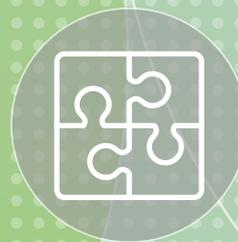


Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards

REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE



QAI REVIEW

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEW

1.1

QQI established *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* for all providers in April 2016, and *Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards* (ETBs) in May 2017¹. These guidelines collectively address the quality assurance responsibilities of ETBs as significant public providers of further education and training. The scope of the guidelines incorporates all education, training and related services of an ETB, leading to QQI awards, other awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or awards of other awarding, regulatory or statutory bodies.

1.2

The education and training boards were established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013. They are statutory providers with responsibility for education and training, youth work and other statutory functions, and operate and manage a range of centres administering and providing adult and further education and training (FET). ETBs also administer secondary and primary education through schools and engage in a range of non-accredited provision. These areas are not subject to quality assurance regulation by QQI.

1.3

In 2018, all sixteen ETBs completed re-engagement with QQI. Following this process each ETB established its quality assurance policy and procedures in accordance with section 30 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended) (henceforth 'the 2012 Act'). QQI recognises that those policies and procedures are reflective of the evolving and developmental nature of quality assurance within the ETB sector as it continues to integrate the legacy body processes.

1.4

As outlined in QQI's Core Quality Assurance Guidelines, quality and its assurance are the responsibility of the provider, i.e. an ETB, and review and self-evaluation of quality is a fundamental element of an ETB's quality assurance system. A provider's external quality assurance obligations include a statutory review of quality assurance by QQI. QQI review functions are set out in various sections of the 2012 Act. The reviews relate to QQI's obligation under Section 27(b) of the 2012 Act (to establish procedures for the review by QQI of the effectiveness and implementation of a provider's quality assurance procedures) and to section 34 of the 2012 Act (the external review by QQI of a provider's quality assurance procedures).

1 <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf>
<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Sector%20specific%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20ETBs.pdf>

1.5

An external review of quality assurance has not previously been undertaken for the ETBs, either through QQI or former legacy awarding body processes. QQI is cognisant of the ETBs' current organisational context in which the establishment of comprehensive and integrated quality assurance systems is an ongoing process. A primary function of the reviews will thus be to inform the future development of quality assurance and enhancement activities within the organisations. Following the completion of the sixteen review reports, a sectoral report will also be produced identifying systemic observations and findings.

1.6

The 2012 Act states that QQI shall consult with SOLAS (the state organisation responsible for funding, co-ordinating and monitoring further education and training in Ireland) in carrying out a review of education and training boards. This will take the form of consultation with SOLAS on the Terms of Reference for the review and the provision of contextual briefing by SOLAS to review teams.

02 PURPOSES

2.1

QQI has specific multi-dimensional purposes for its quality assurance reviews. The *Policy for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Education and Training Boards*² outlines six purposes for this review process. Those purposes, and the ways in which they will be achieved and measured, are as follows:

PURPOSE	ACHIEVED AND MEASURED THROUGH
1. To encourage a quality culture and the enhancement of the learning environment and experience within ETBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Emphasising the learner and the learning experience in reviews. » Constructively and meaningfully involving staff at all levels of the organisation in the self-evaluation and external evaluation phases of the review. » Providing a source of evidence of areas for improvement and areas for revision of policy and change and basing follow-up upon them. » Exploring innovative and effective practices and procedures. » Providing evidence of quality assurance and quality enhancement within the ETB.
2. To provide feedback to ETBs about organisation-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Emphasising the ownership, governance and management of quality assurance at the corporate ETB-level, i.e. how the ETB exercises oversight of quality assurance. » Pitching the review at a comprehensive ETB-wide level. » Evaluating compliance with legislation, policy and standards. » Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.
3. To improve public confidence in the quality of ETB provision by promoting transparency and public awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Adhering to purposes, criteria and outcomes that are clear and transparent. » Publication of clear timescales and terms of reference for review. » Evaluating, as part of the review, ETB reporting on quality assurance, to ensure that it is transparent and accessible. » Publication of the individual ETB reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences. » Publication of sectoral findings and observations.
4. To support system-level improvement of the quality of further education and training in the ETBs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Publishing a sectoral report, with system-level observations and findings. » The identification and dissemination of effective practice to facilitate shared learning.
5. To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Using the expertise of international, national, learner, industry and other stakeholder peer reviewers who are independent of the ETB. » Ensuring that findings are based on stated evidence. » Facilitating ETBs to identify measures for quality relevant to their own mission and context. » Promoting the identification and dissemination of examples of good practice and innovation.
6. To provide an opportunity for ETBs to articulate their stage of development, mission and objectives and demonstrate the quality assurance of their provision, both individually and as a sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Publication of self-evaluation reports, conducted with input from ETB learners and wider stakeholder groups. » Publication of the reports and outcomes of reviews in accessible locations and formats for different audiences.

