

Memorandum of Understanding between the **Higher Education Authority (HEA)** and **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**

June 2025



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARO OIDEACHAS

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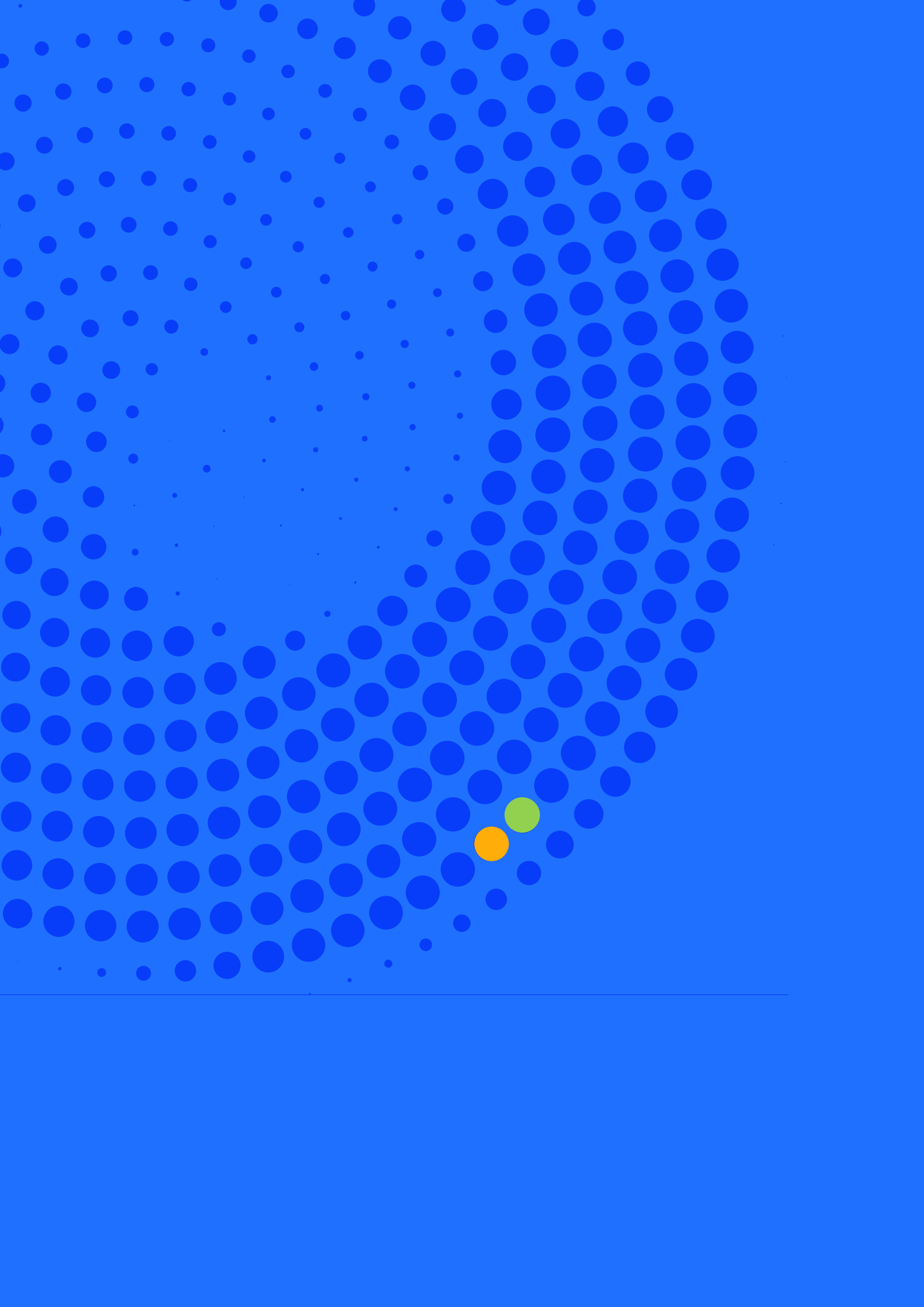


