



Circular

Reference:	2016/01 QQI CL
Title:	New Apprenticeships and QQI
Issued by:	QQI
Subject:	Clarification on certain matters relating to the awarding, quality assurance and recognition of New Apprenticeships
Recipients:	Members of consortia proposing New Apprenticeships
Of interest to:	Apprenticeship Council and Secretariat; awarding bodies; further and higher education and training providers and their representative bodies.
Effective from:	Immediately
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Further information:	www.QQI.ie

1. Introduction

QQI is aware that the Apprenticeship Council has issued a communication to consortia that sets out requirements for new apprenticeships that relate to awarding and quality assurance matters. Specifically, the Apprenticeship Council has stated that:

- New Apprenticeships can be made by any awarding body in the State that has, or has been delegated, statutory authority to make awards following programmes
- Use of the Professional Award-Type Descriptors that are available at levels 5 to 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in the development of all New Apprenticeships is a requirement of the Apprenticeship Council
- Recognition within the Irish NFQ is a requirement for all New Apprenticeships.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is one of a number of statutory awarding bodies in the State. It is also the quality assurance body for further and higher education and training providers and institutions in both the public and private sectors and has responsibilities for the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The following document is intended to clarify how QQI's awarding, quality assurance and NFQ roles will be carried out in the context of responding to the matters communicated by the Apprenticeship Council.

2. QQI as awarding body: Information for consortia intending to develop apprenticeships leading to QQI awards

2.1 Approval of quality assurance procedures by QQI

If a consortium¹ intends developing a programme that leads to a QQI award, it can do so through a lead education and training provider that has had its quality assurance procedures approved by QQI or by one of its predecessor awarding bodies i.e., FETAC or HETAC². Quality assurance procedures must be approved by QQI before any provider can submit a programme for validation. If a consortium does not include a provider that has a current quality assurance relationship with QQI it will first need to identify which entity in the consortium is going to seek to have its quality assurance procedures approved. In these circumstances, the relevant policy to refer to is QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*³.

If a consortium wishes to enter into a quality assurance relationship with QQI in its own right, rather than working through an individual provider member, it will need to have legal personality; expectations in this regard are set out in the policy above. It should be noted that seeking the approval of quality assurance procedures from QQI as a consortium is a more complex matter from a technical and legal perspective. This would need to be taken into consideration by the consortium when it is planning for the introduction of an apprenticeship.

2.2 Quality assurance requirements associated with the development and delivery of new apprenticeships leading to QQI awards

In the case of new apprenticeships, the lead provider is primarily responsible for the quality assurance of the entirety of the delivery of the apprenticeship, including those parts delivered in the workplace. When its quality assurance procedures are being agreed and/or during the process of validating a new apprenticeship programme, a particular focus will be placed on what processes and systems the provider will use to satisfy itself regarding this.

QQI is currently in the process of consulting upon Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. The model it is following is the development of 'core' quality assurance guidelines for all providers and then additional modular guidelines particular to a type of provider or provision. QQI has therefore published draft Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeships which will apply to the provision and quality assurance of apprenticeships.

¹ 'Consortium' and 'consortia' throughout this document relate to the consortia established for the purposes of submitting proposals for new apprenticeships to the Apprenticeship Council.

² Agreements of quality assurance with the previous awarding bodies were transitioned to QQI under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. QQI is currently developing quality assurance guidelines which all relevant providers will be required to have regard to through a process of re-engagement. In the interim, assuming that a provider has remained active in its validation of programmes and learner certification, the quality assurance agreement it entered into with FETAC or HETAC remains current.

³ This document is available at the following link: <http://www.qqi.ie//Pages/Policy-and-Criteria-for-Provider-Access-to-Initial-Validation-of-Programmes-Leading-to-QQI-Awards.aspx>

When a provider is submitting its programme for validation, it will also submit any additional or amended quality assurance procedures required to address the QA Guidelines on Apprenticeship. QQI will evaluate and approve these before proceeding to validation.

2.3 Use of standards when developing new apprenticeships

2.3.1 Use of Professional Award-Type Descriptors

QQI has the statutory ability to make awards at all ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Each level of the Framework includes award-types such as the Level 5 Certificate, the Advanced Certificate and the Honours Bachelor Degree. Each of these award-types has a published descriptor which broadly sets out the knowledge, skills and competence it is expected a learner will acquire in order to successfully gain an award.

