QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards

Application Guide

Contents

1.   Background

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (hereafter the 2012 Act) established conditions that must be fulfilled before a provider may apply to QQI for validation of a programme of education and training. Programme validation by QQI is a two-stage process. The first stage, among other things, enables the statutory conditions to be fulfilled and the second stage is the application for validation of a specific programme(s) for awards made by QQI.

It is important for applicants to appreciate that QQI sets standards for awards. It does not develop programmes for, nor give learner assessment support to, providers. Providers seeking access to validation must take responsibility for the development, maintenance, provision and internal quality assurance (QA) of their own programmes and procedures for the assessment of learners enrolled on those programmes.

QQI quality assures the providers of programmes that it validates. Therefore, it must ensure that there is a minimum capacity in place before a provider may access programme validation. This capacity will depend for example on the award-type, NFQ level and field of education and training.

Providers may also provide accredited education and training with other awarding bodies.

To enable a provider to seek access to QQI validation of its programme, education and training must be a principal function of that provider.

Programmes of education and training take place in a variety of contexts and for many purposes. Not all of them can or should be validated by QQI and not all require recognition within the NFQ.

1.1   Purpose of this guide

This guide to the application process will give providers of education and training information on the process that will be used by QQI to assess the capacity of applicants to offer education and training programmes leading to QQI awards.

Part 1 of the guide gives an overview of the process.

Part 2 of the guide gives guidelines to assist applicants to:
• complete the application form
• prepare a self-assessment document
• develop draft Quality Assurance procedures.

1.2   Relevant documentation

A range of essential and supporting documentation is available to providers i.e. policies and guidelines that will support applicants to meet the requirements of QQI. The documents listed below are available on www.QQI.ie in **Initial Access to Programme Validation**. Over time, QQI will add other documents that may help providers through this process.

Providers proposing to offer programmes leading to further education and training awards at NFQ Levels 1-6 should use the following set of documents to self-assess their capacity to meet QQI criteria, develop their quality assurance system and design and develop their programmes:

- QQI Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards, 2013
- Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes for Further Education and Training Leading to QQI Awards, 2013
- Common Awards System - Policy and Guidelines, revised 2013
- Validation of Programmes: Policy, revised 2013
- Guidelines for preparing programme descriptors for Further Education and Training Programmes, 2013
- Quality Assuring Assessment - Guidelines for Providers, revised 2013
- Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of part 6 of the 2012 Act
- Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of part 6 of the 2012 Act - Guidelines for Providers
- Schedule of Fees.

Providers proposing to offer programmes leading to higher education and training awards at NFQ Levels 6-10 should use the following set of documents to self-assess their capacity to meet QQI criteria, develop their quality assurance system and design and develop their programmes:

- QQI Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards, 2013
- Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes for Higher Education and Training Leading to QQI Awards, 2013
- HET Core Validation Policy and Criteria, revised 2013
- HET General Programme Validation Manual, revised 2013
- Assessment and Standards, revised 2013
- HET Named Awards, 2011
- HET Awards Standards Series
- Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of part 6 of the 2012 Act
- Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of part 6 of the 2012 Act - Guidelines for Providers
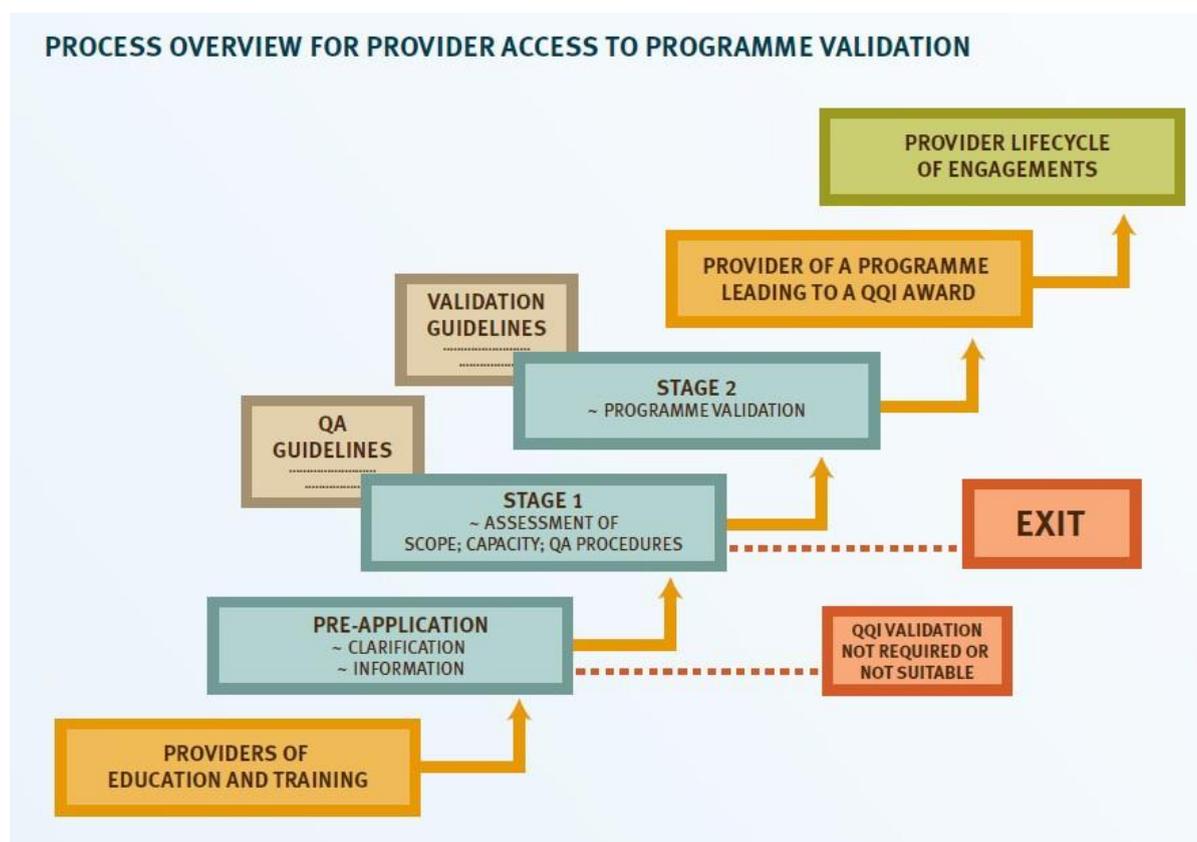- Schedule of Fees.

