

**Performance Delivery Agreement  
between the  
Department of Education and Skills  
&  
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**

**2018**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Context
2. Respective Roles and Functions
3. Service Commitments and Measures 2018
4. Funding of QQI
5. Audit, Risk, Control and Compliance
6. Financial Accountability Framework
7. Governance
8. Review Meetings
9. Change Process
10. Sign Off and Review Arrangements

## **1. Introduction and Context**

This is the fourth management and accountability agreement between the Department of Education and Skills (referred to in this document as “the Department”) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (referred to as “QQI”). It is an important feature of the Agreement each year to set out the purpose of the Agreement; the respective roles and functions; the mutual commitments and the services and activities planned by QQI for the coming year. The purpose of the Agreement is to:

1. Set out the respective roles and responsibilities of both parties in relation to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the quality assurance of the further and higher education and training sectors in Ireland;
2. Provide clarity on the strategic and operational aspects of the organisations’ relationship;
3. Provide a basis and framework for the delivery of high quality services and to set in place for 2018, the parameters and timeframe within which those services will be delivered by QQI;
4. Establish structured arrangements for communications, reporting and liaison;
5. Facilitate improved communication, engagement and co-operation between both organisations.

This Agreement has been developed in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions, national strategies and Government policies, as well as the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and the QQI Corporate Plan.

This Agreement is not a legally binding agreement or a contract and is not exhaustive in its identification of responsibilities. It does not in any way limit any additional actions or policies being implemented between the two organisations. The Agreement does not supersede any specific agreements between the two organisation in relation to particular work areas.

Both organisations will ensure that all relevant staff are familiar with the Agreement and its implications and that all dealings between the two organisations are conducted in accordance with its principles and provisions.

### **1.2. Duration of Agreement**

The services and activities to be delivered as part of this Agreement will be finalised at the first PDA review meeting of each year with a view to ensuring appropriate linkages are in place between the Agreement and QQI’s Corporate Plan.

The Agreement will be reviewed on an annual basis. The content of this Agreement may be amended or modified as required and provided mutual agreement is obtained from both signatories.

### **1.3. Flexibility and Amendment of Targets**

Both parties recognise that it may become necessary to change, modify, add to or otherwise alter, agreed performance targets during the course of this agreement. A necessity for amendments may be prompted by changes in e.g. proposed legislative amendments, government/ministerial priorities or policies, prevailing operating circumstances and/or broader political, economic, financial or related priorities.

Where amendments become necessary, the Department will engage in meaningful and timely consultations with QQI. Such consultation will include consideration of any increase or reduction in effort required to achieve amended targets and any related impact on total output requirements. In the course of all consultations, the Department will be cognisant of the resources required by QQI to deliver additional priorities or the need to deprioritise some objectives if additional delivery requirements emerge. The Department also acknowledges that there may be co-dependencies in some instances where the delivery of objectives also require the commitment of other stakeholder agencies or national objectives under the remit of the Department. At all times, QQI is committed to working with all stakeholders in delivering the Department's objectives for the education and training system.

### **1.4. Reporting and Liaison Structures**

In addition to regular meetings and ongoing dialogue between management in the relevant areas of responsibility in the two organisations, three meetings at senior management level, including the CEO, will be held to review progress on the implementation of the strategic objectives outlined in this Agreement. The three meetings will take place in Quarters 1, 2 and 4.

QQI will agree an Oversight Agreement with the Department and QQI will comply with the Oversight Agreement. QQI notes that this Performance Delivery Agreement operates within the parameters of the Oversight Agreement.

### **1.5. Compliance Notification**

Where QQI becomes aware of non-compliance or potential compliance issues in respect of any obligation, this should immediately be brought to the attention of the Department by the nominated liaison person or the Chief Executive of QQI.

The Department brings to the Board's attention, if necessary on an exceptional basis through the Chair, any strategic issues essential for the Board's oversight of QQI performance of which the Board may otherwise be unaware.

## **2. Respective Roles and Functions**

Education and training is central to individual, societal and economic development and is a vital component for overall national development. The Department and QQI have a common mission of supporting lifelong learning and assuring the quality of the delivery of education and training. Their respective roles are set out below.

## **Department of Education and Skills**

The mission of the Department of Education and Skills, set out in the Department's National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 and the Department's Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 is to enable learners to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development.

