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The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed Submission to Quality and Qualifications Ireland's White Paper on Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines

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INTRODUCTION

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) welcomes the opportunity to engage in the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) consultation process on the White Paper on Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

“The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society.” (INOU Mission Statement)

The organisation has 211 affiliated organisations and over 2,100 individual members. We work at the local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people through the provision of training and welfare rights information services; analysis of Government policies and related advocacy work; and working with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

WHITE PAPER - CORE STATUTORY QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES

The INOU is very aware of the difficulties inherent in trying to identify core Quality Assurance (QA) guidelines that are both practical and relevant to the diverse range of providers across the Irish higher and further education sectors. The quality and enhancement of education and training provision along with the maintenance of standards for learners is of the utmost importance. It is incumbent on all providers to ensure a high quality service that meets standards, has the learner at the centre and is both accountable and transparent. Adult learners are a very diverse group, and the issues that arise for that group in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector are often very different to that of adult learners in the Higher Education (HE) sector. This in turn has an impact on the training and education provision of both sectors to adult learners.

Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines informed by all stakeholders and relevant research is an important tool to ensure best practice in the delivery of education and training to learners. The INOU recognises the challenges in devising such guidelines and appreciates the open consultation process that allows providers to have a voice and input to this document. The following are our comments on this white paper.

2.1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Appropriate and robust governance should be a hallmark of any good quality service. However, it is important that the mechanisms put in place by and expected of providers recognise and take into account the type, size and capacity of individual providers. This is not a suggestion that some providers are allowed lower standards. Rather that providers are not expected to operate overly onerous mechanisms more suited to larger sized organisations and are supported in developing organisation appropriate mechanisms that adhere to QA guidelines.

While the financial stability of a provider is paramount, the integrity of the academic process is also very important. The INOU is pleased to see an acknowledgement of the separation of such a process from that of commercial considerations.

It has been the experience of INOU that engaging all staff in the development and delivery of quality provision is crucial to success. Being overly dependent on cumbersome procedures does not lend itself to a good quality service. It is welcome that these guidelines not only recognise this, but state clearly that *'the burden of procedures do not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture'*

2.3 PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Page 21, section 2.3: a Learner Induction can look very different depending on the size, scope and requirements of individual programmes, i.e. an induction for a degree programme will be very different to that of an induction to a programme that covers a single minor award. The INOU suggests, at the second bullet point, putting the words 'An Appropriate' in before 'Learner Induction to both the provider and the programme'.

2.5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Page 26, section 2.5.2: it is imperative that the learning environment is both encouraging and supportive. It should be an element of good practice that staff not only encourage learning and development, but provide appropriate support and guidance to enable learning and development. The INOU suggests replacing the word 'encouraging' in the first bullet point with the word 'providing' would strengthen the statement.

Page 26, Section 2.5.3: the INOU recognises the importance developments and enhancements to teaching practice at both National and International level play. Being aware and informed on both is necessary to the continuous provision of good quality education and learning opportunities. However, the difficulties of fully engaging with both, particularly the issue of limited resources, must also be acknowledged. For community

organisations operating on shoestring budgets, taking part in National Forums can be difficult, International Forums are often not practicable.

Page 26, section 2.5.4: the guidelines acknowledge the importance of the physical premises, equipment and facilities for an enhanced learner environment. However, the location of said premises and facilities are not referred to. There are many adults who do not have the opportunity of engaging with either FET or HE for lack of physical access, particularly those living in rural Ireland. The INOU would suggest that the guidelines should also refer to the appropriate location of premises for equality of access for learners. While not always possible, and particularly in rural areas, premises should be located on a public transport route or within a short walking distance of same.

2.7 SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS

Page 32, section 2.7.1, ii Pastoral Care. It is understood that this section, while stating ‘this includes counsellors and other advisors’, can be interpreted as providing access to same. However, not all providers would have the financial resources to have a counsellor on staff. The INOU would acknowledge that it is good practice to have links with services and organisations that can provide such supports as counselling and build relationships so that learners can be referred to these services and supports where required.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERATION