



ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK
IN LIAISON WITH PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATIONS



2014

Introduction

Approved by the Affiliated Programmes Board, this handbook codifies the best practices of St Patrick's College, Maynooth. It represents the commitment of the Pontifical University to constantly enhance our academic procedures as a means of further improving the student experience in the many programmes developed or delivered by partner institutions.

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PART A: OVERVIEW

The opening section of the Handbook outlines the Mission, Background, and Vision of the Faculty of Theology of St Patrick's College Maynooth. Accordingly, it sets out the principles of good practice in relation to the validation and maintenance of programmes delivered by partners of St Patrick's College and lists the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders in Quality Assurance.

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MISSION STATEMENT

St Patrick's College, Maynooth, has been internationally recognised and respected as a premier Catholic institution of theological, philosophical, humanistic and scientific education since 1795. Since 1896 it has been a University Institution with Pontifical Faculties of Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy.

Today, the Pontifical University at St Patrick's College is committed to:

- Achieving the highest standards at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Systematic Theology, Moral Theology, Sacred Scripture, Philosophy, Canon Law, Liturgical Studies, Ecclesiastical History & Patrology, Mission Studies and Pastoral Studies;
- Equipping students with the required academic formation for ministry and the civil position or profession that they are likely to follow;
- Promoting excellence and innovation in teaching, research and publication that respond to contemporary developments in ecumenical, inter-religious and cultural dialogue in an increasingly complex and diverse Irish society;
- Broadening access in higher and continuing education through interdisciplinary and focused programmes that meet contemporary needs;
- Creating a supportive, learning and reflective environment, equipped with the best structures and resources available, to enable the academic, spiritual and human development of the student in an atmosphere which respects diversity and difference.

BACKGROUND

1. Background

St Patrick's College was founded in 1795. In addition to the courses in Philosophy and Theology required for the education of candidates for the priesthood, its curriculum included courses in the humanities (Classics, English, Irish and Modern Languages) and natural philosophy (including Mathematics and Experimental science). At time of the celebration of its first centenary, the College was granted Pontifical status.

In 1909, St Patrick's College Maynooth became a recognised College of the National University (NUI), with Faculties of Arts, Philosophy and Celtic Studies. The Universities Act (1997) restructured the university education in Ireland and the recognised College of Maynooth became the independent National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM), independent of Saint Patrick's College.

St Patrick's College continues to promote theological teaching, learning and assessment in accordance with the principles and norms presented in the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (1979), the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992). The Faculty of Theology approves the design and oversees the implementation of the courses leading to Pontifical University Awards, consistent with national and international statutory requirements, aims and standards.

St Patrick's College is committed to working in partnership with appropriate institutions and organisations, in Ireland and abroad. It recognises the mutual benefits that arise from collaborative study programmes and from the increased opportunities, which such provision makes available to a wider range of students.

2. Statutes of the Pontifical University

Relationships with other institutions is authorised in the Section X of the *Statutes of the Pontifical University* (1999) recognising that "Such co-operation is regarded by the Faculties as an important element in accomplishing their work" (§ 149 (2)).

3. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established under the provisions of the Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, 1999. Currently, there are 27 academic awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications, overseen by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)¹

The National Framework is designed to enable the recognition of awards, or learning outcomes associated with awards. In its policies and criteria, three different types of bodies to which the policy applies are identified. The Pontifical University is categorised in Group C: Certain bodies from outside the state, which make awards in Ireland. Otherwise known as International Awards, Group C

¹ See: <http://www.nqai.ie/InternationalawardsalignedwiththeFramework.html>

awards are defined as those made by national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions that have a status in law, or are otherwise recognised as having authority to make awards that have national recognition in their host jurisdiction and whose awards are included in national frameworks or, where such a framework is not in place, in an equivalent national tool for relating qualifications to each other, where such awards are made following the successful completion of programmes by learners in Ireland.

4. International Recognition

The alignment of the awards of The Faculty of Theology are undertaken in the context of the verification of the compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the proposed Qualifications Framework of the Ecclesiastical Faculties (QFEF) of the Holy See. The Framework for Ecclesiastical Faculties is overseen by AVEPRO (Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties).

