



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Annual Report
2016

www.QQI.ie





Quality and Qualifications Ireland

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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Introduction

from the Chief Executive and Chair

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

During the year, the Board of QQI met on five occasions. Its five sub-committees, the Audit Committee, the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC), the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC), the Approval and Reviews Committee (ARC), and the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC), continued to operate and report to the Board on their activities. The outcomes of Board and subcommittee meetings are publicly available via the organisation's website.

2016 saw the culmination of much of QQI's policy development with the issuance of statutory core Quality Assurance Guidelines for all providers of education and training as required by the 2012 Act that established QQI. These core guidelines were complemented by sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines applicable to designated-awarding bodies, institutes of technology, independent providers and providers of statutory apprenticeship programmes.

The year also saw QQI publish its policy on Institutional Review of Higher Education that will lead to the 3rd cycle of such review beginning in 2017.

New policy and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes were also published.

A review of the impact of the National Framework of Qualifications and the process of reviewing the suite of QQI's education and training award standards was also initiated in 2016.

2016 saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between QQI and the Further Education and Training Authority (Solas) complementing the memorandum already in place between QQI and the Higher Education Authority.

We were pleased to organise three well-attended conferences on quality enhancement in the areas of English Language Education, Further Education and Training and Higher Education.

The culmination of this work means we entered 2017 with a clear direction on how the organisation will move from a policy development phase to an implementation phase and the year ahead will involve significant engagement of QQI's diverse further and higher education and training provider base with a set of new policies and procedures established under the 2012 Act.

We also intend to follow-up in 2017 on the prioritised recommendations contained in the Organisational Review of QQI commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills in 2016.

Mr Gordon Clark
Chair, QQI

Dr Pdraig 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.

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 regard to accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.

Progress against our Goals in 2016

We aim to provide a high quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. In 2016 we began working under our second strategy statement 2016-2018. This strategy outlines the goals and objectives for QQI over the next three years. 2016 was our first year working towards these new goals. The following sections highlight our progress to the end of 2016 in relation to the six goals.

GOAL 1: TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES WITH CLEAR OCCUPATIONAL AND / OR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR INFORMED CAREER AND OTHER CHOICES.

Awards and Standards

QQI's strategic approach to qualifications is to ensure that the standards leading to QQI awards are relevant and remain fit for purpose. In this regard we have developed a twin-track approach:

- Researching and reviewing new qualification models / approaches for both the further and higher education and training sectors (including with regard to credit) while at the same time
- Developing, maintaining and reviewing existing awarding arrangements

For much of 2016 we focused on establishing a cohesive approach to the review of award standards across both further and higher education and training. We developed a scope and approach to the review of standards across levels 1 to 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and developed an outline schedule of activity to 2019. Consultation with stakeholders on the proposed approach will inform awards standards activity for the next three years. The consultation document '**Review of QQI Award Standards - Approach and Schedule**' was published in Q4 2016.

Reviews of Awards and Standards

QQI were involved in a review group as part of a Teagasc-led review. The review focused on Levels 5 and 6 major awards and Level 6 special purpose awards in Agriculture. The outcome of this review resulted in significant change to the award standards and these are now being implemented.

At the request of Fáilte Ireland, a standards group was established to develop a new award in tourism guiding. The group undertook a review of existing Level 6 special purpose awards in this area. The outcome has been a rationalisation of the number of awards available as well as the development of the new Level 6 special purpose National Tourism Guiding award standard.

New Award Standards

A number of new award standards were developed including the completion of a Level 6 special purpose award in Firefighting Operations and a Level 6 major award in Digital Media Production. On a systems level, the modification and rebranding of FET award specifications commenced with the Level 4-6 specifications and will continue into 2017.

In 2016 the following new award standards were developed and consulted on:

- Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Web Project Development
- Level 6 Web Project Development Capstone
- Level 6 Component Certificate Internet Programming
- Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Digital Media Production
- Level 6 Digital Media Production Capstone
- Level 6 Component Certificate Interactive Scripting for the Web
- Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate in Firefighting Operations

Policy Development

In 2016, after extensive consultations with stakeholders, we published the following policies:

- Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions
- Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training
- Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Institutes of Technology

Peer-Learning Activity

QQI jointly hosted a Peer-Learning Activity (PLA) in Belfast, Northern Ireland with the EQF (European Qualifications framework) National Coordination Points of Ireland and the UK in cooperation with the European Commission and Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training). It focused on upper secondary school leaving qualifications giving direct access to first cycle degree courses and their place in the EQF. Approximately 40 participants from various European countries attended the event.

The aim of the event was to:

- analyse the extent to which learning outcomes influence the levelling of School Leaving Qualifications (SLQs) within NQFs and identify other factors that are important in identifying a level for an SLQ;
- identify perceived cross-national inconsistencies in the way SLQs are linked to NQF levels;
- inform the future development of the EQF-referencing process, particularly the process of horizontal comparisons; and
- explore the extent to which NQF and EQF levels of SLQs are used in valuing SLQs for cross-border mobility purposes.

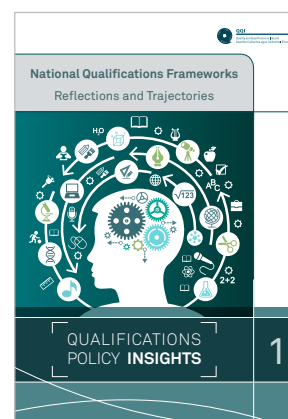
QQI also participated in panel discussions at Cedefop's conference *Making Learning Visible*, in Thessaloniki in November 2016.

