



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

SECTION 4.2

Green Paper on Certification

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 4.2

Green Paper on Certification

4.2.1 Introduction

This section is concerned with the policy and approach that QQI will follow in carrying out its certification role as an awarding body, making awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to learners deemed to have achieved the specified standard.

4.2.2 Rationale

The 2012 Act includes the making of awards as one of the functions of QQI. It is also a legacy function inherited from the two previous FET and HET Awards Councils and maintained under transition arrangements. In addition the 2012 Act sets out quality assurance responsibilities for QQI in respect of designated awarding bodies (DABs) and providers which have been delegated authority (DA) to make awards. Since QQI is operating both as an awarding body and as a quality assurance body in respect of other awarding bodies, these related but separate roles need clear definition.

QQI's ultimate strategy relating to certification is dependent on the QQI Awards Policy (see Section 4.1). The fundamental issues related to the making of awards will be addressed in the QQI Awards Policy but there are some issues that relate more immediately to certification which are explored here under Certification Policy. These include:

- The branding of QQI award parchments.
- The authorisation of a parchment – by awarding body only or jointly by awarding body and provider.
- The ownership of parchments issued by QQI.
- The format and authentication of certification – traditional vs. virtual approaches.

4.2.3 Current Arrangements for Certification

QQI currently makes awards to learners on successful completion of further and higher education programmes where the provider involved has a programme accredited by the FET

or HET Awards Councils and does not have DA to make the award. Providers are responsible for recommending learners to QQI for certification on the basis of the provider's quality assured assessment process associated with the validated programme. Providers submit quality assured learner and result data to QQI for the purposes of making an award and issuing the certification. QQI is responsible for issuing the resulting parchments back to providers for distribution to learners.

QQI also issues certification related to the ACELS (Accreditation and Co-ordination of English Language Services) CELT (Certificate in English Language Training) brand to learners in the English Language Training sector based on the legacy process and procedure operated by NQAI. The status of the CELT certificates with respect to the NFQ is being considered. QQI will continue to issue these certificates in the interim period.

From April 2013, QQI parchments carry the wording "*FETAC awarded by QQI*" and "*HETAC awarded by QQI*" and transitional Logos (see below). Certificates to ACELS providers carry the ACELS logo but are signed by the CEO of QQI. Note that in the brands, "FETAC" and "HETAC" are labels that refer to the respective award systems rather than to the Awards Councils that established these awards systems. This means that "FETAC" and "HETAC" are no longer in use as acronyms. These words are now considered adjectives that can be used to describe the two sets of awards currently made by QQI.



QQI will, in the period up to the development and implementation of a revised Awards Policy continue to operate the policies and processes of the former awarding bodies and NQAI with some modifications. These modifications will relate to:

- The development under way to bring data collection for all certification of NFQ awards into a single, coherent web-based system. These developments will extent

the current system that operates for FETAC awards to include HETAC awards. This change will be implemented before the end of 2013 and will involve comprehensive interaction with providers.

- QQI will review current procedures to ensure that all certification processes are sufficiently robust to maintain and enhance the credibility of QQI awards made to learners.

To support this transition arrangement QQI will consult with providers and publish operational manuals on the operational procedures to be followed by QQI and providers in the regular certification processes.

Current fees relating to certification based on those of the former awarding bodies have been authorised by the Minister on an interim basis.

4.2.4 Issues for Consideration

For each of the following issues, a number of options are presented below for consideration. They are presented along with some of their contingent advantages and disadvantages.

4.2.4.1 Award Branding

A parchment is issued by an awarding body to a learner who may use it to demonstrate formal recognition of learning achieved. At this juncture it is opportune to consider whether branding of QQI certificates needs to change reflecting the post amalgamation situation and pending a full redesign after finalisation of a QQI policy on Awards.

OPTION 1 The interim arrangement is maintained i.e. the previous brands of “FETAC” and “HETAC” are retained on parchments for further and higher education and training programmes respectively, with the ‘Awarded by QQI’ subscript.