VISION OF THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

As stated in the Quality Review (2013), the vision of the Faculty of Theology may be summarised as follows:

- Securing a viable place in the current third level landscape in Ireland; o
Adapting programmes to meet rapidly changing and specific vocational and
- professional requirements;
- Responding to the changing and diversifying student profile;
- Developing new collaborations with other theological faculties and Catholic universities around Ireland and abroad;
- Continuing to be an attractive and desirable place to study, teach and research theology;
- Making a meaningful and relevant contribution to the mission of the Church and society;
- Meeting best practice, standards and procedures at national and international level in relation to third level education.
- Remaining faithful to what is best and distinctive in its own recognised academic tradition and identity

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

The procedures contained in this Handbook are applied to all programmes leading to awards of St Patrick's College, involving collaboration with external organisations. This Handbook sets out the procedures through which it ensures and enhances that its programmes continue to attain the highest possible standards.

Principles underpinning quality assurance are as follows:

- there is an institutional responsibility for the quality and standards of the educational provision;
- there is always scope for further enhancing the experience of students,
- there is learner involvement, participation and regular formal feedback in programme development and monitoring;
- programmes of study and quality assurance mechanisms are subject to national and international internal and external peer evaluation and review, involving consultation with learners and other stakeholders;
- self-evaluation identifying strengths and weaknesses is undertaken.

The aims of quality assurance are to affirm that the quality of educational provision and the standards of awards are being consistently maintained.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF AFFILIATED PROGRAMMES

1. Introduction

Academic quality assurance can only be achieved by a partnership of trust and mutual interaction by all those involved. To this end, the Affiliated Programmes Board has adopted the guidelines and procedures set out in this Handbook for the validation, approval, monitoring, review and general academic quality assurance and quality enhancement in respect of the programmes delivered by external organisations.

This Handbook is a working document and is reviewed and updated periodically in the light of experience in implementing the procedures and feedback received from staff, students and others, for example external examiners and external panel members. All members of the Faculty and interested parties within External Organisations are invited to recommend improvements in the Handbook arising from their experience.

This Handbook should be read in conjunction Partnership with External Organisations: Accreditation/Validation/Franchise Procedures (2013), which is reviewed and updated periodically. Users of this Handbook who require further clarification or information should consult the Director of Affiliated Programmes and/or members of the Affiliated Programmes Board.

2 Teamwork for quality assurance and quality enhancement

The setting and achieving of appropriate academic standards or levels of quality are key issues in education. Academic quality in the programmes offered by external organisations to St Patrick's College requires that the agreed aims, overall objectives and learning outcomes of educational programmes are consistently achieved. This requires the development among all stakeholders the desire to achieve the highest standards and to be recognised in this regard by peers, students, potential students and society in general.

3. Roles and Responsibilities for Quality Assurance

The primary stakeholders for the quality enhancement and assurance of programmes are:

- a) Individual Lecturers/Deliverers
- b) The Programme Director (within the Partnered Organisation)
- c) The Council of Faculty
- d) The Affiliated Programmes Board
- e) The Director of Affiliated Programmes

a) Individual Lecturer/Deliverer

Each lecturer is responsible for delivering academic quality in all her/his activities, particularly in the delivery and assessment of the programme. Consequentially, duties include:

- Delivering well constructed classes, with supplementary material, appropriate to the achievement of the learning outcomes
- carrying out assessment, monitoring and evaluation of student work
- providing an academic and consultative support to students in their learning activities
- participating in committees appropriate to programmes and meetings convened by management for the purposes the development, implementation and maintenance of academic quality assurance arrangements.

b) The Programme Director (within the Partnered Organisation)

The Programme Director is the appointed person within the external organisation with responsibility for the co-ordination of the programme. It is a management position with a range of duties and responsibilities, including the following:

- reporting to the Director of Affiliated Programmes, St Patrick's College
- Sourcing appropriate lecturers/deliverers of modules
- overall management, administration and development of the programme, such as the provision of resources, suitable location and so on
- the co-ordination and safe-keeping of assignments, marks and evaluations
- general academic leadership for the discipline area, including management of academic quality assurance and enhancement activities
- strategic planning and implementation
- budget holder

- providing an annual report.

c) The Faculty of Theology

The full responsibilities of the Faculty are listed in Article 17 of the Statutes of the Pontifical University. With specific regard to the programmes delivered by partner organisations, its responsibilities include the following:

- Make arrangements for teaching in the various disciplines of the Faculty of Theology;
- Decide matters concerning studies and discipline in the Faculty, without prejudice to the authority of the Trustees;
- Admit or exclude students;
- Make provision for matters concerning examinations and the awarding of degrees and diplomas, including the accreditation of partner organisations and the validation of appropriate programmes;
- Draw up Faculty regulations as necessary within such general guidelines as may be approved by the Trustees.

Membership and Meetings

The Council of the Faculty consists of the President, the Dean, professors and permanent lecturers in the Faculty of Theology, St Patrick's College. Other teachers may be invited by the faculty to attend its meetings and have such rights of attendance and voting as the Council shall assign them. The Faculty of Theology meets on the first Tuesday of every month during the academic year. It also meets on other occasions to deal with examination results or other pressing business.

d) The Affiliated Programmes Board

To assist it in exercising its general responsibilities, the Faculty Council delegates some of its functions to committees which carry them out in accordance with clearly defined terms of reference. The Affiliated Programmes Board is responsible for the monitoring the implementation of the procedures for the validation, review and approval of programmes with partnership organisations, as set out in its policies., including

- advising the Faculty, and the Director of Affiliated Programmes, on matters related to partner organisations
- monitoring matters relating to the standards of validated programmes, their quality, and the academic environment in which they operate;
- keeping under review procedures for ensuring the appropriateness of various forms of academic association with external organisations including the franchising of Pontifical University awards and the accreditation of courses offered by other organisations;
- considering reports from partner organisations in relation both to annual monitoring reports on programmes and the monitoring and implementation of quality improvement plans in this respect:
- liaising with other committees of the Faculty in relation all programmes;
- carrying out such other functions as are considered appropriate subject to the approval of the Faculty;

- strategic planning and development of new ventures.

Membership and Meetings

The Affiliated Programmes Board shall consist of the Director of Affiliated Programmes, the Registrar and two appointed members from the Faculty Council. If appropriate, it can consult with others in its deliberations. It shall meet at least twice each semester and at such other times as required. Minutes should be recorded, reported to the Faculty and returned to the Pontifical University Office.

e) The Director of Affiliated Programmes

The Director of Affiliated Programmes is the Chairperson of the Affiliated Programmes Board. The responsibilities of the role include:

- convening meetings of the Affiliating Programmes Board
- progressing the work of the Affiliated Programmes Board
- reporting to the Faculty
- liaising with the appointed Programme Directors in partner organisations
- supporting the practical requirements of the programmes;
- organising the quality assurance monitoring;
- facilitating the progression of the implementation Quality Assurance recommendations;
- development of procedures and policies;
- arrange the practical implementation of procedures of programme validation and the accreditation of partner organisations;
- strategic planning and development of new ventures.

PART B: MONITORING AND REVIEW OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

This Part of the Handbook sets out the various arrangements within the Faculty of Theology for the monitoring and review of academic activities.

- Section 6: Responsibilities of Partnering Organisations
- Section 7: Assessments
- Section 8: Annual Quality Assurance Review

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERING ORGANISATIONS ENSURING QUALITY ASSURANCE

This section outlines the obligations to be carried out by the Partnering Organisation. Partnerships are established according to the policies outlined in Partnership with External Organisations: Accreditation/Validation/Franchise Procedures (2013), which is reviewed and updated periodically.

Responsibilities of Partner Organisation(s)

1 Memorandum of Agreement

The Partnering Organisation (s) and St Patrick's College, Maynooth, must enter into a memorandum of agreement. The memorandum shall outline the requirements of partnering organisation for accreditation of a programme.

2 Programme Director

A Director of Programme is appointed by the Partnering Organisation(s) to undertake executive responsibility for the programme. While the Programme Director of may name a person with day to day responsibility for the running the course, the Director will ordinarily be the person with whom the Faculty of Theology will communicate regarding the course. The Director of Affiliated Programmes is the ordinary representative of the Faculty of Theology and its officers in matters relating to programmes delivered by partnering organisations.

3 Programme Handbook

Where necessary, the programme schedule, or student handbook, should be submitted to the Director of Affiliated Programmes at the beginning of each academic year. The handbook should contain all the necessary information regarding modules, resources and policies required by a student to fulfil the learning outcomes of the programme.

