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# Annual Report 2022

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**QQI**

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



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# INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



**Dr Padraig Walsh**

Chief Executive, QQI

**This annual report covers the first year of QQI's fourth statement of strategy (2022-2024). QQI was established on 6 November 2012, so this year's report coincides with the agency's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.**

To celebrate that anniversary, QQI held a special event in the Croke Park Conference Centre on 18 and 19 October. The conference was attended by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris T.D. and over three hundred national and international delegates. The Minister used the occasion to launch the Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN) co-founded by QQI and the Australian quality agency, TEQSA.

To coincide with the 10-year anniversary, QQI published the fourth issue of our QQI Data Series, looking back at QQI awards over the past 10 years. Exceptionally, to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, QQI issued a call for grant-aid proposals to help build momentum in assessment scholarship or

professional development relating to assessment in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). We received a strong response to the call with 34 applications for funding being received.

During the year, QQI commenced the process of redeveloping our national learners' database, Qualifax, which will result in a new brand and website being launched in 2023. The year also saw further development of the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ), which now lists over 11,000 qualifications included within the NFQ for 250 providers.

At the end of 2022, the NARIC Ireland service, hosted by QQI, listed over 1,600 qualifications comparability statements and a guide to using the NARIC service is now available in 10 languages, including from 2022, Ukrainian.

The year saw the publication of a further 11 quality review reports of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) completing the inaugural quality review of the 16 ETBs. The cycle of CINNTE institutional quality reviews of public higher

education institutions continued with the publication of the review reports for Technological University Dublin and Trinity College Dublin.

Over the course of the year, QQI made over 170,000 awards (up 4% from 2021) to over 110,000 individual learners (up 5% from 2021).

With the increasing international attention and concern over academic integrity, the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) supported by QQI, held a week-long series of academic integrity masterclasses in March provided by an expert from Australia.

During the year, QQI published a series of White Papers relating to the development and implementation of the International Education Mark, including two draft codes of practice for providers of programmes to international learners for - English Language Education and Higher Education.

In November, QQI published the findings of an externally commissioned review of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes developed for the 39 consortium-led new apprenticeships.

Following the reconfiguration of the QQI office workspace, the year also saw QQI introduce its blended working model for staff, which is being trialled for a six-month period from November 2022.



Dr Padraig Walsh  
Chief Executive, QQI

# ABOUT QUALITY AND QUALIFICATIONS IRELAND



**Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It is a state agency whose non-executive members of the board are appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.**

We are responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. We validate programmes, make awards and are responsible for the promotion, maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of

Qualifications (NFQ). We also inform the public about the quality of education and training programmes and qualifications and advise the Minister on national policy regarding quality assurance and enhancement in education and training.

Our stakeholders come from all sectors of education and training: learners; providers; employers; Government departments; state agencies and funding bodies; regulatory bodies; professional bodies; qualifications awarding bodies; the community and voluntary sector; representative bodies; and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

# VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



## OUR VISION

We are committed to a vision of Ireland that offers diverse high-quality further and higher education opportunities, enabling learners to reach their full potential through achieving qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.



## OUR MISSION

We sustain public confidence in the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's further and higher education providers and provide authoritative information on the diverse range of qualifications included in the National Framework of Qualifications.



## OUR VALUES

Our approach to our own work and how we work with our partners is governed by clear values.

We believe we have a **shared responsibility** with others to ensure confidence in and continuous improvement of the quality of education and training. We believe that the attainment of our priorities and objectives is best pursued in a **consultative, collaborative and inclusive** manner with our diverse set of partners and providers. We value and respect partnership for mutual benefit.

We are committed to working with **objectivity, transparency and sustainability**. This underpins our decision-making and our policies, procedures and activities. These are evidence-based, informed by national and international good practice, authoritative and conducted with integrity in a manner which is openly transparent and engenders trust.

We are committed to making a difference to our partners, providers and our people. We value **information, insight and impact** – the successful pursuit of goals and objectives which culminate in impacting positively, confidently and substantively on our operating environment.

We are a **learning** organisation. We are committed to **innovation and excellence**.



# QQI IN NUMBERS

## 5

applications for revalidation of FET programmes, all of which were successfully revalidated

## 2

new providers were approved through the Initial Access to Validation process

## 3

new apprenticeship programmes were submitted for validation

## 7

new provider applications were received.

## 38

applications for revalidation of HET programmes, all of which were successfully validated

## SOCIAL MEDIA:



## 4,843

followers; up 17% - engagement rate up 9%



## 243

followers; up 91% - engagement rate up 57%



## 7,878

followers; up 51% - engagement rate up 34%

## 108

RE-ENGAGEMENT APPLICATIONS PROCESSED

## 103

applications for validation of new FET programmes, of which 101 were successfully validated

## 26 Weeks

Programme Validation – Average duration of process

## 27

APPLICATIONS FOR VALIDATION OF NEW HET PROGRAMMES, OF WHICH 25 WERE SUCCESSFULLY VALIDATED

## CASE STUDY - THE NATIONAL ACADEMIC INTEGRITY NETWORK (NAIN)



The National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) met in plenary four times in 2022, with a face-to-face meeting and workshop planned for early 2023. Regular items at these meetings included the work of the working groups, regulatory updates, information on upcoming events, webinars etc. The NAIN Steering Committee met more regularly (8 times in total). The new 2022-24 NAIN Strategy was activated with two new working groups (4 and 5) established and members invited to join. New members joined the network, mainly from HEIs, so the network grew to approximately 115 members by year end.

A third Academic Integrity Week took place in October around the QQI 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference.

A new NAIN-developed resource - *A Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation including Case Study Management* was drafted and two consultations on the draft document took place (1- internal to NAIN members; 2- external to all NAIN HEIs). Online publication is due in 2023. A NAIN Members' Hub was established at the

end of the year to enable more interactive and effective communication and further support the formulation of a community of academic integrity professionals.

Some emerging indicators of impact from the NAIN are:

- internal Academic Integrity Weeks taking place in HEIs
- SUs nominating SU Officers specifically for Academic Integrity and related peer activity,
- HEI resources being developed and disseminated
- attendance at NAIN webinars increasing and diversifying
- recruitment by some HEIs of newly created senior level posts - Academic Integrity Officers
- a new StudentSurvey.ie Topical Module on Academic Integrity for 2023 developed with NAIN Steering Committee input
- increased engagement in academic integrity within the HE representative bodies
- new academic integrity policies being published by HEIs.

# OUR WORK IN 2022

## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### PRIORITY 1

#### #INFORMATION

- better information and opportunities for learners

We will provide high quality information to school-leavers and all those seeking learning opportunities on progression pathways across and between different institutions in further and higher education by upgrading QQI's qualifications information platforms and services.

#### Certification activity figures

In 2022, 110,693 learners received QQI awards, up 5% from 2021. QQI made 173,713 awards in 2022, up 4% from 2021. Further details on certification figures can be found on the QQI website.

#### Verification of Qualifications

This service continued to be in high demand in 2022. The reasons for such requests are various, e.g., proof of qualifications for employers, education evaluation services, college applications and residency requirements in other countries. In 2022, QQI dealt with over 2,000 requests from holders of awards made by QQI and its legacy awarding bodies. The volume of requests increased by over 2% on the 2021 figures.

#### Certificate Replacement Service

249 applications for replacement certificates were processed in 2022. This is a 30% increase on 2021. The service was introduced in 2019 and the volume of requests has continued to increase since then.

#### Access to higher education using QQI awards

The Higher Education Links Scheme is a well-established route for holders of QQI awards to access a college course. QQI supports this scheme by providing scored results data to the Central Application Office (CAO) to enable participating higher education institutions to make offers to QQI award holders. In 2022, over 10,000 CAO applicants mentioned QQI FE when making a college application.

#### Deactivation of unused awards

Every year, QQI conducts an analysis of the Common Award System (CAS) and publishes a list of CAS awards proposed for deactivation. This activity is required to ensure the integrity of the Common Award System and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Following the processing of retention requests, 36 CAS awards were set for deactivation in 2022.

