

QQI response to public Consultation on HEA Strategy for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
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1. What do you see as the HEA's role in supporting teaching and learning excellence in Irish Higher Education?

In your view, what specific role should the HEA play in advancing teaching and learning excellence across the sector? We welcome your insights on how the HEA can best approach its role, including key support mechanisms and strategies that could strengthen teaching and learning in Irish higher education.

Please provide details

QQI response

QQI welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation in its roles as the national qualifications authority, external quality assurance agency, and awarding body. As such, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across tertiary education is of significant interest to QQI.

QQI acknowledges that both the HEA and QQI legislation emphasise co-operation and consultation across our areas of mutual responsibility. QQI wishes to continue to collaborate with the HEA, students and the wider sector in agreeing a coherent approach to quality enhancement in higher education and in each agency's activities. QQI recognises the importance of the HEA's role as a driver of system performance improvement via initiatives for enhancement in this space. We believe that QQI's role in informing change, maintaining the integrity of our qualifications system and the quality of education and training that is delivered across the tertiary sector is compatible with and complementary to the HEA's role. We believe that a coordinated approach to our areas of mutual responsibility is most beneficial to the sector.

QQI sees the opportunity in this next strategy for all stakeholders to work together to define teaching excellence, a set of measurements and indicators for teaching excellence, and to consider how the HEA can best support quality improvements in teaching excellence.

2. What should the strategic priorities for teaching and learning in higher education be for the next 3-5 years?

The [National Forum Strategy 2019-21](#) identified four strategic priorities designed to enhance the higher education landscape in Ireland:

The Professional Development of All Those Who Teach: Promoting evidence-based, flexible, and inclusive professional development opportunities tailored to the diverse needs and goals of higher education institutions.

Teaching and Learning in a Digital World: Supporting staff, students, and leaders in critically applying digital technologies to enhance learning, teaching, and digital capabilities.

Teaching and Learning Enhancement Within and Across Disciplines: Emphasising the role of disciplines as a key unit of change in higher education, with a focus on achieving excellence in learning, teaching, and assessment within and across disciplines.

Student Success: Developing a vision of success, in partnership with students, with the aim of providing all students with the opportunity to fulfil their potential and become creators of new knowledge who are community engaged, ethically conscious, professionally competent and equipped to flourish in a global world.

Additionally, the [Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement \(SATLE\) Fund](#) (2022 - present) currently prioritises initiatives focused on:

- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
- Digital Transformation in the Tertiary Sector
- Best Practice in Upholding and Cultivating Academic Integrity

Reflecting on these, including the SATLE priority areas, what do you believe should be the key strategic priorities moving forward?

Please provide details

QQI response

A re-evaluation of what teaching and learning entails and whether this terminology needs to be reconsidered (e.g. to explicitly encompass assessment) might be useful to reflect upon given the significant developments in this area since the last NFETL strategy. This might also include a consideration of how teaching, learning and assessment can be best supported, the factors which may impact their success and how capacity is determined, demonstrated and developed.

The NFQ is intended to be a benchmark for awarding bodies when determining qualifications standards. There may be benefit in disciplinary area communities of practice coming together across the system to agree guidance on how to interpret and implement the NFQ in their fields particularly in areas not subject to professional accreditation. This activity would help support learning-outcomes-based standards and could usefully be supported by a collaborative approach highlighting the importance of quality across the HEA, QQI, higher education institutions and other qualifications users, including students.

In QQI's view, assessment is another significant area which could benefit from a more targeted strategic focus, data collection and greater cross-sectoral collaboration. QQI began work in this area through its Rethinking Assessment programme and believes that there is a complementary role for the National Forum in supporting the enhancement of assessment policy and practice. A

key related priority is emphasising the importance of learning outcomes and building awareness and expertise in their design, articulation and the attainment of educational goals and how these support teaching, learning and assessment.

QQI notes that one of the objects of the HEA is to “advance equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in higher education.” Given the increasing diversity of our society and student population, the greater awareness that uniform approaches disadvantage many and the increasing role technology can play in personalised approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, we consider that teaching, learning & assessment for inclusion (informed by appropriate research and monitored using effective data) should also be a key priority for the authority in the coming years.

QQI recognises the positive impact that HEA funded projects can offer and suggests that larger scale projects involving cross-sectoral collaboration could achieve greater impact.

QQI also recognises the value of previous projects funded through the National Forum which included contributions from private/ independent institutions and believes that, for sector wide performance improvement and international standing, it is necessary to enable such institutions to participate fully in future funding initiatives and to access enhancement funding.

