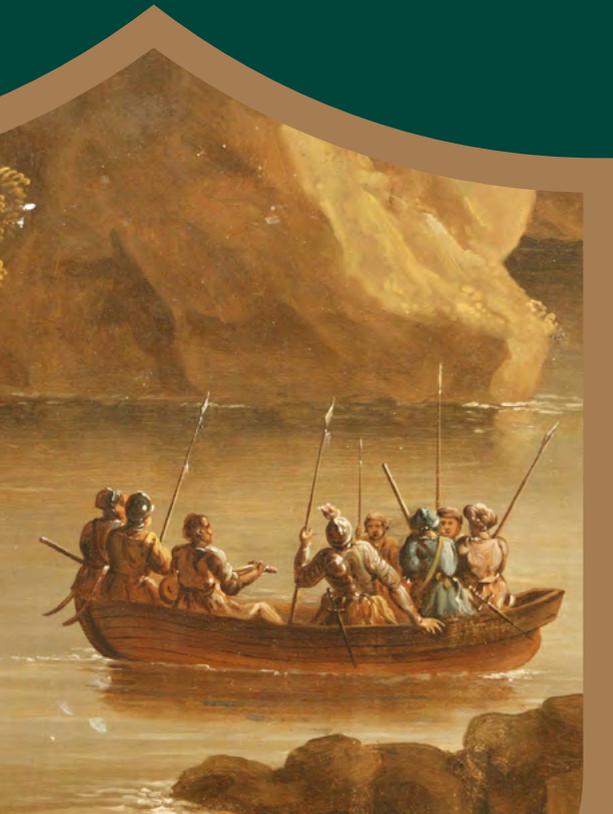




Ollscoil na hÉireann  
National University of Ireland

# Guidelines on Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications





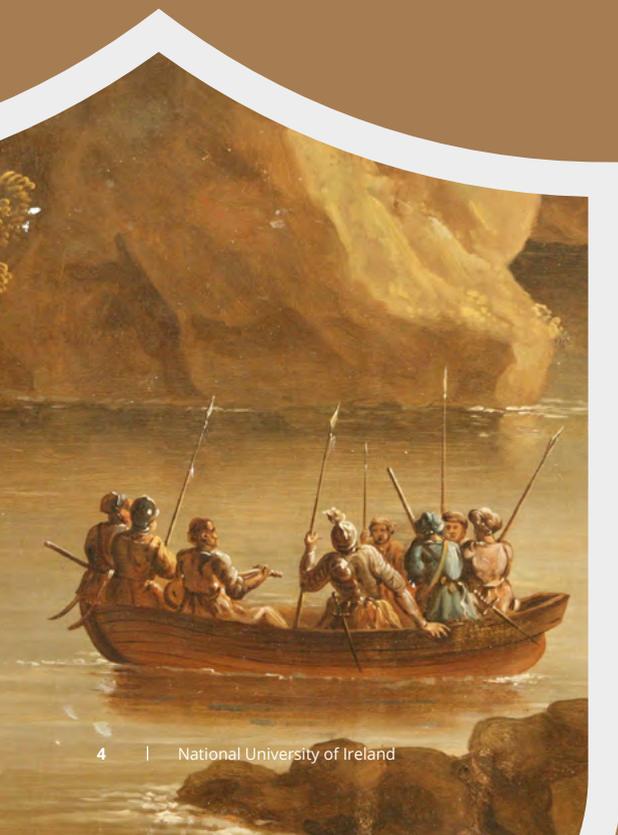
# Guidelines on Collaborative and Transnational Provision of Academic Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications

May 2025  
Version 2

Front cover inset image from NUI's murals (c.1820).  
Read more about the murals in our digital booklet:  
[https://www.nui.ie/mural\\_paintings/mural\\_paintings.html](https://www.nui.ie/mural_paintings/mural_paintings.html).

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## 1 Introduction

NUI is a designated awarding body (DAB) for all programmes leading to NUI qualifications in its member institutions. The four constituent universities and one of the recognised colleges are also designated awarding bodies. NUI has particular responsibility for programmes in its recognised colleges.<sup>1</sup> NUI has fulfilled responsibilities in relation to the standards and quality of its awards in such institutions, ensuring comparability between those qualifications and other qualifications of the National University of Ireland. Proposals for programmes in the recognised colleges, both major and non-major, are subject to approval by the NUI Senate.

