3	0	7	5	0
Grand total	**45**	**7**	**23**	**18**	**2**

Table 10–5 lists the universities outside the State that were represented on the evaluation panels. Thirteen were from the United Kingdom and there was one each from Sweden and Slovakia.

Table 10–5 Foreign Universities represented on evaluation panels

University	Country	Number of panel members
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh	United Kingdom	1
Abertay University, Dundee	United Kingdom	1
Bournemouth University	United Kingdom	1
John Moore's University	United Kingdom	1
Newcastle University	United Kingdom	1
Swansea University	United Kingdom	1
Umeå University	Sweden	1
University of Bath	United Kingdom	2
University of Brighton	United Kingdom	1
University of Derby	United Kingdom	1
University of Lincoln	United Kingdom	1
University of Northampton	United Kingdom	1
University of South Wales	United Kingdom	1
University of Ulster	United Kingdom	3
University of Ziline	Slovakia	1

10.4 Gender diversity on panels

Table 10–6 provides a breakdown by gender of the evaluation panels. It shows that:

- Overall, 31%of the members of evaluation panels were female;
- One panel for the Institute of Technology Tralee, Department of Nursing and Health Sciences, School of Health and Social Sciences 2017 had no male representation;
- The Stage 2 Department of Computer Science, School of Science and Informatics 2016 panel had no female members.

Table 10–6 Gender composition of panels by programmatic review

Institute and faculty	Female	Males	All
Cork Institute of Technology			
Faculty of Business and Humanities Stage 1	2	6	8
Department of Applied Social Studies Stage 2	3	6	9
Department of Accounting and Information Systems Stage 2	3	2	5
Faculty of Business and Humanities All stages	8	14	22
School of Science and Informatics Stage 1	1	5	6
Department of Biological Sciences Stage 2	2	2	4
Department of Computer Science Stage 2	0	4	4
School of Science and Informatics All Stages	3	11	14
Institute of Technology Carlow			
Engineering Stage 1	1	8	9
Engineering Stage 2	4	15	19
Engineering All Stages	5	23	28
Athlone Institute of Technology			
School of Engineering	1	6	7
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology			
Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	3	4	7
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown			
Informatics and Engineering	6	17	23
Institute of Technology Sligo			
School of Business and Social Sciences	6	10	16
Institute of Technology Tallaght			
School of Engineering	2	6	8
Institute of Technology Tralee			
Department of Nursing and Health Care Sciences	6	0	6
Letterkenny Institute of Technology			
School of Tourism	3	6	9
Limerick Institute of Technology			
Department of Information Technology	2	8	10
Waterford Institute of Technology			
School of Engineering	6	18	24
School of Health Sciences	9	11	20
Grand total	**60**	**134**	**194**

10.5 Findings

- The findings for the evaluation panels for programmatic review are very similar to the findings for the evaluation panels for initial validation of programmes.
- The composition of evaluation panels consisted mainly of external members.
- All public higher education institutions were represented on evaluation panels (outside of their institute) except Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.
- Fifty-three per cent (94) of members of evaluation panels were academics, 30% (53) were representatives from industry/professions and six per cent (10) were learner representatives.
- Evaluation panels for programmatic reviews are larger than evaluation panels for initial validation of a programme.
- Twelve evaluation panels (67%) had academics from Irish universities.
- Eleven evaluation panels (61%) had academics from foreign universities, mainly from the UK.
- Only three institutes did not have an academic panel member from either DIT, an Irish university or a university outside of the state.
- Overall, 31 per cent of the members of evaluation panels were female. Twenty-four per cent of the chairpersons and 27% of the industry representatives.
- The ratio of female members to male was 1:2.2.
- There were 55 (28%) industry representatives on evaluation panels. There was industry representation on all but one evaluation panel.

10.6 Suggestions

- The representation of female members on evaluation panels should be increased as well as the number as chairpersons.
- There should be at least one academic member from the Irish university sector and one academic member from outside the state on evaluation panels for programmatic reviews.
- Qualifications and appropriate biological details of panel members should be included in the evaluation panel report.
- There should be a learner representative on all evaluation panels.

11 Main findings

The thematic analysis for the period June 2015 to 2018 for the initial validation of programmes and the revalidation of programmes following a programmatic review confirms that institutes of technology adhere to their quality assurance procedures and guidelines for the initial validation and periodic review of programmes published on their websites. These are in compliance with QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines and ESG 2015. New programmes are initially evaluated internally by both management and academic governance structure e.g., academic council. Programmes are evaluated and reviewed externally against published validation criteria corresponding to QQI validation criteria with the addition of other criteria in some cases.

Fifty-two initial evaluation reports were analysed consisting of four reports for each of the 13 institutes covering a range of disciplines and awards. Fifty-nine commendations, 389 recommendations for improvement and 122 conditions were provided by evaluation panels. Of particular note is that the programme concept was the aspect of the programme most likely to be commended and the curriculum and learning outcomes most likely to be the subject of recommendations for improvement and conditions attached.

In many cases, the structure of the reports did not adequately address the suggested needs of external stakeholders. Standards, while mentioned, are not discussed in detail. Programme outcomes are rarely published in the reports and neither are programme schedules. These are available in other documentation but their inclusion in the validation report would be useful.

Embedded programmes were not reported on in most cases. A frequent condition was that separate programme learning outcomes be written for the embedded programmes. There were differing practices in relation to progression and exit pathways through embedded or exit awards.

Eighteen panel review reports for programmatic reviews were analysed for 11 of the institutes of technology. There are two aspects to the programmatic review. One looks at strategic and high-level issues and the second is devoted to a detailed review of programmes. Two institutes had separate reviews for both while the rest had one review considering the strategic aspects and conducting a detailed review of programmes. Review panels made commendations in relation to all reviews analysed. A total of 122 commendations were made for all of the review reports analysed. Thirty-two (26%) of commendations made were in relation to the programmatic review. A total of 377 recommendations were made. The highest percentage (29%) of recommendations were made in relation to the validation criterion on the curriculum. A total of 30 conditions were made. There were no conditions imposed in 50% of the reports analysed and no conditions were imposed for reports analysed published in 2018 and only one for 2017. The ratio of commendations to recommendations and condition was 1:3.