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Influences on this MoU	4
Roles	4
Intersection of the priorities of the HEA and QQI	6
Priority areas for co-operation	7
Commitments and associated actions	7
1. Commitment to a coherence of approach	7
<i>Associated actions</i>	7
2. Commitment to co-operate on activities	7
<i>Associated actions</i>	7
3. Commitment to partnerships for enhancement	8
<i>Associated actions</i>	8
Sign-off and review	9

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); the original MoU was established for the period 2015-2017. The current MoU re-emphasises the commitment of both organisations to ensure the coordination and complementarity of their activities in the interests of the higher education sector as a whole. While significant progress has been made and valuable lessons learned through implementation of the previous three MoUs, system level challenges remain, and this current MoU will act as a framework to channel the renewed efforts of both organisations and their staff in actively pursuing ways to collaborate meaningfully in the context of a renewed legislative mandate underpinning the work of both organisations.

The MoU between the two organisations has a statutory basis under the Higher Education Authority Act 2022.

- Climate Action Plans 2021 and 2023
- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
- The National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2022-2028
- The responsibilities assigned to both organisations within the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, including the progress review and related plans
- Global Citizens 2030
- Programme for Government 2025 Securing Ireland's Future
- European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference 2024 - Tirana Communiqué
- European Strategy for Universities 2022
- The forthcoming tertiary education strategy and the preparatory consultations on same

INFLUENCES ON THIS MOU

This MoU is based on the statutory responsibilities of the HEA and QQI as they refer to Higher Education, as set out in legislation. The key influences are identified below:

- the HEA and QQI's respective strategic plans
- The respective performance delivery agreements between both organisations and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2023-2025
- The Action Plan for Apprenticeships, 2021-2025
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Skills Strategy Ireland

ROLES

THE HEA'S ROLE

The functions of the HEA, as stated in the HEA Act 2022, are as follows:

- A. promote the objects of An tÚdarás,
- B. promote and support student engagement and student success in higher education and the attainment by students of a high-quality educational experience in higher education,
- C. secure and evidence value for money in the expenditure by An tÚdarás of moneys provided to it under section 19,
- D. in co-operation with Taighde Eireann, plan for higher education provision and make recommendations to the Minister on the overall provision of student places,
- E. plan for research in the higher education system and make recommendations to the Minister on the overall higher education research system,

- F. support the provision of a range of programmes of higher education and training aimed at meeting the educational and skills needs of individuals, business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and other stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, including the educational and skills needs of persons in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks, and outside of such Areas, Towns and Networks, with regard to the promotion and use of the Irish language,
- G. facilitate co-operation at a national, regional and local level between designated institutions of higher education and other education providers,
- H. co-operate with designated institutions of higher education, the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland, An tSeirbhís, Science Foundation Ireland, Skillnet Ireland, Ministers of the Government and other bodies, as may be appropriate, in relation to the development and provision of higher education and training,
- I. promote, support and fund excellent research in the higher education system in all disciplines in accordance with national research policy and in co-operation, as may be appropriate, with Ministers of the Government, Government agencies and such other bodies as An tÚdarás considers appropriate,
- J. provide capital funding and current funding to bodies seeking funding, monitor expenditure by funded bodies and to control or seek a refund of funding in certain circumstances,
- K. measure and assess the performance of designated institutions of higher education with a view to strengthening the performance of the higher education system and the designated institutions of higher education and to ensure their accountability,
- L. support the effective governance of designated institutions of higher education by overseeing appropriate governance frameworks to underpin public confidence in the higher education system and to provide value for money for funding provided and ensure accountability and compliance with those governance frameworks,
- M. assess the performance of funded bodies with regard to securing value for money in the expenditure of funding provided to them by An tÚdarás under this Act,
- N. support equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education, including the participation and success of students in priority groups, or persons in such groups seeking to be students, in higher education,
- O. advise the Minister in relation to national policy on higher education in accordance with section 14, including in relation to the funding required for higher education,
- P. co-operate with An tSeirbhís with regard to the establishment and operation of an Office called the National Apprenticeship Office whose functions shall be to manage, oversee and develop a system of apprenticeships,
- Q. promote co-operation and collaboration with regard to higher education (including with regard to the provision of student places and the enrolment of students) with authorities having responsibility for higher education in Northern Ireland, including the promotion of co-operation between designated institutions of higher education and institutions of higher education in Northern Ireland,
- R. without prejudice to paragraph (q), promote co-operation and collaboration with regard to higher education (including the provision of support and funding for projects and initiatives) with authorities having responsibility for higher education in places outside the State, including the promotion of such co-operation by

designated institutions of higher education with institutions of higher education in places outside the State,

