



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

ANNUAL REPORT



2014

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1. INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CHAIR

This annual report for 2014 represents the activities of the second full year of operation of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). During the year, the Board of QQI met on five occasions.

A significant piece of work for 2014 was the launch of the new QQI website with revised content about QQI, what we do and how we work, the introduction of a new facility, QHelp, which makes available answers to common queries for learners, providers, employers and international visitors. Quick and easy access to a wealth of information is provided through a new search facility, QSearch including QQI publications, policies, reviews, programmes, awards, providers, information about foreign qualification recognition and statistics.

The QQI Board completed the suite of sub-Board Committees with the establishment of the Approvals and Reviews Committee and the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee which met for the first time in 2014. The Board also approved the establishment of the QQI Consultative Forum, a representative group of QQI stakeholders from education and training institutions, learner representatives, state agencies, government departments, representatives of professional recognition bodies and other stakeholders. The first meeting of the Forum was held in April and a further meeting was held in October. The Consultative Forum will meet twice a year in future.

During the year, QQI also established a Collaborative Forum for further education and training (FET) in partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). The Forum, which met in October and November will act as the coordinating structure through which QQI and the ETB sector will work collaboratively on a range of operational, developmental and strategic matters in relation to qualifications and quality assurance.

As part of QQI's European commitments, we are required to demonstrate compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) on a five yearly basis. Following the preparation of a self-assessment report and a site visit to QQI by an international team of experts in May, QQI was found to be compliant with ESG at a meeting of the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in September.

Ireland's strong commitment to the development of the European Higher Education Area was further recognised when the Chief Executive of QQI was re-elected as a Board member and as President of ENQA for a further three years at the association's General Assembly in Zagreb, Croatia in October. At that meeting, the association agreed that the 2015 General Assembly would be hosted by QQI in Dublin in October 2015.

We look forward to 2015 and the further development of policies and procedures to enable us to support the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training systems, to quality assure providers and to support and promote a qualification system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

We hope that you find this Annual Report both informative and useful.

Mr Gordon Clark
Chair, QQI

Dr Pdraig Walsh
Chief Executive, QQI

2. ABOUT QQI

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is a state agency established by the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012 with the non - executive members of the Board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

We are responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. We validate programmes and makes awards to certain providers in these sectors and are responsible for the promotion, maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). We also inform the public about the quality of education and training programmes and qualifications and advise the Minister on national policy regarding quality assurance and enhancement in education and training.

Our stakeholders come from all sectors of education and training: learners, providers, employers, Government departments, State agencies and funding bodies, regulatory bodies, professional bodies, qualifications awarding bodies, community and voluntary sector and representative bodies and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

3. VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND GOALS

Vision

Our vision is to seek extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

Mission

Our mission is to:

- Promote the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training;
- Quality assure providers; and
- Support and promote a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

Values

Learner-Centred: We promote a culture of access, responsiveness, flexibility, trust and quality in education and training and qualifications. We place the learner perspective at the centre of our work and also encourage stakeholders to do so.

Improvement-Oriented: We are a learning, developing and evolving organisation, committed to continuously evaluating and improving the quality of our work. This underpins our approaches to assuring and promoting improved quality in further and higher education and training.

Collaborative: We collaborate with our stakeholders to build confidence in, and improve the quality of education and training opportunities and the recognition of qualifications.

Independent: Although we work within the broad framework of governmental policy, we are operationally independent in the performance of our functions and in our decision making. We operate with integrity and in a transparent, fair, equitable, impartial and objective manner.

Professional: We treat all persons with respect, dignity and courtesy. We work to the highest standards of public service with regard to accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.

4. PROGRESS AGAINST OUR GOALS IN 2014

We aim to ensure that we provide a high quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. In our Strategy Statement 2013- 2016 we identified six goals to assist in fulfilling our mission. The following section highlights our progress to the end of 2014 in relation to these goals.

Goal 1- Establish a comprehensive, coherent set of QQI policies and procedures with the National Framework of Qualifications as a central organising feature.

Consultative Forum

The purpose of the QQI Consultative Forum is to enable collaboration with stakeholders, to ensure greater coherence in the education and training system through consultation and meaningful dialogue between QQI and stakeholders. We sought nominations from our stakeholders and the first meeting was held on 1 April and the second meeting on 7 October 2014.

QQI sought consultation on its policies at each stage of the development process, from green to white papers to the final policy. Consultations were conducted online however we also used the Consultative Forum as a platform for policy consultation. The feedback from the forum has been constructive and the policy development in QQI has been enriched as a result.

Comprehensive Policy Development Programme

We established a Comprehensive Policy Development Programme in March 2013 to take a coordinated approach to policy development in all areas of quality assurance and qualifications. This holistic approach is designed to ensure that we work towards a coherent vision for the qualifications system and the roll out of our functions.

Following on from the successful publication and implementation of the first three QQI policies in 2013 significant progress was made in 2014 with eight further policies being published on our website. The published policies are:

- **Policy and Criteria for the Delegation of Authority to the Institutes of Technology to make Higher Education and Training Awards (including Joint Awards)** - This document sets out the policy and criteria for the delegation of authority to the Institutes of Technology to make higher education and training awards, including joint awards.
- **Policy and Criteria for Recognising Professional Awards within the National Framework of Qualifications** – This policy and these criteria are exclusively for the alignment of professional awards. The document outlines the alignment process, the criteria for alignment and the general conditions for alignment.
- **Re-engagement with QQI Overarching Policy for All Providers** - This document sets out the overarching process and policy for all providers that had a quality assurance engagement with the legacy agencies, FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and IUQB, to re-engage with QQI.

- **Re-engagement with QQI Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training**- This document sets out the process, policy and criteria for voluntary providers of education and training programmes that had a Quality Assurance agreement with the former FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) to continue to access the programme validation process of QQI.
- **Re-engagement with QQI Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Higher Education and Training** - This document sets out the process, policy and criteria for voluntary providers of education and training programmes that Quality Assurance approval by the former HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council) to continue to access the programme validation process of QQI.
- **Policy on Monitoring** - This document sets out the QQI policy approach to its monitoring function.
- **Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines** - This document sets out the QQI policy approach to the development and issuing of guidelines for the establishment of providers' quality assurance procedures.
- **Policy and Criteria for Making Awards** - This document sets out the QQI Policy and Criteria for the making of an award by QQI or by a provider to whom authority to make an award has been delegated
- **Policy for Determining Awards Standards** - This document sets out QQI's approach to the determination of awards standards for the education and training awards that it makes itself and that are made by providers of education and training programmes to whom it has delegated authority to make an award.