National Framework of Qualifications

QQI has legislative responsibility for the NFQ. We are required to promote, maintain, further develop and implement the NFQ for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland.

In 2016 QQI committed to assessing the ongoing impact of the National Framework of Qualifications. We commissioned a Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ and as part of this we conducted an online survey to gather stakeholder views about the effects of the NFQ to date and to inform the future development of the NFQ.

In 2016 we also published an expert paper *Qualifications Frameworks – Reflections and Trajectories*. The purpose of this paper is to inform debate about the possibilities and limitations of qualifications frameworks as tools for reform.



ENIC NARIC

Hosted by QQI, NARIC Ireland provides free advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland.

Our website www.naric.ie is now the main source of recognition advice where individuals can access comparability statements which compare their foreign qualification in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications. Our aim is to steadily expand the number of comparability statements available through our website. In 2016 we increased this by 24%, and our database now contains over 870 qualifications from approximately 60 countries. The service processed nearly 3,000 academic recognition requests in 2016, most of them through our online service.

Website analytics for 2016 indicate that there were almost 46,000 individual visits to the relevant country pages of listed qualifications.

The top five country website pages accessed were:

- Brazil
- UK
- Poland
- Spain
- Croatia

GOAL 2: TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to an EU recommendation concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. QQI reports on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills to the EQF advisory group on progress towards this agenda. In 2016 QQI, in support of the Department, submitted a scoping paper outlining strategic proposals to achieving the EU recommendation.

QQI has continued development of this work through the RPL practitioner network, which provides a forum for practitioners across public, private, further and higher education and training as well as professional bodies and other relevant stakeholders.

In 2016 the RPL network met three times providing opportunities to explore and review current practice in this area.

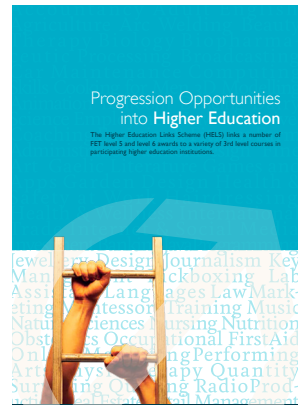
QQI Forum and Education and Training Board

QQI and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) established a forum in 2014. In 2016 the structure of the forum was changed to reflect recent developments in the ETB sector. This resulted in meetings between the Chief Executives Forum with the Chief Executive and Directors of QQI. QQI proposed an outline of a re-engagement plan with the ETB, which was well received. FET Directors were appointed as a formal leadership and governance structure within the ETBs and an FET strategy group was established to work with QQI on the implementation of the re-engagement plan.

Higher Education Links Scheme

The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) gives learners the opportunity to use their QQI Level 5 or 6 major award to apply, through the CAO, for a place in the first year of a higher education programme.

Initial research has been carried out with three ETBs in relation to local arrangements and links to programmes within certain higher education institutions with a view to establishing elements of effective practice that might be of benefit to others. In 2016 we conducted an audit of the published links of the scheme. The audit was carried out in collaboration with SOLAS. An information guide to the scheme 'Progression Opportunities into Higher Education' was published in October.



IQAVET

In 2016 QQI was successful in securing EU funding for the Irish Quality Assurance Network for Vocational Education and Training (IQAVET) project through a grant application. IQAVET is the national reference point for the European Quality Assurance network for Vocational Education and Training. The IQAVET project is responsible for supporting quality assurance arrangements in further education and training in the Irish context. At the same time the IQAVET project contributes to the resources and information available throughout the EU.

Having secured funding, QQI hosted three seminars aimed at further education and training providers. Each event looked at different EQAVET indicators and discussed self-evaluation as part of the governance structure of quality assurance.

The final report of this project is available on the QQI website.

Qualifax Services

QQI hosts Qualifax, which is an extensive database of education and training programmes available in Ireland. Over 15,000 courses are currently listed in the database and just over 530,000 users of the website were recorded during the year. The highest number of visits was in January, when nearly 78,000 hits to the website were recorded. The site was fully updated for all courses for the incoming year (2017) and staff promoted the service through attendance at key events such as Higher Options and the Annual Conference of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

GOAL 3: TO OVERSEE AN IMPROVED QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM THAT IS COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCES ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT AND PROMOTES LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Institutional Reviews

Institutional review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC)

In 2016, QQI undertook an institutional review of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) on behalf of the University of Limerick (UL). MIC is a linked provider of the University of Limerick (UL). As a linked provider, MIC is subject to review and external quality assurance by UL or, if requested, QQI.

Terms of Reference for the review were developed by QQI, UL and MIC, and a handbook was also produced. The review was conducted by an independent review team in line with the Terms of Reference. The team of six reviewers was selected by QQI in 2016 and provided with training on 26 September 2016. The Chair and Coordinating Reviewer undertook a planning visit to MIC in Limerick on 27 September 2016. The main review visit to MIC was conducted by the team between 28 November and 2 December 2016.

Focused Reviews

Focused reviews are carried out where QQI, in the course of its monitoring activities, identifies a cause for concern with respect to a provider or its programmes. QQI conducted two such reviews in 2016. A review of programme validation under section 46 of the Act, published in June 2016, led to QQI withdrawing validation from all of the FET and HET programmes of one provider. A review of the programmes of a second higher education provider was undertaken in the second half of the year and was still in process at year end.