Its key functions in relation to lifelong learning, quality assurance and qualifications are:

- To support Government in determining national policy relating to lifelong learning, quality assurance and qualifications;
- To support Government in developing the legislative framework to ensure that national policies relevant to the quality assurance of further and higher education and training can be implemented;
- To provide high quality opportunities for upskilling and reskilling that meet the needs of individuals and the labour market;
- To provide high quality learning, research and innovation opportunities in the higher education sector;
- To be accountable to the Oireachtas for the public funding assigned to QQI;
- To hold QQI accountable for the performance of its functions.

## **Quality and Qualifications Ireland**

QQI is an independent agency with autonomous responsibility for its own operations. Its qualifications and external quality assurance policies and methodologies are influenced both by national legislation and European models such as the European Standards and Guidelines. It develops these in consultation with further and higher education and training institutions and the wider qualifications system. However, its processes, procedures, decisions and judgements are not influenced by third parties.

QQI is governed by a Board. The Board cultivates and relies on the cooperation, expertise and independent judgement of its members in order to provide the necessary leadership to support the success of the agency in delivering on its functions.

QQI has responsibility for the external quality assurance of further education and training and higher education and is responsible for the National Framework of Qualifications. QQI also validates programmes and makes awards within the NFQ for further and higher education and training providers without their own awarding powers. The functions of QQI as defined in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (referred to as "the Act") include:

- To approve the quality assurance procedures of providers of further and higher education and training, other than universities;
- To review and monitor the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of providers of further and higher education, including universities;

- To promote, maintain and further develop the National Framework of Qualifications;
- To advise the Minister in relation to national policy on quality assurance and enhancement in education and training;
- To establish a code of practice for the provision of education and training programmes to international learners and authorise the use of an International Education Mark by providers who comply with the code.

It is acknowledged that QQI also operates the ACELS Scheme for English language providers on a contractual basis at the request of the Department.

Qualifax, the national learners' database, is maintained by QQI at the request of the Department.

In addition, QQI plays a key role in providing policy advice to the Minister and the Department on the current status of the further and higher education and training system and in the development of future education and training policy. QQI may undertake to conduct research into relevant matters, raising policy issues with the Department where it considers action is required, and will ensure that the Department is kept fully informed or involved on all initiatives/developments under consideration in this context. This should include, where appropriate, the participation of the Department in any working groups or processes established to progress work in a particular area. QQI will also ensure that there is prior consultation with the Department on draft policy documents in advance of final approval or publication.

Internationally, QQI is involved in a number of projects, initiatives, agreements and networks with the aim of improving the quality of education and training across Europe and the world. Currently QQI's contribution to European and international initiatives includes its role as the national contact point for the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF); as the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC); as the National Europass Centre; through participation in the national Bologna steering group; as the national contact point for and member of ENQA; as one of the national contact points for ESCO (European Skills/Competencies, qualifications and Occupations) and currently provides the secretariat to EQAVET (for the period 2016-2019). Through IQAVET, QQI is the national reference point for the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training.

### **Mutual Commitments**

Both parties are committed to the promotion of partnership, responsiveness and mutual co-operation in their ongoing interactions.

The Board of QQI has responsibility to support the delivery of QQI's Strategy. In doing so, the Board maintains oversight of the overall performance of QQI and provides any input necessary to ensure the delivery of the organisation's long-term strategy. In this role, the Board through the Chair, contributes to the PDA engagement process and in this context addresses issues which may have an

impact on the QQI's performance or on the effectiveness of the relationship with the Department of Education and Skills.

Both parties undertake to ensure that no unnecessary delays arise in respect of decision making, responses to correspondence, information requests or related matters. In relation to parliamentary questions or other parliamentary business, QQI will provide appropriate material within the specified timeline. The Chief Executive's Office in QQI will be copied on all such requests.

Both parties commit to keep each other fully apprised and updated on any relevant emerging issues or planned public announcements or publications. A progress report will be prepared by QQI to complement the PDA review meetings in 2018. The Department will be cognisant of the demands placed on QQI in delivering the service and activity commitments set out in this Performance Delivery Agreement and will support QQI wherever practicable. As its parent Department, additional engagement will be required in 2018 between QQI and the Department in the development of the QQI Strategic Statement 2019-2021.

### **Multi-Annual Strategic Planning**

In accordance with the Act, QQI delivers its strategic goals and objectives on a multi-annual basis. QQI's Strategy Statement 2016-2018 sets out the approaches and outcomes to be achieved by the end of 2018. The Statement was submitted to the Minister having been approved by the Board on 12 June 2015.

