



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

SECTION 4.12

Green Paper on Data

FOR CONSULTATION

QQI welcomes your views.

If you have suggestions regarding any aspect of the content of this proposed Policy Document please use the *Questions and Comments* area which appears immediately after it.

PLEASE NOTE:

13 SEPTEMBER 2013

CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS

SECTION 4.12

Green Paper on Data

4.12.1 Introduction

QQI has a legislative responsibility to develop a ‘provider register’ and a ‘programmes and awards database’. The sections of the 2012 Act referring to these responsibilities are identified in the section below. In addition, the availability of good quality data is an essential requirement in order to enable QQI to carry out its functions effectively. Amongst other purposes, QQI requires data in order to:

- Inform its monitoring and evaluation of quality.
- Support the facilitation of access, transfer and progression.
- Inform the demonstration of value for money.
- Compile and share statistics for national and international official data sources, such as those of the Department of Education and Skills, UNESCO, OECD, and EUROSTAT.
- Inform its on-going strategic planning.

Thus, the need for reliable, consistent and timely data permeates all QQI activities from performing everyday operations, through to longer term forward planning.

4.12.2 Legislation

As referenced below, the 2012 Act stipulates the requirement for QQI to provide publicly a provider register and a programmes and awards database, in addition to securing data in order to perform its functions:

Section 9 (1): (j) establish, maintain and develop a database providing information on awards recognised within the Framework, programmes of education and training which lead to awards recognised within the Framework and any other programmes the Authority thinks appropriate, (k) establish and maintain a register (p) collect any information relating to the performance of its functions it considers appropriate.

The 2012 Act states that relevant providers, national awarding bodies and professional bodies, are obliged to supply data to QQI, in order to perform its functions:

Section 13 (1) Upon being requested to do so by the Authority, a relevant provider, a body authorised by law to make awards in the State or a professional recognition body shall provide any information the Authority requires for the performance of its functions in so far as those functions relate to the functions of the provider, the body authorised by law to make awards in the State or the professional recognition body as the case may be, including information in respect of completion rates, within the time specified in the request.

4.12.3 Context

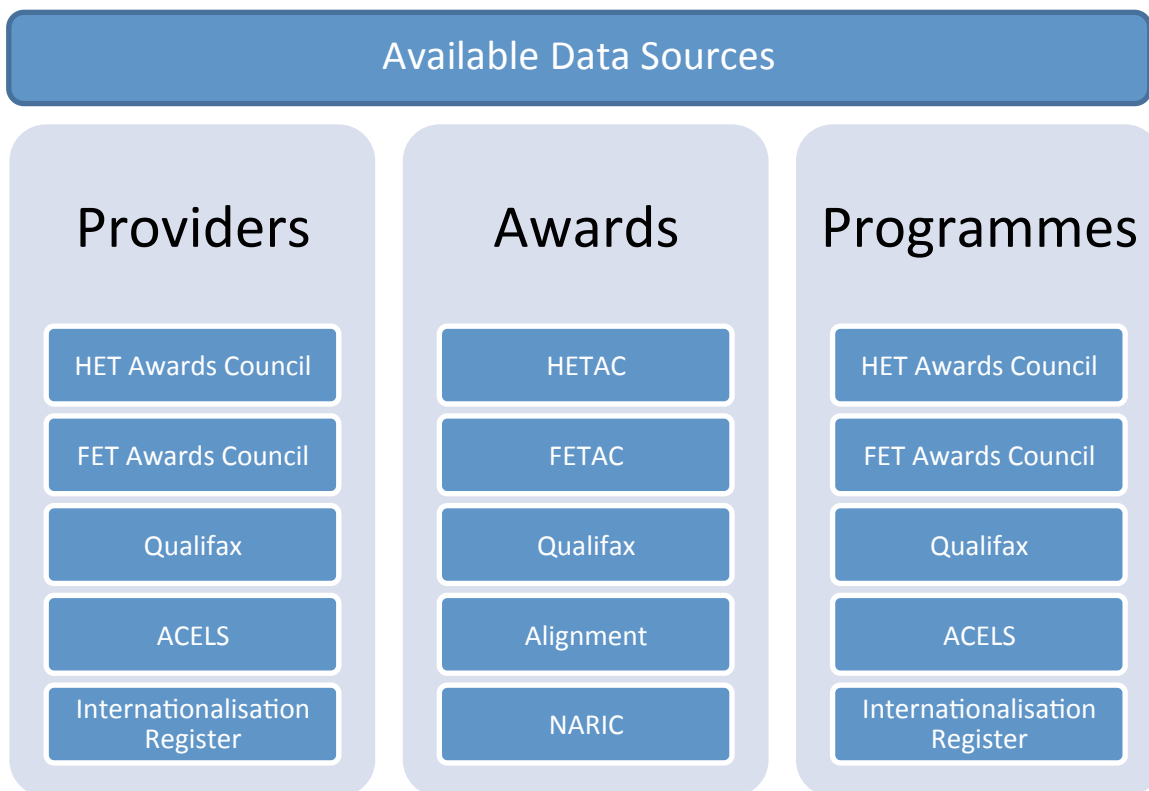
There are increasing demands at a national and international level for data to help measure, analyse, account for and respond to developments in the education and training sector. QQI is concerned with quality and qualifications, and thus with all aspects of the education and training cycle from programmes and standards development, programme delivery, assessment, monitoring and review, certification, as well as feedback loops to engender quality improvement. In this regard, data is required to support every stage of the Provider Lifecycle of Engagements (See Section 1.5).