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was referenced as a central organising feature in all policy development and public consultation activities throughout 2014. So too, the NFQ has continued to be an organising feature for our work as an awarding body, in validating programmes and determining awards standards.

We supported the further use of the NFQ by a range of public sector agencies during 2014. In particular, QQI liaised with the Public Appointments Service and other recruiters on their referencing of the NFQ in determining qualifications recruitment criteria and liaised with the Department of Social Protection, Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) and other funding agencies in their management of education and other social investment schemes.

We continue to offer a public information service for queries on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and during 2014 we developed publications, presentations and online content to promote awareness and understanding of the NFQ for varying audiences.

We have continued to actively participate in European and international networks and our input is framed by our experiences in maintaining and implementing an established qualifications framework. We represent Ireland on the EQF Advisory Group, the Bologna Working Group on Structural Reforms and participate in the networks of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks and of experts on the recognition of prior learning.

We are party to a number of collaborative projects supporting the developing of qualifications frameworks in other countries. We lead on and support initiatives to enhance the use of complimentary recognition and transparency tools such as the Europass portfolio of documents, and are members of the maintenance group for European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) taxonomy tool. We also facilitate the academic recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and abroad through our role as an ENIC-NARIC centre¹. As an awarding body we have worked to ensure both the Irish NFQ and relevant European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels are referenced on qualification parchments.

Collaboration

In relation to liaising with relevant public sector bodies to support appropriate use of the NFQ, QQI has worked with the Department of Social Protection, SUSI (Students Universal Support Ireland), PAS (Public Appointment Service) and Teagasc. This work is ongoing in nature and will continue into 2015.

Collaboration with external agencies and stakeholders such as the Department of Justice and the Department of Education and Skills, took place around the formulation of new policies and approaches in light of new initiatives and government policies.

¹ European Network of Information Centres in the European Region and National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

ENIC / NARIC

QQI is responsible for hosting the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre where it provides advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland. The policy approach in this area has been informed by consultation in 2014 on two key publications. The first was a Green paper 'Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications²', published in March, which relates to QQI's role in facilitating the recognition of both foreign and Irish qualifications. The second publication, a White paper, 'Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications³', was published in December 2014. This paper relates to the online provision of authoritative advice regarding the academic recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland, using the Irish NFQ as a reference and guided by principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

The Irish ENIC-NARIC centre involvement in the NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) and NARIC projects have informed and will complement the policy approach outlined in the White Paper. Developments and outputs during 2014 include:

- **Changing Roles of NARICs (CHARONA) project:** This project explored the widening remit and policy development activities of NARIC centres. A comprehensive report was published in June 2014 and was promoted through the QQI website. The CHARONA II project (2014-16) is underway and will inform a proposal for revision of the ENIC-NARIC Charter of Activities and Services originally published in 2004.
- **European Area of Recognition-Higher Education Institution (EAR-HEI) project:** The Irish ENIC-NARIC centre was involved in the development of a manual of best practice in the recognition of foreign qualifications in conjunction with a number of other centres, and in collaboration with colleagues in HEIs. The manual was launched in March 2014 and is available from: www.enic-naric.net. The 'Streamlining Institutional Recognition – A Platform for HEIs' project began in 2014 and is concerned with developing an online platform for facilitating engagement and discussion on practices and policy in the context of recognition. A number of Irish HEIs have expressed an interest in this tool.
- **System of Quality Assurance for the Recognition Networks (SQUARE) project:** A QA tool has been developed and agreed for use throughout the ENIC-NARIC network to facilitate peer reviews.
- **NUFFIC On-Line Programme:** The Irish centre developed a module on using Qualifications Frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications for use in this annual programme, led by the Dutch ENIC-NARIC, which is aimed predominantly at new members of the ENIC-NARIC network.

QQI hosts a range of projects promoting mobility and transparency of qualifications across Europe, including the National Europass Centre, the European Qualifications Framework National Contact Point (EQFNCP), and the ENIC-NARIC centre for Qualifications Recognition. The National Europass Centre, with the support of the ENIC-NARIC and the EQFNCP, led a range of initiatives promoting synergy between activities and promotional work with the core objective of making it easy for stakeholders nationally to be informed and to benefit from the work at European level (www.europass.ie).

² <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Facilitating-the-Recognition-of-Qualifications-Submissions.aspx>

³ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/White-Paper---Policy-and-Criteria-for-Facilitating-the-Academic-Recognition-of-Foreign-Qualifications.aspx>

Goal 2 - Prioritise learners in our policies and actions and in our relations with stakeholders

QQI engages with learners through:

- Our governance structures with the presence of two representatives on the QQI Board
- Consultation with representative groups
- The involvement of learners in our review, accreditation and evaluation processes. This feedback from learners is an explicit requirement of our Quality Assurance Guidelines
- All Institutional Review teams include a student or a student representative. During reviews, the team met with students and student representatives. Institutions also involve students in their self-evaluation process prior to review

Protection for Enrolled Learners

The approval of Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) arrangements as a condition of validation continued in 2014 for FET and HET providers.

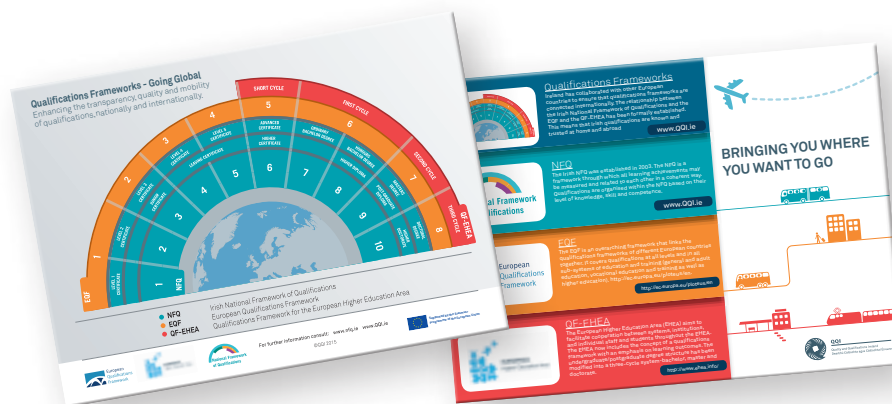
An audit of the PEL protocol implementation was undertaken and a report presented to the Audit Committee in September 2014 and a number of recommendations were made to the executive for monitoring and updating of PEL arrangements of providers. PEL arrangements were activated for one provider in 2014 and learners were assigned by QQI to alternate providers and additional providers as necessary.

