



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# Quality and Qualifications Ireland Annual Report



# 2017



# Quality and Qualifications Ireland

## ANNUAL REPORT 2017

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## Introduction from the Chief Executive



This annual report for 2017 represents the main activities of the fifth year of QQI's business. It is the second report within the period of our second strategy statement 2016-2018.

During the year, the Board of QQI met on seven occasions. The term of office of the first Board of QQI concluded in November 2017. I would like to pay particular tribute to the contribution to the QQI Board of the late Ann Louise Gilligan, who sadly passed away in June 2017.

I would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing Chair, Gordon Clark who led the board so ably following its establishment and to outgoing members Jim Moore and Una Buckley.

The board's six sub-committees, the Audit and Risk Committee, the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC), the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC), the Approval and Reviews Committee (ARC), the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC), and the Human Resources and Organisation Committee continued to operate and report to the board on their activities. The outcomes of board and committee meetings are publicly available via our website.

The year saw the Minister of State for Higher Education launch QQI's Institutional Review of Higher Education cycle (CINNTE) and we also published a policy impact assessment of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

We were pleased to organise four well-attended conferences on Digitalisation in Qualifications; English Language Education; Collaborative Provision in Higher Education in Europe (jointly with our UK partners, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) and Internationalisation in Higher Education (jointly with the Higher Education Authority).

In 2017 QQI moved from the establishment and policy development phases into the more active operational matters of quality assurance and qualifications. During the year, QQI noted and approved the quality assurance procedures of 22 publicly-regulated higher education providers, including all of the Universities and Institutes of Technology. QQI staff visited all 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in preparation for the agreement of the QA procedures of the ETBs in 2018. QQI staff also met with and briefed over 350 other QQI providers in preparation for the agreement of their quality assurance procedures.

The year saw QQI validate new apprenticeship programmes in Accounting, Network Engineering, Software Development and Financial Services.

We also followed-up on the prioritised recommendations contained in the Organisational Review of QQI commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills in 2016.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Padraig Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Padraig Walsh Chief Executive, QQI

# About QQI

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) was established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It is a state agency, with the non-executive members of the board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

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, community and voluntary sector, representative bodies and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full title
<b>ACELS</b>	The Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services
<b>ACELS CELT</b>	Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services Certificate in English Language Teaching
<b>AIQR</b>	Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report
<b>ARC</b>	Approvals and Reviews Committee
<b>BALEAP</b>	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
<b>Cedefop</b>	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
<b>DAB</b>	Designated Awarding Bodies
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>DIT</b>	Dublin Institute of Technology
<b>Eaquals</b>	Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality Language Services
<b>EDUroam</b>	Education Roaming Access Service
<b>ELE</b>	English Language Education
<b>ENIC</b>	European Network of Information Centre in the European Region
<b>ENIC-NARIC</b>	European Network of Information Centre in the European Region - National Academic Recognition Information Centre
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>ETB</b>	Education and Training Board
<b>ETBI</b>	Education and Training Boards Ireland
<b>FET</b>	Irish Further Education and Training
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation

<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEA</b>	Higher Education Authority
<b>HECA</b>	Higher Education Colleges Association
<b>HELS</b>	The Higher Education Links Scheme
<b>HET</b>	Higher Education and Training
<b>HLG</b>	High Level Group on International Education
<b>IHEQN</b>	Irish Higher Education Quality Network
<b>IoT</b>	Institutes of Technology
<b>IOTI</b>	The Institutes of Technology Ireland
<b>IQAVET</b>	Irish Quality Assurance Network for Vocational Education and Training
<b>IUA</b>	Irish Universities Association
<b>IUIL</b>	Institut Universitaire International Luxembourg
<b>JR</b>	Judicial Review
<b>MEI</b>	Marketing English in Ireland
<b>MFA</b>	Management Framework Agreement
<b>MIC</b>	Mary Immaculate College
<b>NARIC</b>	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
<b>NEC</b>	National Europass Centre
<b>NFQ</b>	National Framework of Qualifications
<b>NUI</b>	The National University of Ireland
<b>PAEC</b>	Programmes and Awards Executive Committee
<b>PMDS</b>	Performance and Development Management System
<b>POAC</b>	Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee
<b>PSC</b>	Policies and Standards Committee
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>QAA</b>	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)
<b>QQI</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
<b>RSCI</b>	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SIC</b>	System of Internal Control
<b>SIFC</b>	System of Internal Financial Control
<b>TNE</b>	Transnational Education Review
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>TY Ireland</b>	Transition Year Ireland
<b>USI</b>	Union of Students in Ireland
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>VISKA</b>	Visible Skills of Adults

# Vision, Mission, Values and Goals

## OUR VISION

Extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to:

- Promote the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training;
- Quality assure providers; and
- Support and promote a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

## OUR VALUES

**Learner-Centred:** We promote a culture of access, responsiveness, flexibility, trust and quality in education and training and qualifications. We place the learner perspective at the centre of our work and also encourage stakeholders to do so.

**Improvement-Oriented:** We are a learning, developing and evolving organisation, committed to continuously evaluating and improving the quality of our work. This underpins our approaches to assuring and promoting improved quality in further and higher education and training.

**Collaborative:** We collaborate with our stakeholders to build confidence in and improve the quality of education and training opportunities and the recognition of qualifications.

**Independent:** Although we work within the broad framework of governmental policy, we are operationally independent in the performance of our functions and in our decision making. We operate with integrity and in a transparent, fair, equitable, impartial and objective manner.

**Professional:** We treat all persons with respect, dignity and courtesy. We work to the highest standards of public service, with regards to accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.

# Progress against our Goals in 2017

We aim to ensure that we provide a high-quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. In 2017, we commenced our second corporate plan working under our second strategy statement 2016-2018. This strategy outlines the goals and objectives for QQI over the next three years. The following sections highlight our progress to the end of 2017, in relation to the six goals.

**GOAL 1: We, in association with stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop education and training programmes with clear occupational and / or educational purposes and learning outcomes for informed career and other choices**

## National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

In December 2017, we published a Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ. This was the result of a year-long independent assessment carried out by Indecon (International Economic Consultants). An extensive survey of stakeholder views collected information on the impact of the NFQ across key indicators:

- Transparency and quality of qualifications
- Domestic progression and international mobility and recognition of qualifications
- Employability of graduates

This is the first in-depth analysis of the NFQ, since the Framework Implementation and Impact Study research conducted in 2009. It provides an insight into the role the NFQ plays in Irish society, and indicates what QQI can do to promote, further implement and develop policy in this area. This analysis will be used to inform the strategic direction QQI will take in relation to the NFQ, as we embark on a new strategic period 2019-2021.

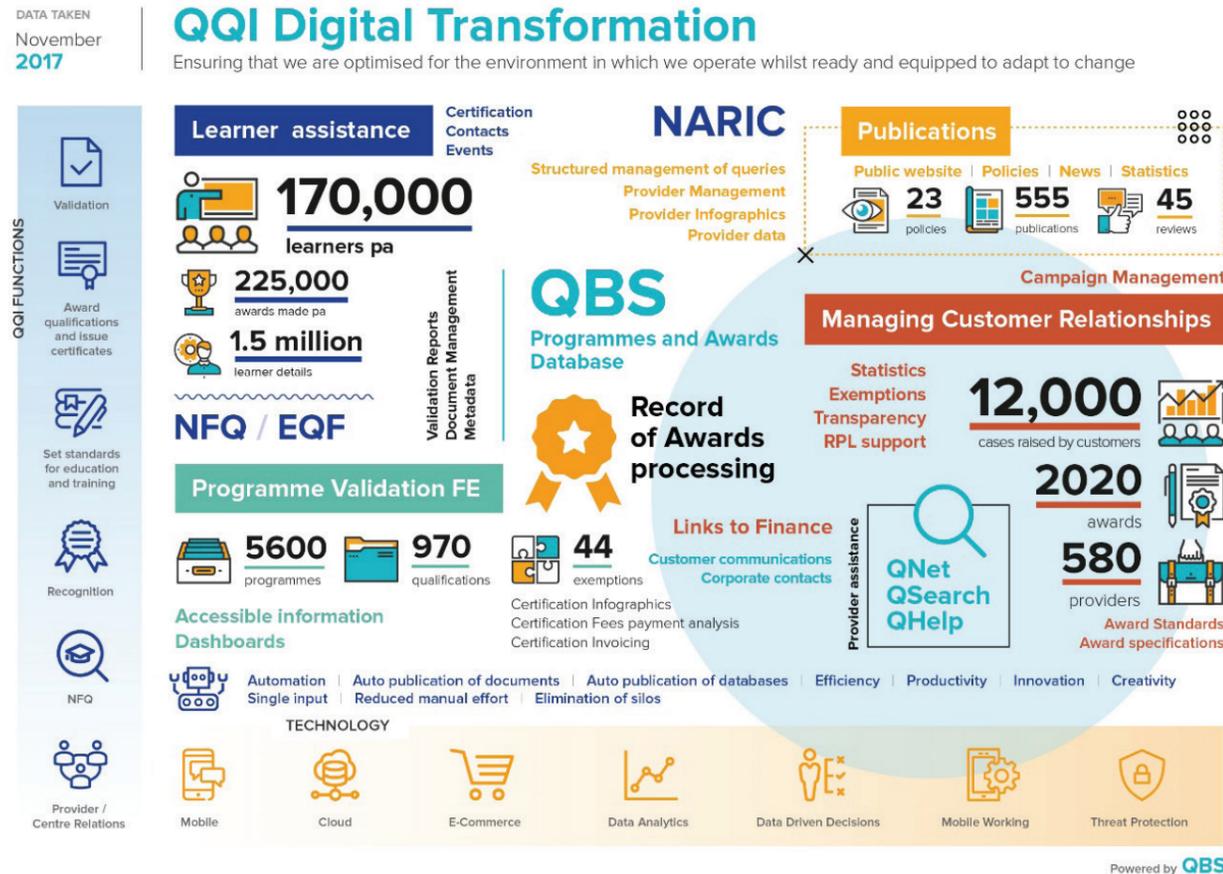
## Peer learning conference - Do NQFs make a difference? Measuring and evaluating NQF impact

In November 2017, QQI and the European Commission supported Cedefop in hosting a peer learning conference to discuss the impact of national frameworks. Some of the issues discussed, included considering if national frameworks make a difference, to the learners and citizens they are supposed to benefit. QQI's John O'Connor provided insight into Ireland's experience to date presenting on the topic 'Why frameworks matter'. The event was attended by policymakers and practitioners from 39 countries, all of whom are involved in this area of work.



## QQI Awards

The following infographic outlines the scope of information digitally processed and made available by QQI. It highlights the large number of awards made by QQI in 2017, the number of customer queries received through our online system, and provides an overview of the number of programmes, providers, policies and other information available online.



In 2017, 155,955 learners received QQI certificates on the National Framework of Qualifications. The awards were achieved across all ten levels of the NFQ, with level five continuing to dominate in terms of volume (see appendix 1 for breakdown of minor, major and supplemental awards achieved).

## OVERVIEW OF MAJOR, MINOR, SPECIAL PURPOSE AND SUPPLEMENTAL AWARDS MADE IN 2017

### Reviews of Awards and Standards

We are committed to developing NFQ standards for employers, learners, awarding bodies and policy makers. We do this through a review of existing award standards and the development of new award standards where appropriate.

In 2017 we consulted on:

- The approach and schedule for review of QQI awards standards at Levels 1-9 of the NFQ
- The review of the EU Skills Competencies Framework

In 2017 we reviewed:

- Level 4 Private Security Standards resulting in a Level 4 Specific Purpose Certificate Door Security Practices and a Level 4 Specific Purpose Certificate Security Guarding
- Level 5 Certificate Dance Studies
- Level 5 Certificate Music
- Level 6 Supplemental Certificate Domestic Gas Safety
- Level 6 Special Purpose Non-Domestic Gas Safety

### New Award Standards

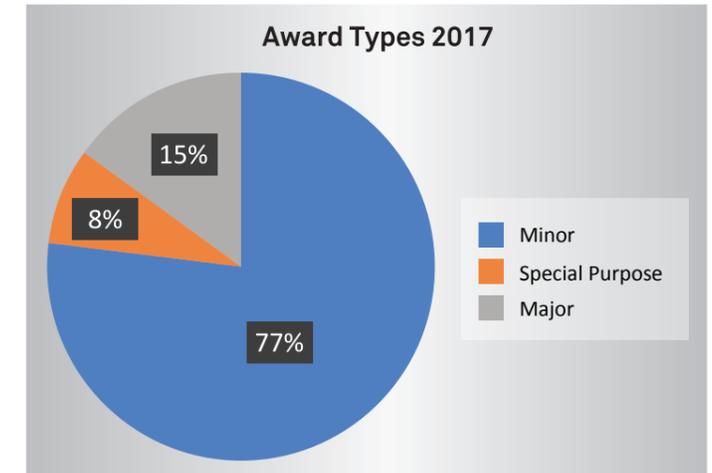
We are committed to developing NFQ standards for employers, learners, awarding bodies and policy makers. In 2017, the following new award standards were developed and / or consulted on:

- Level 6 Special Purpose Certificate Commercial Scuba Diving Operations
- Level 6 Special Purpose Certificate Surface Supplied Diving Operations
- Level 6 Advanced Certificate Dance Studies
- Level 6 Advanced Certificate Music Award

### Policy Development

In 2017 we published the following policies and policy related documents:

- CINNTE Review Handbook DAB website - September 2017
- CINNTE Review ToR DAB - September 2017
- CINNTE Review Handbook for Institutes of Technology - September 2017
- CINNTE Terms of Reference for Institutes of Technology - September 2017
- CINNTE Review Schedule - September 2017
- Sector specific QA Guidelines for ETBs - May 2017



## NARIC Ireland

QQI hosts NARIC Ireland, a free advice service on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland. We are part of a worldwide network of qualification recognition agencies known as ENIC-NARIC.

We have over 1,000 foreign awards listed and compared to levels on the NFQ in our recognition database. There have been over 70,000 individual visits to awards on our country pages in 2017, an increase of over 30% from our 2016 analysis.

*The top 5 countries where information was downloaded were:*

- Ireland
- Brazil
- United Kingdom
- Spain
- Croatia

In April 2017, we facilitated a study visit from our ENIC-NARIC colleagues in Sweden. They were particularly interested in learning more about our online database, as an example of best practice.

By the end of 2017, we had published the NARIC user guide in five languages (in addition to English). As well as our online service, we also responded to more than 3,000 telephone and email enquiries.



## Europass

QQI hosts the National Europass Centre. Part of our role is to promote the Europass initiative, which helps citizens organise their documents to make skills and qualifications easily understood abroad. We promoted Europass at a number of events including Higher Options, Jobs Week Events, TY Ireland and the Ploughing Championships, and we hosted the EU Reference Group of agencies of the Department of Education and Skills in Tullamore. We also hosted the Nordic Baltic Western Cluster Europass meeting at the QQI offices.

## Qualifax

QQI hosts Ireland's national learner database Qualifax, which provides information on higher and further education and training. In 2017, the website underwent a facelift to optimise its main pages. It also contains an annual calendar of national events across the country, which are relevant to education and training. By year end, more than 500,000 individual users had accessed the website. The Qualifax team attended local and national information events promoting the service, among them:

- Higher Options
- Institute of Guidance Counsellors Annual Conference
- National Ploughing Championships
- Jobs Week (operated by the Department of Family and Social Affairs)

**GOAL 2: We, in association with our stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop lifelong learning pathways for personal, social and professional development**

## Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

QQI is a member of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group, representing Ireland on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). In 2017, QQI participated in four meetings with the EQF Group discussing ways in which RPL is managed at European level.

Ireland, through the work of QQI, is participating in a 3-year Erasmus + KA3 funded project, VISKA (Visible Skills of Adults). The project addresses the need to make the skills of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and those with low levels of qualifications more visible, in order to shorten their time to employment and to support their active engagement in society.

Skills Norway is leading the project and is operating with QQI as well as with partners in Iceland and Belgium. Cork Institute of Technology are the research and evaluation partners for the VISKA project. For more information on VISKA see [www.viskaproject.eu](http://www.viskaproject.eu).

## ETB

In 2017, QQI continued to work with ETBI as part of their Quality Assurance Strategy Implementation Group. The 16 ETBs drafted Executive Self Evaluation Reports and Quality Improvement Plans, with an agreed focus primarily on corporate governance of quality assurance. By December 2017, 5 ETBs were working to publish their QA policies and procedures, in line with the final steps towards the approval of QQI's current policies and procedures, meeting accountability and transparency requirements.

## IQAVET

In March 2017, QQI launched the IQAVET Report on Collaborating for Impact in Quality Assurance - together across Europe. The direction set for the work of IQAVET, as a network for 2017 by the members, was to focus on the quality assurance of work based learning.

**GOAL 3: To oversee an improved quality assurance system that is comprehensive and balances accountability and enhancement and promotes local responsibility**

## Quality Assurance

QQI developed a quality assurance micro-site enabling easy access to all policy and guideline materials, developed in relation to quality assurance. The aim of this site is to provide an additional support to providers in higher, further, and English language education for the quality assurance of their programmes and services. The micro-site hosts all QA guidelines, policies and principles and explains in detail each of the sectoral areas.

In 2017, QQI also drafted and consulted on the statutory guidelines in Blended Learning which were scheduled for publication in Q1 2018.

## Reengagement

In January 2017, QQI completed its reengagement with the 23 publicly funded higher education institutions which had commenced in 2016. QQI concluded reengagement with this sector by meeting with Athlone Institute of Technology, Limerick Institute of Technology and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.



QQI also engaged in a series of informal dialogue meetings with the Designated Awarding Body (DAB) sector throughout the year. In addition, QQI also held dialogue meetings with all 16 ETBs.

### National Student Engagement

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) was launched in March 2016 by the programme partners, QQI, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). NStEP aims to develop institutional capacity and increase student engagement within higher education institutions in Ireland. The 2016 pilot stage involved five higher education institutions, and the programme grew to include 23 higher education institutions, across the public and private sectors by April 2017.

