



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Policy and Criteria for the Delegation of Authority to the Institutes of Technology to make Higher Education and Training Awards (including Joint Awards)



QQI, an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland

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1 SUMMARY

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in November 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act).

This document sets out the policy and criteria for the delegation of authority (DA) to the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to make higher education and training (HET) awards, including joint awards.

QQI policy is developed through a consultative process involving all stakeholders. Details of the policy development process are available on www.QQI.ie. QQI policy is adopted by its Board and implemented by its executive.

2 INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out policy and criteria that pertain to the delegation of authority (DA) to make higher education and training awards (including joint awards). It includes:

- Awards policy
- Auxiliary procedures and criteria for delegating authority

These policy, procedures and criteria are specific to the Institutes of Technology. They must not be taken as indicating the approach to be taken in future comprehensive QQI policy and criteria on making awards or the determination of awards standards; or in future comprehensive procedures and criteria for delegating authority to make awards.

2.1 Bodies which may Request DA

This policy applies exclusively to the recognised institutions to which the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HET Awards Council) had delegated authority under the Qualifications (Education and Training) 1999 Act (the 1999 Act); namely the Institutes of Technology (IoTs). “Institute of Technology” means an institution referred to in section 3 (amended by section 4 of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006) of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992.

2.2 Legal Basis

The 2012 Act provides explicitly for QQI to make joint awards. It also provides for joint awarding by bodies to which QQI has delegated authority (under the 2012 Act) to make awards.

Section 84(14) of the 2012 Act provides that after the coming into operation of Section 53 of the Act, and until QQI establishes procedures and criteria for the determination of a request for DA to make an education and training award, the procedures agreed under section 29(4) and criteria determined under section 29(3) of the 1999 Act apply to a request by a provider specified in paragraph (a) of section 52(2), except in so far as the procedures agreed under section may be inconsistent with the 2012 Act.

The saved procedures and criteria are: *Criteria and Procedures for the Delegation and Review of Delegation of Authority to Make Awards* (HET Awards Council, 2004). These are supplemented by parts of *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria* (HET Awards Council, 2010) and *Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and Joint Awards* (HET Awards Council, 2012). The provisions of this policy have precedence over the saved policy, procedures and criteria.

2.3 Purpose of this Policy

One purpose of this policy is to establish the infrastructure required to enable Institutes of Technology to establish joint awards under the 2012 Act. In this regard it aims to match saved DA policy to the 2012 Act.

A second purpose is to enable Institutes of Technology to validate their own research degree programmes in any Discipline Area at NFQ Level 9.

Apart from the changes in this document, this policy and these procedures and criteria are not otherwise intended to change QQI’s approach to delegating authority to make awards.

3 POLICY AND CRITERIA

3.1 Approach

The approach taken here is to enable joint awards to be made under the 2012 Act within the scope of an IoT's DA and to enable IoTs to validate their own master's research degree programmes in new discipline areas and award master's research degrees in respect of validated research degree programmes.

IoT's complying with sectoral protocols agreed for the purposes of this policy between QQI and Institutes of Technology Ireland ((IOTI), acting on behalf of the Institutes of Technology) are afforded complete autonomy to:

- Make joint awards within the scope of their DA
- Award master's research degrees in respect of validated research degree programmes

QQI envisages no involvement in the operation and management of joint awarding at individual IoT level. QQI will periodically review the operation and management of individual IoT's focusing, among other things, on their joint awarding activity and research degree programmes.

Joint awarding agreements established by the HET Awards Council for IoT's (whether or not DA has been granted to make joint awards under any such agreement) remain valid but they should be replaced as soon as practicable after the necessary DA has been granted by new joint awarding arrangements (including a new agreement) between the parties to the agreement being replaced excluding QQI.