QQI has also introduced a series of Professional Award-Type descriptors at levels 5-9 of the Framework⁴. These are suited to the development of programmes leading to qualifications that are more vocational and occupational in nature.

For those developing a new apprenticeship at levels 5 to 9 on the Framework a combined standard will be used of a general purpose award-type descriptor in conjunction with the Professional Award-Type Descriptor appropriate to the level of the qualification. For example, if an apprenticeship is being designed for inclusion at level 5, it should refer to the award-type descriptor for the Level 5 Certificate and the Professional Award-Type Descriptor relevant to Level 5. If a provider is developing a programme at level 8 it should refer to the award-type descriptor for the Honours Bachelor Degree or the Higher Diploma and the Professional Award-Type Descriptor relevant to Level 8.

It is important to be aware that the award-type that is used in conjunction with the Professional Award-Type Descriptor will lend the new apprenticeship certain characteristics, including the credit associated with the award, and the name of the award.

2.3.2 Use of existing award specifications as part of new apprenticeship programmes

A number of the proposals from consortia refer to programmes that have already been developed and which lead to awards included in the NFQ. Some of these refer to programmes designed using further education and training award specifications included in the Common Awards System (CAS) and which currently lead to QQI awards. In these circumstances there are matters where a provider and consortia intend incorporating the award specifications for existing awards into a new apprenticeship:

- The new apprenticeships constitute a very particular type of programme which combine on and off-the-job education and training. As an important and innovative national initiative,

⁴ The professional award-type descriptors for levels 5 and 6 are available here: http://www.qqi.ie//Pages/Professional-Award-type-Descriptors-NFQ-Levels-5-and-6.aspx?_ga=1.234039069.2061022297.1441626965 and for levels 7, 8, and 9 are available here: [http://www.qqi.ie//Pages/Professional-Award-type-Descriptors-\(Award-Class-Professional\)-For-the-Alignment-of-Professional-Awards-at-NFQ-Levels-7,-8-.aspx?_ga=1.264824844.2061022297.1441626965](http://www.qqi.ie//Pages/Professional-Award-type-Descriptors-(Award-Class-Professional)-For-the-Alignment-of-Professional-Awards-at-NFQ-Levels-7,-8-.aspx?_ga=1.264824844.2061022297.1441626965).

the quality of the design and delivery of these programmes is very important. Every programme that is being submitted to QQI as a new apprenticeship will be subject to the validation process outlined below (section 2.4.2)

- The existing award-specifications available through the CAS can certainly form a substantial reference point for certain new apprenticeships where appropriate. However, for a new apprenticeship programme that draws on existing award-specifications to be validated, it must not only reproduce these award specifications but also incorporate at least one substantial module which draws these elements together and reflects the Professional Award-Type Descriptor relevant to the level at which the award is requested. Equally the intended programme learning outcomes must also reflect the relevant Professional Award-Type Descriptor.

2.4 Validation of programmes leading to QQI awards

2.4.1 Validation policy

QQI published⁵ draft *Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI* in December 2015. This is the policy that should be referred to by consortia developing new apprenticeships which they intend submitting to QQI for validation.

2.4.2 The validation process

In summary, the validation process for new apprenticeships will include the following elements:

- The development of a programme document by the provider/consortium setting out at a programme and module level the intended learning outcomes, curriculum, assessment methods, delivery settings and delivery methods;
- The approval by QQI of the provider's quality assurance procedures with regard to the quality assurance guidelines for apprenticeship;
- The development of an evaluation document by the provider that addresses QQI's validation criteria;
- The establishment by QQI of an independent evaluation panel which will include specific expertise in apprenticeship and in the subject-matter area;
- An evaluation by the independent panel of the application for validation received and meetings between the panel and those to be involved in the provision of the programme;
- The submission of the report of the independent panel to QQI and to the provider (the provider will have an opportunity to comment upon the report);
- Consideration of the report and of the provider's response by QQI, which will determine the application;
- Communication of the outcome to the provider;
- Publication of the report of the independent panel and of the outcome of the process to the QQI website.

