CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA CHORCAÍ

Academic Procedure

1. Document Details

Title:	**Validation of Special Purpose, Minor and Supplemental Awards**
Author(s):	Registrar's Office
This Version Number:	1.0
Status:	Approved
Effective Date:	January 2013
Review Date:	January 2014
Governing Policy:	n/a

Important Note: If the 'Status' of this document reads 'Draft', it has not been finalised and should not be relied upon.

2. Revision History

Version Number	Revision Date	Summary of Changes	Changes tracked?

3. Relevant/Related Existing Internal Documents

CIT	Sept. 2008	*Handbook for Operation of the CIT Programme Approval Process*

4. Relevant/Related Existing External Documents

HETAC	Revised Oct. 2008	*Policy and Draft Guidelines on Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards*

5. Consultation History

This document has been prepared in consultation with the following bodies:

Academic Management, Academic Staff and Students / Academic Council

6. Approvals

This document requires following approvals (in order where applicable):

Name	Date	Details of Approval Required
Academic Council	**14 December 2012**	

7. Purpose

To set out the procedure and guiding principles for validation of new Special Purpose, Minor and Supplemental Awards.

8. Scope

This procedure applies to all taught higher education programmes provided by Cork Institute of Technology which do not lead to a major award. This includes CPD programmes leading to professional body awards mapped (or capable of being mapped) to framework awards at Levels 6 – 9 of the NFQ.

9. Definitions

Throughout this procedural document, the terms **Special Purpose Award**, **Minor Award** and **Supplemental Award** shall be interpreted in accordance with the award type descriptors set out in HETAC, *Policy and Draft Guidelines on Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards*, revised October 2008. (These may be accessed by clicking here.)

10. Responsible Officer(s)

Registrar's Office / CIT Faculties and Colleges

11. Supporting Documents

CIT, *Handbook for Operation of the CIT Programme Approval Process*, Sept. 2008.

12. Procedure

1. *Basic Principles*

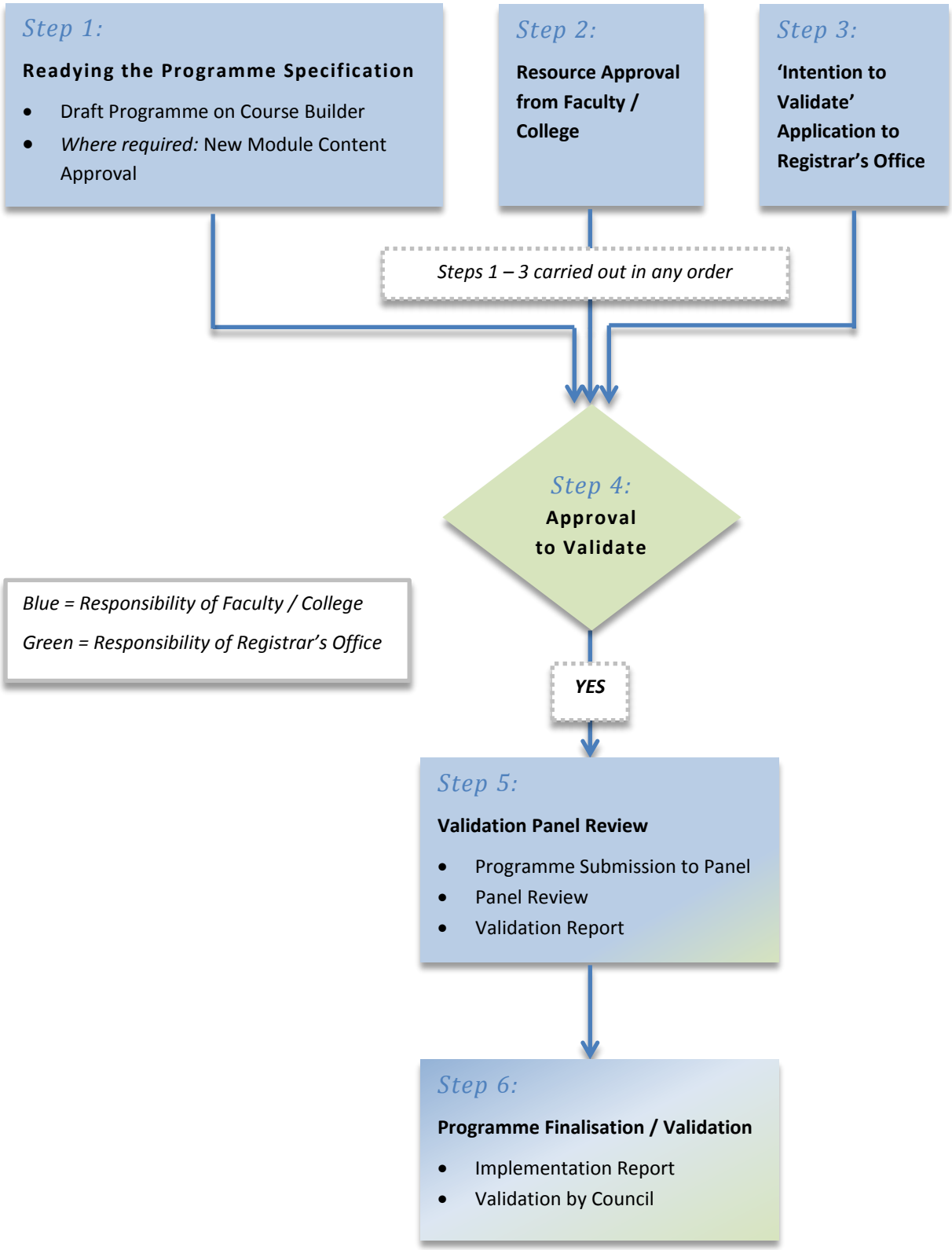
(a) Every award conferred by Cork Institute of Technology contributes to the overall academic standing of the Institute and the reputation of all of its graduates. Therefore, validation of Special Purpose, Minor and Supplemental Awards (SPMSAs) needs to be conducted with the same care, and follow the same principles of good practice, as validation of major awards.