### Apprenticeships

In 2017, QQI appointed an Apprenticeship Quality Assurance Manager, a new position created to support apprenticeship provision in a national context, and to manage the validation process for new apprenticeships and traineeships. The key priority for this area in 2017, was to work with providers in both the higher and further education and training sectors, who are providing apprenticeship programmes and support them, as they transition to QQI's Validation of Programmes policy.

A number of workshops aimed at providers took place in 2017, to support apprenticeship applications, and to clarify the role of QQI in validation.

- 6 October: launched the Higher Education and Apprenticeship training of programme validation panel members: 73 participants attended
- 1 December: 100 participants attended training for evaluators



(l-r) Dr. Joseph Ryan, CEO, Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), Natasha Kinsella, Apprenticeship Council and Regional Skills Forum Manager, Dublin, James Eustace, Project Manager, SOLAS and Alex Keys, Apprenticeship Quality Assurance Manager, QQI at the Apprenticeship Workshop, 6 October 2017.

### Programme Validation Activity for Apprenticeships in 2017:

Programme type	Process type	Programmes
HET	Panel and site visit	2
FET	Panel and site visit	16

### Apprenticeship Programmes Validated in 2017:

Provider	Validated	Levels
<b>SOLAS (existing)</b>	- Electrical Instrumentation	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Instrumentation	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Electronic Security Systems	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Wood Manufacturing Engineering	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Tool Making	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Farriery	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Agricultural Mechanics	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Sheet Metal Working	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Industrial Insulation	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Vehicle Body Repair	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Brick and Stonelaying	Advanced Certificate Level 6
	- Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting	Advanced Certificate Level 6
<b>Kerry ETB</b>		
	- Advanced Certificate Culinary Arts (TBC) Commis Chef	Level 6
<b>Accounting Technician Ireland (ATI)</b>		
	- Advanced Certificate Accounting (TBC)	Level 6
<b>National College of Ireland (NCI)</b>		
	- Higher Certificate in Business in International Financial Services	Level 6
	- Higher Diploma in Business in Financial Services Analytics	Level 8
<b>Fast Track to Information Technology (FIT)</b>		
	- Advanced Certificate in Software Development	Level 6
	- Advanced Certificate in ICT Network Engineering	Level 6



The training events for evaluators (programme validation panel members) had a particular focus on chairpersons and secretaries although all roles were covered.

The events incorporated feedback from previous events and included workshops to encourage interaction.

QZI also published resource documents to assist providers making an application for validation under the new policies and criteria. These were discussed at the training events and amended based on feedback received and are published on the QZI website.

**Programme Validation (including Revalidation and Apprenticeship) Activity in 2017**

The majority of programmes for validation, were processed and completed within a 25-week timeframe. In HET, 80% of applications were processed within 25 weeks, with the average panel and site visit being completed within 14 weeks. In FET, 91% of programmes were validated within 25 weeks, with the average panel and site visit being completed within 12 weeks.

Please see table below for additional information:

Programme Type	Process Type	Number of Programmes	Avg number of weeks	Max number of weeks	Min number of weeks
HET	Panel and Site Visit	25	14.04	30	4
HET	Devolved Responsibility	2	13.00	22	4
HET	Desk Evaluation	2	5.50	10	1
FET	Panel and Site Visit	33	12.76	29	1
FET	Devolved Responsibility	61	4.02	10	0
FET	Desk Evaluation	26	9.92	21	3

**Institutional Reviews**

**Launch of CINNTE review cycle**

In September 2017, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, the Minister of State for Higher Education launched CINNTE, the first review cycle for publicly regulated higher education institutions. This means a total of 23 institutions (Universities, Institutes of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI)) will be quality reviewed over the next seven years. In each case, the reviews will be carried out by an independent team of experts and peers.

To coincide with the launch, QZI collaborated with the DAB and IoT sectors, and published handbooks for the respective areas. Terms of reference and cyclical handbooks were developed for Institutes of Technology and Universities and other Designated Bodies.



Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. and Dr Padraig Walsh, QZI CINNTE Review launch, 26 September 2017.

**Institutional Review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC)**

As a linked provider of the University of Limerick, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by University of Limerick, or if requested by QZI. In 2015, QZI was asked to review MIC

and published the final report of the institutional review in July 2017. The review was conducted by an independent review team appointed by QQI. Full details and the final report are available from the review library on our website [www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie).

### Institutional Review of Institut Universitaire International Luxembourg

In September 2017, QQI published the final report of an international institutional review of the IUIL. The review was organised by QQI on behalf of the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche du Luxembourg. This was the first time QQI was contracted to carry out an institutional review of an overseas institution, on behalf of another organisation. The review was conducted in accordance with European standards, and guidelines for reviews and terms of reference were developed between QQI, IUIL and the Ministère. The review team was appointed by QQI with the agreement of the Ministère and IUIL.

### Transnational Education Review (TNE)

In 2017, QQI requested that our UK partner, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), review UK awarding bodies operating in Ireland. The purpose of the review, was to support development of TNE by UK providers, taking into consideration the interests of QQI in UK provision within our jurisdiction. The cyclical review unit in QQI acted as the link unit for QAA throughout the review and assisted them throughout.

### Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQR)

#### AIQR Summary Report

Every year, QQI prepares a summary of the Annual Institutional Quality Reports (AIQRs) published by publicly regulated higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland. The report highlights quality initiatives undertaken across higher education institutions and identifies common quality themes for institutions. The 2017 report included information from Universities, Institutes of Technology and the RCSI.

Highlights from this year's report included:

- Continuing initiatives within institutions to improve the student experience, with institutions focusing on the first-year experience and improving progression rates.
- A focus on creating a quality culture at institution and unit level, with a clearer mission-centred focus in initiatives.
- Increasing the role of data to inform quality, with the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) in particular, providing a way for institutions to benchmark nationally. Many HEIs are also using their own institutional research functions to gather information to support QA.
- The growing importance of quality assurance for Irish HEIs, and the increasing profile of quality offices within HEIs.
- The continuing impact of reduced funding, the Employment Control Framework and additional strategic planning, relating to regional mergers and alliances on the effectiveness of QA.

