



**HANDBOOK  
FOR OPERATION OF THE  
CIT PROGRAMME APPROVAL  
PROCESS**

**CIT Registrar's Office**

**Version 1.2  
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# CIT Programme Approval Process

## Introduction

This document presents updated guidance on the operation of the CIT Programme Approval Process as adopted by the Academic Council in January 2007. These guidelines should be used by both proposers and reviewers of new programmes.

As the approval of modules is an integral part of the Programme Approval Process, the guidelines for the operation of the Module Approval Process are also included in this document.

## Aims

The following are the aims of the Programme Approval Process:

1. Ensure that the proposed programme complies with and contributes to the strategic goals of the Department, School, Faculty/College and the Institute
2. Ensure that the proposed programme will deliver graduates who have met the Programme Outcomes
3. Ensure that there is a demand for graduates with the proposed profile
4. Ensure that the Institute has the resources to deliver the proposed programme.

## Summary of the Programme Approval Process

The process consists of four phases. There are two major phases, *Feasibility Review* and *Programme Approval*, and two secondary phases, *Initiation of Programme Development* and *Review of Programme Structure and Content*. The four phases are described below.

To facilitate appropriate oversight of the quality process and to allow reporting to Academic Council, the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement will need to be kept informed of the various programmes under development from the outset. As a minimum, the person responsible for a particular phase in the process, normally the Head of Faculty, must inform the Dean once a programme has completed that phase of the Programme Approval Process.

Where any disputes or disagreements arise during the course of the Programme Approval Process e.g. between panel members or between panel members and proposers, these should be resolved by the individual or head of function responsible for that particular phase. In exceptional cases, where no resolution can be found, the case may be referred to the Registrar.

### **Phase 1: Initiation of Programme Development**

The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- An individual or group wishing to develop a new programme will submit an Intention to Develop application (Appendix A: Document 1) to the Faculty Board of Studies.
- This application must be signed by Head of Department (after discussion with Department Committee) and Head of School (after discussion with School Executive) prior to submission to the Faculty Board of Studies.
- A review of all submissions received during an academic year will be organised by the Faculty Board of Studies.
- Following the review the Faculty Board of Studies will decide to grant *permission to develop* to a limited number of programmes (per academic year). The Faculty Board of Studies will also rank the programmes in receipt of permission in order of priority. This ranking should indicate the relative strategic importance (in the opinion of the Faculty Board of Studies) of each programme. The Faculty Board of Studies should complete this work and communicate the rankings to the programme developers and the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement before the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.

### **Phase 2: Feasibility Review**

The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- A detailed formal Feasibility Study is prepared for the proposed programme. This study will cover aspects such as need for the course, student numbers, employability of graduates and cost to the Institute (Appendix A: Document 2). The completed Feasibility Study is submitted to the IEB through the Head of Faculty.
- A Feasibility Review Group established by the IEB will examine each Feasibility Study and will provide a summary report to the IEB.
- The summary report will contain a recommendation to the IEB on the feasibility of the proposed programme or programmes, as well as sufficient information on each programme to allow the IEB to make an informed final decision.
- The IEB will consider each recommendation and issue a final decision. This will be communicated to the Faculty and the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement in writing no later than the start of Semester 2 for any degree programme which is to commence the following September, and will also be notified to Academic Council at its next available sitting.
- In approving the feasibility of the programme the IEB is signalling its commitment that (subject to academic approval) this programme will be resourced to commence at the start of the next academic year.
- Programmes which do not receive feasibility approval must complete Phase 1 again before they will be reconsidered for feasibility review.

### **Phase 3: Review of Programme Structure and Content**

This phase will often be completed in an iterative rather than a linear manner. Therefore it is envisaged that, in practice, the process will move back and forth (as