2. Overview of the Process

The overview of the access to initial validation process includes information on the role and responsibilities of QQI and of an applicant and timelines for completing the process.

Diagram of the Process

PROCESS OVERVIEW FOR PROVIDER ACCESS TO PROGRAMME VALIDATION

2.1 Principles of the process

The process is underpinned by the following principles:
- Commitment to making this process as fair, straightforward, transparent and consistent as possible.
- Adherence to agreed timelines.
- Effective provision of information. Regular briefings will be provided about the policy and process. It is not possible or appropriate for training, on-going support or consultation to be provided on any aspect of an applicant's submission.
- Confidentiality - QQI will treat all the information provided by an applicant as confidential in accordance with its Data Protection policy.

Note - QQI is subject to Freedom of Information legislation

2.2   QQI's responsibility

QQI is committed to providing an objective evaluation of each submission which will include the engagement of third party expertise.

QQI will evaluate each application on the basis of the scope of the provision an applicant is proposing to offer and its capacity to offer quality assured education and training to learners seeking QQI awards to which the programmes lead.

QQI is conscious of the variety of education and training providers and their many operating contexts. The approach of QQI to evaluation of each application will be proportionate to the provider's operating context.

At all times, QQI reserves the right to seek additional information from applicants that it considers relevant to an application.

2.3   Applicant's responsibility

Providers seeking access to validation are responsible for the development, maintenance, provision and internal quality assurance (QA) of their own programmes and the procedures for the assessment of learners enrolled on those programmes. Therefore, there is a minimum capacity which must be in place before a provider may access programme validation.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure submission of sufficient evidence as proof of capacity to provide learners with a well-supported learning experience which allows them to achieve the learning outcomes for the award class and level of QQI award sought.

3.   How the process works

3.1   Pre-application engagement

Active participation in this phase is a compulsory part of the process. It will ensure that providers interested in applying for initial validation of a programme(s) will have every opportunity to be fully informed before committing to a formal application.

3.2   How will a provider engage with QQI?

- An interested provider submits an Expression of Interest through QHelp on www.QQI.ie - Expression of Interest/Initial Validation - supplying the following information in the Comments box:
  - Name of entity/organisation/college/group
  - Contact details (telephone and email) and position of a contact person who will liaise with QQI
  - Website details
  - QQI awards it is proposing to offer - NFQ level and class of award.
- Expressions of Interest are automatically acknowledged by return email and a Reference Number assigned.

- Following the Expression of Interest, a provider will be invited to the next scheduled QQI briefing. These briefings will give information on the requirements of the process and commitments of a provider during its lifecycle engagement with QQI. There is no charge for these briefings.

An application for initial validation from a provider who has not attended a briefing will not be accepted.

