



Statement of Strategy 2019-2021

Adding value to qualifications



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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Foreword

This Strategy Statement of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) builds on the solid progress achieved by the organisation, since its establishment in 2012, in growing confidence among learners and employers in the quality of further and higher education and training in Ireland.

The period 2019-2021, encompassed in this strategy statement, will be a challenging one for the organisation in several respects. Legislation amending the role and remit of QQI will be enacted early in the life of this new Strategy and will broaden the scope of the organisation's activities, offering regulated access for awarding bodies to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), providing greater protection to learners and facilitating the deployment of an effective International Education Mark (IEM). These are welcome developments.

A key challenge for the organisation over the period of this strategy statement will be to garner the necessary resources to successfully implement these additional measures while we seek to add more value to the further and higher education and training sectors, by informing policy formulation and refining and enhancing our service offering to providers. We look forward to embracing this challenge.

This statement has been prepared following extensive consultation with stakeholders. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to our stakeholders and to our staff for their contributions to this process and we look forward to working cohesively with our many partners towards the successful execution of this strategy.

Ms. Joanne Harmon
Chairperson

Dr. Pdraig Walsh
Chief Executive

Introduction and Context

QQI's unique position as the agency that spans all post-secondary education and training means that we have been centrally involved in many of the transformations and developments that have occurred in education and training in recent years.

We are committed to the principle of shared responsibility whereby providers of education and training have the primary statutory responsibility for quality and its assurance and QQI's role is to add guidance and accountability. We do this by issuing guidelines on quality assurance to providers and by monitoring and periodically reviewing and reporting on the effectiveness of providers' internal quality assurance procedures. We share responsibility with a range of stakeholders for maintaining and developing a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) that delivers qualifications that meet demands. Over the next period, we will place greater emphasis on analysing and demonstrating the impact of measures taken to improve and enhance the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners.

What we have achieved

Since our last strategy we have made substantial progress in our key priority areas. QQI has dedicated resources to

developing the NFQ. We published a policy impact assessment of the Framework, the result of a year-long extensive study of stakeholder views. We also commenced a series of *Qualifications Policy Insights* beginning with *National Qualifications Frameworks - Reflections and Trajectories*. This series of reflections will continue as part of our NFQ work.

We have made great strides in quality assurance, developing and publishing core and supplemental policy guidelines. We have met with and provided briefings to a wide range of stakeholders impacted by these developments and have published our policies and guidelines on our website.

QQI launched CINNTE, the name given to our current cycle of institutional quality review. All 22 publicly-regulated higher education institutions will be evaluated over the period 2018 – 2023. These quality reviews will assess and report on how effectively they are maintaining and enhancing quality in education. A similar exercise with the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) was initiated by QQI, granting formal approval to each ETB that they have established quality assurance procedures in line with QQI guidelines.

We created a new Apprenticeship Quality Assurance unit to support apprenticeship provision in a national context. QQI has been working with providers in both the higher and further education and training sectors that offer apprenticeship programmes and we will continue to support them to deliver quality assured apprenticeships in line with Government policy.

We have been innovative in adopting technology that enhances and improves how we do our business, implementing systems that increase efficiencies such as moving to an integrated contact information system, developing and implementing an online payment system, introducing self-service recognition advice on international qualifications, and providing accessible and comprehensive statistical information through our infographics service.

The work of QQI is closely informed by Government policy. We support the Minister for Education and Skills' ambition to make Ireland's education and training system the best in Europe by 2026. Our work reflects the focus on quality in the government's *Action Plan for Education 2016-19*. We serve on the National Skills Council and the Apprenticeship Council and actively contribute to the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19* and its

review. We will continue to work actively with the Department of Education and Skills, providers, learners and other stakeholders to achieve the goals of the *Action Plan for Education* and associated Government strategies such as *Project Ireland 2040*.

The Changing Environment

In the last six years, the landscape of education and training has changed significantly. The further education and training landscape has been streamlined, with the establishment of Education and Training Boards, and of SOLAS, responsible for the delivery of the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019*.

Higher education has seen the incorporation of many teacher education colleges into universities, and the designation of a new kind of institution - the technological university - which will be formed from the merging of several institutions. A Higher Education Performance Framework has also been put in place to allow individual institutions to set their own mission within national goals. QQI, through its work with government departments, agencies and institutions supports these developments.

Following the establishment of the Apprenticeship Council in 2014, innovative new apprenticeship programmes have been established. These quality assured apprenticeships already span levels five to nine on the National Framework of Qualifications in new fields such as accountancy, insurance, financial and property services. We will continue to support new partnerships to deliver these and to validate new apprenticeships.

In relation to international education, QQI embraces its role in delivering the goals and objectives of *Irish Educated, Globally Connected, an International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2021*. We have specific responsibility for the development and implementation of the International Education Mark (IEM). QQI will award the IEM to providers that comply with a Code of Practice for international learners in higher education or English Language Education (ELE). This will enable QQI to grow the reputation of Irish education in general, and ELE specifically, on the international stage.

A core objective for this period will be to prepare and fully implement the new and amended policies and processes required under the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill 2018*. The Government has published this amending legislation to ensure that QQI can broaden the

offerings available in the National Framework of Qualifications to awards of other awarding bodies, to provide the statutory basis for the IEM and to offer greater protection for learners.

Towards 2021

In this Strategy Statement, we look forward to the next three years and to addressing the challenging environment in which we operate. In addition to policy and structural changes, we must take account of the demand for the recognition of skills, digitalisation and the impact of new technologies on the learning environment. We anticipate progress towards the European Education Area by 2025 with Ireland at its heart. QQI is expected to inform and advise on these global and European developments in skills and the recognition of qualifications and on the internationalisation of education more broadly.

This statement details the values that define us, the key priorities and actions necessary to enhance confidence in the quality of Irish education and training, both nationally and internationally, and the indicators against which we will measure our impact. It has been shaped following wide consultation with our stakeholders and partners.

Over the period 2019-2021, our key role in protecting standards and improving quality will be amplified through developing and promoting the integrity of the **National Framework of Qualifications**.

We will demonstrate through our **analyses** how the work of QQI delivers **impact** through the promotion of quality improvement among education and training providers, and how this, in turn, improves the experience and outcomes of learners. We will use our expertise and knowledge in this field to inform and influence our key stakeholders. Our evaluations, analyses and publications will shape a fuller understanding of quality in education and training, and guide policymakers and funders in their decision-making.

Our success hinges on greater **strategic collaboration** with stakeholders to deliver our priorities and a shared vision of high quality education and training.

The strategy, in line with *Our Public Service 2020*, the national framework for development and innovation in the public service, will allow us to develop our **organisational capacity** to support sustainability, improvement and good governance.

We recognise that a key challenge for QQI is to ensure that we have the requisite human and financial resources over the period of this strategy to successfully take on additional actions, while also seeking to add more value to education and training, and to streamline and enhance our service offering.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

We are committed to working enthusiastically and purposefully towards a vision of Ireland that offers extensive high-quality education and training opportunities, enabling learners to fulfil their potential through achieving qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

Our Mission

QQI sustains public confidence in the quality of education and training, promotes trust in the National Framework of Qualifications and drives a culture of continuous improvement by education and training providers.

Our Values

Our approach to our own work and how we work with our partners is governed by clear values and associated behaviours.

We believe we have a **shared responsibility** with others to ensure confidence in and continuous improvement of the quality of education and training. We believe that the attainment of

our goals and objectives is best pursued collaboratively and constructively with our diverse set of partners and providers. We value **collaborative effort** for mutual benefit.

We are committed to working with **objectivity and transparency**. This underpins our decision-making and our policies, procedures and activities. These are evidence-based, informed by national and international good practice, and conducted in a manner which is openly transparent and engenders trust.