Consultation on a white paper on 'Procedures for Focused Reviews by QQI of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA Procedures' was launched in December 2016 and scheduled to close in January 2017.

Quality Assurance Guidelines

QQI is committed to improving quality assurance systems and in 2016 published a number of quality assurance guidelines, which are available on our website:

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines
- Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies
- Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Private and Independent Providers
- Sector-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Institutes of Technology



Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN)

QQI continued to act as secretary to the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) in 2016. The IHEQN provides a forum for the discussion of quality assurance and quality improvement

issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland. It comprises membership from the DIT; the HEA; HECA; IOTI; IUA; NUI; QQI RCSI; USI and the Department of Education and Skills.

National Student Engagement Programme

In April QQI launched the National Student Engagement Programme and its pilot project. The pilot aims to develop tools and resources that can be more widely applied to improve student engagement practices.

The participants in the pilot were selected following a call for proposals. The call was open to all higher education institutions with students' unions (affiliated to USI or otherwise) and a relationship with QQI and/or the HEA. The successful institutions were Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), NUI Galway, the National College of Ireland (NCI) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).



Launch of the National Student Engagement Programme

English Language Training Organisations Recognition

ACELS

ACELS is the national, voluntary scheme for English language teaching organisations (ELTOs). It is a non-statutory service of QQI that will be superseded by the International Education Mark (IEM).

The ACELS Recognition Committee met on five occasions in 2016 to consider applications and act accordingly. As a result of its deliberations and decisions, three ELE providers had their ACELS 2016 recognition withdrawn for issues of non-compliance; one of these appealed, one was in process of making a decision as to whether to appeal or not at end of 2016, and the other chose not to appeal.

In 2016, 28 inspections of recognised English Language Training Organisations took place. This was a slight decrease on the previous year due to inspector availability.

The annual renewal process took place with a new 2016 listing of recognised ELE providers uploaded to the ACELS website. In addition the ACELS website was redesigned using a different

and more robust platform, enabling information to be more accessible to all stakeholders nationally and internationally.

English Language Education Conference

QQI's inaugural English Language Education (ELE) conference was held on the 14 November 2016. The event was attended by approximately 235 delegates from across the ELE sectors nationwide, including FET, HET and ELE. The theme of the conference was exploring the role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) and its role in upholding and sustaining quality in English language education.

QQI collaborated with ELT Ireland in the organisation and delivery of the conference. An exhibition of exam bodies, publishers and other accreditation agencies was arranged to support the conference. Recordings were made of the three plenaries, photos of the event were taken and a live Twitter feed operated throughout the day. The recordings of the talks were made available on the ELE section of the QQI website. Online discussion forums were opened after the event and hosted for two weeks which enabled delegates to continue conversations and engage with appointed experts.



Delegates at the ELE conference

Seminar on Self-Evaluation and Reflective Practice

QQI, in association with ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland), hosted an enhancement seminar for the Education and Training Boards on 6 April 2016 at Farmleigh House in Dublin.

The seminar was designed specifically for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to coincide with the introduction of the work QQI is doing with the ETBs on QA guidelines, validation policy and future institutional-level review. The aim of the event was to explore the benefits of self-evaluation and reflective practice from strategic and operational perspectives.

National and international speakers presented on approaches and models of self-evaluation and reflective practice and provided examples and experiences from Ireland and overseas. Presentations from the event were published to the QQI website.

Programme Validation

QQI conducted a review of its validation and re-validation policy and procedures which proposed the need for a consistent system of validation across further and higher education and training. We have continued to implement changes based on the recommendations arising, including ensuring that protection for enrolled learners (PEL) arrangements are in place prior to the validation timeframe commencing.

The level of programme validation activity in 2016 is indicated below:

Sector	Providers	Programmes
Further Education and Training (NFQ Levels 1 -6)	77	179
Higher Education and Training (NFQ Levels 6-10)	12	81
Total	89	260

HET programmes submitted for validation in 2016 took on average 13.9 to be processed. In FET, the average processing time was 10.5 weeks.

European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA)

QQI was reconfirmed with full membership of ENQA in 2014. At that time, the ENQA Board concluded QQI was substantially compliant with its standards and guidelines as set out by ENQA. It made a number of recommendations to be implemented and requested a follow-up report on the recommendations in 2016. The follow-up report was submitted to ENQA in October 2016 and included updates on the following:

- Continued development of QQI's policies and procedures and a move away from legacy procedures
- The QQI website and its search function enabling search of policies, reviews, programmes and awards
- Update of Memorandum of Understanding with the HEA
- Development of system-wide analyses resulting in publication of Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources in April 2016
- Update on devolution of awarding powers with draft policy and criteria for delegation of authority being published in September 2016 for consultation
- Approach to internal quality assurance, culminating in publication of an Internal Quality Assurance policy in December 2016

The follow-up report was accepted by ENQA.

Annual Institutional Quality Report

Each year individual higher education institutions provide QQI with an annual report on their internal quality assurance. This is called the Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR). It covers a reporting period of the preceding academic year. The 2016 AIQR covered the reporting period of 2014/15. The AIQR is submitted to QQI through an online portal in quarter 1 of the year.

