

33rd Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

7 July 2022 from 10:30am to 1:30pm

Hybrid Meeting

Meeting Note

Present: Anne Walsh - Committee Chair
Achim Hopbach, International Expert
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Hannah McGee – National Expert
Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member
Damien Owens - National Expert (part)
Aileen Ponton - International Expert (online)
Alan Power – National Expert (online)
Peter Rigney – National Expert (online)

In attendance: Peter Cullen – Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
John O Connor, QQI (Item 4.1)
Cliona Curley (Item 8.1.1)
Mary Grennan (Item 8.1.2)
Katherine Walsh, QQI, Minutes.

Apologies: Ann Graves – QQI Secretary
Niamh O'Reilly - Board Member

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the Committee.

1 Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

2 Minutes of previous meetings.

The minutes of the 32nd Meeting, 21 March 2022, noted.

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes which can be 'pp' signed in the Covid-19 context.

3 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.

There were no matters arising.

4 Standards – review and development

4.1 Level 1-4 Consultation

An update on a change in approach to how QQI determines and establishes award standards in further education and training was provided. A project of work known as ‘broad standards at levels 1-4’ is ongoing and is the result of extensive stakeholder engagement since 2016. The existing structure of QQI awards at these levels follows the CAS (common awards standards) structure. CAS award standard specifications are highly specified, and their use is governed by detailed rules and procedures. The CAS structure is resource intensive to maintain and is proving difficult to react to demands for greater responsiveness and flexibility in programme design and delivery. The development of broad standards at NFQ levels 1-4 intends to offer providers greater scope to develop more responsive solutions to the needs of learners while maintaining sufficient reliability and consistency across providers offering comparable programmes.

Twenty-one broad standards are under development, these are a mix of core competences such as literacy, digital competence, sustainable development and citizenship at NFQ levels 1-4 and vocationally oriented award standards in administration, ICT, agriculture and retail at NFQ levels 3-4.

The draft standards will be published for consultation in the autumn. Users of the draft standards will be invited to comment on the appropriateness of the learning outcomes articulated in the draft standards and on the implementation of the draft standards in practice.

The committee noted the update.

5 Strategic Approach

5.1 Chair’s Report from the Board

The Chair presented a report from the meeting of the Board.

The Chair noted the QQI office layout has been reconfigured with the aim of having hot desks which offer flexibility in the workplace and ensures the space is fit for purpose and in line with government legislation. There will be a phased return to the office for staff, however in the interim, IT and MS teams is facilitating staff to communicate and work effectively from home.

The Chair outlined the recent QQI statistics in relation to certification, validation and re-engagement and highlighted the increased promotion of micro credentials and the increased interest evidenced by the number of micro-credentials seeking validation. QQI’s validation process has been adapted for micro credentials. Providers want to promote small awards (minor and special purpose awards) as micro credentials. Overall, 2022 certification numbers are up from 2020 and 2021.

In relation to “The Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025”, there are big ambitions to encourage engagement from employers. There are also plans to move apprenticeships to a new single apprenticeship model.

Regarding quality review and monitoring activities, reviews of ETBs are now complete and DAB quality reviews and quality dialogue meetings are ongoing. The inaugural Cinnte Review for the Technological University Dublin (TUD) took place recently with the TCD Cinnte Review currently underway. The next phase of Cinnte Reviews will include the recently established technological universities.

Further work on the governance of apprenticeships and the question of delegated authority is being reviewed.

In relation to the review and development of the new Qualifax website, this work has now commenced with discovery meetings taking place with relevant staff and the consultancy firm.

Work continues on RPL (there was a recent presentation to the QQI Board on RPL by the QQI executive) which is driven by EU guidelines, ensuring that learners receive recognition of prior learning. A memorandum of understanding is currently in place with SOLAS to ensure recognition of micro-credentials.

There has been high level engagement with PSRBs-- Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval.

The Chair confirmed invitations to the QQI 10-Year Anniversary Conference (18-19 October 2022) have been circulated to stakeholder and registration to same is now live.

6 PSC Reflection

6.1 Membership of PSC – balance of expertise

Due to the term of the QQI Board, the PSC Committee membership is due to change shortly, the Chair emphasised the importance of having all stakeholders represented on the Committee. One suggested including learner representatives, perhaps someone from HE and someone from FE. Another mentioned the importance of views from apprenticeship. Another mentioned the issue of learner diversity and the challenge of finding a student who can represent this vast diversity and suggested looking towards the parts of the student body that may be underrepresented e.g., apprenticeship. One suggested we need representatives of labour market actors.

