

Document Title/Reference	Policy and Procedures for Design and Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that courses/modules are designed with overall programme objectives in line with Institutional strategy • To ensure that programmes have explicit intended learning outcomes and that expected student workload is defined e.g. in ECTs. • To provide a systematic process for the development of new programmes in conjunction with stakeholders • To ensure programmes proceed through an external academic validation process
Scope	This policy applies to the process of approval up to and including the updates to existing modules/programmes and the introduction of new programmes / modules
Contents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction 2. Introducing New Subjects, Modules, Streams to Existing Accredited Programmes 3. Introducing New Programmes and Modules
Audience	Education Division Faculty, SMG, Education Committee Students, IPA-NUI Steering Committee
Contextual Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESG 1.2 ‘Design and Approval of Programmes’ • QQI Core Guidelines No.3.1‘Programme Development and Approval’. • NUI Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges • NUI Quality Assurance for Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications (2013)
Related Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks and Standards • Student Feedback & Participation Policy • Teaching, Learning & Assessment Policy
Revision History Commencement Date Date of Next Review	<p>2021 version – effective from September 2021</p> <p>2017 version – effective from September 2017</p> <p>2006 version – effective from December 2006</p> <p>Date of Next Review: 2026</p>
Policy Owner	Registrar/Head of Education

1. Introduction

1.1 How does the IPA know that its programme proposals will provide learners with the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their personal, civic and professional roles? First, the Institute can refer to consultative meetings with employers, which identify new or revised forms of specialised knowledge and skills that must be taught to employees. Second, the validation process for a programme guarantees that proposed themes and topics meet acceptable academic criteria. These forms of evaluation measure the objectives of a programme and its *intention*.

1.2 As such, the IPA relies on four key principles underpinning its design and review of programmes:

1.2.1 There should be a systematic approach to programme design and development to provide clarity around purpose, adherence to strategic goals, responsibilities, resource implications and adequate lead-in times for development. Programme proposals should proceed through IPA Faculty and SMG approval.

1.2.2 There should be sufficient clarity around the objectives, learning outcomes and NFQ identifiers (type of award, level, volume, duration, progressions opportunities).

1.2.3 The design phase of the programme should involve sufficient reflection on how the programme structure, content and assessment methodologies match the learning outcomes.

1.2.4 The proposals should be peer reviewed. *NUI Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges* provide for the judgement of independent reviewers on the merits of each programme proposal.

2. Introducing New Modules or Specialist Streams to Existing Accredited Programmes

2.1 Internal IPA Process for Introducing Major/Minor Changes to Existing Programmes

2.1.1 As part of programme review and development exercises, it is expected that there will arise a need to introduce new subjects or modules to an existing specialisation or to introduce a new specialisation to an existing accredited programme.

2.1.2 While such additions will ultimately be referred to the Awarding Body for approval, they should be referred in the first instance by the IPA Lecturer/Coordinator responsible for the subject area to the Head of Education. The case for the change should be precisely articulated, providing the rationale for and precise nature of the change and, where appropriate, the objectives of the new module or streams, methods of teaching, learning and assessment, and information about how the effect of the change will be monitored (e.g. performance in assessment, evaluation questionnaires, etc.).

- 2.1.3 The Head of Education will forward relevant documentation to the Awarding Body in order to have it reviewed at the next available meeting of the IPA-NUI Steering Committee.