3.2 Awards and Standards

3.2.1 Defining joint awards

The definition of joint awards in the 2012 Act is implicit via sections 2(1) and 50(1). This is consistent with the definition used by the HET Awards Council. The latter is essentially the same as the definition adopted (9 June 2004) by the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region:

A joint award 'should be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions'¹

¹ Based on the definition adopted (9 June 2004) by the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

The full form of this 2004 definition implies that various forms of issue (single diploma or multiple diplomas) are possible. QQI follows the HET Awards Council in preferring the issue of a joint award by way of a single diploma.

A necessary characteristic of a joint award made under the 2012 Act is that there is an agreement between awarding bodies to make a joint award. The term joint award does not comprehend the concept of issuing multiple uncorrelated diplomas for the same learning (as distinct from the issue of multiple (correlated) diplomas to manifest a joint award). The issue of multiple uncorrelated diplomas arises where different awarding bodies each make awards independently for the same work without formal agreement to act in concert.

3.2.2 Awards policy

The overall approach of IoTs with DA to make joint awards must be broadly consistent with QQI's approach to making joint awards and with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and Framework standards.

Before a Joint Award can be established or made by an IoT under DA, the programme of education and training leading to the award must be validated by the Institute against one of the NFQ's higher education award-types. This means, among other things, that the learning that must be achieved before a joint award may be made (the minimum intended programme learning outcomes) must be consistent with the NFQ award types' expected learning outcomes.

Additionally, wherever an award standard (or HET subject guideline) has been determined by QQI for the discipline area concerned it should be used to guide the development of the joint award but strict compliance is not required.

3.2.3 Risk and due diligence in establishing joint awarding agreements

Joint awarding is inherently risky because of the involvement of multiple institutions and the complexity of the arrangements required to ensure that the joint award is soundly established and duly recognised.

Establishing a joint award (even between two well established public institutions based in Ireland) is complicated because there are many more ways the arrangement can fail than in the case of a unilateral awarding arrangement. Systematic due diligence enquiries are essential as are careful consideration and documentation of the arrangements.

Such diligence and attention to detail are even more important when establishing joint awards with foreign awarding bodies where conflicts of law or culture may arise. In transnational arrangements the risk is not only to the Institute's reputation but to the country's reputation.

Due diligence must always include (but is not limited to) ensuring that the award is properly recognised (in the context of its purpose and target learners). Joint awards should not be established if they are not sufficiently widely recognised. Recognition

cannot be assumed rather it must be verified. At the very least the awarding bodies involved should ensure that the joint awards are recognised by qualifications authorities in their own jurisdictions and in all 'receiver' countries (countries where a transnational programme is provided).

3.3 DA Prerequisites, Procedures and Criteria

Prerequisites for making an application for DA to make awards are (quoting from 52(3) of the 2012 Act):

- a) *"the provider has established procedures for quality assurance under section 28,*
- b) *the provider has established procedures for access, transfer and progression under section 56,*
- c) *the provider has complied with section 65 in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable, and*
- d) *if subsection (10) applies to the provider, the provider has consulted with the other person referred to in that subsection."*

Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for collaborative or transnational provision agreed with the HET Awards Council are relevant here and their approval by QQI remains in force unless otherwise indicated by QQI.

However, joint awarding QA procedures agreed with HETAC are not fully adequate because the parameters have changed significantly for joint awards under the 2012 Act where joint awarding is explicitly provided for.

Extending DA into new discipline areas at Framework Level 9 or Level 10 will continue to rely on the HET Awards Council's *Research degree Programme Policy and Criteria* 2010. However, this QQI policy document amends the approach to delegating authority to Institutes of Technology to award master's research degrees.

3.3.1 Procedures and criteria for extending DA to the making of joint awards and to the awarding of research master's degrees

The necessary DA must be in place before any joint awarding arrangements are established, research master's degrees are awarded or research degree programmes are validated by an IoT.

Any reviews by QQI for the purpose of extending the scope of DA (e.g. into new research discipline areas at doctoral level) will routinely address criteria for joint awarding.

Before establishing an initial joint awarding arrangement under the 2012 Act an IoT must first apply to QQI for extension of (all) DA (granted under the 1999 Act) to cover joint awarding under the 2012 Act. Applications for extension should cover the entire scope of DA held (rather than a partial scope).