Beyond its internal uses, the data collected, generated and hosted by QQI is likely to play a role in supporting education and training policy formulation, whilst also informing the decisions of education and training funders and actors, learners, providers and other stakeholders. Fulfilling QQI's outlined data obligations is contingent on the availability of an appropriate QQI information infrastructure which hosts high quality, accurate and timely data. There are currently several data sources collected and hosted by QQI with varying levels to which they can operate effectively together. These data collections include the inherited:

- FET Awards Council data systems.
- HET Awards Council data systems.
- Qualifax programmes database.
- ACELS data.
- National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) (a file repository).

- The Internationalisation Register.
- Data on international awards that have been submitted to QQI as part of alignment policy.

Figure 1: Available data sources for potentially populating Provider Register and Programmes and Awards Database



QQI is currently integrating FET and HET Awards Councils data systems into the core QQI-IT system. The other data sources identified are undergoing detailed analysis in terms of their suitability and conditional integration into the core IT system. A planned and phased long-term integration of the appropriate elements is under consideration. It is possible that some data may not be integrated and will stand alone.

4.12.4 Rationale

The underlying rationale for the provider register and programmes and awards database is to provide publicly, key information about the NFQ; providers; awards and programme provision. Key users of this information include learners, providers, guidance counsellors,

employers, parents, funders, immigration authorities, professional recognition bodies and international recognition authorities.

This Green Paper further proposes the view that the rationale for the introduction of these features, is to contribute to realising synergies across the wider education and training statistical system, given the considerable amount of structural and organisational change taking place in education and training nationally. This paper coincides with initiatives across the system to coordinate and maximise data potential at a time when key organisations such as Solas and the Education and Training Boards are being established and dedicating significant resources into developing their respective information infrastructure. The Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have expressed a desire to coordinate data across the publicly funded sector. This builds on foundations laid by the Central Statistics Office and the National Statistics Board who have made great strides in determining data needs and gaps, and have set out a strategic plan for data collection and coordination across the Irish Statistical System.

Considering both of these elements together, QQI's legislative responsibilities and national opportunities for collaboration, it is proposed that the following guiding principles could inform QQI's approach to collecting, displaying and sharing data:

- Data should be treated as a valuable asset.
- Data integrity and confidentiality should be respected.
- Data sharing and linking should be facilitated.
- Data should be made available and published online.
- Data should be collected efficiently and cost effectively.
- The response burden for external parties submitting data to QQI should be minimised.

4.12.5 Potential Policy Positions

Position 1 QQI will need to adopt a coordinated intra-organisational approach to data collection and data analysis. All QQI policy formulation could consider and reflect data collection and data analysis requirements.

Advantages

- The development of data requirements informs policy development and maximises data utility and potential.
- In turn the 'information' infrastructure will be appropriately 'informed' and a whole-of-organisation view will feed into a 'one-stop-shop' coordinated data system, facilitating data sharing and linking and lending to ease of publication.

Disadvantages

- Policy will be developed at varying paces and thus continuous tweaking of the IT infrastructure may be required during QQI's formative stage.
- There will be a time lag between articulating data requirements and fulfilling data requirements.
- Data requirements may not be known until policy is implemented.
- It may not be possible and/or cost effective to capture the data required to support all policy developments.
- Policy makers and data engineers have different skills sets, so combined efforts will be required and this will require time.

Position 2 Providers will be required to return high quality, robust, comprehensive and timely data to QQI. Sanctions could be applied where providers fail in this regard.

QQI is not a primary data producer and will rely on providers (as well as national awarding bodies and professional bodies) for data. Secondary feeds will need to be from a verifiable source to minimise concerns about data quality and reliability, and will require data protocols and agreements. Data collection arrangements will need to be automated as far as possible. Data requirements should be strengthened in current and new agreements concerning data sources. Data management agreements may form part of the QA procedures agreed, noted or reviewed by QQI. The time of data collection needs to be agreed and may vary according to sector and award-type.

Advantages

- QQI would be promoting the development of comprehensive and centralised data by providers, this could benefit providers themselves as well as other parties.