2.2 NUI Approval for Major/Minor Changes to Existing Programmes

2.2.1 Major changes to existing programmes include:

- a. A change in programme title;
- b. A change in the programme structure, for example, the addition of a minor, special purpose or supplemental award as a progression or exit route and/or a change in the overall credits for the programme;
- c. A substantive change in assessment methodologies;
- d. A substantial change in programme content and/or programme learning outcomes;
- e. The creation/withdrawal of subject areas/pathways/streams within a programme;
- f. The creation of a new subject area not previously taught in the programme;
- g. A change in the mode of the delivery or learning environment. (Modes of delivery may include but are not restricted to full-time/ part-time study, distance learning, classroom-based learning, blended learning, online learning);
- h. The deletion/withdrawal of a discontinued programme previously approved by NUI from the IPA's portfolio;
- i. The addition of a new partner for programmes delivered in collaboration or addition of a partner to an existing programme approved by NUI;
- j. A change to undergraduate admissions requirements;
- k. Entry requirements for Taught Postgraduate Programmes – where a proposed change results in a departure from the entry requirements originally approved, this may be considered a major change e.g. if the proposal results in an exclusion of a cohort previously allowed apply for the programme, or makes the entry requirement harsher than those specified at original programme approval.

2.2.2. Proposed major changes to programmes will require support by an Extern Assessor who is expert in the relevant discipline area. The Extern Assessor can be (i) appointed independently by the IPA or (ii) acting as an NUI appointed extern examiner for an existing programme in a related discipline area in the IPA.

2.2.3 The report of the Extern Assessor containing recommendations is submitted by the Head of Education to the NUI Registrar together with:

- A short course document outlining the proposed major change(s) to the programme and detailing the impact of these changes on the overall structure and associated learning outcomes of the programme.
- A statement supporting the application and providing a rationale for the proposed major changes.

These will be submitted to NUI Senate for approval (see NUI guidelines).

2.2.4 Minor Changes. Where the proposed changes to existing programmes do not significantly alter the content and overall learning outcomes of the programme (minor

changes), and have been subject to an internal review process in the IPA, the recommendations regarding the approval of the minor changes will be reported to Senate for noting.

- 2.2.5 Minor changes include any change in programme structure or module descriptions that are not considered Major as defined above. Examples include:
- a) Change in existing title and credit value of module(s);
 - b) The replacement of module(s);
 - c) The addition of new module(s);
 - d) The discontinuation of modules;
 - e) The change in the ratio of core to elective modules;
 - f) Introduction of full-time or part-time option for existing programme;
 - g) Entry Requirements for taught postgraduate programmes only – any change other than those outlined in 2.2.1 (k) above.
- 2.2.5 Occasionally, proposed changes to an existing programme may be so substantial that the proposal should be classified and processed as a new programme. The IPA will receive guidance from NUI in such instances.
- 2.2.6 The IPA Lecturer/Programme Coordinator will be responsible for informing the Registrar's Office of the approved changes so that appropriate notification can be given to internal examiners, external examiners and students. Appropriate amendments should be made to the Student Guide and timetables and so on.
- 2.2.7 Such changes to a programme should be in place in advance of a new academic year and should pertain to new entrants to that stage. Changes should be overseen by IPA Lecturer/Programme Coordinator.