In early 2016, QQI finalised the template for the AIQR report, in consultation with the institutions, and pilot tested the online portal for submissions. Accordingly, the deadline for submission of AIQR

reports in 2016 was deferred until August. A summary Report of the AIQRs of the Designated Awarding Bodies called 'Quality within the Universities, RCSI and DIT 2016' was published in December 2016. A summary report for IoTs was not possible as not all institutions submitted an AIQR in 2016. In early 2017, the remaining 8 higher education institutions are expected to submit their AIQRs.

The call for submission of the 2017 AIQR was made in December 2016. This will cover a reporting period of the academic year 2015/16 and the deadline for the submission of the Report will be in February 2017.



Annual Dialogue Meetings

Annual Dialogue Meetings (ADMs) between QQI and each Designated Awarding Body (DABs) and Institute of Technology (IoT) form an integral aspect of the external quality assurance framework for public higher education institutions.

These meetings provide an opportunity to consider a range of issues relating to the development of the quality assurance (QA) infrastructure, that help to clarify and define the relationship between QQI (as an external quality assurance and qualifications body) and the individual institutions (which have primary responsibility for their own quality assurance) as it develops.

The Annual Institutional Quality Report forms the basis of the discussion for these meetings, providing an opportunity for each institution to discuss, with QQI directly, matters relating to its own specific operating context. Following submission of the 2014-15 AIQR reports in August 2016, ADMs were scheduled with 19 institutions between late October and December 2016. A further three ADMs took place in January 2017. Each meeting allowed for the exchange of relevant updates between the respective institution and QQI, in addition to a focus on activities undertaken to improve or further embed QA in the reporting period.

GOAL 4: TO PROVIDE CLEAR AUTHORITATIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION TO STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC REGARDING QQI'S ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES.

Management Framework Agreement

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. 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 2016. It was published to our website and QQI and the Department meet quarterly to update one another on progress on the activities planned.

Memoranda of Understanding

Higher Education Authority (HEA)

QQI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the HEA in 2015. This provides an agreed framework for cooperation and communication and provides for a number of annual bilateral exchanges. This includes an annual presentation by the chief executive of one organisation to the Board of the other. The Chief Executive of QQI made a presentation to the HEA Board at its meeting of 22 November 2016 and the Interim Chief Executive of HEA presented to the QQI Board at its meeting of 25 November 2016. As further provided for in the MOU, the senior management teams of both organisations met in QQI on 12 May 2016.

As part of the MOU, QQI and HEA also established the QQI-HEA Higher Education Forum. This provides an opportunity for QQI and HEA executives to interact with the representative associations of the universities and the institutes of technology (IUA and THEA respectively) and with the national student representative body USI. Two meetings of the forum were held in 2016.



Padraig Walsh CEO of QQI and Paul O'Toole CEO of SOLAS

Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)

QQI and the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016. Both QQI and SOLAS are committed to enhancing the quality, performance and coherence of further education and training and the Memorandum signals the organisations' joint commitment to working together to ensure the coordination and complementarity of their activities.

The Memorandum, which will be implemented over the period 2016-2019, sets out a framework for cooperation and communications between SOLAS and QQI, as well as close working partnerships with the further education and training sector. It sets out a range of actions which will support the three key commitments presented in the document: coherence of approach, alignment of activities and partnerships for enhancement.

The agreement provides for a number of annual bilateral exchanges. This includes an annual presentation by the chief executive of one organisation to the Board of the other. The QQI Chief Executive made a presentation to the SOLAS Board at its meeting of 6 December 2016 and the Chief Executive of SOLAS is scheduled to present to the QQI Board at its first meeting in 2017.

In addition, the senior management teams of both organisations met on five occasions in 2016, largely to progress the MOU prior to its signing on 6 December 2016.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), United Kingdom

In 2013, QQI signed a Memorandum of Understanding and an Information Sharing Agreement with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK). The MOU provides for bilateral exchanges each year. The Chief Executive of QQI was invited to present at the annual QAA annual conference in Leeds in May 2015 and the Chief Executive of QAA presented at the annual QQI Quality Enhancement Event in Dublin Castle on 15 December 2016.

As part of the MOU, meetings are held twice annually, either in Dublin, the UK or by video-conference. A video conference meeting was held on 11 May 2016 and QAA visited Dublin for the meeting of 16 December 2016. At that meeting, QAA indicated that Ireland was likely to be chosen as one of the countries where it would undertake a review of UK Transnational Education provision in 2017. QQI agreed to provide assistance with any such review.