Only 25% of review reports had the follow-up report (quality enhancement plan) attached. All review panels met with management and academic staff, 67% met with learners on the programmes, 61% met with either graduates or employers or both as part of the site visit to the institute. A variety of topics were covered in review reports covering programmes and module review, assessment, research, work placement, staff, and staff development. Many reports discussed the difficulties with the employment control framework, and funding issues.

There is a wide variety of review report formats. Some review panels focused on major issues that were identified in the academic unit self-evaluation report. Others, in particular for those with two stages to the review, focused on the individual modules. Some reports provided information on the academic unit under review. There is little or no data provided in review reports on student numbers, progression rates, success rates in examination and graduate employment information.

The findings in relation to both evaluation panels and review panels are similar in most areas. There were 291 members on the 52 initial evaluation panels and 194 members on the 18 programme review panels. The composition of initial validation panels was 30% female and 31% female for the review panels. All panels had a majority of external members. The panel representation for initial validation was 64% academics, 30% industry/employer representatives/

professions and less than 1% learners. This compared to 48% academics, 28% industry/professions and 5% learners for the composition of the review panels. External academics were represented on panels for all initial validation panels and review panels. In the main these were from IoT sector. The similarity of programmes, policies and processes within the IoT sector may limit the "externality" of these panel members.

All public higher education institutions in Ireland were represented on evaluation panels and on all review panels except Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology for the reports analysed. Seventeen per cent of academics for initial validation panels and 19% for review panels for programmatic review were from universities outside the state.

12 MAIN SUGGESTIONS

The suggestions below are based on the good practice observed throughout the sector and also from the wider higher education system. Many of the suggestions have already been implemented within IoTs since 2018. Several of the suggestions are made based on the assumption that approval and review reports are public facing documents that are designed to provide information to both external and internal stakeholders. They are provided in the spirit that it would be useful for IoTs to consider them when re-evaluating their QA processes and procedures.

(1) Quality assurance manuals

- The validation criteria for the initial validation and revalidation criteria should be provided in a separate section within quality assurance manuals.
- The committee or person that approves the initial validation of a programme and the revalidation following a programmatic review should be clearly stated.
- Guidelines should be developed to ensure the inclusion of learners in programme development and review. (Section 3.1 Core QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016).
- Guidelines should be developed on demonstrating how to ensure the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are consistent with the relevant awards standards or in cases where there is no award standard to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) award type descriptors.
- Templates should be developed for evaluation panels to record their recommendations and conditions against each of the institute's validation criteria. The template should include a section for the recording, where applicable, of good practice and commendations.
- At least once a year, the institutes should consider in detail (i) how to cascade good practice; (ii) which policies and strategies merit review at institutional level based on validation and programme review reports;(ii) how all the above feeds into staff development activity.

(2) Panel reports

- The format and structure of the report should take account of the broad range of stakeholders who have an interest in such reports. The following is recommended for inclusion in the evaluation reports for initial validation:
  - a brief introduction to the programme;
  - rationale for the programme;
  - minimum intended programme learning outcomes;
  - programme schedules;
  - ISCED code and EFQ level of the programmes;
  - All programmes covered by the review, including embedded programmes, should be evaluated and reported on.
- In the case of evaluation panel reports for programmatic reviews it is recommended that:
  - brief information is provided on the academic unit undertaking the review.
- Summary data should be provided in relation to the numbers of students who have undertaken the programme, progression rates and student performance.
- The discussion of the programme, recommendations for improvement and conditions should be structured in relation to the validation criteria. Where conditions are to be imposed, a statement of the deficiency to be addressed should be included.
- Where recommendations are made, a statement of the benefit that would accrue to the programme by its implementation should be made.
- A positive statement should be made, where applicable, that the programme outcomes are consistent with the appropriate awards standards where there is no award standard to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) award type descriptors.
- The quality enhancement plan (follow up report) should be attached to the evaluation report.

- Institutes should ensure that all embedded and exit awards are given consideration by external evaluation panels. This can be done at the same event as the parent programme.

(3) Evaluation panels

- Institutes should avoid, where possible, a preponderance of IoT academics on the evaluation panels.
- The representation of female members on panels should be increased as well as the number of female chairpersons.
- There should be at least one learner representative on all panels.
- There should be at least one academic from the Irish university sector on all evaluation panels.
- There should be a broader representation of academics and industry experts from outside of the IoT sector. This would help underpin the quality of the system and its comparability with other educational qualification systems. This is important for higher level programmes, in particular, Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma programmes. It is also the case for programmatic reviews and reviews of academic units. Consideration should also be given to extending the representation from outside of the UK.
- The area of expertise of the external members should be stated together with their qualifications, affiliation and function on the panel e.g., subject expert, industry representative, teaching and learning expert, learner.
- It should be recorded in the report when internal staff are full members of the panel. Their position within the institute should also be stated.
- Information on the secretary to the panel should be recorded and whether they are full members or not. Institutes should appoint one person as secretary to the evaluation and review panels. The secretary should receive suitable training and be conversant with institutional expectations with regard to the reports.
- A section within the report on conflict of interest should be included with a statement in relation to no relevant interests or conflicts, when this is applicable, and a note on any declarations of interest made. The declarations should be published with the panel report.
- A copy of the final report as signed off by the chairperson should be published on the website. It is also recommended that the full report be published rather than an abridged version of the report.
- Consideration should be given to having a teaching and learning representative on the panel.

(4) Addressing commendations, recommendations, and conditions

- Examples of exemplary practice should be described in such a way that they can be of use to other programme development committees within the institute and to other higher education institutions.
- The thematic analysis has found that there were recurring opportunities for improvement and weaknesses at both the initial validation and at the programmatic review stage. Recurring themes at initial validation are in relation to the curriculum and programme learning outcomes. These same issues arise at programme review. An analysis of these recurring weakness and opportunities within individual institutes should be undertaken to highlight where action needs to be taken.
- It is not always clear why a recommendation is proposed rather than a condition and vice versa. The view of the authors is that normally conditions should only be imposed when a validation criterion is not met, or some other quality assurance matter has arisen. It is recommended that recommendations and conditions are matched to the appropriate validation criteria.