Qualifications Frameworks - Making Connections

Qualifications frameworks describe what learners should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification.

QQI is responsible for the promotion, maintenance, further development and implementation of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. We are also the designated National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework. As part of our promotional activity we developed a suite of communications materials in relation to national and international qualifications frameworks.

The EQF and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) are overarching systems that link different countries' qualifications systems together. Ireland has collaborated with other European countries to ensure that qualifications frameworks are connected internationally. The relationship between the Irish NFQ, the EQF and the QF-EHEA has been formally established. This means that Irish qualifications are known and trusted at home and abroad.



Recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland

A Green paper ‘Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications⁴’ was published in March, relating to QQI’s role in facilitating the recognition of both foreign and Irish qualifications. A second publication, a White paper, ‘Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications⁵’, was published in December 2014. This paper relates to the online provision of authoritative advice regarding the academic recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland, using the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a reference and guided by principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

Summary of Qualifications Recognition Activity 2014:

Applications

- Formal applications for academic recognition in 2014 = 2,380
- Applications closed in 2014= 2,243 (including 1,468 higher education awards, and 455 further education awards)
- For the period 2010-14 inclusive, approximately 9,000 formal applications were received. The top 5 countries in terms of volume of applications received were Poland, UK, Romania, Lithuania and Latvia (43%). The top 5 non-EU countries were India, Philippines, Russia, Nigeria and Brazil (7%)
- A full review of application processing took place in early 2014 and from August, mechanisms were in place to facilitate applications to be received in soft copy, increasing efficiency of the service

4 <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Facilitating-the-Recognition-of-Qualifications-Submissions.aspx>
 5 <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/White-Paper---Policy-and-Criteria-for-Facilitating-the-Academic-Recognition-of-Foreign-Qualifications.aspx>

Queries

- Number of queries received through Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system = 2,000
- Email queries to individual team members: Approximately 500
- Phone = 1,300

The new QSearch⁶ facility on our website provides quick and easy access to information about the recognition of foreign qualification in Ireland under the heading NARIC. This facility provides advice on the general academic recognition of a foreign qualification by comparing them, where possible, to a major award at a certain level on the Irish NFAQ. We currently have comparability statements on 367 qualifications from 66 countries. This advice can be downloaded in the form of a one-page comparability statement.



The National Diploma Supplement is a European Union document that is issued to graduates of higher education institutions along with their parchment and transcripts of results. This document aims to facilitate learners in gaining fair recognition of their Irish qualifications abroad by providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies a student pursued and successfully completed.

Section 8 of the National Diploma Supplement was updated and published, following consultation in May 2014, to reflect changes in the national higher education and training system.

Goal 3 - Quality assure providers and support the enhancement of the quality of education and training provision

Review of Reviews

In July 2013, QQI commenced a review of the institutional review models used by the legacy agencies (IUQB, HETAC, NQAI). The Review of Reviews Report⁷ was launched on 29 May 2014.

The development of a reviews policy was deferred by QQI until the Review of Reviews Report was completed. Following the publication of this Report and in preparation for reviews policy development, QQI carried out a survey on reviews with institutions and other stakeholders over the summer period. The purpose of the survey was to build on the momentum offered by the publication of the Review of Reviews Report, by asking for the views of stakeholders on key questions posed in the Report. The findings of the survey⁸ were published in December 2014.



QQI also hosted a consultative seminar on reviews in December 2014. The objective of the seminar was to progress the development of the policy on reviews in consultation with higher education institutions (HEIs) and other stakeholders. The seminar provided examples of different ways of approaching reviews from other jurisdictions and shared the findings of the reviews survey. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on the purposes, models and types of reviews that would be most appropriate in the Irish context. Three international speakers were invited to present: Dr Helka Kekäläinen, FINEEC; Dr Barbara Brittingham, NEASC; Dr Sijbolt Noorda, Internationalisation Consultant. The event was attended by representatives from higher education institutions and other stakeholders. Feedback from the participants has been analysed and will further inform policy development in 2015.

EQArep Project

QQI took part in the ENQA-led EQArep project in 2013 and 2014. The objective of the project was to map current agency publication practices, explore the different needs of stakeholders for transparent and comparable information, develop standards for different types of quality assurance reports in the European Higher Education Area and evaluate whether a European template for quality assurance reports could be feasible. QQI also hosted a meeting of the project team in March. The project ended in September 2014 with the publication of a final report, entitled 'Transparency of European Higher Education Through Public Quality Assurance Reports⁹ (EQArep)'.

⁷ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Review%20of%20Reviews%20-%20Report%20of%20the%20Independent%20Review%20Team.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Review%20of%20Reviews%20-%20Results%20of%20the%20QQI%20Survey%20of%20Reviews%202014.pdf>

⁹ [http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Transparency-of-European-Higher-Education-through-Public-Quality-Assurance-Reports-\(EQArep\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Transparency-of-European-Higher-Education-through-Public-Quality-Assurance-Reports-(EQArep).aspx)

EQAVET

EQAVET is a community of practice which promotes European collaboration in quality assurance for VET. The overall goal of EQAVET is to support Member States, social partners and the European Commission's efforts towards improving quality assurance in VET, promoting the use of the EQAVET Framework and increasing the performance and attractiveness of VET in the EU.

QQI has taken over the contract with the Commission to host the ENQAVET Secretariat and support the project until the end of 2015. The major successes in 2014 have been:

- The annual forum held in Athens in March agreed a work programme for 2014-2015 which has, as its principle objective, the strengthening of the national approaches to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation, primarily through the national reference points (NRPs).
- The Secretariat carried out a survey to assess progress in implementing EQAVET in the Member States. This survey, finalised in 2014, forms the basis for the report of the European Commission to the European Parliament on the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation. The development of quality assurance frameworks for VET at both system and provider level in Member States is an inherent part of improving European VET in line with the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in VET for the period 2011-2020.
- As the year concluded work commenced on preparing a strategic plan for the development of the next phase of EQAVET in 2016-2017 which will build on previous work stressing the importance of the quality assurance of work based learning, apprenticeships and concrete measures for implementing quality assurance approaches in VET systems increasingly focused on learning outcomes.