#### Updated AIQR Online Submission

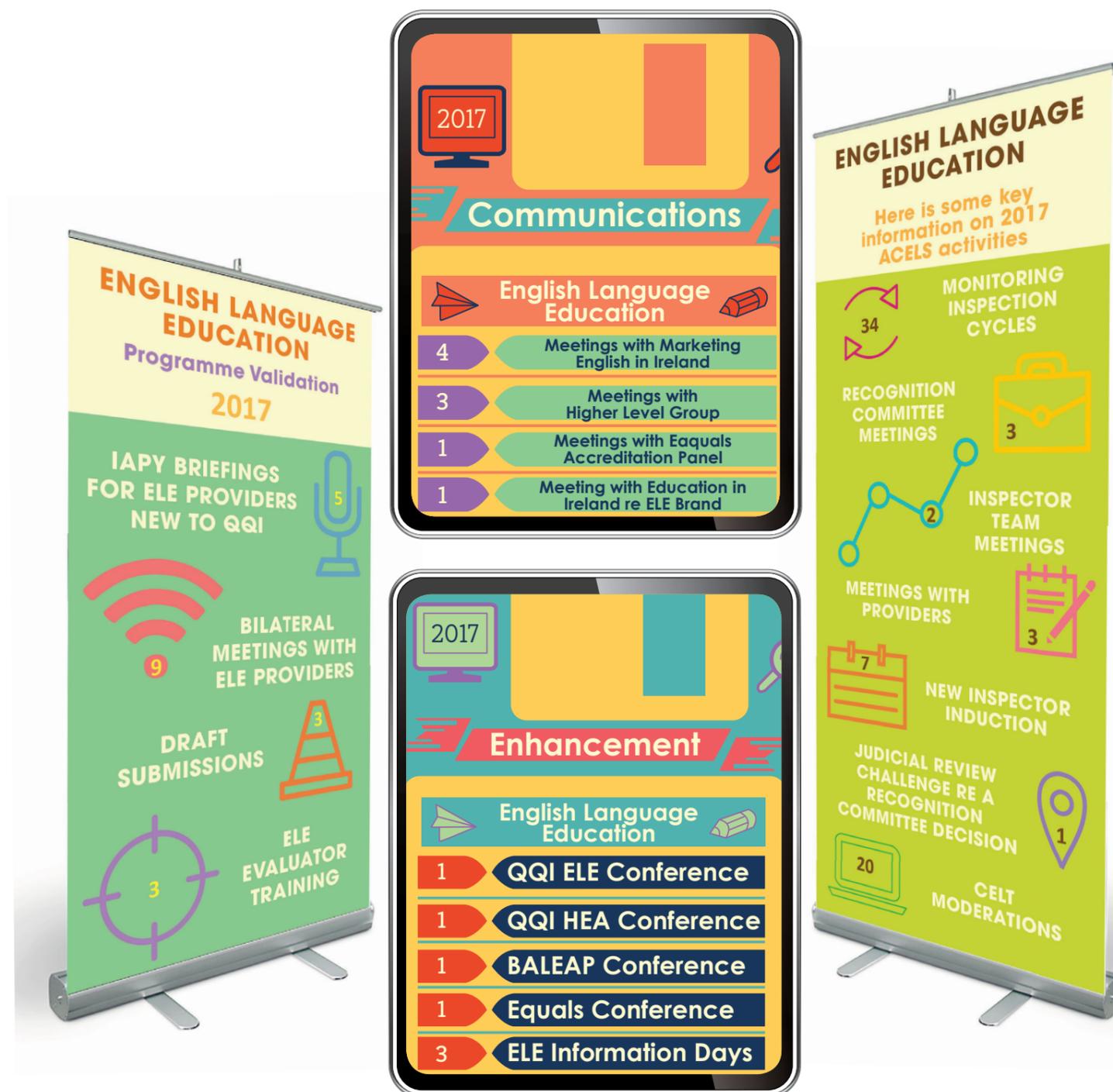
In 2017, QQI in collaboration with universities and institutes of technology streamlined a system of online reporting to allow for the electronic submission of Irish higher education institutions' AIQR. The online system enables easy access to reporting and facilitates publication on the QQI website.

In 2017, for the first time, AIQRs for all 22 Public Irish HEIs were published on the QQI website. In advance of the new system being launched, a workshop for Institute of Technology staff was held in October 2017.

### English Language Education

QQI operates the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS) while inspecting and monitoring ACELS recognised providers. We validate programmes relating to QQI English Language Education programmes, and work with stakeholders to enhance, develop and share information in the English Language Education arena.

ACELS is the national scheme for accreditation. In 2017, there were 96 ACELS recognised providers representing approximately 130 centres nationwide. Details on our monitoring activities, programme validation and communication and enhancement work are outlined in the following infographics:



**GOAL 4: We will provide clear authoritative and comprehensive information to stakeholders and the public regarding QQI's roles, responsibilities and activities**

**Management Framework Agreement (MFA)**

QQI is committed to building mutually supportive relationships with stakeholders and developing strong working relationships with key sectors. This had led to the development of an annual management framework agreement with the Department of Education and Skills (DES). This MFA largely reflects the activities in our annual corporate plan, as well as some key areas of development agreed with the Department. The MFA was agreed with the Department in April of 2017 and was published on our website. QQI and the Department met quarterly to update one another on progress on the activities scheduled.

**Consultative Forum**

The consultative forum met twice in 2017, in May and November. The forum has been in existence since 2014. In 2017, the membership was reviewed, and ten new stakeholders were invited to join the forum. The themes for the 2017 meetings were:

11 May: Review of consultative forum and membership. We took the opportunity to review the terms of reference for the group and identified ways in which the forum could be improved, to facilitate better engagement and discussions with members.

9 November: Effective Stakeholder Engagement. This meeting was in workshop format and examined the challenges and opportunities for our organisation's now and in the future, in relation to developing strategic priorities.