QQI and Hong Kong

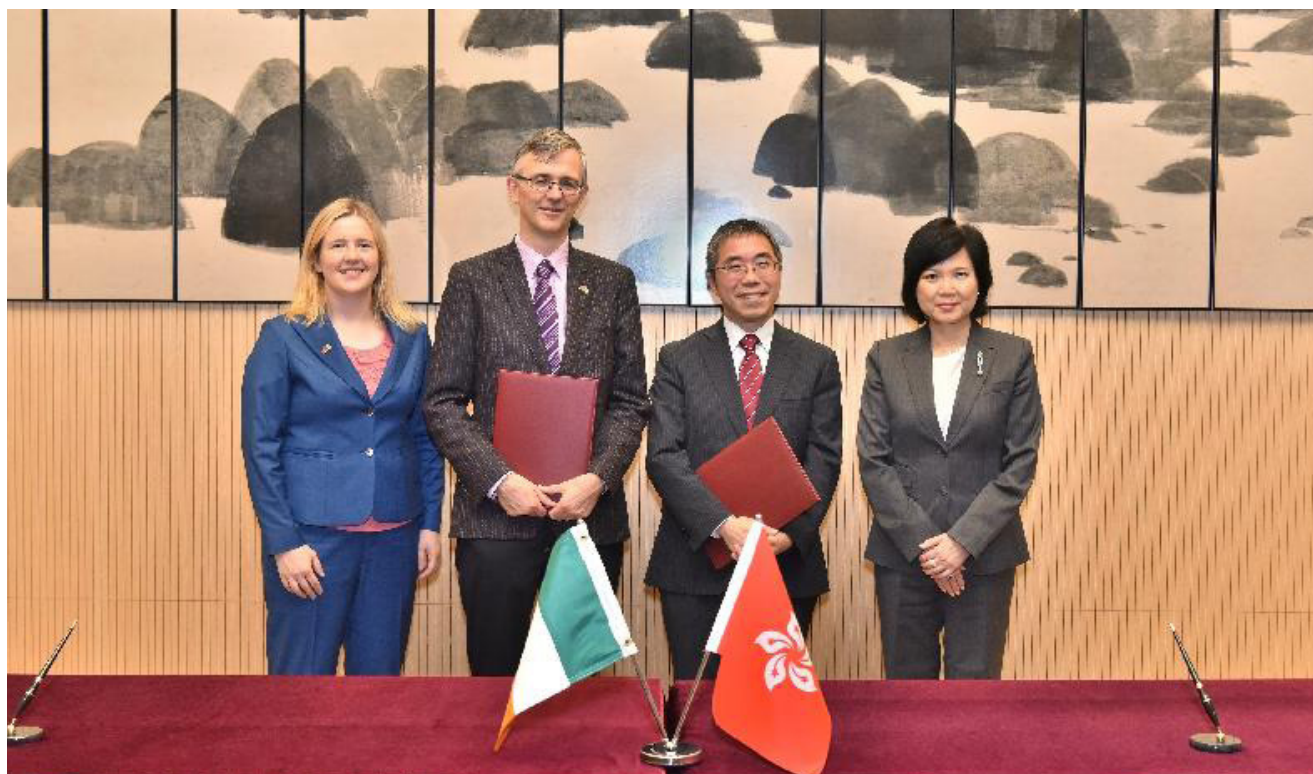


Photo (L-R): Isobel O'Connor (Deputy Consul General of Ireland in Hong Kong), Bryan Maguire (Director of Quality Assurance – QQI), Brian Lo (Deputy Secretary for Education), Marion Lai (Permanent Secretary for Education)

QQI and The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in qualifications frameworks in September 2016.

HKSARG is responsible for quality assurance in education and training in Hong Kong. Under the terms of the MOU we will cooperate in the development and understanding of qualifications frameworks. This MOU will build on the results of a joint project carried out by the EU Commission and the Education Bureau, which compared the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework.

Analysis of quality in teaching and learning

Following on from evaluation work conducted in 2015, QQI published a report *Quality in an era of diminishing resources*. The report sought to analyse the comments in relation to any perceived reduction in quality of teaching and learning in the internal quality review reports published by Irish public higher education institutions during the period 2008-15. This coincided with the period of reduced funding available to the institutions.

Consultative Forum

QQI's Consultative Forum is a collaboration exercise with stakeholders with the aim of creating greater coherence in the education and training system. The Forum facilitates meaningful dialogue and consultation between QQI and stakeholders.

The Consultative Forum provides an important single platform for representative stakeholders to come together on matters of common interest. The terms of reference, stakeholder nominee organisations to the Forum, and meeting documentation is published on our website¹.

The Consultative Forum met twice in 2016 on the following dates:

- 31 May 2016 (Theme: Qualifications Frameworks towards 2030)
- 24 November 2016 (Theme: Implications of Brexit for education and training providers in Ireland)

Communications

In 2015 QQI launched an award brand campaign scheduled to run until Q1 2017. The primary focus of the campaign was to build awareness of the QQI award brand and to deliver information about its value and role across the NFQ. This was delivered through a series of radio, digital and newspaper advertisements. In Q4 2016 a review of the campaign found:

- Unprompted recall of QQI increased significantly with 7% of the overall population spontaneously nominating QQI as being responsible for quality and qualifications in the Irish education system
- An AB demographic, Dubliners and those recently out of education (completed a course in past two years) are driving this awareness
- One in four of the population claims to be aware of QQI when prompted, an increase of three points since 2015.

When the campaign concludes in 2017, a complete review will be conducted.

1. <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Consultative-Forum-.aspx>

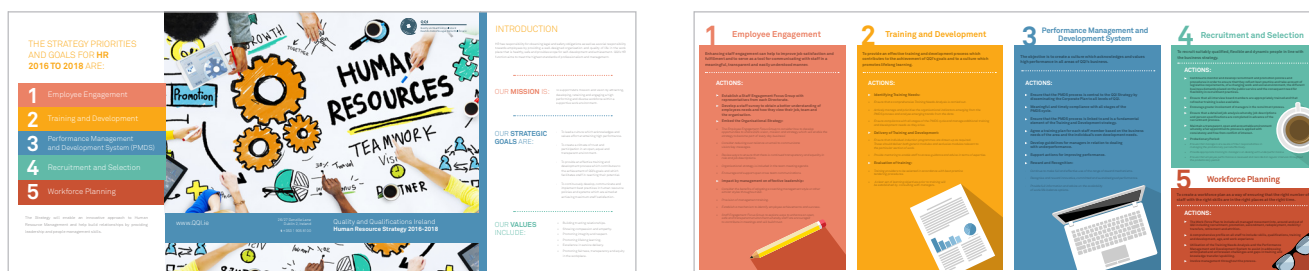
GOAL 5: TO PROACTIVELY ENABLE AND ENCOURAGE QQI STAFF TO DEVELOP, THRIVE AND BE FULLY ENGAGED IN THEIR WORK.