The Chair will bring this feedback to the QQI Board.

6.2 Aileen Ponton: valediction

Aileen Ponton in her valediction as a member of the PSC Committee thanked QQI and the PSC members and noted the PSC as a rich source of information with a large scope and range of activities. She paid tribute to the Chair and her ability to navigate through tricky agendas and complemented the high levels of professionalism of the papers and the interest and expertise that members contributed to the committee. She highlighted that QQI continues to operate in turbulent and challenging times and noted its really good work on the impact on learners. She also noted the new structure and observed that it may need to evolve as implementation happens e.g., the introduction of listed awarding bodies; the coherence of the tertiary education system; the continued review and enhancement of the NFQ in the context of growth in demand for micro credentials; changes in approaches to quality assurance and digital interventions. She noted the role of QQI in Europe and how it has led initiatives there.

The Chair and members of the Committee thanked Aileen Ponton for her expertise, invaluable diligent analysis of documentation and the quality of her constructive feedback and insight.

7 Policy Stocktake and Roadmap

7.1 Policy Stocktake – Roadmap

The policy stocktake roadmap is a comprehensive, live excel list of policies due to be submitted and reviewed by the committee, with three significant papers to be considered today. A number of changes to the website have taken place recently and an updated version of the roadmap will be presented at the next meeting.

8 Policy Development and Review

8.1.1 Amended Legislation Policy Development Plan Update

The committee was asked to consider and approve the accompanying Criteria and Guidelines on the draft ministerial regulations in relation to Capacity and Capability of Providers (Due Diligence) and note the update on Protection of Enrolled Learners. The committee considered and discussed the documents.

The PSC APPROVED the Draft Ministerial Regulations in relation to Capacity and Capability of Providers (Due Diligence) with accompanying Criteria and Guidelines and noted the update on Protection of Enrolled Learners.

8.1.2 Draft Codes of Practice for IEM

The Committee was requested to consider and approve the first drafts of the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners: English Language Education and the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education and Training to International Learners and also to consider the submission of the White Papers of the two Codes of Practice.

The International Education Mark (IEM) is intended to attest to the quality of providers and their programmes/awards, be recognised internationally and mark Ireland as a destination of choice for international learners.

There are two IEMs, one for Higher Education and one for English Language Education, and the mark is underpinned by:

- due diligence requirements for private providers
- a statutory learner protection fund to protect international learners
- statutory codes of practice for providers

The following points were noted:

- The HE and ELE Codes of Practice were circulated to both internal and external HE and ELE stakeholders as well as the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- The Code of Practice for English Language Education embeds compliance with a formal QA system for ELE provision in Ireland and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

- ELE Quality Assurance Guidelines are currently being developed and providers will be offered briefing sessions on the development of their curriculum and syllabus. The briefing sessions will take place in Q3 and are an opportunity for engagement with both mature and newly established providers, to increase awareness and assist providers to update their programmes accordingly.
- As the ELE sector is quite specific, with international and non-EEA students, the ELE quality assurance guidelines are intentionally quite specific, prescriptive and detailed promoting a high quality of regulation in our education system.
- An IEM Policy Document is currently being drafted due to the importance of the IEM quality mark and the broader attesting to the quality that will be placed on the IEM brand to promote Irish education internationally. As the IEM will have multiple users, a Branding Group has been formed to review the IEM as a brand quality mark in the Irish education system. An ancillary paper on the branding and communication of the IEM is currently being compiled in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland and Education in Ireland.
- Discussions currently ongoing with the academic integrity network and stakeholders highlighting the IEM and the inclusivity of 'academic integrity' as a core component to both national and international students.
- The Committee proposed the IEM be included in all International Education Strategy documentation, confirming high standards of education in the ELE and HE sector which also includes the international sector.

The PSC APPROVED the First draft of Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners: English Language Education and the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education and Training to International Learners.

8.2 Approval of Minor Modifications - No business

8.3 Green Papers - No business

8.4 White Papers - No business

8.5 Final Decision on Guidelines - No business

8.6 Policy Advice - No business

9 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions - No business

10 Notable new publications

- Quality in the Irish Private and Independent Higher Education Institutions (March 2022)
- Evaluation of the Comparability of the Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate Qualifications (April 2022)
- Quality in Irish Public Higher Education Institutions (May 2022) Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (May 2022)

11 Any Other Business - No business.

11.1 Paperless Meetings

The Committee agreed to receiving electronic (digital) copies of documentation for future meetings unless a member of the Committee specifically requests to receive hard copies of same.

Next meeting - 19th September 2022.

Meeting ended.