**Social Media and Communications**



**2078**  
Views

**17**  
Videos

**47**  
Subscribers



**258**  
Tweets

**583**  
Followers

In August, QQI launched its first organisational social media account on Twitter (@QQI\_connect). The account is regularly used to update followers on the work of QQI including consultations, events, new publications, general news and updates.

Our top tweet of the year announced that our draft quality assurance guidelines on blended learning were published for consultation. This organic post had 5,700 impressions. The platform is proving successful in terms of gaining positive traction with followers and increasing engagements.

We also produced a series of corporate videos to communicate the work of QQI and its various business areas. These were circulated to stakeholders through a QQI Ezine, published on our YouTube channel and tweeted to our followers.

**Podcasts**

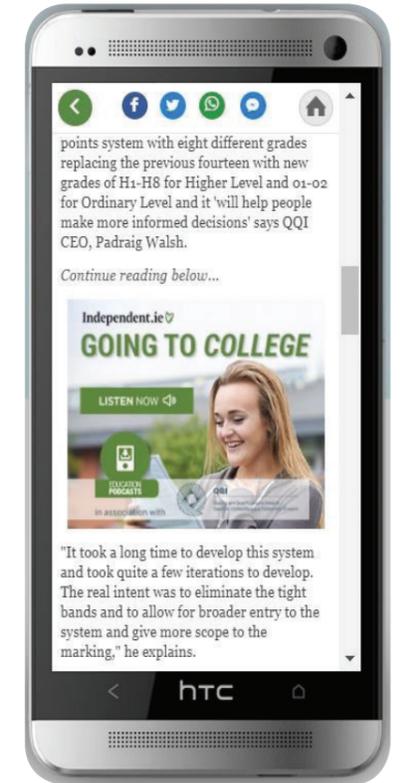
In June we teamed up with the Irish Independent, to sponsor their 'Going to College' podcast series. During August, to coincide with the release of the Leaving Certificate results, we participated in four podcasts hosted by John Walshe of the Irish Independent. The podcasts were advertised digitally and resulted in over 18,000 listens.

**EPISODE 1:**  
Preparing for Leaving Cert Results

**EPISODE 2:**  
Take your time before making your decision

**EPISODE 3:**  
What to do if you didn't get a college offer

**EPISODE 4:**  
How to best prepare for college life



**Events**

**Digitalisation Agenda, Re-thinking the Role of Qualifications and Skills Digitalisation Conference**

In October 2017, QQI hosted the Digitalisation Agenda Conference. This event brought together experts and an audience of enterprise, educationalists and policy-makers, to consider how new skills and competences emerging from creativity, entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn, digital competence and other skills and competences should be defined, described, taught, acquired and recognised.

This event had over 400 participants registered and was facilitated by Ingrid Miley.

It focused on three related themes:

- Digitalisation and Skills for Work
- Digital Student Data Ecosystem
- Digitalisation and Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Attendees were surveyed after the event:

- 95% of respondents considered the quality of speakers to be “Excellent/Very Good”
- The majority of respondents (97%) expressed their satisfaction with the conference content and format
- 97% would recommend this conference to a colleague



(l-r) Ms Barbara Kelly, Dr Pdraig Walsh, Ms Ingrid Miley and Mr John O'Connor at the Digitalisation Agenda conference, Radisson Blu Hotel, Golden Lane, 24 October 2017.

### English Language Education Quality Enhancement Event

This was our second national English language conference and was held on 22 November 2017. The theme for this event was Management of Effective English Language Education. We focused on three core components which drive the success of an English language education provider: assessment; teaching and learning; and quality assurance. Over 170 participants registered to attend the event. Those in attendance were surveyed afterwards:

- 94% were happy with the plenary talks presented
- 89% were satisfied with the online conference registration process
- 83% were happy with the breakout sessions



(l-r) Dr. Fiona Farr, Chair of the ACELS Recognition Committee and Dean of Teaching and Learning at University of Limerick and Ms Sue Hackett, QOI at ELE event in Croke Park, November 2017.

### Collaborative Provision in Higher Education in Europe

QOI hosted a joint conference in Belfast with our UK partners in quality assurance; Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The conference looked at the most recent evaluation of transnational provision between the UK and Ireland and collaborative provision around Europe in general.

**GOAL 5: We will proactively enable and encourage QOI's staff's ability to develop, thrive and be fully engaged in their work**

### Staff Development and Training

QOI conducts ongoing staff engagement through its Employee Engagement Group, whose membership includes staff at all levels in the organisation. The work of the forum has overseen several initiatives including a Mental Health and Positive Wellbeing Programme in 2017. QOI continues to engage with the recognised trade union on matters involving terms and conditions of employment.

QOI and the Department of Education and Skills have jointly engaged the services of an external change manager, to support the implementation of agreed recommendations arising from an organisational review which was concluded at the end of 2016.

QOI, informed by the Performance and Development Management System (PMDS), facilitated staff training and development which included professional coaching, attendance at forums, conferences, briefing sessions and continuous professional development.



We also provided training in relation to:

- Access
- Excel
- PowerPoint
- Social Media
- Time Management
- Professional Irish Language Skills
- Supervisory Skills
- Effective Writing Skills
- First Aid
- Manual Handling
- Advanced Presentation Skills

**GOAL 6: To enhance QQI's self-service systems, processes and technological capabilities to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service it delivers**

QQI has enhanced its service to customers, by developing new application forms and an online payment system, for the reissue of certification records of awards and for the NARIC service. The addition of an automated certification invoicing system has provided a more efficient service to our customers.

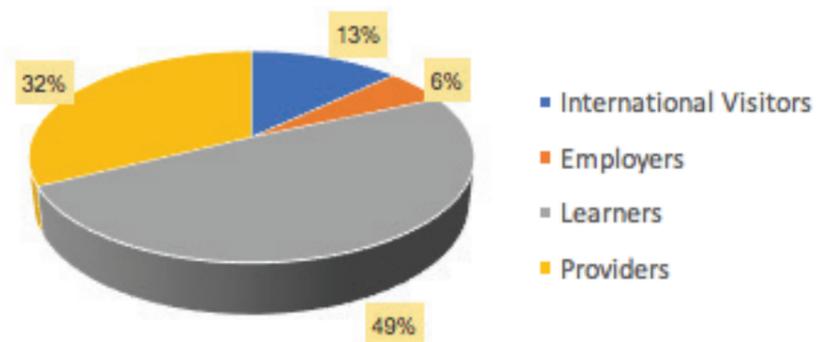
QQI has established effective systems for external and internal communications, through the development of a single contacts information system, which will facilitate a new events management system to be developed in 2018. The introduction of EDUroam, has increased the capacity of QQI staff to access web services externally, and of stakeholders to access similar services within QQI premises.