Human Resource (HR) Strategy

QQI's HR Strategy 2016 – 2018 was published in January 2016. All staff had the opportunity to contribute to the strategy through our consultation process. The HR Strategy has five key themes:

1. Employee Engagement
2. Training and Development
3. Performance Management and Development
4. Recruitment and Selection, and
5. Workforce Planning.

The HR Strategy identified a programme of work for the period 2016 to 2018 and all of the 2016 activities have been completed.



Planning

Activities and deliverables are tracked and monitored in QQI throughout the year via PROMISE, our planning database. The Board are provided with a quarterly planning report and status update at each of their meetings. At the end of 2016 the Board reviewed the corporate plan and the status of its activities as mapped in PROMISE. The Board also considered and approved the proposed corporate plan for 2017.

Staff Engagement Forum

In Q2 2016 a new staff engagement forum was established. Staff were invited to join the forum and it now consists of 10 members. The purpose of the forum is to work with HR in achieving the strategic goal of enhancing effective staff engagement. It enables staff to exchange ideas and perspectives, encouraging communication and transparency.

Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)

The PMDS cycle was delayed in 2016 and commenced in April, seeing the organisation through from April to December. Training in this area was made available to staff, and individual performance plans for managers and staff were completed by June 2016.

GOAL 6: TO ENHANCE QQI'S SELF-SERVICE SYSTEMS, PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SERVICE IT DELIVERS.

ICT Security Review

A review of QQI's ICT and Data Security was conducted over a six week period in Summer 2016. The review examined both internal and external security. It acknowledged strengths in highly qualified staff, network design, patching policy, role segregation and Internet Access Control.

A number of recommendations were made to improve the following areas:

- password strength
- data loss prevention
- network intrusion systems
- vulnerability assessments

The ICT unit developed a plan of action to address the recommendations and progress is reported to the Programme Board and the Audit and Risk Committee. Further review to assess implementation are planned for 2017.

Statistics and Infographics

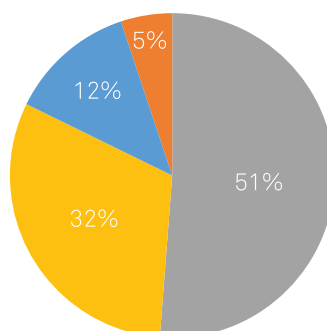
Since its establishment in 2012 QQI has published statistics on awards made by QQI to learners. Originally this data was published as worksheets in numeric form. In 2015 QQI released the first version of its infographics service. This service provides an attractive graphical interface and allows users, both internal and external, to interact with the data and pose and answer their own questions. In 2016 QQI added extra visualisations within the infographics service. These included viewing data by provider and by named award.

Financial Budgets Devolved

The introduction of devolved budgets was deferred to 2017. Unit Managers participated in the preparation of QQI's operational budget by identifying key activities and costs associated with those activities. Activities were categorised as featuring in the Corporate Plan or the Management Framework Agreement (deliverables agreed with the Department of Education and Skills). A database was developed to assist with this process and will be used in 2017 to advance the next iteration of devolved budgeting.

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 2016 we received 11,863 queries through this system.

