Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Programme of Education and Training

Part 1 A

Provider name	Independent College
Date of site visit	23 May 2019
Date of report	17 June 2019
Is this a re-validation report (Yes/No)	Yes

Overall recommendations

Principal programme	Title	Master of Arts in Dispute Resolution
	Award	Master of Arts
	Credit[1]	90 ECTS
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions[2] OR Not Satisfactory*	Satisfactory

Embedded programme[3]	Title	N/A
	Award	

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[1] Specify the credit units because more than one system of units is in use. E.g. 20 (ECTS).

[2] Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that the validation process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that a programme virtually meets the validation criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude "Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions" where the special conditions prescribe the defects that require to be corrected.

Further, in exceptional cases the 'special conditions' may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. For example, an application might propose a programme to be provided at two locations but the independent evaluation report may find the application satisfactory on condition that it be provided only at one specified location and not at the other. These conditions will not however be used to recommend that QQI can be satisfied with a programme conditional on a different QQI award (e.g. at a lower NFQ level or having a different CAS award title) being sought than the one identified in the application.

[3] Copy this panel for each embedded programme.

	Exit award (Yes/No)	N/A
	Credit	
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory*	

Module[4]	**Title**	N/A
	Award	
	Credit	
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory*	

Evaluators

Evaluators		
Name	**Role**	**Principal occupation**
Mr Colm Kelleher	Chair	Lecturer in Human Resource Management and Management Studies, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.
Dr Trish O'Brien	Recording Secretary	Principal, O'BRIEN / Governance Design.
Mr Christopher Harrington	Learner representative	Current learner on a similar programme – Postgraduate Diploma in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Trinity College Dublin.
Dr Treasa Kenny	Subject Expert - Mediation	Programme Director and Lecturer Edward M Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention, Maynooth University.
Professor Elizabeth Mytton	Subject Expert - Law	Course Leader and Lecturer in Criminal Law, New College of the Humanities, London.
Mr Bill Holohan	Employer Representative	Previous Chairperson of the CIARB. Member of the Alternative Disputes Resolution Committee of Law Society and Council Member of Mediators Institute. Senior Partner Holohan Lane Solicitors.

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[4] A module leading to a QQI award is a special case of an embedded programme. Discrete modules are only validated on a stand-alone basis if they are to lead to a QQI award.

Part 1 B
Principal Programme

Names of centres where the programmes are to be provided	Maximum number of learners *(per centre)*	Minimum number of learners
Independent College Dublin, Block B, The Steelworks, Foley Street, Dublin 1	180 (per annum)	30 (per annum)

Enrolment interval *(normally 5 years)*	Date of first intake	February 2020
	Date of last intake	February 2024
Maximum number of annual intakes	2	
Maximum total number of learners per intake (over all centres)	90	
Programme duration (months from start to completion)	12	
Target learner groups	Law graduates Non-law graduates Other candidates who meet the approved entry requirements	
Approved countries for provision	Ireland	
Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time	Full-time only	
The teaching and learning modalities	Classroom lectures Computer lab Practical sessions Workshops Tutorials Individual work Group work	
Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g. who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)	Independent College describes the programme as a specialist postgraduate degree that provides a solid grounding in the main Alternative Dispute Resolution methodologies. It facilitates learners to examine and understand conflict and its effects, what interventions and methodologies are available to address conflict and how to manage and administer these methodologies at the highest levels. The programme is aimed at learners who are interested in working in conflict and dispute resolution. Examples provided of potential roles for graduates include mediation, change management, social and community work and management. Students can also progress to higher levels of research.	
Summary of specifications for teaching staff	Staff teaching on the MADR are expected to have an LLB, BCL, or above (*Programme Revalidation Document*, p.11).	

	They are also required to have experience of teaching in higher education.
Summary of specifications for the ratio of learners to teaching-staff	2.65 based on 550 hours as 1 FTE and a 90 learner intake.
Overall WTE staff/learner ratio.[5]	2.65 WTE / 90 learners. If the College was successful in meeting its maximum intake capacity of 180, the WTE would be 0.029.

