



Monitoring, Evaluation and Enhancement of Programmes Policy

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1. Purpose

This *Monitoring, Evaluation and Enhancement of Programmes Policy* establishes the principles and processes for the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review / enhancement of programmes at Atlantic Technological University (ATU). Monitoring and evaluation of quality, including the review / enhancement of academic programmes, academic units, and related services is an integral part of the University's quality assurance and enhancement framework. The process enables the University to identify and maintain current good practices, whilst also identifying and addressing those areas requiring improvement and enhancements that are aligned to a continuous improvement cycle. Regular monitoring, review, revision and enhancement of programmes of study will help ensure that our provision remains responsive and appropriate, and that an effective and supportive learning environment is maintained for students.

2. Scope

This policy describes the quality assurance mechanisms that are in place to monitor, evaluate and enhance programmes of study provided by ATU to ensure that:

- programmes remain current, relevant and viable,
- programmes that are no longer relevant or viable are removed or re-developed.

The monitoring and review of programmes, post validation, is both a national (QQI, 2016) and European (ESG, 2015) regulatory requirement.

The scope of this Policy covers the evaluation and consideration of:

- the content of programmes in light of latest research in a given discipline to ensure that the programme remains current and relevant,
- the changing needs of society,
- the varied demands and market for programmes in specific and new disciplines,
- the access routes to and admission / entry requirements for programmes,
- the potential employment opportunities for graduates,
- teaching, learning, assessment, and certification strategies that are responsive to advances in these areas,
- student workload, progression, and completion rates,
- the effectiveness of procedures for assessment and recognition of learning achievements,
- student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the learning programmes,
- the learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for programmes.

This policy applies to all ATU programmes that lead to a major award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), including (where applicable) collaborative and joint programmes, but excluding those that are classified as research programmes. The policy by extension also applies to all staff involved in the management and delivery of the above specified programmes.

The quality assurance and monitoring of other (non-major) University awards, including *minor awards, supplementary awards, special purpose awards* and *micro-credentials* is ensured through faculty-based quality assurance structures and procedures detailed elsewhere within the University's academic quality assurance and enhancement framework (AQAEF).

This policy also relates to monitoring, review, evaluation and enhancement which forms part of the regulatory QA requirement for the review of education programmes. A separate but related policy (*AQAE017: Programme and Module Revision Policy*) in the University AQAE framework focuses on programme and module revisions that may arise outside of the statutory / regulated process.

3. External Reference Documents

The development of this policy was informed by the following documents and publications (available on the ATU Staff Portal):

- *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015)*
- *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Core Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQI, 2016)*
- *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Designated Awarding Bodies (QQI, 2016)*
- *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Programme Review Manual (2022)*

4. Policy

4.1 Guiding Principles

This policy is guided by the four principles that underpin the ethos of Quality Assurance of Programmes at ATU. These are:

4.1.1 Principle of Academic Excellence

The principle of academic excellence establishes that the academic, professional, and personal development of the student and faculty is fundamental to the rationale for programme provision, and by extension, to informing the continuous improvement and enhancement of programmes. ATU is committed to offering a diverse range of programmes of study that meet high academic standards, and to seeking to continually assure that the quality of its programmes is maintained and / or enhanced.

4.1.2 Principle of Student-Centred Experience and Values

This principle places the student perspective as central to shaping the monitoring, review and enhancement of academic programmes at ATU. In reinforcing student-centred experiences and values, the processes for the monitoring and reviewing of programmes will incorporate feedback from students on all aspects of programme provision and delivery, and at all stages of the programme. It will also ensure the representation of students on Programme Boards and Committees in which the monitoring and enhancement of programmes is considered.

4.1.3 Principle of Regular Stakeholder Engagement

This principle establishes our commitment to engaging with internal and external stakeholders to inform programme monitoring and enhancement. Stakeholders include subject matter experts, industry representatives, professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), civic and community organisations, linked providers, other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and external quality assurance agencies.

4.1.4 Principle of Sustainability, Agility and Responsiveness of Programmes

This principle recognises the role that programme provision plays in honouring the commitment that our university makes in its mission to 'enabling sustainable economic, social and cultural development; connected to our region and with a mindset that reaches far beyond it'. ATU will therefore continually seek to ensure that all programmes remain sustainable, current, and responsive to the needs of stakeholders.