#### Broad Awards Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4

Over the last few years, we have been working closely with the further education and training sector to develop a range of twenty new QQI draft award standards. This exercise ensures that further education and training qualifications at NFQ levels 1-4 continue to support the personal, social and economic interests of learners, while also providing more flexibility in the design of programmes, teaching, learning and assessment.

In 2022, we published these draft award standards and proposed implementation guidelines for public consultation. It is envisaged that a suite of twenty new award standards will be finalised, approved and published in 2023.

### Qualifax website

During 2022, the Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities team updated 15,150 courses across further and higher education and training in Ireland.

In 2022, the Qualifax site analytics indicated some 999,000 visits to the site following the introduction of new analytics tracking. Patterns of visits showed strong correlation with the school examinations results timelines and CAO deadlines during the year.

Since June 2022, development work has been underway on branding, discovery, research and architecture for a new Qualifax website. Work will continue in 2023 towards a launch of the new site in late autumn.

### Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) and Qualifications Dataset Register (QDR) (Europass)

The IRQ has been operational since 2020 at [www.irq.ie](http://www.irq.ie) and now lists over 11,300 programmes and over 11,350 qualifications recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications for 250 providers. During 2022, the register enabled QQI to respond to enquiries providing reliable and accurate information on qualifications for graduates and their stakeholders. The IRQ continues to grow its audience with 8,432 new users in 2022, an increase of over 5,000 new users when compared with 2021. The amalgamation of the Institutes of Technology establishing Technological Universities (TUs) during 2021 and 2022 led to the need to merge the data from several former Institutes of Technology – this was completed in association with the new TUs by the end of the year.

In July and December 2022, QQI in association with the National Europass Centre, published the IRQ data for higher education programmes to the new Europass Qualification Dataset Register (QDR) at [www.europass.ie](http://www.europass.ie) making this information on higher education options visible at EU level. The cooperation of the designated awarding bodies continues to be critical to the comprehensive population of both these databases which is ongoing.

**We will play our part in ensuring that learners can achieve their potential within the further and higher education system by evaluating provider adherence to a national approach to access, transfer and progression and the appropriate recognition of prior learning.**

### NARIC

QQI hosts NARIC, the National Academic Recognition Information Centre and provides a free advisory service on the recognition of foreign academic qualifications. We are part of a world-wide network of qualification recognition agencies known as the ENIC-NARIC network. QQI is represented on the ENIC NARIC Bureau until 2023. The bureau manages the work of the European Network.

At the end of 2022, the NARIC database listed 1,611 comparability statements for new award titles, an increase of 110 since 2021. Comparability Statements are available online to all enquirers, providing where possible, an advisory comparability with a particular award against an award type and level of the National Framework of Qualifications. A guide to using the services is now published in ten languages, including from 2022, Ukrainian.

Global mobility continued to be impacted by COVID-19 to some degree, but traffic to the website and comparability statement downloads remained consistent in pattern with previous years:

Disaggregating downloads of comparability statements, key demand continues from Brazilian enquirers, the UK and India, both as outside the EU and generally. Within the EU, Spain, Ireland and Poland continue to use the service significantly.

EU-based downloads from the NARIC Ireland site	Internationally-based downloads from the NARIC Ireland site
Spain, 9%	Brazil, 33%
Ireland, 8%	UK, 12%
Poland, 8.2%	India, 10.2%
Romania, 5.2%	South Africa, 5.1%
Croatia, 4.1%	USA, 4.3%,
	Ukraine, 1.05%

Additionally, the service managed 1,800 specific queries using the on-line CRM process and approximately 277 additional enquiries by phone and email.

NARIC Ireland was a partner in several Erasmus+ projects, such as Implementation of Automatic Recognition in the networks (I-AR), the ADDS UP project - Digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement, FfraudS+: False records, Altered Diploma and Diploma Mills Collection. Results of these projects have been circulated to stakeholders across the ENIC-NARIC network and disseminated via the QQI website.

Four new projects were approved for 2022-2024, which focus on supporting the implementation of the Automatic Recognition Recommendation in line with the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and the recognition of micro-credentials

NARIC Ireland participates in the Bologna Process Thematic Peer Group on Recognition (TPG B). A workplan for 2022-24 was agreed with support from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

(DFHERIS) focused on the strand 'establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures' and on 'collaborating with relevant stakeholders working with refugees to provide fair recognition'.

NARIC Ireland also became a signatory to the Council of Europe managed process providing the 'European Qualifications Passport for Refugees' (EQPR) with support from colleagues in University College Dublin, University of Limerick and Munster Technological University (MTU). Training will be offered by the Council in 2023

**We will improve learner choice and opportunity by including an increased range of flexible qualifications including micro-credentials in the National Framework of Qualifications.**

#### **Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs)**

Draft policy and criteria for the establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies and the inclusion of their awards in the National Framework of Qualifications have been developed and discussed internally. A number of meetings with individual prospective Listed Awarding Bodies were held throughout 2022 and commitment was given by a number of bodies to seek listing when available. A poster presentation regarding the LABs scheme was presented at the QQI 10 Year Anniversary Conference, and a platform presentation was given at the TAICEP (The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals) Conference in Glasgow in October. The Policy and Standards Committee (PSC) discussed the proposed scheme at its meeting in November 2022. Feedback from the committee, conferences and meetings with stakeholders have informed the draft policy and criteria, which are due to be issued for consultation in early 2023.

We will play our part in ensuring that all learners are enabled to access accredited qualifications in learning environments suitable to their needs including in the workplace.

**Access Transfer and Progression**

A project to conduct a high-level review of Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) practice was agreed in July 2022. The review will be a secondary analysis of existing evidence and data with the purpose of identifying examples of effective ATP practice and presenting the strengths and weaknesses of existing ATP practice. A comprehensive request for tender was developed and agreed in December 2022 and will be issued early in 2023.

## PRIORITY 2

### #PROTECTION

- implementing strengthened regulation to protect learners

We will protect learners by promoting and maintaining awareness of academic integrity and the monitoring of those seeking to undermine it.

#### ENQA Working Group on Academic Integrity

QQI's Manager for Academic Integrity Enhancement and Strategic Projects assumed the role of chair of the ENQA Working Group on Academic Integrity during 2022. This group brings together approximately 96 ENQA members and affiliates to explore the level of awareness of, and engagement with, academic integrity matters across Europe, with a remit to report on the current landscape and make recommendations accordingly.

#### NAIN Academic Integrity Masterclasses

In May 2022, a week-long series of academic integrity masterclasses was hosted by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) for the Irish higher education sector, provided by Kane Murdoch (Manager, Student Conduct Unit, University of New South Wales, (UNSW)). During the masterclasses, representatives of public and private higher education institutions, students and QQI staff met to hear about approaches to detection in UNSW as well as to discouraging and managing student engagement in academic misconduct.

#### DAB (Designated Awarding Bodies) Senior Leader Meetings on Academic Integrity

QQI and NAIN held two fora for senior leaders of the designated awarding bodies (universities, technological universities and institutes of technology) in May and October to discuss

common areas of focus with regard to academic integrity. The focus was on a national regulatory response to contract cheating and the session included guest contributions from Professor Cath Ellis, UNSW and Dr Helen Gniel, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia.

#### Academic Integrity in the Private HE Sector

QQI held a briefing session on section 43A of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 for the private higher education sector and, subsequently, held a one-day workshop for the sector to discuss the implications of the legislation and to consider potential policy responses to academic misconduct. Following the workshop, an academic integrity hub was established for private HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) to facilitate communication and exchange of information relating to academic integrity.

#### Academic Integrity Reporting to Advertising and Social Media Platforms

During 2022, QQI established monitoring and reporting processes with a number of social media and advertising platforms, including Meta (Facebook, Instagram), Google (YouTube), TikTok and Distilled SCH (Adverts.ie, DoneDeal) to identify and remove content promoting academic cheating services.