necessary) between the various steps in this phase. The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- The Programme Specification document is prepared by the programme developers (Appendix A: Document 3).
- The Programme Specification document is submitted to the Faculty Board of Studies.
- The Programme Specification will contain the list of the overall Programme Outcomes, a list of the modules that a student may take to meet the Programme Outcomes and a mapping between the module learning outcomes and the Programme Outcomes. The Programme Specification and its associated modules must be prepared and submitted using the CIT module and programme database (currently Akari Curriculum Management).
- The Faculty Board of Studies will review the Programme Specification and will determine if it is suitable for external review. The Faculty Board of Studies should also examine issues such as the sharing of modules at this stage.
- The Head of Faculty will organise a review of the Programme Specification by two external experts. This review may be organised as a panel review or may be carried out 'offline'.
- The aim of the review is to establish that the programme outlined in the Programme Specification will produce a graduate with the required profile in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
- Following approval of the Programme Specification the Head of Faculty must organise for the approval of any module not previously approved which is cited in the Programme Specification.
- Each module must be approved using the **Module Approval Process** (described later in this document). Module approval may be conducted 'offline' or, where a large number of modules are proposed for approval, may be carried out by suitably convened panel.
- When the Programme Specification and all relevant modules have been approved, the Head of Faculty will sign the Programme Specification Document to indicate that the programme's overall structure and content have been approved.
- In cases where the majority of modules were previously approved, the programme team may request approval from the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement to use the independent external Peer Review Panel to review the content of any remaining new modules. The final decision on granting this request lies with the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement. New draft modules submitted to the independent Peer Review Panel for content review will be clearly marked as such in the Programme Specification Document.

#### **Phase 4: Programme Approval**

The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- The Programme Document (Appendix A: Document 5) is created by the programme developers.

- The complete Programme Document (including documentation proving completion of Phases 1 - 3) is submitted to the Registrar's Office.
- Following desk review to establish that the documentation is in order the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement will convene an externally-based independent Peer Review Panel.
- This panel should satisfy itself that the following questions have been answered in relation to the proposed programme:
  - Is there a convincing need for the programme with a viable level of applications?
  - Are level and type of the proposed award appropriate?
  - Is the learning experience of an appropriate level, standard and quality?
  - Is the programme structure logical and well designed (inc. procedures for access, transfer and progression)?
  - Are the programme management structures adequate?
  - Are the resource requirements reasonable?
  - Will the impact of the programme on the Institute be positive?
- Given previous stages this panel can conduct a top-level review and will not normally need to involve itself in the detail of programme feasibility or content, except for any new modules which it has been specifically asked to review in detail.
- All documentation from previous stages will be available to the panel should they wish to conduct a detailed review of any aspect of the programme.
- The chairperson of the Panel will prepare a report of the Panel's requirements and recommendations for validation and forward this to the Registrar's Office.
- The Registrar's Office will sign off on completion of any agreed panel requirements, following which the report will go forward to Academic Council for consideration and, if adopted by Academic Council, will then be submitted to Governing Body for approval.

## General Guidelines

This section provides some general guidelines on various aspects of the operation of the Programme Approval Process.

### Timeframe for Programme Approval

In the normal course of events the following timeframe is envisaged for the Programme Approval Process:

- Intention to Develop applications are submitted before 1<sup>st</sup> of June
- Faculty prioritises the programmes in June and issues *permission to develop* to the development teams concerned
- If a proposal does not receive *permission to develop* it will not be allowed to progress for a 12-month period. After that period has elapsed it will have to be resubmitted before it will be considered again by the Faculty Board of Studies
- Feasibility Study is carried out and submitted before Christmas

- Content approval should normally be obtained before the end of February.  
*NB:* It should be noted that this timescale may require work on the Programme Specification to commence prior to receipt of the feasibility approval.
- Final Programme Document will be submitted by the end of March
- Panel and Academic Council adoption by May 31<sup>st</sup>

### **Fast-Track Process**

One of the key issues in relation to course approval processes is that the timeframe from initial proposal to approval should facilitate flexibility in terms of responding to institutional, social or economic needs. The Programme Approval Process is designed to facilitate expeditious operation when the need arises.

Therefore, in *exceptional* cases it may be possible to prepare a programme for the final validation stage very rapidly. This would apply, in particular, where the Faculty and the IEB were convinced of the need for the programme and where the programme was mostly made up of existing modules. In every case, it would be expected that:

- the programme passes the normal feasibility criteria;
- the final submission is of a high quality; and
- the independence of the final validation process is protected.

### **Multi-disciplinary and Inter-disciplinary Programmes**

If a programme is proposed by two or more Departments which reside in different faculties, the programme developers should only submit the Intention to Develop to a single Faculty Board of Studies. The proposing Departments will need to agree which Faculty Board of Studies they wish to submit the proposal to.

# CIT Module Approval Process

## Introduction

This section contains guidelines for the operation of the CIT Module Approval Process.

