42nd Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee
Monday 24 February 2025 – 2.00 PM to 5:00 PM
QQI Offices, Denzille Lane, Dublin 2

Meeting notes

Present:	Kevin McStravock – Committee Chair Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member Anne Naughton – National Expert (online) Damien Owens - National Expert Eithne Guilfoyle – National Expert (online) Cassy Taylor - International Expert Caty Duykaerts – International Expert (online)
In attendance:	Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC) Beata Sokolowska– Items 4.1, 4.2 and 8.6.1 Marie Gould (online) – Item 8.3.1 Mairead Boland – Item 8.3.2 Alex Keys – Items 8.6.2, 8.6.3 and 8.6.5 Sabine Epitalon – Item 8.6.4 Katherine Walsh and Yvonne Agnew – observers Dobrawa Brach - QQI Secretary

The Chair welcomed everybody and informed the Committee about the changes in personnel in the PSC secretariat: Dobrawa Brach would be filling in for Rebecca Doyle who left for maternity leave. The Committee wished Rebeca well on her leave.

1. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the 41 meeting, 25 November 2024, were approved by the Committee, with a minor amendment.

3. Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings

No business.

4. Standards – review and development

4.1 Standards for Youth Work at NFQ Level 5

The Executive presented *Award Standards for Youth Work at NFQ Level 5* for approval by the Committee. They are broad standards as distinct from Common Awards System standards.

A clarification was sought from a Committee member on whether there were QQI standards for youth work available at higher NFQ levels. The Executive stated that there were not.

It was noted that the document was clearly written and fit for purpose.

A Committee member noted (1) an absence of a focus on developing young people, (2) that it might be useful to have an explicit list of underpinning values and principles and (3) that the section on specialised skills and tools may need elaboration.

The Executive responded to these three points noting that the standards are designed to allow flexibility to programme designers.

It was suggested that it may be useful to add reference to the use of social media.

It was observed that something could be added on GDPR and the importance of being mindful of the positive and negative aspects of the use of social media tools in the context of the youth work.

It was suggested that it might be helpful in the future to detail QQI's responses to the feedback gathered during the consultation process along with the rationale for them.

The Committee approved the *Award Standards for Youth Work at NFQ Level 5*.

4.2 Integrated broad Award Standards for Community Development / Community Work at NFQ levels 5-6

The Executive presented *Integrated Broad Award Standards for Community Development / Community Work at NFQ Levels 5-6* and requested that the Committee approve them.

It was noted that document was quite comprehensive and read well. One member noted that the document differs stylistically from the *Standards for Youth Work at NFQ Level 5* document and suggested that QQI considers making them consistent. The Executive responded that different groups were involved in writing the documents.

Another Committee member commented that confidentiality considerations were included at level 6 but not at level 5 and that there were minor typos throughout the document.

There was a discussion around the use of the term "peak bodies". It was suggested that adoption of this terminology by QQI would need to be carefully considered and discussed with PRSBs before it was introduced as part of QQI's official vocabulary.

The Committee approved, subject to small amendments, the *Integrated Broad Award Standards for Community Development / Community Work at NFQ levels 5-6*.

The Chair thanked the representative of the Executive who presented the proposed awards standards.

5. Strategic Approach

5.1 Report from the Board

The Committee Chair provided a short update from the February Board meeting.

6. PSC Reflection

No business.

7. Policy Stocktake and Roadmap

7.1 Policy Stocktake – Roadmap

No updates were presented.

8. Policy Development and Review

8.1 Approval of minor modifications

No business.

8.2 Green Papers

No business.

8.3 White Papers

8.3.1 Draft white paper on QQI Monitoring Policy and Framework

The Executive presented the draft white paper on *QQI Monitoring Policy and Framework* and requested that the Committee approve it for publication for public consultation. The Executive noted that the current monitoring policy was published in 2014 and overdue for renewal.

One Committee member commented on the complexity of the issue, especially around balancing compliance with enhancement. They commented on the broader issue of the complex relationships between 'QA' processes and monitoring activities. They asked if there would be an option for the peer review processes to be replaced, to which the Executive responded that there would not. The institutional review process, which is a peer review process, in line with the ESG, is a separate process.