#### Engagement with Student Representatives on Academic Integrity

QQI and NAIN provided two briefings for the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) sabbatical officers in 2022. The first of these took place in March 2022 in DCU (Dublin City University), and the second, in August 2022 in Ulster University (Coleraine Campus). The objective of both sessions was to raise awareness of the legislation, to hear directly from student officers about experiences, to empower student representatives to take action against contract cheating services, to hear experiences – those of participants and of their peers – of being approached by cheating services, and to receive

advice from sabbatical officers about how best to communicate with students about academic integrity and contract cheating.

### **Presentations and Webinars on Academic Integrity**

QQI presented its work on academic integrity to both national and international audiences during 2022, including at the:

- European Quality Assurance Forum 2022 (Timisoara, Romania)
- European Consortium on Accreditation (online)
- Council of Europe ETINED Plenary Meeting (online)
- MTU professional development seminar (online).

The ENQA Academic Integrity Working Group Chair (QQI Manager Academic Integrity Enhancement & Strategic Projects) and member colleague from the NVAO, Holland, presented on work to date at the ENQA General Assembly (Stockholm, Sweden).

### **National Forum for Research Integrity (NFRI)**

QQI has become a member of the National Forum for Research Integrity Community of Practice initiative, which aims to enable the nurturing of communities of practice.

**We will robustly assess and monitor private providers for their fitness to offer QQI awards and provide security to their learners through our stewardship of the statutory learner protection fund.**

### **Initial Access to Programme Validation**

Providers who have not previously had a programme validated by QQI must apply to have their organisational capacity and quality assurance procedures evaluated against our guidelines and validation policy.

In 2022, seven new applications were received. All were from providers seeking validation for FET programmes only.

Six applications, made before 2022, continued into 2022. Two were approved, two are still in process and two were withdrawn prior to evaluation. (See Appendix 1).

### **Re-engagement**

Re-engagement describes the process by which education and training providers whose quality assurance (QA) was previously agreed with HETAC (the Higher Education and Training Awards Council) or FETAC (the Further Education and Training Awards Council) are now required to demonstrate that their governance and QA systems comply with QQI quality assurance guidelines.

During 2022, 75 applications for re-engagement were received. All were from providers of FET programmes only. See Appendix 2 for a summary of activity in 2022 as well as a status summary of the process to date.

In the period since July 2018 when the reengagement process began, a total of 269 providers have voluntarily ended their relationship with QQI as relevant providers and so did not avail of the reengagement process. 59 of these providers continue to offer programmes but under the quality assurance of another provider.

### **Extensions to scope of provision**

Providers seeking to apply for validation of programmes which have demands of capacity and/or quality assurance significantly beyond what they are currently validated for, can apply to have their 'scope of provision' extended. This entails an evaluation of the provider's capacity to manage, and quality assure the new type of provision.

In 2022, there was one such application for an extension of scope to include blended learning programmes.

### Programme Validation

Validation is a regulatory process that determines if a provider's programme of education or training meets the criteria required for a QQI award.

For a summary of the numbers of new programme applications processed in 2022, see Appendix 3.

Revalidation refers to a renewal process for programmes that had been previously validated by QQI, but which have now evolved or changed and require fresh approval. For a summary of the numbers of new programme applications processed in 2022, see Appendix 3.

QQI seeks to ensure that at least 90% of applications for validation are completed within 25 weeks (from date of receipt of a complete application deemed ready for evaluation, to a decision by QQI's Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)).

During 2022, the average duration for an application for new validation was 26 weeks, with the longest being 42 weeks.

Where any application took longer than the target duration, it was always with the consultation and agreement of the provider involved.

All applications for revalidation were completed within the 25-week target.

**We will contribute to ensuring a high-quality learning experience for international students through issuing the International Education Mark for higher education and English language education providers.**

A new international education unit was formed in late 2021 to manage the implementation of the amended legislation in relation to the establishment of the International Education Mark (IEM). The IEM is a quality mark that will be awarded to higher education and English language education providers who have demonstrated that they meet national standards to ensure a high-quality experience for international students, from enrolment to completion of their programme of education and training.

In 2022, QQI published a series of White Papers relating to the development and implementation of the IEM. The White Papers included two draft codes of practice for providers of programmes to international learners: for English Language Education (ELE) and Higher Education (HE). They also included new draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education providers and a proposed policy on authorisation to use the IEM.

The IEM team created an application space for providers within the QQI provider portal to facilitate a digitalised process. Providers will be able to visit the portal in due course to upload their application and to check its status. The team have also developed a robust application process that is transparent, reasonable, and fair for applicants.

Throughout 2022, there was regular consultation and engagement with stakeholders to assist with preparation for the launch of the IEM. Stakeholders across the sectors were offered the opportunity to meet with the International Education team to provide feedback on the IEM White Papers. In addition, three workshops on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages were hosted for ELE providers, with an average attendance of 60 participants.

To date over 100 providers have expressed interest in applying for the International Education Mark.

## CASE STUDY - INAUGURAL REVIEW OF QUALITY IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS – POST-REVIEW REPORTING PROCESS



The inaugural review of the effectiveness of quality assurance in the ETBs was completed in May 2022. The inaugural review, was undertaken as an omnibus review, whereby all sixteen ETBs were reviewed within a relatively short timeframe, over 3 phases. Each ETB has been reviewed and the individual review reports are published on QQI's website.

A project was initiated in April 2022 to address the following objectives:

1. Confirmation of a post-review reporting process, and the
2. Establishment of a sectoral report team to review the 16 ETB review reports.

Each ETB submits an Action Plan, a high-level response to recommendations, three months after the publication of the review report. A further follow-up report is due 12 months after publication of the Action Plan.

QQI consulted with representatives from the ETBs in developing the reporting format. A schedule of meetings was established to gain their feedback on the process and draft report templates. The final template aligns with the sections and format of the review report and action plan. An additional section encourages the ETBs to share the impact of their QA processes and best practice case studies.

The submission date for the follow-up report aligned to the phases of the review process and action plan submission dates. The Phase 1 ETBs are due to submit their follow-up reports in Quarter 1, 2023.

## PRIORITY 3

### #DEVELOPMENT

#### - driving and stimulating provider development

**We will support capacity for flexible and innovative programme development and robust quality assurance in the ETBs.**

The third and final phase of the inaugural review of education and training boards (ETBs) commenced in February 2022 with the completion of a virtual review visit by an external expert team to Tipperary ETB. The virtual review visit to City of Dublin ETB (CDETB) in May 2022 marked the conclusion of the inaugural review process. ETBs included in Phase 3 were Tipperary ETB, Galway and Roscommon ETB (GRETB), Louth and Meath ETB (LMETB), Kildare and Wicklow ETB (KWETB), Longford and Westmeath ETB (LWETB), Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) and City of Dublin ETB (CDETB). The last of the review reports was published in November 2022. Review reports from all 16 of the ETBs are published on the QQI website in the review's library.

Each ETB submits an action plan in response to the recommendations of the review report. These plans are submitted three months after publication of the review report. 13 Action Plans received from ETBs have been published on QQI's website in 2022. The remaining three plans are due in 2023.

QQI liaised with representatives from the ETB sector to produce a format for the Follow-up Report, due 12 months after publication of the Action Plan. The first phase of ETBs, aligned with the inaugural review, are due to submit their Follow-up Report in Quarter 1, 2023.

A sectoral report team was established in October 2022 to consider the 16 review reports, meet with key stakeholders and make systems and

sector level findings. The sectoral report team comprised of seven members selected from the 16 ETB review teams, and included a learner representative, an industry representative, and both national and international members. International joint chairs were appointed from among the inaugural review team chairs. The sectoral review took place from October 2022 to January 2023. The Sectoral Report will formally launch in Quarter 1, 2023.

**We will assess the effectiveness and embedding of quality assurance within the new and evolving technological universities through our institutional quality reviews.**

Technological University Dublin was the first technological university (TU) to undertake an external quality review in late 2021; the review report was published in 2022 and can be found on the QQI website in [QQI's Reviews Library](#), together with details on the composition of the expert review team.