4.2 Definitions

Programme: ATU provides programmes of study, the successful completion of which leads to a university award. Programmes are comprised of modules of study, which are organised into pathways for completion over the duration of the programme.

Approved Programme Schedule: An Approved Programme Schedule (APS) is the definitive record of the structure of each programme offered by ATU. The APS is a record of the constituent modules and pathways followed to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes (PLOs) that serves as a reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, and for its monitoring and review.

4.3 Programme Monitoring

In accordance with statutory guidelines, programme delivery will be monitored in a way which allows for the identification of needs and the modification and adjustment of the programme and / or the delivery method, as appropriate.

4.3.1 The Programme Board

The Programme Board is responsible for the delivery and monitoring of all programmes of study leading to a University award. In instances where two or more closely related programmes exist within a department, they may be covered by a single Programme Board.

4.3.2 Membership of the Programme Board

Membership of the Programme Board shall comprise:

- the Programme Chair
- all lecturers on a programme (or programme stage),
- up to two students per stage (with gender balance, where possible) of the programme,
- the Head of Department where the programme resides,
- the Head of School where the programme resides.

Participation of other staff / support functions at Programme Board meetings may be arranged by invitation.

4.3.3 Functions of the Programme Board

The mandate of a Programme Board is to:

- elect a *Programme Chair*. Depending on the structure and size of the programme, a Chair may be elected in respect of the entire programme, or separate Chairs may be elected in respect of *e.g.* different stages of the programme,
- implement the delivery of the curriculum for the programme, in accordance with University policy,
- review the curriculum, in accordance with University policy,
- assess the degree of achievement of the programme learning outcomes,
- monitor student performance and feedback and to take action where relevant,
- initiate and respond to proposals for change in the curriculum, and
- where relevant, ensure adherence to the standards required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

4.3.4 Responsibilities of the Programme Board

The specific responsibilities of the Programme Board are:

1. to monitor the academic standards of the programme in relation to programme focus, content, delivery as per the approved programme schedule (APS), learner experience, assessment, marks and standards, learning resources, and evaluation of programme learning outcomes.
2. to ensure that principles and practices of academic integrity are consistently emphasised to students, and that they are incorporated into teaching and learning philosophies and into the design and execution of assessments.
3. to develop and approve the assessment plan for the stage / semester in advance of the commencement of teaching, giving consideration to the mix and timing of assessments, and to communicate this to all students within one week of the commencement of teaching.
4. to monitor the implementation of the programme and to facilitate on-going development, planning, delivery, evaluation and assessment of the programme, against the programme assessment strategy and coursework schedule.
5. to review, on a regular basis, the academic content and structure of the programme, its academic coherence and relevance, and maintenance of academic standards.
6. to ensure adherence with the University's Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Framework (AQAEF) in relation to programme operation.
7. to identify and establish sub-groups of the Programme Board, with a defined remit, as and when required.
8. to consider student progress and achievements in line with programme learning outcomes.
9. to monitor and review programme retention and attrition rates and to take and / or advise appropriate action, as required.
10. to review student feedback on the programme and to take and / or advise appropriate action, as required.
11. where possible, to identify suitable candidates to act as External Examiners to the programme.
12. to receive and review External Examiner reports, to respond to these reports, and to address recommendations outlined therein.
13. to consider and approve the annual evaluation report – the Programme Board Annual Report (PBAR) – on the ongoing operation and development of the programme.

14. to engage with Programmatic, Academic Unit and Institutional Reviews, including the self-evaluation review (the PROBE) of the programme (see section 4.5.1)
15. following programmatic review, to consider and implement the recommendations of the Programme External Evaluation Review (PEER) report.

4.3.5 Meetings of the Programme Board

The Programme Board will meet at least once per semester, and typically three times per year. The Programme Chair sets out the agenda for the meeting, in consultation with the Head/s of Departments in which the programme resides. The quorum for a meeting will be half the membership, plus one.

Minutes recording all decisions agreed and actions emanating from meetings of the Programme Board must be circulated to members within two weeks of a meeting.