3.3 How will QQI engage with interested providers?

It will be the responsibility of QQI to:
- Publish on its website the relevant application forms and guidelines required to make an application for initial validation.
- Send automatic email responses with a Reference Number which will be sent when an Expression of Interest is submitted. Queries are responded to in sequence within 5 working days. This response will give details of the briefing to which the provider will be invited.
- Arrange regular briefings. These briefings will be arranged to match the demand from providers. A provider who submits an Expression of Interest will be invited to a briefing to be held within one month (approximately) after the submission of an Expression of Interest.
- Make QQI staff available after each briefing to discuss a provider's individual circumstances. It is essential that providers are fully aware of all the implications of submitting a formal application for programme validation. Some providers, following a briefing and discussion, may decide that the submission of programmes for validation by QQI is not something they wish to pursue for a range of reasons.

4 Making an Application for initial programme validation leading to QQI awards - how to do it

Making an application to QQI is a two stage process:

Stage 1   Assessment of capacity and approval of QA procedures

Stage 2   Programme validation

Applicants must be successful at Stage 1 before they can proceed to Stage 2. The applicant will, following attendance at a briefing:

- Submit the following documentation on a **writable disc (CD-RW, DVD-RW)** and 6 copies of all documentation in separate ring binders
    - Application Form and supporting evidence
    - Completed self-assessment document
    - Draft QA Procedures and supporting documentation
- Pay the appropriate fee:
    - The schedule of fees is published here
    - This fee is non-refundable

Note that only when all elements have been submitted will an application be considered complete. Incomplete applications or incorrectly completed applications will not be accepted and will be returned to the applicant.

4.1   Stage 1 Assessment of capacity and approval of QA procedures - Role of QQI

The role of QQI will be to:
* Review all submitted documentation and screen each application to ensure that all the requested evidence has been submitted. Incomplete applications or incorrectly completed applications will be returned to the applicant by registered post. The applicant may resubmit within the timeframe provided. If resubmission is not received within this timeframe, the application is closed.
* Process applications only where the applicant has paid the appropriate fee.
* Acknowledge, with timelines for the completion of the process, to the applicant within 10 working days after a complete application is received. It is anticipated that Stage 1 will take a maximum of 25 weeks to complete.
* Establish a Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel to evaluate applications. The panel will be comprised of experts in governance, quality assurance and assessment in education and training. The panel membership and terms of reference will be published on www.QQI.ie
* Publish a schedule of meetings of this panel who will evaluate each application on the information and evidence provided by the applicant.
* Invite each applicant to an evaluation meeting with the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel.
* Make arrangements with applicants for a site visit (if required by the panel).
* Advise the applicant of the outcome of its Stage 1 application following a recommendation of the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel which will be considered under QQI's governance structures. Applicants will be informed no later than 21 days after the Approval and Review Committee meets.

4.2   The Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel

The Panel will:
* Meet at least 5 times a year to evaluate applicants draft Quality Assurance procedures and their capacity to meet the QA criteria set by QQI.
* Review all the documentation submitted by each applicant and any additional documentation prepared by QQI in relation to each application e.g. a report from a financial expert on the financial viability of an applicant based on the evidence submitted by the applicant.
* Meet each applicant to review its application and discuss the applicant's QA procedures. Four to six members of the panel will attend each evaluation meeting.
* Following the meeting with the panel, an applicant will be advised about a site visit - if recommended by the panel. This (where required) will normally be conducted in the 5 working days after the meeting with the panel.
* Following its evaluation of the application, make a recommendation to QQI about the approval of the applicant's QA and the scope of the provision it may submit for validation.

- If applicable, recommend a number of conditions that must be met by the applicant before a programme can be submitted for validation.

5. Outcome of Stage 1 - Assessment of capacity and approval of QA procedures

5.1 What are the outcomes of Stage 1?

The outcome of the process is determined by the 2012 Act.

2012 Act para.30 deals with the outcome of the evaluation of QA procedures as follows:

(2)   Upon consideration of the proposed procedures submitted to it under subsection (1), the Authority may

(a)   approve the proposed procedures,

(b)   refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make such recommendations to the provider as it thinks appropriate, or

(c)   in accordance with section 31, refuse to approve the proposed procedures.

5.2 Successful outcome - Approval of QA procedures

If the applicant is successful at Stage 1 of the process, it may submit for validation the programme(s) it has been approved to provide. Each applicant has up to a maximum of 6 months to submit the programme(s) for validation from the date of notification from QQI. If the programme(s) is not submitted within 6 months, the Stage 1 approval will lapse. Applicants will be required to make a new submission. The appropriate fee will apply.

5.3 Unsuccessful outcome - Non-approval of QA procedures with recommendations

Applicants who are refused approval with recommendations made by QQI, may resubmit their revised QA policies and procedures and additional evidence requested to demonstrate their capacity to meet the QA criteria by a date specified by QQI after the outcome has been notified to them. All the recommendations of QQI must be implemented in the resubmission. There is no fee charged for a resubmission. The Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel will evaluate the resubmission at its next scheduled meeting and make a recommendation to QQI. The outcome of that evaluation will be final i.e. Approval or Non Approval.

5.4 Unsuccessful outcome - Refusal to approve QA procedures

Applicants who are refused approval of their draft QA procedures and who fail to demonstrate their capacity to meet the QA criteria will be notified in writing and the reasons given for the refusal. Such applicants may submit observations to QQI for consideration by the Approvals and Review Committee within a specified time period.

6.   Stage 2 - Submission of Programme(s) for Validation leading to QQI awards

The applicant who is approved at Stage 1 of this process and is progressing to Stage 2 - the submission of programme(s) for initial validation leading to QQI awards will:

- Be required to attend a briefing on QQI validation requirements.
- Have a maximum of 6 months to submit a programme(s) for validation after approval at Stage 1.
- Where an applicant is approved to offer one or more programmes of further education and training leading to awards at levels 1-6 of the NFQ, the validation policy and procedures for the Common Award System (CAS) will apply.
- Where an applicant is approved to offer one or more programmes of higher education and training leading to awards at levels 6-10 of the NFQ, the HET Core Validation Policy and Criteria will apply.
- Pay the appropriate non-refundable fee for the validation of its programme(s). Evaluation will not commence until the fee is paid.

6.1   Role of QQI

- Arrange briefings for providers successful at Stage 1 on the Stage 2 process to inform them of the validation requirements in the context of the scope of provision they may apply to validate.
- Evaluate the submitted programme(s) according to the evaluation criteria for further or higher education and training - whichever is most appropriate to the scope of provision that has been approved at Stage 1.
- The evaluation will be undertaken by subject matter, industry and quality assurance experts appropriate to the programme. Two to five evaluators will conduct this evaluation. The number of evaluators will depend on the NFQ Level and complexity of the proposed programme. QQI will determine the number of evaluators assigned to each programme. A site visit will typically form part of this evaluation.
- The programme evaluators will make a recommendation to QQI about the programme(s) evaluated. They can also recommend conditions that must be met before approval and completion of the validation process.
- Following consideration of the evaluator's recommendation, inform the applicant of the outcome within a maximum of 25 weeks of the programme submission. Multiple submissions may take longer to process.
- Reports on the outcome of the process will be published on www.QQI.ie

7. Outcome of Stage 2 - Programme Validation

7.1 What is the outcome of Stage 2?

2012 Act para 45 deals with the outcome of the evaluation of programme validation

> ***45***.—*(1) Upon receipt of an application under section 44(5), the Authority may*
> *(a) subject to subsection (2), validate the relevant programme of education and training where the programme satisfies the criteria established by the Authority under section 44(1), or*
> *(b) refuse to validate the programme and give reasons for the refusal.*

7.2 Successful outcome - programme is validated by QQI

An applicant approved to offer a programme(s) leading to QQI awards will be committed to the lifecycle of providers engagements with QQI associated with programme validation: these include provision of information for learners, review and monitoring.

7.3 Unsuccessful outcome - programme validation is refused

An applicant who is refused validation for the programme(s) they have submitted may appeal the decision under the 2012 Act.

8. Timelines

QQI is aware that applicants will want an efficient process to enable them have programme(s) validated within a reasonable time frame.

It is anticipated that Stage 1 will take a maximum of 25 weeks and Stage 2 will take a maximum of 25 weeks.

However, QQI will put in place measures to shorten that time frame where possible by:

- Arranging regular briefings for providers who express an interest in this process.
- Meeting the deadlines given on screening applications.
- Adding further meetings of Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel if more than those scheduled are required.
- Communicate with applicants to ensure they are kept informed of the progress of their application.

Part 2   Submitting an Application

1.   What makes up an application?

Providers can only submit an application to QQI after they have attended a **mandatory briefing**.

A completed application is made up of the following:

(A)   Completed Application Form together with the documentation required to support the questions asked in the application form.
(B)   Self-assessment document against the criteria for access to validation.
(C)   Draft Quality Assurance Procedures.
(D)   Payment of the appropriate fee.

All four elements listed above are required for an application to be deemed complete.

A.   Completing the application form (the guide should be read in conjunction with the Application Form)

The application form is in 5 Sections:

Section 1   Applicant Details
Section 2   Ownership, management structure and control of the entity.
Section 3   Financial viability and resources
Section 4   Scope of provider's proposed provision: programmes leading to QQI awards other accredited/self-certified programmes
Section 5   Statutory Declaration

The application form should be saved to the applicant's system and completed electronically.