(5) Review of academic units

- It is recommended that institutes consider the two-stage approach of separating the strategic element and the detailed consideration of changes to programmes.

13 THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

13.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the institutes of technology regulatory environment. It provides information on the Institute of Technology Act 1992-2006, the Qualifications and Education and Training Act 2012, QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 and management structures within the institutes.

13.2 Institute of Technology Acts 1992 -2006

Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006: this Act is one of a group of Acts included in this collective citation, to be construed as one (Institutes of Technology Act 2006 (25/2006)[7].

The Acts state the functions of the institute, the statutory role of the governing body, an academic council and executive director (now titled "president").

Figure 13-1 states the functions of the institute, **Figure 13-2** the role of the governing body, and **Figure 13-3** the role of academic council.

Function of Institutes of Technology

"The principal function of a college shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, be to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the state with particular reference to the region served by the college....."

Figure 13-1 Extract from Section 5 of the Institutes of Technology Act

Governing Body

"... the governing body shall manage and control the affairs of the college and all property of the college and shall perform the functions conferred on the college by this Act, and shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of those functions subject to such policies as may be determined by the Minister from time to time and to the programmes and budget approved annually..."

Figure 13-2 Extract from Section 7 of Institute of Technology Act

Academic Council

"Each college shall have an academic council appointed by the governing body to assist it in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the college and to protect, maintain and develop the academic standards of the courses and the activities of the college. (2) (a) Each governing body may by regulations made under this section provide for the membership and terms of office of the academic council. (b) The majority of members shall be holders of academic appointments within the college and at least one shall be a registered student of the college. (c) The members appointed to the academic council shall hold office for a period of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) the academic council shall have the following particular functions— (a) to design, develop and assist in implementing courses of study consistent with the functions of the college; ..."

Figure 13-3 Extract from Section 10 of Institutes of Technology Act

7 REGIONAL TECHNICAL COLLEGES ACT 1992 REVISED Updated to 24 April 2018. This Revised Act is an administrative consolidation of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992. It was prepared by the Law Reform Commission in accordance with its function under the Law Reform Commission Act 1975 (3/1975) to keep the law under review and to undertake revision and consolidation of statute law.

President

"The Director of a college shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, control and direct the activities of the college and shall control and direct the staff of the college in the implementation of such activities and be responsible to the governing body therefor and for the efficient and proper management of the college."

Figure 13-4 Extract from Section 9 Institutes of Technology Act

Note: The director is now known as the president in institutes of technology.

13.3 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established Quality and Qualifications Ireland. Its mission is to: (i) promote the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training, and quality assure providers; (ii) support and promote a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

13.3.1 Delegation of authority by QQI to make awards

Institutes of technology can make their own awards. They obtained delegation of authority from QQI under Section 53 of the Qualification and Quality Assurance (Education and Training Act) Act 2012 to make awards at Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree and Master's Degree (taught and research). The awarding of doctoral degrees is delegated to some institutes and in specific disciplines. The institutes as independent awarding bodies in their own right are responsible for their own programmes of education and training, research and related services. Delegation of authority to make awards is subject to requirements set out in the legislation, including procedures and criteria.

13.3.2 Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

QQI has established Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for providers of higher, further and English language education and training. These guidelines are "statutory" guidelines. The core guidelines "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016" are applicable to all providers. QQI has also established sector-specific guidelines including "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Institutes of Technology (other than DIT)."

Institutes of Technology must have quality assurance procedures as per Section 2 of the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016. ***Figure 13-5*** outlines the main areas to be addressed in the QA procedures.

Main QA procedures

1. Governance and management of quality
2. Documented approach to quality assurance
3. Programme of education and training
4. Staff recruitment, management and development
5. Teaching and learning
6. Assessment of learning
7. Supports for learners
8. Information and data management
9. Public information and communication
10. Other parties involved in education and training
11. Self-evaluation, monitoring and review

Figure 13-5 Extract from QQI Section 2 of "Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016

Section 3.1 of the Core "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines April 2016" relates to the requirements for programme development and approval and Section 3.3 to programme monitoring and review. The findings of evaluation panels in relation to both requirements are the subject of this thematic analysis.

13.3.3 Awards Standards

QQI has established awards standards for specific fields of learning. Institutes with delegated authority are required to take cognisance of these standards where they relate generally to the programme being developed. In the absence of an award standard, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) award type descriptors should be used at the level appropriate to the proposed programme. Currently there are ten standards for broad fields of learning such as engineering, science, business. These are thresholds and describe standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired, and where appropriate demonstrated, by a learner before an award can be made.

There are different standards at different levels of the NFQ. The award title is an indication of the level and

standard to which the programme conforms. The standards for specific fields of learning should be used as reference points in the design of programmes. Where a programme is multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary in nature, the use of more than one standard may be necessary.

The sector specific "Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Institutes of Technology (other than DIT) July 2016" requires institutes of technology to have specific procedures in relation to standards and awards. **Figure 13-6** specifies the requirements in relation to standards and awards.

Standards and Awards

- Learners enrolled on programmes leading to awards recognised within the NFQ acquire the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level and award type of the NFQ.
- Each award of an institute of technology meets national standards established by QQI.
- All programmes:
  - for regulated professions meet the accreditation standards of the relevant professional recognition body.
  - offered leading to awards of other awarding bodies lead to awards recognised in the NFQ.

Figure 13-6 Requirements in relation to standards and awards. Extract from Section 6 of Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for institutes of technology

13.3.4 Reporting

The institutes of technology together with the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology report annually to QQI. The Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR) is an annual report about internal quality assurance that institutions provide to QQI. The AIQR template has been developed with reference to ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) European Standards and Guidelines. The AIQRs are published on the QQI website.