4.3.6 Programme Board Annual Report (PBAR)

Programme Boards will prepare an Annual Report (PBAR). A Programme Board is responsible for co-ordinating the drafting of a report using a standard form, which must be submitted to the Head of Department. The Head of Department has overall responsibility for ensuring that reports are prepared within a specified and agreed timeframe and that all follow-on actions identified are addressed.

The PBAR must detail the following:

- programme enrolment and retention,
- student performance,
- a summary of actions agreed at Programme Board Meetings,
- relevant programme feedback derived from module evaluations, stage evaluations and External Examiner reports, and actions taken in response to them,
- key actions and priorities for the following academic year(s),
- any other relevant comments and recommendations.

The Head of Department will provide a summary report to the Faculty Academic Planning Committee (Faculty APC) for consideration.

4.4 Annual Monitoring

Programme monitoring is an annual process which provides a check on ongoing learning and teaching provision at an operational level. This differs from the statutory programmatic review which typically occurs in a 5 – 7-year cycle. The annual monitoring of modules, stages and programmes allows for continuous improvement and enhancement of the quality of all programmes offered by the University.

4.4.1 Annual Monitoring of Modules and Stages

Reflections on the content and delivery of teaching is an ongoing part of normal activity for academic staff within the University. Annual monitoring provides staff with an opportunity to reflect on the most recent delivery of a module, obtain feedback from students on the module, and to consider future improvements and enhancements, where necessary.

Regular meetings of all lecturers involved in the delivery of a module provide a useful forum for professional dialogue and sharing best practice in relation to teaching and learning, assessment strategies and practices, the use of resources, and the monitoring of student engagement in the module.

The module and stage evaluation processes are key aspects of the annual monitoring of programmes. The primary purpose of module and stage evaluation is the enhancement of teaching quality and students' learning experience. Specifically, module and stage evaluation fulfil the following intentions:

1. to provide the module lecturer/s with feedback on the quality of the teaching, supervision and assessment on their module(s).
2. to provide the module lecturer/s with information to support module enhancement.

Module and stage evaluations must be conducted in a consistent manner and according to the following guidelines:

- the use of *Forms AQAE-XX and AQAE-YY* (or their electronic equivalent) or an alternative mechanism either at the end / towards the end of the delivery of a module, or at the end of a stage,
- the module / stage evaluation form must be either available online or distributed to students,
- module and stage evaluations must be anonymous,
- lecturers must conduct an analysis of responses from module / stage evaluations.
- a summary report of stage evaluations will be shared with all PB members.

4.4.2 The Role of the External Examiner in Monitoring of Programmes

External examination is a quality assurance mechanism employed by the University and is designed to ensure independence and external governance in the assessment and grading of student performance. External Examiners have a responsibility to assure standards in the modules to which they are appointed, as well as in the overall programme and award to which they are appointed, subject to the requirements of the *University's Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Framework (AQAEF)*.

In ATU, the role of an External Examiner is to provide informative comment and recommendations on whether:

- the University is maintaining the threshold academic standards set for its awards and in accordance with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), and applicable standards set by professional, regulatory and statutory bodies (PRSBs),
- the assessment process measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended Programme and Module Learning Outcomes and is conducted in line with University policy,
- the academic standards and achievements of students are comparable with those in other higher education institutions.

In the context of annual monitoring of programmes, External Examiners provide informative comment and recommendations regarding:

- good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment, and,
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students.

External Examiners provide this commentary through the following activities:

- scrutiny of assessment briefs / tasks / examination papers prior to issuance,
- moderation of student examination papers and coursework,
- attendance at ATU Examination Boards,
- engagement with academic staff during annual visit to ATU, and
- the production of an annual report.

4.5 Programmatic Review

Programmatic Review is designed to ensure the continuous improvement and relevance of educational programmes offered by the University. Each major programme must undergo a programmatic review at least once every 5 – 7 years. All taught programmes will be reviewed, revised, and potentially re-validated during periodic programme review, and in adherence with statutory obligations. Faculty review (review of academic units) – see section 4.9 – shall precede and inform programmatic review.

Programmatic review endeavours to ensure:

- the maintenance of academic standards,
- the relevance and adaptability of programmes to current needs,
- that academic learning and labour-market requirements are considered and addressed, and,
- enhancement in the quality of, and public confidence in, ATU's programmes.