Section 1   Applicant Details

1.1   Name of legal entity applying

Note that the name of the legal entity may differ from the trading name(s).

1.2   Type of Legal Entity

The applicant shall be a clearly identifiable legal entity having rights and responsibilities under law, whether as a company, sole trader, partnership etc. properly constituted and registered, where appropriate, in accordance with the requirements of the Registrar of Companies, the Irish Revenue Commissioners and other relevant regulatory authorities.

Common types of legal entities are listed in the table below. Applicants must submit the appropriate evidence requested in the table below.

(Please note that further information/documents may be required in any given case).

Type of legal entity	Documentation that must be attached to **all** Application Forms: • Evidence of Registration with the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána (if applicable) • RBN1s for each trading name intended to be used by the applicant. Please note that all documents must be certified by the issuing Authority or certified as a true copy by the Applicant's solicitor/accountant.
Limited company	Copy of Certificate of Incorporation Current Memorandum and Articles of Association Current Company Printout from CRO
Sole trader	Copy of passport
Partnership	Copy of Partnership Agreement Certified list of all current partners
Trust	Copy of Trust Agreement
Other e.g. co-operatives	If none of the above, please supply full details of the legal status of the applicant entity with copies of supporting documentation.

1.3 Company Registration Number (CRO)

• This a unique number given to all companies registered with the Irish Companies Registration Office.

1.4 Registered business/trading name(s)

• An entity may have more than one registered business/trading name(s). List all registered business/trading name(s) the entity intends using. Indicate the business/trading name(s) that will be used when offering specific programmes leading to QQI awards.

1.5 List of registered domain name(s) and website addresses

• List all registered internet domain names and website addresses. As part of the Evaluation Process, QQI will review the website. This review will be used in the evaluation process. QQI seek clarifications from the applicant if on the website content, if necessary.

1.6 Address of applicant's parent company/organisation, if appropriate

- Address and details of parent company/organisation to include a contact at that location.

1.7 Principal place of business of applicant (if different from parent company address)

- Some applicants will have other locations from where business is conducted apart from the head office. If there are a number of locations, please amend the form to reflect additional locations.

1.8 Existing operations *within* Ireland

- QQI requires information about whether an applicant has business operations within Ireland and a brief description of the nature of those operations. This information is not restricted to education and training provision e.g. applicants may have a recruitment company, healthcare facility.

1.9 Existing operations *outside* Ireland

- QQI requires information about whether an applicant has business operations outside Ireland and a brief description of the nature of those operations and in what countries. This information is not restricted to education and training provision e.g. applicants may have a recruitment company, healthcare facility.

1.10 Education and training as a principal function

- QQI's criteria for access to programme validation requires applicants to have education and training as a principal function. Education and training is carried out in a range of contexts - there are providers whose sole purpose it is and there are others who have education and training as a key part of their operations e.g. hospitals.
- Many employers provide training for their staff. In some cases they outsource the delivery of that training because it is not a principal function. In other cases, they consider that training and education is a principal function.
- QQI will determine an applicant's principal function based on the evidence that is publically available (website, advertising material, strategic plan, annual reports). If applicants believe that what is publically available to meet this criterion is not sufficient, they should submit relevant documentation in support of their position.

1.11 Contact details for enquiries on the application for initial validation

- QQI requires contact details of a person who has the authority to liaise with QQI throughout the application process. The nominated person should be familiar with the application submitted and be in a position to respond to requests for clarification and/or information.

1.12 Compliance Statement

- QQI requires applicants to comply with all applicable law and regulation in Ireland. This is also a requirement if an applicant is operating in other jurisdictions. Examples include (but are not limited to) relevant legislation relating to financial management, equal opportunities, employment and health and safety. The responsibility is on the applicant to determine the relevant legislation for their particular context.
- If QQI become aware that applicants are non-compliant with any relevant all applicable law and regulation in Ireland and/or in other jurisdictions, it will suspend the processing of an application for initial validation until the issues have been resolved

Please note: If any change occurs with any of the details supplied on application during the Evaluation Process, QQI must be informed.

Section 2   Ownership, Management Structure and Control of the Entity

2.1   Details of all persons who own/are the legal entity applying for initial validation of QQI awards

QQI requires full disclosure of all persons who own/have a shareholding or a significant interest in the entity. These details should align with the details available from the Companies Registration Office (CRO). Clarity as to the beneficial ownership is required and if the detail available from CRO differs, for whatever reason, from the details of the beneficial ownership of the applicant, the information must be disclosed. QQI is also seeking information on the extent of the involvement/role of the beneficial owner(s) in relation to education and training provision.