4 Module Deliverers

The Programme Director is responsible for providing teaching of all the modules of the course by suitably qualified personnel.

4.1 Review of Module Deliverers

The Programme Director shall submit a list of deliverers, with an outline of qualifications and experience, must be submitted to the Faculty at the beginning

of each academic year. To maintain the highest of standards, the Faculty reserves the right not to recognise a particular deliverer. In case of necessity, the partnering Institute may exercise its discretion in replacing a deliverer of a module. The Director of Affiliated Programmes will be informed.

4.2 Remuneration

Unless otherwise pre-arranged, remuneration of Module Deliverers of the teachers and other staff is the responsibility of partnership organisation.

4 Entrance Requirements

Where necessary, the Programme Director shall draw up a statement of entrance requirements for the programme, in line with the practices of the Pontifical University, similar programmes and recognised by the National Framework of Ireland.

4.1 Registration

Registration will be processed in collaboration with the Pontifical University/Theology Office. The Programme Director will arrange registration at the beginning of each academic year. The Programme Director must ensure that the required forms and lists are correct and submitted according to the requirements of the Pontifical University/Theology Office. If a student withdraws from the programme, the Pontifical University/Theology Office shall be informed promptly.

4.2 Registration Fees

Registration fees will be processed in collaboration with the Accounts Office of the St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The fee must be established before signing the memorandum of agreement. The fee will be established in line with the Fee Schedule for Affiliated Programmes, which will take account of the cost of administration and the entitlements of the student. It is the responsibility of the partnering organisation to ensure that the registrations fees are paid in full on an annual basis.

5 Academic Discipline and Appeals

Where necessary, the Programme Director will have in place a code of academic discipline and an appeals procedure in accordance with those outlined in the *Kalendarium* of the Pontifical University. These should be made known to the students undertaking the programme.

ASSESSMENTS

1 General Assessment Regulations

Unless otherwise stated in the regulations and policies of the partnering institutions, all assessments are to be administered under the Regulations outlined in the *Kalendarium* of St Patrick's College, Maynooth.²

2 Confidentiality of the assessment process

Matters relating to individual candidates and examiners that arise in the assessment process must be treated as strictly confidential by all examiners, examination boards, the Programme Director.

3 Internal examiners

Where appropriate, an internal examiner is nominated by the Faculty of Theology. Internal examiners on programmes leading to awards of the Pontifical University are normally full-time or part-time members of academic lecturing staff of St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

4 Assessment results

The function of the Examination Board is to determine the result and level of performance in respect of each candidate. The partnering institution may establish an exam board. All exam results must be presented to the Examinations Board of the Faculty of Theology, or a delegated committee thereof. The Director of the Programme is responsible for preparing the list of results to the Examinations Board of the Faculty of Theology.

5 External examiners

External examiner(s) must always be employed in respect of the final assessments of a programme leading to an award of the Pontifical University, in order to provide an annual objective peer judgement on the standards achieved at the completion of the programme. In some cases, external examiners may also be employed for assessments at an earlier stage or in special circumstances as determined by the Programme Director or Director of Affiliated Programmes. The detailed responsibilities of an external examiner are set out in the *Kalendarium* of St Patrick's College, Maynooth and in the policies of the Affiliated Programmes Board.

5.1 Nomination of an external examiner

The Director of the Programme brings forward a nomination of a willing and available external examiner to the Affiliated Programmes Board. The Faculty shall appoint all continuing and proposed new external examiners. This listing of approved external examiners should contain the following information: programme (year/stage, where appropriate), name, qualifications, position, postal address and period of appointment.

5.2 Liaison with the external examiner

² See: <http://www.maynoothcollege.ie/current/kalendarium.shtml>

The external examiner is provided with details of the responsibilities of the appointment. The Director of the Programme then forwards a range of briefing documents to the external examiner including the approved Programme Document, examination papers, any assessment exemplars and a suitable representative sample of scripts. This liaison with the external examiner is carried out at the earliest possible stage to enable her/him to plan optimally and fulfil the duties involved.

5.3 External examiner's report

Each external examiner is required to make a formal written report. This report, which is a valuable element of peer judgement on the programme, is returned to the Director of the Programme who considers any issues of immediate concern. Such issues should be brought to the attention of the Affiliated Programmes Board. Copies of the report are to be included in the annual monitoring process.