² <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Inaugural%20Quality%20Assurance%20Review%20of%20Education%20and%20Training%20Boards%20Policy.pdf>

OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA FOR REVIEW

3.1

The core objective of the external review is **to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of an ETB's quality assurance procedures**. As this is the inaugural review, it will have a particular emphasis on the arrangements established to date to support the operation of the quality assurance system. Recognising that the development and implementation of an ETB-wide quality assurance system and procedural framework is an ongoing process, the review will also have a forward-looking dimension and will explore the ETB's plans and infrastructure to support the ongoing development of these systems. The review will thus examine the following:

OBJECTIVE 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Evaluate the comprehensive oversight arrangements and transparent decision-making structures for the ETB's education and training and related activities within and across all service provision (for example further education colleges, training centres, community-based education services, contracted providers, collaborative partnerships/arrangements).

The governance and quality management systems would be expected to address:

	INDICATIVE MATTERS TO BE EXPLORED
a) The ETB's mission and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How/do the ETB's quality assurance arrangements contribute to the fulfilment of these? » Is the learner experience consistent with this mission?
b) Structures and terms of reference for the governance and management of quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Are the arrangements sufficiently comprehensive and robust to ensure strong governance and management of operations (e.g. separation of responsibilities, externality, stakeholder input)? » Is governance visible and transparent? » Where multi-level arrangements exist (e.g. where responsibilities are invested in centre managers), is there sufficient clarity, co-ordination, corporate oversight of, and accountability for, these arrangements?
c) The documentation of quality assurance policy and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How effective are the arrangements for the development and approval of policies and procedures? » Are policies and procedures coherent and comprehensive (do they incorporate all service types and awarding bodies?), robust and fit for purpose? » Are policies and procedures systematically evaluated?
d) Staff recruitment, management and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How does the ETB assure itself as to the competence of its staff? » How are professional standards maintained and enhanced? » How are staff informed of developments impacting the organisation and how can they input to decision-making?

	INDICATIVE MATTERS TO BE EXPLORED
e) Programme development, approval and submission for validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What arrangements are in place to ensure alignment of programme development activity with strategic goals and regional needs? » Are the arrangements for the approval and management of programme development robust, objective and transparent? » What arrangements are in place to facilitate and oversee a comprehensive programme development process in advance of submission for validation (e.g. the conduct of research, inclusion of external expertise, writing learning outcomes, curricula etc.)? » Are there structures in place to support collaborative programme development with other ETBs/providers?
f) Access, transfer and progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How does the ETB quality assure access, transfer and progression systematically across all programmes and services? » Are there flexible learning pathways, respecting and attending to the diversity of learners? » Are admissions, progression and recognition policies and processes clear and transparent for learners and implemented on a consistent basis?
g) Integrity and approval of learner results, including the operation and outcome of internal verification and external authentication processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What governance and oversight processes are in place to ensure the integrity of learner assessment and results? » How does the ETB ensure that these arrangements provide for consistent decision-making and standards across services and centres?
h) Information and data management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What arrangements are in place to ensure that data are reliable and secure? » How are data utilised as part of the quality assurance system? » What arrangements are in place to ensure the integrity of learner records (including, where relevant, the sharing of learner data with other providers on national apprenticeships)? » How is compliance with data legislation ensured?
i) Public information and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Is information on the quality assurance system, procedures and activities publicly available and regularly updated? » What arrangements are in place to ensure that published information in relation to all provision (including by centres) is clear, accurate, up to date and easily accessible?

OBJECTIVE 2: TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Evaluate the arrangements to ensure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the ETB and a high-quality learning experience for all learners. These will include:

	INDICATIVE MATTERS TO BE EXPLORED
a) The learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How/is the quality of the learning experience monitored? » How/are modes of delivery and pedagogical methods evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of learners? » How is the quality of the learning experience of learners on work placements ensured? » Is there evidence of enhancement in teaching and learning?