Programmes being replaced by the MADR

Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)			Arrangement for enrolled learners	Date when replaced programme is planned to cease completely
Code	Title	Last enrolment date	Indicate whether "Teach out" or "Transfer to replacement programme"	
PG21927	Master of Arts in Dispute Resolution	September 2019	Teach out	28 August 2020

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[5] This is the total wholetime equivalent number of staff dedicated exclusively to this programme divided by the maximum number of learners that can be enrolled with that complement of staff.

Other noteworthy features of the application

The MA in Dispute Resolution (MADR) was validated in 2010 and revalidated in 2015. As the College was changing premises and confirming its programme management team, the MADR was not run in 2015 and 2016 and re-commenced in 2017. This impacted on the data and outcomes available to the College to inform this revalidation.

Of its September 2017 intake, 35 applications were received, 23 provisional offers were made, and 17 learners were enrolled. Of the 15 learners that commenced the programme (2 deferred), all learners successfully completed the MADR with 2 receiving a 1.1, 9 receiving a 2.1 and 4 passing (3 of whom were repeating). The first graduation from this revised programme took place in November 2018 and information presented regarding learner destination continues to be gathered by the College. The data presented indicates that 2 continued to further education, 7 are seeking employment in the area of dispute resolution (4 domestically and 3 overseas) and 2 are seeking alternative employment opportunities. Before the end of 2019 dissertation examination boards will have been held for two further cohorts of learners: those who commenced in February 2018 (16 enrolled learners) and those who commenced in September 2018 (24 enrolled learners) (*Review of Current Programme*, pp.52-52).

To inform this programmatic review, the College gathered feedback from current and graduated learners as well as conducting research and inviting sector views on programme amendments. The research gathered supports the proposed programme changes.

The programme has previously included Irish learners, but its enrolment currently is fully international. While this cross-cultural mix brings an interesting and valuable dynamic to the programme, the College is seeking to also include Irish learners amongst its numbers as part of its general plans for student growth. Its learner body includes a mixture of those with and without a legal background; learners without a legal education come from a variety of backgrounds, including business and engineering. An undergraduate degree, or a Higher Diploma (or equivalent postgraduate qualification) is required for admission. An application has been made by the College for professional accreditation of the programme.

The Panel was satisfied that the MADR is capable of being a sound and effective preparation for learners to subsequently enter the labour market or progress to further studies in this or a related field. It has made some recommendations with a view to further enhancing the programme and its delivery. No special conditions have been recommended.

Part 1C Evaluation of the Case for an Extension of the Approved Scope of Provision (where applicable).

Comment on the case for extending the applicant's Approved Scope of Provision to enable provision of this programme.

Not applicable.

Part 2A Evaluation against the validation criteria

QQI's validation criteria and sub-criteria are copied here in grey panels.

Criterion 1

The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme	
a) The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme. b) The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed. c) The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.[6]	
Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	**Comment**
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The Panel is satisfied that the provider has met Criterion 1. The Chief Executive will sign the application form on submission of the revalidation application to QQI.

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[6] This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked, but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.

Criterion 2

The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought

a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.
b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.
   (i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.
c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).
d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards.*
e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.
f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
   (i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.
   (ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.
g) For each programme and embedded programme
   (i) The **minimum intended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.[7]
   (ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are **consistent with** the relevant QQI awards standards.
h) Where applicable, the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.
i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.

For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.[8]

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The aims and objectives and programme and module learning outcomes of the MADR are largely unchanged from the validated programme; they were subsequently approved when the programme was previously revalidated. The College has updated a number of module titles in order to make them as descriptive as possible for prospective learners and employers. Having independently reviewed them, the Panel is satisfied that the aims and objectives of the programme are expressed clearly, and it notes the amendment to PLO7 and its included reference to 'ethical considerations'. The award title, a Master of Arts in Dispute Resolution, continues to be appropriate and fit-for-purpose. The Panel is also satisfied that the MIPLOs are appropriate to the relevant awards standard and that the MIMLOs are specified for all modules.

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[7] Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.
[8] Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

Criterion 3

> **The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)**
>
>   a)   The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.[9]
>
>   b)   The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.
>
>   (i)   There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.
>
>   (ii)   The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.
>
>   (iii)   There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
>
>   (iv)   There is evidence[10] of learner demand for the programme.
>
>   (v)   There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant[11].
>
>   (vi)   The programme meets genuine education and training needs.[12]
>
>   c)   There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.
>
>   d)   Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.
>
>   e)   The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The College conducted and presented the outcomes of research with relevant stakeholders, which supports the appropriateness of its proposed programme amendments. The College has also documented an analysis of its proposed programme with comparable programmes offered nationally.