(b) It is recognised that SPMSA programmes are often developed in response to external funding initiatives with tight deadlines. However, to protect the integrity of CIT awards, *learners may only be registered* on SPMSA programmes *after they have been validated*.

(c) For most proposed programmes leading to SPMSAs, Faculties and Colleges will be able to organise a validation panel at a time that suits their own needs, once permission has been given by the Registrar's Office.

(d) As a general rule, the higher the NFQ level, overall programme credit volume and/or number of new modules, the larger and more externally-based the validation panel should be.

2. *Summary of Standard SPMSA Procedure*



3. *Procedural Steps*

Steps 1 – 3 can occur in any order, but *all* steps have to be completed before validation approval (Step 4) can be given.

Step 1: Readying the Programme Specification

The Proposers ready the programme specification for the Validation Review by:

(a) Setting up the draft programme on Course Builder (through the Module Moderator), and linking the Draft Programme Descriptor up with the relevant Module Descriptors.

(b) Obtaining content approval for any new modules.

- New module content approval should follow the standard Module Approval Process (as per the *Handbook for Operation of the CIT Programme Approval Process*).
- Within reason, it may be possible to use the Validation Panel to approve the content of new modules, provided that the modules have first undergone Module Moderation. This requires *prior sign-off* from the Registrar's Office.

Step 2: Obtaining Resource Approval from the Faculty / College

The Proposers obtain Resource Approval from the Faculty / College.

- A brief written statement signed by the Head of Faculty / College will suffice.
- Where resource approval applies to a limited number of intakes only, this should be noted in the statement.

Step 3: Making an 'Intention to Validate' Application to the Registrar's Office

The Proposers apply to hold a Validation Review for the new award by submitting the necessary materials to the Registrar's Office *at least (2) weeks ahead* of the planned panel date.

- Where possible, it is advisable to submit the application materials in advance of the (2)-week deadline.

The following application materials should be submitted to the Registrar's Office *in hardcopy*:

i. The completed SMPSA Application Form (click here to access a copy)

ii. Statement of Resource Approval

iii. An indication of any preliminary arrangements for the Panel Review (preferred date, proposed panel members, etc.) – *EMAIL WILL SUFFICE*

iv. An indication of any specific requests / issues (e.g. regarding content review of new modules, large credit modules, etc.) – *EMAIL WILL SUFFICE*

- The remaining programme documentation (see ***Step 5*** below) will not normally need to be included with the validation application.
- It is *not advisable* for the Faculty / College to finalise panel arrangements until Validation Approval has been received from the Registrar's Office.

Step 4: Obtaining Approval to Validate

The Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement (or nominee) reviews the application.

- This review is normally conducted *within three working days*.
- As part of the review, the Dean (or nominee) may make contact with the Proposers to clarify or discuss particular aspects of the proposed programme. On occasion, the Dean (or nominee) may also request additional documents to assist him/her in the review.
- The outcome of the review may be:
  - *Unconditional Approval*

    In this case, the Dean (or nominee) signs the Application Form and returns it to the Proposers. The Proposers continue with their arrangements for the Validation Review as planned (see ***Step 5*** below).
  - *Approval with Requirements*

    In some cases, the Dean (or nominee) will engage with the Proposers with regard to specific Registrar's Office requirements for the Validation Review. These may include, for example, Registrar's Office representation on the Validation Panel, change of award type, etc.

