



QQI Awards

Guide to completing QQI Programme¹ Validation Descriptor – Higher Education Microcredentials

¹ Where programme is 30 ECTS or less.

Introduction

This document should be read with reference to the HET Guidance for Completing Programme Descriptor and the associated glossary of terms.

The document serves only to identify what is unique to the process of validating very small, standalone HET programmes while leading to QQI special purpose awards are more commonly called microcredentials.

Definition:

For the purpose of validation by QQI, a microcredential is a programme with the following attributes:

- volume of between 5 and 30 ECTS, leading to a special purpose award at NFQ 6 to 9.
- designed to meet a current market need for which there is demonstrable learner demand and value.
- targeted to a clearly expressed learner profile and programme delivery and assessment methods appropriate to that learner profile.
- delivered using a blended learning delivery mode (blend of onsite and online media) or solely online delivery. It will not be awarded transnationally.
- comprising one or more modules which may either originate from previously validated programmes or which may be novel.
- having a clear and persuasive rationale for creation of a new standalone award for such a programme rather than as an embedded award created through the standard validation / revalidation processes. These are standalone single programmes, without embedded awards. If additional award(s) is sought, this would require a separate application.
- with quality assurance procedures relevant to the delivery and assessment methods proposed.

Procedure for Evaluation of Microcredentials

1. All applications to be documented in a standard descriptor template available on QQI website.
2. In addition to the self-evaluation report, the descriptor is to be accompanied by a document setting out the rationale and business case for the programme.
3. All applications will be made via QHub and will be screened by QQI.
4. QQI will appoint an independent expert panel to evaluate the programme and make a recommendation to QQI on validation.
5. QQI will retain the right to decide whether a programme is evaluated by desk audit or with require a meeting between the provider and the expert panel. This will depend on the novelty of the programme.
6. The evaluation process, including selection of and communication with the panel, may be managed by QQI or by a provider with devolved responsibility.
7. Prior to making its recommendation, a panel conducting the evaluation by desk audit may require clarification about the application. A document template is provided for this purpose.

Alternatively, the panel chair may request QQI / provider with DR to arrange a virtual meeting.

8. The panel will report its findings using the QQI report template.
9. The decision of validation will be made by PAEC in the normal manner and the panel report will be published.
10. In recognition of the need for microcredentials to be current and agile in meeting changing employment market needs, the validation period will be maximum of three years rather than the standard five. The provider will specify in its application the period of validation sought.
11. Validation fees for these programmes vary according to programme volume as shown below:
 - *Programmes of 5 – 10 ECTS: €1,000 per year of validation, with a minimum of €2,000 per programme.*
 - *Programmes of 15 – 30 ECTS: as per the current fee schedule for special purpose awards i.e. €5,000.*
12. Submission of the programme via QHub
 - a) Ensure that there is consistency between the programme descriptor and what is entered into QHub. The QHub data is what will be used to populate the Certificate of Validation and so it is essential it is accurate.
 - b) Note that there may be need to edit the programme document and QHub based on feedback from the panel.

Evaluation of the Programme(s)

- a) **Screening:** a programme entered on QHub will have to meet mandatory data fields and document requirements before it can be submitted. This is to ensure that (i) the data required to create a new award is entered and (ii) the documents required to evaluate the programme (descriptor, rationale document, PEL evidence and self-evaluation report) have been uploaded. This is part of the screening. Further screening will check that the programme is ready to be sent to a panel. If not, it will be reverted for further editing.
- b) **Panel Evaluation:** QQI will appoint at least two evaluators to evaluate the documentation. Where the documentation / data entry is of good quality and there is good evidence of preapproval and endorsement, a desk audit will be used. If the programme is larger and / or there is a lack of clarity in the application, a site visit / online visit will be arranged.
- c) The evaluators will represent a QA perspective and a subject matter expertise (SME) perspective. Ideally at least one evaluator would have both. Where necessary two SMEs will be appointed.
- d) Evaluators will review the documentation independently and then come to a consensus. They may:
 - a. Request further information.
 - b. Recommend validation with or without conditions.
 - c. Recommend refusal of validation of one or all programmes in a suite.
- e) A condition proposed by a panel can be addressed before a validation decision or may be addressed within a specified timescale afterwards.

Validation of the Programme

- a) The evaluators' independent evaluation report (IER) is presented together with supporting information, to a meeting of QQI's Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) for consideration and decision.
- b) If validated, the panel report and certificate of validation (CoV) for the programme will be published on the Irish Register of Qualifications www.irq.ie
- c) Irrespective of outcome, the validation report is published on the QQI website.
- d) A programme is validated for a maximum of three years. The Last Intake Date on the CoV is the last date by which a new intake of learners can start the programme, the number of intakes per annum is specified at validation. For any further intakes, the programme needs to be replaced by a new version through revalidation.