## Aims

The following are the aims of the Module Approval Process:

1. Ensure that the proposed module will meet and assess the proposed learning outcomes
2. Ensure that the module is at the level proposed
3. Ensure that the proposed module will be relevant to a programme (or programmes) within CIT
4. Ensure that the Institute has the resources to deliver the proposed module
5. Ensure that the proposed module does not duplicate (to a significant degree) an existing module

## Summary of the Module Approval Process

The proposed Module Approval Process consists of three phases. The phases are described below.

### Phase 1: Module Suitability Review

The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- The Module Descriptor (created using the CIT module and programme database (currently Akari Curriculum Management) is submitted to the Faculty Board of Studies.
- The Faculty Board of Studies will review the module and determine its suitability. The suitability of the module will be assessed in a number of respects including the following: learning outcomes, level, indicative content, assessment and usefulness in the context of a programme or programmes.
- If the module is considered unsuitable it may be referred back for modification.
- If the module is considered suitable the Faculty Board of Studies will initiate the External Module Evaluation Phase.

### Phase 2: External Module Evaluation

The steps required to complete this phase normally are as follows:

- Two suitable, external, discipline area experts are appointed by the Faculty Board of Studies.
- The external experts are provided with copies of the Module Descriptors for each of the modules requiring approval.



- The external experts will complete and sign an External Module Evaluation form (Appendix B) indicating that they believe the module is suitable, relevant and of a good standard and that the learning outcomes, content, assessment regime, workload and resources are appropriate (or not).
- Upon receipt of the External Module Evaluation forms and provided these are positive and recommend the module for approval, the Faculty Board of Studies will submit the module to the Module Moderator(s) for module moderation and subsequent inclusion in the Book of Modules.

By exception, and with the prior approval of the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement only, the evaluation of a module or a small number of modules may be conducted by the independent external Peer Review Panel for a particular programme, which will then issue a recommendation for approval.

### **Phase 3: Module Moderation**

The module moderation process is designed to ensure that the Institute's book of modules is accurate and coherent and that it contains modules of an acceptable quality. Module moderation is subject to oversight by, the Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement. Where practicable the Institute will appoint or nominate an individual or individuals to act in the role of Module Moderator. Where such an appointment or nomination is not possible, the role of the Module Moderator may be performed by a suitable convened panel. The steps required to complete this phase are as follows:

- The Module Moderator(s) check(s) that the module has been recommended for approval following a review of its structure and content. This recommendation will normally be made by the Faculty Board of Studies based on the reports of two independent external experts. In exceptional cases (see Programme Approval Process, Phase 3), this recommendation may also be based on the draft report of an independent external programme review panel.
- The Module Moderator(s) check(s) for previous versions of the new module and resolves any conflicts (version control).
- The Module Moderator(s) check(s) for redundancy or duplication between this module and modules already contained in the Book of Modules and any issues are resolved.
- The Module Moderator(s) prepare(s) a report for Academic Council recommending approval or rejection of the module and Council will be asked to adopt the recommendation contained in the report.  
In exceptional cases where a new draft module was first reviewed by a programme validation panel, the Module Moderator(s) will recommend approval or rejection of the relevant modules in the appropriate section of the Validation Panel Report.
- If the module is approved by Academic Council the Module Descriptor is added to the Book of Modules by the Module Moderator(s).
- If the module is rejected the reasons for rejection are communicated to the proposers by the Module Moderator(s) along with a set of steps which the proposers should follow if they wish to have the module approved subsequently.

## General Guidelines

In the case where there are a small number of modules the external module evaluation will most likely be carried out as a desk review, meaning that the Module Descriptors will be emailed or mailed to the experts and the External Module Evaluation forms returned by email or mail also. Where large numbers of modules are being approved (e.g. for a new programme) the option remains to gather a panel of external experts at CIT and carry out the approvals over the course of a day.

With regard to the possibility of approving a module or modules in the context of the programme validation review itself, see the relevant provisions of Phase 3 of the Programme and Module Approval Process respectively.

As well as the tasks described above, the module moderation process will also seek to rationalise the grouping of modules into coherent fields of study. Furthermore, the contents of the Book of Modules will be checked for duplicate, redundant or obsolete modules.

## Approval:

Version 1.2 of the *Handbook for Operation of the CIT Programme Approval Process* was approved by the Academic Council of Cork Institute of Technology on 9 November 2018.

## Appendix A: Required Documentation

The new Programme Approval Process will require the sponsors of a proposed programme to provide 4 documents. A generic CIT document will also be required. The documents required are outlined below.