Initial access to programme validation

Following the publication of the policy and criteria, enabling education and training providers to apply to QQI to validate programmes that will lead to QQI awards, an application process opened in October 2013.

There is sustained interest from education and training providers in offering awards on the National Framework of Qualifications and learning about the process.

In 2014, we held 6 briefings attended by representatives from 74 education and training providers.

Of the 74 providers that attended the briefings, most were private training providers of various size and stage of business development interested in offering programmes at NFQ Level 5 and 6.

Three of the education and training providers were UK based, interested in operating in Ireland.

In July 2014, a small private company specialising in delivering programmes in the area of food safety, applied to access QQI awards at NFQ Level 5 and 6 in food safety and hygiene. Following an evaluation process, their draft quality assurance procedures were approved by the Approval and Review Committee of QQI on 03 November 2014.

The Lifecycle of Provider Engagements Process

The Lifecycle of Provider Engagements process has been established to identify the range of engagements that will exist between QQI and a provider following the approval or establishment of their quality assurance. It differs between voluntary and obligatory providers, and between providers availing of different QQI services.

The 2012 Act clearly differentiates between providers with their own statutory requirements who are obliged to engage with QQI and all other providers that engage with QQI on a voluntary basis. Obligatory providers are providers with a prescribed legal obligation to seek QQI validation. Voluntary providers are all other providers that decide to engage with QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of seeing QQI validation and external QA.

Establishing the lifecycles of provider engagements will clarify QQI's role as an external QA agency and the responsibilities of providers in providing public accountability and public confidence in the NFQ.

The Lifecycle of Engagements has been introduced to education and training providers seeking initial access to QQI awards. It will be introduced to all legacy providers in 2015 when QA guidelines are published and re-engagement commences.

Education and Training Board Ireland QQI Forum

The ETBI QQI Collaborative FET Forum was established in 2014 in partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). The Forum, which met twice in 2014 in October and November, has representation from QQI, the ETBI, the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the Further Education Support Service (FESS). It is the coordinating structure through which QQI and the ETB sector will work collaboratively on a range of operational, developmental and strategic matters in relation to qualifications and quality assurance. This collaborative Forum provides a framework and mechanism through which representatives from QQI and the ETBs can work together and share information. A working group, with representation from QQI, ETBI, the ETBs and FESS was established to devise and co-ordinate an overall work plan for the Forum.

In October 2014 we circulated draft 'QA Guidelines for the ETB Sector' to the collaborative FET Forum members and to the Chief Executives of the ETBs. The draft guidelines are intended to assist the ETBs in the development of appropriate quality assurance systems which will promote and support quality in ETB programmes and services.

Irish Higher Education Quality Network

QQI continues to act as secretary to the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN). The IHEQN provides a forum for the discussion of quality assurance / quality improvement issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland. It comprises membership from the Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education (CHOICE); the Department of Education and Skills; the DIT; the HEA; HECA; IOTI; IUA; NUI; QQI; RCSI; USI.

QQI have continued to participate in the Network's working groups which have addressed QA topics deemed of interest and importance to the HE sector. Currently the network has two working groups:

- Training - The purpose of this group is to share knowledge and experience and thereby promote good practice amongst “front line” staff in HEIs. The working group held a very successful training workshop on “closing the feedback loop to students” in December 2014. The workshop was hosted by RCSI and was attended by over 70 participants. It has been proposed that two further training workshops be held during 2015.
- College of Information Systems - This working group aims to define minimum standards for colleges in delivering information. It is hoped that the best attributes of existing different information systems will be highlighted. This working group presents an opportunity to minimise bureaucratic reporting requirements and to improve the quality of data available.

International Education Mark

The establishment and implementation of an International Education Mark (IEM) is provided for under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. We have progressed policy development in this area including a Code of Practice. We consulted on a policy setting out how the IEM will be authorised and the Code of Practice which providers seeking the IEM will be obliged to meet.

A High Court case in December 2014 relating to the connected policy area of international student immigration regulations has impacted on the anticipated implementation schedule for the IEM. It has also led to a further examination of the 2012 Act in order to ensure that the bases upon which the IEM will be introduced are sufficiently secure. We are continuing to engage with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) regarding the IEM and will work towards its introduction as soon as practicable.

English Language Training Organisations Recognition

ACELS

ACELS is the national, voluntary scheme for English language teaching organisations (ELTOs). It is a legacy, non-statutory service of QQI, due to be replaced by the IEM, a statutory function of QQI, once this is ready for implementation. For 2014, ACELS services have been maintained.

In 2014, 37 ELTO applications for ACELS recognition were processed and taken through the standard documented process. Of these applications:

- 16 ELTOs were granted ACELS recognition
- 11 ELTO applications stopped either due to sudden closure or changes of circumstances post application
- 4 ELTO applications were refused
- 6 ELTO applications were still in process by end 2014

Briefings for providers interested in applying to ACELS, were held on three occasions. Some ELTOs attended briefings and subsequently decided not to apply.

ACELS Recognition Committee meetings took place on a regular basis. The committee continued to make decisions regarding ACELS applications and providers. Appeals from providers that were refused recognition, were processed and submitted to an independent moderator for a report including a decision on the appeal.

An annual training refresher day was held for ACELS inspectors. Ongoing communications for administration of inspections carried on in the normal way.

Monitoring

Following consultation and publication of a white paper on monitoring the QQI Policy on Monitoring¹⁰ was approved by the Board of QQI.

Monitoring activity undertaken under legacy processes included the monitoring of a total of 139 providers during 2014. This monitoring activity consisted of desk review of provider documentation (121), site visits (10), and attendance at exam boards of providers (8). Follow up visits and meetings with providers were also held where issues of concern were identified by QQI with providers.