We are committed to making a difference to our partners, providers and our people. We value **achievement and impact** - the successful pursuit of goals and objectives which culminate in impacting positively and substantively on our operating environment.

We are committed to **learning and innovation** in our organisation to continuously improve our services.

VISION

Extensive high quality education and training opportunities that enable learners to fulfil their potential through achieving qualifications that are widely-valued nationally and internationally

PRIORITY 1

Integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications

To develop, promote and protect the integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications

PRIORITY 2

Analysis and Impact

To analyse and demonstrate the impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners

PRIORITY 3

Collaboration and Engagement

To support a high-quality education and training system through mutually beneficial strategic partnerships

PRIORITY 4

Organisational Capacity

To build internal capacity to sustain, improve and communicate our performance

Who we are, what we do now and what we will do

Quality Assurance

- » We issue quality assurance guidelines.
- » We approve providers' quality assurance procedures.
- » We validate programmes of education and training.
- » We monitor and review providers.
- » We run projects and organise events to foster quality improvement.



Qualifications

- » We set standards for our education and training awards.
- » We award qualifications and issue certificates.
- » We ensure providers offer learners access, transfer and progression opportunities.



QQI AWARD

The National Framework of Qualifications

- » We maintain the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a system relating different qualification levels to one another.
- » We support, promote and further develop the NFQ.
- » We will approve the inclusion of the qualifications of awarding bodies in the NFQ.

Recognition

- » We advise on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland.
- » We advise on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad.



International Education

- » We will establish a Code of Practice for providers offering courses to international learners.
- » We will authorise the use of the International Mark (IEM) to English Language Education and Higher Education providers.



Our priorities, actions and indicators

Priority 1 – Integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications

To develop, promote and protect the integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Actions

- a. We will regulate access to the National Framework of Qualifications for awarding bodies and qualifications, and maintain, develop and promote the Framework as the central feature of a flexible, responsive system for quality-assured qualifications in Ireland.
- b. We will streamline our system of standards and awards to permit providers to deliver flexible, responsive and nationally-benchmarked programmes of education and training leading to our awards.
- c. We will regulate access to QQI awards to private education and training providers and provide security to their learners through the introduction of a statutory learner protection fund.
- d. We will authorise the use of the International Education Mark by providers of higher education and English Language Education to international learners.
- e. We will provide comprehensive information and be recognised as an authoritative voice on high-quality education and training provision and qualifications available in Ireland.

Indicators

- i. Ireland has a National Framework of Qualifications which reflects developments in international qualifications frameworks.¹
- ii. Information about the quality of education and its assurance is more visible and easily accessible.
- iii. QQI award standards are responsive and sustainable and meet the evolving and diverse needs of learners, providers and employers.
- iv. Providers that offer programmes leading to awards in the NFQ have the capacity and capability to engage with QQI's regulatory requirements and ensure that their learners meet the appropriate standards.
- v. QQI takes appropriate action where evidence shows that quality or standards have been compromised, so as to protect the integrity of the Irish education and training system.
- vi. The International Education Mark is awarded to institutions and providers that meet its requirements.
- vii. Ireland is a more attractive destination for international learners.

¹ including the revised recommendations on the European Qualifications Framework; Europass and Key Competences; Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning; European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification system, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and UNESCO's World Reference Levels which facilitate the international comparison and recognition of qualifications.

Our priorities, actions and indicators *[continued]*

Priority 2 – Analysis and Impact

To use our unique position as the agency that spans all post-secondary education and training to analyse and demonstrate the impact of measures taken to improve the quality of education and training for the benefit of learners.

Actions

- a. Our independent evaluations of providers and our research and analysis of provider-led evaluations will be used to provide high-level advice to policymakers and funders on quality in the education and training system.
- b. We will provide guidance to and evaluate providers to stimulate and promote quality enhancement in education and training provision.
- c. We will rigorously analyse and report on the outputs of our qualifications system to inform education and labour market decision-makers.

