



## QQI Community and Voluntary Sector Joint Working Group

### Minutes

Minutes of the second meeting of the **QQI Community and Voluntary Sector Joint Working Group** held in Behan House, 10 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2 on Monday, 20 April 2015 at 11:00 am.

#### **PRESENT:**

##### For the Community and Voluntary Sector

Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (AONTAS Executive Committee)

Maria Finn, CASP (*Clondalkin Addiction Support Programme*)

Gaye Kelly, An Cosán

Suzanne Kyle, Limerick Community Education Network (AONTAS CEN Steering Group)

Stuart Lawler, National Council for the Blind

Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS (Head of Membership Services)

Sylvia Ryan, ICTU

Nuala Whelan, Ballymun Job Centre (QA Network)

##### For QQI

Marie Gould, Provider Relations

Colette Harrison, Quality Assurance Services

Angela Lambkin, Quality Assurance Services

Mary McEvoy, Provider Relations

Mary Sheridan, Provider Relations

##### Independent Facilitator

Peter Nolan

#### **APOLOGIES**

Sive Bresnihan, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Deborah Brock, South County Dublin Partnership

Rachel Tucker, CTEC (*Community Training and Education Centre, Wexford*)

## 1. MINUTES OF FIRST MEETING (CVSWG/M1)

The minutes were agreed, subject to the acknowledgement that the Terms of Reference are still in draft format and would be dealt with at item 5 below.

## 2. DRAFT QQI QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES: Working Document

The Group welcomed the draft *QQI Quality Assurance Guidelines* and thanked the QQI executive for its work in drafting these. Colette Harrison presented a brief PowerPoint accompanied by a paper on *Provider Capacity*.

Some members from the sector expressed concern regarding the ability of the C&V sector to satisfy certain criteria, for example, being “stable and in good financial standing”. Members outlined that much of the C&V sector operates on a ‘hand-to-mouth’ basis and is dependent on public funding, thereby making it impossible to say whether a C&V sector provider is sustainable in the medium to long term. This also has implications for effective planning within the C&V sector. Members also expressed concern regarding the lack of understanding by QQI and other agencies of the way in which the C&V sector actually operates, from a financial perspective. There was consensus that the concept of ‘provider capacity’ should not be associated with the ability to pay fees. It was further noted that the issue of ‘provider capacity’ would be incorporated into the QA guidelines.

Other members expressed concern at the absence of clarity surrounding the role of other agencies (Solas, ETBs, etc) in terms of funding, programme sharing, and collaboration.

QQI indicated that it is mindful of the context of each provider when it is deliberating on issues such as capacity. It noted, that there are different implications/issues for providers offering a 2-year programme, than providers offering a 6-month programme. QQI is required to satisfy itself that providers have considered this in a business context.

The group agreed that there needs to be a mechanism to inform other relevant state agencies such as Solas, Pobal, Skillnets, ETBs and DES of the deliberations of this working group. It was suggested that consideration should perhaps be given to organising a Joint Seminar between this working group and the relevant agencies so that issues such as collaboration, funding, and lifelong learning can be articulated and considered. Proposals on how to best articulate the capacity requirements are welcome.

Finally, the group agreed that any other feedback relating to the draft QA Guidelines be communicated to Colette Harrison by members. It was also stipulated by QQI that the draft QA Guidelines are still a work-in-progress and are not for circulation outside of the

membership of this working group. A draft for consultation will be issued as soon as possible, and following receipt of legal advice on a specific issue.

### 3. INTRODUCTION TO RE-ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Colette Harrison presented a brief PowerPoint accompanied by a hand-out entitled '**Life Cycle of Provider Engagement**'. Colette outlined that the re-engagement procedure consists of an application process, followed by an evaluation process.

The group welcomed the life cycle document and acknowledged that there are different phases of re-engagement for different provider types. A point to note here is that the formal agreement of QA between QQI and providers which are identified as being from within 'community and voluntary' will not commence until mid-2016.