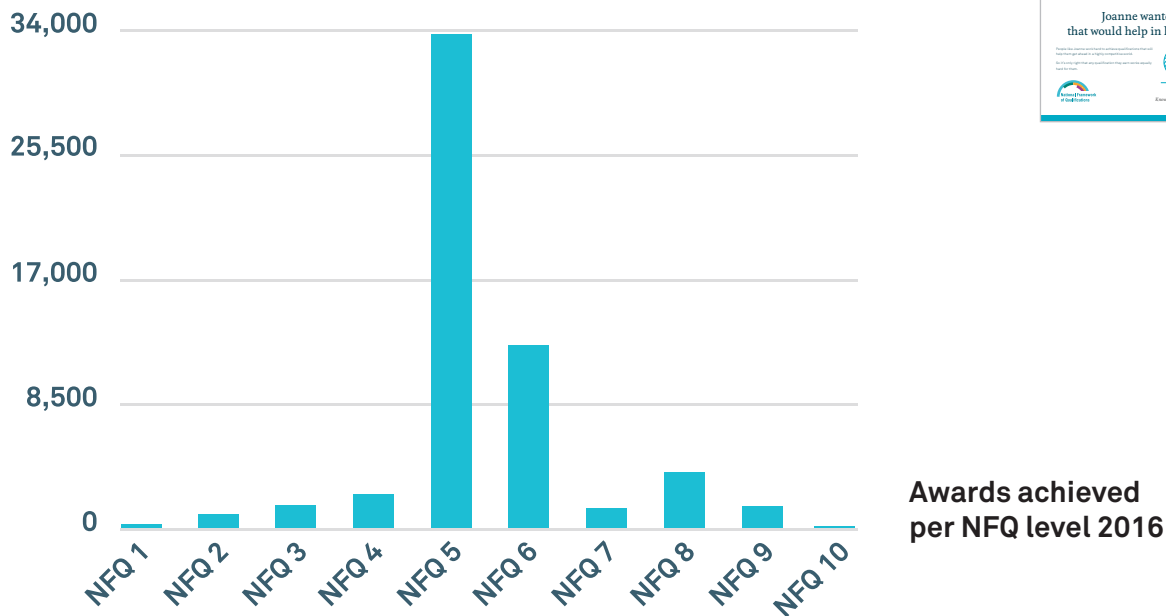


QHelp High Level Statistics 2016

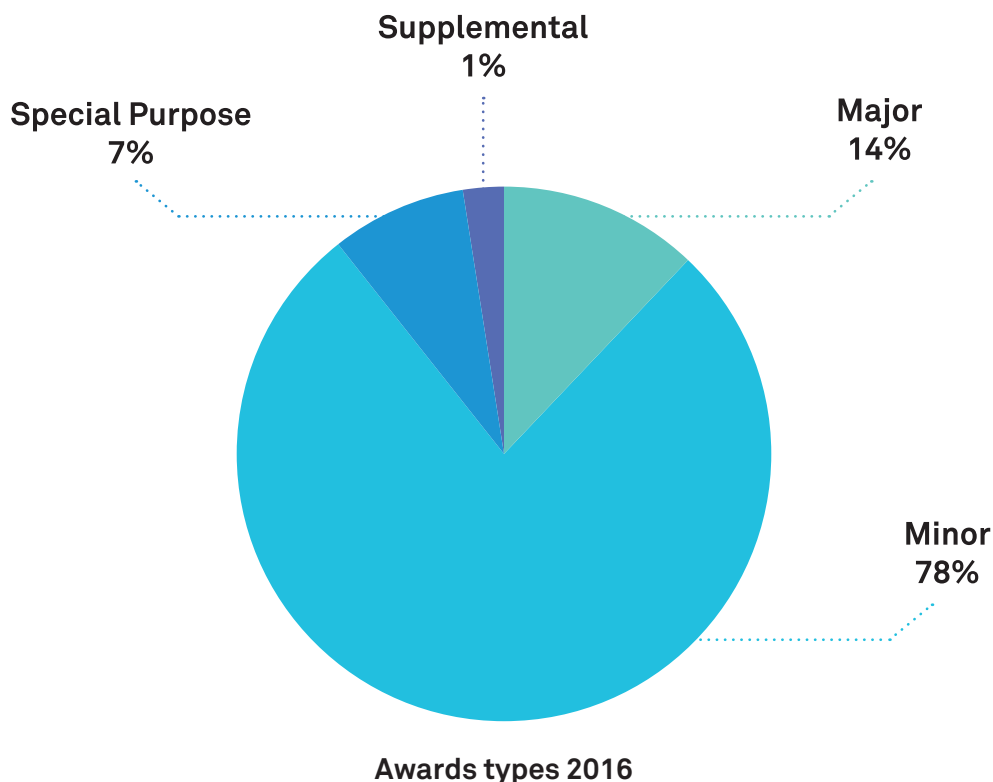
- International Visitors
- Employers
- Learners
- Providers

QQI Awards

In 2016, 174,815 learners received over 181,824 QQI certificates for awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. The awards were achieved across all ten levels of the NFQ, with level 5 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 2016 (see appendix 2 for disaggregated by award type and NFQ level).



Governance

QQI Board

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. The Board's functions including the approval of financial accounts, strategy statements and annual reports. It also has functions in relation to programme validation, delegation of authority, 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).

The QQI Board members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Chief Executive is appointed by the Board with the consent of the Minister.

The Board Members are:

- Mr Gordon Clark (Chair)
- Dr Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (International expert)
- Ms Una Buckley (Learner representative)
- Ms Mary Danagher
- Dr Ann Louise Gilligan
- Ms Joanne Harmon
- Mr. Jack Leahy (USI nomination)
- Mr Thomas McDermott
- Mr James Moore

In 2016, the Board met on the following dates:

- 12 February
- 15 April
- 10 June
- 30 September
- 25 November

Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2016 QQI Board Meetings

	12 Feb	15 Apr	10 June	30 Sept	25 Nov	Max	Attendance
Gordon Clark	✓	-	✓		✓	5	3
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Barbara Brittingham	✓	✓	✓		✓	5	4
Una Buckley	✓	✓	✓		✓	5	4
Mary Danagher		✓	✓	✓**	✓	5	4
Ann Louise Gilligan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Joanne Harmon	✓	✓		✓	✓	5	4
Jack Leahy*	✓	✓			✓	5	3
Thomas McDermott	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓	5	5
James Moore	✓	✓		✓	✓	5	4

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

** attended via phone conferencing

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 2016. Expenses were incurred in 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 2016 were €17,568.

Board Performance Evaluation

The Board carried out a self-evaluation of its 2015 performance in Quarter 1 2016. This performance evaluation consisted of a survey of Board Members and a Board workshop. An external performance evaluation of the Board is scheduled to take place in 2017.

Remuneration and expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €136,276 in 2016. 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 €1,032 in 2016.

Sub-Board Governance Structures

Audit and Risk Committee

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure to measure and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of its internal control procedures, including the internal audit function within QQI.

Members: Thomas McDermott (Chairperson), James Moore, Colin Maynard (to 11 November 2016)

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 7 times in 2016.