    While the Dean (or nominee) will make every effort to take into account the Proposers' intended timescale, validation approval cannot be given until the required arrangements are agreed and confirmed.
  - *Rejection*

    Where the review indicates fundamental issues with any aspect of the award, programme, or associated provision arrangements, the Dean (or nominee) may reject the validation application.

    S/he transmits this decision to the Proposers in writing as soon as possible, outlining his/her reasons. The Dean (or nominee) may also stipulate a particular course of action for redevelopment as appropriate.

    Where redevelopment has been recommended, the Proposers will be expected to significantly redevelop the proposed award / programme along the lines indicated prior to resubmitting an application for validation.

    The Proposers may appeal this decision to the Academic Council through the Faculty / College structure.

Step 5: Conducting the Validation Review

The general format of the Validation Review for an SPMSA follows that for a major award. It entails preparation of a programme submission, followed by independent peer review of the overall programme proposal.

(a) Documentation for the SPMSA Validation Review

- The SPMSA Validation Panel should receive the following documentation:

  i. SPMSA Application Form signed by the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement (or nominee) to indicate validation approval

  ii. Statement of Resource Approval

  iii. Programme Submission (see Appendix 1 for guidelines)

  iv. Programme Descriptor and Book of Modules (from Course Builder)

  v. Supporting materials as appropriate (incl. panel resource pack, external calls for proposal, data sets, surveys, certificates of professional recognition, etc.)

- Panellists should receive the programme documents no later than *one week in advance of the panel date*.

- No new documentation should be circulated during the panel session, unless specifically requested by the panel.

(b) SPMSA Validation Panel

- The SPMSA Validation Panel is appointed by the Head of Faculty / College (or nominee) on behalf of the Faculty / College Board of Studies, taking into account any Registrar's Office requirements in this regard.

- The SPMSA Validation Panel includes *at least*:

  i. (1) member of CIT Academic Senior Staff from a School other than the School(s) from which the proposal originates

  ii. (1) external expert for each relevant discipline

  iii. (1) additional member of CIT Academic Staff or Senior Staff from a School other than the School(s) from which the proposal originates.

- Where it is considered useful to widen the external input (e.g. for larger Special Purpose Awards, or for awards in a new 'niche' area), an appropriate balance between academic and industry expertise should be achieved.

- It is allowable for (1) external expert previously involved in module content approval to participate in the Validation Panel, provided the discipline is represented on the panel by at least (1) additional external expert.

- A *second external expert* must also be included if the credit volume of the SPMSA equals or exceeds 60 credits, and/or if the Validation Panel with the permission of Registrar's Office is used to approve the content of new modules (see ***Step 1 (b)***).

- Conflict of interest, as well as the appearance thereof, should be avoided in the selection of panel members. (Appendix 2 provides guidelines.)

(c) Conduct of SPMSA Validation Panel Review

- The SPMSA Validation Panel will normally be convened and chaired by a Senior Academic from another CIT School or Faculty/College, except as otherwise agreed with or determined by the Registrar's Office.

- Appropriate recording support should be provided to the Panel Chair through the Faculty / College.

- At the conclusion of the review, the Validation Panel should agree a set of clear and unambiguous findings and recommended actions, which should be collated in a preliminary report. As a minimum, the Panel must arrive at a clear recommendation to Academic Council regarding validation.

- Actions which *must* be carried out by the Proposers as a condition for validation should be phrased as *requirements*. Actions which should be carried out at the next opportunity, but which would not need to hold up validation, should be phrased as *recommendations*.

- On conclusion of the panel session, the Panel Chair should notify the Proposers of the Panel's validation decision and give a preliminary indication of all requirements and key recommendations.

(d) SPMSA Validation Report

- The formal SPMSA Validation Report to Academic Council addresses all relevant review criteria in a succinct manner. A template is available here.

- The first draft is normally put together by the Panel Chair, who subsequently circulates it to the other panellists for comment and agreement.

- Once agreed by the full panel, the 'Panel Draft' of the Validation Report should go to the Proposers for confirmation of factual accuracy.

- Upon consideration of the response and amendment of any errors, the Panel Chair forwards the Final SPMSA Validation Report to Registrar's Office and the Proposers.

