

Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI)

Sectoral Protocol for the Delegation of Authority (DA) by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to make Joint Awards

1. Background

In May 2014, QQI published a policy (QP.04) entitled *Policy and Criteria for the Delegation of Authority to the Institutes of Technology to make Higher Education and Training Awards (including Joint Awards)*.¹ One of the purposes of QP.04 is to establish an infrastructure to enable the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) to establish joint awards under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act). Section 53(14) of the 2012 Act provides

that where a provider has delegated authority to make an award under this section and enters into an arrangement with another awarding body to make a joint award in respect of a programme of education and training of the provider, that provider shall notify the Authority of the arrangement within 14 days of it being made.

The existing DA granted by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) to the IoTs under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) has been saved by the transitional and savings provisions of the 2012 Act (section 84 (14)). The policy approach adopted by QQI is to enable joint awards to be made under the 2012 Act within the scope of an IoT's existing DA.

A key part of the enabling infrastructure for the DA of joint awards under the 2012 Act is the agreement of a sectoral protocol on joint awarding between QQI and IOTI (acting on behalf of the 13 IoTs). As set out in QP.04 (p. 8), the sectoral protocol is not intended to replicate the detailed quality assurance policies and procedures that are already in place in some IoTs, or that will be put in place by IoTs that do not yet have them. Rather, it is envisaged that it will set out the high level quality principles that underpin the sector's approach to joint awarding, and the related activities of collaborative and transnational provision; and the essential quality assurance infrastructure that should be in place within an IoT before applying for the authority to make joint awards within the scope of its existing DA. With this in mind, the following protocol has been developed by the 13 IoTs, in consultation with QQI and with the support and coordination of IOTI, to meet the requirements of the 2012 Act and QP.04. The protocol was approved by QQI on 3 November 2014.

IoTs complying with this protocol will be afforded complete autonomy to make joint awards within the scope of their existing DA. Under QP.04, QQI envisages no involvement in the operation and management of joint awarding at the individual IoT level. Joint awarding agreements that were previously established by HETAC for IoTs should be replaced as soon as practicable after the necessary DA has been granted under the new joint awarding arrangements. As is the case with other higher education institutions, the joint awarding

¹ <http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Policy%20docs/QQI%20Policy%20No.4.pdf>

activities of IoTs will be subject to periodic review by QQI, as part of the normal cycle of review activity undertaken by the agency.

2. The Sector’s Approach to Joint Awarding: Definition and Quality Assurance Principles

2.1 Definition of Joint Awards

In QP.04 (p. 3) QQI adopts the definition of joint awards that was used by HETAC, which is consistent with the implied definition of joint awards in the 2012 Act (sections 2(1) and 50 (1)), and which closely resembles the definition of joint awards adopted by the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, in its Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees of 9 June 2004.² The definition set out in QP.04 (p. 4), which the IoTs endorse, reads:

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’.

It is clear from this definition that the issue of joint awarding is inextricably linked to the issue of collaborative provision (both in its national and transnational dimensions) and, thus, in framing general quality principles for the sector’s approach to joint awarding, the IoTs recognise that these principles will often and necessarily subsume principles relating to the sector’s approach to collaborative and transnational provision.

2.2 The Principles

The principles that follow are intended to address at an overarching level the quality assurance approach of the sector to joint awarding both in terms of the linkages to collaborative and transnational provision, and in terms of the specifics of the awarding function. These principles should be embedded in detailed institutional policies and procedures by each IoT ahead of seeking DA for joint awards within the scope of its existing DA (see sections 3 and 5 below). The principles reflect the collective experiences of the institutions and the general community of practitioners in this area. They are also informed by key documents produced by the same community of practitioners, including HETAC’s *Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and Joint Awards* (2012),³

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<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=320284&SecMode=1&DocId=822138&Usage=2>

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<http://www.hetac.ie/docs/Policy%20for%20Collaborative%20programmes%20transnational%20programmes%20&%20joint%20awards%202012%20Revised.pdf>

and the Irish Higher Education Quality Network's *Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision*.⁴

- *Strategy, Policy and Process*
As autonomous and responsible higher education institutions, IoTs recognise and document the place of collaborative and transnational provision and joint awarding arrangements within their own institutional strategies; and the relationship of these institutional strategies to broader national and international educational policies and strategy, including all relevant statutory obligations. IoTs also define the nature and scope of their collaborative activities, develop appropriate supplementary quality assurance procedures to underpin them, and clearly articulate the relationship of the supplementary processes to their existing suites of institutional policies and procedures.
- *Governance and Documentation*
IoTs recognise that all collaborative provision and joint awarding arrangements should have appropriate and transparent governance arrangements that protect the academic integrity of the institution and safeguard against financial impropriety, recklessness and negligence. All such activities are undertaken after careful consideration, and on foot of formal written agreements with partner bodies. These written agreements are developed with the advice, and are subject to the approval of the appropriate governance, management and academic quality structures in each institute. IoTs publish appropriate information on the collaborative relationships they maintain with other bodies.
- *Due Diligence and Risk Assessment*
IoTs recognise that collaborative and transnational provision, and any related joint awarding arrangements, present particular risks as they involve multiple institutions and may operate across different educational systems, legal jurisdictions and cultural contexts. To identify, assess and obviate the risks associated with collaborative, transnational and joint awarding arrangements, including ensuring that the joint award is duly recognised, IoTs operate systematic, documented due diligence processes. These enquiries consider all potential risks, including financial, legal, operational, academic and reputational risks as appropriate. Where necessary, technical advice is also sought from the appropriate bodies in relation to cross-jurisdictional legal issues and qualifications recognition.
- *Academic Standards and Quality Assurance*
IoTs are responsible for the academic standards and quality assurance of all programmes they offer in the context of collaborative partnerships, including where they make an award jointly with another institution/awarding body. All such programmes are subject to the core quality processes that underpin the rest of their programme portfolios, including validation, ongoing monitoring and periodic re-