There is evidence, including through the Law Reform Commission, that the trend towards mediation will continue and that an increasing priority and value will be placed on mediators with appropriate education and training. In addition, the Mediation Act 2017 commenced in its entirety in January 2018. These developments suggest that demand for the programme from those wishing to be

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[9] Awards standards however detailed, rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

[10] This might be predictive or indirect.

[11] It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

[12] There is clear evidence that the programme meets the **target learners'** education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

employed as mediators should increase. For other learners, the MADR appears to be providing methodologies that are supporting their general ability to successfully manage interactions with others; skills which they can use in a range of fields and occupations.

The Panel noted that the College has applied for professional accreditation for the programme and it has suggested that, in the light of its currently international learner-base, the College would consider international as well as national accreditation options.

Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the proposed programme can provide its graduates with the knowledge, skills and competence required to follow careers within dispute resolution, to support careers in other areas, and to pursue further study.

The Panel makes the following recommendation:

o   The College should continue to pursue professional accreditation to support the future employability of candidates, and consider the full range of professional accreditation options, in Ireland and internationally.

Criterion 4

The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory

a)   The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied[13].

b)   Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.

c)   If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL[14]) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.

d)   The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).

e)   The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.

f)   The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-

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[13] Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria   are (QQI, restated 2015) arranged under the headings
-   Progression and transfer routes
-   Entry arrangements
-   Information provision

[14] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

(i) Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).	

(i) Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
(ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
(iii) Has long-lasting significance.
g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The College is operating Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) procedures and has the capacity to recognise prior experiential and equivalent academic qualifications for the purposes of admission. The College operates an insurance bond to satisfy State requirements for the protection of enrolled learners (PEL).

Most learners entering the programme come through agents. In addition to requiring an undergraduate degree, or equivalent, two years of relevant professional experience is required; as a result, learners are not admitted directly from post-primary level studies. It was emphasised that time and attention is placed on recruiting qualified and committed learners to the programme. In addition to providing evidence of qualifications, a CV and references, every applicant is interviewed by the College. The interview is held by the admissions office and the outcomes are provided to the Programme Leader who makes a final decision on admission; this decision may require a second interview with an applicant that is attended by the Programme Leader.

The English language level required is IELTS 6.5. Staff reported that this has proven sufficient for successful participation in the programme. The College has access to the language support services of International House where required. A series of bridging classes are provided as part of the induction for all learners to orientate them to, in particular, the Fundamentals of the Irish legal system and the Fundamentals of Tort.

Detailed programme information is available to learners via the College's website and through tailored admissions documentation. The learners whom the Panel met articulated a range of indirect routes that led to their identification of the MADR as their chosen course. Overall, the Panel considered the programme to be a strength of the College and recommends publicity is increased to optimise awareness.

The Panel makes the following recommendations:

  o The College should consider optimising enrolment opportunities by increasing academic involvement in the interview process and requiring applicants to submit a Personal Statement as a means of elaborating on their professional experience and explaining their

motivation for wishing to pursue the programme.

- o The College should implement a marketing strategy that would increase the profile of the MADR programme, including through the utilisation of social media.

Criterion 5

The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose	
a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.	
b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.	
c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.	
d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.	
e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles[15].	
f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.	
g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.	
h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.	
i) Elements such as practice placement and work based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.	
j) The programme duration (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its fulltime equivalent contact time (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.[16]	
Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	**Comment**
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

As noted above, the College has updated a number of MADR module titles in order to make them as descriptive as possible for prospective learners and employers. The Panel could see the value in this revised labelling and considered that it was an improvement on the previous module titles. The Panel noted some relatively minor issues with the quality of the programme documentation which can be addressed through a thorough proofreading in advance of making it available to learners.

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[15] This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion.
In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.
[16] If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified.