The provision of accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date information has been facilitated by further development of our Infographics service, and a new internal data visualisation system for analysis of fees income.

**Queries received through QHelp**

To answer queries, QQI uses an online system called QHelp, which is accessible through our website. Those submitting queries register their details and submit their query, which is then sent to our centralised customer relationship system. In 2017 we received 11,494 queries through this system.

Our QHelp service also provides a number of articles which aim to provide answers to common questions. The number of unique page visits to this service in 2017 was 92,313 broken down as follows:



QHelp Articles - High Level Statistics 2017

# Governance

**QQI Board**

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The board is responsible for the approval of financial accounts, policy, strategy statements, corporate plans and annual reports. The board makes decisions in relation to several functions including but not limited to:

- Approval of all policy and approaches to policy
- Strategic planning, corporate planning and approval of annual reports
- Approval of accounts
- 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. To improve efficiencies, a number of sub-board committee structures have been established to assist with academic governance (see the section on sub-board governance for more information, p.23).

The first five-year term of the QQI Board concluded on 5 November 2017.

The board members are:

- Mr Gordon Clark (Chair) (to 5 November 2017)
- Dr Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (International expert) (reappointed 6 November 2017)
- Ms Una Buckley (Learner representative) (to 5 November 2017)
- Ms Mary Danagher (reappointed 6 November 2017)
- Dr Ann Louise Gilligan (to 15 June 2017)
- Ms Joanne Harmon (reappointed 6 November 2017)
- Mr Oisín Hassan (USI nomination) (appointed 21 July 2017, reappointed 6 November 2017)
- Mr Jack Leahy (USI nomination) (to 30 June 2017)
- Mr Thomas McDermott (reappointed 6 November 2017)
- Mr James Moore (to 5 November 2017)

In 2017, the board met on the following dates:

- 10 February



- 7 April
- 22 and 27 June (incorporeal meetings)
- 21 July
- 22 September
- 3 November

### Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

QQI is in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) with the following derogations:

- Post resignation / Retirement
- Secretary of the Board
- Document Retention
- Governance Arrangements
- Oversight Agreements
- Board to ensure that Performance Delivery Agreements and Statement of Strategy are communicated to all
- Customer Charter Cycle
- Customer Action Plan
- Confirmation of adherence to the relevant aspects of the Public Spending Code

### Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2017 QQI Board Meetings

	10 Feb 2017	7 April	Incorporeal Meetings 22 and 27 June	21 July***	22 Sept	3 Nov	Max	Attendance
Gordon Clark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7
Barbara Brittingham	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	7	6
Una Buckley	✓	✓	✓ (27 <sup>th</sup> only)	✓	✓	✓	7	6
Mary Danagher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7
Ann Louise Gilligan	✓						2	1
Joanne Harmon	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓	✓	7	7
Oisín Hassan*					✓	✓	2	2
Jack Leahy*	✓		✓ (27 <sup>th</sup> only)				4	2
Thomas McDermott	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓	7	7
James Moore	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		7	6

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

\*\* Attended via phone conferencing.

\*\*\* This meeting was originally scheduled to take place on 16 June 2017.

### Board Member Payments

Members of the Board of QQI act entirely in a voluntary capacity and no fees were paid to members of the board in 2017. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, domestic travel, flights and subsistence. Board members' travel and subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total board expenses in 2017 were €16,456\* (2016: €17,568).

### Remuneration and Expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €138,694.71\* in 2017 (2016: €136,276). The Chief Executive received no performance related pay during the 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 €2,780\* in 2017 (2016: €1,032).

Our audited financial statements are available from the publication library on our website.

\*These figures are extracted from the 2017 draft financial statement.

## SUB-BOARD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

### Audit and Risk Committee

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure and support the 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.

Members: Relative to the size of the board, membership of the committee is comprised of two board members: Thomas McDermott (Chairperson) and James Moore (to 3 November 2017), and one external non-board member: Tony Mealy (as opposed to three as stated in the Code of Practice).

### Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The function of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) is largely to make 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 ten times in 2017.

Members: Padraig Walsh (Chair), Barbara Kelly, Angela Lambkin, Bryan Maguire, Karena Maguire, John O'Connor, Roisin Sweeney, Andrina Wafer.

### Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The mission of the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) is to apply its expertise to considering QQI draft policy and make 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 the knowledge, skills and competence which are expected for higher education awards. The PSC met four times in 2017.

Members: James Moore (Chairperson) (to 4 September 2017), Lucien Bollaert, Bryan Fields (from 8 November 2017), Ann Louise Gilligan (to 15 June 2017), Joanne Harmon, Ewart Keep, Barbara Kelly, Daire Keogh (from 28 April 2017), Catherine MacEnri (to 29 June 2017), Bryan Maguire, Aidan Mulkeen (to 19 March 2017), Ann-Marie Ryan.

### Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The mission of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC) is to review and analyse the activities of the PAEC, and on that basis to provide advice and make recommendations to the PAEC on the fulfilment of its mission. It will also confirm or refer back decisions of the PAEC, as appropriate. The PAOC met four times in 2017.

Members: Barbara Brittingham (Chairperson), Ken Carroll (from 22 May 2017), Liz Carroll, Maureen Conway, Peter Cullen, Mary Danagher, Sarah Ingle (to 9 April 2017), Paul Lyons (from 22 May 2017), Anne Mangan, John D. Mulcahy.

### Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The ARC makes decisions and recommendations about the approval of quality assurance procedures; the International Education Mark and delegated authority. The Committee is also responsible for approving effectiveness reviews of providers' quality assurance procedures.

The ARC met four times in 2017.