4.5.1 Programmatic Review Process

The programmatic review process consists of two main phases:

- (i) The PROBE phase: An internal assessment of a programme or family of programmes conducted by a Programme Board.
- (ii) The PEER phase: An evaluation of the programme or family of programmes by an independent panel of external experts.

4.5.2 PROBE (Programme Review and Objective Evaluation)

The PROBE is a comprehensive, objective internal evaluation by a Programme Board that reflects on the programme's performance, achievements, potential areas for improvement, and other thematic areas which may be determined by Academic Council. The internal process involves all academic staff and student representatives, and includes:

- consultations with external stakeholders, including graduates, employers, PRSB and community representatives, where relevant.
- analysis of the programme's aims, outcomes, structure, historical performance, and changes since the last review.
- evaluation of teaching methods, assessment strategies, student feedback, and quality assurance policies and procedures relevant to the programme.

The output of this phase is a detailed report – the **PROBE** (Programme Review and Objective Evaluation) Report – that provides insights into the programme's performance and recommends improvements and enhancements proposed for future iterations of the programme.

4.5.3 PEER (Programme External Evaluation and Review)

After the internal self-evaluation review is complete, an external peer review panel will be conducted to evaluate the programme.

The external panel will:

- review the PROBE report,
- normally visit programme delivery site(s),
- meet with programme staff and students,
- consider feedback obtained from graduates, employers and other stakeholders,
- assesses the quality and relevance of programmes, and
- evaluate the efficacy of any recommended changes to programmes, and suggest additional recommendations, if appropriate.

At the end of the external review process, the panel will provide feedback through a formal report and make a recommendation on the revalidation of programmes.

4.5.4 Composition of the PEER Panel

The PEER panel consists of experts with academic and professional competence. The panel will typically include:

- *A Chairperson*: A senior educationalist or business / professional individual,
- *A Secretary*: ATU Vice-President for Academic Affairs & Registrar or nominee,
- *Academic Members*: Representatives from the Technological University sector and other HE providers with relevant expertise,
- *A Professional Practitioner*: An individual with relevant professional experience, and
- *A Graduate Member*: An ATU (or legacy Institute) graduate with at least one year of relevant post-qualification experience.

4.5.5 PEER Panel Report

The external review panel will produce a detailed report – the **PEER** (Programme External Evaluation Review) report – that:

- addresses the academic quality of the programme and identifies areas for improvement,
- provides specific recommendations for programme enhancement, with due regard to both the PROBE report and the site visit findings, and,
- states the decision / recommendation regarding a programme's revalidation, which may be predicated on certain conditions and / or recommendations.

4.5.6 Implementation Plan

Upon receipt of the PEER report, the Programme Board, in consultation with the Head of Department, will formulate an implementation plan to address the recommendations contained in the PEER report.

The implementation plan may contain a series of **GOALS** (one *goal* per recommendation) that includes:

- **Guidelines** - identifies the metrics / indicators for monitoring progress toward the achievement of the recommendation.

- Objectives -** describes the recommendation in objectively measurable terms in the context of the module / programme / academic unit that the recommendation relates to.
- Actions -** describes / analyses the specific tasks to be undertaken and the resources needed to achieve the objectives.
- Leads -** identifies who / what group will be leading the actions to be undertaken.

Academic Council will be advised on the implementation plan (GOALS), and the Head of the Academic Unit will provide an annual progress report.

4.5.7 Feedback Mechanisms

All participants involved in the Programmatic Review process will be encouraged to provide feedback on the process, ensuring continuous improvement of the *review process itself*.

4.5.8 Documentation and Publication

The PEER report document will be published to ensure transparency and public confidence in ATU's programmes. Updated programme documents will be produced, and legacy documentation associated with the programme archived.

4.6 Programme Enhancement

For changes to a programme and / or modules outside of the 5 – 7-year programmatic review process, the following ATU academic quality assurance and enhancement policies must be referenced:

AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy

AQAE017 Programme & Module Revision Policy

AQAE021 Micro-credentials Policy

4.7 Programme Suspension or Termination

Programme Suspension: A programme will be suspended (paused) when a decision is taken not to recruit to the programme or to deliver the programme for a defined period.

Programme Termination: A programme may be terminated when there are no students enrolled (including those who have deferred). Programme termination consists of two stages:

1. the programme is closed to applicants / new entrants.

