



Degree Approval and Accreditation Procedures

Guidelines for Panel Members

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of a degree course proposal is a two-step process involving:

1. Approval: an evaluation of the course itself; and
2. Accreditation: an evaluation of the capacity of the provider to offer the course and maintain the standard of graduates at a degree level.

The evaluation occurs through a process of peer review against gazetted criteria for approval and accreditation established by the NZ Qualifications Authority. A panel of people representing the interest groups in the field covered by the proposal is asked to evaluate the material. The chairperson of the panel will be an independent person, appointed by ITP Quality.

The Panel's role is to make recommendations to ITP Quality who make the final decision on whether to grant or withhold approval and accreditation.

COURSE APPROVAL

Members of the panel are all likely to be familiar with the broadly accepted qualities and characteristics of degrees, either through past experience or day-to-day contact. However, in the minds of most professionals, the concept of a degree is generally a broad perception rather than a systematic set of criteria.

Evaluators must ensure that the proposal is for a course which is clearly of degree quality.

To sharpen the focus of this general perception, the Education (1989) describes a degree:

...the award recognises the completion of a course of advanced learning that:
“ a is taught mainly by people engaged in research; and
b emphasises general principles and basic knowledge as the basis for self directed work and learning”.

In addition to describing a degree the Education Act 1989 requires NZQA (and, through delegation, ITP Quality) to ensure that a number of other matters are considered during the course approval process. These are the defined criteria for the approval of degree programmes (see *ITP Quality Approval and Accreditation of Courses Leading To Degrees and Related Qualifications, April 2004*).

ACCREDITATION

To be accredited for degree programmes a provider must be able to demonstrate that it has appropriate and effective procedures where:

- (a) monitoring and promoting of academic standards necessary for achieving the stated aims and objectives are practiced;
- (b) best practice in maintaining quality is actually practiced or can be applied; and
- (c) good practice in regard to the maintenance of academic standards at national level can be achieved

The Education Act (1989) requires ITP Quality to ensure that a number of other matters are considered during accreditation. These are listed as criteria for the accreditation of providers to offer approved degree programmes (see *ITP Quality Approval and Accreditation of Courses Leading To Degrees and Related Qualifications, May 2009*).

PROCEDURES FOR COURSE APPROVAL AND ACCREDITATION

The general criteria for constituting a panel are detailed in the *ITP Quality Approval and Accreditation of Courses Leading To Degrees and Related Qualifications (May 2009)*.

The appointment of panel members is confirmed by ITP Quality, following consideration of nominations from the applicant provider. All nominations are required to be endorsed by the appropriate academic, industry or professional associations. The process used for considering the approval and accreditation of a submission may extend over a six month period. It consists of three stages:

- A Preparation for evaluation visit
- B Evaluation visit;
- C Preparation of a written report to be considered by ITP Quality.

Panellists are required to abide by the code of ethics which outlines responsibilities and accountabilities.

A PREPARATION FOR EVALUATION VISIT

1. ITP Quality assigns a Quality Systems Evaluator (QSE) and Panel Chairperson to coordinate the evaluation process and guide panel members in terms of their responsibilities.
2. The applicant's course submission and documents, the course approval and accreditation criteria and the *Guidelines for the Role of Panel Members* will be distributed to the evaluation panel members well before the evaluation visit.
3. Panellists may be asked to provide a written response to the course proposal.
4. The response is required by a stated date so that a preliminary appraisal can be made to determine whether the proposal should be processed further.
5. Further correspondence may be necessary between the applicant and the QSE to ensure that course approval and accreditation documentation is completed before the evaluation visit occurs. Panel members will receive all subsequent documentation to ensure that a thorough evaluation of the material allows

decisions on course approval and accreditation to be made. Prior to the evaluation visit, briefing documents will be prepared for the evaluation panel including the summary analysis by the QSE of the application.

6. It is expected that in accepting the position of a panel member, response dates and meeting dates will occupy a priority position in a panel member's diary.

B EVALUATION VISIT

1. The evaluation visit is usually held over two and a half days, and will be in three parts:

(a) Briefing Meeting

The panel will assemble for a briefing meeting on the evening prior to the visit to the provider. This meeting is arranged to ensure that panellists are well informed about their role and responsibilities, that processes are understood and to confirm the agenda for the two day visit for course approval and accreditation.

(b) Course Approval

On the first day the panel will:

- i. evaluate the written material according to the course approval criteria; and
- ii. discuss issues of the proposal with the course presenters, senior academics and management..

(c) Course Accreditation

On the second day the panel will

- i. evaluate the documentation and other resources against the accreditation criteria
- ii. discuss issues of the proposal with course presenters, senior academics and management.

The exact sequence and times will be on the agenda negotiated between the applicant and the QSE.

2. The Panel will determine whether the submission meets all criteria for approval and accreditation, or if there are requirements that must be met before approval and accreditation can be recommended.
3. The Panel may also make recommendations to the provider that, in the view of the Panel, would enhance the quality of the programme.
4. At the end of the Panel visit the Chairperson provides an oral summary of the findings of the panel.

C REPORTING

1. Immediately following the evaluation visit the QSE prepares a draft report and circulates it to panel members for confirmation of accuracy. A prompt reply (within 2-3 days) is required with any amendments or corrections. The report is then sent to the provider, and a response to any requirements and recommendations is invited.
2. The provider's response to the report, including any actions taken in response to any requirements or recommendations, is circulated to the Panel for consideration.
3. In making the final recommendation for course approval and accreditation the report will make separate reference to each criterion, and Panel members are asked to confirm (in writing) that all criteria have been met and that the report is accurate.
4. If all Panel members do not agree that all criteria are met, the procedure will be to prepare majority and minority reports to ITP Quality for a decision to be made.
5. Evaluation panel reports conclude with recommendations to ITP Quality who has the responsibility for the final decision on course approval and accreditation.
6. ITP Quality will then:
 - (a) approve or not approve the course as a degree level award for a stated period, subject to satisfactory reports; and
 - (b) accredit or not accredit the applicant to offer the degree.
7. The Panel is also required to nominate an external Monitor for the programme. This is usually (but not necessarily) one of the Panel members and the appointment is discussed with the provider during the evaluation visit. The role of the Monitor is to:
 - provide ITP Quality with the assurance that the programme, in the initial years of delivery, continues to meet the approval and accreditation criteria; and
 - make recommendations to the provider that will assist the provider maintaining and enhancing the quality of the qualification.