In terms of significant changes to the programme curriculum and structure:

- o The revised programme assigns 5 ECTS credits to all modules. Staff spoke of the benefits of transparency this model can provide in terms of learner performance. The Panel discussed with the Programme Team the importance of ensuring that a master's level programme is capable of enabling deep learning. In response, the College confirmed that it intends ensuring that the introduction of 5 ECTS credit modules across the programme will not lead to compartmentalisation. Its strategy for avoiding this includes the assessment of learning outcomes across modules, where appropriate.

- o The revised programme also moves the module Research Methods from the first semester to the second. The Programme Team explained that this was done to reduce the time between the delivery of the Research Methods module and the point at which learners are required to submit a proposal for their dissertation. In advance of the proposal itself, learners are also required to deliver a presentation on the anticipated subject for their proposal.

In terms of the dissertation element to the programme, the Panel noted the reference in the MADR *Review of Current Programme* document, to conducting research that involves direct contact with children (p.55), and considered that this is an area that the College's Ethics Committee should focus upon.

In common with similar programmes offered nationally[17], the MADR does not include an internship. The College has, however, spent time considering this option and speaking with professionals in dispute resolution to explore possibilities for bringing learners closer to the world of work; this has included increasing invitations to guest lecturers.

The Panel makes the following recommendations:

- o That the Proposed Programme Schedule be accepted but that the College continuously and periodically monitor its impact on the coherence and integrity of the programme.

- o Whilst the Research Methods module is moving to semester 2, supports to develop learner research skills should pervade the MADR and commence in semester 1. This could, for instance, include fortnightly workshops on relevant topics.

- o The College's Ethics Committee should reflect on the possibility of learners conducting research that includes the participation of vulnerable people and should pro-actively construct a process that enables and safeguards this research in the future.

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[17] An exception is the MA in Mediation and Conflict Intervention offered by Maynooth University over two-years, which offers an internship arrangement through which students practice with experienced mediators.

Criterion 6

There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned
a) The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to-practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).
b) The programme has an identified complement of staff[18] (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.
c) The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.
d) There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development[19] opportunities[20].
e) There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.
f) Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The College generally requires that staff members have a qualification above the level of the programme on which they are teaching. For the MADR an LLB, BCL, or above, along with experience of teaching in higher education, is required. The Head of School is the only full-time, permanent, whole-time academic staff member who will be engaged in the delivery of the MADR programme; the remainder of staff are contract based. While the whole-time equivalent staff to learner ratio is adversely impacted by the composition of staff, the Panel is satisfied that the staff to learner ratio is appropriate. This view is informed by the Programme Leader position - which while not full-time, has a significant time commitment to the management of the programme – and the bank of appropriate part-time lecturers that the College has developed and can access. The College has

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[18] Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme's provider; it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.

[19] Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.

[20] Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.

developed a criteria-based assessment process for applicants before they are admitted to a list of potential lecturers; this includes an interview and presentation. The College emphasised the importance of appointed lecturers committing to the teaching period. It was confirmed by the College, and supported in discussion with learners, that a very small number of classes have been rearranged in semesters 1 and 2.

It was clear to the Panel that the College and its learners place significant importance on industry experience. The College is now seeking to reflect the value arising from this industry experience through published research output from staff and learners. Examples of the innovative research topics being conducted by learners and supported by staff are online mediation and mediation in the context of artificial intelligence.

CPD supports are provided to staff including on topics such as teaching in a cross-cultural environment, utilising different forms of assessment, and academic lesson planning. Lecturer performance is subject to formal appraisal by the Head of School. This also provides an opportunity to discuss career development with lecturers and to re-confirm the College's ambitions for increasing scholarly activity.

The Panel makes the following recommendation:

- o The College should take every opportunity to raise the research profile of its staff and learners, in order to promote the interesting and diverse research and practice that the MADR is generating.

Criterion 7

There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned

   a) The specification of the programme's physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 d).
   b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:
      (i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme's learning environments including the workplace learning environment),
      (ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided),
      (iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment
      (iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable
      (v) technical support,
      (vi) administrative support,
      (vii) company placements/internships – if applicable.
   c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).
   d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
	(i) Planned intake (first five years), and (ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake. e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

During its visit, the Panel reviewed the College's premises, including its library. The College provided the Panel with a copy of a commissioned review of its library facilities. Its recently appointed librarian is currently implementing the recommendations arising from this review. In addition, the Panel was informed that the College librarian is providing induction for learners on the library and on referencing conventions. She is also offering one-to-one consultation sessions with staff and learners to guide them towards appropriate resources to support their studies and research. The Panel was informed that this is, in turn, driving up demand for library resources; a demand that the College is seeking to meet, including through additional database subscriptions.