There was a question about sharing data and about what negative consequences on page five might be. The Committee acknowledged a complex relationship between different national agencies in terms of defining, gathering and sharing data. The Committee also acknowledged that providers might feel overwhelmed with requests for data coming at them, from many directions at the same time. It was suggested that it might be worthwhile to explicitly list possible negative and positive consequences for the providers of the monitoring process early in the document. The executive confirmed the outcomes of monitoring would be defined within distinct monitoring procedures.

A discussion took place around having clear definitions of a focused review, a peer review and the relationships between monitoring and QA processes.

The Committee requested that the Executive consider how focussed review is articulated and approved the proposed *Monitoring Policy and Framework* for publication for consultation.

The Chair thanked the representative of the Executive who presented the draft white paper.

8.3.2 White paper on Procedures for Focused Reviews of Programmes of Education and Training Validated by QQI

The Executive presented the *White paper on Procedures for Focused Reviews of Programmes of Education and Training Validated by QQI* and requested the Committee to approve and recommend the paper as per the explanatory memorandum.

The Executive set out the context and reminded the Committee that a version of the document was previously approved by the Policies and Standards Committee at its meeting in November 2019. However, the work on it was then paused because of the Covid pandemic.

It was suggested that the listed outcomes under Section *2.8 The Review Reports* be reviewed to include additional possibilities.

With reference to Section 4.1, it was suggested that the role of QQI in decision-making, be set out more clearly, and that clarity be provided as to where the decision-making authority lies. It was suggested that the process needed to be reviewed, and a few more steps added for clarification of QQI role.

A few further minor amendments were suggested: (1) to remove the reference to Skype as means of communication; (2) to tweak the references to FE and HE in light of the HEA Act and the evolving understanding in the context of tertiary education policy; (3) to explicitly include a possibility to combine different types of reviews in one process; and (4) to update the footnote on page 3.

The Committee approved and recommended, subject to abovementioned considerations, the white paper on *Procedures for Focused Reviews of Programmes of Education and Training Validated by QQI*.

The Chair thanked the representative of the Executive who presented the the white *paper*.

8.3.3 White paper on Procedures for Focused Reviews of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA and ATP Procedures

The Executive presented the *White paper on Procedures for Focused Reviews of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA and ATP Procedures* and requested that the Committee approve and recommend the paper as per the explanatory memorandum noting that this was largely a technical adjustment but with legal significance, so the consultation would be formal but relatively low key.

The Committee agreed that the change was of a technical nature. With reference to Section 2.4.1 (and the discussion of Section 2.4.1 in the previous item), it was suggested that the governance structure be reviewed to clarify the role of QQI within the process.

The Committee approved, subject to abovementioned review, the white paper on *Procedures for Focused Reviews of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Provider QA and ATP Procedures.*

The Chair thanked the representative of the Executive who presented the white paper.

The Committee took a short break.

8.4 Final Decision on Guidelines

No business.

8.5 Policy Advice

No business.

8.6 Other Policy Business

8.6.1 Report on consultation on Policy and Criteria for Determining QQI Awards Standards

The Executive presented the report on consultation on the white paper entitled *Policy and Criteria for Determining QQI Awards Standards* for noting and presented draft *Policy and Criteria for Determining QQI Awards Standards* for noting and endorsing.

It was noted that the engagement in the consultation process on all this and the other three polices was low, however, it was explained, that this was due to direct engagement and consultations with the providers prior to releasing the documents for feedback.

The Executive pointed to equality, diversity and inclusion considerations that were included.

The Committee made a note of some minor typos and questioned the legibility of some of the figures in the document.

The Committee noted the report and endorsed the draft policy and criteria subject to the clarity of the figures being addressed.

8.6.2 Report on consultation on Policy and Criteria for Provider Approval

The Executive presented the report on consultation on the white paper entitled *Policy and Criteria for Provider Approval* for noting and presented draft *Policy and Criteria for Provider Approval* for noting and endorsing.

It was noted that reading the document in light of the consultation feedback was extremely difficult because everything is included in a single document.