The beneficial owner may, in some cases, be one of the key personnel/executive and responsible for many aspects of the entity's operations. In other cases, the beneficial owner(s) takes no part.

If there are more than two owners/shareholders, additional sections may be added. The purpose of this section is to provide QQI with accurate information regarding the ownership and management profile of the applicant provider.

If ownership of the entity changes during the application process, QQI must be informed. It is likely that the timelines for processing the application will be impacted.

2.2 Details of influential *non-owners* of the legal entity applying for initial validation

QQI is using the expression 'influential non owners' to reflect the variety of roles that could exist in an entity that will influence aspects of the education and training provision.

Key personnel/executive, such as chief executive/director of studies/senior trainer/registrar, should be detailed here as should consultants working with the applicant.

If there are more than three influential persons within the organisation, please add his/her/their details.

2.3 Organisation Chart

Attach an organisation chart for the entity. The chart must show the organisation structure, hierarchy of key personnel/executive (including names of current incumbents) and reporting relationships. It should indicate the ownership and governance structures also.

2.4 Declaration

The applicant entity should satisfy itself that it is in a position to give confirmation in respect of all owners or influential non owners. If all questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, please supply details.

2.5 Details of 3rd party collaborations and partnerships

QQI requires details on any relevant 3rd party collaborations and partnerships that will impact on any element of the education and training provided by the applicant. For example, another provider with specific technical expertise/equipment may be contracted to provide elements of a programme, an agreement between providers to share the programmes developed by one or both providers.

Please note: If any change occurs with any of the details supplied on application during the Evaluation Process, QQI must be informed.

Section 3   Financial Viability and Resources

3.1 Financial Resources

Applicants proposing to offer education and training programmes that QQI will validate must provide assurances to QQI that it has the necessary financial resources to sustain the programme delivery it is proposing.

Financial resources can come from private or public sources. In some cases, it can be a mixture of both.

Applicants are required to provide sufficient documentation to QQI to establish their financial viability. One of the following should be submitted:

• Letter from the applicant provider's auditors, who must be members of and in addition be authorised to act as auditors under the Companies Acts by one of the Recognised Accountancy bodies that have been granted recognition for the purposes of section 187 of the Companies Act, 1990 (i.e. recognition to bodies of accountants for audit purposes) by the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA), confirming that the applicant has audited accounts signed off for the last three financial years and is in conformance with Irish company law. QQI reserves the right to request copies of the last three years audited accounts where it is deemed appropriate.
• Applicants not in a position to have three years accounts available, e.g. a new entity, must furnish whatever audited financial statements it has in place along with a letter of confirmation from its auditors.
• Confirmation from funding organisation(s) giving details of the funding arrangements.

If funding provided is from a public source for example, an ETB, SOLAS, the Department of Justice, Enterprise Ireland and others, QQI may engage with the relevant funding authority in the context of the provider's application.

QQI may use independent expertise to evaluate the viability of the applicant. The report will be used in the evaluation process.

3.2 Public Liability Insurance Details

QQI require that providers have in place adequate public liability insurance in respect of their operations. A copy of the policy must be provided.

3.3 Current Tax Clearance Certificate

Please attach copy of current certificate. Applications from applicants that cannot produce a current tax clearance certificate will not be processed.

If the validity of Tax Clearance Cert expires during the application process, the applicant must submit the up-to-date certificate. Failure to do so may delay the processing of the application.

Section 4   Scope of Provider's Proposed Provision

4.1 Proposed education and training provision

Access to validation is bounded. The scope of access sought by a provider determines the boundary within which the approval of quality assurance will apply and applications for programme validation may be made. The education and training sector has a wide variety of providers whose scope of provision ranges from, for example, a number of component awards at Level 4 in one field of learning to a provider offering a number of award classes across Levels 5 to 8.

The evaluation of an applicant's capacity and QA procedures by QQI will relate to the context of each provider. The scope of the provision that an applicant proposes is a critical element in determining QQI's approach.

When a provider is successful in validating programmes through this process it may apply to validate other programmes in the same field of learning and/or NFQ level. A provider that wishes to validate programmes in a different field of learning or at a different level will be required to submit evidence of its capacity to do so.

The following details must be supplied for *each* programme for which access to initial validation is being sought:

• **NFQ Level** - Please insert the appropriate level from the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ Levels 1-10).
• **Award Class** - Please insert the appropriate award class. The NFQ includes different classes or categories of awards which reflect a mix of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. They are classified as Major, Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental.
• **Programme field of learning** - Please insert the appropriate field of learning from the following list from the ISCED classification of fields of learning. If appropriate, name the professional/occupational domain.

