

Validation Report



BN033

**Higher Certificate in Science in Professional
Horticulture Practice¹**

¹ See conditions of validation

Introduction

The mission of the Institute is to serve its students and the community by meeting the skills needs in the economy and increasing the level of participation in third-level education and training, particularly in Dublin North-West and its environs.

The Institute in 2006 was awarded delegated authority enabling the development, validation, implementation and continuous improvement of its existing taught higher education and training programmes up to and including level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the peer review panel established to validate this proposed programme against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated in the Institute policy document 2MP01¹.

Programme overview

The programme is largely based on modules within the first two years of our existing full-time NFQ level 7 offering, BN022 Bachelor of Science in Horticulture, which contains a mix of horticultural science, horticultural practice and horticultural related business with an emphasis on development and utilisation of practical skills in these areas. It is proposed to offer this programme in part-time mode over a period of two calendar years.

To provide a comprehensive coverage of the fundamental concepts, knowledge and supporting practical skills the academic content of this programme has been structured into the following six key areas:

- Science
- Plant studies
- Landscaping
- Business
- Practical skills
- Professional development

The programme will be delivered using a combination of online and classroom lectures. Learners will receive online instruction with the use of 'Adobe Connect' on three modules per week. Learners will be expected to attend the IT

¹ 2MP01 Design, validation and accreditation of new academic programmes

Blanchardstown campus every second Saturday each semester to allow them to complete a range of practical and tutorial sessions, interact with staff and their peers.

Proposed programme detail

Programme and award title	Higher Certificate in Science in Horticulture
Award type	Major
NFQ^I level	6
ECTS^{II} credits	120
Programme code	BN033

Panel members

Chairperson	Dr. Michael Hall Institute of Technology Tralee
Panel members	Dr. Owen Doyle University College Dublin Ms. Claire Woods College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise Mr. Kevin Halpenny Fingal County Council
In attendance	Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan Registrar, IT Blanchardstown Mr. Michael Keane Quality Assurance Officer, IT Blanchardstown
Date of Panel Meeting	Tuesday 4 th June 2013

^I National Framework of Qualifications

^{II} European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Consultation

Management consulted during panel meeting:

Dr. Larry McNutt	Head of School of Informatics and Engineering
Mr. Richard Gallery	Head of Department of Engineering

Academic staff consulted during panel meeting:

Mr. Michael Hagan	Ms. Ciarnad Ryan	Mr. Eamon Kealy
Mr. Joe Smith	Mr. Paul Dervan	Mr. Ronan Mullen
Ms. Sandra Thompson		

Industry:

Consultation regarding the design, content and preferred structure of the programme included:

- Association of Landscape Contractors Ireland
- Fingal County Council
- Garden Centre Association of Ireland

Panel findings

In evaluating the appropriateness, quality and proposed operation of this programme the following criteria has been considered and is hereby reported upon:

Strategic planning

The panel was satisfied that the programme is in keeping with the Institute's mission, that it does not constitute redundant provision and that it makes efficient use of resources.

Evidence of consultation

Through discussion with Institute staff, the panel found that a comprehensive research/consultation effort was undertaken with stakeholders to validate the need for, and the preferred structure and characteristics of the proposed programme.

Learner employment potential

The panel concurred on the wide range of skills a graduate of this programme seeking employment in the horticulture sector would require and felt that these were well reflected in the programme.

Protection of learners

Section 43 of the Act¹ does not apply.

Quality assurance

The panel was informed of how the submission had been developed and approved internally whilst complying with the Institute's quality assurance policies and procedures. The panel concurred that said policies and procedures had been applied to the development of the proposed programme.

¹ Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

Programme titles and award titles

The panel was of the opinion that the programme title as proposed within the submission document, 'Higher Certificate in Science in Horticulture', did not accurately reflect the level of practical and professional skills a learner will acquire on successful completion of this programme. Following discussion, the panel requested that the title be revised to 'Higher Certificate in Science in Professional Horticulture Practice' to provide further clarity, accuracy and be fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders and consistent with QQI^I award titles. See panel conditions of validation.

Ethics

The panel was satisfied that the Institute has internal policies and procedures in place to ensure that all teaching, learning or research activity across the spectrum of NFQ levels is conducted / delivered in a manner that is both morally and professionally ethical.