Since the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), NUI quality assurance policy has also included alignment between the standards and quality of programmes leading to NUI qualifications and those of the Framework. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 articulates the statutory quality assurance responsibilities of higher education institutions, including NUI, that are designated awarding bodies (DABs). There are further responsibilities in relation to the quality assurance of linked providers.

## 2 Purpose and Scope

### 2.1 Purpose

This document identifies the general principles relating to collaborative and transnational provision for **all members** of the federal university, including constituent universities, their associated colleges, and the recognised colleges of NUI.

1. At the time of publication, NUI has two recognised colleges: the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland - University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI). The relationships between NUI and these institutions are different because the IPA is a **linked provider** and RCSI is a designated awarding body in its own right – for further details on the unique relationship between NUI and RCSI see [The Quality Relationship between the National University of Ireland and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland - University of Medicine and Health Sciences](#). The NUI Senate is primarily responsible for assuring the quality assurance system of its linked provider whereas RCSI has a direct relationship with the Irish quality agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Both institutions must submit new programmes or changes to programmes for approval by the NUI Senate, as the programmes in both institutions that lead to qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications also lead to NUI qualifications.

In addition, this document sets out the quality assurance requirements that apply specifically to the recognised colleges of NUI (whether a linked provider or designated awarding body).

Individual member institutions continue to have responsibility for developing internal quality assurance policies and procedures relating to collaborative and transnational provision.

### 2.2 Scope

Section 3 applies to all NUI member institutions engaging in a collaborative or transnational arrangement to provide (or partially provide) a programme of education leading to an NUI award. Sections 4, 5 and 6 apply only to NUI recognised colleges.

In this context, NUI uses the definitions provided by QQI:<sup>2</sup>

**Collaborative provision:** two or more providers being involved by formal agreement in provision of a programme of higher education and training.

**Transnational education:** the provision or partial provision of a programme of higher education and training in one country by a provider that is based in another country.

## 3 General Principles

### 3.1 Reputation of the University

All member institutions will be cognisant of the reputation of both their institution and the National University of Ireland when exploring potential collaborative and transnational arrangements. All member institutions will employ robust due diligence reviews of any potential partners.

### 3.2 Good Practice

In developing collaborative and transnational arrangements, all member institutions will align with good practice, giving due regard to the relevant national statutory guidelines and policies, and regional and international guidelines.<sup>3</sup>

2. See QQI (2012) [Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards](#). p.5 and p.10.

3. See Section 7 for indicative list of relevant documents.

### 3.3 Equivalency

Collaborative and transnational arrangements present opportunities and risks for member institutions and the Federation. Any programme leading to an NUI award delivered in a partner institution or international setting should, in all material respects, be equivalent in quality and standard to other programmes delivered by the member institution.

### 3.4 Human Rights

All member institutions will consider the protection and promotion of the human rights of students, staff and stakeholders, regardless of the country in which they are located in accordance with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 and NUI's [human rights doc].

### 3.5 Comparability of Student Experience

Member institutions will ensure that the learner experience of all students, wherever they are learning, is comparable and compliant with relevant codes and statutory requirements, such as QQI's *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*.

### 3.6 Integrity of NUI Graduate Status (and Data)

All graduates of programmes leading to NUI awards will be graduates of NUI. Each member institution is responsible for the integrity of the data and sharing graduate data with NUI.

### 3.7 Consultation with NUI (Parchment and Graduate Data)

NUI is, jointly with member institutions, responsible for the integrity of NUI awards and the security of the NUI crest. Whether NUI is to produce parchments or share crest and signatures with a third party, member institutions will consult with NUI on parchment and graduate data matters for a new collaborative or transnational programme early in the development of such arrangements.