Approximately 100 ACELS providers received annual renewal of recognition and were listed on the ACELS website for 2014. www.acels.ie

12 inspections of recognised English Language Training Organisations took place due to; new additional centres, new management staff, new ownership and following complaints. In two cases regarding complaints, the inspection led to the ACELS Recognition Committee withdrawing ACELS recognition.

English Language (EL) teacher training qualifications

Standards for EL qualifications from Level 6-9 were drafted and agreed.

The drafting of a handbook for CELT commenced with providers.

The EL teacher training providers of the CELT and Prep ELT programmes continued to be moderated and reviewed.

Programme Validation

We conducted a review of our validation and re-validation policy and procedures. The review proposed the need for a unified system in further and higher education and training. On the basis of the recommendations we have:

- Implemented a standard operating procedures manual for higher education which operates an offline validation process

¹⁰ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/QQI%20Policy%20on%20Monitoring%202014.pdf>

- Implemented a new programme validation report template
- Developed training material for peer review group members and
- Updated internal quality assurance procedures

The level of programme validation activity in 2014 is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: 2014 Validation activity in FET and HET 2014

Sector	Providers	Programmes
Further Education and Training (NFQ Levels 1 -6)	173	644
Higher Education and Training (NFQ Levels 6-10)	16	114
Total		758

The HET figures include programmes revalidated following programme review. The revalidation process for the FET sector is not yet established.

Analysis of Annual Institutional Reports (AIR) of the Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs)

Each of the nine DABs (universities and self-awarding institutions) prepare an annual institutional report for QQI which highlights the key quality activities of the institution in the previous year. In 2014, we prepared a summary analysis of these individual reports and, following approval, the analysis was published on our website. During 2014 we progressed with a representative working group to review and improve the content and reporting process for these institutions. A similar process is in progress with the Institutes of Technology.

Springboard and Momentum programmes

QQI liaised with the HEA and SOLAS in relation to validation of providers' programmes and their funding under Springboard and Momentum.

Goal 4 - Collaborate with stakeholders to create greater coherence within Ireland's education and training systems and with its qualifications system

2014 was an important year for further education and training with the publication of the FET Strategy, the establishment of the ETBs and the Apprenticeship Council. QQI is playing its part in the implementation of the FET Strategy through:

- Its membership of the Apprenticeship Council
- The review of apprenticeships
- The publication of major awards standards for professional award type descriptors, which meet the needs of new apprenticeship programmes

Consultative Forum

The Consultative Forum met twice in 2014 on the following dates:

- 01 April 2014
- 07 October 2014

The purpose and mission of the QQI Consultative Forum is to enable collaboration with stakeholders, to ensure greater coherence in the education and training system; to contribute to the development and implementation of an enhanced education and training and qualifications system through consultation and meaningful dialogue between QQI and stakeholders.

We engage directly with a range of different stakeholders within sector specific contexts; the Consultative Forum provides an important single platform for all stakeholders across the education and training and qualifications system to come together within a common theme. It is a collective entity and it is our intention to foster and develop a collective ownership of the Forum.

The terms of reference, stakeholder nominee organisations to the Forum, and meeting documentation is published on our website¹¹.

Memorandum of Understanding between the Higher Education Authority and QQI.

The Higher Education Authority and QQI have been engaged in a process to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). As part of this process, we met with the HEA and consulted with the Department of Education and Skills, the IOTI and the IUA to discuss the direction of the MoU and the areas in which it might become operational. The MoU was approved by the QQI Board in December 2014.

A significant element of the MoU is collaboration with the higher education sector as a whole. The view of both organisations, and of the Department, is that the MoU should be tangible in terms of how the relationship between QQI and the HEA can evolve. As a result, it includes a number of identified actions to support the realisation of stated objectives over the next three years. These include scheduled engagement between the senior management teams of both organisations and an annual presentation by the CEO of each organisation to the Board of the other.

The MoU is intended to stand for the period 01 January 2015 - 31 December 2017. The focus for 2015 is on setting the foundations for realising the MoU and in so doing facilitating engagement between colleagues in the two organisations so that we can better understand each other's objectives and functions. In discussion between QQI and the HEA to date, both organisations identified common priority areas to work on for 2015. These include bringing parties in both organisations together to build a common understanding of individual roles and organisational functions and fostering bilateral working relationships. The MoU also refers to the establishment of a forum between QQI, HEA, DES, IUA and IOTI, a development which could be very beneficial to all participants. The objectives of this forum and how it will be resourced will also require agreement as part of the implementation of the MoU.

¹¹ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Consultative-Forum-.aspx>

Hong Kong Understanding

We have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications) to cooperate by exchanging information, recognising each other's decisions and working with each other in quality assurance activities where feasible.

Management Framework Agreement with Department of Education and Reform

Work commenced on a Management Framework Agreement (MFA) between the Department of Education and Skills and QQI which sets out the roles and responsibilities of both parties in relation to the quality assurance of the further and higher education and training sectors in Ireland. The MFA sets out the management and accountability framework between the Department and QQI. The purpose of this is to provide enhanced arrangements for communications, reporting and liaison between the two bodies.

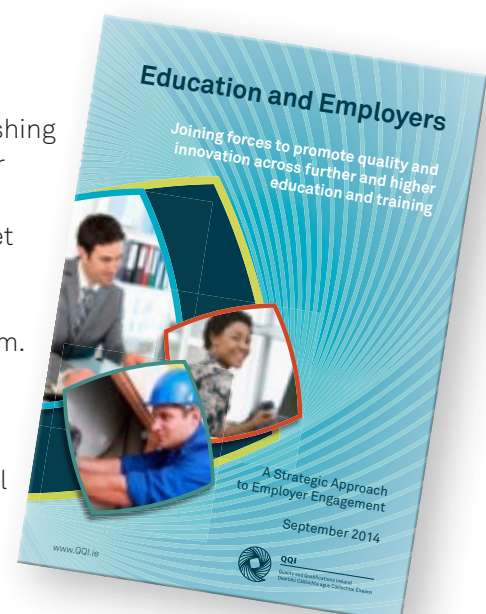
Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills

QQI in collaboration with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Léargas, the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and Euroguidance launched the Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills in July 2014. The aim of the Irish Reference Group is to promote efficient connections between initiatives that work across education and training and a wide range of stakeholders. In November, a publication was launched by Mary Doyle, Deputy Secretary General of DES, entitled 'Education and Skills: Working Together to bring Opportunities across Europe Home to you'¹², presenting many key initiatives that are active in education and skills nationally in a common format. The publication is available on line on www.europass.ie.