Unity

The panel found that the programme design is consistent with HETAC's policy on accumulation of credits and certification of subjects, that it has an underlying unifying theme with modules bonded by linkages being either implicit or explicit. It was also clear to the panel how the standards of knowledge, skill and competence evolve throughout the programme as a whole.

Teaching and learning

The panel discussed with staff of the Institute the various modes of interaction practised with learners. Course management arrangements were discussed and deemed adequate. Evidence of a clear dialogue was confirmed, enabling learners to develop and have available to them the support of academic staff. An online demonstration of the proposed use of 'Adobe Connect^{II}' was well received by the panel. A model of the new horticulture facility currently under construction was presented to the panel who commended this substantial resource investment by the Institute to future proof the delivery of both the full-time and part-time horticulture programmes. The panel however expressed some concern in relation to what appeared to be an intensive learner workload in the first semester and recommended that this be monitored. See panel recommendations.

^I Quality Qualifications Ireland (Formerly HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council)

^{II} eLearning software enabling the delivery of course materials via virtual classes.

Learner assessment

Through discussion with the design team, it was explained in detail to the panel the multiple modes of assessment, both formal and informal that will be employed throughout this programme. The panel heard how IT Blanchardstown's policy on continuous assessment is based on the objective of developing/enhancing the learners' application of knowledge, aptitude for critical analysis and problem solving within specific timeframes. The scale of learner assessment was deemed by the panel to be appropriate for the proposed programme however the panel recommended that a matrix of the assessment schedule per semester be included in the student handbook.

Standards of knowledge, skill and competence

Having reviewed the syllabi and assessment methods as proposed the panel was of the opinion that learners would be capable of attaining the standards of knowledge, skill or competence relevant for this award.

Access, transfer and progression

The panel confirmed that the programme incorporates the established procedures for access, transfer and progression while accommodating a variety of access and entry requirements from applicants with expertise in this discipline. The panel welcomed the intention of the Institute to develop a part-time NQF level 7 add on programme to provide a progression route for graduates of this programme unable to attend as full-time learners.

Decision of the panel

The panel recommended the validation of the proposed programme namely:

Programme and award title	Higher Certificate in Science in Professional Horticulture Practice
Award type	Major
NFQ level	6
ECTS credits	120
Programme code	BN033
Banner code	BN_SCPHP_C

Panel conditions

This validation is subject to the following conditions:

- Revise the programme title to 'Higher Certificate in Science in Professional Horticulture Practice'
- Clearly define and articulate the academic support and student services to be provided to learners over the summer semesters.
- Incorporate special regulations within the approved course schedule in respect of manual handling and safe pass certification learners will be expected to undertake as part of this programme.

Panel recommendations

The following specific recommendations were made:

- 1) Clearly articulate expected learner effort including access to any horticultural resource necessary in order for learners to successfully engage on this programme.
- 2) Replace the proposed mandatory module 'Project/Portfolio or Placement' in semester 5 with two elective modules (a Project/Portfolio module and a Placement module) to facilitate both work based and non-work based learners on this programme. Populate the module descriptors to include guidelines relating to each.
- 3) Incorporate and clearly articulate repeat strategies within all module descriptors.
- 4) Reverse the delivery sequence of the business modules as discussed at the panel meeting.
- 5) Preface the titles of the plant science modules with the word 'applied' i.e. 'Applied Plant Science 1' and 'Applied Plant Science 2'.
- 6) Review and update the reading lists as discussed at the panel meeting.
- 7) Revise the module descriptors and indicative content to more accurately reflect module learning outcomes ensuring that each learning outcome is measurable and linked to individual assessment events as appropriate.
- 8) Include more content on heritage garden management within the module 'Plant Materials'.
- 9) Increase the component of commercial food production in the 'Plant and Food Production' module to further address the identified gap in the market.
- 10) Consider a contingency plan in the event that the workload as proposed in the first semester proves too intensive for work based learners.
- 11) Make other technical and minor amendments as discussed at the panel meeting.

Panel signatures

Chairperson

Dr. Michael Hall _____ Date _____

Secretary

Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan _____ Date _____