



QQI Re-engagement Peer Learning Event

Thoughts of a Panel Chair

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Is Re- engagement for us?

- Quality Assurance is nothing new for providers; however, re-engagement is a major undertaking for any provider – regardless of scale.
- The **first** question you should ask is “Why do we want to do this?” or “Do we really want to do this?”
 - The initial application preparation is onerous, and the ongoing operation of the QA system will be demanding on resources.
 - Before proceeding with the application, you need to be clear on the costs versus the benefits and make an informed decision.

Overview

- So, we've decided to go ahead, but remember:
 - it poses significant risk for the provider;
 - a **successful outcome** allows the provider to apply for validation/re-validation of programmes and therefore offer these programmes, but success is not guaranteed.
- It is a forward-looking process and **not a review**, with panels composed of experienced peers, who will approach the task in a supportive and collegiate manner.
- There is a repository of published reports:
(<https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QA-Approval-Reports-.aspx>)

Re- engagement Purpose

- Develop a set of QA policies and procedures (incorporated in a Quality Manual) and associated documentation (Learner Handbook, Tutor Handbook etc.) that:
 - are fit-for-purpose for your enterprise;
 - are accessible and user-friendly;
 - reflects the requirements of QQI's Statutory QA Guidelines – Core, Sector Specific (Private Providers, ETBs etc.), Topic Specific (Apprenticeship, Blended Learning etc.);
 - covers day-to-day operations including **assessment integrity**;
 - shows how staff, including contracted trainers, are managed;
 - includes policies and procedures for the development and preparation for validation/re-validation of programmes in accordance with QQI latest policies and criteria for validation ([https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Application-for-Validation-\(Levels-1-6\).aspx](https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Application-for-Validation-(Levels-1-6).aspx)). This is likely to be new to some FE providers.

Management of the Application

- **Support:**
 - Requires full initial and ongoing support from senior management. It must be seen as a strategically important project and resourced appropriately.
- **Team:**
 - The development team should have the appropriate expertise to develop the QA Manual, but it's also important to engage other staff in the process thereby fostering a wider sense of ownership from the outset.
- **Reporting:**
 - The team should provide regular progress reports to senior management.

Preparation of the Application

- **Do some research:**
 - Examine published re-engagement reports.
 - Look up QA Manuals of approved providers on the web.
- **Starting Point:**
 - Some providers start off by trying to shoe-horn their existing policies and procedures into the new template, only to realise several months into the process that it won't work and they have to start again with a clean sheet.
- **Gap Analysis**
 - A considered and 'honest' gap analysis exercise will point you in the right direction and show up any deficiencies in your procedures.

Main Issues

- Governance Structure:
 - Can be challenging for small providers
- Ease of Navigation of Documentation:
 - Follow structure of Guidelines
- Confusion around Appeals:
 - Persons previously involved should not play role in Appeals
- Consistency between Student Handbook, Tutor Handbook and QA Manual:
 - Consider setting up automatic links between the various documents

Governance:

Some Key Principles

1. Separation of academic decision-making from commercial side of enterprise –
Implies having a corporate governance unit and an academic governance unit.
2. Ensuring separation between those who develop material and those who approve it – External resource can help in a small provider.
3. Identification and management of risk.
4. Learner Representation.
5. Staff Representation.

Typical Highest- Level Units of Governance

1. A Governing Authority

- Responsible for commercial decision-making in the organisation. **Holds the cheque book!**
- Can be the Board of Directors or a Governing Authority having devolved authority from that Board (or owner(s)) to make commercial decisions. One or two Directors should be members of this body.

2. An Academic Council/Committee

- Responsible for academic decision-making in the organisation. **Does not spend money!**
- Established by the Governing Authority, with delegated responsibility to carry out its functions.
- Ideally has an external independent Chair

Why Externality?

- Some providers have concerns about involving external expertise:
 - Loss of control.
 - Business risk of release of commercially sensitive information.
 - Potential loss of competitive advantage.
 - Intellectual Property.
- Benefits:
 - Gives confidence to stakeholders that systems are in place to ensure that quality decision-making won't be compromised.
 - Provides additional number(s) to ensure that those who develop policies do not approve them (important in a smaller provider).

Externality in Practice

1. You are familiar with role of external authenticator.
2. Some providers involve external Subject Matter Experts in programme development.
3. Majority of providers have an external independent chair of their Academic Council/Committee.
4. Some also have an external chair, or other external person(s) on their Governing Authority.

Separation of Academic and Commercial sides

- Interaction between the commercial side and the academic side
 - The system must ensure that there is no undue influence exercised by the commercial side over the academic side.
 - Poses particular challenges for smaller providers with small number of staff.
- Involvement of external expertise can help
 - The external person (e.g. Chair of Academic Board) should be wholly external, independent with extensive senior experience in FE or HE as appropriate.

Risk and Learner Representation

- Identification and management of risk
 - Requires input from academic unit of governance.
 - Should be standard agenda item for meetings of both high-level units of governance.
- Learner Representation/Learner Voice
 - Required on at least one of the high-level units of governance (usually Academic Board).
 - Need not be current learners.

One Possible Approach to Establishing Sound Governance

1. Map out a model that's **appropriate for your organisation**, taking account of the key principles of good governance and the scale and scope of activity (if small you don't need a lot of sub-committees, but you're recommended to involve external persons)
2. Establish the roles of the key units with detailed Terms of Reference.
3. Establish the membership of the units having regard to the roles they perform and the principles of good governance, including externality etc.

Possible Membership of Units of Governance

1. **Governing Authority might include:**
 - Representative(s) of Board of Directors
 - Chief Executive
 - Independent Chair of AC
 - Senior Financial Officer
 - Head of HR function
 - etc.
2. **Academic Board might include:**
 - Independent External Chair with experience at senior level in HE or FE
 - Training Manager or equivalent
 - Head of QA or equivalent
 - Tutor/Teaching Staff Representatives
 - Representative(s) of learner interests
 - etc.

Cross-body membership requires careful consideration.

Thank You