Enterprise engagement

In 2014 we built on our relationship with employers by publishing Education and Employers: A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement¹³. The publication promotes the building of strategic relationships between education and labour market stakeholders. It also sets out a range of objectives and actions for QQI including the aim of enhancing employer's understanding of and accessibility to the qualification system.

We also held a number of consultation dialogues with employers and participated in a project on the employability of professional bachelor award holders from an international perspective. The final report was published by CHEPS (the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of



¹² <http://www.europass.ie/europass/documents/EducationandSkillsWorkingTogethertobringOpportunitiesacrossEuropeHomeToYouPortfolio.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Education%20and%20Employers%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Approach%20to%20Employer%20Engagement.pdf>

Twente) in August 2014. In 2015 we will be further developing our engagement with employers by responding to the finding of the National Employer Survey. We will also be showcasing effective employer – education collaborations and partnerships. In 2015 we plan to measure the impact and effectiveness of our employer engagement strategy so that we can identify further areas for development as we move forward with our strategic vision for the organisation.

Standards Development:

The following award-type descriptors were developed:

- Award-type Descriptors for the class of professional award-types determined at levels 7-9 in 2011 were extended to Levels 5 and 6 in 2014
- Award Type Descriptors - (Award Class: Professional) For the Alignment of Professional Awards at NFQ Levels 7, 8 and 9 Translated for Use in the Alignment of Professional Qualifications in Accountancy

The following HET standards were finalised and published:

- Counselling and Psychotherapy – Awards Standards
- Professional Master of Education – Award Standard
- English Language Teaching— Awards Standards
- HETAC HET awards standards were rebranded and re-issued

Apprenticeship Standards Re-approval Pilots (only for existing apprenticeships)

- SOLAS, following its reviews of five craft curriculums, organised external reviews to inform QQI considerations towards its adoption of awards standards. This work was managed by SOLAS under terms of reference agreed with QQI and using expert panels agreed with QQI. It resulted in five new awards standards and motivated the development of new award-type descriptors both presented above.

Other Standards Development

- In 2014 Teagasc started a process of reviewing/developing a number of awards specifications under terms of reference agreed with QQI

The following proposals were advanced:

- **Guidelines for pre-higher education foundation awards for international students** were developed in 2014
- A Position Paper on Supporting a More Coherent and Responsive System of Qualifications for People Pursuing Careers in Culinary Arts, Hospitality, and Tourism at NFQ Levels 3 to 9 (for meeting in June 2014 with stakeholders—this work is being done with the Industry and External Partnerships Unit)

- The process for the Review of Framework Awards Standards at Levels 1 to 3 was started on 16 October 2014—this major project will continue in 2015

Evaluations

- QQI completed the first stage (consideration of outline applications) of the process for the alignment of professional accountancy qualifications

Goal 5 - Provide relevant, timely and comprehensive information to the public on the quality of education and training provision and qualifications

During 2014 QQI engaged in a range of activities to improve the quality of service for internal and external stakeholders.

New QQI Website

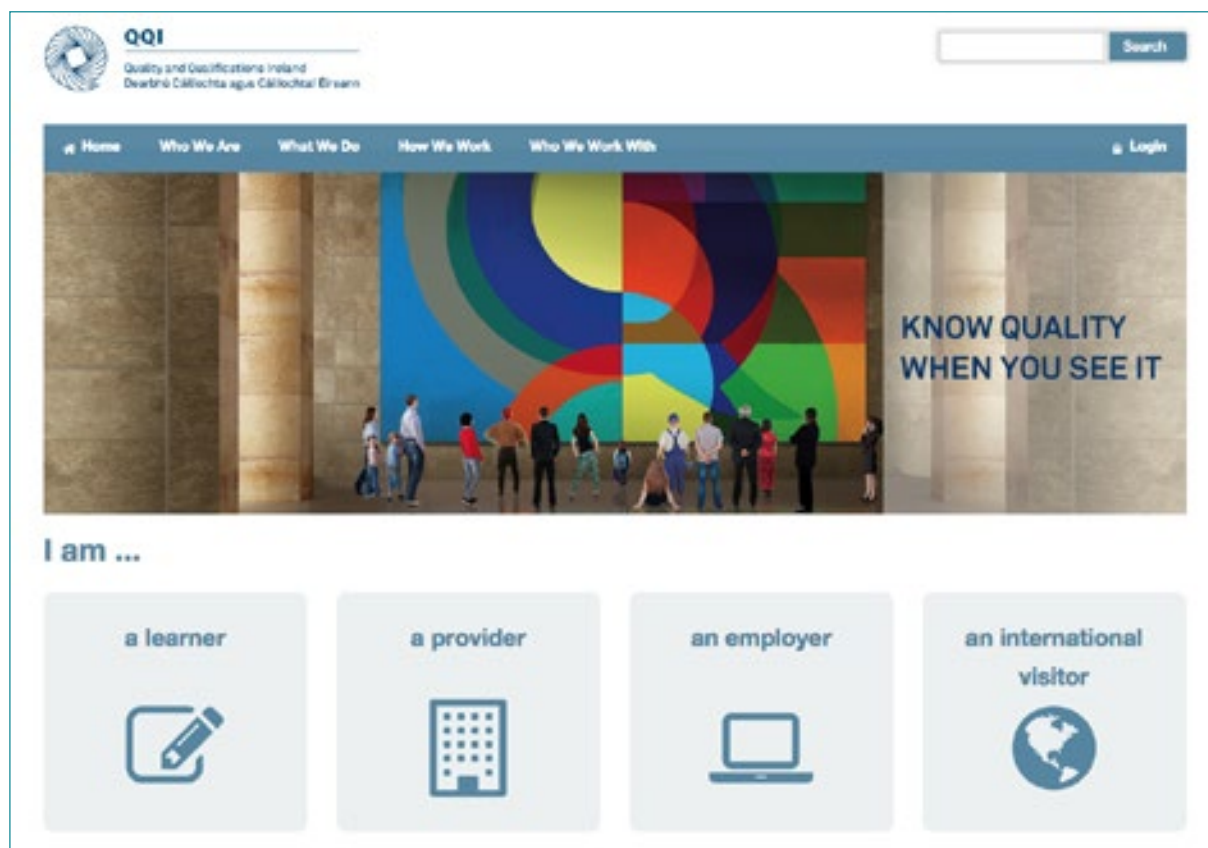
A significant piece of work for 2014 was the launch of the new website www.QQI.ie with enhanced facilities for visitors to the website in the form of QSearch and QHelp. The new website has a fresh, new look with improved navigation, giving quick and easy access to the essential information that people want about the services we offer. The website was developed following research carried out with a variety of focus groups.