Step 6: Finalising the Programme / Academic Council Validation

- On receipt of the SPMSA Validation Report, the Proposers implement all outstanding requirements and as many recommendations as feasible.
- The Faculty / College confirms implementation in a brief *Implementation Report*, recording any noteworthy points (e.g. amended programme title where such was required, etc.). The Implementation Report is sent to the Registrar's Office.
- Following any necessary final checks, the Registrar's Office submits the Final SPMSA Validation Report and the Faculty / College Implementation Report to Academic Council (or the AC Executive if so mandated) for formal validation of the programme.
- Upon validation of the SPMSA programme by Academic Council, the Registrar's Office sets the programme status in Course Builder to 'Approved', thus allowing registration of learners.

4. *Accelerated Procedure*

Acceleration of the standard SPMSA Validation Procedure *may* be allowable where programme development occurs in certain narrowly defined, exceptional circumstances. These are:

- The SPMSA programme is being developed in response to a national skills or comparable initiative (e.g. Springboard) aimed at addressing a short-term national / regional need; ***AND***
- The call for proposals requires CIT to commit to a first intake into the programme *within 3 months* of the external submission deadline; ***AND***
- The call for proposals is published at a time when a large segment of the 3-month development window falls outside of the academic year (esp. during the summer months).

Acceleration of the SPMSA Validation Procedure requires the *prior written agreement* of the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement, or where s/he is unavailable, the Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

The following elements *must* be maintained:

- Set-up of draft programme on Course Builder
- Panel review of the programme proposal by a duly convened Validation Panel
- Production of an SPMSA Validation Panel Report which clearly records, as a minimum, the Panel's recommendation regarding validation and any associated requirements
- Learners *must not be registered* on an SPMSA programme before a formal written validation recommendation has been received by the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement from the Panel Chair on behalf of the Panel. Final validation by Academic Council itself may be deferred until the next opportunity.

Appendix 1: Programme Submission Guidelines

The Programme Submission for a Special Purpose, Minor or Supplemental Award (SPMSA) should be succinct, but provide enough information for the Validation Panel to enable an informed decision on the suitability of the proposed programme for validation.

As a minimum, the SPMSA Programme Submission should address the following headings / aspects:

(a) *Need for the programme*

- Rationale / market demand (incl. professional accreditation)
- Learner demand
- Graduate profile and opportunities (incl. employment / up-skilling / academic progression)

(b) *Entry requirements (academic / professional)*

(c) *Award*

- Relationship to existing major award(s)
- Fit of Programme Outcomes with award type / level

(d) *Learning experience and programme structure*

- Brief comment on programme structure and subject theme(s)
- Brief comment on delivery and assessment mechanisms, especially non-standard (incl. online, work-based, etc.)
- Brief comment on how modules support Programme Outcomes
- External inputs & requirements (incl. professional body requirements)

(e) *Programme management*

(f) *Resources*

- Staff requirements (incl. qualifications where relevant)
- Required facilities, equipment, learning resources, IT resources
- Impact on delivery of other programmes

The following should also be noted:

- Where Proposers have already collated information which covers the above aspects elsewhere, e.g. in the context of an external call for proposals, there will be no need to reproduce that information. Instead, Proposers may submit the existing proposal as part of the Programme Submission. If necessary, the proposal should be supplemented by a brief document specifically addressing any outstanding aspects.

- Supplementary information or additional documents in support of the programme proposal may be requested by the Validation Panel if deemed necessary by the panel members.

Appendix 2: CIT Guidelines for the Selection of the Review Panel Members

To ensure an effective panel review, and to maintain the integrity of the academic quality assurance system overall, the independence of review panels must be safeguarded.

It is paramount that conflict of interest, as well as the appearance thereof, be avoided in the selection of panel members. Even the appearance of conflict of interest, where none exists, may damage the credibility of a panellist and the review process as a whole.

The following Principles of Good Practice apply to the selection of panel members:

1. Panellists must not have had any previous involvement in putting together the programme proposal or in writing the modules.
2. Panellists must not be in a family or other relationship with members of the proposing team.
3. Panellists must not have any other links with members of the proposing team (professional, social, academic or commercial) – or indeed with other members of the Validation Panel – which may compromise, or be perceived to compromise, the proper discharge by the panellist of her/his duties.

Internal panellists specifically:

4. Internal panellists must not be subordinate to any member of the proposing team.
5. Internal panellists should not come from the sponsoring School. Exceptions require *prior sign-off* from the Registrar's Office.

External panellists specifically:

6. External panellists should not have acted as External Examiners for any programme of the sponsoring Department within 3 academic years of the panel date.