The College has increased the sizes of some of its lecture rooms, which are spacious and bright. Its lecture rooms include projectors and multi-media resources. A computer lab and IT supports are available to learners as required. In terms of general maintenance, the College has instigated a log-book system at reception, which can be used by staff and learners to note issues as they arise. This was initiated to avoid learners waiting until senator (class representative) meetings to communicate problems.

The Panel makes the following recommendations:

o The College should continue to build on the improvements made to its library services and place emphasis on addressing the remaining recommendations arising from its commissioned review.

o The Programme Team should consider developing a comprehensive overall core reading list for the MADR to assist learners in appreciating the range of resources available to them.

Criterion 8

The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners

 a) The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.

 b) Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
c) The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.	
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The Panel was assured by both staff and learners that a learning environment has been created that is supportive of learner cohorts and individual learners. Learners met by the Panel confirmed that there are ample opportunities to engage with staff on academic matters as needed. The College's administration offices have also implemented an open-door policy for learners.

With regards to the dissertation component of the MADR, the College explained that learners can request the allocation of a specific supervisor but are also provided with advice from the College on the appropriateness of this selection for their dissertation subject. Three supervisor meetings are formally provided to learners, but staff reported that for some learners this can extend to seven or eight meetings. More general supports available to learners are referenced under Criterion 11.

Criterion 9

There are sound teaching and learning strategies
a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.
b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.
c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).
d) Learning is monitored/supervised.
e) Individualised guidance, support[21] and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The College believes that the transition to a 5 credit semesterised model will present opportunities to more closely monitor and support learner progress and it communicated to the Panel its wish to take a formative approach to its teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the MADR. An example of this is its approach to the dissertation element of the programme and its requirement for learners to include a credit-bearing presentation on its outline proposal, in advance of submitting

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[21] Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt, it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.

the proposal itself.

The College is making increased use of Moodle as a support for learner engagement with modules outside of class delivery. It is correspondingly providing further training for lecturers to utilise the full range of resources that Moodle incorporates.

As noted previously, the programme does not include a workplace component. However, the College places an emphasis on engaging guest speakers from industry. Some staff delivering the programme are also actively working in mediation and can provide learners with the benefits of this practical and authentic engagement with the subject.

The Panel makes the following recommendation:

- o   As part of its re-positioning of the Research Methods module (discussed under Criterion 5), the Programme Team should assure itself that learners are receiving feedback on their dissertation presentation sufficiently in advance of the submission of their dissertation proposal.

Criterion 10

There are sound assessment strategies
- a)   All assessment is undertaken consistently with ***Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards***[22]
- b)   The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
- c)   The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.[23]
- d)   The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.
- e)   There is a satisfactory written **programme assessment strategy** for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.[24]
- f)   Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.
- g)   There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.
- h)   The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.[25]

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[22] See the section on transitional arrangements.

[23] This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

[24] The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.

[25] If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The Programme Team are focussed on supporting the successful participation of learners through the programme; this includes an increasing emphasis on formative assessment through devices such as reflective journals in its Programme Assessment Strategy. The Programme Team is providing opportunities for cross-module assessment of learning outcomes, which has the added benefit of interconnecting module subjects. It is also aware of and embracing a more digitised environment; applications like Kahoot and Quizlet are utilised to support formative assessment.

Due to the nature of the MADR programme, the Programme Team has emphasised practical and authentic exercises and assessment methods. The College draws from a pool of actors used by higher education institutions in similar contexts to support practical dispute resolution exercises. It was reported that the programme and its learners are benefitting from the expertise of these actors in testing relevant learning outcomes. Practical exercises of this nature are video recorded for the purposes of external examination. It is notable that the reports of the External Examiner, which were reviewed by the Panel, indicated a high level of satisfaction with assessment methods utilised and with demonstrated learning outcomes.