One Committee member commented that by and large the document is clear. They questioned why there are three possible outcomes for the panel report but four outcomes for the QQI decision.

In the discussions the following suggestions were made: (1) clarify the decisions available to the independent panel and the QQI committee; (2) clarify the scope of the process including whether the policy refers to all programmes offered by a provider or only those that are QQI-approved; (3) refer to QQI monitoring (4) consider the format of Appendix 1; (5) ensure that ATP is consistently referenced; and (6) ensure the policy is future proofed by correct references to the tertiary education system.

The Committee noted the report and endorsed the draft policy and criteria subject to amendments suggested.

8.6.3 Report on consultation on Policy and Criteria for Validating Programmes Leading to QQI Awards

The Executive presented the report on consultation on the white paper entitled *Policy and Criteria for Validating Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* for noting and presented draft *Policy and Criteria for Validating Programmes Leading to QQI Awards* for noting and endorsing.

A Committee member commented on how comprehensive the document was and observed that there was a minor numbering error on one of the pages and that the flow chart needed to be reviewed for legibility.

The Committee noted the report and endorsed the draft policy and criteria, subject to abovementioned edits.

8.6.4 Report on consultation on Policy and Criteria for Making Awards

The Executive presented the report on consultation on the white paper entitled *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards* for noting presented draft *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards* for noting and endorsing.

A comment was made about consistent use of and reference to the tertiary education system. There was a discussion about the feedback regarding titling of certain FET awards.

The Committee asked for a consistent presentation of such documents to the PSC in the future showing how consultation feedback was responded to. A template may facilitate this.

The Committee noted the report and endorsed the draft policy and criteria.

8.6.5 Update on Review of QQI as an Awarding body

The Executive presented an update on *Review of QQI as an Awarding Body* for noting.

A Committee member asked who was on the advisory group. **The list would be shared with the Committee.**

The Committee noted the update.

The Chair thanked the representatives of the Executive who presented the papers for items 8.6.1-8.6.5.

8.6.6 The Interim Guidelines on Assessment and External Authentication of QQI FET Awards

The Executive presented a report on consultation on the white papers (*Interim Guidelines on Assessment and External Authentication of QQI FET Awards*) and detailed QQI's response to the feedback. The Committee was also asked to reflect on the status of non-statutory guidelines on the assessment of QQI awards and advise on the appropriate governance arrangements for their approval.

The Executive noted that, overall, the guidelines were positively received but a range of opportunities for further enhancement were identified and considered that most would be better addressed in the context of the full review that QQI plans, than by making amendments to the interim guidelines.

The Executive also presented the revised draft *Interim Guidelines on Assessment and External Authentication of QQI FET Awards***.** Only minor changes were made to the white papers following consultation.

There was some detailed discussion about whether the guidelines should make arrangements for a derogation for the perceived requirement for an in-person EA visit.

The Executive proposed that it would review the wording to determine whether there was sufficient flexibility and if necessary, provide for a derogation to allow for virtual EA visits where necessary.

The Committee noted the report on the consultation, the proposed way forward, and approved the revised drafts in so far as it could give its terms of reference and noted the question on governance would be brought to the QQI Board along with the drafts for approval.

9. Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions

9.1 Diagrams for the policy review and development framework

The Executive presented the diagram for the policy review and development framework for noting. They pointed, that if PSC terms of reference would change, the diagram would also have to be updated.

The Committee welcomed the diagram.

10. Notable new publications

Programme for Review of National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Policies | Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Green Paper on QQI Revised ATP Policy | Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Green Paper on Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 | Quality and Qualifications Ireland

New publication: Synthesis of the Education & Training Board Follow-Up Reports | Quality and Qualifications Ireland

11. Any other business

11.1 Damien Owens valediction

It was Damien Owens' last meeting as a Committee member. He thanked the board for this opportunity and acknowledged that it was a privilege to be the member of the QQI PSC Committee. He paid tribute to all staff at QQI and complemented them on their professionalism, especially around organisation of the events. He wished QQI all the best in the future. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Damien for his time and contributions.

11.2 Next meeting

The next in person off-site meeting would take place in June, date and location TBC.