Members: Kevin Ryan (Chairperson), Colette Harrison, Marie Kehoe O'Sullivan, Mary Sheridan, Ailsa Crumm, Oisin Hassan, Martin Lyes and Geraldine Larkin.

Maurice Buckley, Una Buckley and Jack Leahy were all members of ARC in 2017 with their terms coming to an end at various stages during the year.

### Human Resources and Organisation Committee

The purpose of the Human Resources and Organisation Committee is to assist and advise the board in order to reinforce its own governance and oversight in the areas of HR and the organisation.

The HR and Organisation Committee met four times in 2017.

Members: Gordon Clark (Chairperson, to 3 November 2017), Una Buckley (to 3 November 2017), Mary Danagher, Joanne Harmon.



## Corporate Matters

### Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee is supported by three members of the Executive. The Audit and Risk Committee held four meetings in 2017 on the following dates:

- 3 March
- 21 July
- 29 September
- 3 November

### Internal Audit Function

QQI has a three-year internal audit plan which commenced in 2017. Internal audits are to be carried out on all the key corporate and business functions of QQI. The following internal audits have been completed in 2017:

- Annual System of Internal Financial Control (SIFC) 2016
- Internal Audit of the System of Internal Control (SIC) 2016
- Audit of internal controls around the risk of lack of detection of poor quality provision, owing to failure to monitor providers

- Official Languages Act
- Quality Assurance Improvement Cycle
- Payroll and Personnel Cycle
- Revenue Cycle

### External Audit Function

As per the requirement of the Code of Practice for governance, QQI met with Mr. Dinos Christodoulides, Senior Auditor, Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. The meeting took place between Mr Christodoulides and the Audit and Risk Committee on 03 March 2017.

### Risk Management

QQI's Risk Management Policy was revised at the Audit and Risk Committee meeting of September 2017. The Committee noted that the revised Risk Appetite Statement requires further amendment to reflect more accurately the breadth of activity undertaken by QQI. The revised Risk Management Policy, incorporating a revised interim Risk Appetite Statement was approved by the Audit and Risk Committee, and by the board on 03 November 2017.



## Risk Register

An in-depth review of the Risk Register was undertaken during the 2017. This was supported by externally facilitated training across the QQI management group. During this process the following five risk categories were identified:

- Financial Sustainability and Viability
- Knowledge, Skills and Competencies
- Shareholder Relationships and Engagement
- Corporate Support Services
- Reputation

## Principal Risks

The board has carried out an assessment of QQI's principal risks. They are listed below along with some of the controls required:

- Risk: Inability to administer a meaningful financial management, budgetary control process and adequate forecasting of expenditure.

Mitigated by sanction for appointment of a Finance Manager, configuration of the Financial Management System (FMS) to enable the recognition of expenditure at section, unit and project level; consideration of monthly management accounts by the Executive Management Team (EMT); manage the tracking and status of projects at monthly programme board meetings.

- Risk: QQI IT systems, document management, and operations will not be GDPR compliant by May 2018.

Mitigated by the approval of a Project Plan by the Programme Board and the provision of staff briefing sessions on GDPR.

- Risk: QQI is found to be operating beyond its legal powers (*ultra vires*) following successful legal challenge.

Mitigated by the acquisition of legal advice when devising policies to implement functions; the briefing of providers and applicants thoroughly to ensure an understanding of the powers and limitations of QQI.

- Risk: QQI cannot discharge its corporate functions due to manpower and skills gaps.

Mitigated by the appointment of a Change Management Consultant in September 2017; the appointment of a Director of Corporate Services in December 2017; sanction to fill posts following identification of skills gaps in Finance and Communications.

- Risk: Providers may challenge decisions of ACELS due to lack of statutory remit, resources and defects in procedures.

Mitigated by the annual revision of ACELS Regulations; the appointment of new English Language Inspectors.

## Summary of 2017 Financial Results

In 2017, QQI received €10.8 million between State Grant, fee income, EU funding and other. For the same period, expenditure was €11.2 million. Pay and pensions costs in 2017 amounted to €5.5 million.

## Data Protection

QQI is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. Data Protection is the safeguarding of the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of personal data. 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 and assists in order 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 should 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. A new QQI Protected Disclosures Policy which complies with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 was approved by the board in March 2017.

No reports were made by QQI workers under the QQI Protected Disclosures Policy in the 12-month period to 31 December 2017.

Two reports were received by QQI under Section 7 of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 in the 12-month period to 31 December 2017. These disclosures were not from employees of QQI and relate to a worker or workers employed in an entity that falls within the remit of QQI, whereby such a disclosure can be made to a prescribed person in QQI under S.I. 339 of 2014.

Both disclosures were concluded following investigation.

## Complaints of Service

During 2017, QQI received no complaints of service.

## Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012

Following extensive engagement with the Department of Education and Skills and QQI's wider stakeholder group, the General Scheme for the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Amendment Bill was approved by the Government on 15 May 2017. It is anticipated that this will proceed through the Oireachtas during 2018, thus enabling QQI to undertake the functions envisaged for it more comprehensively.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

Level	Award Type	2017
1	Major	372
2	Major	1130
3	Major	1777
3	Special Purpose	10
4	Major	2056
4	Special Purpose	413
5	Major	22733
5	Special Purpose	12651
6	HE Minor	181
6	Major	6095
6	Special Purpose	7157
6	Supplemental	57
7	HE Minor	24
7	Major	844
7	Special Purpose	499
8	HE Minor	16
8	Major	2846
8	Special Purpose	478
9	HE Minor	2
9	Major	1970
9	Special Purpose	87
10	Major	28

## Appendix 2

QQI awards disaggregated in 2017; by award type and by NFQ level.  
All tables exclude awards which were achieved via providers who have delegated authority.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6 FET	Level 6 HET	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10	Total
Major	372	1,130	1,777	2,056	22,733	5,909	186	844	2,846	1,970	28	39,851
Minor	1,046	7,828	23,958	34,688	113,292	18,495	403	37	184	115		200,046
Special Purpose			10	413	12,651	6,040	1,117	499	478	87		21,295
Supplemental						57						





**QQI**

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