13.4 Higher Education Authority (HEA)

The HEA leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system with the objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions, which is responsive to the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and its people and supports the achievement of national objectives.

The HEA has a statutory responsibility, at central government level, for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system.

The institutes of technology together with the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology report annually to the HEA through a Compact as stated in **Figure 13-7.** The compacts provide for how performance is to be measured and a proportion of funding is contingent on performance.

Compact

Compact is an agreement between the Higher Education Authority and Higher Education Institution and is the outcome of a process of strategic and performance dialogue between the two bodies. The purpose of strategy and performance dialogue is to align the missions, strategies and profiles of individual higher education institutions with national priorities, and to agree strategic objective indicators of success against which institutional performance will be measured and funding allocated.

Figure 13-7 Extract from HEA website www.HEA.ie

13.5 Management structures within the institute of technology sector

The management structures within the IoT sector are as follows:

1. President
2. Executive team/senior management team
3. Management teams

The president is the principal executive officer of the institute. The president is assisted by a senior management team referred to in institutes as either the executive, executive team or senior management

team. Its role is to assist the president in the management of the institute and in formulating strategies and policies for approval by the governing body. It is a non-statutory committee of the institute. Each institute has determined the most appropriate roles and responsibilities for its executive and these have evolved over time. The number of senior managers varies from seven to 11 inclusive of the president. The larger institutes have either 10 or 11 senior managers and smaller institutes seven or eight members.

The normal composition of the executive is the president, together with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Registrar (Registrar), Vice President for Finance and Corporate Services (Secretary Financial Controller), Vice President Research, Development and External Services (Development) and Heads of Faculty (Schools). Some institutes assign specific responsibilities to members of the executive such as:

- Vice President for Strategy at Waterford Institute of Technology
- Head of the Wexford Campus at the Institute of Technology Carlow
- Head of Faculty of Lifelong Learning at the Institute of Technology Carlow
- Leadership and Organisational Development at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

The total management of an institute consists of heads of academic departments and support services e.g., librarian, finance manager, human resources manager, academic administration and student services manager, buildings officer.

14 METHODOLOGY

14.1 Introducton

This report was commissioned by QQI to provide a thematic analysis of reports related to:

- The approval of new programmes of higher education (e.g., academic validation, professional accreditation);
- The re-approval following review and modification of previously approved programmes.

The current report constitutes the second part of the review and deals with those programmes offered by public institutions with delegated authority to make awards. These institutes constitute the institute of technology sector of higher education. The Dublin Institute of Technology, which has a different statutory position, was not included in this part of the analysis.

14.2 Approach

The approach taken was to rely only on the documentary sources and to base findings on a close analysis of those sources. Only data available in the source documents was used in the analysis.

14.3 Sources of data

- The source of data for review of the approval of new programmes was the reports from the institute of technology evaluation panels that carried out initial validation of programmes and programmatic review processes, as published by institutes of technology on their websites.
- Four evaluation reports in respect of the validation of new programmes were selected from each institute. All of these reports were published within the period June 2015 to June 2018. The evaluation reports were chosen to ensure that they represented the range of disciplines and types of awards obtaining throughout the sector. There was no attempt to ensure that similar disciplines and types of programmes were chosen from each institute.
- Only 11 of the institutes published evaluation reports on the programmatic reviews in the period under discussion. One report was taken from each of nine institutes and two were taken from Waterford Institute of Technology. Six review reports from Cork Institute of Technology were analysed – two strategic review (phase 1) reports and four programme review reports (phase 2) linked to the strategic review reports. One strategic report (stage 1) and the follow-on (stage 2) report for the Institute of Technology Carlow were also analysed (total of 18). These reports were available on the institutes' websites.

14.4 Analysing the data

- Details of the evaluation reports were entered into a database. This included programme details, the composition of the panels and any commendations, recommendations, and conditions made by panels. The structure of the report was also recorded.
- Commendations, recommendations, and conditions were categorised based on 11 appropriate QQI validation criteria. Where necessary, for example in curricular matters, they were further divided into subcategories.
- Aspects of the programme evaluation and programme review reports deemed relevant to the stakeholders were recorded.
- The membership of the evaluation panel was recorded on the database. Functions, affiliations and gender of panel members were recorded. Qualification details were included when provided in the reports. The position of panel members in their organisations was not recorded in sufficient detail to allow for useful analysis in many cases. No personal details of panel members were used in this report. All information on members was available on the institutes' websites.
- The database allowed the production of the tables used in this thematic analysis.
- Where the reviewers made a judgement e.g., on the desirable features of reports and of panels, this is indicated in the body of this report.
- The findings were based on the evidence provided in the reports.
- The recommendations in the report are the considered views of the authors.