Indicators

- i. Key influencers in education and training use and reference sectoral and analytical reports produced by QQI.
- ii. Providers demonstrate commitment to quality through completing statutory QQI processes including approval of quality assurance procedures, programme validation and cyclical review.
- iii. Providers publish their quality assurance procedures and the reports resulting from the application of those procedures.
- iv. The Irish quality assurance system for education and training is benchmarked against strong systems in other countries.
- v. Higher education students demonstrate broad and consistent levels of engagement with their learning, as measured by the Irish Survey of Student Engagement.
- vi. QQI policy impact analysis informs the formulation and revision of our own policies.

Priority 3 – Collaboration and Engagement

To support a high-quality education and training system through mutually beneficial strategic partnerships.

Actions

- a. We will strive to inform and influence policy through our relationships with government, public funders and other stakeholders.
- b. We will engage with government departments, agencies, social partners and professional recognition bodies to contribute to co-ordinated policy in relation to skills requirements, regulations and associated occupational standards and qualifications.
- c. We will work with providers and awarding bodies to promote shared responsibility for a high-quality education and training system that stimulates transparency and improvement.
- d. We will engage with learner representative bodies to encourage best practice in providers.
- e. We will work with our EU colleagues and other international partners to influence European quality and qualifications policy and to inform our work here in Ireland.

Indicators

- i. Our memorandums of understanding with the Higher Education Authority and SOLAS and our international agreements are renewed, implemented and valued by our partners.
- ii. QQI contributes to the strategies and development work of key influencers and policymakers.
- iii. Providers and stakeholders have a shared vision of what constitutes quality in education and training and their related roles and responsibilities.
- iv. The regulatory load on providers is reduced through collaborative efforts on the part of QQI and professional and regulatory bodies.
- v. Our providers and stakeholders are satisfied by how QQI develops, establishes and communicates its policies, procedures and standards.
- vi. QQI is a partner of choice in EU and Bologna process initiatives concerning post-secondary education and training.
- vii. European and international policies for education and training continue to be strongly informed by Ireland's policies and interests.

Our priorities, actions and indicators *[continued]*

Priority 4 – Organisational Capacity

To build internal capacity to sustain, improve and communicate our performance.

Actions

- a. We will continue to support and develop our people to build and foster a flexible, engaged, adaptable and motivated executive.
- b. We will formulate and seek agreement for a transparent and sustainable funding model, underpinning confidence in the execution of our strategy.
- c. We will invest further in our ICT infrastructure and internal capability as a means of further improving organisational productivity and enhancing service levels to our clients.
- d. We will demonstrate best practice in relation to our functional and corporate governance in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and adherence to relevant legislative and regulatory obligations.

Indicators

- i. Successful workforce planning supports the effective delivery of this strategy.
- ii. QQI identifies and achieves a recognised Human Resources quality mark.
- iii. QQI has established stable, predictable, sustainable and transparent income streams.
- iv. ICT business applications and systems respond to the growing needs of QQI.
- v. We successfully implement an awards verification service for employers and others.
- vi. QQI complies with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.
- vii. A proactive and responsive communications strategy that supports the delivery of the organisational strategy.

Notes

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LEARNERS
ASSURANCE
QUALITY
STRATEGY
ANALYSIS
POLICIES
INDICATORS
STANDARDS
PRACTICE
SKILLS
INTERNATIONAL
RECOGNITION
EDUCATION
TRAINING
NFEQ
IMPACT
QUALIFICATIONS
STAKEHOLDERS
AWARDS
SUPPORT
ACTIONS
IMPROVEMENT
PROMOTE
REVIEW
LEARNING
NATIONAL
CONFIDENCE
PROCEDURES
INFORM
PARTNERS
RESPONSIBILITY
NOISIA
SERVICE PROGRAMMES
APPRENTICESHIP
GUIDELINES

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