



**QQI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# Re-engagement with QQI Overarching Policy for All Providers



QQI, an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland

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# Re-engagement with QQI

## Overarching Policy for All Providers

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## 1 **SUMMARY**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in November 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (the 2012 Act).

This document sets out the overarching process and policy for all providers that had a quality assurance (QA) engagement with the former Further Education and Training (FET) Awards Council, the former Higher Education and Training (HET) Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) to re-engage with QQI.

Detailed procedures and guidelines support this policy document. QQI policy is developed through a consultative process involving all stakeholders. Details of the policy development process are available on [www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie). QQI policy is adopted by the Board and implemented by the Executive accordingly.

## 2 **INTRODUCTION**

QQI has a comprehensive range of responsibilities for external quality assurance (QA) and for qualifications in Irish further and higher education and training. QQI's predecessor agencies (the FET and HET Awards Councils, the NQAI and the IUQB) engaged with a wide range and type of providers of education and training. Section 84 of the 2012 Act provides for the continuity of quality assurance services and awards for these legacy providers. Legacy providers are the designated awarding bodies (DABs), Institutes of Technology (IoTs), and providers who have a statutory current QA agreement with either of the former Awards Councils. Section 84 enabled the transition of legacy providers to QQI with a minimum of disruption.

English language teaching organisations (ELTOs) do not have statutory QA procedures that are saved under Section 84 of the 2012 Act. Re-engagement with ELTOs is a non-statutory process and can be managed through QQI's temporary continuation of the ACELS scheme until the International Education Mark (IEM) becomes available for ELTOs. Authorisation to use the IEM for ELTOs will require (amongst other things) a statutory QA approval under Section 30 of the 2012 Act.

Re-engagement for each provider will be a one-off occurrence which establishes its QA procedures with QQI in accordance with either Section 29 or 30 of the 2012 Act. QQI's intention through re-engagement is to recognise the work done in developing and implementing QA processes in the past while ensuring a sound statutory basis for future QA development and enhancement.

### 2.1 **Expiry of Savings Provisions**

Section 84 allows for legacy providers to engage with QQI on a temporary basis until such time as new QQI policies and procedures are developed and commenced. This transitional status will expire. QQI will communicate with each legacy provider to give the timeframe within which QQI intends to re-engage with them and the date by which they must re-engage to continue having access to QQI services.

## 2.2 Provider Groups<sup>1</sup>

The 2012 Act clearly differentiates between providers with their own statutory requirements who are obliged to engage with QQI and all other providers that engage with QQI (as they did with the former FET Awards Council and/or former HET Awards Council) on a voluntary basis. Obligatory providers are providers with a prescribed legal obligation to seek QQI validation. Voluntary providers are all other providers (both public and private FET and HET) that decide to engage with QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of seeking QQI validation and external QA. The process of re-engagement will commence the provider's on-going lifecycle of engagements with QQI. The concept of a Lifecycle of Provider Engagements has been introduced in order to identify the range of engagements that will exist between QQI and a provider following the approval or establishment of their QA and differs between voluntary and obligatory providers, and between providers availing of different QQI services.

Establishing the lifecycles of providers will clarify QQI's role as an external QA agency and the responsibilities of providers in providing public accountability and public confidence in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). QQI will fully articulate each provider's particular lifecycle of engagements and will aim to operate engagements that add value to providers, rather than acting simply as regulatory gateways.

The aim of re-engagement is to allow providers to demonstrate that they can act autonomously in developing programmes and assessing learners, focussing on the achievement of learning outcomes. Providers will also be able to demonstrate continuous self-evaluation to achieve a strategic focus on enhancement and educational development.

### 2.2.1 Obligatory Providers

Access to NFQ awards and the role of QQI as the external QA agency for obligatory providers is enshrined in law which means that re-engagement must happen.

Obligatory providers include:

- *Previously Established Universities (PEUs)*

The PEUs have completed statutory review cycles up to 2012/13 under the Universities Act, 1997. The requirements for re-engagement with the PEUs are to implement the 'new' aspects of the 2012 Act, e.g. QA of linked providers. The next stage for re-engagement with the PEUs involves the collaborative development of new QA guidelines and the development of a new review mechanism and the agreement of QA procedures between PEUs and their linked providers.
- *Other Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs)*

The DABs have completed statutory review cycles up to 2012/13 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 (the 1999 Act). The other DABs are the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the National University of Ireland. The next steps for re-engagement with these providers are broadly similar to those of the PEUs.