The Cinnte Review Schedule has been extended to include the review of all the Technological Universities. Each TU is required to undertake an external quality review eighteen months after its establishment, and discussions began in 2022 to agree a timeframe for the reviews for the four remaining TUs, i.e., Munster Technological University (MTU), Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and South East Technological University (SETU).

We will stimulate autonomous universities to demonstrate how effectively they monitor and improve the quality of the learner experience in research and community engagement

**Institutional Review of the National University of Ireland (NUI)**

The Terms of Reference for the Institutional Review of the National University of Ireland (NUI) was published in March 2022, with the main site

visit of the review planned for March 2023. The Review Team was appointed in July 2022. NUI submitted its Institutional Self Evaluation Report (ISER) in December 2022.

### **Higher Education Monitoring and Review**

The review of Trinity College Dublin had been delayed by Covid-19 and initially there was an expectation that it would be the first higher education institution to return to an onsite review visit. A sudden rise in Covid-19 cases in early 2022 meant that main review visits had to continue virtually, and Trinity's main review visit was held via MS Teams in March 2022. Details of Trinity's Cinnte review, including the composition of the expert review teams, key dates and the published review report, can be found on the QQI website in [QQI's Reviews Library](#).

### **Quality Dialogue Meetings**

As part of its monitoring function, QQI conducts quality dialogue meetings with higher education institutions. In 2022, meetings took place between June and September with 16 public higher education institutions including new technological universities established in April and May respectively. The quality dialogue meetings provide an opportunity for QQI and the institutions to discuss the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance developments and enhancements within the institutions' internal quality system during the report period. Topics arising for discussion at the meetings included the recovery from Covid-19, the continued impact on teaching, learning and assessment and new challenges associated with rebuilding an on-campus experience for students, developments in research and innovation, and growing partnerships with the regional Further Education and Training (FET) sector and collaborative and transnational provision.

## PRIORITY 4 #INSIGHT

– publishing authoritative analysis and insight

We will analyse the further and higher education system to inform closer alignment and integration, to provide evidence of how it can provide a wider choice at transition points and enable progression pathways across and between different providers.

### Evaluation of the Comparability of the Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate Qualifications

There are separate further and higher education awards at NFQ Level 6 - the Advanced Certificate (FET) and the Higher Certificate (HE). Historically, there has been a perception that achieving the Higher Certificate, as opposed to the Advanced Certificate, will increase a learner's chance of progressing to higher education awards at Level 7 and above.

In 2020, QQI commissioned Ecctis, the operators of the UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills, to determine whether there is a significant difference between the learning associated with the Advanced Certificate programme cycle and the higher certificate programme as implemented at level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The [report](#) (completed in July 2021 and published in 2022) revealed few differences and many similarities when comparing further and higher education awards which both exist at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

We will analyse and provide insights on QQI awards data and trends to inform providers, policy makers, funding agencies and government strategies.

### QQI Data Series

QQI published the fourth issue of the QQI Data Series, entitled 'QQI awards and related provision: Looking back over the past 10 years'. The analysis looks back at QQI certification data over the past 10 years to reveal the trends and shifts in the demand for QQI awards and the related provision of programmes (i.e. courses, apprenticeships, traineeships etc.). It provides insights on how provision has evolved over the decade and how some shifts in the demand for QQI awards are being driven by the needs of learners, policy and the labour market.

Since 2018, QQI has published, an annual analysis of QQI certification data. It provides an analysis of QQI awards made each year by NFQ level, class, field of learning, provider type and learner profile for further education and training providers and certain higher education providers. [The analysis of QQI certification data for 2021 was published in February 2022.](#)

The analysis of QQI certification data for 2022, which will be published in February 2023, includes a brief analysis of how the overall number of awards made by QQI in between 2020 and 2022 was affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

### Statistical analyses

QQI published an interactive dashboard on its website, presenting a new statistical analysis of QQI Award certification data to provide an insight into how, and in what subject areas, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students might be progressing to higher education through their QQI Award.

[From FE to HE: performance of PLC candidates with QQI FET awards.](#)

The analysis, which encompasses the period 2018 - 2021, found that:

1. 52% of QQI Award PLC learners who were eligible for a higher education place in 2021 earned the maximum CAO points possible (390 points), an increase of 31% from 2018.
2. The overall number of PLC candidates with QQI Awards fell in 2021 by 2% from 2020 but increased by 7% between 2019 and 2020.
3. One in four of all PLC candidates between 2018-2021 achieved an NFQ Level 5 QQI Award in Nursing Studies.
4. The top 5 QQI major awards in terms of numbers of PLC CAO applicants were the same in 2020 and 2021: nursing studies; business studies; community health services; applied social studies; and laboratory techniques.
5. The average CAO points earned did not change much between 2020 and 2021; but increased three percentage points from 2019 to 2020.

**We will evaluate the experience of remote and blended learning and provide guidance on authentic assessment for an improved learner experience and outcome.**

#### **Blended Learning Seminar Series**

The Blended Learning Seminar Series continued into 2022 with an event focused on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for blended learning delivery in FET and HE, which took place online in March.

A recording of the event and the slide decks of the presentations are available on QQI's website.

**We will publish system-level analyses and host enhancement events including an annual summit event with key stakeholders on a key strategic theme embracing quality and qualifications.**

#### **QQI 10-year Anniversary conference**

QQI hosted its landmark 10-year anniversary conference 'Strengthening strategic partnerships to effect system change' in Croke Park on 18 and 19 October 2022 with more than 300 delegates registered to attend.

The conference featured international and national experts and colleagues from across Further and Higher Education and Training and there was a significant response to the conference poster call and requests to deliver lightning talks with over 130 submissions. The conference also saw Minister Simon Harris, TD launch the Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN) which was co-founded by QQI and its Australian partners, TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency).

**An illustrated summary of the conference can be seen in the mural by Ruth Graham on the following pages.**

Recordings from the conference and slide decks of the presentations from the plenary and breakout sessions and lightning talks are available to view on QQI's website.

#### **Quality, Good Practice and the Future of the Programme Webinar**

As part of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary programme, QQI hosted 'Quality, Good Practice and the Future of the Programme' virtually on 17 May 2022.

The event was attended by colleagues from public and private higher education institutions and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in Ireland and focused on innovations in programme design and delivery and discussed the challenges effecting programmes and learner experience. The four QQI commissioned thematic analyses of accreditation/validation and institutional oversight of programmes were also referenced and are available to view on our Insights page here: [Our Insights | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)





A recording of the event and the slide decks of the presentations are available to view on QQI's website.

### **Assessment and Confidence in HE Qualifications included in the NFQ – QQI Anniversary Funded Proposals**

Exceptionally, to mark its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, QQI issued a call for grant-aid proposals in 2022 to help build momentum in assessment scholarship and/or professional development relating to assessment in the context of the NFQ. There was a strong response to the call and QQI received 34 applications for funding. The results were announced in January 2023.

### **Review of Consortia-Led Apprenticeships in Ireland**

This report, published in November 2022, sets out the findings of a QQI-commissioned review of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes developed for the 39 consortium-led apprenticeships that were established by mid-2021.

In doing so, the report offers a snapshot of the diversity of industries, occupations, delivery models and qualification levels that the consortium-led model of apprenticeship has been able to accommodate since the model was rolled out in 2016.

### **Rethinking Assessment: Learner Focus Groups**

As part of the Rethinking Assessment: Stakeholder Perspectives project, QQI, in collaboration with the Union of Students in Ireland, UCD Students' Union, Dublin Business School, AHEAD, Cork Education & Training Board and City of Dublin Education & Training Board, organised eight learner focus groups on assessment between April and June 2022. There were six higher education groups and two further education and training groups. The learners expressed views and ideas on a wide range of matters relating to assessment.

The transcripts were analysed by QQI and an outline of the findings will be reported at QQI's Let's Talk About Assessment Conference in January 2023. A QQI Insight document on the findings will also be published in 2023.

**We will conduct system-level analyses of the outcomes of further and higher education quality reviews to inform new and innovative approaches to institutional quality assurance.**

### **Insights on Quality in Higher Education**

In 2022, QQI continued to receive annual quality reports from each publicly regulated HEI (Higher Education Institution) and from 24 independent and private higher education institutions. These annual quality reports are published on QQI's website and cover the reporting period 2020-21.

