

30th Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

20th September 2021 from 10:00 am to 1:00pm

MS Teams Meeting

Meeting Note

Present: Anne Walsh - Committee Chair
Barbara Kelly - QQI Executive Member
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Aileen Ponton - International Expert
Bryan Fields - National Expert
Alan Power – National Expert
Hannah McGee – National Expert

Apologies: Niamh O'Reilly - Board Member
Achim Hopbach, International Expert

In attendance: Peter Cullen – Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
Ann Graves - QQI Secretary
Karena Maguire, QQI (Item 6.1)
Laura Flynn, QQI (Item 6.1)
Trish O'Brien, Consultant (Item 6.1)
Mary Sheridan, QQI (Item 7.0.1)
Walter Balfe, QQI (Item 7.4.1)

The Chair opened the meeting.

1 Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

2 Minutes of previous meetings.

The Minutes of the Meetings of the 29th Meeting, 14 June 2021, were **APPROVED** The minutes can be 'pp' signed in the Covid-19 context.

3 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.

No matters arising

4 Standards – review and development

No business

5 Strategic Approach

5.1 Chair's Report from the Board

The Chair noted that the Board had been addressed by Simon Harris, Minister with responsibility for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) who

outlined his commitment to an integrated education system for both further and higher education and training. He emphasised that the role of education to meet the diversity of demands is ever more important. There is a need to upskill, reskill and to provide flexible pathways for all learners and a need to overcome structural and systemic barriers.

The Chair advised that the Board had participated in a strategy meeting and workshop and that, following public consultation the draft strategy was welcomed particularly the proposed pillars and that there were no significant changes. The draft strategy articulates a mission that sustains public confidence in educational qualifications; values that encompass shared responsibility, a partnership approach, that encourages transparency, trust and excellence to ensure continuous improvement; and a mission to provide authoritative information on the diverse range of qualifications. The Chair noted that the Board welcomed the overall focus of the strategy on:

- Increasing the range of qualifications in the NFQ
- Developing a sustainable, diverse and agile qualifications system
- Approving programmes offered by providers and certifying learners, emphasising digital delivery
- Providing greater protection from financial loss to learners on programmes in private providers that lead to QQI awards
- Enhancing confidence through the awarding of the International Education Mark for learners in higher education and English language education
- Advising the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on quality assurance and qualifications matters
- Continuing to improve our services, the transparency of our costs and charges and our communications.

The Chair noted that in response to dealing with COVID 19 that QQI continues to be involved in the DFHERIS working arrangements in repose to COVID-19 and that QQI maintains ongoing working arrangements as part of the Government's *Covid -19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 – The Path Ahead*

The Chair noted that one of the risk items for QQI is the protection for enrolled learners, there is a risk that QQI is not sufficiently prepared to implement its legislative function. PEL provisions continue to be developed and this will be discussed under item 7.0.1 on the agenda.

6 PSC Reflection

6.1 Consultation Framework Review

The PSC noted the paper circulated Proposal for revised QQI Consultation Framework for discussion.

This report was commissioned by QQI and proposes a number of revisions and additions to the current consultation framework, which more accurately reflect current consultation practice and facilitate a more consistent approach when consulting with stakeholders. The approach included research based on the 2020 QQI stakeholder survey evaluation report in addition to a series of interviews with internal and external colleagues who were involved in some of the more significant QQI consultations which have taken place in previous years.

The Committee acknowledged the in-depth document which they agreed would be a useful resource that could be used widely by QQI. They welcomed the review and agreed the importance of targeting the appropriate contacts within stakeholder organisations from the outset and agreeing key point representatives.

The PSC also noted the importance of the inclusion of cohorts that are sometimes 'invisible' but with an important voice such as part-time professional learners. The executive agreed to contact NStep

and USI to ensure consultation will be all inclusive. The PSC noted that quality offices in provider bodies have a responsibility to disseminate information to their learners and to outline the importance of consultation. The PSC suggested that it would be useful to include an appendix.

The executive noted that while the framework will serve as an external communication to indicate the value that QQI puts on the consultation process, it is not intended to be uniform but will cover the various different methods used by QQI to consult.