To ensure effective governance and achievement of QQI's legal functions this Agreement provides opportunities to advance an alignment between QQI State funding and the longer term strategic goals of the organisation.

### 3. Service Commitments and Measures 2018

The following section provides an overview of the key services and activities for 2018 which, when delivered in conjunction with the 2016 and 2017 plans, will contribute to a realisation of QQI's mission for the three-year period up to and including 2018.

It is acknowledged that, in addition to commitments below, QQI continues to devote considerable resources to important areas of work which are not central to its statutory mandate.

## QUALIFICATIONS

<b>Goal 1:</b>	<b>We, in association with stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop education and training programmes with clear occupational and / or educational purposes and learning outcomes for informed career and other choices.</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
1.1	Develop NFQ standards and guidelines for employers, learners, awarding bodies and policy makers	Review of 3 sets of Further Education and Training award standards	Q4 2018
		Review of 2 sets Higher Education award standards	Q4 2018
		Develop new standards as appropriate	
1.2	Make QQI awards in accordance with our policy and criteria	Provide 6 certification periods, support direct service contact with 900 FE centres and 36 HE centres in order to delivering in excess of 175,000 paper certificates in 2018	Q1-Q4
1.3	Promote NFQ qualifications to stakeholders by maximising the use of QQI's online communication channels	Enhance the recognition advice service (NARIC Ireland) qualifications database by increasing the number of Comparability Statements by 10% to 1,050	Q4
<b>Goal 1.2:</b>	<b>We, in association with stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop lifelong learning pathways for personal, social and professional development.</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
1.2.1		Support national implementation of the 2017 European Qualifications Framework Recommendation as Ireland's designated EQF-NCP	Q4
1.2.2		Produce a comparative guide of framework awards jointly	Q4



		between Ireland and New Zealand	
1.2.3	Complete a review of the application and effects of the NFQ	Engage with stakeholders in responding to the findings of the NFQ Impact Assessment Report	Q1

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

<b>Goal 2:</b>	<b>We will oversee an improved quality assurance system that is comprehensive and balances accountability and enhancement and promotes local responsibility</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
2.1	Ensure our quality assurance procedures are sufficiently able to address innovations in education and training	Re-engage with all ETBs with a view to approving quality assurance procedures	Q2
		Consult with the National University of Ireland on developing guidelines for the performance of reviews	Q4
		Re-engage with TEAGASC to complete approval of its quality assurance procedures	Q3
		Process applications for reengagement with voluntary providers (50 out of 400 (12.5%) providers for 2018) Publication of report on pilot on reengagement	Q1 – Q4 Subject to approval of fees
		Publish Code of Practice for Research degrees	Q1
2.2	Validate programmes of education and training in accordance with our policy and criteria	Validate programmes of education and training in response to applications. Process applications within 25 weeks.	Q1-Q4
		Complete consultation on the Green Paper on Assessment of Learning (and publish outcomes for 2019)	Q4
		Process applications to validate apprenticeship programmes (within 25 weeks)	Q1-Q4
		Develop and publish procedures for the review of quality assurance procedures of SOLAS as a provider	Q4
		Implement phase II of development of the National	Q4

		Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)	
2.3	Implement new risk based approaches to monitoring and review that are systematic and proportionate	Publish the outcomes of the 2 scheduled reviews of Higher Education Institutions under the CINNTE quality review cycle	Q3
		Publish quality profiles for the 2 Higher Education Institutions that have completed the CINNTE quality review	Q4
2.4	Consult and work with public authorities and providers to implement the International Education Mark	Develop a programme of work for implementation of the proposed legislation (Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill)	Q1-Q4

## COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

<b>Goal 3:</b>	<b>We will provide clear, authoritative and comprehensive information to our stakeholders and the public regarding our roles, responsibilities and activities</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
3.1		Develop the QQI strategy statement 2019-2021	Q2
3.2		Plan for QQI's quality assurance review by ENQA in 2019	Q4
3.3	Build mutually supportive relationships with all of our stakeholders to better communicate and collaborate with them	Host international conference of Cross Border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education in Asia and Europe (CBQAN) in Dublin	Q4
		Develop and implement stakeholder communications plan for 2018-2020	Q1-Q4
		Host FET quality enhancement event on work based learning	Q2
		Host English Language Regional Seminars – pathway to IEM	Q2-Q4
		Host annual event for reference group for EU initiatives in education and skills in Ireland	Q4
3.4	Develop strong working relationships with key sectors, organisations and bodies through a	Review the Memorandum of Understanding with the Higher Education Authority (HEA)	Q1

series of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU)		
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## DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY SERVICE