15 Appendix A
Programme evaluation reports examined

Code	Institution	Award Title	Programme Title
AL01	Athlone Institute of Technology	B.B.	in Office Management and Administration
AL02	Athlone Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Business Information Systems
AL03	Athlone Institute of Technology	B.Sc.	in Polymer Processing Technology
AL04	Athlone Institute of Technology	M.Sc.	in Nursing in Leadership in Quality Healthcare
CK01	Cork Institute of Technology	B.B.(Hons)	in Culinary Entrepreneurship
CK02	Cork Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Agri-Bioscience
CK03	Cork Institute of Technology	M.Sc.	in Data Science and Analytics
CK04	Cork Institute of Technology	MBA	in Strategy
DL01	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	B.A.(Hons)	in Creative Media Production
DL02	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	B.A.(Hons)	in New Media Studies
DL03	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	M.B.	in Digital Entrepreneurship
DL04	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	M.A.	in Interdisciplinary Design Strategies
DK01	Dundalk Institute of Technology	HC in Science	in Computing and Business
DK02	Dundalk Institute of Technology	HC in Arts	in Front Office Management and Business Administration
DK03	Dundalk Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Agri-Food Production
DK04	Dundalk Institute of Technology	B.Eng.(Hons)	in Civil Engineering
GM01	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	B.A.(Hons)	in History and Geography
GM02	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	B.B.(Hons)	in International Tourism Management
GM03	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Agriculture and Environmental Management
GM04	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	M.A.	in Creative Practice
BL01	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	M.A.	in Creative Digital Media
BL02	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	B.Sc.	in Process Instrumentation and Automation
BL03	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	B.Sc.	in Horticulture
BL04	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	M.Eng.	in Internet of Things
CW01	Institute of Technology Carlow	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Brewing and Distilling
CW02	Institute of Technology Carlow	B.Sc.	In Flight Operations
CW03	Institute of Technology Carlow	B.B.(Hons)	in International Business
CW04	Institute of Technology Carlow	M.Sc.	in Weapons Systems, Ordinance, Munitions and Explosives Engineering
SL01	Institute of Technology Sligo	B.Eng.	in Precision Engineering and Design
SL02	Institute of Technology Sligo	B.A.(Hons)	in Business in Insurance Practice
SL03	Institute of Technology Sligo	B.B.	in Business Administration
SL04	Institute of Technology Sligo	M.Eng.	in Road and Transport Engineering
TA01	Institute of Technology Tallaght	B.B.(Hons)	in International Business
TA02	Institute of Technology Tallaght	B.Eng.(Hons)	in Engineering Software
TA03	Institute of Technology Tallaght	B.Eng.(Hons)	in Biomedical Design
TA04	Institute of Technology Tallaght	M.Sc.	in Biopharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology

TL01	Institute of Technology Tralee	B.A.	in Design for Interactive Media
TL02	Institute of Technology Tralee	B.A.	in Event Management
TL03	Institute of Technology Tralee	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Automotive Manufacturing Engineering
TL04	Institute of Technology Tralee	HC in Arts	in Early Childhood Care and Education
LY01	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	B.A.(Hons)	in Animation
LY02	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	B.Sc.	in Culinary Arts
LY03	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	HC in Business	in Administration, Information Technology/ Customer services
LY04	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	M.Sc.	in Computing in Private Cloud Technologies
LK01	Limerick Institute of Technology	B.Eng.	in Industrial Electrical Engineering
LK02	Limerick Institute of Technology	B.Eng.(Hons)	in Precision Engineering
LK03	Limerick Institute of Technology	M.A.	in Social Care Management
LK04	Limerick Institute of Technology	H. Dip. in Business	in Digital Marketing
WD01	Waterford Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Applied Computing in the Internet of Things
WD02	Waterford Institute of Technology	HC in Arts	in Adult and Further Education
WD03	Waterford Institute of Technology	M.A.	in Social Justice and Public Policy
WD04	Waterford Institute of Technology	B.Sc.(Hons)	in Sport and Exercise, in Health and Exercise, in Nutrition and Exercise

16 Appendix B
Programme review reports examined

Institution	Faculty/ Department	Report Type
Athlone Institute of Technology	School of Engineering	Strategic review and revalidation
Cork Institute of Technology	School of Science and Informatics	Strategic review
Cork Institute of Technology	School of Science and Informatics -Department of Computer Science	Revalidation of programmes in Department of Computer Science
Cork Institute of Technology	School of Science and Informatics – Department of Biological Sciences	Revalidation of programmes in Biological Sciences
Cork Institute of Technology	Faculty of Business and Humanities	Strategic review
Cork Institute of Technology	Faculty of Business and Humanities - Applied Social Studies	Revalidation of programmes in Social Sciences
Cork Institute of Technology	School of Business and Humanities - Department of Accounting and Information Systems	Revalidation of programmes in Accounting and Business Systems
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies	Strategic review and revalidation
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown	Informatics and Engineering	Strategic review and revalidation
Institute of Technology Carlow	Engineering Stage 1	Strategic review
	Engineering Stage 2	Revalidation of Engineering Programmes
Institute of Technology Sligo	School of Business and Social Sciences	Strategic review and revalidation
Institute of Technology Tallaght	School of Engineering	Strategic review and revalidation
Institute of Technology Tralee	School of Health and Social Sciences	Strategic review and revalidation
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	School of Tourism	Strategic review and revalidation
Limerick Institute of Technology	Faculty of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology - Department of Information Technology	Strategic review and revalidation
Waterford Institute of Technology	School of Engineering	Strategic review and revalidation
	School of Health Sciences	Strategic review and revalidation

17 Appendix C
Analysis required by the tender

This is an extract from the tender for the thematic analysis

4 Analysis Requirements

The analysis should focus on the following:

1. The recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the improvement of programmes communicated by the relevant reports. The kinds of programmes of interest are:

- Master's Degree programmes;
- Honours Bachelor Degree programmes (three and four year);
- Ordinary Bachelor Degree programmes;
- Higher Certificate programmes.

2. (a) and (b) are offered by all the main providers.
(c) and (d) are uncommon in the universities.
Research degree programmes are excluded from this analysis (though they may be addressed incidentally by some relevant reports that will need to be analysed).

3. The recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the improvement of the relevant reports in terms of their clarity, the usefulness of the information they provide stakeholders about programmes and the evidential supports cited in reports in support of conclusions. Stakeholders include those who require, either directly or indirectly, objective information about the quality of programmes, for example:

   the academic committees (i.e., the Programme and Awards Executive Committee in the case of the Contracting Authority) responsible for approving programmes (e.g., information about whether the programme meets the approval/accreditation process requirements and criteria);

   the programme development teams (e.g., information that will help to enhance the programme);

   prospective students (e.g., information that will help inform students' choices);

   prospective employers of graduates (e.g., information that will help inform employers' expectations concerning graduates);

   Government and its agencies (e.g., concerning the quality of the programmes).

4. Not all of these groups typically read (re-) approval/accreditation reports. Reports are normally addressed directly to (a) and (b). Nevertheless, the reports are expected to be a source of objective evaluation that supports information about the programmes that might be provided to these groups.

5. The analysis of the characteristics of expert panels and their diversity (generally reports are the outcomes of evaluations/reviews by expert panels). The identification of any recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the improvement of the validation panels and the information provided about them. Within each arm of the study (as defined below) evaluation of the consistency of panel characteristics and consideration of the diversity.

