

# 37<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

26<sup>th</sup> June 2023 from 2pm to 5pm  
QQI Offices, Denzille Lane, Dublin 2

## Meeting Note

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

**In attendance:** Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)  
Padraig Walsh - QQI  
Walter Balfe – QQI (Item 4.1)  
Órla Barry - QQI (Item 9.1, 9.2 & 9.3)  
Rebecca Doyle - QQI Secretary

The Temporary Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the Committee.

### **1 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions**

It was decided that Alan Power would again be the temporary Committee chair of this meeting as the Committee is waiting on a chair to be appointed from the newly formed QQI Board. The members of the Committee were all in agreement.

### **2 Declaration of Interest.**

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

### **3 Minutes of previous meetings.**

The minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 27 March 2023, agreed, and signed by the chairperson.

### **4 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.**

#### **4.1 Update on the consultation process for the following white papers approved at the meeting in September 2022:**

- **Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners: Feedback,**
- **Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners: Feedback, and**

## - **Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers**

The executive provided a verbal update on the consultation process for the Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners; Draft Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners and Draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers.

The Committee has previously signed off on the QA guidelines for ELE. The QQI executive had been awaiting QQI Board appointments before the Board could meet to look at the Codes of Practice and Policy on Authorisation. The Board met in May and June 2023 and approved the Code of Practice for Higher Education and Code of Practice for English Language Education. These will come into effect once the relevant legislation commences. The draft versions of these documents had been sent to a range of stakeholders prior to their publication, on the QQI website. It is anticipated that these documents will be published on QQI's website in the late summer/early autumn, and consequent upon discussions with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science (DFHERIS) regarding publicity around the launch of the IEM.

There have been extensive discussions with the Department of Justice on transitional arrangements from the existing regulatory regimes, for example, how does ILEP transition to the IEM. These will inform the final version of the Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark. It is planned that the Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark will be finalised in the Autumn once the text of the ministerial regulations is confirmed.

The Committee welcomed this update. The Committee questioned whether smaller providers might merge in order to become bigger providers or whether takeovers were likely to happen once the IEM was launched. The executive observed that small providers are proud to be independent providers. QQI has had extensive engagement with the providers, including hosting seminars in person and online for the sector. The change process will be challenging for the sector. As the IEM is a voluntary regime, some providers might change their business model so that they focus more on European students rather than visa students. Other providers have indicated that they are eager to embrace the new regulatory regime.

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

### **4.2 White paper on *Quality assurance guidelines for providers of programmes supported by digital education.***

The executive provided a verbal update on the white paper on Quality assurance guidelines for providers of programmes supported by digital education.

These will be a new addition to QQI's suite of QA guidelines. They will be statutory and will apply to all providers, so it is important that they have good exposure and consultation. The period of consultation has been extended; it was originally to finish the 8 June 2023 but was extended to the 30 June in order to receive more submissions.

In total, as of the 26 June, there had been 58 submissions. Overall, the feedback received has been positive. There have been some common themes coming through the feedback regarding the definitions associated with online and blended learning. Three different definitions were provided in the white paper. Blended Learning was described as the typical mode of delivery, in a college or in a centre but supplemented with online materials. Hybrid is the term used for what was previously known as blended – mix of online and remote with some in person classes. Online learning is

described as fully online learning with no face-to-face interaction. This breakdown has been described by some in the feedback as confusing, particularly with redefining what blended means.

Feedback has been positive around the good practice statements in the white papers as they are seen as a useful resource on how providers will write their QA procedures. The self-assessment tool built in is also seen as a useful resource by providers. The issues that pertain solely to online learning – these are the things that providers need to take account of if they propose to offer solely online courses. Once the window for feedback closes on Friday, 30 June, the feedback will be collated and given to National Institute for Digital Learning in DCU. QQI will meet with them and see how the feedback can be incorporated or referred to in the guidelines. The final guidelines will be ready for finalisation and to request approval by the Committee at the next PSC meeting.

The Committee welcomed the update on the white papers for digital education. The Committee questioned whether the consultation was targeted more towards specific providers or could anyone respond to the consultation. The consultation has been published on the QQI website and anyone can submit feedback to the white papers. The Committee felt that it was useful to hear back and articulate the work that has been going on around the consultation and any discussion or feedback is appreciated.

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

## **5 Standards – review and development**

No Business

## **6 Strategic Approach**

### **6.1 Report from the Board**

The QQI CEO provided an update from the 22 May and 19 June Board meetings that included the following points:

- The meeting that took place on the 22 May was the first Board meeting since November 2022, as there were only four members remaining on the QQI Board, and the quorum to meet is five.
- Induction was spread over two meetings, with induction taking place in the morning, with approvals in the afternoon. Two more meetings are planned for this year, 22 September, and 4 December.
- There is a new chair of the Board, Dr Irene Sheridan, who has been a member of the Board for the previous five years.
- Five new members have joined the QQI Board.
- There will be one more new member who will join at the next Board meeting, the student representative is still to be confirmed, but will be confirmed by early July.
- Once the final member has joined the Board, there can be a decision on which QQI Board members would be elected to QQI Committees, including the Policies and Standards Committee.
- There will be a proposal on membership for each of the Committees; this will be done incorporateally prior to the next QQI Board meeting.

## **7 PSC Reflection**

No business.

## **8 Policy Stocktake and Roadmap**

## **8.1 Policy Stocktake – Roadmap**

The Committee noted that the Policy Stocktake and Roadmap document is currently being updated. This document lists existing and planned policy and standards related documents along with information that has been collected about plans for their review and development. It is a working draft and there are some gaps in the information returned. This will be followed up at the next meeting.