The PSC noted that advising on policy is part of their remit and that consideration should be given to amending the Terms of Reference of the committee to include a procedural role that ensures that the executive has carried out consultation as required. The executive agreed to raise this with the QQI Board and provide an update at the next meeting of the committee.

7 Policy and Guidelines – review and development

7.0.1 PEL and the new legislative provisions, including the establishment of the Learner Protection Fund

The executive presented the QQI paper on Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) and the new legislative provisions. The paper has been submitted to DFHERIS with the intention of informing and guiding discussion on the new PEL Scheme and raising awareness of some of the complexities arising. Ministerial Regulations will govern the Learner Protection Fund. QQI will be responsible for establishing, maintaining, and operating the Fund.

The paper addresses the issue of the transition for providers from existing arrangements to the new scheme, and the challenges that the new scheme will present for QQI ICT systems.

In preparation for the transition to the new PEL arrangements, a significant project is underway to confirm the integrity and completeness of the data that QQI holds in relation to the PEL arrangements currently in place for every required programme. DFHERIS has indicated that it intends to consult on the establishment of the Learner Protection Fund.

The PSC noted that issues that need to be addressed – GDPR/finance/IT build and extension of scope could be seen as the perfect storm. However, the paper addresses these complexities and interrelationships between them.

The executive advised that management of the fund by QQI is legislated for and it will be complex. Publicly funded providers are exempt and where public providers engage external provision this is also exempt. Where private providers offer public programmes such as Skillnets, the learners on these programmes are also exempt.

The executive further noted that while corporate fitness and PEL are both complex areas there is a lot of work being carried out in QQI internally and that an online form will be ready to go to all providers in order that the Department can start the fund.

An update will be provided to the committee early in 2022. The paper was NOTED

7.1 Policy Review Schedule - No Business

7.2 Approval of minor modifications - No Business

7.3 Green Papers - No Business

7.4 Modification to Sectoral Convention 3 on Repeating for Honours in QQI's 'Assessment and Standards'

The executive presented the documents circulated.
Modification to Sectoral Convention 3 on Repeating for Honours in QQI's 'Assessment and Standards'
Public HEI Practice 2021
Feedback from Private HEIs on Sectoral Conventions Number 3

The executive propose replacing Sectoral Convention 3 with the following:

Revised Sectoral Convention 3 on Determination of Award Classification

Calculation of the award classification shall be based on the credit-weighted mean value of the allowable grades (i.e. those that contribute to the classification) for modules of a specific programme which has been validated by QQI or by a recognised institution for the purpose of making the award.

A learner may claim exemption from a module whose grade would otherwise contribute to the award classification, provided that he or she can demonstrate the attainment of the relevant knowledge, skill and competence. In cases where the attainment cannot be graded fairly and consistently, only an unclassified award shall be available.

Procedures for exemption and/or pass by compensation shall not compromise national standards for awards.

When a module whose grade is designed to contribute to the determination of an award classification is failed on the first attempt, the maximum achievable grade shall be capped at Pass for any and all subsequent attempts and the capped grade shall be used in the determination of the award classification which is not capped at Pass.

The change to Sectoral Convention 3 will only apply to awards made after its adoption by QQI i.e., there will be no retrospective change to the classification of awards already made.

The PSC noted that a white paper will be written up based on the proposal which will go to public consultation, the proposal addresses the embargo on repeating – the model will be a short paper inviting feedback from stakeholders, particularly the designated awarding bodies, student representatives, PSRBs, employers and others with an interest in how higher educational qualifications are classified. The committee further speculated that there will likely be more honours degrees as an outcome but that this is a fairer way for learners.

The committee agreed that the research presented speaks for itself, implementation is diverse in nature and has developed over time.

Having considered the proposal, the PSC APPROVED the proposal for consultation.

7.5 Final Decision on Guidelines – No Business

7.6 Policy Advice – No Business

8 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions - No Business

9 Notable new publications since the last PSC meeting

[Irish doctoral student experience and standard of awards endorsed by international report \(qqi.ie\)](#)

[QQI early exploration into Micro-credentials in Higher 2014 2020](#)

NOTED

10 Any other business

The Chair noted the absence from the meeting by Achim who was involved in an accident and on behalf of the members of the committee expressed best wishes to him.

Next meeting – 15 November 2021

Meeting ended