<b>Goal 4:</b>	<b>We will proactively enable and encourage our staff's ability to develop, thrive, and be fully engaged in their work</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
4.1	Ensure that the individual and collective skills and abilities of our staff support the ongoing delivery of a high quality service to providers and stakeholders	Develop a programme for workforce planning, organisational development and skills and implement phase 1	Q1 and Q4
<b>Goal 4.1</b>	<b>We will enhance our self-service systems, processes and technological capabilities to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service we deliver.</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Service Commitment</b>	<b>Associated Indicator</b>	<b>Delivery Target</b>
4.1.1	Develop and utilise high quality ICT systems that support progressive services to all stakeholders	Extend the programmes and awards database (beyond those of QQI) to include the universities and Institutes of Technology	Q2
4.1.2		Develop a programme of work to create a Management Information System to support QQI's quality assurance functions	Q4

# **Corporate Governance and Financial Accountability Framework**

## **Corporate Governance**

QQI will ensure that appropriate governance and assurance mechanisms and structures are in place in QQI in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 and subject to the appointment of a Chair and other Board Members by the Minister for Education and Skills.

### **4. Funding of QQI**

The Department will allocate funding to QQI for the performance of its functions in accordance with the Financial Accountability Framework and Financial Policies and Procedures. QQI shall keep proper records and in particular adhere to section 23 of the Act.

Monies will be advanced to QQI in line with agreed procedures which are set out in the grant allocation letter which issues from the Department each year. These procedures will be kept under review to ensure they remain fit for purpose. QQI will provide financial reports and statistical data as required, including data to support the preparation of budget and performance assessment and reporting.

The Performance Delivery Agreement will provide an opportunity to look at funding from a multi-annual perspective with a view to achieving a closer connect between QQI's future activities and the necessary grant aid year on year.

The Department in each financial year will advance to QQI such sum from monies sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform which is not greater than the sum required for the purpose of defraying expenditure incurred by QQI in the performance of its functions under the Act, taking into account the projected income from fees and other sources expected by QQI in each year. It is acknowledged that fee income is difficult to predict.

### **5. Audit, Risk, Control and Compliance**

#### **5.1. Written Procedures**

QQI shall comply with the Public Financial Procedures published by the Department of Finance and at all times keep appropriate records.

QQI will ensure that there are written financial procedures in place which reflect, and are in compliance with, the requirements of the Public Financial Procedures and other relevant financial regulations and guidelines and reflect the updated requirements of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform circular 13/2014. These procedures will be kept under ongoing review having particular regard to the findings of the annual internal review of the effectiveness of QQI's system of internal controls and audits.

## **5.2. Risk Management and Compliance**

QQI will adopt and maintain a structured approach to risk and control and, where appropriate, enhance its risk management and keep it under continuous review for improvement. This should include:

- an annual review of the effectiveness of QQI's system of internal controls, including financial, operational and compliance controls and risk management must be carried out as soon as possible following the end of each financial year.
- detailed procedures must be in place, outlining QQI's control procedures and the in-built control and financial monitoring, control and verification checks implemented to ensure accountability and compliance with best financial practice.
- QQI will establish a quality assurance system to measure customer satisfaction, and highlight opportunities to improve work processes.

## **6. Financial Accountability Framework**

### **6.1. Objective**

The objective of this Financial Accountability Framework, operating as an integral part of the wider Performance Delivery Agreement, is to ensure that there are appropriate structures in place in QQI to provide for the necessary assurances to the Department of Education and Skills in respect of any funding advanced to QQI for the performance of its functions/administration of the agency.

### **6.2. Financial Procedures**

QQI will have written financial procedures in place which reflect, and are in compliance with, the requirements of the Public Finance Procedures and other relevant financial regulations and guidelines. These procedures will be kept under ongoing review having particular regard to the findings of the annual internal review of the effectiveness of QQI's system of internal controls and audits.

### **6.3. Management of Resources**

QQI will, on an ongoing basis, assess and review the deployment of its resources, ensuring appropriate skills development through effective training plans. QQI will comply with the arrangements for the Delegated Sanction Agreement for the recruitment and promotion of staff, workforce planning requirements and relevant employment law. Should performance or compliance issues arise from the loss of skills or staff QQI will immediately bring this to the attention of the Department.