The independent evaluation panel will give attention to the particular characteristics of the proposed apprenticeship, including the importance of cohesive design, delivery and assessment of the programme in both the on and off-the-job settings in which it is delivered; and the quality

⁵ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/White-Paper-on-New-QQI-Validation-Policy-and-Criteria.aspx>

assurance by the relevant provider of all of these aspects of the programme.

The involvement of interested professional, statutory or regulatory bodies in the proposed apprenticeship will also be considered.

3. Information for consortia intending to develop programmes leading to awards of another awarding body

In addition to QQI, there are a number of bodies in the State that have the authority to make awards which are included in the NFQ. They are, the Institutes of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, the universities and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Any of these bodies can make a new apprenticeship award.

3.1 Use of professional award-type descriptors by other national awarding bodies

As communicated by the Apprenticeship Council, consistency across the new apprenticeships is important. Therefore, the Professional Award-Type Descriptors discussed in 2.3.1 above will be used in the design and development of all programmes leading to apprenticeships, regardless of the awarding body.

3.2 Quality assurance requirements associated with the development and delivery of new apprenticeships

As noted above, QQI is consulting upon Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeships. When finalised, these quality assurance guidelines will be incorporated by all awarding bodies into their quality assurance policies and procedures and this will be confirmed to QQI. It is on this basis that external quality review of the apprenticeships will be conducted.

4. Information for consortia intending to develop programmes leading to awards made by awarding bodies requiring recognition through the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

4.1 Recognition of awards within the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The Act under which QQI was established⁶ has been identified as requiring amendment in order for QQI to be capable of recognising awards through the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). As a result, QQI is currently unable to fulfil this function.

4.2 Apprenticeships and the NFQ

The Apprenticeship Council has determined that the new apprenticeships should be recognised through the NFQ in the interests of learners and other parties. In the absence of QQI's ability to

⁶ The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

recognise the awards of other awarding bodies through the NFAQ, the only current route available for inclusion in the NFAQ is via a joint award (certified either by a single certificate issued jointly or by dual/multiple certificates) with QQI or with another awarding body (as named in section 3 above). Where consortia anticipate that a new apprenticeship award will be made by a body that is not one of the awarding bodies named in section 3 above, the consortia must seek dual or joint awarding status with one of those named awarding bodies in order for the new apprenticeship to be included in the NFAQ. It is important to identify which of QQI's policies will apply to these circumstances:

- QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards* will apply⁷
- QQI's published draft *Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI*⁸ will apply
- All new apprenticeships included in the NFAQ will reflect the Professional Award-Type Descriptor, therefore, section 2.3.1 above applies.

5. Timeframes and Further Information

5.1 Timeframes

QQI is conscious of the wish of a number of consortia to have their apprenticeships available in September 2016. It has organised the consultation of its QA Guidelines for Apprenticeship to facilitate this approach (a consultation which concludes on 16 February). As circumstances differ across consortia, we would like to arrange meetings with the lead partners of each consortium. The meeting will be used to establish in detail the stage of development of proposed apprenticeships in terms of both quality assurance and awarding; whether that is in terms of submission of a programme to QQI for validation or seeking a joint award (certified either by a single certificate issued jointly or by dual/multiple certificates). In order to manage this process we would ask that each consortium do the following:

- (i) Nominate up to three attendees to meet with QQI
- (ii) Email Tina Medjber (tmedjber@qqi.ie) in our Communications Unit putting **Apprenticeship Meeting** in the subject line and indicating availability to meet with QQI in the week beginning 15 February. Tina will then respond with a time for the meeting.

5.2 Further Information

QQI is holding a consultation briefing on its quality assurance guidelines and validation policy and criteria on 28 January and invitations have already been issued to consortia members for this event.

In order to address any additional queries arising, we would greatly appreciate if these could be directed in the first instance to Tina Medjber (tmedjber@qqi.ie) in our Communications Unit putting **Apprenticeship Query** in the subject line. Tina will gather queries arising and liaise with QQI colleagues to address these for consortia members.

⁷ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Policy%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Making%20Awards.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/White-Paper-on-New-QQI-Validation-Policy-and-Criteria.aspx>