- The importance of data as an element of quality assurance, which in itself needs to be quality assured, would be underscored by the application of sanctions for providers not being able to submit this information to QQI.

Disadvantages

- Providers may not have either an information infrastructure or a capacity to produce the data required in a consistent, reliable and timely manner.
- Depending on the scale of a provider, the information may not be centrally collated and may thus require significant efforts to coordinate information during the initial set-up phase.
- The application of sanctions with the lack of availability of data to submit to QQI may be considered premature by providers as they may require time to establish their information systems.
- QQI must ensure that its own information systems are in a state of readiness to receive this data.

Position 3 QQI could seek to actively promote a coordinated and whole of system approach to data collection and data analysis.

As identified above, there are a number of actors involved in gathering data nationally. A number of these strands of data are not currently connected which can create difficulties for QQI in terms of charting programmes, awards, learners and associated funding across the NFQ. A whole of system approach would go towards meeting the NSB objective¹ to “*Ensure that the Irish Statistical System is coherent, and that the potential to produce relevant, impartial, and reliable statistics to inform policy and fiscal decisions is fully realised.*”

Advantages

- Taking cognisance of data produced across the wider public sector would maximise data efficiencies and is in keeping with best practice.
- The use of common standard unique identifiers such as PPSN would facilitate data linking and matching across databases, potentially reducing response burden and maximising data potential.
- Adopting standard definitions for the collation of data is cost effective, reduces response burden and lends itself to ease of structured and intelligent online reporting.

¹ National Statistics Board Strategy 2009-2014

- The identification and prioritisation of data gaps across the Irish Statistical System would input into QQI's future data collection priorities.
- Similarly, the identification and prioritisation of data duplications across the Irish Statistical System would equally input into QQI's future data collection priorities.

Disadvantages

- QQI will be constrained by finite time and resources and may not be able to prioritise this activity.
- There are data sharing restrictions which may need to be considered.
- Significant collaboration work would be required around data checks and data mapping and matching.
- Significant data restructuring may be required as classifications are modified.
- New requirements may be identified in order to connect national data sources which would increase response burden.

4.12.6 Short term options for the development of the Provider Register and the Database of Programmes and Awards

The short-term options around the development of the Provider Register and Database of Programmes and Awards are primarily focused on the need for business continuity; the need to meet expectations from providers, learners and others that existing information sources will remain available and current; and to provide time for QQI and for providers to develop their information systems sufficiently. The short term options are to either:

OPTION 1 Produce a separate Provider Register and Programmes and Awards Database.

In the first scenario a Provider Register, probably consisting of a Spread Sheet, would illustrate the combined legacy data on the range of providers with which QQI is currently engaging. The programme and awards database could be derived in two 'lots' and made available as two separate datasets, one being the existing Qualifax dataset which is a programme centric database (with incomplete data on awards), and the other the QQI IT data reports which host combined information on FETAC-QQI and HETAC-QQI awards and to a lesser extent programmes.

Advantages

- This could result in an interim provider register and an interim programmes and awards database.
- The information provided would be current and kept updated.

Disadvantages

- There is a duplication of records in the information sources that would feed this short term register and database which would need to be filtered and managed.

OPTION 2 Provide the Provider Register and the Programmes and Awards Database as an integrated entity.

In this case, the provider, programmes and awards information would be available together as a data-stream from the QQI IT infrastructure based on integrated FETAC-QQI and HETAC-QQI datasets. This combined with the Internationalisation Register, ACELS list of providers, and Qualifax are all available online and together form the collective information required for an integrated provider register/programmes and awards database.

Advantages

- This could provide an interim combined provider register and awards and programmes database.
- The information provided would be current and kept updated.

Disadvantages

- There is a duplication of records in the information sources that would feed this short term register and database which would need to be filtered and managed.