In the course of all consultations, the Department will be cognisant of the resources required by QQI to deliver additional priorities or the need to de-prioritise some activities if additional delivery requirements emerge.

### **6.4. Monitoring and Reporting**

QQI will put in place monitoring and verification arrangements to ensure best practice is followed and financial controls are adhered to, in order to safeguard the public funding provided from the Exchequer. QQI will effectively manage the public monies provided, ensuring that agreed savings are delivered.

QQI will submit an annual set of accounts and report on activity as provided for in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012.

## **7. Governance**

The governance objectives of this Agreement are to ensure that QQI:

- follows the strategic direction laid out by the Department by ensuring the delivery of the agreed services and activities and the achievement of the agreed targets.
- effectively performs its statutory functions.
- has a proper accounting framework for the monies advanced to it by the Department and that appropriate structures are in place to provide assurance to the Department.
- has standards and codes of practice to ensure integrity and professionalism and to maintain its reputation in the performance of its functions, and ensuring that such standards are adhered to by its staff.

QQI will ensure that it has appropriate governance and assurance mechanisms and structures in place. QQI will ensure that it adheres to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and that such circulars as may issue from time to time from the Departments of Finance/Public Expenditure and Reform are implemented, where appropriate. QQI shall, in accordance with *Section 25* of the Act, submit to the Minister an annual report not later than 30 June each year.

In line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies – August 2016 QQI will comply with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 02/2016 requiring State bodies to comply with expenditure approvals on IT and telecommunications projects, systems and infrastructures.

QQI will also ensure adequate and appropriate data collection and analysis systems in support of the delivery of its remit. This will include appropriate data sharing arrangements with relevant stakeholders, consistent with the General Data Protection Regulation and national legislation.

## **8. Review Meetings**

The overall engagement of QQI and the Department will be governed by PDA Review meetings, which will be additional to the regular meetings and ongoing dialogue between management in the relevant areas of responsibility. The purpose of the PDA Review meetings will be to review the overall performance of this Agreement, to review the performance of each party and to set future medium and long-term strategies for developing the relationship.

In general, the PDA Review meetings will take place three times per year, with the meetings below to take place during the period covered by this Agreement.

<b>Type of Meeting</b>	<b>Level of Attendance</b>	<b>Date</b>
PDA Review	Senior Mgt DES/QQI	End Q1 2018
Mid-year PDA Review	SG/QQI Chair/DSG/CEO	End Q2 2018
Progress 2018 and Draft PDA 2019	Senior Mgt DES/QQI	Early Dec 2018



## 9. Change Process

Both parties are cognisant of the implications for resourcing and the resulting delivery of change objectives on foot of the implementation of recommendations associated with the review of QQI and subsequent follow up. QQI will review progress to date in Quarter 2 and reassess its priorities for the remainder of the year as necessary.

## 10. Sign Off and Review Arrangements


This Performance Delivery Agreement covers the period from January to December 2018. This Agreement is jointly signed by the Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills with responsibility for Higher Education and Qualifications and the Chief Executive of QQI. The agreement is renewed on an annual basis.

Both organisations will ensure that all relevant staff are familiar with this Agreement and its implications, and that all relevant dealings between the two organisations are conducted in accordance with its principles and provisions.

This Performance Delivery Agreement will be fully reviewed at the end of 2018.

The performance of QQI will be reviewed periodically on the basis of achievement of the deliverables set out in section 3 of this Agreement. Where QQI becomes aware of non-compliance or potential compliance issues in respect of any obligation, this should immediately be brought to the attention of the Department by the nominated liaison person or the Chief Executive of QQI.

Signed on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Doyle  
Deputy Secretary General  
Department of Education and Skills

20/03/18  
Date

Signed on behalf of Quality and Qualifications Ireland:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Pdraig Walsh  
Chief Executive  
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

15/3/18  
Date



## Appendix

### QQI's Strategic Goals

No.		Strategic Goals
1.	Qualifications	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
2.		To support the development of lifelong learning pathways for personal, social and professional development
3.	Quality Assurance	To oversee an improved quality assurance system that is comprehensive and balances accountability and enhancement and promotes local responsibility
4.	Communication & Information	To provide clear, authoritative and comprehensive information to stakeholders and the public regarding QQI's roles, responsibilities and activities
5.	Delivering High Quality Service	To proactively enable and encourage QQI staff's ability to develop, thrive and be fully engaged in their work
6.		To enhance QQI's self-service systems, processes and technological capabilities to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service it delivers