3. What initiatives of the National Forum should the HEA continue or expand?

The National Forum implemented a range of initiatives under its key strategic priorities to support teaching and learning across Irish higher education. Based on your experience or perspective, which of these initiatives should the HEA prioritise for continuation or expansion?

Initiatives have included, but are not limited to:

National Professional Development Framework, Open Courses, and progress toward a National Recognition Framework.

Enabling Policies for Digital and Open Teaching and Learning, Irish National Digital Experience (INDEX) Survey, Supporting Open Education, and the National Resource Hub.

Student Success Toolkit, Online Learning Analytics Resource (ORLA), and the Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI).

Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) Framework, National Learning Impact Awards, and enhancement themes in Teaching for Transitions and Assessment of/for/as Learning.

Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) Fund initiatives, focusing on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Digital Transformation in the Tertiary Sector, and Best Practices in Academic Integrity.

We invite your thoughts on which of these initiatives should remain a focus or be expanded.

Please provide details

QQI response

QQI views expanding the role of data collection to that of measuring the impact of teaching and learning funding initiatives would be of great significance. A collaborative approach to data collection could involve a review of data currently gathered, consideration of what needs to be measured and enhanced usage of data in decision-making.

Developing greater research capacity in academic processes would, in QQI's view, support evidence-based decision making across the sector.

QQI believes the practice of including secondees in the National Forum to lead on key areas of focus has been advantageous in informing enhancement and continues to be beneficial.

QQI understands that the open courses tailored to staff learning and development needs have been well received by the sector and believes there is value in continuing the provision of such short courses. There may also be merit in supporting increased participation from academic staff in the design of high-quality courses which may in turn support sectoral ownership of same.

QQI also acknowledges the benefit of SATLE funding initiatives and would like to highlight the value of the stream focused on Best Practice in Academic Integrity and the significant positive impact it has had across the sector from funding academic integrity posts to supporting dissemination and enhancement events. As per QQI's opening statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on the Future Funding of Higher Education in 2022, we continue to recommend that all higher education institutions, public and private/independent, receive adequate funding to support academic integrity.

QQI believes that the resources developed by and made available via the National Forum bring significant value and that its role in curating the resources focused on the Irish higher education context and environment continues to be particularly useful.

4. What new initiatives would you like to see?

What new initiatives would you like to see introduced? We invite your suggestions on new initiatives, approaches, resources, or emerging needs that could drive meaningful change and enhance the excellence and impact of teaching and learning across the sector.

Please provide details

QQI response

QQI believes that the HEA could play a significant role in supporting the development of national communities of practice which facilitate the enhancement of teaching and learning. Such communities, whether thematic or disciplinary focused, might usefully produce sectoral resources which could be adapted for use by individual institutions for the benefit of the higher education sector. These communities could also expand the reach of the Forum across the sector and help to enhance the impact of its initiatives.

From QQI's perspective, as per our previous point on communities of practice, we believe it would be useful to consider adopting a disciplinary perspective which would support national and international collaboration. It would also be helpful to consider how national collaboration across projects is measured and evidenced and how related reporting mechanisms might support this. A disciplinary level focus could facilitate the involvement of all key stakeholders, including students and professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (where applicable) making for an inclusive and comprehensive response to enhancement within the discipline.

Should the Forum prioritise work on disciplinary guidelines, there would be opportunities for collaboration amongst publicly regulated and private/ independent higher education institutions, students and other key stakeholders on matters such as curriculum design, the design of learning outcomes and education goals and changes, the impact of which may be measurable over time.

5. How should the National Forum identity be carried forward under the HEA?

The National Forum has built a strong identity as a leader in enhancing teaching and learning across Irish higher education. As it now operates under the HEA, we are interested to understand how to evolve this identity to maximise its impact.

How do you think the National Forum's identity should be carried forward under the HEA? Please share your thoughts on key elements, values, or approaches that should be maintained or reimagined to continue supporting excellence in teaching and learning.

Please provide details

QQI response

QQI recognises the strength of the National Forum brand and the positive perceptions regarding the Forum which exist across the higher education sector. While acknowledging the important focus of the National Forum's mission on collaboration, inclusivity and innovation, it is QQI's view that an evolved mission could better position the Forum into the future. QQI's perspective is that the development of a broader understanding of teaching and learning which considers assessment and the role of the learning environment would be helpful.