	INDICATIVE MATTERS TO BE EXPLORED
b) Assessment of learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How is the integrity, consistency and security of assessment instruments, methodologies, procedures and records ensured – including in respect of recognition of prior learning? » How is the standard of assessment of learners on work placements ensured – particularly where these are undertaken by non-ETB staff? » Do learners in all settings have a clear understanding of how and why they are assessed and are they given feedback on assessment?
c) Supports for learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How are support services planned and monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of learners? » How does the ETB ensure consistency in the availability of appropriate supports to learners across different settings/regions? » Are learners aware of the existence of supports?

OBJECTIVE 3: SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

Evaluate the arrangements for the monitoring, review and evaluation of, and reporting on, the ETB's education, training and related services (including through third-party arrangements) and the quality assurance system and procedures underpinning them. It will also reflect on how these processes are utilised to complete the quality cycle through the identification and promotion of effective practice and by addressing areas for improvement. This will include:

	INDICATIVE MATTERS TO BE EXPLORED
a) Self-evaluation, monitoring and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What are the processes for quality assurance planning, monitoring and reporting? » Are the processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and review (including the self-evaluation report undertaken for the inaugural review) comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based? » Is there evidence of strategic analysis and follow-up of the outcome of internal quality assurance reviews and monitoring (e.g. review reports, external authenticator reports, learner feedback reports etc.)? » How is quality promoted and enhanced?
b) Programme monitoring and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How are programme delivery and outcomes monitored across multiple centres (including collection of feedback from learners/stakeholders)? » Are mechanisms for periodic review of programmes comprehensive, inclusive and robust? » Is there evidence that the outcome of programme monitoring and review informs programme modification and enhancement? » Are the outputs of programme monitoring and review considered on a strategic basis by the ETB's governance bodies to inform decision-making?
c) Oversight, monitoring and review of relationships with external/ third parties (in particular, with contracted training providers, community training providers, and other collaborative provision).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How does the ETB ensure the suitability of the external parties with which it engages? » Is the nature of the arrangements with each external party published? » Is the effectiveness of these arrangements monitored and reviewed through ETB governance? » Does the ETB assess its impact within the region and local communities?

3.2

In respect of each dimension, the review will:

- » evaluate the effectiveness of the ETB's quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of further education, training, and related services;
- » identify perceived gaps in the internal quality assurance mechanisms and the appropriateness, sufficiency, prioritisation and timeliness of planned measures to address them in the context of the ETB's current stage of development; and
- » explore achievements and innovations in quality assurance and in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

3.3

Following consideration of the matters above, the review will:

- » Provide a qualitative statement about the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the ETB and the extent of their implementation;
- » Provide a statement about the extent to which existing quality assurance procedures adhere to QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines and policies (as listed at 3.4), to include an explicit qualitative statement on the extent to which the procedures are in keeping with QQI's *Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training*³;
- » Provide a qualitative statement on the enhancement of quality; and
- » Identify effective practice and recommendations for further improvement.

3.4

The implementation and effectiveness of the ETB's quality assurance arrangements will be considered in the context of the following criteria:

- » The ETB's mission and objectives for quality assurance;
- » QQI's *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*;
- » QQI's *Sector-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards*;
- » QQI's *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes*⁴;
- » QQI's *Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning*⁵;
- » QQI's *Policy Restatement and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training*;
- » QQI's *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*⁶; and
- » Relevant European guidelines and practice on quality and quality assurance.

3 <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ATP%20Policy%20Restatement%20FINAL%202018.pdf>

4 <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Apprenticeship%20Programmes%20QAG%20Topic-Specific.pdf>

5 <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf>

6 https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

04 THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1

QQI will appoint a review team to conduct the review. Review teams are composed of peer reviewers who are learners; leaders and staff from comparable providers; and external representatives including employer and civic representatives. The size of the team will depend on the size and complexity of the ETB but in general will comprise five or six persons. A reviewer may participate in more than one ETB review.