ISCED fields of learning	Code
Generic Programmes and Qualifications	00
Education	01
Arts and Humanities	02
Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	03
Business, Administration and Law	04
Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	05
Information and Communication Technologies	06
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	07
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	08
Health and Welfare	09
Services	10

• **Professional Domain** - Some programmes may lead to awards required by a professional, regulatory, statutory body (PRSB). Please indicate the professional domain and the relevant PRSB. In this context, QQI will consult with the relevant body.
• **Details of specific award name including code where appropriate** - Providers offering Further Education and Training awards at NFQ Levels 1-6 include the code and name of the award specification from the common award system (CAS). Providers offering Higher Education and Training awards at NFQ Levels 6-10 should refer to the award standards published by QQI

- **Principal Teaching and Learning Modes** - Please identify all that applies to each programme
  - Centre/School/College Based
  - Apprenticeship/Traineeship
  - Workplace Learning
  - Workplace Training
  - E-Learning
  - Distance Learning
  - In-Company Training
  - Other
- **Profile of target learner groups** - Please provide a profile of the target learner group for each programme.
- **Minimum number of learners planned for each programme** - Please insert as appropriate. QQI is seeking this information as it is relevant to resources (staff, facilities etc.). Applicants are not bound by the figures they provide.
- **Maximum number of learners planned for each programme** - Please insert as appropriate. QQI is seeking this information as it is relevant to resources (staff, facilities, finance etc.) that will be required. Applicants are not bound by the figures they provide.
- **Resources** - Resources required for programmes can vary significantly e.g. staff, specific location, technical equipment, online resources. Please provide general information on the resources available for each programme.
- **Protection of Enrolled Learners** - Please refer to Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act.

In cases where an applicant is seeking validation for more than two programmes, please copy the template for each additional programme.

4.2 Sites where programmes will be provided

Many providers will be offering programmes from their own premises (owned or leased). In other cases, programmes will be delivered in client sites, leased locations, remotely, on-line etc. QQI requires the relevant detail on each site.

In cases where applicants do not provide programmes in their own or leased premises, it may not be possible to provide specific site details. In these cases applicants are expected to have criteria that are used to assess the appropriateness of suitable sites e.g. size, facilities, safety standards etc. This information will inform the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel of the nature of the site-visit that will be required in the context of the scope of provision proposed.

4.3 Details of education and training provision accredited by other awarding bodies and/or organisation/self-certified

Many providers offer programmes that are accredited by other awarding bodies and/or offer programmes that are self-certified.

QQI requires this information to make an informed evaluation on the capacity of an application to provide the proposed programmes that will lead to QQI awards.

Section 5   Statutory Declaration

QQI requires all applicants to complete a statutory declaration confirming that all the information supplied in the application form is true and accurate. In cases where it becomes known that the information supplied to QQI is not accurate or true, will stop the evaluation of the application until the issues identified are resolved. QQI may also initiate legal proceedings.

B.   Provider Self-assessment against the Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards

Introduction

This section provides guidelines on preparing a provider self-assessment as part of an application under "*Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards 2013*".

Before starting its self-assessment, an applicant must ensure that it understands the requirements of QQI policy together with applicable policies and guidelines. The core documentation to reference when preparing a self-assessment for the provision of further and higher education and training awards is set out in paragraph 1.2 of this Guide.

Careful consideration of all policies and criteria (including - programme validation policy and criteria associated with stage 2) will enable applicants to prepare and present their self-assessment successfully.

The self-assessment will be used to assess the capacity of each applicant to offer the programmes it wishes to validate. This will form part of the discussion with the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel meeting with the applicant.

The Self-assessment process

What is a self-assessment?

A self-assessment is an analysis/review setting out how the provider meets and/or plans to meet the QQI criteria for access to initial validation. The self-assessment document is a key part of the provider submission for evaluation.

Why is it needed?

The purpose of the self-assessment is to enable the provider to clarify its background, plans and context to demonstrate that they can meet QQI criteria. The self-assessment must indicate to QQI that the applicant meets the criteria as set out in *Section 3.2* of *Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* 2013.

How does the applicant prepare a self-assessment?

Applicant providers are obliged to prepare a document in which the provider describes how it meets each of the required elements of the QQI criteria.

Each of the criterion and its elements must be addressed in the self-assessment explicitly.

For example the provider must report and analyse how the organisation meets the following criterion:

3.2.2.F   Have education and training capacity demonstrated by:

   *i Experience and track record in providing education and
      training programmes.*

   In order to address this criterion, the applicant must provide:
   - details of their experience in providing programmes
   - information on staff experience in the context of the programmes for
      which validation is being sought
   - experience with other awarding bodies
   - selection criteria for tutors etc.