### Document 1: Intention to Develop

The audience for the Intention to Develop document is the Faculty Board of Studies which must decide whether or not to prioritise the development of this programme. The document is intended to give a very top-level view of the programme.

The contents of the Intention to Develop should be:

- **Programme Information:**
  - Title
  - Sponsor
  - Award
  - Duration
  - Mode(s)
- **Description of Programme of Study:**
  - Paragraph(s) of text describing the broad subject areas that will be studied by students on the programme
  - Outline indication of scope to use existing modules
- **Description of Graduate Profile:**
  - Paragraph(s) of text describing the profile of graduate that the programme will produce. This is to include a description of possible career opportunities for such graduates.

### Document 2: Feasibility Study

In the first instance the audience for the Feasibility Study is the IEB. The document must contain sufficient information to allow the IEB to make a decision on the feasibility/viability of the programme but must not be so verbose as to make analysis cumbersome.

The contents of the Feasibility Study should be:

- **Identified Need for the Programme Including:**
  - Employment potential for graduates →
    - Consultation with prospective employers
    - Specialist/sectoral consultation (inc. published reports)
    - Statistical data (employer surveys, workforce projections, etc.)

Student demand and feedstock →

Consultation with prospective students

Statistical data (inc. demographic/census, student surveys, etc.)

Proposed student throughput

- **Strategic Alignment:**

Alignment / compatibility with CIT Academic Plan

Alignment with CIT Strategic Plan

- **Information on Department(s) in the Context of Operating the Programme:**

Information on related programmes and on student throughput on these programmes

Information on existing staff in Department in the context of this programme

Information on existing facilities in Department relevant to this programme

- **Resources Required:**

Number of student places

Staff required (including staff ratios, THAS)

Space requirements

ICT/Library needs

Facilities costs (capital)

Recurrent costs

### **Document 3: Programme Specification**

This document is intended to give a detailed description of the programme.

The contents of the Programme Specification should be:

- **Programme Descriptor:**

Programme title page (inc. Educational Aim where appl.)

Programme Outcomes

Semester Schedules

PO Delivery (mapping of module learning outcomes to Programme Outcomes)

- **Module Descriptors**

- **Supplementary Documentation (e.g. on access/transfer/progression mechanisms) as appropriate**

The Programme Specification is produced using the CIT module and programme database (currently Akari Curriculum Management).

## Document 4: CIT Profile

This will be a generic document submitted with all CIT programmes.

The contents of the CIT Profile should be:

- **Introduction:**
  - History
  - Profile
    - Structure
    - Academic portfolio
    - Student numbers
    - Staff numbers
    - Research activities
- **Facilities:**
  - Library
  - Sporting
  - Teaching & Learning
- **Services:**
  - Careers & Counselling
  - Medical
  - Learning Support
- **Academic Quality System**

## Document 5: Programme Document

This document will be largely comprised of the other documents described here. This is the document that will be sent to the external Peer Review Panel.

The contents of the Programme Document should be:

- **Introduction:**
  - Drawn from Document 1
- **Programme Rationale/Feasibility:**
  - Drawn from Document 2
- **Programme Structure/Content:**
  - Drawn from Document 3
- **CIT Capacity to Deliver Programme:**
  - Drawn from Document 4
- **Sponsor's Capacity to Deliver Programme:**
  - Sponsor Department(s) profile →
    - Programme Staff
    - Programme Facilities
    - Research

## Appendix B: External Module Evaluation Form



### External Module Evaluation Report – ‘hardcopy’ version

**NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR:** Should you wish to return the report by email, please use the separate ‘online’ version of this form. This has separate instructions for saving and returning the completed electronic version of the report.

<i>To be completed by the Proposer(s):</i>	
<b>Full Module Title:</b>	
<b>Module ID:</b>	
<b>Module Author(s):</b>	
<b>Module Coordinator:</b>	
<b>Host Department:</b>	

<i>To be completed by the External Evaluator:</i>	
<b>External Evaluator:</b>	
<b>Position:</b>	
<b>Department / Institution:</b>	
<b>Date of Evaluation:</b>	

#### **NOTE TO THE PROPOSER(S):**

Only fully complete Module Descriptors which have been drafted on CIT Akari Curriculum Management should be sent for evaluation.

#### **NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR:**

For more detailed information on the National Framework of Qualifications and individual NFQ awards standards for higher education, please refer to the relevant sections of the QQI website: [NFQ Standards and Guidelines](#) and more specifically [Active NFQ Standards for Higher Education](#)

## MODULE EVALUATION

Evaluation criteria are provided under each heading.

### 1. Learning Outcomes

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is there an appropriate number of Learning Outcomes (typically 4 – 7)?</li> <li>▪ Are the Learning Outcomes expressed in clear language, using appropriate active verbs? ▪ Are the outcomes appropriate to the NFQ level of the module?</li> <li>▪ Are the Learning Outcomes achievable within the given time period, and is their achievement demonstrable? &lt;Standard delivery period: 13 weeks.&gt;</li> </ul>
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#### EVALUATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES:

### 2. Description, Indicative Content & Module Requirements

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are Description and Indicative Content clear, well presented and of good quality?</li> <li>▪ Does the Description match the Indicative Content?</li> <li>▪ Do both Description and Indicative Content match the Module Title?</li> <li>▪ From the Indicative Content, is the area of study / subject matter covered at appropriate breadth and depth for the module level?</li> <li>▪ Is adequate coverage / assimilation of the Indicative Content feasible within the given time period? &lt;Standard delivery period: 13 weeks.&gt;</li> <li>▪ Does the Indicative Content match the Learning Outcomes? &lt;All material included should be addressed by at least one Learning Outcome.&gt;</li> <li>▪ WHERE APPLICABLE: Are all relevant Health &amp; Safety requirements (or similar) stated under Module Requirements?</li> </ul>
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#### EVALUATION OF DESCRIPTION, INDICATIVE CONTENT & MODULE REQUIREMENTS:

### 3. Assessment

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are all Learning Outcomes sufficiently assessed? <i>&lt;Ideally, Learning Outcomes should be assessed more than once.&gt;</i></li> <li>▪ Is the amount and timing of assessments reasonable?</li> <li>▪ Are the Assessment Types suited to the subject matter examined, the Learning Outcomes, and the module level?</li> <li>▪ Is the Coursework Breakdown (i.e. the proportion of Continuous Assessment v. Final Exam) appropriate to the module content and NFQ level?</li> <li>▪ Has a reasonable schema for re-assessment ("Autumn repeats") been submitted along with the Module Descriptor?</li> </ul> <p><i>&lt;NB: The schema of re-assessment should accompany the completed Module Descriptor as a separate document. Particular attention should be given to the re-assessment of Continuous Assessment elements.&gt;</i></p>
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#### EVALUATION OF ASSESSMENT:

### 4. Student Workload

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the learner workload reasonable? <i>&lt;Standard workload: 7 hours total weekly learner workload per 5-credit module.&gt;</i></li> <li>▪ Is the amount of class contact hours appropriate for each delivery mode (e.g. full-time, part-time)?</li> <li>▪ Is the breakdown of Workload Types (e.g. lecture, lab) appropriate to the subject matter/ field of study, module level and delivery mode?</li> </ul>
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#### EVALUATION OF STUDENT WORKLOAD:



## 5. Resources

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Are the Resources sufficiently comprehensive and appropriate to the subject matter/field of study and module level?</li><li>▪ Are the Resources reasonably up-to-date?</li><li>▪ Is the bibliographical information provided sufficiently complete (including ISBN numbers where applicable)?</li><li>▪ Is there an appropriate breakdown of recommended and supplementary resources?</li></ul>
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### EVALUATION OF RESOURCES:

## 6. Overall Module Quality

<b>Criteria:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Is the Module Descriptor complete? &lt;Please <b>specify any elements missing at the time of evaluation.</b>&gt;</li><li>▪ Is the module as proposed relevant and suitable overall?</li><li>▪ Is the Module Descriptor of good quality overall (including presentation, language, spelling etc.)?</li></ul>
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### EVALUATION OF OVERALL MODULE QUALITY:

## 7. Additional Comments

<i>Please enter 'x' into the appropriate set of brackets below.</i>
Based on the above evaluation, I <b>recommend</b> this module for approval. [ ]
I further recommend that <b>final approval</b> should be made <b>pending</b> on implementation of the following recommendations:  
Based on the above evaluation, I <b>do not recommend</b> this module for approval. [ ]

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR:**

Once the completed Module Evaluation Report has been printed out, signed and dated, it should be sent to the **Head of the Host Department** for the module.