**Sections 4, 5 and 6 apply to the recognised colleges only.**

## 4 Quality Assurance Requirements for the Recognised Colleges

This and subsequent sections of the policy apply to recognised colleges of NUI only. In order to assure itself that programmes of study leading to NUI qualifications in the recognised colleges are of an appropriate academic standard, NUI requires that:

- Programmes leading to NUI qualifications are designed in accordance with the current approval policy.<sup>4</sup>
- The aims and learning outcomes are clear and coherent and the proposed level of the award is in accordance with national standards.
- The curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment methods enable students to reach an appropriate standard to achieve the award.
- Student support arrangements are appropriate within the recognised college and sufficient to enable the student to achieve their award.
- There are sufficient physical and learning resources and staffing in the recognised college to support the proposed programme.
- There are adequate procedures in place to assure the quality and standards of programmes accredited by NUI, including arrangements to support the student experience and monitor student performance.
- Programmes of study take appropriate account of relevant external subject benchmarks and professional requirements and include the involvement of external stakeholders, such as employers and graduates, where relevant.

## 5 Developing Collaborative and Transnational Provision

Embarking on a collaborative or transnational initiative is a significant undertaking that presents a unique set of challenges. A rigorous process of research, planning and discussion is essential to minimising the additional risk associated with such ventures. In planning the development of collaborative or transnational provision, recognised colleges will give careful consideration to strategic, academic, quality assurance, administrative and operational matters.

4. At the time of writing, the relevant policy, [Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the approval of New Programmes and changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges](#) is scheduled for review. Colleagues in the recognised colleges will apply the most up-to-date policy available.

## 5.1 Due Diligence

Recognised colleges are expected to undertake effective due diligence in order to manage risk, safeguard the interests of students, and protect the reputation of the recognised college and NUI, in developing collaborative or transnational arrangements for the delivery of NUI-approved programmes.<sup>5</sup>

In conducting due diligence, information from potential partners should be documented and capable of independent verification. As part of this process, NUI requires that recognised colleges undertake site visits to any proposed partner or transnational sites.

Due diligence must include the following:

### 5.1.1 Strategic Suitability of Partner Institutions

It is important that any prospective partner institution is a good strategic fit for the recognised college. Ideally, prospective partners should have:

- a background in providing similar higher education programmes, or
- significant experience in dealing with higher education institutions of comparable status.

The educational objectives of proposed partner institutions should be compatible with those of the recognised college (and, by extension, NUI) so as to assure both prospective students and external stakeholders of the quality of the programme proposed

### 5.1.2 Educational/Academic Matters

- Educational mission and objectives of the partner institution.
- Experience in operating an educational business.
- Knowledge and experience of the student market.
- Academic quality, reputation and standing.
- Other existing partnerships the institution has developed.

5. See Appendix 2 of the IHEQN (2013) *Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision* for a specimen checklist.

### 5.1.3 Business and Financial Matters

- Business strategy/business plan.
- Business structure and ownership (e.g. no related businesses or entities which could compromise the programme or cause the collapse of the partnership).
- Financial strength, stability and probity.
- Management and administrative capabilities (i.e. good business capability).
- Ability to repatriate funds.

### 5.1.4 Legal Matters

- Formal legal status.
- Compliance with the laws of the country concerned (especially educational, corporate, tax and criminal laws).
- Capacity to handle student/graduate data that complies with Irish data protection requirements, where relevant.
- Existing compliance with legal authorities to operate educational programs.
- Any legal cases or formal disputes with the partner should be disclosed.

### 5.1.5 Reputational Matters

Reputation with government, regulators and employers; other education institutions; students; any existing partners; and (where relevant) with Irish and other international education institutions and authorities.

### 5.1.6 Facilities and Infrastructure Matters

- Location(s) of operation (note, a site visit is required in most cases)
- Quality of buildings and facilities, including ICT and learning facilities.

### 5.1.7 Social, Political and Economic Matters

In respect of transnational provision, consideration should also be given to the following social, political and economic considerations:

- Comparability of the legal/regulatory framework with Irish law and practice.
- Stability and openness of the economy, political system and bureaucracy.
- Safety of the social and cultural context for all students enrolled on an NUI approved programme and staff (both Irish and local) associated with the partnership.
- Equality and human rights record of the institution and/or the country concerned (consulting authoritative sources).
- Compatibility of partnership with NUI's (2013) *Human Rights Principles and Code of Conduct for the National University of Ireland and its Member Institutions*.<sup>6</sup>
- Travel and safety considerations for staff and students (whether Irish or international).