QQI is continuing to produce synthesis reports of the AQRs (Annual Quality Reports) as part of its Insights Series. The synthesis of quality in higher education identifies key themes arising across the AQRs in quality development and enhancement activities reported by the institutions. The synthesis reports highlight and disseminate good practice and identify key areas of focus for the higher education sector during the reporting period. The synthesis of the 2022 AQRs is near completion and, as in previous years, will include reports covering both the public and private higher education sector.

In order to showcase some of the areas of good practice in quality assurance and enhancement practices across the HE sector and to make it more readily accessible to stakeholders, QQI has developed a database of over 200 case studies taken from the AQRs of both public and private/independent HEIs. The database provides rich evidence of quality assurance in action and is a valuable QA resource for sharing good practice and initiatives. QQI will continue to work on and enhance this resource. This database is available through the QQI website.

## CASE STUDY - SECTORAL REPORT ON THE INAUGURAL REVIEW OF ETBS



Following conclusion of the inaugural review in each of the ETBs, QQI established a sectoral report team to identify system-level findings arising from the inaugural review process. The team was tasked with providing an independent overview of quality assurance across the ETB sector. The sectoral report will inform and shape future strategic decision-making on the ongoing development of quality assurance within the sector.

The purpose of the sectoral report is to complement the inaugural review process and to support sectoral level enhancement of the quality of further education and training across the ETBs. The sectoral report brings together the salient issues identified by review teams across the sector.

The sectoral report team was selected by QQI and comprised of seven members selected from

the sixteen ETB review teams, and included a learner representative, an industry representative, and both national and international members. International joint chairs were appointed from among the inaugural review team chairs. Unlike the review report, one team member was engaged specifically to write the report.

The sectoral review took place from October 2022 to January 2023. To complete the sectoral report, the team analysed the 16 ETB review reports, and conducted in person and virtual interviews with representatives from the ETB sector and other key stakeholders.

The sectoral report findings include recommendations for the ETBs sector and QQI in the development of quality assurance in the sector. The report will be formally launched in Quarter 1, 2023.

## KEY ENABLER 1 #PARTNERSHIP - strengthening strategic partnerships to effect system change

We will inform and influence education and training policy through our relationships with government, public funders, providers and other stakeholders.

**Revised Consultation Framework published**  
QQI revised its consultation framework in 2022 in order to update our approach to consultation. [The revised framework](#) and [the proposal for the report](#) are published on QQI's website.

QQI publishes written responses to our formal consultations with respondents' permission in addition to submissions from QQI to external consultations. These can be viewed on our website.

### Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF)

The Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF) was established to enable high-level discussion of national system-level quality and qualifications issues such as the future development of the National Framework of Qualifications and the educational quality assurance infrastructure.

The first meeting of the statutory awarding bodies group (SABG), which forms part of the IQQF, took place in October 2022.

This group will continue to meet, and the Forum will expand to include representatives from other core constituencies as the forum considers further priorities.

We will assist in the development of mechanisms for effective learner engagement in the quality of their education and training through our work with learner representative and advocacy bodies.

### Our work with learners

QQI continued to identify opportunities to work with learners. As members, we contributed to various national groups such as the Aontas led National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group and The StudentSurvey.ie Analysis and Impact Group. QQI also continued, with our partners, the HEA and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), to steer the work of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP).

QQI sponsored and participated in the judging panels for the Aontas STAR Awards 2022 (Learner Voice category) and the USI Student Achievement Awards 2022 (Academic Representative of the Year).

QQI is also working closely with USI and NStEP colleagues on the Postgraduate Student Engagement working group, which is reporting to the National Framework for Doctoral Education Advisory Forum.

### National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)

In May 2022, the NStEP Strategy 2022-2025 was launched at the 2022 NStEP conference by NStEP with its partners, the HEA, QQI, and USI. The strategy development included consultation sessions with staff, students and student representatives, an online questionnaire and the review of 114 class representatives' reports and 759 training feedback forms. Following the consultation, the following strategic priorities were identified:

- a. Strengthening the value of student engagement at the national level
- b. Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education

- c. Supporting staff to create and sustain meaningful partnership with students.

The first *Steps to Partnership* open course began in 2021 and concluded in early 2022. Staff who submitted a student engagement and partnership plan (SEPP) to receive their digital badge, also received feedback from students on their work.

In the academic year 2021-2022, NStEP trainers delivered 114 training sessions and 1,252 students completed modules in person or online with the annual 'Train the trainer' event taking place in person for the first time since 2019.

NStEP continued working with QQI and USI in 2022 to recruit and train students to participate in quality assurance review panels for the evaluation of practices in higher education institutions.

December 2022 saw the first in-person National Student Engagement Network event take place since 2019, in Maynooth University. The event themes included student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement activities, supporting students in governance and decision-making, student partnership in assessment and student partnership in student services.

NStEP is collaborating with 25 institutions to explore and further embed student-staff partnerships and increase opportunities for student engagement across the Irish higher education sector.

NStEP continues to welcome interest from other higher education institutions which may be interested in joining the programme.

### **Student Survey.ie: Impact & Analysis Group**

During 2022, a new topical module on academic integrity was developed, field tested and finalised for inclusion in the 2023 StudentSurvey.ie.

The SS.ie Impact and Analysis Group produced new analysis tools for HEIs, including an InTouch

Dashboard, as well as an annual report on the national data.

Research bursaries were awarded to HEI applicants for qualitative research related to both surveys.

### **The National Framework for Doctoral Education (NFDE) Advisory Forum**

In 2022, the co-chairs, QQI and the HEA, and members of the Advisory Forum agreed to refresh the existing National Framework for Doctoral Education (NDFE). Forum members agreed that this was timely considering the changes in the doctoral education landscape since 2015 and the progress being made by the working groups to implement recommendations from the [2021 European University Association \(EUA\) Solutions report on the implementation of the NFDE by Irish higher education institutions](#). The refreshed NFDE project is expected to be completed in 2023.

The working groups established to date include:

- The Career Profile Working Group
- The Career Tracking Working Group
- The Postgraduate Student Engagement Working Group.

**We will contribute to reducing overlap in programme evaluation practices by working with professional and statutory regulatory bodies and higher education institutions.**

### **Finding Common Ground**

QQI continued its engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in 2022 through the Finding Common Ground programme and other opportunities for engagement. Topics discussed during Finding Common Ground events included perspectives on developing and deploying micro-credentials within Ireland and further afield, and approaches to work-integrated learning and placements in Ireland and Australia, with input from Professions Australia.

QQI presented to the Irish Inter-Professional Association (IIPA) on the Finding Common Ground programme in February 2022. It also delivered presentations to individual organisations on the Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers during the year. These principles aim to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved in professional and academic accreditation and to reduce unnecessary administrative burden arising from duplication or overlap between such processes. A number of additional organisations endorsed the principles during 2022, bringing the total number of endorsing organisations (PSRBs and HEIs) to 36.

**We will continue to influence and contribute to good practice in quality assurance and qualifications through deepening our strategic relationships with partner agencies in Europe and worldwide.**

### **National Europass Centre (NEC) and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) National Contact Point Joint Action Project 2021-2023**

The Europass and EQF-NCP Ireland 2021-2023 project was approved under the ERASMUS+ Programme. This joint project supports the ongoing promotion and communication of the new upgraded Europass platform and the EQF to our key stakeholders across higher and further education, and the general public. Key EQF priorities of the project include developing a scheme for Listed Awarding Bodies and inclusion of awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); ongoing promotion of the NFQ; and the integration of the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) to the Qualifications Dataset Register (QDR) platform and preparing for digital credentials.

The National Europass Centre held the Annual Meeting of the EU Reference Group virtually for Agencies of DFHERIS with around 55 attendees. In addition to virtual promotional events, an interagency event and production

of a collaborative booklet on European Mobility was undertaken as a key activity for Europass/EQF/Eurodesk/EURES. Europass also attended the European Commission National event to mark the European Year of Youth at the European Foundation for Working and Living (Eurofound) in Dublin.

