39th Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

27th November 2023 from 2pm to 5pm

QQI Offices, Denzille Lane, Dublin 2

Minutes

Present: Kevin McStravock – Committee Chair
Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Hannah McGee – National Expert
Anne Naughton – National Expert
Cassy Taylor - International Expert (Virtually)
Achim Hopbach - International Expert (Virtually)

In attendance: Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
Beata Sokolowska – Item 5.1 – 5.5
Mairéad Boland (virtually) – Item 9.3.1
Órla Barry (virtually) – Item 9.4.1, 9.6.2, 9.6.3 and 9.6.4
Marie Gould (virtually) – Item 9.5.1
Mary Sheridan – Item 9.6.1
Rebecca Doyle - QQI Secretary

Apologies: Damien Owens - National Expert

The Committee Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the Committee.

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

2   Declaration of Interest.
There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

3   Minutes of previous meetings.
The minutes of the 38th meeting were agreed and signed by the chairperson.

4   Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.
4.1   Update on the International Education Mark
The Executive provided a verbal update on the International Education Mark.

- The tender for reviewers for the IEM has been published.
- The guidance handbook was published for consultation along with a template that providers will use in order to apply for the IEM.
- QQI has been working with the Department in order to finalise the fees and charges for providers, and work is progressing on the fees that will apply (application fee and annual fee) and the charges relating to the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) fund.
- There is ongoing work in the ICT-related development of the application portal.

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

5   Standards – review and development

5.1 Two Broad Award Standards at Levels 1-4 for Approval: Award Standards - Community Support Services and Award Standards - Multilingual (Core Competence)

The Executive presented two Broad Award Standards - Award Standards - Community Support Services (at NFQ levels 3-4), and Award Standards - Multilingual (Core Competence) at NFQ levels 1-4 for proposed for approval. Sixteen out of twenty broad award standards were approved by the PSC at the last meeting. The final two award standards, Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) and ICT are being finalised by the subject matter experts and are expected to be ready in December 2023. It is proposed that these would be sent to the PSC members for approval by email.

Discussion

The Committee noted the proposed new standards and supporting documents. During the Committee's discussion, members noted few areas in which there was ambiguity in the language. It was suggested that the levels be made clearer for providers. The Chair thanked members for the detailed feedback and noted that it will be taken on board where it can be.

On that basis, the Committee APPROVED the two Broad Award Standards namely: Awards Standards - Community Support Services and at NFQ Levels 3-4 and Award Standards - Multilingual (Core Competence), proposed at NFQ Levels 1-4.

5.2 Two Draft Broad Award Standard at Levels 1-4 Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) and Award Standards – ICT

The Executive presented two Awards Standards - Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) at NFQ levels 1-4 and Awards Standards – ICT at NFQ levels 3-4 for Noting, with the intention of seeking the Committee's approval for these two award standards by email once they have been finalised by the subject matter experts and are expected to be ready in December 2023. It was proposed that these be sent to the PSC members for approval by email.

Discussion

The Committee noted the draft new standards and supporting documents. During the Committee's discussion, there was discussion over the use of language in the two award standards. One member questioned how learner confidence could be assessed given that 'confidently' was used in the draft. The Chair thanked members for the detailed feedback and noted that it will be taken on board where it can be, e.g., polishing of the wording and specific points of feedback.

On that basis, the Committee NOTED the Awards Standards - Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) at NFQ levels 1-4 and Awards Standards – ICT at NFQ levels 3-4 with the expectation that these will be sent to Committee members for approval by email once they have been finalised.

5.3 Two awards standards for approval: Level 4 Special Purpose Award Enforcement Guarding and Level 4 Minor Award Enforcement Guarding Skills.

The Executive presented two Award Standards – Level 4 Special Purpose Award Enforcement Guarding and Level 4 Minor Award Enforcement Guarding for Approval. With QQI's approval, a Standards Development Group (SDG) was established to develop award standard(s) to meet the Enforcement Guarding requirements set out in The Private Security (Licensing and Standards) Regulations 2023. A public consultation took place from September 2023 - November 2023. Two responses were received. The original idea was to develop one qualification, which has evolved now into two qualifications.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the presentation on the two award standards for approval. There was significant discussion around the learning outcomes and how many of the learning outcomes related to 'in the moment' actions and whether there would be benefit in adding a learning outcome

relating to preparation. The Executive agreed that another learning outcome could be added to address this. It was suggested that this award should be added to the QQI's risk register. The Chair thanked members for the detailed feedback and noted that the changes to be taken on board.

On that basis, the Committee APPROVED the Level 4 Special Purpose Award Enforcement Guarding and the Level 4 Minor Award Enforcement Guarding.

