36th Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

27 March 2023 from 2pm to 5pm

QQI Offices, Denzille Lane, Dublin 2

Meeting Note

Present: Alan Power - Temporary Committee Chair, National Expert
Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member
Damien Owens - National Expert
Cassy Taylor - International Expert
Hannah McGee – National Expert (Virtually)

In attendance: Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
John Connors – QQI (Item 4.1, Item 4.2 & Item 8.7.1)
Órla Barry - QQI (Item 8.6.2) (Virtually)
Mary Grennan - QQI (Item 8.1.1 & Item 8.5.1)
Walter Balfe – QQI (Item 8.4.1 & Item 8.7.2)
Trish O'Brien - QQI (Item 8.6.1) (Virtually)
Rebecca Doyle - QQI Secretary

Apologies: Achim Hopbach - International Expert
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the Policies and Standards Committee (hereafter Committee) members.

1   Declaration of Interest.
No declarations of interest were expressed by any member.

2   Minutes of previous meetings.
The minutes of the 35th Meeting, 21 November 2022, were agreed and signed by the chairperson.

3   Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.

It was raised that at the previous meeting (three) further papers concerning listed awarding bodies (LABs) were anticipated to come before the Committee early in 2023, the Executive stated that these were likely to come before the Committee at the June 2023 PSC meeting.

4   Standards – review and development

4.1   Temporary Modification of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System

The Executive presented a paper on the Temporary Modification of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System for **APPROVAL**.

The specific proposal for APPROVAL was to *extend the Temporary Modifications of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System apart from the list below until a review and update of the CAS award standards is completed and further advice is available.*

- *Career Preparation and Planning in the vocational pool of award (Horticulture).*

- *Personal and Professional Development – in the vocational pool of awards Animal Care, Community Care, Health Service Skills, Community Health Services, and Youth Work.*

The Committee (PSC) initially approved QQI's 'Measures to Mitigate Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Programmes Leading to QQI Awards' in March 2020. These modifications, with several amendments to the original proposal, were further extended until 31 December 2022.

On 21 March 2022, the Committee approved the extension of the period within which providers can use the Temporary Modifications of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System until the end of June 2023. Feedback and case studies from the sector support the extension of the majority of the temporary modifications of rules for awarding in Common Awards System beyond the pandemic period.

The Committee welcomed this proposal and supported the need to extend the time period. A review and update of the CAS award standards needs to be completed for a better understanding of what is needed in the sector.

The PSC APPROVED the requested extension.

4.2   Transfer of responsibility for award standards in architecture from QQI to the RIAI

The Executive presented a paper on the Transfer of responsibility for Award Standards in Architecture and Awards Standards in Architectural Technology from QQI to the RIAI for **APPROVAL**.

The Awards Standards in Architecture were developed jointly by RIAI and HETAC. As RIAI has already adopted the original HETAC award standards, the transfer process would be straightforward and with the approval of the Committee, the RIAI would become the sole custodian of the Awards Standards in Architecture. RIAI made a proposal on this basis and QQI responded positively to this proposal. The paper sets out the interactions between QQI and the RIAI. In parallel, both organisations agreed to the establishment of a Memorandum of Cooperation to set out respective role, responsibilities, and shared interests. Originally brought to the PSC was also architectural technology, however throughout the course of the conversation it was deemed that this would cause issue as there is a competitive body for architectural technology. The executive subsequently submitted an updated paper to the committee requesting only that there is a transfer for responsibility for awards standards in architecture from QQI to the RIAI.

The committee welcomed the proposed transfer of the Awards Standards in Architecture to the RIAI.

The PSC APPROVED the Transfer for responsibility for Awards Standards in Architecture from QQI to the RIAI.

4   **Strategic Approach**

No business.

6   **PSC Reflection**
No business.

7   **Policy Stocktake and Roadmap**

7.1   Policy Stocktake – Roadmap
The Committee **NOTED** that there were no updates being presented to the Policy Stocktake – Roadmap document.

8 Policy Development and Review

8.1 Updates
8.1.1 Update on the consultation process for the following White Papers approved at the meeting in September 2022
- **Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners Feedback**
- **Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners Feedback**
- **Draft Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark Feedback**

The Executive presented a paper providing an update on the consultation process for the above White Papers concerning the International Education Mark that were approved at the meeting in September 2022 for **NOTING**.

During the consultation period, providers were also asked to submit an expression of interest (EOI) in the IEM to gauge demand. Regarding feedback on the above White Papers, QQI received 47 submissions in total during the consultation period. QQI also met 37 organisations/representative groups in the period 24 November 2022 to 14 March 2023 to discuss the White Papers.

The Executive focussed on two areas from the update paper that were the main areas of concern for providers during the consultation process. One area is IEM fees and charges, and this was raised by both Higher Education (HE) providers and English Language Education (ELE) providers. The other area related to concerns of smaller ELE providers about how the International Education Mark (IEM) would affect them. These providers were concerned about meeting both due diligence and ELE Code of Practice/QA Guidelines requirements. Provider concerns about the IEM fees and charges have been taken on board by QQI, and it will make every effort to arrive at a schedule for the IEM fees and charges that is fair, reflects the ability of different providers to pay them, has a clear rationale that is easily understandable, and meets the requirements of the legislation. Some ELE providers are concerned that the requirements set out in the ELE Code of Practice and QA Guidelines are not all applicable. It was suggested that QQI produce a short template to support providers that would help smaller providers to prepare to meet the IEM criteria.

The Committee welcomed the update. There was a discussion around the challenges that some providers will face, and it was felt that communication with providers will be key in both helping smaller providers apply for the IEM and explaining fees and charges to providers.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the update.

8.2 Approval of minor modifications
No business.

8.3 Green Papers
No business.

8.4 White Papers
8.4.1 Statutory Quality Assurance guidelines for [Providers of Programmes Supported by Digital Education][1]

---

[1] The working title of these guidelines was *Statutory Quality Assurance guidelines for Blended and Online Learning*. This was changed prior to submission of documents to the Committee.

The Executive presented a paper on Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Programmes Supported by Digital Education for **APPROVAL**.

QQI has committed to developing statutory quality assurance guidelines for providers seeking to offer programmes fully online i.e., without any in person contact between the provider and the learners and potentially to learners outside Ireland. These guidelines have now been developed in draft form. In recognition of the significant acceleration in development and implementation of online programmes since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, in 2022 QQI requested tenders from organisations with appropriate expertise to develop quality assurance guidelines for fully online programmes.

The first draft of the guidelines was received in January 2023 and was reviewed by the Executive. While the broad content and structure were accepted, there was feedback given and a revised version was received by QQI in early March 2023. The next phase of development is the publication of a further draft as a white paper stage of QQI's formal consultation process. It is intended that all stakeholders will have the opportunity to give their feedback on the draft guidelines.

The Committee welcomed the draft Statutory QA guidelines for Blended and Online Learning. There was discussion around how this would benefit learners and how the changing landscape can benefit learners and makes it more accessible. There was also discussion on how some learners prefer classroom-based programmes, that this needs to be considered and that there should be balance and flexibility involved.

The Committee APPROVED the Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Programmes Supported by Digital Education for public consultation.

8.5   Final Decision on QA Guidelines
8.5.1 Final Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers

The Executive presented Final Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers for **APPROVAL** as statutory quality assurance guidelines. The Executive noted that guidelines were developed as part of QQI's Amended Legislation Programme (ALP) and in consultation with key internal stakeholders, including those directly involved in the ALP, other QQI colleagues, external stakeholders, including provider representatives, international experts, and relevant government departments. The feedback from stakeholders, together with inputs from the Committee, was incorporated into the draft White Paper.

The QA guidelines are specific to ELE providers that come to QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of seeking authorisation to use the IEM. They are designed to be used by ELE providers, along with the ELE Code of Practice, when designing, implementing, and reviewing their quality assurance policies and procedures. Annex One sets out guidelines for providers on the alignment of ELE programmes to the CEFR. Annex Two sets out Guidelines for Assessment in ELE, which outline approaches to and principles of assessment in ELE and set out guidelines on the development and design of assessment for ELE.

The committee welcomed the finalised draft guidelines and suggested that making the guideline elements more visible and having sections more clearly labelled would make the document more accessible and less daunting for ELE providers.

The PSC APPROVED the Final Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers.