Advantages

- The brand identity which exists for “FETAC” and “HETAC” is not lost while references to the awards councils, now defunct, are removed. The names “FETAC” and

“HETAC” in effect become detached from their previous meanings and become sub-brands of QQI.

- The transition to a fully redesigned parchment is gradual and any potential confusion is minimised.
- The identification of QQI as an awarding body is kept to a minimum.
- This option is simple and efficient.

Disadvantages

- The opportunity to raise awareness of QQI provided by the issuing of thousands of certificates to learners is missed.
- It may be perceived that little has changed following the establishment of QQI.

OPTION 2 Award Parchments carry the QQI corporate logo and all previous branding is removed.

Advantages

- QQI identity and brand gets immediate exposure to providers, learners and employers. This serves to raise public awareness of QQI and its function as an awarding body.

Disadvantages

- QQI is identified primarily as an awarding body, at the expense of its other functions and of other awarding bodies making awards in the NFQ.
- The QQI brand does not have the public awareness levels that legacy branding had.
- Potential cost of promoting the new identity may be high.
- Potential confusion as a series of changes may be required before a final decision on branding under the new awards policy is agreed.

OPTION 3 A parchment will have branding associating it only with the NFQ and not with QQI.

Advantages

- This would focus attention on the NFQ rather than any awarding body.
- There is already a high level of public awareness of the NFQ so the branding should be effective.
- QQI's role as an awarding body would not be highlighted at the expense of its other functions and of other awarding bodies making awards in the NFQ.

Disadvantages

- QQI role as an awarding body is not recognised.
- There could potentially be confusion among the public and employers.
- Loss of the strong legacy brands.

OPTION 4 Award parchments will have a completely new brand.

Advantages

- A new identity for NFQ awards made by QQI could be developed with an associated publicity campaign.
- Indicates change following establishment of QQI.

Disadvantages

- QQI role as an awarding body is not recognised.
- There could potentially be confusion among the public and employers.
- QQI's role as an awarding body would not be highlighted at the expense of its other functions and of other awarding bodies making awards in the NFQ.
- Potentially expensive for what would be an interim position.

4.2.4.2 Authorisation of Parchments

Parchments are legal documents, conferring rights on their holders. There are a number of differences between the format and content of parchments made for further and higher education and training awards. Most differences derive directly from the Awards Policy but one significant difference which lies within the scope of Certification Policy is the authorisation for the parchment i.e. who signs the parchment to authorise the recognition it bestows on the award holder? In HET, the parchment includes the signatures of the CEO of QQI *and* the Director/President of the provider. In FET, the parchment may recognise learning that has been achieved through programmes run by more than one provider, so the only signatory is that of the CEO of QQI. The question arises as to whether this difference should be maintained.

OPTION 1 The current arrangements are maintained i.e. dual authorisation on higher education and training awards and authorisation by QQI only, on further education and training awards.

Advantages

- The current system is well understood and accepted in all sectors. There is no demand for change.

Disadvantages

- Variation in practice between sectors – is this lack of consistency merited?
- Printing the provider's signature on the parchments is technically complex and also prone to error in cases where there is a change to the role of President/Director of which QQI isn't notified.

OPTION 2 Only have QQI authorisation on parchments.

Advantages

- Consistent approach on all parchments.
- Clear separation of roles between awarding body and provider.

Disadvantages

- Change of practice HET.
- May not sufficiently recognise the role of the provider.

OPTION 3 Have dual authorisation on all parchments.

Advantages

- Consistent approach on all parchments

Disadvantages

- Change of practice in FET.
- Would be difficult to decide which provider(s) would authorise the issuing of a FET parchment where the learner involved attended more than one provider.
- FET providers include a wide diversity of setting including education centres within the prison services.

4.2.4.3 Ownership of Parchments after Issue

QQI needs a statement of policy around ownership of awards made by QQI. Consideration of the procedure for revocation of awards is also required.