Features of the website include:

- A new look and feel website with revised content about QQI, what we do and how we work
- The introduction of a new facility, QHelp, which makes available answers to common queries for learners, providers, employers and international visitors as well as the ability to raise queries with QQI and track their progress
- Quick and easy access to a wealth of information through a new search facility, QSearch, including QQI publications, policies, reviews, programmes, awards, providers, information about foreign qualification recognition and statistics
- The consolidation of a number of existing legacy websites into www.QQI.ie

A number of other key projects were also undertaken in 2014 to ensure the provision of relevant, timely and comprehensive information to the public, including:

- The commencement of a project to facilitate the generation of certificates through our QBS system using the new QQI design
- Work continued on enabling QQI provide programmes and qualifications data to the Portal on learning opportunities throughout the European space (PLOTEUS)
- On-going support was provided for the key certification period in May to enable the speedy and efficient collection of results for some 70,000 learners



Communications

The year saw the development of the new QQI Award brand to replace the brands of the former awards councils, FETAC and HETAC. The QQI Award brand logo is available to providers for use in the promotion of their programmes leading to QQI awards. Guidelines for the use of the logo were also developed and are available on our website. A series of national public information notices was released mid-year to support the newly branded QQI Awards.

A series of e-communications were developed and issued throughout the year to provide key stakeholder groups with updates on a variety of matters of interest including progress on the roll out of QQI's policies across a range of areas of our work.

Supporting its internal communications drive QQI launched a programme of internal briefings for staff including briefings from stakeholder organisations. The objective of these briefings is to further the message about the work of QQI and for QQI to get a greater insight into the environment of its key stakeholder groups.



QQI AWARD

Summary of QHelp Activity 2014:

Queries

- Number of queries received in 2014 = 17,422

QHelp Articles

The new facility, QHelp, makes available answers to common queries for learners, providers, employers and international visitors

Within two months from November to the end December 2014 there were 16,407 unique visitors to each are as follows:

- Providers = 5,751
- Employers = 493
- International visitors = 1,423
- Learners = 8,740

Statistics

We provide statistics on awards made by QQI where the providers are not operating under delegated authority. Statistics on HET providers with Delegated Authority are included in the HEA (Higher Education Authority) data and can be located on their website. Statistics are also available in downloadable form from the Downloads area in QSearch on our website¹⁴.

We also publish an Annual Statistics Report on our website which includes statistical analysis of QQI awards and other awards recognised in the NFQ. The full 2014 statistics report is available on our website¹⁵.

¹⁴ <http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=dataexports>

¹⁵ <http://www.qqi.ie/Data%20Export%20Library/Statistics%20Report%202014%20data.pdf0>

QQI Awards

In 2014, approximately 149,000 learners received over 156,000 QQI certificates at levels 1 - 10 on the NFQ. The awards were achieved across all ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) with Level 5 continuing to dominate in terms of volume.

Numbers of QQI awards made in 2014 by Award Type	
Component certificates (106,000)	71%
Certificates for major awards (33,500)	23%
specific purpose certificates (16,000)	11%
supplemental certificates (220)	0.1%

QQI Awards (disaggregated) in 2014; by award type and by NFQ level. (All Tables exclude awards which were achieved via providers who have delegated authority).												
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6 FET	Level 6 HET	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10	Total
Major	463	1,253	2,592	1,989	17,464	4,739	244	820	3,172	913	38	33,687
Minor	816	7,196	32,479	36,126	108,484	20,021	309	5	163	186	-	205,785
Special Purpose	-	-	12	1,016	9,933	3,306	1,147	360	445	18	-	16,240
Supplemental	-	-	-	-	-	220	-	-	-	-	-	220
Totals	1,279	8,449	35,083	39,131	135,881	28,289	1,700	1,185	3,780	1,117	38	255,932
	0%	3%	14%	15%	53%	11%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	100%

The FET sector saw an even distribution by gender of learners who achieved QQI awards in 2014, where 51% of the learner cohort are female and the corresponding 49% are male. The HET sector saw more females than males achieve awards where 55% of the learner cohort are female and the corresponding 45% are male.

QQI Awards by Gender		
	Female	Male
HET	55%	45%
FET	51%	49%

Goal 6 - Build an organisational culture to enable QQI to perform successfully

Finance

In 2014, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General signed off on the audit of the 2013 financial statements and the accounts were laid before the Houses of Oireachtas.

The Finance Unit streamlined its payment processes to meet SEPA requirements in February 2014. Work on an automated purchase order requisition system was completed in 2014. The result of the new processes has increased efficiency, transparency and reduced processing overheads.

In line with Government policy, from 19 September 2014 'e-Day', QQI required its debtors to pay their invoices by electronic fund transfer only. Cheques are now only accepted in exceptional circumstances.

QQI had issues with many of its aged debtors in 2013 which was impacting on cash flow and staff time. This was addressed in 2014 through a variety of means and the aged debtors issue was brought within acceptable and manageable levels.

Human Resources

As part of the implementation of the Corporate Plan 2014, PMDS training was provided for all staff of QQI. PMDS reviews and planning meetings for senior managers commenced in December 2014.

As part of an Organisation Development Programme a number of events were organised for all staff including dignity and respect training, lunch and learn events and all staff briefings. QQI also piloted an Action Learning programme which concluded in December 2014 and is being reviewed with a view to rolling it out across the agency.

QQI implemented the new public sector sick leave regulations effective from 31 March 2014. The new regulations reduced entitlements to full pay on sick leave to three months and half rate of pay on sick leave to three months from six months previously.

As the emergency measures in the public interest continued in 2014 QQI was required to maintain the Employment Control Framework (ECF) ceiling of 78 employees by the non-filling of staff vacancies.