3. Introducing New Programmes and Modules

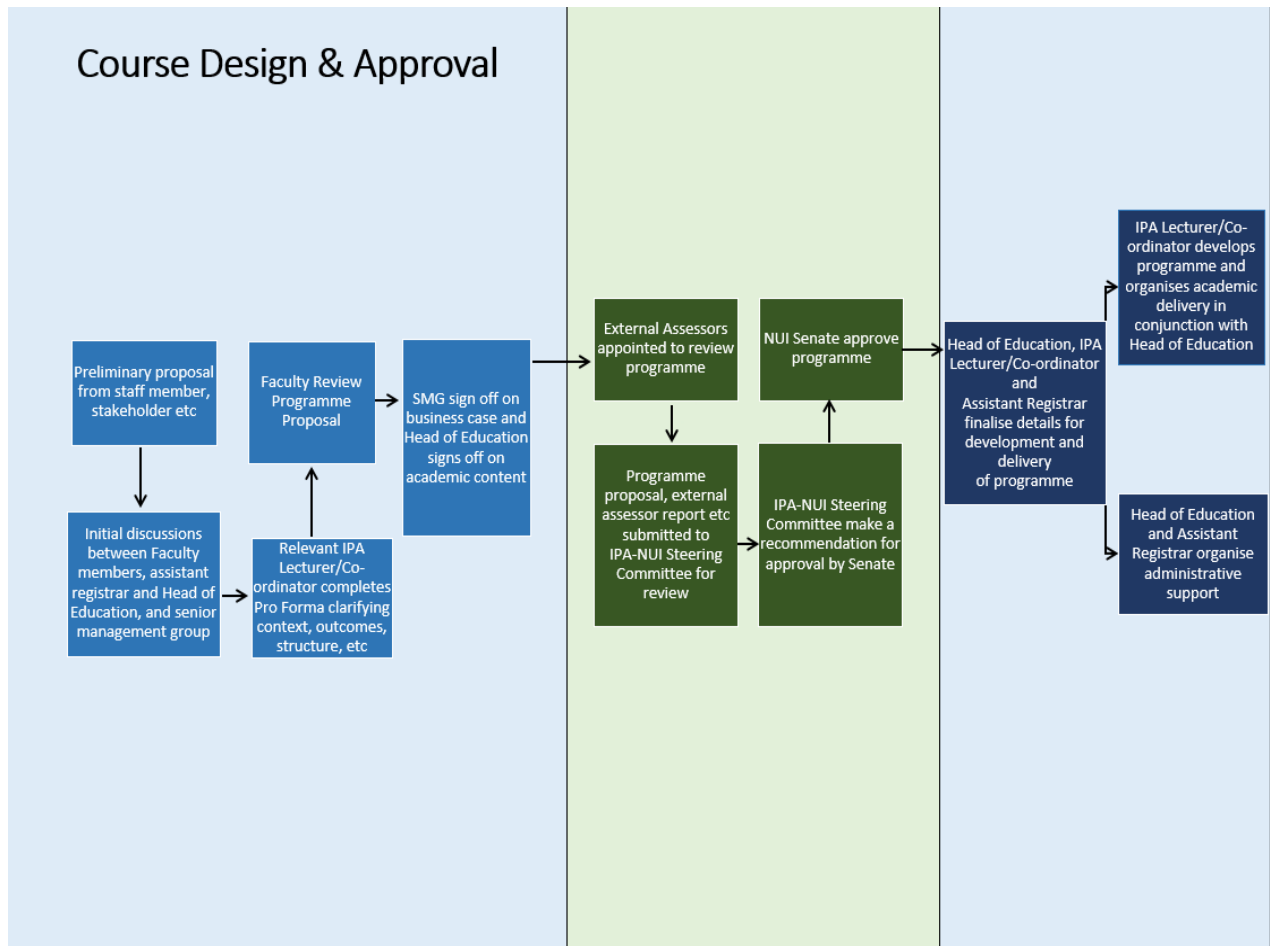
3.1 Introduction: Creating a New Course or Module

3.1.2 In work environments that are complex, fast-changing and increasingly specialised, public sector employees require new and advanced forms of knowledge and skills. The development of new programmes to meet their needs forms an integral component of the Institute's mission. Furthermore, in a competitive and demanding environment, it is highly desirable that these programmes have the *imprimatur* of university recognition. The following section covers the procedures for introducing new NUI validated courses within the Institute.

3.1.3 The three stages of the approval procedure are:

- (i) Internal approval to develop a proposal; and
- (ii) Internal approval to submit a proposal; and
- (iii) Awarding Body approval.

The two steps that precede Awarding Body approval basically are designed to ensure that there is internal agreement in the IPA that the course should be introduced. These steps also establish guidelines and internal review mechanisms to help generate the strongest proposal possible.



3.1.4 Given the process involved, it is prudent that organisers should allow at least nine months to secure final approval for their programmes.

3.2 Internal Approval to Develop a Proposal

3.2.1 Staff should first inform their line manager and Head of Education of the intention to develop a proposal for a new module or programme. It is advisable to provide preliminary information on proposed subject area and level (certificate/diploma/degree), objectives, target group and reasons for introducing programme. At this point, and where relevant, discussions should be held with stakeholders, through the Education Committee or directly with a sponsoring government department or public sector agency.

3.2.2 The Head of Education should be satisfied that the programme or module is workable: that it will meet the required academic standard; that it aligns with strategy; that there

are sound academic and financial reasons for the introduction; that the resources are available to develop and implement the module or programme.

3.3 Internal Approval to Submit a Proposal

3.3.1 Once a staff member has been authorised to develop a proposal, they should generate detailed specifications for the module or course by addressing the relevant guidelines below. Again, this will involve collaboration with necessary stakeholders.

Content Headings

A. *Programme Type*

Title of award/qualification; title of programme; the award type and level; duration; ECTS; minor/exit award to be included; whether the programme complements a suite of programmes already on offer or introduces a new specialisation.

B. *Rationale*

This section answers the questions: 'why should this programme be introduced?' and 'what value will it have?' It provides an opportunity for an extended reflection on why the programme is necessary. Emphasis should be placed on the transformations in a particular area and the new set of skills, competencies and knowledge required to operate in the changing environment. Reference might be made to the dearth of cognate third-level programmes elsewhere. The analysis should conclude by introducing, in general terms, topics in the programme that will meet the needs of the prospective professional learners.

C. *Aims*

This section answers the question: 'what does this programme set out to do?' It requires a more definitive and detailed statement on the programme's objectives, which should follow naturally from the 'Rationale'. Identifying the prospective students; the main challenges facing them in their work; types of knowledge and skills the course will offer them.

D. *Learning Outcomes*

This section answers the question: 'What knowledge, skills and competence can we expect from a learner who has completed the programme?' Attention should be given to general knowledge and in depth knowledge of a subject; to the skills a learner will develop to perform specified tasks; and to their ability to apply knowledge and skills in social, civic and occupational situations. The award for which they are eligible determines the standards expected from a student. The award level indicators are descriptors set by the QQI. The National Framework of Qualifications is a necessary guide when deciding the stage and standard of outcomes that might be expected.

E. Framework Level

This section establishes the programme level on the National Framework of Qualifications.

F. Content

This section answers the questions: ‘what topics will be covered in the course?’ and ‘what are the objectives of each subject or module?’ Under each subject or module heading, it is recommended that the following information be given: (i) description of subject; (ii) subject objectives; (iii) learning outcomes; (iv) syllabus; and (v) proposed reading list.

G. Teaching/Learning Methodologies

This section answers the questions: ‘how will tuition be offered?’ and ‘why are these tuition methods appropriate?’ Given the IPA’s role in blended/distance learning, the section should clarify how much class/seminar contact and home study should be expected. Reference should be made to how these tuition methods meet the needs of students and how they are best suited to enhancing a student’s academic experience and attainment of learning outcomes.

H. Assessment Methods

This section answers the questions: ‘how will the student be assessed?’ and ‘how do we prove the student has attained the required standard (learning outcomes)?’ Details of assessment methods and allocation of marks should be given, along with an explanation of the purpose of each assessment method.

I. Progression and Transfer

This section answers the question: ‘To where does a student proceed after successful completion of the programme?’ Information on further study opportunities for successful students must be provided here: perhaps a diploma, bachelor’s degree or postgraduate degree in the same field? Perhaps details of a bridging programme that will permit them to gain entry to a higher award level or an indication of exemptions on offer to prospective graduates?

J. Award Classification

This section outlines the grade bands and classifications for each award level in question. For example, in a Bachelor’s degree programme, 40% = Pass; 50-59% = Lower second-class honours; 60-69% = Upper second-class honours; 70+ = First class honours.

K. Admission Requirements

This section states the minimum entry requirements for the programme, and these must be in line with NUI Minimum Academic Entry and Registration (Matriculation) Requirements.

L. Teaching Staff

A short CV of each member of staff responsible for the delivery of the programme.

3.3.1 Once the specifications for the course have been developed, the IPA will complete an **approval proforma** supplied by the NUI, as per below, for submission to NUI.

New Programme Overview	
Title of Award/Qualification	e.g. Bachelor of Science
Title of programme	e.g. Biomedical Sciences For Research Degrees the type of Degree should be clarified, e.g.; Masters by Research Traditional PhD Professional Doctorate Structured PhD Practice PhD
School/Department	
Proposed start-date	
Award-type	Major Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental
Minor/Exit Awards to be included	
NFQ: Level	
Mode of delivery⁸	
Duration of Programme	
Total Credits (ECTS) of programme	

Entry requirements	e.g. formal qualifications or pre-requisites needed to undertake the programme and additional selection criteria, where appropriate.
Recognition of Prior Learning	A Statement on how RPL is embedded into the admissions policy.
Outline of programme structure	Diagrammatic overview
Marks and Standards	These are the assessment regulations used in the presentation of results to examination boards; for determining pass/progression within the programme; for decisions on the awarding of the qualification; the honours or other classification awarded; the requirements for completing outstanding requirements, repeat examinations, etc.
Programme Aim	In general terms, the knowledge and skills set attained by students completing the award.
Programme Content	Outline in general terms of the topics covered.
Programme Learning Outcomes	These are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate having completed the programme. Statements should focus on what the student will have achieved rather than focussing on the content of what has been taught.

<p>Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategies</p>	<p>Teaching, learning and assessment strategies including the alignment of module and programme learning outcomes with assessment methods.</p> <p>This section should make clear the extent to which a programme includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ continued assessment and the proportion of marks allocated to both continuous assessment and examinations; ▶ the mapping of assessment strategies to learning outcomes at (i) the module level and (ii) the programme overall. ▶ Practice-based elements where applicable. ▶ Supervision of research degrees (which may include a research studies panel). ▶ Regulations for assessment of research degrees.
<p>Progression/Exit Pathways/ Transfer routes</p>	<p>Where appropriate a general statement should be included to advise students on pathways to further study on completion of their initial award aim and any specific requirements in terms of academic standard, attendance, etc.</p> <p>Where exit awards are offered please provide separate learning outcomes for each award.</p>
<p>Professional/regulatory considerations</p>	<p>Where relevant.</p>

<p>Details of each Module offered</p>	<p>To include for each module:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core/optional Credit volume NFQ Level General Aims and Objectives Module-specific Learning Outcomes Appropriate learning resources Assessment criteria
<p>Resources Statement</p>	<p>Description of the overall resources required for the programme, staffing and physical resources, and the evaluation of the adequacy of resources and ease of access for students.</p> <p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching staff profiles Learning resources and student supports Information Systems Public Information Appeals

3.3.2 Upon completion, the proposal shall be reviewed by Faculty. Approval on academic content is signed off by the Head of Education. The Senior Management Group sign off on the business case and strategic fit for the proposed programme.

3.4 Obtaining NUI Approval: Steps and Guidelines

3.4.1 All new accredited programmes in the IPA must be approved by the Awarding Body. This is the final step. The appropriate steps and submission guidelines are outlined in *NUI Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges*.

3.4.2 The Head of Education will send the finalised proposal to the Awarding Body.

3.5 Awarding Body Approval

3.5.1 As per *NUI Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes*, the NUI's approval process ensures that:

- programmes leading to NUI qualifications are designed in accordance with the University's requirements for programme design as specified in their Guidelines.
- Programme aims and learning outcomes are clear and coherent and the proposed level of the award is in accordance with national standards and consistent, in so far as is reasonably practicable, with the requirements set out in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
- Curricula, teaching, learning and assessment methods enable students enrolled on programmes to acquire the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of that award.
- In the case of collaborative degree awards particular attention is attributed to the portion of the curriculum delivered by the partner institution and that due diligence has been performed (NUI Quality Assurance for Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications (2013))
- The student experience is pivotal in the design and delivery of programmes and encourages an active role by students in the learning process and the devising of assessments strategies to reflect this approach.
- Student support arrangements are appropriate within the Recognised College and sufficient to enable the student to achieve their award.
- There are sufficient resources (both learning and physical) and staffing in the Recognised College to support the proposed programme aims and objectives.
- There are adequate procedures in place in the Recognised College to assure the quality and standards of programmes accredited by NUI, including arrangements to support the student experience and monitor student performance.
- The standards and quality assurance of programmes leading to qualifications in regulated occupations take appropriate account of relevant external subject benchmarks and professional requirements nationally and internationally.