Criterion 11

Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for

   a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.

   b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.

   c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.

   d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.

   e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.

   f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.

   g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.

   h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities[26].

   i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*[27] and there are appropriate in-service supports

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[26] For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners, (QQI, restated 2015).

[27] See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students, (QQI, 2015)

in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.	
j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).	

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The College enrols full-time learners only on the MADR. Its learner cohort is currently all international students and the College has put supports in place for their practical and pastoral care. The Student Experience Officer provides a range of learner supports from operations to careers; these include public speaking and mock interview supports, along with the provision of more directed supports and information for entering a career in dispute resolution.

In addition to formal processes for learners presenting with and requesting supports, staff and learners spoke of the proactive approach taken by all staff in encouraging students to share any issues arising. The Panel was satisfied in speaking to the staff and learners of the College that programme-specific information, and other relevant information, is made available to learners in a timely manner. It received no sense that there is any difficulty in seeking and receiving clarification where necessary. In this regard, the relatively small nature of the College is a strength in the accessibility of information to learners.

The Panel is satisfied that the College takes its responsibilities for the learners in its care very seriously and that it is actively seeking out and using learner views to inform its decision-making.

Criterion 12

The programme is well managed
  a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.
  b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-the-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.
  c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.
  d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.

Satisfactory (yes, no, partially)	Comment
	e) Quality assurance[28] is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria. f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved. g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable. h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.
Yes	The Panel has evaluated the MADR having regard to the criterion and sub-criteria and recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the programme meets this criterion.

The MADR programme is subject to the College's QA policies and to its academic governance arrangements. The College's governance structure includes a series of sub-committees reporting to its Academic Council. Amongst these are Programme Boards which bring academic, support and QA staff together with learners to monitor and report on programme progress. A further sub-committee, Facilities and Learner Support Services, plans and reviews programme-specific resources. QA governance is overseen by a QA Committee that reviews agreed KPIs, synthesises reports from other committees, and provides summary reports to the Academic Council.

Staff and learners are provided with opportunities to provide feedback on the MADR programme on a continuous basis. A feedback report is developed at the end of each year that allows lecturers and the Programme Team to reflect on changes that would benefit modules.

The College uses a bespoke learner management system to support its processing of student data and its transfer of data to QQI for certification purposes. It is confident that this system enables it to collect and transfer quality assured student data.

Finally, the Panel noted that the conditions made as a result of the previous programmatic review appear all now to be well-established in the management of the MADR. These were, the appointment of a qualified programme leader; the identification of appropriate College premises; and the establishment of an Ethics Committee. In terms of the programme content and delivery, the College has also actioned recommendations made to develop new streams within the programme, and to increase its links with industry.

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[28] See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

Part 2B Overall recommendation to QQI

Principal programme

Select one	
X	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (**minor**) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);[29]
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons[30] for the overall recommendation

As illustrated above, the Panel is satisfied that Independent College, and the MA in Dispute Resolution, has met each of the validation criterion. The Panel has made some recommendations for the further enhancement of the programme but has not seen it necessary to recommend special conditions of validation. The Panel has confidence, in the programme as it is presented for revalidation; in the Programme Team and in the wider College's ability to support the programme; and in the emphasis placed by the College community on keeping learner interests at the heart of its decision-making.

Summary of recommended special conditions of validation

Not applicable.

Summary of recommendations to the provider

The Panel believe that the College is learner centred and that decisions are taken, and proposals made after thoughtful deliberation, which includes consultation with a range of stakeholders.

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[29] Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, so as to ensure that the validation process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that a programme virtually meets the validation criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude "Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions" where the special conditions prescribe the defects that require to be corrected.

[30] Give precise reasons for the conclusions organised under each of the 12 criteria (for the programme and each embedded programme and any modules proposed to lead to QQI awards) citing supporting evidence. If any criteria or sub-criteria are not met by the application this must be stated explicitly giving precise reasons with evidence. A "Not Satisfactory" recommendation may be justified if any one of the applicable criteria or sub-criteria are not demonstrated to be satisfied.

