41st Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

25th November 2024 from 2pm to 5pm

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Note of the Meeting

Present: Kevin McStravock – Committee Chair
Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Anne Naughton – National Expert
Damien Owens - National Expert
Eithne Guilfoyle – National Expert
Cassy Taylor - International Expert
Caty Duykaerts – International Expert

In attendance: Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
Órla Barry – Items 9.2.1 and 9.5.1
Naomi Oldenburg – Item 9.2.2
Barbara Kelly – Item 9.6.1
Rebecca Doyle - QQI Secretary

The Committee Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the members and QQI staff in attendance.

1 Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

2 Minutes of previous meetings.

The minutes of the 40th Meeting, 25th June 2024, agreed by the Committee Chair.

3 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.

No business.

4 Introductions
4.1 Eithne Guilfoyle

The Chair welcomed Eithne Guilfoyle as a new member of the Committee and invited her to introduce herself to the members of the PSC.

Eithne has held postdoctoral fellowships at McGill University and at MIT, and taught at McGill University, Queen's University (Ontario) and the University of Calgary. She served as the first Head of Humanities at IADT from 1999-2004. In 2004, she joined Dublin City University as the Executive Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, a role she held until 2011. Subsequently, she served as the Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Dublin City University from 2012 to 2020. Since retiring from Dublin City University in 2021, she has continued her linguistic research and has served as an external member of boards and committees in various Higher Education Institutions. In 2023, she led the revision of the National Framework for Doctoral Education.

The members welcomed Eithne and looked forward to working with her in the future.

4.2 Caty Duykaerts

The Chair welcomed Caty Duykaerts as a new member of the Committee and invited her to introduce herself to the members of the PSC.

Caty is the former Director of Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur (AEQES). Caty was a language teacher for 21 years, then director of a large adult educational & vocational centre located in Brussels. Since October 2008 through her work with AEQES, she was responsible for implementing external evaluation procedures in the Belgian French-speaking higher education system (6 universities, 19 university colleges, 16 art schools & conservatoires and 80 adult education centres). Since retiring, she is a member of the UKÄ International Advisory Committee and was previously an ENQA representative in the HAQAA initiatives 1 and 2 (Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation) and was also the Vice-chair of ENQA.

The members welcomed Caty and looked forward to working with her in the future.

5.   Standards – review and development

No business.

6.   Strategic Approach

6.1 Report from the Board since the last meeting

As the Committee Chair was absent at the last board meeting, Anne Naughton, who is also a board member, provided an update from the September Board meeting.

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, and Committee members were advised of the gaps.

9   Policy Development and Review
9.1 Approval of minor modifications
No business.

9.2 Green Papers
9.2.1 Green Paper on Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6
The Executive presented a Green Paper on Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 for Approval. Since the establishment of the NFQ, there has been frequent discussion about the placement of separate further and higher education award types at NFQ Level 6, in the form of the Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate award types, respectively. The purpose of the green paper is to propose the development and implementation of a move to a single major award type at NFQ Level 6 and describe the knock-on impacts on NFQ Level 5.
The Committee welcomed the Green Paper on Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6.

A discussion took place after which the Chair thanked members of the Committee for their contributions and the Executive for presenting. It was suggested that an executive summary be

added at the beginning of the paper to help make the paper clearer and more accessible for the public consultation.

The Committee approved the Green Paper on Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6.

9.2.2 Green Paper on QQI's Access, Transfer and Progression Policy
The Executive presented a Green Paper on QQI's Access, Transfer and Progression Policy for approval. The Green Paper sets out the proposal for a new QQI policy on access, transfer, and progression (ATP) providing key background to the functions of ATP and setting out high-level principles for awarding bodies and providers in developing and updating their own ATP policies and procedures.

The Committee welcomed the Green Paper on QQI's Access, Transfer and Progression policy. It was felt that although it is a substantial paper, it reads very well, and a lot of work has gone into it.A discussion took place after which the Chair thanked members of the Committee for their contributions and the Executive for presenting. It was suggested that an executive summary be added at the beginning of the paper to help make the paper more readable for the audience in the public consultation.

The Committee Approved the Green Paper on QQIs Access, Transfer and Progression policy.

9.3 White Papers
No business.

9.4 Final Decision on Guidelines
No business.

9.5 Policy Advice
9.5.1 Programme for Policy Review of NFQ
The Executive presented a Programme for Policy Review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to the Committee for noting. The NFQ is over 20 years old but has never been fully reviewed in the 20 years of its existence. A priority of the QQI Statement of Strategy 2025-2027 is to future-proof the National Framework of Qualifications as the authoritative information source for quality assured tertiary qualifications. The review will be action oriented with a three-pronged approach:
- a revised and updated policy framework for the NFQ and
- clear, documented strategies for the maintenance and implementation and,
- promotion and communication of the NFQ going forward.

QQI's role in relation to the NFQ extends beyond policy development and review. As such the review will have three strands:
- Policy review and update
- Maintenance and implementation
- Promotion and communication

The Executive noted that it is an ambitious programme, which will take about 6 years to complete, with 3 years of intensive policy work involved.
The Committee welcomed the paper on the Programme for Policy Review of the NFQ. The Committee felt that the paper was very well structured, and existing projects that are going on are explained very clearly. It was seen by the Committee as an exciting piece of work and very welcome in the industry. One member observed that it was great that the QQI board had adapted it as a core priority for the next three years in the Statement of Strategy, and that it will help solve a lot of the problems currently in the system, and although not all issues can be resolved, steps will be put in place in order to address some of the key issues from the current NFQ that is over 20 years old.

