

Validation Report



BN526

Higher Diploma in Business

Introduction

The mission of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown 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 2MP01ⁱ.

This submission by the School of Business and Humanities evolved through:

- Examining the competence, expertise and experience of staff in addition to the strategy of the department/school/Institute and government educational policy.
- Strategic response to the 'International Education Strategy 2010 – 2015'ⁱⁱ.
- Responding to identified demand from the Institute's international partners.

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

ⁱⁱ Higher Education Authority, 2011

Programme overview

The proposed programme, Higher Diploma in Business, is pitched at level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and is designed as a conversion style business programme to take graduates in non-business disciplines and cross-skill them in preparation for a new career in business and/or pursue studies at NFQ level 9 in business. The programme is also designed to enable international learners to build on their existing qualifications and education to attain a NFQ level 8 standard in business and facilitate their progression onto NFQ level 9 programmes in business.

One of the key objectives of the International Education Strategy 2010-2015 is to increase total international higher education students by 50% with an identified strategic action requiring the development of relevant international education offerings, based on higher education institutions capacity and learner needs. The development of this programme is a clear response not only to this initiative but also to identified demand from our international partners.

The programme is comprised of modules on the following key business areas:

- Management and Strategy
- Marketing
- Economics
- Accounting and Finance
- Operations and Project Management

Programme detail

Programme title	Higher Diploma in Business
Award title	Higher Diploma in Business
Award type	Major
Format	Ab initio
NFQ level	8
ECTS credits	60
Programme code	BN526
Banner code	BN_BHDBS_G

Panel composition

Chair: Mr. Dermot Finan
Institute of Technology Sligo

Members: Dr. Larry Elwood
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

Ms. Kay Fitzgerald
Institute of Technology Tralee

Ms. Pauline Willis
Dublin City University

Mr. David Brennan
Kleinwort Benson

In attendance: Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan
Registrar
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Mr. Michael Keane
Quality Assurance & Compliance Officer
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Date of Panel Meeting Wednesday 25th April 2012

Institute staff consulted during panel visit

Session I

Dr. Mary Meaney	President
Mr. Pat O'Connor	Head of School of Business & Humanities
Ms. Patricia Doherty	Head of Department of Business
Mr. Brian Watters	Department of Business

Session II

Mr. Pat O'Connor	Ms. Patricia Doherty
Mr. Brian Watters	Mr. David Murphy
Mr. Liam Bolger	Ms. Fiona Malone
Ms. Linda McWeeney	Ms. Tara Rooney
Ms. Anne-Marie Nolan	Mr. Martin Fitzgerald
Ms. Fionnuala Darby	

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.

Protection of learners

Section 43 of the Act^I 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 the Institute's policies and procedures had been applied to the development of the proposed programme.

Programme titles and award titles

Following discussion, the panel was satisfied that the title of the proposed programme is clear, accurate and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders and consistent with HETAC^{II} award titles.

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.

^I Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

^{II} Higher Education and Training Awards Council

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. However, the panel was of the opinion that the contact hours as proposed were excessive and needed to be reduced to more accurately reflect NQF level 8 programme norms in business.

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. However, the panel noted the absence of an overarching programme assessment strategy and deemed the scale of learner assessment excessive. The panel also stressed the importance of using integrated assessments across the core modules. See panel recommendation II.

Standards of knowledge, skill and competence

Having reviewed the syllabi and assessment methods as proposed, the panel was of the opinion that learners would not be capable of attaining the standards of knowledge, skill or competence relevant for this award without having first completed an intensive 2/3 week bridging programme on the fundamental business subjects. Suggested topics included information technology, contract law, finance, fundamentals of economics and management as well as elements of research methodology. See conditions of validation. Also, skill gaps identified by the panel within the syllabi as proposed included information systems, human resource management and financial management. See panel recommendation IV.

Access, transfer and progression

The panel confirmed that the programme incorporates the established procedures for access, transfer and progression.

Decision of the panel

The panel recommended the approval of this programme, subject to conditions. Detail as follows:

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Conditions of validation

This validation is subject to the following conditions:

Condition 1 - Entry requirements

The panel expressed reservations with regard to the ability of prospective learners to successfully engage on this Higher Diploma in Business at NFQ level 8 programme given the deficit in fundamental business skills normally delivered at NFQ level 6/7. To address this, the panel concluded that an intensive bridging programme was necessary in order to provide prospective learners with fundamental knowledge on the core business subjects. The panel suggested that a series of modules, possibly packaged as a NFQ level 7 special purpose award be designed to accommodate this. The panel requested that the successful completion of same was stipulated as an entry requirement in addition to learners holding a NFQ level 7 degree with a GPA of 2.0 or higher.

Condition 2 - ECTS credit allocation:

Revise the ECTS credit allocation of all modules to multiples of 5 with an appropriate reduction in corresponding class contact hours to more accurately reflect NFQ level 8 norms in business programmes.

Panel recommendations

- I. Revisit the programme learning outcomes as proposed within the submission document to ensure that they more accurately reflect the aims and objectives of this programme at level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Align the module learning outcomes to the updated programme learning outcomes.
- II. Develop an overarching assessment strategy for the programme to incorporate integrated assessments across modules whilst reducing the overall volume of assessments.
- III. Consider identifying a capstone module to run throughout the year with a greater credit allocation to bring together and assist learners in applying the core business skills they acquire as they progress throughout the programme.
- IV. Having reduced credit allocation as per condition 2, introduce two new modules and revisit the following to address identified skill gaps in information systems, human resource management, financial management and organisation theory:
 - a. H6011 Management Skills and Practice
 - b. H6013 Financial Accounting
 - c. H6016 Strategy and Change
 - d. H6018 Accounting for Decision Making
- V. Revisit module titles as discussed at the panel meeting to more accurately reflect the module content as proposed.
- VI. Consider bringing the delivery of the project management module forward to semester one.
- VII. Make other technical and minor amendments as discussed at the panel meeting.

Panel signatures

Chair

Mr. Dermot Finan _____ Date _____

Secretary

Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan _____ Date _____