- S. provide a recommendation to the Minister in relation to the proposed acquisition or disposal of land, an interest in land or any other property by a designated institution of higher education, where the consent of the Minister is required for such a transaction,
- T. research any matters relating to the objects and functions of An tÚdarás, and
- U. collect statistical information and maintain an evidence base in order to provide high quality evidence-based policy advice.

QQI'S ROLE

QQI is an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. It has a wide range of functions including

- to promote, maintain, further develop and implement the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), a 10-level framework for the development, recognition and awarding of qualifications in Ireland,
- to develop and maintain awards standards and certify learners who successfully complete programmes of education and training that lead to QQI awards,
- to manage the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) Ireland which provides advice on the recognition of Irish and of foreign qualifications,
- to approve (validate), monitor and review programmes offered by further and higher education and training providers that lead to QQI awards,
- to include the awards of Listed Awarding Bodies in the NFQ,
- to provide information to learners and the public on recognised programmes and qualifications in Qualifax and in the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ),

- to provide external quality assurance of further and higher education institutions through periodic institutional reviews of the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures; monitoring; reporting activities and the development of guidance and guidelines to support the development and delivery of education and training programmes in the tertiary sector,
- to provide insight and analysis of the outputs of its work in particular with respect to quality assurance, certification and qualifications,
- to support academic integrity,
- to develop, maintain and authorise the use of TrustEd Ireland, the international education mark, for higher education and for English language education.

INTERSECTION OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE HEA AND QQI

The roles of the HEA and QQI are different and complementary. The HEA and QQI have different roles, each focusing on distinct areas of the higher education system. The organisations have common interests in areas such as: both organisations are concerned with enhancing the quality, coherence, and performance of the Irish higher education system while upholding the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy that are enshrined in State legislation on higher education. Likewise, both aim to minimise the bureaucratic burden placed on higher education institutions while ensuring their full accountability to the State; and both are committed to operating in a transparent manner in partnership with institutions and other stakeholders.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR CO-OPERATION

The HEA and QQI have identified priority areas for co-operation for the period of this MoU. The list below is not exhaustive, and other priorities may be identified throughout the lifetime of this MoU.

- i. Supporting the continued development of quality assured micro-credentials as part of a wider higher education provision.
- ii. Co-operating on data to support the measurement, evaluation and enhancement of quality in the higher education institutions ensuring unnecessary duplication of data collections across the organisations; and including, as appropriate, agreeing a common approach on data definitions in relation to international learners to address existing statutory requirements including co-operation on systems and system development to streamline data transfers and integrations where appropriate.
- iii. Maintaining a co-ordinated approach to the enhancement of the quality of apprenticeship provision and the provision of national tertiary degrees.
- iv. Co-operating on the support of action to strengthen academic integrity in HE through policy and enhancement initiatives.
- v. Co-operating on the international education mark and co-operating on maintaining and enhancing Ireland's reputation within an international context in respect of the quality of higher education provision. Both the HEA and QQI have a role to play in supporting the implementation of Global Citizens 2030.
- vi. Continuing to co-operate and collaborate on student engagement through the shared governance of

the National Student Engagement Programme and the National Student Survey.

- vii. The HEA and QQI will continue to work in partnership with the sector and funding bodies to promote and support the refreshed *National Framework for Doctoral Education* (NFDE) and the work of the NFDE Advisory Forum.
- viii. Both the HEA and QQI will mutually support each other in the fulfilment of the organisations' distinct but connected responsibilities in the areas of access and progression fostering a coherent approach to enhancing access, transfer and progression in higher education is a shared concern of the HEA and QQI.