## **9 Policy Development and Review**

### **9.1 Draft Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies**

The Executive presented a paper on Draft Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies for APPROVAL.

Listed Awarding Bodies or LABs are part of a suite of measures provided for in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019. The Listed Awarding Body Scheme is intended to provide voluntary, regulated access to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) for awarding bodies without statutory awarding powers in the State.

A prospective LAB will be required to establish QA procedures with reference to the sector specific guidelines for LABs. The Core QA guidelines and any other relevant QA guidelines will also apply. In the case of provider and Combination LABs, QQI will be required to approve the QA procedures as these LABs are considered relevant providers. Non-provider LABs will be required to submit their QA procedures as part of their application. These statutory, sector-specific QA guidelines address the responsibilities of Listed Awarding Bodies in the context of inclusion of their awards in the NFQ, and specifically the relationship with associated providers. These guidelines set out additional, statutory, quality assurance (QA) guidelines specific to Listed Awarding Bodies that come to QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of:

- Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body
- Inclusion of awards in the Framework

The approval of quality assurance procedures only has relevance in the context of establishment as a Listed Awarding Body, and awards included within the Framework. The status of being a Listed Awarding Body is associated with an approval, monitoring and review system that extends beyond approval of quality assurance procedures.

The Committee discussed the content of the paper, made suggestions, and welcomed the explanation given in relation to the Draft Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies. It was agreed that the guidelines are consistent with other QQI guidelines and fits within the structures, and that providers should be able to navigate through the document quite easily. It was noted that the document may be missing guidance on support structures for learning, career, and cultural development.

The consultation will open over the next number of weeks and will be open for feedback until September. The QA guidelines will come back to the Committee in their final draft to be approved for adoption.

**The Committee APPROVED the Draft Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies for consultation with stakeholders.**

### **9.2 Draft Policies & Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies**

The Executive presented a paper on Draft Policies & Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies for APPROVAL.

The QQI policy approach is to develop two sets of policies and criteria, one for establishment as a LAB and one for inclusion of awards in the Framework. There is some overlap between the two policy documents and that is because the first step is to establish as a LAB but the policy and criteria for inclusion in the Framework will be relevant on an ongoing basis as LABs seek to include additional awards.

A prospective LAB will be required to evidence achievement of the criteria to be established as a LAB. The awards proposed for inclusion in the Framework will have to evidence achievement of the criteria for inclusion. As outlined, there is some flexibility about how each individual LAB might evidence this, with opportunity for engagement with other regulators. The legislation does not require any specific bodies to seek establishment as a Listed Awarding Body. However, certain awarding bodies will be required to be established as a Listed Awarding Body if they wish to continue awarding relationships with relevant providers.

The Committee welcomed the draft policies and criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies and provided a range of feedback on the document presented. There was a discussion around the opening of applications and if there was a possibility of the 'floodgates' opening, and the huge body of work that would surround this. In response, the executive noted that the criteria that have been set by QQI can only be met by a limited number of providers and awarding bodies so this will mitigate that issue. There was a question around the term 'good standing' and what the definition of good standing is. It was noted that this is quite a loose term and open to interpretation and might, therefore, need to be thought out a little more.

**The Committee APPROVED the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies for consultation with stakeholders.**

### **9.3 Draft Policies & Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework**

The Executive presented a paper on Draft Policies & Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework for APPROVAL.

These are the core policies and criteria for the inclusion of awards in the Framework. This is a regulatory process that determines if an award should be an award that is included in the Framework. Applicants must be established as a LAB before their awards can be included in the Framework under this process, although in practicality, both decisions will be taken at the same time.

The Committee provided feedback on the draft. It was noted that there is a lot of duplication between the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework and the previous document presented, the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies, however awarding bodies will be coming back to this document any time they would like to include awards in the framework so the duplication is thought to be needed, as they are less likely to go back to the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies once they are established.

There was also a query from the Committee if the awards will be included in the framework for a certain length of time or whether they are included indefinitely. It was noted by the Executive, that stability of the qualifications system is desirable, and as such, it is proposed that awards are included indefinitely (although subject to internal review and governance arrangements to be evidenced as

part of cyclical external review) to avoid repeated cycles of inclusion and removal. This approach maximises the clarity of information provided in the Irish Register of Qualifications.

The Committee welcomed the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework and commended the work that has been done surrounding Listed Awarding Bodies. It was suggested that there could be room for some more clarity at the beginning of the document as it is not clear that some terms will be expanded upon at other sections, and that it might be better to cross reference throughout the document.

**The Committee APPROVED the Draft Policies & Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework for consultation with stakeholders.**

#### **9.4 Approval of minor modifications**

No business.

#### **9.5 Green Papers**

No business.

#### **9.6 White Papers**

No business.

#### **9.7 Final Decision on QA Guidelines**

No business.

#### **9.8 Policy Advice**

No business.

### **10 Notable new publications**

- [Quality Assurance of FET in the ETB Sector Sectoral Report 2023](#)
- [Quality in Irish Public Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [Quality in Irish Private & Independent Education Institutions](#)
- [OECD Skills Strategy Ireland: Assessment and Recommendations | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)
- [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning | CEDEFOP \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [The future of vocational education and training in Europe: volume 4: delivering lifelong learning: the changing relationship between IVET and CVET \(europa.eu\)](#)

### **11 Any Other Business**

#### **Next meeting**

The dates of the final two meetings of the PSC for this year were agreed upon – These will take place on Monday, 2 October and Monday, 27 November.

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

**Meeting ended.**