5.4 Draft Outline Action Plan for Review and Updating of QQI Common Award Standards
The Executive presented a draft outline action plan for review and updating of QQI Common Award Standards. The Common Awards System (CAS) is an evolving system of QQI awards, made up of c. 1500 award standards at NFQ Levels 1 to 6. The CAS award standards in further education and training, cover major and non-major awards across NFQ levels 1-6. A Project Charter and has been approved by the Project Steering Group. The purpose of the project was to establish whether QQI maintains the CAS system or changes it. A request for quotations was issued. QQI received one submission and following evaluation, the submission has been accepted and the project team formed. The project involved a broad engagement with stakeholders.

Discussion
The Committee welcomed the draft outline action plan for review and updating of QQI Common Award System. The Committee questioned if QQI were confident they had the resources to do the amount of work required as it is a major overhaul. The Executive believes that it is achievable as the entire sector is in support of the overhaul, as changes are very much needed.

The Committee NOTED the Draft Outline Action Plan for Review and Updating of QQI Common Award System (CAS) standards.

5.5 Findings of the review of the following award standards and approval of their replacements:
   - **Level 6 Special Purpose Award Commercial Scuba Diving 6S20612**
   - **Commercial Scuba Diving Minor Award Level 6 6N20618**
   - **Level 6 Special Purpose Award Surface Supplied Inshore Diving 6S20621**
   - **Surface Supplied Inshore Diving Minor Award Level 6 6N20620**.

The Executive presented the findings of the review and the proposed replacements. Originally there were two standards in diving at level 6, however owing to the tightening of the international standards, they were never fully aligned to international standards. There is only one provider currently offering programmes leading to the diving awards in Ireland. QQI appointed the provider to conduct a review of the awards within their programmatic review.

Discussion
The Committee noted the findings. There was a question about the provider reviewing the standards while being the only provider offering the relevant awards and whether there was sufficient externality. The Executive responded that the review group included some who were not from the provider and had international and national inputs.

The Committee NOTED the findings of the review of the award standards and APPROVED their replacements.

5.6 Processes for approving awards standards
The Executive gave a verbal presentation about the processes for approving awards standards at the PSC. The current procedure is that draft award standards come to the Committee after public consultation, and considering comments given during the presentation of the levels 1-4 broad award standards at the last PSC meeting, the Executive asked if the PSC may wish to consider whether standards should be subject to approval prior to public consultation.

Discussion

The Committee discussed the pros and cons of making a change and whether this was a governance question or a methodological question concerning the development of standards. It was suggested that the guidance given to Committee members could be enhanced. The Committee noted that the Executive can, at its discretion, bring draft standards to the Committee at any stage for advice.

The Committee NOTED the processes for approving awards standards.

The general consensus was that there is not a particular appetite for standards to come to the Committee routinely prior to consultation.

6. Strategic Approach

6.1 Report from the Board

The Chair had no report from the Board which is scheduled to meet on 4 December.

7 PSC Reflection

No business.

8 Policy Stocktake and Roadmap

8.1 Policy Stocktake – Roadmap

The Committee noted that the Policy Stocktake and Roadmap document is a working document and is being updated continuously. This document lists existing and planned policy and standards related documents along with information that has been collected about plans for their review and development. There are some gaps in the information returned.

9 Policy Development and Review

9.1 Approval of minor modifications

No business

9.2 Green Papers

No business.

9.3 White Papers

9.3.3 Academic integrity policy (White Paper)

The Executive presented a white paper on Academic Integrity for approval. A suite of amendments made to the 2012 Act in 2019 included a provision that created new offences related to the facilitation of cheating, the advertising of cheating services, and the publication of such advertisements. The paper sets out QQI's intended approach to implementing this. An early version of the paper was discussed by the Policies and Standards Committee in October 2023. This paper incorporates the feedback received at the last Committee meeting as well as feedback provided during early consultation.

Discussion

The Committee commended the Executive for addressing the previous feedback. There was discussion about whether the white paper has sufficient coverage of research integrity. Overall, the Committee were pleased to see how the feedback has been incorporated in and interested to see what comes back in from the public consultation. The public consultation will take place in the New Year and will be open for 10 weeks.

The Committee APPROVED the Academic Integrity Policy (White Paper).

9.4 Final Decision on Guidelines

9.4.1 Quality Assurance Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies

The Executive presented Quality Assurance Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) for approval. These statutory, sector-specific QA guidelines address the responsibilities of LABs in the context of inclusion of their awards within the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). These statutory quality assurance (QA) guidelines are specific to LABs that come to QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of:

- establishment as a LAB
- inclusion of awards within the Framework.