The Committee NOTED the Programme for Policy Review of NFQ.

9.5.2 Titling of non-major awards included in the NFQ

The Executive presented a paper on the titling of non-major awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The paper relates to an attempt to agree a proposal for a convention on the titling of NFQ minor, special-purpose, and supplemental classes of awards with the designated awarding bodies, the analysis and discussion of the feedback on the proposal and the actions proposed following failure to achieve the required consensus.

The proposal was intended to help make the relevant award titles more meaningful to learners and employers by aligning the title stems with the credit volume by using "certificate" in the stem of relevant awards involving fewer than 60 ECTS and "diploma" for those involving 60 ECTS or more. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) had previously agreed a sectoral convention on the titling of non-major awards in 2009. Some institutions have been implementing this, while others appear to have forgotten about the document.

The Committee welcomed the paper on the titling of non-major awards included in the NFQ and a discussion took place

The Committee advised on the paper entitled "Report on QQI's consultation with DABs on the titling of minor, special-purpose, and supplemental classes of awards and recommendation".

9.6 Other policy business

9.6.1 Awards directorate overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027

The Executive presented an overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Awards Directorate.

There are five main areas in the awards directorate that are the focus in the strategic approach going forward:

- Review of QQI as an Awarding Body
- Transitioning from the Common Awards System model (CAS) to a Programme Derived Awards model
- Evaluating blended/online learning applications for programme validation
- Enhancing the quality of the existing suite of FET programmes
- Supporting the move to a single, integrated apprenticeship model.

The Executive also wanted to acknowledge that the Head of Quality Assurance, Walter Balfe, will be retiring at the end of the year and highlight his role in bringing these strategic priorities to fruition.

The Committee NOTED the presentation on the overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Awards Directorate.

9.6.2 Development directorate overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027

The Executive presented an overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Development Directorate.

There are three divisions that fall under the development directorate:

- International Mobility and Recognition Division
- International Education Division
- Research and Innovation Division

The Committee NOTED the presentation on the overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Development Directorate.

9.6.3 Integration directorate overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027
The Executive presented an overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Integration Directorate.

One of the key priorities in the strategic plan is around the future proofing of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), and as a key component of that is the responsibility of Qualifax and reforming the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) which will compliment Qualifax and then ultimately replace it. There is also the implementation of the Listed Awarding Bodies (LAB) Scheme, the first two applications are expected to be in next year. Another main priority is in the Tertiary Education Monitoring and Review Division and engaging with further and higher education providers to develop appropriate models for future institutional quality review and what these will look like. There will also be a focused review on access, transfer and progression and how individual institutions have a responsibility in this area to adhere to QQI's access, transfer, and progression policy.

Another area that is a strategic priority is increasing autonomy and flexibility for private higher education providers by granting them delegated authority to make their own awards, with effective quantitative and qualitative monitoring to ensure oversight of quality.

The Committee NOTED the presentation on the overview of work to be completed over the next number of years as outlined in the Statement of strategy 2025 – 2027 in the Integration Directorate.

The Committee thanked the Executive for their presentations on the work to be completed over the next few years. One member commented on the volume of work that is expected to be completed and questioned if resourcing or financial issues might have an impact on implementing the work across the organisation. The Executive detailed how the organisation has core funding and how the strategic plan was signed off by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, so they are aware of the resources and funding needed to implement the strategic plan over the next three years. If needed, priorities can be identified within the strategic plan, however core business processes need to continue throughout.

9.6.4 Policy Review and Development Framework, its implementation and update
The Executive presented a paper detailing the Implementing the QQI Policy Development and Review Framework to the Committee.

An earlier draft of the Policy Review and Development Framework was presented to the PSC Committee at the June meeting, although this document has been in existence for a while. The Committee welcomed this paper on the policy review and development framework and made some comments and suggestions.

The Committee APPROVED the Policy Review and Development Framework, its implementation and update.

10 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions
10.1 Revised Terms of Reference

The Executive presented minor modifications to the terms of reference which are tracked in the revised Terms of Reference document. These were approved by the Board at its September meeting. There were two changes to the Terms of Reference:

- The word 'straight' was replaced by the word 'simple' in the following sentence: While it is preferable that decisions are reached by consensus, if this cannot be achieved, decisions will be made by simple majority vote with the Chair having the casting vote;

- The sentence 'considered at the end of 2019 or in the intervening period' was replaced with 'reviewed from time to time'.

The Committee noted these minor modifications to the PSC Terms of Reference.

11 Notable new publications
- [QQI Insights: Quality in Irish Higher Education 2024](#)
- [QQI publishes new Integrated Award Standards for Business](#)
- [QQI publishes new procedures for the QA of Joint Programmes based on the European Approach](#)

12 Any other business

12.1 PSC Self-assessment evaluation survey

The Executive presented the PSC self-assessment evaluation survey, which was sent out to members in July this year. Feedback overall was very positive, with a few minor suggestions made on how to improve the running of the Policies and Standards Committee. One suggestion made was the possibility of having one Committee meeting a year as an online meeting.

The Committee NOTED the PSC self-assessment evaluation survey.

12.1 Next PSC meeting

The first PSC meeting for 2025 was provisionally agreed to be held on Monday, 24 February. The remaining PSC dates for 2025 are to be confirmed.

Meeting ended.