4.12.7 Long term approach to the development of the Provider Register and the Database of Programmes and Awards

Host an integrated database with live automated updates

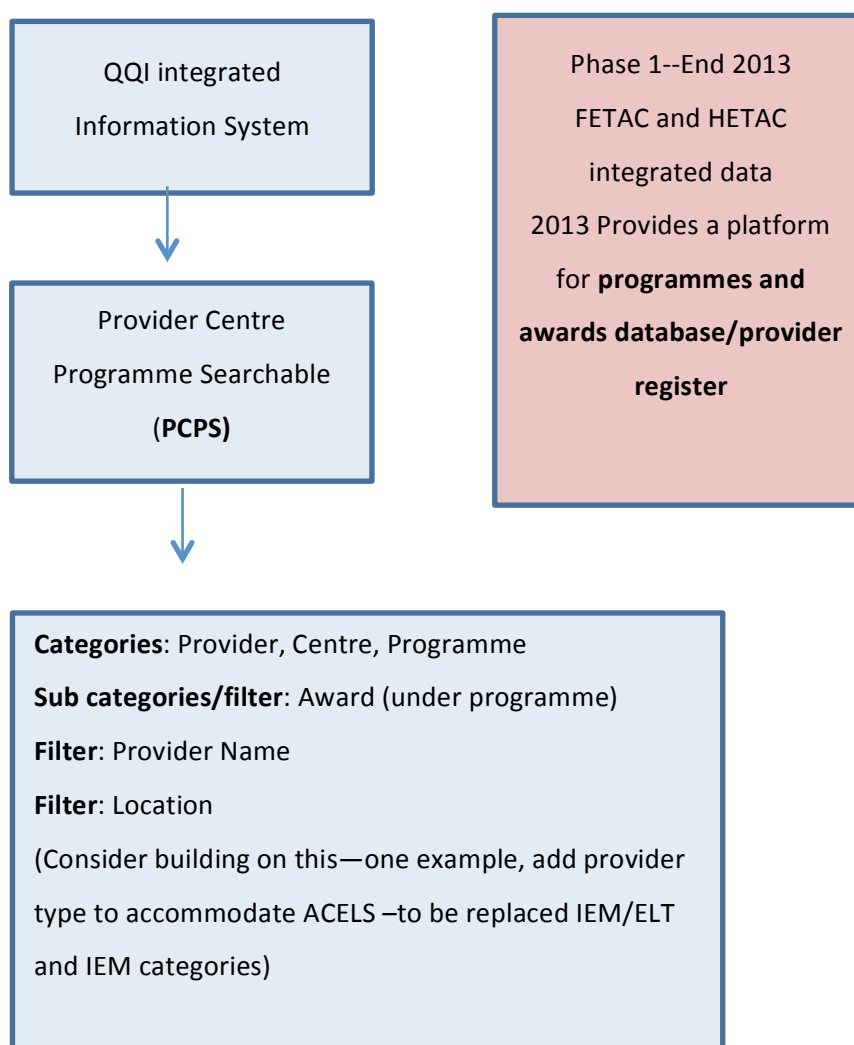
The extent to which this long-term option can be realised with due regard to cost is being analysed by QQI. The data collection underpinning the programmes and awards database/provider register will principally emanate from QQI functions. Thus, the limits, and possibilities, of the register/database are set by the QQI business functions and the QQI IT

system. If the QQI business functions and underpinning QQI IT business system were *in situ*, then the register/database would be accomplished, and the sole focus required would be on refining a front-end product for public viewing.

The starting QQI IT information infrastructural platform is the existing PCPS (Provider Centre Programme Searchable database) which will host FETAC and HETAC integrated data. The other datasets should be integrated into this information system including Qualifax. ACELS and the internationalisation register should be facilitated by adding new categories to the QQI IT infrastructure to capture the new International Education Mark parameters.

Figure 2 provides a schema of the initial phases in populating the QQI Information System to enable an integrated provider register/programmes and awards database.

Figure 2: Schema indicating potential phase 1 QQI Information System to enable an integrated provider register/programmes and awards database



4.12.8 Considerations surrounding Qualifax

Data hosted in Qualifax is derived from multiple, and in some cases transient data sources. The effort in acquiring the data is significant. Additionally, the data quality is variable.

The data capture warrants further consideration, such as re-modelling the data capture via an automated and online input to PCPS directly from the programme providers.

The qualifax.ie website provides a variety of resources to support the guidance community in addition to the database itself. To explore the long term future of these resources, as well as that of the database, QQI proposes to collaborate with the National Council for Guidance in Education (NCGE), the body with statutory responsibility to advise on national guidance policy, in developing a joint green paper on issues and options to serve as a basis for further public consultation.

Questions and Comments

SPECIFIC CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Q4.12.A Do you agree with the principles proposed to underpin QQI's relationship with data?

yes

no

Further Comments:

Q4.12.B Do you agree that the provision of data should be considered part of the quality assurance relationship between QQI and the providers with which it engages?

yes

no

Q4.12.c Is it your view that QQI should seek to influence the national coordination of certain data sets?

yes

no

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 - » When you have finished commenting please submit your comments by going to the last page and clicking the *Submit* button. Thank you.

Questions and Comments

SPECIFIC CONSULTATION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Q4.12.D Which of the short-term proposals for the realisation of a provider register and database of programmes and awards do you prefer and why?

option 1 Produce a separate Provider Register and Programmes and Awards Database.

option2 Provide the Provider Register and the Programmes and Awards Database as an integrated entity.

Reasons and Comments:

Q4.12.E Have you any observations in relation to the longer term approach?

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Please provide the following details.

Which sector do you work in?

If other please describe here

Contact email address

If you are satisfied with your comments please send them to us now by clicking the *Submit* button below.

You can also give feedback to QQI at: consultation@qqi.ie

Thank you for your time!