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<sup>1</sup> See Green Paper 4.14 on the Re-engagement of Legacy Providers with QQI and Future Access to QQI Awards for background and more details on provider categorisation.

- *Institutes of Technology (IoTs)*  
IoTs have completed statutory reviews cycles from 2009 to 2012. IoTs have delegated authority (DA) to make awards. As well as the collaborative development of new QA guidelines and a new review mechanism, re-engagement with the IoTs requires further development of QQI's DA policy to bring it up to date with the 2012 Act.
- *Education and Training Boards (ETBs)*  
The education and training institutions established by the former Vocational Education Committees, are now managed by the ETBs established in 2013. Re-engagement with the ETBs will reflect a fit-for-purpose sectoral QA system building upon the restructuring of the FET sector and the statutory national FET strategy. QQI will establish external quality assurance and ensure the effectiveness of QA procedures of FET providers under the 2012 Act.
- *Teagasc, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Fáilte Ireland*  
Re-engagement with these agencies is happening through dialogue and the development of QQI policy for these bodies. This includes development of relevant QA guidelines and other policies such as for DA.
- *Solas*  
QQI is engaging with Solas on a number of policy and system developments. Solas will continue to be responsible for some education and training provision. The establishment of Solas' QA procedures is dependent upon their establishment as an education and training provider and on the further development of the national FET strategy.
- *Recognised schools*  
Where a recognised school provides vocational or adult education leading to an NFQ award that school is an obligatory QQI provider. In order to engage with these providers, collaboration on the establishment of QA procedures is required to satisfy the requirements of the 2012 Act.

### 2.2.2 Voluntary Providers

Access to NFQ awards and QQI's role as an external QA agency is dependent upon a QA approval process which providers may or may not choose to engage in, this is what makes them voluntary providers. For voluntary providers, the core of re-engagement is the approval of their QA procedures by QQI under Section 30 of the 2012 Act. The intention through this re-engagement is to enable a more autonomous and sustainable voluntary provider to develop that takes full ownership of its own QA procedures.

It is important to state that, while some of the providers that had a QA agreement with the former Awards Councils will progress to QA approval by QQI, the QA procedures and capacity of some legacy voluntary providers may not meet QQI QA criteria. Equally, some providers may decide not to re-engage with QQI.

QQI has not adopted the concept of a 'registered provider' as defined by the former Awards Councils. The approval of QA procedures must be for access to a QQI service,

it is not a status in its own right. For example QA approval to seek or provide a QQI validated programme leading to a QQI award.

Voluntary Providers include:

- Private providers of FET and HET
  - Colleges, companies, individuals, etc.
- Community/Voluntary Sector Organisations
- Employer/Work-based Learning providers
- Sectoral Representative Bodies

### 2.2.3 Current ACELS Recognised ELTOs

English language teaching organisations (ELTOs) do not have statutory QA procedures that are saved under Section 84 of the 2012 Act. Re-engagement with ELTOs is a non-statutory process and can be managed through QQI's temporary continuation of the ACELS scheme until the International Education Mark (IEM) becomes available for ELTOs. Authorisation to use the IEM for ELTOs will require (amongst other things) a statutory QA approval under Section 30 of the 2012 Act.

## 3 THE RE-ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Fundamentally, the re-engagement process involves issuing policy, criteria and relevant QA guidelines for each specific group of providers in order to allow them to re-engage. Through either Section 30 or 29 of the 2012 Act, providers' QA procedures are then established.

### 3.1 Quality Assurance Guidelines

In order for any group of providers to re-engage, QQI must issue relevant QA guidelines, following consultation, to which the provider's procedures must have regard. QA guidelines provide the basis for assurance that the procedures underpinning provision can provide learners with a well-supported learning experience within the scope of the provider's provision.

### 3.2 Approval of QA Procedures (Section 30)

Once guidelines, relevant to a particular group of providers, have been issued by QQI a process for the approval of the QA procedures of legacy providers (other than PEUs, see section 2.2) will be implemented for that group.

### 3.3 QA Procedures of the PEUs (Section 29)

Once relevant QA guidelines have been issued by QQI, the PEUs will establish their own QA procedures with regard to these in consultation with QQI under Section 29 of the 2012 Act.

### **3.4    Re-engagement Mechanisms**

A policy for each group will outline the mechanism for re-engagement with that group.

### **3.5    Fees for Approval of QA**

A fee will apply for the approval of a provider's QA procedures.

## **4    REVIEW OF THIS POLICY**

As re-engagement is a one-off process for each provider, there is no requirement to review this policy. This policy will therefore expire once re-engagement has been completed for all providers.











[www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie)

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