6. The recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the improvement of programme re- approval/ accreditation processes (this should look at the programme review process (through the reports) as well as the process for formal approval/accreditation of the modified programme (sometimes called re-accreditation/re-approval, e.g., revalidation).

5. Cross cutting analysis

   a. The recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the improvement of the reports in terms of their use of evidence to back up assertions. Identification of examples of exemplary practice in the effective use of evidence.

   b. The consistency of reports.

   c. The comparability of reports.

   d. Regarding all of the above, determine whether factors such as academic discipline, programme duration (e.g., three-year vs. four-year bachelor programmes) and such like are associated with specific strengths or weaknesses.

6. The identification of opportunities for improvement.

For the first stage of this study (the stage that addresses outcomes of the Contracting Authority's approval processes and related matters) there are additional objectives:

7. The consistency of the reports (e.g., style, application of the criteria) from one programme to another.

8. The consistency of the reports with the Contracting Authority's published validation policy and particularly the 12 validation criteria.

9. Some analysis may be limited by the quantity of available data.

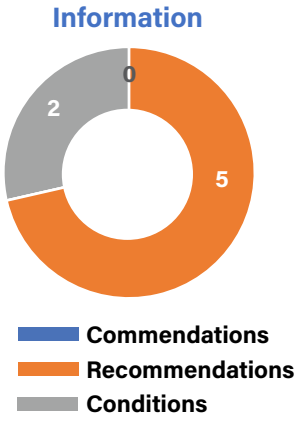
For the professional accreditation arm of this study (part of the Second Stage), we are interested in comparisons between the professional accreditation reports and the corresponding academic accreditation reports. We would like to understand how academic approval and professional accreditation compare. We expect the approval/accreditation/review reports to be internalised by the researchers and the analysis to be on the meaning of the reports rather than on statistical analyses of the text (e.g., how many times such a word is used).

18 Appendix D
Additional information on the recurring issues in programmes

The following categories of issues did attract attention from panels but in each case the number of mentions was less than five per cent of the total.

18.1.1 Information

This area covers the information available to learners and prospective learners and in some cases, employers. External evaluation panels did not raise this issue often. There were only seven mentions of it, five recommendations and two conditions.



Some were in relation to the employer's role in work placement for learners, e.g.,

"Generate an employer work-based learning handbook to provide further clarity on the:

1. *Employer role in relation to student selection and enrolment.*
2. *Employer role in the assessment of the work-based competencies to ensure learner attainment of the work-based modules learning outcomes."*

BL02 Commendation Bachelor of Science

Others related to prospective learners:

"The advertising material and interview for the programme should highlight the unique aspects of the programme, inform prospective students of the time commitment required to successfully complete the programme, and advise on the location and timetable for delivery of the programme."

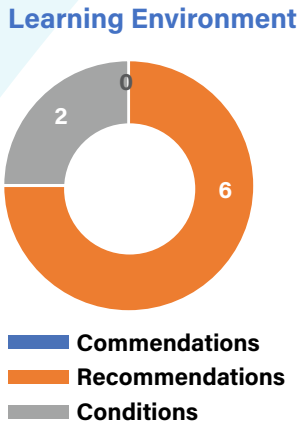
WD02 Recommendation Master of Arts

18.1.2 Learner protection

Learner protection is required to insure against the provider not being able to provide the programme. It is normally not an issue in public institutions. The issue arose once in the 52 programmes and that was related to a new apprenticeship programme. This is an issue that may arise in the future as institutes develop apprentice programmes at advanced levels.

"Provisions for learner protection in the event of company downsizing should be formulated and recorded in the programme documentation."
LK01 Recommendation Bachelor of Engineering

18.1.3 Learning environment



This criterion relates to the social, cultural and intellectual environment and support systems in place to facilitate the achievement of the programme learning outcomes. It includes the socialisation of new learners into the peer group. It also requires that work placement learning and assessment be as rigorous as any other part of the programme.

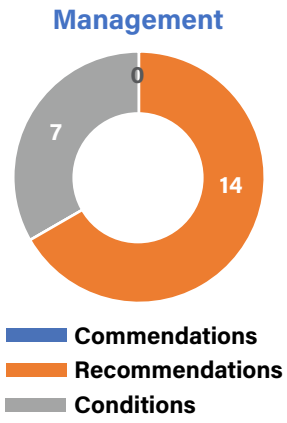
The issue of work placement arose in one recommendation from an external evaluation panel:

"The proposers told the panel that employers are accustomed to paying students during placement. The panel recommends that this expectation re remuneration should be made clear to employer."
CK01 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Business

A recurring opportunity for improvement was that learners undergo adequate induction processes:

"Student cohort – the panel recommended the team deliver an induction programme, to cater for the diverse cohort of students."
DL03 Recommendation Master of Business

18.1.4 Management



Management of programmes and the quality management regime did not attract any commendations. There were seven conditions and 14 recommendations associated with the management of the programme. Quality management was a concern where programmes or parts of programmes were delivered outside of the home department or in collaboration with other departments or institutions. One external evaluation panel was concerned about the management of the international experience of learners:

"A guideline document on the management of learner international placements must be developed to ensure a strong clear international dimension is incorporated into the proposed learning outcomes to be achieved through the placement. The Department of Management is to commit to having this in place and approved by the end of 2017."
TA01 Condition Honours Bachelor of Business

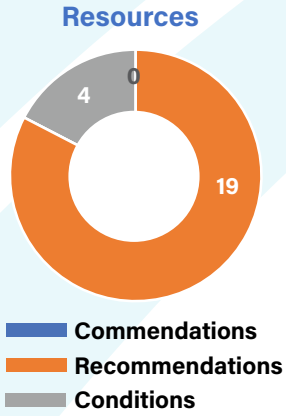
Other external evaluation panels were concerned about the inter-departmental or inter-institutional management of learners:

" Given the collaborative nature and off-site delivery of the programme, the School should devise opportunities to encourage greater integration of the programme board, particularly in the initial stages, to allow for collaboration, common shared practice, shared knowledge, and the creation of synergies. The non-WIT staff involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme should receive an induction session in the quality assurance and other procedures of WIT and be given the opportunity to attend any formal training in the areas of teaching and learning, assessment et cetera offered by WIT."
WD03 Condition Master of Arts

Eight of the 14 recommendations were concerned with the management of industrial placements and three were concerned with collaborative programmes, e.g.,

"The panel recommend that the proposers commence the development of a framework for managing their relationship with industrial partners in respect to industry-based projects. This may take the form of a tri-partite learning agreement between the learner, the Institute and the Industry Partner. The agreement would describe the various roles and responsibilities of the various actors to the agreement. Additional items such as IP, protocols regarding data storage and dissemination of project outcomes should also be considered. Furthermore, a project/ thesis handbook should be developed to include, inter alia, project guidelines, indicative project milestones, research and report writing guidelines."
CK03 Recommendation Master of Science

18.1.5 Resources



This criterion covers physical and IT resources available to learners. It also covers technical and administrative support together with the financial resources necessary to support the programme and the printed and electronic material necessary to support the teaching and learning. It does not include academic staff who are considered under a different heading.

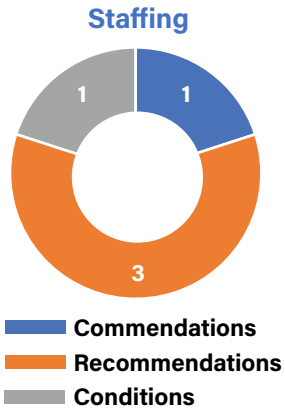
Most of these resource areas did not attract any attention from external evaluation panels. Technical and physical resources were deemed to be sufficient. Of the 23 mentions of resources, 19 were concerned with learning resources. Only four conditions relating to this criterion were attached. One related to a requirement that learners provide their own computing equipment:

"It is proposed in the submission that students on the programme would be required to provide their own devices and software. An Institute Bring Your Own Device Policy, 2CE 2: BSc (H) in Applied Computing in the Internet of Things which would take account of all aspects of such a requirement, should be in place prior to the commencement of the programme on a BYOD basis".
WD01 Condition Honours Bachelor of Science

Fifteen of the 19 recommendations related to learning resources. The recurring issue was the adequacy of the reading and learning resources and whether they represented the most up to date editions of material. Some recommendations were more specific, e.g.,

"Ensure reading material is up to date.
Danger of over-reliance on core Teagasc manuals.
More emphasis on peer-reviewed journals and international literature where relevant.
Engagement with more recent rural literature to facilitate a wider perspective."
GM03 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Science

18.1.6 Staffing



This criterion covers the staffing requirement necessary to deliver the programme. It requires that there is an identified complement of staff or potential staff allocated to the programme. Staff support and staff management also come under this criterion.

There was only one condition relating to staffing, and that was for specialist staff for a collaborative programme with the Army:

"Ensure the expertise is available to deliver the relevant elements of the programme, e.g., developing officers of the Ordnance Corps, forging partnerships with national or international universities or with the Institute of Technology Carlow."
CW04 Condition Master of Science

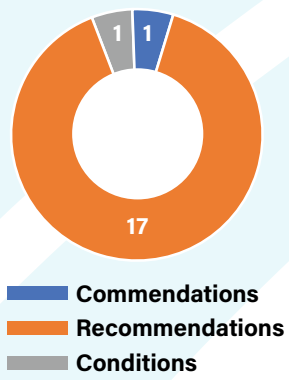
Among the four recommendations, staffing issues related to industrial placement were raised. External evaluation panels made recommendations that the academic supervision of placements be sufficiently resourced as well as the administrative requirement of placements:

"The Department acknowledged future staff requirements in the document and the panel supports the proposed staff recruitment plan. The panel also encourage the establishment of internal administrative and academic supports for placement, including a dedicated placement officer."
WD04 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Science

And

"The panel recommends to the programme management team that in the allocation of resources for the current arrangements which are in place re placement coordinators would, insofar as possible, continue into the Applied Industry Project module, where the "matchmaking" of students to authentic industry projects is likely to be a complex process."
CK01 Recommendation Honours Bachelor of Business

18.1.7 Teaching and learning



This criterion covers the teaching and learning strategies necessary to support the achievement of the programme outcomes. It requires that the learning is sufficiently supervised, and that individual guidance and support is available to learners. There was one commendation and one condition as well as 17 recommendations related to this criterion. Example:

"To be cognisant of the workload required for the delivery of the programme and the academic supervision of apprentices while in the workplace."
AL03 Recommendations Bachelor of Science

A recurring theme was the external evaluation panel's encouragement of institutes to develop more flexible approaches to learning in particular, to the adoption of blended learning modes. This was particularly evident in the recommendations on postgraduate programmes, Masters and Higher Diplomas, e.g.,

"Delivery – the programme team should monitor and review delivery modes. Flexible delivery modes could increase the capacity to grow applicant numbers – consider part-time, boot camp, blended delivery as options. A boot camp offering would be of particular interest to digital start-ups, who are keen to build their business online."
DL03 Recommendation Master of Arts

And

"Going forward review the blended learning opportunities to determine what may be possible for certain elements of the program to allow for flexible programme access."
LK04 Recommendation Higher Diploma in Business

18.1.8 Engagement

Engagement refers to the level of interaction between the programme development team and the external evaluation panel. The quality of that interaction can be critical in supporting a programme and can give the external evaluation panel insight into how the delivery staff will deliver the programme. There were 12 commendations by external evaluation panels of the level of engagement, e.g.,

"The panel commended the professional engagement of the staff in the external validation process. The contributions were very valuable and useful."
LK03 Commendation Master of Arts

18.1.9 Documentation

This refers to the documents supporting the programme, typically the programme submission and any associated material.

There were 16 mentions of documentation. The five commendations were of the high quality of documentation supplied to the evaluation panels. The conditions imposed by evaluation panels were in relation to the removal of inconsistencies that emerged during the discussion of the programme. Recommendations were made to improve the clarity of the document.