3.5.2 All programmes leading to Major Awards in the NFQ will be reviewed by at least two Extern Assessors, one to be appointed by NUI and one to be appointed by the IPA. The Extern Assessors to be proposed should be agreed in advance following consultation between NUI and IPA.

3.5.3 All programmes leading to Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental awards at all levels in the NFQ will be subject to external review as follows:

- a) Programmes which are more substantial in nature and typically equate to full-time study over a minimum of one year, i.e. a minimum of 60 credits, will require the support of an Extern Assessor appointed by the IPA, in consultation with NUI.
- b) Shorter programmes, typically less than 60 ECTS credits, will require support by an Extern Assessor who is expert in the relevant discipline area. The Extern Assessor can be (i) appointed independently by the IPA or (ii) acting as an NUI appointed extern examiner for an existing programme in a related discipline area in the IPA.
- c) There may be occasions when the NUI will seek to independently appoint an Extern Assessor to review a short programme, irrespective of the credits associated with the programme or the proposed NFQ Level. Any such review will be conducted in consultation with the relevant Recognised College.

- 3.5.4 The Registrar of the NUI and IPA Head of Education shall arrange to put in place an independent External Reviewer for the proposal, as per NUI Guidelines.
- 3.5.5 The findings of the Extern Assessor (where appointed by NUI) are submitted to the NUI Registrar in the first instance. The report is then shared with the Head of Education in the IPA where an opportunity is provided to respond to the findings or any issues raised. Where the Extern Assessor is appointed by the IPA, the initial report is submitted to the NUI Registrar together with any subsequent follow-up documentation to include, but not limited to, a response by the IPA to the initial findings/issued raised.
- 3.5.6 The programme will be discussed at an IPA-NUI Steering Committee. The NUI will then make an appropriate recommendation to the Senate of the NUI.

3.6 Implementation

- 3.6.1 Once Awarding Body approval is obtained, the IPA Lecturer/Coordinator will complete development work on the programme.
- 3.6.2 IPA Lecturers/Coordinators should inform the Assistant Registrar of the details of new courses including its admission requirements, assessment details and so on.
- 3.6.3 The IPA Lecturer/Coordinator will develop the programme and organise the academic delivery (i.e. the design of materials, selection of module content etc.) with the support of the Head of Education. The Head of Education and Assistant Registrar will organise administrative support.
- 3.6.4 Normally, a new course may not run until Awarding Body approval has been obtained. In **exceptional** cases, Awarding Body approval may be sought to allow a programme to proceed pending the outcome of a review. However, programme organisers take the responsibility of informing students that the course is an internally approved IPA programme without external validation. It should not be advertised as having applied for accreditation. If Awarding Body approval is granted before the students sit their annual examinations, permission must be sought from the Awarding Body to apply accreditation in retrospect. Obviously, if the Awarding Body has approved the programme subject to specified amendments, it may not be possible to award the current programme retrospective accreditation.
- 3.6.5 If, subsequent to Awarding Body approval, a programme is not offered at the next available opportunity or not introduced at all, the organiser must inform the line manager and the Head of Education.
- 3.6.6 If an approved programme is offered and then 'rested' i.e. is not offered for a number of academic years, the organiser must inform the Head of Education.

3.7 Progress Report

- 3.7.1 Twelve months after the introduction of a new programme, organisers should provide the Head of Education with a progress report.
- 3.7.2 The report should refer to enrolment figures, exam pass rates, relevant academic or support issues and feedback from students. If there is internal agreement that substantial changes need to be made to structure, academic content, teaching methods or

assessment, then a further proposal may need to be developed and submitted to the Awarding Body.

3.7.3 These progress reports will form the basis of an oral report to the Education Committee.