Given the diverse nature and scope of providers of education and training in Ireland, QQI outlined its difficulty in identifying who correctly belongs to the 'community and voluntary' sector, as represented by this group. It was agreed that Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS would provide QQI with an accepted public policy definition of the community and voluntary sector.

Members agreed that the re-engagement process requires a level of support from QQI, and other agencies. The idea of provider network support groups was raised, and welcomed as being an essential element in building *communities of practice* to share, develop and enhance QA. The possibility of QQI providing more widespread briefings/communiques on re-engagement was also discussed.

A discussion took place regarding the sharing of programmes where it was noted that this would continue to be an option for providers, where the owner of a programme can satisfy itself regarding the QA policies and procedures of the third party provider.

A discussion also took place on the development of guidelines for consortia. It was agreed that the working group would consider this issue further. This issue can only be progressed in a meaningful way following the publication of QA Guidelines and further work on the re-engagement process.

It was envisaged that the next steps for QQI regarding the re-engagement process are as follows:-

- Publish the draft QA Guidelines and Criteria for consultation
- Finalise QA Guidelines and Criteria
- Communicate with providers on the process
- Supporting documentation for providers to be prepared
- Timelines established for providers

- Formal notification to providers

#### **4. AONTAS CEN DOCUMENT “QQI Re-engagement for Community Education Legacy Providers...” and QQI RESPONSE DOCUMENT**

The Group welcomed QQI’s response to the AONTAS CEN document. It was generally agreed that providers are interested in the possibility of becoming part of a consortia for the purpose of their education and training remit. Whilst it was generally accepted that the establishment of consortia for the purposes of QA can be complex, it was also acknowledged that through consortia there may be efficiencies and economies of scale achieved and which would facilitate better use of scarce resources. It was noted that one of the key challenges in establishing consortia is the requirement of a single provider within the group to accept the role as lead and to take the associated responsibility.

The members requested clear guidance from QQI in respect of the workings of consortia.

The group noted that QQI had recently completed a feasibility study report on the effectiveness of the draft QA guidelines for the ETBs. The feasibility study report makes a number of recommendations for amendments to the current draft guidelines. The group welcomed QQI’s offer to facilitate, through the ETBI/QQI Forum, national discussion on a range of operational, developmental and strategic issues with the ETBs and the community and voluntary sector. In the context of this discussion, QQI noted that the ETB sector is in the process of significant change and therefore individual ETBs may not be in a position at this point to enter into agreements with providers in the C&V sector, even where they had done so in the past. It is anticipated that as the infrastructure of the ETBs become more secure, ETBs will be in a position to engage more proactively with other providers.

#### **5. DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The group agreed that the draft Terms of Reference should be amended to include reference(s) to the following:

- Other relevant policy makers will be advised of the deliberations of this working group
- The working group will inform how the re-engagement process will proceed.
- The formal expectations of the working group members should be included.

## **6. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2015**

It was agreed that rather than issuing a doodle poll, the QQI executive would select a date in **May** and a date in **June** for the next two meetings of the Working Group. The Working Group would be informed of the selected dates as soon as possible.

## **7. REVIEW: Agreed Actions**

The following actions were agreed:

- Niamh O'Reilly to provide an accepted public policy definition of the phrase 'community and voluntary sector'.
- The identification and implications of issues emerging regarding re-engagement to be considered.
- QQI to explore briefings/discussion groups

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Marie Gould informed the Working Group that she is taking up a three-year secondment as Education and Training Officer with ETBI on 5 May 2015. Marie thanked the Working Group for its work to-date and hoped to continue to work closely with the community and voluntary sector in the future.

Peter Nolan acknowledged Marie's dedication and hard work in coordinating and liaising with the community and voluntary sector and expressed his appreciation of her valuable input and expertise. On behalf of the Working Group, Peter wished her every success in her new role.

The meeting concluded at 1.15pm