The procedures and criteria for delegating authority to make awards that are

described here supplement the procedures and criteria determined by the HET Awards Council under the 1999 Act pending the development of new comprehensive mutually supporting procedures by QQI under the 2012 Act and new QA guidelines and procedures and criteria. The procedures agreed under section 29(4), and criteria determined under section 29(3), of the 1999 Act shall apply to a request by an IoT for DA except where inconsistent with the 2012 Act or with procedures and criteria established and published by QQI under Section 52 of the Act of 2012; i.e. the HET Awards Council's DA procedures and criteria apply subject to supplementary DA procedures and criteria determined by QQI until comprehensive new DA procedures and criteria are established by QQI.

Section 4.2 of the HET Awards Council's *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria*, 2010 entitled "*Delegation of Authority to Award Masters Degrees*" shall no longer apply to IoTs.

The supplementary criteria for the purpose of extending DA to enable an IoT to make joint awards under the 2012 Act are that QQI is satisfied with the Institute's:

- a) Capacity for establishing robust joint awarding agreements
- b) Capacity for executing the awarding body functions, and operations and management concerned with joint awarding
- c) Operations and management (particularly governance) in respect of the provision of associated programmes of higher education and training

Any IoT may apply for extension of DA to make awards at NFQ Level 9 in respect of all its own validated research degree programmes. The supplementary criteria for the purpose of extending DA to enable an IoT to make awards at NFQ Level 9 in respect of all its own validated research degree programmes under the 2012 Act are that QQI is satisfied with the Institute's:

- d) Capacity for maintaining an institutional strategy for research
- e) Capacity for executing the awarding body functions, and operations and management concerned with awarding research master's degrees
- f) Operations and management (particularly governance) in respect of the provision of master's level research degree programmes of education and training including a research validation process to replace QQI's research validation process (approval/accreditation)

The supplementary procedures for the purpose of extending DA to enable IoTs to make joint awards, and awards at NFQ Level 9 in respect of its own validated research degree programmes, under the 2012 Act assume that the IoT will:

- g) Implement sectoral protocols concerning joint awarding and awarding research master's degrees under DA. The sectoral protocols will be a pair of high level documents (concerning Level 9 research degree programmes and joint awarding) that will be developed by the Institutes. The protocols will not seek to replicate the detailed policies and procedures already in place in some Institutes of technology. The sectoral protocols will be agreed between QQI and IOTI on behalf of all of the Institutes.
- h) An Institute may only apply to QQI for extension of DA under this policy after its Academic Council has satisfied itself that it has established policies and procedures that accord with the relevant sectoral protocol (and therefore demonstrate that it meets the criteria for extending the relevant delegated authority). QQI will extend DA following receipt of a formal request from an IoT that demonstrates that the criteria for extension have been met by the requesting Institute—it is not envisaged that QQI will need to conduct a review to confirm that such an Institute meets the criteria for extending DA.

3.3.2 Conditions of DA

The statutory conditions apply and may be augmented by further conditions.

4 REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The policy and criteria for DA to the Institutes of Technology to make HET awards (including joint awards) will be reviewed two years after the date of adoption by the Board or earlier if necessary and whenever QQI published more general policy and criteria for making awards or procedures and criteria for DA to make awards.

5 REFERENCES

European Communities *ECTS User's Guide* 2009

Higher Education and Training Award Council *Assessment and Standards, Revised* 2013

Higher Education and Training Award Council *Core Validation Policy and Criteria* 2010

Higher Education and Training Award Council *Criteria and Procedures for the Delegation and Review of Delegation of Authority to Make Awards* 2004

Higher Education and Training Award Council *Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and Joint Awards, Revised* 2012

Higher Education and Training Award Council *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria* 2010

NQAI *Policies, actions and procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners* 2003

IHEQN *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions* 2009

NQAI *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training* 2006

NQAI *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training* 2005

QQI *Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* 2013



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