

24th Meeting (Incorporeal)
of the Policies and Standards Committee
Thursday 26 March 2020 09:00 am to 10:30 am
Via MS Teams

Present: Anne Walsh - Committee Chair
Niamh O'Reilly - Board Member
Barbara Kelly - QQI Executive Member
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Aileen Ponton - International Expert
Bryan Fields - National Expert
Aoife Sweeney – National Expert
Daire Keogh - National Expert

In attendance: Peter Cullen – Head of Research and Standards (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
Paul Brady - QQI Secretary
Walter Balfe - QQI (Item 1, 3, 4)
Deirdre Stritch – QQI (Item 2)

Apologies: None

In opening the meeting, the Chair welcomed the PSC members and those of the QQI executive to this incorporeal meeting of Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) urgently arranged to seek the approval and advice of the Committee on mitigating arrangements to address the coronavirus challenge.

The following documents were circulated in advance of the meeting:

- Temporary Modification of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System

- Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessments
- Temporary Extension of Providers' Scope of Provision and Related Amendments to Validated Programmes
- Extension of Period of Enrolment for Validated Programmes
- Building Confidence: Supports and Arrangements for the Tertiary Education System

Item 1 Temporary Modification of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System. (For Approval)

The Committee **noted** the aim of this paper is to modify the rules for any specified major award in the Common Awards System (CAS). Any such modifications will cater for situations where a learner is unable, for valid reasons arising from the Coronavirus pandemic, to meet the certificate requirements for the major award (e.g. to complete a 15 credit work experience module) but can meet the overall outcomes by alternative means. The Committee **noted** the proposed methodology and criteria, and the work experience and work practice related to enhancing a learner's readiness for a generic workplace setting but does not include awards which are strongly vocational in nature e.g. Healthcare Support, Early Childhood Care and Education. The Committee **suggested** the use of a template form may assist a Provider's submission for change. The Committee **recommended** that there should be a level of provider collaboration for a joint proposal to adjust an award.

Following discussion, the Members **AGREED to Approve** the approach set out in the document entitled "Temporary Modification of Rules for Awarding in Common Awards System".

Item 2 Guiding Principles for Alternative Assessments (For Approval)

The Committee **noted** this paper, a proposed **Topic-specific Quality Assurance Guideline**, is to guide providers when developing and implementing alternative assessments necessitated by the social distancing measures mandated by Government to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Committee **noted** that in the current circumstances, the normal white paper stage has been omitted, however, several key stakeholders had been invited to comment on an earlier draft and QQI's aim is to publish this in March 2020. The Committee suggested clarification that the provider's internal

QA team would approve all alternative arrangements. The Committee also suggested that 'incidental' in point 1 might be more clearly defined. The Committee **noted** that the guideline is for all providers of FET and HE programmes leading to NFQ awards and that the integrity of assessment is central to the credibility of awards.

The Members **AGREED to Approve** the Topic-specific Quality Assurance Guideline.

Item 3 Temporary Extension of Providers' Scope of Provision and Related Amendments to Validated Programmes *(For Approval)*

The Committee **noted** this paper set out the steps taken by the QQI executive to temporarily extend providers' approved scope of provision to accommodate the modifications to programme delivery and assessment. The Committee recognised that because of the social distancing measures mandated by Government to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic a provider's previously validated programme's form of delivery and assessment may no longer be permitted and that online provision may be the only viable alternative. The Committee **noted** that any modifications granted were on a temporary basis for the duration of this crisis and that an end date for the measure date would be included in the document.

The Members **AGREED to Approve** the **Temporary Extension of Providers' Scope of Provision and Related Amendments to Validated Programmes**.

Item 4 Extension of Period of Enrolment for Validated Programmes *(For Approval)*

The Committee **noted** that this paper proposed that QQI extend, by 4 months to 31st December 2020, the last intake date for those validated programmes whose last permitted intake date will have passed by 31st August 2020. This extension will be unilateral i.e. without a requirement for the providers to request it. It will be granted in recognition of the current difficulties arising from the Coronavirus pandemic, which makes the processes of programme review and revalidation vulnerable, dependent as they are on the availability of external experts, provider QA personnel and QQI executive staff. The Committee also **noted** that this development would have a negative effect on Fee Income received by QQI.

The Members **AGREED to Approve** the proposed Extension of Period of Enrolment for Validated Programmes.

Item 5 Building Confidence: Supports and Arrangements For The Tertiary Education System (*For Noting*)

The Committee **noted** that QQI plan to publish this document immediately (if not already published).

The document has been endorsed by key stakeholders and representative bodies.

The Committee **noted** this statement of confidence is supported by Guiding principles for alternative assessments (Item 2 above) and includes reference to the other papers brought to this meeting for PSC approval.

The Committee suggested some clarifying amendments to the paper particularly concerning the section on postponement (move it to follow the alternative arrangements) and the reference to students with particular disabilities.

it is recommended that these provisions include an explicit end date even if they have to be extended in the future.

The Committee through the Chair thanked the QQI Executive and Staff for their professional approach to the current crisis and similarly the QQI Executive thanked the Policies and Standards Committee for its commitment and speedy response to the items covered at this meeting.