The Panel's recommendations are summarised as follows:

o The College should continue to pursue professional accreditation to support the future employability of candidates, and consider the full range of professional accreditation options, in Ireland and internationally.

o The College should consider optimising enrolment opportunities by increasing academic involvement in the interview process and requiring applicants to submit a Personal Statement as a means of elaborating on their professional experience and explaining their motivation for wishing to pursue the programme.

o The College should implement a marketing strategy that would increase the profile of the MADR programme, including through the utilisation of social media.

o That the Proposed Programme Schedule be accepted but that the College continuously and periodically monitor its impact on the coherence and integrity of the programme.

o Whilst the Research Methods module is moving to semester 2, supports to develop learner research skills should pervade the MADR and commence in semester 1. This could, for instance, include fortnightly workshops on relevant topics.

o The College's Ethics Committee should reflect on the possibility of learners conducting research that includes the participation of vulnerable people and should pro-actively construct a process that enables and safeguards this research in the future.

o The College should take every opportunity to raise the research profile of its staff and learners, in order to promote the interesting and diverse research and practice that the MADR is generating.

o The College should continue to build on the improvements made to its library services and place emphasis on addressing the remaining recommendations arising from its commissioned review.

o The Programme Team should consider developing a comprehensive overall core reading list for the MADR to assist learners in appreciating the range of resources available to them.

o As part of its re-positioning of the Research Methods module (discussed under Criterion 5), the Programme Team should assure itself that learners are receiving feedback on their dissertation presentation sufficiently in advance of the submission of their dissertation proposal.

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

No interests have been declared.

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Colm Kelleher   Date: 17 June 2019

Signed: *Colm Kelleher*

Addendum

Independent College formally responded to the report on 25 July 2019 and have addressed each of the ten recommendations to the satisfaction of the panel members. The panel is satisfied that each recommendation has been taken on board and the recommended action has been taken or is scheduled to be taken.

On behalf of the panel, I confirm that **we recommend the MA in Dispute Resolution programme to QQI.**

My thanks to each of the panel members for their work on this review and continued success to Independent College in providing high quality programmes of study.

Panel chairperson: Colm Kelleher   Date: 19 August 2019

Signed: *Colm Kelleher*

Disclaimer

Part 3: Proposed Programme Schedule

Name of Provider:	Independent College Dublin							
Programme Title	Master of Arts in Dispute Resolution							
Award Title	Master of Arts							
Stage Exit Award Title[3]	N/A							
Modes of Delivery (FT/PT):	Full Time							
Teaching and learning modalities	FT Face to Face, Online Support							
Award Class[4]	Award NFQ level	Award EQF Level	Stage:	Stage NFQ Level[2]	Stage EQF Level[2]	Stage Credit (ECTS)	Date Effective	ISCED Subject code
Major	9	7	Award	9	7	90	1st February 2020	0429

Module Title	Semester	Module		Credit Number	Total Learner Effort Module (hours)						Allocation of Marks (from the module assessment strategy)			
		Status	NFQ level where specified	Credit Units / HET Credits	Total Hours	Class (or equiv.) Contact Hours	Directed eLearning	Hours of Independent Learning	Work-based Learning Effort	Other (research, interviews, etc.)	C.A.%	Supervised Project %	Proctored Practical Demonstration %	Proctored Written Exam %
Understanding Conflict, Causes, Analysis & Dynamics	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			50			50
Principles of Mediation Theory	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			30			70
Principles of Mediation Practice	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			30		70	
Principals of Negotiation Theory	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			30			70
Applied Negotiation Practice	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			30		70	
Theory & Practice of Arbitration	1	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			40			60
Advanced Mediation Theory	2	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			40			60
Advanced Mediation Practice	2	M	9	5	125	30	15	80					100	

Restorative Practice	2	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			30	70		
Research Methods	2	M	9	5	125	30	15	80			100			
The Role & Application of Mediation in the Community	2	E	9	5	125	30	15	80			10		30	60
The Role & Application of Mediation in the Family	2	E	9	5	125	30	15	80			10		30	60
Theory & Practice of Workplace Dispute Resolution	2	E	9	5	125	30	15	80					50	50
Commercial Dispute Resolution	2	E	9	5	125	30	15	80					50	50
Dissertation	3	M	9	30	750	10		240		500	100			

Special Regulations: Learners are unable to progress to the dissertation stage until they have successfully passed all of the taught elements.