## 5.2 Memoranda of Understanding

To ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities and to safeguard academic standards for NUI awards, NUI expects that in all collaborative arrangements, a written and legally binding agreement will be developed between the parties, setting out the objectives of the partnership and the rights and obligations of each party.

<sup>6</sup>This document may be revised or replaced – recognised colleges should give due consideration to the most up-to-date version of this document.

### 5.2.1 Legal Advice

Recognised colleges are advised to take professional legal advice regarding the content and form of all agreements as they may differ depending on the type of agreement, location etc. Any such agreement should be signed by:

- the Registrar of the recognised college, following approval by its governing authority;
- a person of equivalent position/seniority within any partner institutions; and
- the NUI Registrar, following formal approval of the relevant programme(s) by the NUI Senate.

Such agreements should be time limited (e.g. 5 years) and reviewed periodically.

### 5.2.2 Core Elements of a Memorandum of Understanding

The core elements of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) are included in the suggested template in Appendix A. Such agreements should be tailored to the needs of the individual parties and the nature of the programme(s) in question. Key issues for consideration are:

- Governance
- Financial arrangements
- Programmes matters (governance, admission, curriculum, assessment)
- Teaching staff
- Quality assurance arrangements
- Graduation arrangements
- Resources
- Communications
- Monitoring and review

## 6 Approval, Monitoring & Review of Collaborative and/or Transnational Programmes

### 6.1 Introduction

The following policies relating to approval, monitoring and review of programmes, or revised versions of the same,<sup>7</sup> apply to all programmes leading to NUI qualifications in the recognised colleges:

- *Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges* ('approval policy')
- *NUI Extern Examiners: Primary Degree and Taught Postgraduate Programmes in NUI Recognised Colleges*
- *Guidelines for the Periodic External Review of Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications in Linked Providers*<sup>8</sup>

Some additional requirements apply to collaborative or transnational programmes, and these are outlined below.

### 6.2 Approval of New Programmes

New collaborative or transnational programmes proposed by recognised colleges are considered under the procedures for the approval of new programmes as set out in the approval policy, subject to the additional arrangements outlined below.

#### 6.2.1 Additional Documentation for Collaborative/Transnational Programmes

Where a proposed new programme is of a collaborative or transnational nature, the programme proposal submitted by the recognised college should reflect the additional dimensions of such a programme for NUI Senate to consider.

7. Recognised colleges should refer to the most up-to-date version of the policies listed, as these are subject to regular review and re-publication.

8. As noted above, RCSI is a designated awarding body, not a linked provider, and different arrangements are in place for the external review of programmes, see [NUI \(2025\) The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences](#).

A suggested template detailing the areas that should be included in proposals for programmes of a collaborative or transnational nature is included at Appendix B.

Where the proposed programme is a collaborative initiative, a proposed Memorandum of Understanding must also be submitted.

#### 6.2.2 Extension of Approved Programmes to Overseas Campuses

Proposals to extend programmes previously approved for domestic provision to an international campus are likely to be considered under the procedures for changes to existing programmes; however, this will depend on the extent and nature of any changes to the original programme. Approval arrangements in these circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### 6.3 External Assessment

The independent external assessor will review proposals for new programmes in accordance with the existing approval policy. In some circumstances, a site visit may be appropriate, this can be agreed with the NUI Registrar if/when it arises.

### 6.4 Monitoring & Review

#### 6.4.1 Monitoring

NUI monitors the quality and standards of programmes on an annual basis through the reports submitted to NUI by appointed external examiners. It is also expected that recognised colleges benchmark their own quality assurance procedures through the ESGs, which would include a process of self-evaluation, peer review and the development of quality enhancement plans. The recognised college should advise the University of any issues arising through ongoing monitoring mechanisms, such as steering committee meetings.

## 6.4.2 External Review of Programmes

As mentioned, NUI policy on external review of programmes applies to all programmes.

In some countries, local regulators may conduct programmatic reviews. Where the process is compatible with ESGs and comparable to standard NUI requirements for external review of programmes, the report of the local regulator may be accepted in place of a second external review. This is subject to NUI Registrar approval, which will be based on a satisfactory review of equivalency by NUI.

## 7 References and Resources

Irish Higher Education Quality Network (2013) Guidelines for the Approval, Monitoring and Review of Collaborative and Transnational Provision, Available via [QQI](#).

NUI (2013) Human Rights Principles and Code of Conduct for the National University of Ireland and its Member Institutions.

NUI (2025) [Guidelines for the Periodic External Review of Programmes Leading to NUI Qualifications in Linked Providers](#).

NUI (2025) [NUI Policy and Guidelines on External Examiners for Taught Programmes in the Recognised Colleges](#).

NUI (2020) [Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines for the Approval of New Programmes and Changes to Existing Programmes in the Recognised Colleges](#).

NUI (2025) [The Quality Assurance Relationship between the National University of Ireland and RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences](#).

QAA (2014) [UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance – Partnerships](#).

QQI (2012) [Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards](#).

QQI (2016) [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines Developed by QQI for Use by all Providers](#).

QQI (2016) [Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines Developed by QQI for Designated Awarding Bodies](#).

QQI (2017) [Topic-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines Developed by QQI for Providers of Research Degree Programmes](#).

QQI (2023) [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes](#).

QQI (2024) [Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners](#).

[Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#). (2015) Brussels, Belgium.

TEQSA (2022) [Transnational Education Toolkit](#).

UNESCO (2005) [Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education](#).

UNESCO (2007) [Revised Code of Good Practice in Provision of Transnational Education](#).

# Appendix A – Suggested Memorandum of Understanding Template for Collaborative Provision

Heading	Content
Names of Partners	
Contact details for all partners	
Objectives and Purpose of the Agreement	
Duration of the Agreement	Including arrangements for; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring and review; and</li> <li>• suspension and termination of the agreement.</li> </ul>
Legal Jurisdiction (where relevant)	The country in which any legal interpretation or dispute in relation to the agreement shall be sited.
Background of the Parties	Legal status; national accreditation, awarding body; location; overview of provision.
Strategic Context for the Agreement	
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management structure</li> <li>• Decision-making and reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Guarantees, indemnity and liability</li> <li>• Cybersecurity policy and procedures</li> <li>• The rights, obligations and legal capacities of all partners</li> <li>• Documented and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all parties with respect to all activities (marketing, admissions, teaching, assessment, staffing, external examining, monitoring and review etc)</li> <li>• The obligations of each party and arrangements in respect of Protection for Enrolled Learners</li> <li>• Compliance with QQI (2024) Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners</li> <li>• The nature of the services to be performed by each partner</li> <li>• Dispute resolution</li> <li>• Intellectual property rights</li> <li>• Arrangements relating to agents</li> <li>• Equality, diversity and inclusion</li> </ul>

<b>Finance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangements for payment of fees and other charges</li> <li>• Respective liability for costs, e.g. capital, delivery, administrative costs</li> </ul>
<b>Governance and Management of Programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme management structure</li> <li>• Awarding body/bodies</li> <li>• Staff responsibilities (academic and administrative).</li> <li>• The regulatory framework, including national/professional accreditation recognition and quality assurance requirements</li> <li>• Policies and procedures (transfer, progression, plagiarism, attendance, discipline, appeals, complaints etc.)</li> <li>• Management of student records</li> </ul>
<b>Admission to Programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic and other entry requirements, including arrangements for the recognition of prior certified or experiential learning.</li> <li>• Procedures for applications, decisions, fee payment, student registration, etc.</li> <li>• Parties responsible for admitting and registering students to programmes/ modules</li> </ul>
<b>Programme Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Award standard</li> <li>• Learning outcomes (programme and module)</li> <li>• Programme structure, including modes of delivery</li> <li>• Assessment strategy (equivalent to comparable domestic programmes; aligned with learning outcomes; maximising learning for students; secure methods) - where a domestic programme is extended to an international location, there should be some input from the same external examiner(s).</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic qualifications and experience, professional registration/accreditation.</li> <li>• Language of instruction</li> </ul>