8.6   Policy Advice
8.6.1   Scoping a project on connectivity and collaboration between enterprise/employers/industry and other labour market actors and the education and training community including QQI

The Executive an overview presentation by the author of the paper "Scoping a project on connectivity and collaboration between enterprise/employers/industry and other labour market actors and the education and training community including QQI" presented for **DISCUSSION**.

This was a piece of work to scope a research project. The Executive wanted to establish the information flow between the labour market and educational providers and awarding bodies. The aim was to see how awards on the framework were helping the labour market.

The committee welcomed this report and found the themes to be well articulated and that it raised interesting questions for QQI to consider.

8.6.2   Twentieth Anniversary of the NFQ

The Executive gave an overview of the current plans in place to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the NFQ, which occurs this year.

QQI issued a request for quotes for a report to celebrate the NFQ anniversary. The report will be a high-level overview of 20 years of the NFQ focusing on achievements to date and opportunities for the future and will include a wide range of stakeholder perspectives. There will be an event in November to mark the twentieth anniversary of the NFQ. It is notable that the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is being evaluated this year and QQI has submitted feedback as part of this. It is also the European Year of Skills and QQI is hoping to register the conference as part of that. This anniversary presents an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of maintaining a mature framework while actively innovating.

The Committee thanked the Executive and welcomed this update.

8.7   Other Policy Business
8.7.1   Extension of pilot on using non-CAS QQI awards as credit towards a CAS major award

The Executive presented a paper on Extension of pilot on using non-CAS QQI awards as credit towards a CAS major award for **APPROVAL**.

In April 2022, a pilot on using non-CAS QQI award credit towards a CAS major award had been approved by the Policy and Standards Committee. To facilitate the pilot, QQI has made provision for the necessary technical and policy amendments. To date, the pilot has not been activated.

The committee welcomed this paper on the extension of pilot on using non-CAS QQI awards as credit towards a CAS major award. There was a discussion on why there has not been an uptake as of yet and what would be the criteria for judging them would be, as if demand grows, then it would need to be brought back to the PSC.

It was **AGREED** that the executive could submit an updated document to the Committee by email for consideration for approval. This item involved discussions at the meeting on 23 March and consideration of a supplementary paper arising from the discussions, that was circulated by email. Upon circulation of the supplementary information:-
  - The Committee was requested to approve an amended pilot as described in supplementary paper.

By email communication the Committee APPROVED the amended pilot.

8.7.2   Approval of temporary extension of Provider's scope of provision and related amendments to validated programmes

The Executive presented a paper on the approval of temporary extension of Provider's scope of provision and related amendments to validated programmes for **APPROVAL**.

In 2020, 2021 and 2022 the Committee sanctioned emergency extensions to the *approved scope of provision* for providers to enable them provide programmes online or using a blend of online and in-person activity owing to the COVID-19 restrictions. This approval is due to expire at the end of June 2023.

The changes that providers have made to their programmes under these sanctioned conditions have not yet all been reversed and it is the intention of many providers to retain these changes. This would require validation [of the modified programmes] by QQI. Some providers have already obtained QQI approval to develop new blended programmes. Others are waiting on the new QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for guidance on how best to adapt their quality assurance for the longer term.

The committee welcomed this paper on the approval of temporary extension of Provider's scope on provision. The committee felt that extending the expiry date to June 2024 is a valid ask and allows providers to have some guidance when applying for validation of blended and online learning.

The Committee APPROVED a temporary extension of Providers' scope of provision and related amendments to validated programmes to 30 June 2024.

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

10   Notable new publications

- [Community Education in FET (Solas Report)](#)
- [New report: Review of Consortia-Led Apprenticeships in Ireland | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)](#)
- [QQI publishes Trinity College Dublin quality review | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)
- [Extension: Temporary modifications of rules for awarding in CAS | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)](#)
- [Assessment and Confidence in HE Qualifications included in the NFQ – QQI Anniversary Funded Proposals | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)
- [QQI Award certification data and analysis 2022 | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)
- [Advice on artificial intelligence in education and training | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)](#)
- [Graduate outcomes for graduates with a disability (HEA Report)](#)
- [Graduate outcomes and socioeconomic status (HEA report)](#)

11   Any Other Business

Next meeting

26 June 2023.

Meeting ended.