Members: Pdraig Walsh (Chairperson), Barbara Kelly, Angela Lambkin, Bryan Maguire, Karena Maguire, John O'Connor, Deirdre Stritch, 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, skill and competence required for higher education awards. The PSC met 4 times in 2016.

Members: James Moore (Chairperson), Lucien Bollaert, Ann Louise Gilligan, Joanne Harmon, Ewart Keep, Barbara Kelly, Catherine MacEnri, Bryan Maguire, Aidan Mulkeen, 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 4 times in 2016.

Members: Barbara Brittingham (Chairperson), Liz Carroll, Maureen Conway, Peter Cullen, Mary Danagher, Sarah Ingle, Anne Mangan, John D. Mulcahy, Diarmuid O'Callaghan (to 10 April 2016)

Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The purpose of the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) is to perform such of the Board's functions as to ensure that providers, to which it grants access to external quality assurance, the International Education Mark, and delegated authority, have met and continue to meet, the associated criteria. The ARC met 4 times in 2016.

Members: Kevin Ryan (Chairperson), Maurice Buckley, Una Buckley, Colette Harrison, Marie Kehoe-O'Sullivan, Jack Leahy, Martin Lyes, Trish O'Brien (to 2 September 2016)

Corporate Matters



Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee is supported by four members of the executive.

The Audit Committee held 4 meetings in 2016 on the following dates:

- 01 April
- 09 June
- 15 September
- 11 November

Internal Audit Function

The Audit and Risk Committee reviewed its Internal Audit Charter and the revised Internal Audit Charter was approved by the Board in November 2016.

The revisions did not involve any significant change to the nature and substance of the original Internal Audit Charter.

The following internal audits have been completed in 2016:

- Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)
- Procurement Audit
- Qualifications and NARIC Audit
- Testing of previous Risk Register Controls Nos. 4 & 5

- Awards and Certification
- Programme Validation
- Financial Reporting Cycle
- Provider Approval Cycle

External Audit Function

The Audit and Risk Committee issued an invitation to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General to meet with the Committee at its meeting to be held in August 2016. The Comptroller and Auditor General's Office acknowledged the invitation and advised that it would be happy to meet at its next scheduled meeting in February 2017.

Risk Management

The Risk Register Project Plan was approved by the Audit and Risk Committee, and by the Board, in June 2016. Owing to the resignation of the Head of Strategic Planning and Communications and the retirement of the Director of Corporate Services, Strategic Planning and Communications in 2016, their respective risks to be re-assigned to new risk owners.

Principal Risks identified by QQI

The Audit and Risk unit identified the main risks QQI faces. The Board carried out an assessment of these principal risks and controls were put in place to reduce the likelihood and impact of each risk occurring. The top five risks for QQI are:

1. There is a risk that expenditure will fail to match organisational targets and outputs due to inability to manage a meaningful financial management and budgetary control processes which could result in difficulties tracking targets and outputs.

Mitigated by: iQA processes and ongoing business processes.

2. There is a risk that providers who are subject to 'for cause' reviews become dissatisfied due to lack of clear policy, criteria and procedures and associated process guidelines which could result in legal action against QQI.

Mitigated by: providing clear guidance for providers; training and guidance for review teams; awareness of time-bound conditions.

3. There is a risk of legal challenge by English Language Providers who lose ACELS approval due to the lack of legislative authority which could result in successful legal action.

Mitigated by: Re-establishment of ACELS recognition committee; revised ACELS regulations for 2017 with legal advice; communications with Department of Education and Skills and Department of Justice.

4. There is a risk of poor quality provision due to lack of detection which could result in quality assurance being compromised.

Mitigated by: development of a formal monitoring function supported by published agreed procedures; introduction of systematic monitoring; systematic follow-up on special conditions of validation.

5. There is a risk that QQI is unable to follow through on its strategic objectives due to external developments in education and training outside of its control, human resource constraints and lack of corporate culture and internal communications strategy supporting QQI's vision and mission which could result in QQI being unable fulfil its statutory functions.

Mitigated by: organisational planning; priority given to activities based on core business requirements; development of HR strategy.

Summary of 2016 Financial Results

In 2016 QQI received €9.99 million between State grant, fee income, EU funding and other. For the same period expenditure was €9.83 million. Pay and pensions costs in 2016 amounted to €4.8 million.

Complaints of Service

During 2016, QQI received one complaint of service.

Data Protection

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.

Appendix 1

Number of awards issued in 2016 (Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose)

Level	Award Type	2016
1	Major	372
2	Major	965
3	Major	1,604
3	Special Purpose	22
4	Major	1,986
4	Special Purpose	432
5	Major	22,181
5	Special Purpose	11,598
6	HE Minor	232
6	Major	6,253
6	Special Purpose	6,002
6	Supplemental	28
7	HE Minor	14
7	Major	671
7	Special Purpose	700
8	HE Minor	13
8	Major	3,144
8	Special Purpose	690
9	HE Minor	100
9	Major	1,432
9	Special Purpose	23
10	Major	22

Appendix 2

QQI awards disaggregated in 2016

QQI awards disaggregated in 2016; 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	965	1,604	1,986	22,181	6,036	217	671	3,144	1,432	22	38,630
Minor	1,123	7,757	24,534	33,013	134,979	20,015	232	51	117	345		222,166
Special Purpose			22	432	11,598	4,789	1,213	700	690	23		19,467
Supplemental						28						28



QQI

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