4.2

QQI will identify an appropriate team of reviewers for each review who are independent of the ETB with the appropriate skills and experience required to perform their tasks. This will include experts with knowledge and experience of further education and training, quality assurance, teaching and learning, and external review. It will include international representatives and QQI will seek to ensure diversity within the team. The ETB will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed composition of its review team to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. The roles and responsibilities of the review team members are as follows⁷:

CHAIRPERSON

4.3

The chairperson is a full member of the team. Their role is to provide tactical leadership and to ensure that the work of the team is conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner, and in compliance with the Terms of Reference. The chairperson's functions include:

- » Leading the conduct of the review and ensuring that proceedings remain focussed.
- » Co-ordinating the work of reviewers.
- » Fostering open and respectful exchanges of opinion and ensuring that the views of all participants are valued and considered.
- » Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based team decisions (ideally based on consensus).
- » Contributing to, and overseeing the production of, the review report within the timeline agreed with QQI, approving amendments or convening additional meetings if required.

⁷ Further detail on the conduct of reviewers is outlined in QQI's *Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators*.

CO-ORDINATING REVIEWER

4.4

The co-ordinating reviewer is a full member of the team. Their role is to capture the team's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and express them clearly and accurately in the team report. It is vital that the co-ordinating reviewer ensures that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the team's recommendations. The role of the co-ordinating reviewer includes:

- » Acting as the liaison between the review team and QQI; and, during the main review visit, between the review team and the ETB review co-ordinator.
- » Maintaining records of discussions during the planning and main review visits.
- » Co-ordinating the drafting of the review report in consultation with the team members and under the direction of the chairperson within the timeline agreed with QQI.

ALL REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS

4.5

The role of all review team members includes:

- » Preparing for the review by reading and critically evaluating all written material.
- » Investigating and testing claims made in the self-evaluation report and other ETB documents during the main review visit by speaking to a range of staff, learners and stakeholders.
- » Contributing to the production of the review report, ensuring that their particular perspective and voice (i.e. learner, industry, stakeholder, international etc.) forms an integral part of the review.
- » Following the individual ETB reviews, providing observations to inform the development of the sectoral report.

THE REVIEW PROCESS AND TIMELINE

5.1

The key steps in the review process with indicative timelines are outlined below. Specific dates for each ETB review will be outlined by QQI in accordance with the published Review Schedule.

STEP	ACTION	TIMEFRAME
Preparation	Preparation of a provider profile by each ETB (e.g. outlining mission; strategic objectives; local context; data on staff profiles; recent developments; key challenges).	6-9 months before first main review visit
	Provision of ETB data by SOLAS (e.g. data on learner profiles; local context; strategic direction).	
	Establishment of review teams and identification of ETBs for review by each review team, selected in accordance with the ETB provider profiles and data and in consultation with ETBs on potential conflicts of interest.	
Self-Evaluation Report	Preparation and publication by ETBs of individual, inclusive, whole-of-organisation self-evaluations of how effectively they assure the quality of teaching, learning and service activities.	11 weeks before main review visit
Desk Review	Desk review of the self-evaluation report by the review team.	Before initial meeting
Initial Meeting	An initial meeting of the review team, including reviewer training, briefing from SOLAS, discussion of preliminary impressions and identification of any additional documentation required.	5 weeks after submission of self-evaluation report 6 weeks before main review visit
Planning Visit	A visit to the ETB by the chair and co-ordinating reviewer of the review team to receive information about the self-evaluation process, discuss the schedule for the main review visit and discuss any additional information requests.	5 weeks after receipt of self-evaluation report 6 weeks before main review visit
Main Review Visit	A visit to the ETB by the review team to receive and consider evidence from ETB staff, learners and stakeholders in respect of the objectives and criteria set out in the Terms of Reference.	11 weeks following receipt of self-evaluation report

STEP	ACTION	TIMEFRAME
Review Report	Preparation of draft review report by review team.	6-8 weeks after main review visit
	Draft report sent to ETB by QQI for a check of factual accuracy.	1 week following receipt by QQI
	ETB responds with any factual accuracy corrections.	1 week following receipt
	Final report sent to ETB.	1 week following receipt of any factual accuracy corrections
	Response to review submitted by ETB.	2 weeks after receipt of final report
Outcomes	QQI considers findings of review report and ETB response through governance processes.	Next available meeting of QQI Approvals and Reviews Committee
	Review report is published with ETB response.	
Follow-Up	Preparation of an action plan by ETB.	1 month after publication of the review report
	QQI seeks feedback from ETB on experience of review.	6 weeks after publication of the review report
	One-year follow-up report by ETB to QQI. This (and any subsequent follow-up) may be integrated into annual reports to QQI.	1 year after submission of the action plan
	Continuous reporting and dialogue on follow-up through annual reporting and dialogue processes.	Continuous



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