When QQI issues a parchment, it is for a specific learner but is sent to the provider who is responsible for presenting/sending it to the learner. Normally, there is no further contact required between the awarding body and the learner. However, a situation can arise where it comes to light that the parchment should not have been issued to the learner e.g. if it transpires that the data submitted by the provider was incorrect or the process which led up to the awarding was in some way invalid. Physical possession of a parchment does not convey the rights and recognition attached thereto if the award is invalid.

OPTION 1 QQI states its ownership of the parchment and requires the provider to recover it from the learner.

Advantages

- Clarity and consistency. If the award should not have been made, then the learner should not have the parchment.

Disadvantages

- May be difficult to enforce. There can be situations where the learner may not be contactable, especially if a substantial period of time has passed.

OPTION 2 QQI informs the learner and provider that recognition of the parchment has been withdrawn on QQI records. It will state its position that, irrespective of the parchment existing, no award has been made i.e. the award has been annulled.

Advantages

- Simplicity.
- Effective in the cases where authentication of the parchment is sought from QQI.

Disadvantages

- Not effective except where authentication of the parchment is sought from QQI. If the learner chooses to use the parchment and it is not authenticated then it will be used invalidly.

4.2.4.4 Format and Authentication of Certification

Certification in QQI follows traditional methodology i.e. physical paper parchments are issued to learners in recognition of their award achievement. There are electronic alternatives to this form of certification and it is necessary to consider this option i.e. to give learners a 'virtual' rather than a physical certificate. Another possibility is to supplement

either virtual or physical certification with electronic authentication i.e. enable anyone seeking authentication of a certificate to do so electronically without having to contact QQI.

OPTION 1 QQI would maintain the current arrangements i.e. parchment certification allied with direct authentication when requested (if an employer or other body requests verification of a parchment, they can contact QQI directly and request that the details of the parchment be verified against QQI records).

Advantages

- Currently accepted and effective system.
- No additional costs are incurred.

Disadvantages

- Loss of opportunity to be seen as innovative.
- Will require substantial on-going commitment of human resources.

OPTION 2 QQI introduces virtual certification i.e. will replace physical parchments with web-based proof of achievement.

Advantages

- Would be in keeping with trend towards web based provision of services and in line with the public sector reform agenda.
- Following initial set up costs, this could be a very cost efficient option.
- Offers potential of more open and detailed access to award history for learners.
- Could deal with the problem of parchments getting damaged or lost.
- Could easily be combined with on line authentication of certification.

Disadvantages

- This would be a major break with tradition and may not be popular with learners.
- Would be expensive to establish.
- The technical difficulties of ensuring that learners receive and *retain* secure on line access to confidential data, would be considerable. Instead of replacing lost / damaged parchments, QQI could end up replacing lost / inoperative access codes.

OPTION 3 QQI would retain parchment certification but offer electronic authentication system i.e. the learner would be given a parchment and a secure access facility to enables employers and others to check the veracity of the parchment.

Advantages

- Would be in keeping with trend towards web based provision of services.
- After initial set up costs, could be cost efficient.
- Retains physical parchment for those who prefer it.
- Could enhance the portability and recognition of NFQ awards.

Disadvantages

- Would be expensive to establish.
- Would involve technical issues at outset but would also require considerable resources to ensure the guaranteed access to authentication.
- Failure in the system would have major reputational consequences.

Questions and Comments

GENERAL CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Are there other options that have not been considered in this Green Paper?

Are there advantages and disadvantages that have not been identified for each option?

Do you have any preferences among the options?

4.2.4.1	option 1	option 2	option 3	option 4
4.2.4.2	option 1	option 2	option 3	
4.2.4.3	option 1	option 2		
4.2.4.4	option 1	option 2	option 3	

Do you have any comments on the issues raised in the Green Paper?

- » You can choose to save this document and return to add further comments.
- » When you have finished commenting please submit your comments by going to the last page and clicking the *Submit* button. Thank you.

Are you finished commenting?

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!