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http://www.iheqn.ie/fileupload/File/IHEQN_Guidelines_Collaborative_Provision_FINAL_21May13_55218605.pdf

validation. IoTs expect that all collaborative partners will affirm their individual and collective responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance in all collaborative arrangements, including joint awarding arrangements, and that this affirmation will be documented in the associated written agreements. These written agreements also make provision for addressing issues that may arise from the different quality assurance processes in place in each of the partner bodies.

- *Flexibility*

IoTs recognise that fruitful collaborative partnerships require flexibility on the part of the participating institutions. Such flexibility is necessary to facilitate a continuous dialogue and interaction among the partners and to enable the collaboration to evolve in response to the challenges posed by a dynamic national and international higher education environment.

- *Awards*

All programmes offered by IoTs on a collaborative basis, or which lead to a joint award, are validated against a higher education award-type in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. Associated NFQ infrastructure, such as QQI determined award standards, are referenced as appropriate. All programme validations associated with the development of joint awards take place before joint awards are established.

3. Quality Assurance Infrastructure and other prerequisites

3.1 Quality Procedures

Before proceeding with an application for DA to make joint awards within the scope of its existing delegated authority, an IoT will have the following quality assurance infrastructure in place:

- Procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services that the IoT provides (2012 Act, section 28).
 - As well as covering the core quality processes for taught and research programmes, and other services, these procedures also provide for the quality assurance of collaborative and transnational provision, and any associated joint awarding arrangements.
 - They procedures for collaborative and transnational provision, and for associated joint awarding arrangements, enshrine the principles set out in section 2.2 above.
 - They are consistent with HETAC/QQI's *Policy for Collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and Joint Awards* (2012), and the Irish Higher Education Quality Network's *Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision*. For

further guidance, the essential elements of a quality assurance procedure for the establishment of joint awards are outlined below in section 3.3.

3.2 Other Prerequisites: Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP)

The 2012 Act defines ATP in terms of the movement of learners into and between programmes of education and training with recognition for knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired (2012 Act, section 2(5)).

- IoTs making an application for DA to make joint awards within the scope of its existing delegated authority will have published policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression in accordance with section 56(2) of the 2012 Act

3.3 Quality Assurance of Joint Awards: Guidelines for Drafting Policy and Procedures in an IoT

The following guidelines have been agreed by the IoT sector as the essential components of the procedures for assuring the quality of joint awards.

- *Documentation*
 - The intention to proceed with a joint award in any collaboration is signalled in all documentation associated with the partnership, including the initial Memorandum of Understanding signed by the partners.
 - A formal joint awarding agreement is put in place for all joint awarding arrangements. It specifies:
 - the award standards: the means by which the academic standards of a joint award are agreed and maintained by the collaborative partners is a critical element of any joint awarding agreement; the agreement indicates the standard of knowledge, skill and competence to be attained by the learner before an award can be made
 - the validation procedures that will apply
 - the awards and award-types covered under the agreement and their place on the Irish NFQ and any equivalent Qualifications Framework
 - the roles and responsibilities of the parties, including their respective quality assurance responsibilities
 - the mutual recognition of quality assurance processes by the partners
 - the steps to be taken to secure recognition of the award
 - the provisions for mutual indemnification, dispute resolution and the legal jurisdiction.
- *Ongoing Monitoring and Review*
 - It is essential that ongoing processes for monitoring and review of a programme leading to a joint award are established. These will be agreed by the partners and will take account of their respective needs and the unique nature of the joint programme.

- *Making of Awards*
 - The joint awarding agreement also specifies the arrangements for the making of awards. These will normally include details on
 - the format of the award parchment
 - the conferring process and procedure
 - the assignment of credit to the programme
 - the issuing of the European Diploma Supplement
 - the permanent and secure archiving of records concerning graduates and their awards.

4 Applications for an extension of DA to make joint awards within the scope of an IoT's existing DA

IoT may apply for an extension of DA to make joint awards within the scope of its existing DA under QP.04, after its Academic Council has satisfied itself that it has established policies and procedures that accord with this protocol. The Academic Council's attestation that it has the requisite policies in place demonstrates that it meets the criteria for extending DA to make joint awards within the scope of its existing DA.

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.