<b>Quality Assurance Arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal procedures and arrangements for internal programme review.</li> <li>• Arrangements for annual, periodic and interim review (where necessary)</li> <li>• Arrangements for external examiners and review (mirroring role for domestic programmes but with due regard to contextual differences).</li> <li>• Student feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>Graduation Arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parchment content and production</li> <li>• Gowns</li> <li>• Ceremony location</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodation, laboratories, library, IT provision (including virtual learning environment)</li> <li>• Staffing (academic and professional)</li> <li>• Student support services</li> </ul>
<b>Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student information</li> <li>• Use of logos</li> <li>• Approval of marketing material</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring &amp; Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific arrangements for reviewing MoU (with reference to Irish and local QA requirements)</li> <li>• Annual report on human rights issues</li> </ul>

# Appendix B – Suggested Template for Proposals for New Collaborative or Transnational Programmes

A proposal for a new collaborative or transnational programme should include, but is not restricted to, the following:

New Programme Overview	
Title of Award / Qualification	e.g. Bachelor of Science.
Title of Programme	e.g. Biomedical Sciences.
School / Department	
Programme Director	
Partner Institutions	Context for partnership and details of proposed partners.
Awarding Body/ies	
External Examiners	Subject area/s required and range of cover (any country-specific requirements?).
Proposed start-date	
Award-type	Major or Non-major (Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental).
Minor / Exit Awards to be included	
NFQ Level	
Duration of Programme	(Specify duration for full-time and part-time, if relevant.)
Total credits (ECTS) of programme	
Entry requirements	e.g. qualifications or prerequisites needed to undertake the programme (including, where relevant, language requirements), and additional selection criteria, where appropriate.
Outline of programme structure	Diagrammatic overview.

<b>Marks and Standards</b>	These are the examination regulations used in the presentation of results to examination boards; for determining pass/progression within the programme; for decisions on the awarding of the qualification; the honours or other classification awarded; the requirements for completing outstanding requirements, repeat examinations, etc.
<b>Programme Rationale</b>	Subject developments; research links; industrial, commercial and professional links; regional needs; demand for programme; the existence of, and impact for, any similar programmes.
<b>Programme Aim</b>	In general terms, the knowledge and skills set attained by students completing the award.
<b>Programme Content</b>	Outline in general terms of the topics covered.
<b>Programme Learning Outcomes</b>	These are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate having completed the programme. Statements should focus on what the student will have achieved rather than focussing on the content of what has been taught.
<b>Mode(s) of Delivery / Location(s)</b>	For transnational provision, include commentary on human rights considerations.
<b>Arrangements for the Protection of Enrolled Learners</b>	
<b>Teaching, Learning &amp; Assessment Strategies</b>	Teaching, learning and assessment strategies including the alignment of module and programme learning outcomes with assessment methods. This section should make clear the extent to which a programme includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continued assessment and the proportion of marks allocated to both continuous assessment and examinations;</li> <li>Practice-based elements where applicable.</li> </ul>

<b>General Regulations</b>	E.g. Plagiarism, attendance etc.
<b>Progression/Exit Pathways</b>	Where appropriate a general statement should be included to advise students on pathways to further study on completion of their initial award aim and any specific requirements in terms of academic standard, attendance, etc. Where <b>exit awards</b> are offered please provide separate Learning Outcomes for each award.
<b>Professional / regulatory bodies and considerations</b>	Where relevant.
<b>Details of each module offered</b>	To include for each module: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Core / optional</li> <li>Credit volume</li> <li>NFQ Level</li> <li>General Aims and Objectives</li> <li>Module-specific Learning Outcomes</li> <li>Appropriate learning resources</li> <li>Assessment criteria</li> </ul>
<b>Resources Statement</b>	Description of the overall resources required for the programme, staffing and physical resources, and the evaluation of the adequacy of resources and ease of access for students. To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching staff profiles</li> <li>Learning resources and student supports</li> <li>Information Systems</li> <li>Public Information</li> <li>Financial viability (including analysis of varying student enrolments).</li> </ul>
<b>Programme Management and Evaluation</b>	Management structure; (where relevant) relationship to other departmental, school or faculty structures; methods of programme evaluation; student input to evaluation.
<b>General memorandum of understanding (MOU) in relation to academic cooperation between a Recognised College and other relevant partner institution(s) (where applicable)</b>	To be completed in the case of programmes offered jointly with one or more other partners.





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