These Quality Assurance Guidelines were brought to the Committee before and have gone out for public consultation. There was generally broad support for the policy documents and minor amendments have been made following the consultation period.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the proposed Quality Assurance Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies and commended the work. It discussed the title of the document: as much of the document is concerned with the LAB monitoring the associate providers should the title reflect this? However, it was noted that the Guidelines are for LABs, with whom QQI has a direct relationship in this context, and it is their responsibility to guide their own associated providers.

The Committee APPROVED the Quality Assurance Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies.

9.5 Policy Advice
9.5.3   Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes Based on the European Approach

The Executive presented a white paper on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes Based on the European Approach for approval. The European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was developed to ease the process for quality assurance of joint programmes, it was adopted by the Ministries in 2015. The proposed procedures are being established to enable QQI to respond to a request to conduct an evaluation of a joint programme using the European Approach. Draft procedures were circulated for information and feedback to the Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs), Irish Universities Association (IUA) and Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), and to the National Forum of Irish EU partners.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the white paper. There was a discussion about whether this would add to the QQI's workload and if QQI would be charging a fee for this. The Executive does not envisage that it will receive many requests for this service, these procedures enable QQI to respond to a request if needed.

The Committee APPROVED the white paper on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes Based on the European Approach.

9.6 Other policy business
9.6.1   Due Diligence Criteria and Guidelines

The Executive presented a paper on Due Diligence Criteria and Guidelines for noting. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 provides a legal basis for QQI to be able to look at the background of providers. All providers will have to provide information to QQI for QQI to determine whether they meet the criteria. An online interactive portal is currently under development to facilitate the assessment of providers by QQI.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the paper on due diligence criteria and guidelines. There was a question from the Committee on if there is a mechanism in place for the information submitted to be checked

professionally. The Executive outlined its plans in that regard. There was a question about appeals. The Executive clarified that the standard statutory appeals mechanism would apply.

The Committee NOTED the paper on Due Diligence Criteria and Guidelines.

9.6.2 Report on QQI's consultation on white papers related to the development and implementation of the Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) scheme

The Executive presented a report on QQI's consultation on white papers related to the development and implementation of the Listed Awarding Bodies scheme for noting. QQI published three White Papers on the development and implementation of the LABs scheme for public consultation. The following White Papers were issued as part of the consultation.

- Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Listed Awarding Bodies engaging with QQI on a voluntary basis.
- Core Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs),
- Core Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

QQI received 14 written submissions during the consultation period and two verbal submissions. There is demand for the scheme which is an important signal form the sector. Overall, the feedback was supportive. The Committee welcomed the report.

The Committee NOTED the report on QQI's consultation on white papers related to the development and implementation of the Listed Awarding Bodies scheme.

9.6.3   Policies and Criteria for Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies

The Executive presented the Policies and Criteria for Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies for endorsement. The listing of an awarding body is a regulatory process that determines if an organisation is an appropriate body, with reference to specified awards, to make those awards. LABs will be listed on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ). LABs can apply to QQI to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the policies and criteria for establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies. The Committee commended the document's clarity. There was discussion around the minimum requirements for being deemed an established awarding body. The Executive explained that nearly every provider that has shown an interest in becoming a LAB has been in existence for more than 20 years. They should meet the minimum requirements to be classed as an emergent awarding body.

The Committee ENDORSED the *Policies and Criteria for Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies*.

9.6.4 Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework

The Executive presented the *Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework* for endorsement. The inclusion of awards within the Framework is a regulatory process that determines if an award should be included within the Framework. Awards which are included within the National Framework of Qualifications will be listed on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ). The Committee welcomed the *Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework*.

The Committee ENDORSED the *Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework*.

10   Notable new publications

- [A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training](#)
- [QQI Consultation on Draft Broad Award Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4](#)
- [At a Glance - QQI's Public Consultation on a Suite of Draft Broad Award Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4](#)

- [QQI Insight: Quality in Irish Higher Education](#)

11 Any Other Business

The Chair acknowledged that Alan Power, who was temporary Chair of the Committee, has formally resigned owing to a change of role. He expressed gratitude to Alan for his valuable contributions to the work of the PSC as a member and for taking on the role as temporary Chair.

In closing the Chair thanked the members of the Committee and the QQI Executive for their contributions and participation in the meeting.

Next meeting

The meeting dates for the first two PSC meetings of the year were confirmed.

Meeting ended.

Addendum to 39th Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee.

Following on from the November PSC, as mentioned in Item 5.1, the final two award standards, Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) were sent to committee members via email in January 2024. The committee members welcomed the award standards for Mathematical and Numerical (Core Competence) and considered them clear and understandable. **The award standards for Mathematical and Numerical were APPROVED by committee members.** The committee members also welcomed the award standards for ICT. **The award standards for ICT were APPROVED by committee members.**