External Examiner may in addition write in confidence to the Director of Affiliated Programmes highlighting issues that they wish to bring directly to the Faculty's attention.

6 Consideration of assessment results

The Examinations Board of the Faculty of Theology considers overall examination results. They are also considered in detail through the annual monitoring process when the Director of Programme presents the assessment statistics to the Affiliated Programmes Board. These statistics should include comment on with regard to pass rates and attrition rates. Any action required is addressed in the Programme Action Plan.

ANNUAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF PROGRAMMES

This section outlines the formal procedures for the monitoring the quality of their taught programmes.

1 Rationale

To provide regular academic quality assurance and enhancement of each programme, an annual monitoring report on the functioning of the programme in the previous academic year is prepared by the Director of the Programme. This report is submitted to the Director of Affiliated Programmes.

The main purposes of the annual monitoring of programmes are to:

- follow-up from previous years' reports;
- critically evaluate the programme and its delivery;
- ensure that academic standards are maintained on the programme;
- consult and consider the reports of external examiners and the feedback from students, staff and professional bodies.
- allow the Programme Committee an opportunity to reflect on and implement corrective measures and other modifications on an annual basis;
- put in place an active plan for the development and enhancement of the programme;
- ensure that all stake-holders take responsibility for the quality of programmes within their remit; and,
- ensure that, where appropriate, the Pontifical University is in a position to take action in order to enhance the quality of its programmes.

2 Timetable for the Annual Quality Assurance Process

Annual monitoring occurs at the end of the academic year under review. The Annual Quality Assurance Report is compiled and submitted to the Director of Affiliated Programmes by the partnering institution in early September and considered by the Affiliated Programmes Board soon afterwards. Separate consideration can be given to Annual Quality Assurance Reports for programmes that do not follow the traditional academic calendar. Issues that require urgent attention may be forwarded to the Director of Affiliated Programmes at any time.

2.1 Annual Quality Assurance Report

Many of the issues discussed within the report form and evidence presented should be drawn from the experience through the year, from the external examiner reports, student and staff feedback and from statistical information, such as registration and withdrawal figures and assessment results. The Director of the Programme completes the report form under each of the following headings:

- The programme plan from the previous year's report is listed, with a commentary on how this has been implemented. Summaries of any major or minor programme modifications that have been approved are recorded.

- A summary of recommendations received from external examiners, students/staff, programme advisory boards, professional bodies or external reviews.
- The report may specify any significant developments or special circumstances affecting the year under review, to put the report in context.
- Comment on resource issues which should be addressed to improve the operation of the programme and which have affected programme delivery in the year.
- The operation of partnership arrangements in place for the programme.
- Statistics on student admissions, and examination results and a commentary on the data presented and any implications thereof are presented. Specific responses are sought in relation to attrition rates.
- Examples of best practice which other programmes may find useful to implement.
- Priorities for action for the forthcoming year, based on the issues identified in the previous sections, and indicate how these should be implemented.

The Director of the Programme returns a copy of the completed form to the Affiliated Programmes Board. The report may also provide the basis for feedback by the Programme Director to other interested stakeholders.

2.3 Consideration of the Annual Quality Assurance Reports

The Affiliated Programmes Board considers all Annual Quality Assurance Reports. Where necessary others may be included to advise and assist the board. Any recommendations of the Board are to be listed in a Programme Action Plan.

2.4 Annual Quality Assurance Review

On receipt of the Annual Quality Assurance Report, the Programme Directors are invited to consider its findings with the Affiliated Programmes Board. It is envisaged that this will take place in October/November of each year. Out of this conversation, and a Programme Action plan is drawn up listing the required enhancements to be progressed during the following year.

2.5 Discontinuation of an approved programme

An approved programme may only be discontinued on the recommendation of the Faculty of Theology. The reasons for the discontinuation must be recorded.

Where an approved programme does not operate for two years due to lack of student demand or lack of resources, its period of approval will be deemed to have lapsed unless the reasons for the non-operation of the programme have had prior acceptance from the Faculty. If the programme approval lapses in this way, the Director of the Programme is required to re-submit the programme for validation and approval before it is offered again.