19 Appendix E
Glossary of terms used in this report

This glossary is largely taken from QQI's Assessment and Standards and reproduced in "the Green Paper on Assessment of learners and learning, (For Consultation)" 2018. Those entries in italics are drawn from that source or from other QQI documents.

Academic committee	*A top-level deliberative committee with overall responsibility for the governance of academic affairs.*
Assessment	*Learner assessment (specifically assessment of learning) means inference (e.g,. judgement or estimation or evaluation) of a learner's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard based on appropriate evidence. Self-assessment is included in this. Assessment has many purposes.*
Assessment instrument	*Any assessment task and criteria, along with procedures for its conduct, together with the explicit grading scheme (i.e., grading rubrics).*
Award	*An award which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.*
Award standards	*Award standards are the expected prior learning required to qualify for an Award. Award Standards and award type descriptors are structured and presented under the three main strands: Knowledge, Know-how and Skill, and competence; currently these are further divided in the NFQ into eight to 11 sub-strands (depending on the award-type). The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) defines these terms.* *Award standards describe the required learning for awards at specified levels. Higher education awards standards are (ideally) concise texts that normally cover broad fields of learning. However, professional qualifications-specific award standards may also be determined where appropriate.*
Commendations	*Commendations are made in validation, revalidation and programmatic review reports when panels detect a particular strength. In this review commendations were synonymous with strengths.*
Conditions	*See weakness(es) below*
External examiner	*An external examiner is an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme's field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to his/ her likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.*
Independent providers	*The Irish higher education system is conventionally divided into three distinct sectors depending on the level of autonomy of the institutions and their relationship to QQI. The independent providers are those institutions that provide programmes for which QQI is the awarding body. These institutions are typically for profit or not for profit self-funding colleges.*
Intended learning outcomes	*The intended learning outcomes represent the educational goals. They describe the learning outcomes that the teacher intends that learner will attain as a result of teaching and learning activities (see minimum intended programme learning outcomes below).*
Learning environment	*Learning environments are diverse. Teachers and other learners are part of a learner's learning environment as are workplace colleagues if applicable. Learning environments have both physical and social structures. Learners interact with the learning environment; the environment responds to the learner, and the learner to the environment.*

Learning outcomes	*A learner's knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. The learner changes.*
Level	*This term is used in this report to indicate the level of a programme on the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ).* *The NFQ is a ten-level framework. Higher education awards are those at levels 6 to 10. The major awards at these levels are as follows* *Level 6: Higher Certificate* *Level 7: Ordinary Bachelor Degree* *Level 8: Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma (HDip)* *Level 9: Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)* *Level 10: Ph.D., and Professional Doctorates. (Not covered in this review)*
Minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs)	*The minimum achievement (in terms of knowledge, skill, and competence) that the learner is certified to have attained if he/she successfully completes a particular programme (i.e., passes all the required assessments). These must always be specific by the provider. A learner who completes a validated programme is eligible for the relevant award if he or she has demonstrated, through assessment (including by recognition of prior learning), attainment of the relevant minimum intended programme learning outcomes. MIPLOs are not normally assessed directly but their achievement is implied by the cumulative achievement of the MIMLOs.*
Minimum intended modules learning outcomes (MIMLOs)	*Minimum intended modules learning outcomes are written for all modules. They reflect in their language the NFQ level of the module.*
Module	*A programme of education and training of small volume. It is designed to be capable of being integrated with other modules into larger programmes. A module can be shared by different programmes.* *In describing the educational formation provided by an independent module, it is sufficient to specify (i) the learning outcomes (ii) the assumed prior learning.*
Modules descriptors	*Modules descriptors include the title of the modules, the credit volume and level of the modules, the minimum intended modules learning outcomes, indicative content, assessment instruments and schedule and learning resources*
Named awards	*Within an award type (e.g., Honours Bachelor Degree) the particular awards that are named with respect to a field of learning (e.g. Honours Bachelor of Science Degree). Standards for named awards often include reference to knowledge, skill and competence within a specific field of learning (the standards may be expressed by the MIPLOs approved at validation where a generic QQI award standard is used).*
NFQ	*The National Framework of Qualifications is a ten level framework. Higher education awards are those at levels 6 to 10. See entry on Level above.*
Opportunities for improvement	*See recommendations below.*
Panel	*Panel is a term used to describe the independent expert groups that evaluate programmes for initial validation and those that are involved in programmatic reviews and revalidations.*

Programme	*A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.* *A major award programme will normally require some kind of "cohesion generating" process which integrates constituent modules so that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the programme.*
Programmatic review	*A programmatic review refers to the review of a suite of programmes that have been previously validated. The programmes reviewed are normally within discipline or within a faculty of a provider. Programmatic reviews consist of an evaluation of a self-evaluation report presented by the provider and the revalidation of the programmes. Normally programmes are reviewed within five years of initial validation.*
Provider	*A "provider of a programme of education and training" is a person who or a body which, provides, organises or procures a programme of education.*
Recommendations	*Recommendations are made by panels in validation, revalidation and programmatic review reports. They are suggestions to improve the programme. They are not required to be implemented by the provider. They are synonymous with "opportunities for improvement" in this report.*
Reports	*Reports are those produced by independent evaluation panels. Validation reports are produced following an initial validation event. Programmatic review reports are produced following a programmatic review accompanied by a revalidation report for each programme revalidated during the review.*
Review	*This document is referred to as a review. Its purpose is to review and analyse the validation, revalidation and programmatic review reports.*
Validation	*Validation is a regulatory process that determines whether or not a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a provider's programme of education and training.* *A programme of education and training is validated where QQI confirms under section 45 of the 2012 Act," that the provider of the programme has satisfied it that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award of QQI being offered in respect of that programme"*
Weakness(es)	*A weakness is an aspect of a programme that requires amendment to ensure that the programme meets the criteria for validation. A condition or conditions are attached to ensure that the programme can be validated. Conditions are taken to indicate weakness.*

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