The previous project for the 2018 – 2020 period concluded with payment received from the European Commission following evaluation of the final report. Network and Advisory Group meetings for both strands were attended virtually and in – person in 2022 at national and EU levels including the Annual EU Reference Meeting of the Agencies of DFHERIS.

### **Five Country Qualification Frameworks Group**

The annual five country qualifications frameworks meeting was hosted in January. This two-day meeting brought together qualification authorities, quality assurance agencies and government officials from the jurisdictions. The meeting was an excellent opportunity for policy dialogue and exchange across the UK and Ireland. The group promotes alignment between national qualifications systems, providing information on our mutual qualifications systems within the common travel area along with an annual updating of the ‘Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries’ guide.

### **29<sup>th</sup> ENIC-NARIC Annual Meeting hosted in Dublin**

QQI, represented by NARIC Ireland, hosted the 29th joint Annual ENIC-NARIC networks meeting in Dublin in June with over 140 delegates attending from the wider ENIC-NARIC community. The meeting took place at the Grangegorman Campus at Technological University Dublin. This was the first ENIC-NARIC in-person event in 3 years and attracted attendees from Australia to Kazakhstan. Funded by the European Commission, topics of interest included updates on the progress on the Lisbon, Regional and Global Recognition Conventions, Digitisation, Recognition of Refugee qualifications and ‘micro-credentials’.

## KEY ENABLER 2 #EXCELLENCE

- building organisational excellence

We will develop and provide opportunities for our people by continuing to build an agile, engaged, responsive and motivated workforce.

### QZI Learning Hub

We continued our Learning Hub series to help colleagues learn more about internal and external initiatives and projects. In 2022, this included updates from Aontas on the findings of their Community Engagement Network census and from the Higher Education Authority on their 2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey.

We will reimagine the QZI workplace through utilising ICT for remote and blended working and embedding sustainability in our work processes.

Following a period of remote working from March 2020, QZI staff transitioned to blended working in Quarter 4, 2022. To assist in this transition and to accommodate a blended working environment, the ICT desk based set up was upgraded and meeting rooms were equipped with supporting technologies to facilitate hybrid meetings. Additional remedial works were completed to bolster the ICT network, and consequently its reliability and robustness for the new working arrangements. Blended working provision, including office set up and infrastructure will be kept under review.

We will demonstrate best practice in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and adherence to relevant legislative and regulatory obligations.

### Compliance with Code of Practice

QZI complies with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016). QZI presented its checklist of compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) in October 2019. The only outstanding derogation, relating to the Public Spending Code, was addressed and reported on in the 2019 Annual Report. QZI updated the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and reported on its compliance with the Code of Practice during 2022. As such, as of 31 December 2022, there were no outstanding derogations.

### Public Spending Code

QZI adheres to the Public Spending Code by:

- having a Purchasing and Procurement Policy that clearly sets out the requirements and authority levels of purchasers,
- ensuring all non-routine items of expenditure support the delivery of QZI's strategic and corporate plan,
- ensuring value for money for all expenditure,
- undertaking audits of procurement and purchasing to ensure adherence with best practice,
- encouraging staff to be aware of the cost of services so as to avoid unnecessary expenditure.

### Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

QZI reports on outcomes to its line department, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science through a Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA), a

requirement under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The PDA, which is developed and agreed annually, is linked to objectives contained in QQI's Corporate Plan, which is derived from the QQI Strategy Statement 2022-2024. An associated three-year Oversight Agreement (covering the period 2021-2023) was also developed. QQI meets several times a year with department officials to review progress under the agreements.

### **Internal audit function**

QQI has a three-year rolling internal audit plan 2021 – 2024, that is reviewed annually. Internal audits are carried out on all the key corporate and business functions of QQI on a cyclical basis. From March 2020, staff were directed to change to remote working due to government restrictions. As a result, from mid-March 2020 and up to October 2022, audits were performed remotely.

### **External audit function**

In 2022, an invitation was issued to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in line with the revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016), whereby, whereby it recommends that the Authority and the Audit Committee engage in discussion with the external auditors at least once a year, without executive members of the Authority or employees of the State body present, to ensure that there are no unresolved issues of concern. An officer of the C&AG attended a meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee on 21 October 2022.

The system of governance, risk management and internal control in QQI is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve aims and objectives. Senior QQI management is responsible for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework. The Audit and Risk Committee's monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of the internal and external auditors.

A review of the effectiveness of the internal controls for 2021 was completed in 2022, as required by the Code, and was forwarded to the Authority for consideration at its meeting in February 2022.

## CASE STUDY - GLOBAL ACADEMIC INTEGRITY NETWORK (GAIN) ESTABLISHED TO COMBAT CONTRACT CHEATING



Contract cheating and other forms of academic fraud have the potential to cause significant damage to our national qualifications systems. These are global issues that require a collaborative, cross-border approach to combat.

In recognition of this, the **Global Academic Integrity Network** (GAIN) was co-founded by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and launched by Mr. Simon Harris, T.D., Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in October 2022.

GAIN is a collective of regulators and quality and integrity agencies that aims to maintain existing connections between regulators and to establish new ones. Through the network, members disseminate new developments and research on contract cheating and academic fraud across

jurisdictions, and plan to develop and implement common, global approaches to combatting these challenges to protect learners, education providers, and national qualifications systems.

At the date of its establishment, GAIN had 14 members from across the globe. Countries represented included Australia, Italy, Lithuania, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and Zambia. The network was endorsed by the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Council of Europe. The current membership list can be viewed on a newly created website: [Global Academic Integrity Network](#).

GAIN plans to meet online, once per quarter. The first meeting took place on 5 December 2022.

# GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

## QQI Board

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Non-executive members are appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The QQI Board is responsible for the approval of financial accounts, policy, strategy statements, corporate plans and annual reports. The Board makes decisions in relation to a number of functions including but not limited to:

- Preparation and adoption of the strategy statement,
- Strategic direction and planning, corporate planning and approval of annual reports,
- Approval of financial accounts,
- Approval of all policy and approaches to policy,
- Withdrawal of approval of quality assurance procedures,
- Withdrawal of programme validation,
- Delegation of authority to a provider to make awards,
- Withdrawal or variation of delegated authority to make awards.

It also has functions in relation to programme validation, joint awards, and access, transfer and progression. A number of sub-board committees assist with academic and other key areas of governance and include QQI Board members among their membership.

The term of the second QQI Board ended on 5 November 2022.

## Membership:

- Ms Joanne Harmon (Chair)  
(to 5 November 2022)
- Dr Pádraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (international expert)  
(to 5 November 2022)
- Ms Mary Danagher  
(to 5 November 2022)
- Mr Blake Hodkinson
- Mr Thomas McDermott  
(to 5 November 2022)
- Ms Clodagh McGivern (USI nomination)  
(from 1 July 2022)
- Ms Megan O'Connor (USI nomination)  
(to 30 June 2022)
- Dr Niamh O'Reilly (learner representative)  
(to 5 November 2022)
- Professor Irene Sheridan
- Dr Anne Walsh  
(to 5 November 2022)

## Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2022 QQI Board Meetings

	18 FEB 2022	8 APR	10 JUN	7-15 JUL (INCORPoreal MEETING)	23 SEPT	4 NOV	MAX	ATTENDED
Joanne Harmon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Barbara Brittingham	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Mary Danagher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓	6	6
Blake Hodkinson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Thomas McDermott	✓**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Clodagh McGivern*	-	-	-	-	✓		2	1
Megan O'Connor*	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	3	3
Niamh O'Reilly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6	5
Irene Sheridan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6
Anne Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6

\* USI Representative, term of office runs from 1 July to 30 June each year.

\*\* attended via video conferencing

### Gender balance in QQI Board membership

The term of the second QQI Board ended on 5 November 2022. Four of the ten members remained in office at that point. Therefore, at 31 December 2022, QQI was awaiting the appointment of six board members (including a chairperson). Of the four continuing members, there were two male and two female members, giving a 50% gender distribution as of 31 December.