In the context of the provider's own circumstances, there may be a range
of additional relevant points that can be made.

What are the expectations of QQI for the self-assessment?

• Every self-assessment will be unique.

It is expected that each provider will have unique responses to the criteria and
there is no standard response. Applicants should be candid about any perceived
weaknesses or improvements required for them to meet all the criteria.

• Each criterion and its elements must be addressed as appropriate.

Each of the criteria must be considered in the context of the scope of access
sought. For example, a criterion concerning the quality of the teaching staff does
not require an assessment of the quality of the staff but rather the quality of the staff
as tutors operating within a defined scope i.e. their fitness for the purpose of
providing tuition to learners enrolled on a programme falling within the scope of
access sought. The level of provision sought is relevant for the qualifications and
experience of the teaching staff.

• A self- assessment will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of a provider.

It is important to note that quality assurance requirements demand that
applicants have the capacity to identify weaknesses, diagnose their causes and
formulate improvement strategies.

The ability of the provider to monitor and identify improvements is core and the
capacity of a provider to recognise and confront problems is essential for
developing and maintaining high quality procedures.

What does the applicant do to prepare a self-assessment?

• Devise a template using the criteria.

In order to be systematic about the self-assessment, it is suggested that the
applicant should insert all the criteria in the *Policy and Criteria for Provider Access
to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* 2013 into a template.

Using their template the applicant should present its case for how each criterion is met, giving examples and citing appropriate evidence.

This approach will help ensure that the self-assessment is accurate and complete. Criteria that are *not applicable* should be addressed by explaining why.

Providers are also advised to:

- Be precise and open.
- Be succinct and indicate what is in place using plain language to ensure third parties understand the particular context.
- Be clear about the current position; for example, describe what is in place and what is planned to be put in place.
- Proof read before submitting it.

How does the provider address the criteria?

Frequently this will involve narrative to present a case or make a particular point. Making any point or presenting a case should be accompanied by evidence.

- If an applicant has provisions in place that demonstrate a criterion:
    - Explain what provisions are in place now and provide any directly applicable evidence.
    - Analyse how current provisions address the criteria and present a case that demonstrates their strengths and identifies any areas for improvement.
    - Outline any concrete plans that are in place to sustain or improve performance.

- If an applicant has no case or point or no provisions currently made for a particular criterion:
    - Explain why this is the case - each context is different for each applicant.
    - If the criterion is not applicable explain why.
    - If the criterion is applicable explain how it applies and discuss how and why it has been overlooked and identify any further development or existing weaknesses or opportunities or threats that have arisen or might arise as a result of this.
    - Outline any concrete plans that are in place.

How will QQI use the self-assessment in this process?

Each applicant's self-assessment document will be used to assess the capacity of each applicant to offer the programmes it wishes to validate. This will form part of the discussion with the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel meeting with the applicant.

C.   Draft Quality Assurance procedures to be submitted by applicant providers

Introduction

This section provides guidance on preparing draft Quality Assurance Procedures as part of the application under "*Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards 2013*".

The 2012 Act requires QQI to approve a provider's draft Quality Assurance Procedures before a provider can submit programmes for validation.

What has an applicant to do to present draft Quality Assurance Procedures?

An applicant must be able to demonstrate it has an effective quality assurance system, supported by comprehensive procedures, in place.

In order to address this requirement, the applicant must examine its own QA procedures against QQI's criteria for approval of quality assurance. QQI has made available two sets of guidelines for providers of further and higher education and training which will assist providers in developing an effective quality assurance system. The scope of access sought determines which set of guidelines should be used.

Providers proposing to offer further education and training programmes at NFQ Level 1-6 should use *Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards - Further Education and Training*.

Providers proposing to offer higher education and training programmes at NFQ Level 6-10 should use *Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards Quality - Higher Education and Training*.

Some providers may wish to validate both further and higher education programmes. If this is the case, both guidelines and criteria will be relevant.

What criteria will be used by QQI to assess an applicant's QA procedures?

The guidelines also contain the criteria the QA procedures will be assessed against by the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel as part of stage 1 of the process for Initial Access to Programme Validation for QQI Awards.

Please note: When submitting QA procedures, the relevant supporting documentation/procedures should be included e.g. the Learner Handbook, Feedback Sheets etc.

D.   Payment of Fees

Applicants are required to pay the fee appropriate to their application. The Fee Schedule gives the relevant details. Fees must be received by QQI, by electronic bank transfer only, before the assessment of the application will commence.

If fee payment is not received within 5 working days of the submission of the application, the application will be returned to the applicant.

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