COMMITMENTS AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

The HEA and QQI have reflected on areas of common interest under three key commitments which have been agreed for the period.

1. COMMITMENT TO A COHERENCE OF APPROACH

Coherence of approach refers to how the organisations will inform and engage with each other at an early stage on matters of mutual concern. This includes planned evaluations of providers, provision, funding educational programmes, including those leading to QQI awards, the regulation and assurance of private/independent higher education, data strategies and major initiatives such as consultations.

Associated actions:

1. Sharing of corporate plans with each other. The HEA and QQI will agree and include in their corporate plans any collaborative actions required to further the priority areas identified above.

2. Sharing of any system level communications by any organisation between the two Chief Executives and the nominated points of contact for the MoU.
3. A liaison person for each organisation will be nominated to ensure that communication and information is exchanged in a timely manner between the organisations.
4. The Chief Executive of each organisation will be invited to meet with the Board of the other on a minimum of a biennial basis.
5. The senior management teams will meet twice a year to update each other on developments.
6. The organisations will actively seek to identify where information and communication should be extended to other parties in the interest of national coherence and consistency.

2. COMMITMENTS TO CO-OPERATE ON ACTIVITIES

Associated actions:

1. Data sharing - provider, award and other data: Where available and appropriate, QQI and the HEA will share provider and award data and collaborate on protocols for data collection. The HEA will include QQI in the list of organisations with which data is shared under the terms and conditions for data-collection from higher education providers. The organisations will also exchange information, as appropriate, in the event that either party has cause to undertake an investigation of a provider or its activities.
2. The organisations will consult with one another in the development of policy and of mechanisms and infrastructure to support policy-implementation. Both organisations will consult and agree text on references to the other in published form which are actionable or which entail interpretations of each other's policy positions.
3. Access, transfer and progression, learning pathways and other supporting policies: QQI will consult the HEA when developing its

statutory policy relating to access, transfer and progression and learning pathways. Similarly, the HEA will consult with QQI on the development of its national access plan, as set out in the recent HEA Act. The HEA will actively promote and encourage all HEA funded higher education providers to facilitate lifelong learning by developing appropriate access, transfer and progression procedures, in accordance with QQI policy.

4. Qualifications and Recognition: QQI (NARIC Ireland) and the HEA will co-operate around the academic recognition and comparability of international qualifications. Both organisations will also seek to advance the interests of learners in Ireland by making good use of European Union (EU) initiatives in the area of lifelong learning, skills and qualifications. QQI and the HEA will collaborate, where appropriate, on the implementation of European initiatives, for example, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Universities initiative, the European degree package, Europass and the European, Skills, Competencies and Occupations (ESCO).

3. COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The HEA and QQI are committed to working in partnership with higher education providers and other parties. The HEA and QQI will collaborate closely with relevant stakeholders, aligning quality improvement activities with sectoral developments, national requirements and international practice including those of the NQF and EQF.

Some specified actions to support the third commitment of partnerships for enhancement are indicated below.

Associated actions:

1. Sharing best practice: QQI and the HEA will seek to establish means through which international experiences and learning can be shared with each other and with stakeholders across the HE sector.

2. Survey contributions. QQI will continue to partner with SOLAS and the HEA in the survey of employers and other joint surveys, as appropriate.
3. International delegations: QQI and the HEA will individually and collaboratively share Irish higher education policy and practice with international delegations and visitors and continue to support each other in this regard.

SIGN-OFF AND REVIEW

This MoU is jointly signed by the Chief Executive of the HEA and the Interim Chief Executive of QQI, and it takes effect from the date on which it is agreed and signed by the two parties. This MoU is intended to stand for the period 1 June 2025 – 31 December 2027. In the intervening period its currency will be kept under review. Any amendments required to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, and that it reflects the emerging priorities, roles and circumstances of the organisations, will be published by mutual written agreement.

Signed on behalf of the Higher Education Authority (HEA):



Alan Wall,
Chief Executive

Date: 27 June 2025

Signed on behalf of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):



Cliona Curley,
Interim Chief Executive

Date: 27 June 25



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