The following measures are planned to address and improve gender balance on QQI's board::

- The term of the QQI Board ended on 5 November 2022. The gender balance on the Board was given due consideration during the appointments process and highlighted to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

### Performance evaluation

A self-assessment of the effectiveness of the Authority for the year 2021 was carried out in Quarter 1, 2022.

### Sub-board governance

A number of sub-board committees provide specific expertise to academic and other key areas of QQI operations:

### Audit and Risk Committee

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure and support the QQI Board in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and aspects of governance, by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Board's and Accounting Officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances. The Audit and Risk Committee met four times in 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Due to the size of the QQI Board, membership of the Committee is comprised of one board

member and three external non-board members (as opposed to three board members as required by the Code of Practice).

Blake Hodgkinson (Chair)	4/4
Kate Cullen (non-board member)	2/4
Pearl Cunningham (non-board member)	4/4
Walter Johnston (non-board member)	4/4

### Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) makes decisions regarding the validation of programmes leading to QQI awards. The decisions and recommendations of the Committee are informed by external expertise and recommendations, normally provided in the form of external panel reports and the outcomes of monitoring and review activities carried out by QQI. The PAEC met six times in 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Padraig Walsh (Chair)	6/6
Órla Barry	3/3
Andrea Durnin	3/3
Mary Grennan	6/6
Marie Gould	2/2
Barbara Kelly	5/6
Angela Lambkin	3/3
Jim Murray	6/6
John O'Connor	6/6

### Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) considers QQI draft policy and makes recommendations to the Board regarding the approval of these policies in line with the organisation's strategy. It also considers and may act on recommendations from the executive to determine standards of knowledge, skill and competence for education and training awards or to endorse subject guidelines concerning knowledge, skill and competence which are expected for higher education awards. The PSC met four times in 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Anne Walsh (Chair)	3/3
Achim Hopbach	3/4
Bryan Maguire	4/4
Hannah McGee	2/4
Jim Murray	3/4
Niamh O'Reilly	1/3
Damien Owens	4/4
Aileen Ponton	2/2
Alan Power	4/4
Peter Rigney	1/4
Cassy Taylor	2/2

### Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC) reviews and analyses the activities of the PAEC, providing advice and making recommendations on its decisions. It will also confirm or refer back decisions of the PAEC, as appropriate. The PAOC met twice in 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Barbara Brittingham (Chair)	2/2
Billy Bennett	1/1
Mary Danagher	0/2
Mark Kane	1/2
Mary Meaney	1/2
Gerard Morgan	1/1
Brendan O'Dea	2/2
Seán Rowland	2/2

### Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Approvals and Reviews Committee makes decisions and recommendations about the approval of quality assurance procedures; the International Education Mark; delegated authority; and approves for publication the findings of quality reviews conducted by QQI. The ARC met four times in 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Irene Sheridan (Chair)	4/4
Fiona Farr	1/1
Laura Flynn	4/4
Carol Hanney	3/4
William Kelly	2/4
Siobhan Kinsella	2/3
Geraldine Larkin	1/1
Clodagh McGivern	1/1
Anna Murphy	2/3
Megan O'Connor	0/2
Ronan O'Loughlin	4/4
Gerry O'Sullivan	3/4
Tony Pettit	2/3
Mary Sheridan	1/1

### Human Resources and Organisation Committee

The Human Resources and Organisation Committee assists and advises the QQI Board in order to reinforce its own governance and oversight in the areas of HR and the CEO performance. The Human Resources and Organisation Committee met twice during 2022.

### Membership and attendance

Joanne Harmon (Chair)	2/2
Mary Danagher	2/2
Blake Hodkinson	2/2

# CORPORATE MATTERS

## Finance

In 2022, QQI received €14.095 million from State Grant, fee income, EU funding and other sources. For the same period, expenditure was €14.052 million. Pay and pensions expenditure in 2022 amounted to €8.73 million (including FRS17 adjustments)\*.

## Board Member payments

Members of the QQI Board act entirely in a voluntary capacity and therefore no fees were paid to members of the Board in 2022. Expenses are paid for accommodation, travel, flights and subsistence in line with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total board expenses in 2022 were €15,388\*.

## Remuneration and expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €159,567\* in 2022. No performance-related pay was received during this period. The Chief Executive's pension entitlements do not extend

beyond the standard entitlement in the model public sector defined benefit superannuation scheme. The Chief Executive incurred vouched expenses of €170\* in 2022.

\* These figures are extracted from the draft QQI Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022.

QQI's audited financial statements are published on the QQI website - [www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie).



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## CASE STUDY - PLAYING OUR PART IN SUPPORTING PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM UKRAINE

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The crisis in Ukraine required a national and international response from education and training partners; as home to the National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) and as an agency with expertise in recognition, international education and English language provision, QQI was pleased to play our part in the national effort.

The scale of displacement of people from Ukraine to Ireland necessitated the establishment of a co-ordinated interagency and inter-Institutional Working Group within the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). A decision was made to establish a National Student and Researchers (NSR) helpdesk to facilitate the rapid management of applications for a seamless transition to higher education programmes for those for whom this was an ambition; the national infrastructure in adult guidance and Vocational Education and Training (VET) further provided frontline supports within the ETB sector, focused together on supporting effective, seamless integration. For NARIC Ireland this meant that the information need in relation to Ukrainian qualifications was universal; the guide to services was swiftly translated to Ukrainian, bringing the number of different language guides to ten.

NARIC Ireland worked with the NSR Helpdesk, supporting preparatory work with presentations, direct links for services and through ongoing collaborative work including as part of the DFHERIS working group. This involved mediating information shared across the ENIC NARIC network and that developed by the European

Commission and European Training Foundation into national contexts. The NSR partnership with all the higher education institutions nationally ensured a rapid sharing of information and tools so that over 300 students could continue their higher education pathway without interruption by the new academic year, with fair recognition of learning and qualifications.

QQI was also directly involved in the consideration of English language assessment and short and longer terms supports for those who were considering applications to further and higher education. A cross-sectoral expert Working Group was established to examine solutions to national testing providing assurance that those who progressed in programmes would have capacity and support to successfully participate; careful analysis and research resulted in the selection of the DuoLingo English Test for initial baseline testing. DuoLingo subsequently offered 3,500 free tests in response to the crisis, a total value of \$171,500. The Working Group submitted a report to DFHERIS for the development of a unified, cross-sectoral process around English Language assessment and provision enabling an inclusive and pragmatic immediate response, but also highlighting necessary actions to ensure a sustainable national approach to supporting people who are displaced in the short, medium and longer term. This Working Group continues to meet and is planning to research different areas of English language provision for academic purposes to examine areas such as learner progression and ongoing needs.

QQI also met with sectoral groups who were recruiting people with qualifications from



Ukraine, including professional bodies, and with the National Recruitment Federation, to explain the NARIC service and system, and to share our learning about Ukrainian qualifications, and the education and training system.

As the numbers grew, and clearly there was an information need regarding the broad systems in Ukraine to support people at all stages of education, NARIC Ireland developed the 'Rough Guide to Ukrainian Qualifications in the context of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.' This information supplement supports as a 'one-stop-shop' for Irish employers and education and training providers in making recognition decisions relating to Ukrainian Qualifications.

Recognition principles and tailored information about different parts of the Ukrainian education system with links for further information, sit alongside information on specific qualifications, in a single source. Rough Guides were also developed for Syria and Afghanistan.

# RISK MANAGEMENT

QQI continued to manage risk in line with its Risk Management Policy, which was revised in June 2022. The revision exercise followed an external review of QQI's risk management framework and the introduction of measures to further improve and embed risk management in QQI. These measures included a new approach to articulating risks, a focus on a smaller number of high-level risks at corporate level and the development of local risk registers. Steps were taken to raise awareness of risk management amongst all staff and in projects and business planning.