2. the programme is fully closed when all enrolled students have either completed their studies or left the programme.

4.7.1 Rationale for Suspension or Termination of a Programme:

A programme may be suspended (paused) or terminated for several reasons, including, but not limited to:

- low or declining student applications and/or enrolments,
- design of a new programme that replaces a number of existing programmes,
- changing strategic priorities at Department, School, Faculty or University level,
- addressing concerns about the quality and academic standards on the programme,
- termination of a memorandum of understanding or a collaborative provision arrangement which also results in the termination of a programme.

A programme that is not re-validated at Programmatic Review is terminated when all students have left the programme.

4.7.2 Decision in Respect of Temporary Suspension of a Programme:

The Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar and / or the Head of Faculty may propose to temporarily suspend a programme.

In exceptional cases, the University might need to suspend a programme without going through the usual consultation process if there aren't enough qualified first-year applicants when the CAO application data is released in August. In such situations, the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar, and the relevant Head of Faculty will discuss the situation and recommend a decision for endorsement by the University Planning Team.

4.7.3 Decision Making Process for Termination of a Programme:

The consultative process that must be adopted in respect of decisions to terminate a programme includes the following:

- consultation, led by the Head of Faculty, with Programme Board / Department or School
- review by Faculty Academic Planning Committee
- review by University Planning Team

- decision of the University Planning Team (and noted at next Academic Council meeting)

4.8 Review of Academic Units

The University recognises the importance of regular and rigorous review of its academic units to ensure a high standard of educational excellence. A review of an academic unit will serve as a strategic guide that informs the review of programmes (programmatic review) attached to an academic unit.

This policy will align to a separate policy with related procedures for the review of academic units. These will outline the process, criteria, and timelines for reviews of Academic Units to ensure transparency, consistency, and alignment with the University's mission and goals.

Unit reviews will commence after the completion of the Institutional Review (*i.e.* following the CINNTE Review; a legislative requirement). Until the additional policy is in place, the University will continue to uphold its commitment to academic quality and integrity through existing mechanisms and guidelines.

4.9 Responsibilities

4.9.1 Vice-President Academic Affairs & Registrar

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs & Registrar has overall responsibility for the quality assurance and enhancement of all academic programmes, including their ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review.

4.9.2 Head of Faculty

The Head of Faculty has responsibility for implementing this policy and ensuring compliance with it in their respective area(s) of responsibility.

4.9.3 Head of Department

The roles and responsibilities of the Head of Department in relation to the monitoring of programmes are as follows:

1. to ensure that quality assurance processes for changes to programme and modules, arising from monitoring and review activities are actioned,
2. to provide relevant functional areas with appropriate information regarding changes to programmes,

3. to work with the Programme Board to co-ordinate the induction of students on matters relating to a programme,
4. to liaise with student representatives on the Programme Board,
5. to complete their duties in respect of the nomination, ratification and appointment of External Examiners,
6. to report and advise the Head of School and / or Faculty APC of any issues arising in respect of a programme in accordance with specified timelines.

4.9.4 Academic Programme Board Members

The roles and responsibilities of academic (staff) Programme Board members in relation to the monitoring of programmes are as follows:

1. to participate in the regular review of the ongoing academic relevance of the programme, its continuing development, quality assurance and enhancement, and in ensuring that the work of the board complies with university policies and procedures,
2. to participate in meetings of the Programme Board, and in consultation with board members, agree to a mechanism for the chairing of meetings and the recording of minutes,
3. to work with the Head of Department and Programme Board members in co-ordinating the induction of students on matters relating to a programme,
4. to participate in the drafting of the Annual Report of the Programme Board, in consultation with other Programme Board members and the Head of Department.

Additional Duties of the Programme Chair:

5. to ensure that all relevant Programme Board documentation is lodged with the School Office and that a record of the minutes of meetings are forwarded to the Head of Department for circulation and action,
6. report and advise the Head of Department of any issues arising in respect of the programme in accordance with specified timelines.

5. Associated Documents Generated by this Policy

- *Procedure for Programmatic Review (under development)*
- *Form AQAE_XXX – Module Evaluation Form*
- *Form AQAE_XXX – Programme Stage Evaluation Form*

6. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Policy Approved by Academic Council	08 / 12 / 2023