The corporate risk register was revised and reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Executive Management Team. It was considered and

approved by the Audit and Risk Committee and the QQI Board at regular intervals. Particular attention was given to the potential loss of corporate memory, the continuance of strong corporate governance, sufficient financial resources, the introduction of the International Education Mark, cybersecurity, the transition to blended working and records management. Two of these risks materialised by year end – the delay in the implementation of the International Education Mark and delays in re-constituting membership of the QQI Board.

## Principal risks

The Authority assessed the principal risks, and their mitigations, to QQI in 2022 at its meeting on 22 May 2023. These are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. QQI's principal risks and mitigations, 2022

RISK RANKING	PRINCIPAL RISK
1	<i>Risk of loss of corporate memory due to high levels of staff retirement within the next two years</i> Mitigated by a more balanced management structure, management development programmes, and basing succession planning and filling vacancies on achieving an appropriate balance of grades and skillsets, based in turn on business needs and organisational priorities.
2	<i>Risk that the ICT system is compromised due to a cyberattack</i> Mitigated by controls to ensure secure access to QQI resources and systems, external independent security centre, regular incident review and vulnerability scanning and robust regular backups.
3	<i>Risk of insufficient financial resources to deliver on objectives in Statement of Strategy due to unpredictable levels of income from services and potential reduction in core grant</i> Mitigated by budgetary controls, monthly reports, and review of management accounts, proposed revised funding model and reserves retention policy for consideration by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

RISK RANKING	PRINCIPAL RISK
4	<p><i>Risk that the transition to blended working will lead to diminished operational capacity and reduced morale due to inadequate communication with staff and insufficient planning</i></p> <p>Mitigated by staff surveys, completion of IT and office works to facilitate staff return and introduction of a pilot blended working policy.</p>
5	<p><i>Risk that an effective record management system is inconsistently implemented organisation wide due to a lack of adequate buy in and appropriate management support</i></p> <p>Mitigated by a programme of work overseen by the Programme Management Office, initiation of projects on a records management policy, business processes, and classification system.</p>

### Data protection

QQI is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. The Acts provide for the collection and use of data in a responsible way and provide against unwanted or harmful uses of the data. QQI maintains oversight of its level of compliance to ensure that we have adequate arrangements in place to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Acts.

### Protected disclosures

Section 21 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires that every public body establish and maintain procedures for the making of protected disclosures by workers who are, or were, employed by the public body and for dealing with such disclosures.

No reports were made by QQI workers under the QQI Protected Disclosures Policy in the 12-month period to 31 December 2022.

No reports were received by QQI under Section 7 of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 in the 12-month period to 31 December 2022.

### Complaints of service

During 2022, QQI received no complaints of service.

### Internal controls

QQI has taken steps to ensure an appropriate control environment is in place in relation to identification and management of risks. There were no material breaches of internal controls in 2022.

### Fraud

No instances of fraud or suspected fraud were disclosed or discovered during 2022. Neither were any instances of fraud reported to HR, the Chief Executive, the Internal Auditor or the Audit and Risk Committee during the year.

### Energy efficiency and environmental policy statements

QQI is committed to implementing environmentally sustainable policies and reducing our carbon footprint. Continued initiatives to help us achieve this include:

- QQI has made significant progress towards being a paperless office including the provision of publications in e-format only
- QQI is monitoring and minimising its energy usage in accordance with public policy and is pursuing the installation of new technology in order to significantly reduce its carbon footprint
- As a public sector body, QQI makes

annual reports to the SEAI (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland) on our energy performance

- Ensuring the use of eco-friendly toiletries, cleaning products and other office perishables.

### **Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty**

All public bodies in Ireland have a responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This legal obligation is called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. It originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, which imposes a statutory obligation on public bodies in performing their functions to have regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment for staff and persons to whom it provides services
- protect the human rights of staff and services.

QQI is committed to the full implementation of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. In 2021, we published our statement of strategy for 2022-2024 in which we recognise the diversity of our stakeholders and set out our values which include integrity, transparency and inclusivity. In 2022, a cross-organisational working group was established to begin work on preparing a corporate Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy for publication in 2023.

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## CASE STUDY - CINNTE REVIEW OF TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN (TUD) INAUGURAL EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW OF A NEW TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

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External reviews are typically retrospective processes that reflect on the internal quality assurance (QA) and enhancement practices and activities established and tested within an organisation over a period of time, usually five years. But what happens when the institution subject to a quality assurance review has been established for less than half that time? The commencement of the Technological Universities Act in 2018 brought with it significant change for the Irish higher education landscape with the establishment of five new technological universities.

Technological University Dublin (TUD) was established in January 2019, creating Ireland's first technological university (TU) which would offer programmes up to doctoral level. It is QQI policy that new TUs are subject to external QA review 18 months after their establishment, making TU Dublin the first technological university to undergo an external review in October 2021.

For QQI, consideration was given to the existing terms of reference for external QA review and the tools used in the process, e.g., self-evaluation reports, to ensure they were appropriate to measure the effectiveness of a quality framework that was largely still in development when the institutional self-evaluation was submitted. The challenge was to adapt and re-shape the review process to be more forward looking, while retaining the standards and integrity of the process. Any adaptation of the review process also needed to be meaningful for TU Dublin and support the future development of its quality framework.

For TU Dublin, preparations for external review commenced shortly after the university's establishment. Much of the reflection and self-evaluation that informed the review process was developed in tandem with other formative processes important to the evolution of the University's new unitary identity, mission and vision. The review created a shared focus for university staff and facilitated greater internal collaboration and integration between what were previously three independent institutions.

TU Dublin valued the opportunity to reflect on experiences prior to and since the formation of the university. The engagement with the review team and international peers regarding the approach taken to QA and enhancement provided an opportunity to explore the processes in place and under formation.

Ultimately, the recommendations identified by the university and endorsed by the review team have supported the organisation to produce a sustainable roadmap for its quality enhancement agenda. This endorsement by the review team was important to TU Dublin, with the 'quality stamp of approval' ensuring public confidence in this new university.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### INITIAL ACCESS TO VALIDATION – APPLICATIONS MADE IN 2022

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	APPROVED	REFUSED	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN
Higher Education and Training	0	0	0	0	0
Further Education and Training	7	0	0	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

### INITIAL ACCESS TO VALIDATION – APPLICATIONS MADE PRIOR TO 2022 BUT FINALISED IN 2022

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	APPROVED	REFUSED	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN
Higher Education and Training	1	0	0	0	1
Further Education and Training	5	2	1	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

## APPENDIX 2

### RE-ENGAGEMENT – APPLICATIONS MADE IN 2022

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	APPROVED	REFUSED	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN
Higher Education and Training	0	0	0	0	0
Further Education and Training	75	3	1	63	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>8</b>

### REENGAGEMENT – APPLICATIONS MADE PRIOR TO 2022 BUT CONTINUED / FINALISED IN 2022

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	APPROVED	REFUSED	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN
Higher Education and Training	0	0	0	0	0
Further Education and Training	33	16	0	17	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>

**RE-ENGAGEMENT – OVERALL POSITION TO DATE**

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	APPROVED	REFUSED	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN BEFORE EVALUATION
Higher Education and Training	27	26	0	0	1
Further Education and Training	161	61	1	80	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>20</b>

**APPENDIX 3****NEW VALIDATION – APPLICATIONS MADE IN 2022 (Apprenticeships in brackets)**

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	VALIDATED IN 2022	REFUSED VALIDATION	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN BEFORE EVALUATION
Higher Education and Training	93 (3)	20 (0)	3	52 (3)	18
Further Education and Training	109 (0)	26 (0)	2	68 (0)	13 (0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>46 (0)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>120 (3)</b>	<b>31 (0)</b>

**DIFFERENTIAL VALIDATION/REVALIDATION/EXTENSION of VALIDATION – APPLICATIONS MADE IN 2022**

SECTOR	APPLICATIONS	VALIDATED	REFUSED VALIDATION	IN PROCESS	WITHDRAWN BEFORE EVALUATION
Higher Education and Training	67	52	0	11	4
Further Education and Training	105	89	0	16	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



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<http://qhelp.qqi.ie>



[www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie)



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