Information Communications and Technology

This is one of our largest areas supporting 700 providers and the issuing of 151,000 learner certificates in 2014. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas over the course of the year:

- The introduction of a new customer relation management system was implemented. The new system consolidates all QQI customer and contact information in a single, easy to use service enabling QQI staff provide a better service to its stakeholders.
- QQI has moved technology to the Office 365 service, simplifying the infrastructure and management of our existing email service.

- We have reduced the complexity and support required to maintain a number of key services by moving a number of services from existing data centres to the Microsoft Azure cloud based service.

QQI has supported e-government initiatives by providing self-service systems to empower customers and stakeholders to carry out business and access information on their own initiative.

QQI has supported Government initiatives on Public Sector Reform by:

- Providing information to its customers through a range of online tools. These tools facilitate direct engagement with QQI.
- Mainstreaming the use of online technologies to reduce the need for internal support and maintenance and focus efforts on QQI's core business.
- Retiring old technologies and systems and consolidating existing systems or developing new unified systems to reduce costs and drive better value for money.
- Reducing its datacentre presence by making greater use of online systems.
- Standardising operating systems and software across servers, PCs, tablets and mobile phone platforms.

Planning and Project Management

In order to enable QQI perform successfully, we introduced an interactive database that tracks and monitors planned corporate objectives and activities as set out in our yearly corporate plans. Each section updates their progress on activities via the database. The Planning Unit is responsible for working with business sections to ensure updates are recorded on the database.

QQI have introduced a new reporting structure to enhance the corporate plans and tracking of same. Each quarter we report to the QQI Board on our progress to date on work that has been completed, on track, deferred or at risk. QQI also work with the Department of Education and Skills in line with the Management Framework Agreement.

Following a review of corporate objectives, key strategic projects are identified which are planned, managed and monitored through QQI's programme management process. QQI established a programme management structure providing a holistic view of cross-section related projects and activities thereby alleviating possible duplication of work and promoting cross sectional cohesion. Project management training was provided to QQI staff in November and December 2014.

Membership

In 2014 QQI undertook a self-evaluation to measure compliance with the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European higher Education Area (ESG). Following a site visit and follow up report the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) determined that QQI were compliant and we received re-confirmation of full membership with the association for a further five year period.

5. GOVERNANCE

QQI Board

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) describes the composition of the Authority (hereafter and normally referred to as 'the Board') which governs Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The Board members are:

- Mr Gordon Clark (Chair)
- Dr Pádraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (International expert)
- Ms Una Buckley (Learner representative)
- Dr Margaret Cullen (Chairperson, Audit Committee)
- Ms Mary Danagher
- Mr Kevin Donoghue (USI nomination; from 02 June 2014)
- Dr Ann Louise Gilligan
- Ms Joanne Harmon
- Mr James Moore
- Ms Cat O'Driscoll (USI nomination; to 01 June 2014)

In 2014 the Board met on the following dates:

- 14 February 2014
- 11 April 2014
- 24 June 2014
- 26 September 2014
- 05 December 2014

Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2014 QQI Board Meetings

2014	14 Feb	11 Apr	24 June	26 Sept	5 Dec	Max	Attendance
Gordon Clark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Barbara Brittingham	✓**	✓	✓**	✓	✓	5	5
Una Buckley	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Margaret Cullen	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	4
Mary Danagher	–	✓	✓	***	***	5	2
Kevin Donoghue*	–	–	✓	✓	–	3	2
Ann Louise Gilligan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Joanne Harmon	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	4
James Moore	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Cat O'Driscoll*	✓	✓	–	–	–	2	2

* USI Representative, term of office runs from 1 July to 30 June each year.

** attended via phone conferencing

*** on medical leave of absence

Board Member payments

Members of the Board of QQI act entirely in a voluntary capacity and no fees were paid to members of the Board in 2014. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, flights, taxis and sundry items. Board members' travel and subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total Board expenses in 2014 were €12,326.

Remuneration and expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €133,888 in 2014. No bonus payments were made to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive incurred expenses (cash and credit card) of €1,347 in 2014. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, subsistence (vouched), rail travel, flights, taxis and sundry items.

QQI Sub-Board Governance Structures

In 2014, the QQI Consultative Forum held its first meeting in April and QQI's governance system was completed with the establishment and meeting of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee; the Policies and Standards Committee; and the Approvals and Reviews Committee.

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The function of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee is to make decisions regarding the validation of programmes in the National Framework of Qualifications. The decisions and recommendations of the Committee are informed by external expertise and recommendations, normally provided in the form of external panel reports and the outcomes of monitoring and review activities carried out by QQI. The Programmes and Awards Executive Committee met six times in 2014.

Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee

The mission of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee is to review and analyse the activities of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee, and on that basis to provide advice and make recommendations to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee on the fulfilment of its mission. It will also confirm or reject decisions of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee, as required. The Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee met three times in 2014, the first being the initial meeting of the committee in April 2014, following its establishment.

Policies and Standards Committee

The mission of the Policies and Standards Committee is to apply its expertise to considering QQI draft policy and make recommendations to the Board regarding the approval of these policies in line with the organisation's strategy. It will also consider and may act on recommendations from the executive to determine standards of knowledge, skill and competence for education and training awards or to endorse subject guidelines concerning knowledge, skill and competence which are expected for higher education awards.

The Policies and Standards Committee met four times in 2014.

Approvals and Reviews Committee

The Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) was established in August 2014 and held its first meeting in November 2014. The mission of the Approvals and Reviews Committee is to perform such of the Board's functions as to ensure that providers, to which it grants access to external quality assurance, the International Education Mark, and delegated authority, have met and continue to meet, the associated criteria. The ARC meets five times per year and has a schedule of meetings planned for 2015.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee consists of 3 members, 2 of whom are Board members and the third member is an external person with audit and financial experience. The Audit Committee is appointed by the QQI Board. The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure to measure and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of its internal control procedures, including the internal audit function within QQI. The Committee met three times in 2014.

Internal Audit Reports and Reviews:

The following audits were completed in 2014:

- ICT Controls and Security
- Implementation Status on previous Internal Audit Recommendations
- Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL)
- Systems of Internal Financial Control (SIFC) 2014
- Procurement Cycle Audit
- Qualifications & Recognition Cycle

A Desk Review of the ICT Controls and Security internal audit report was conducted by the in-house internal auditor in November 2014.

6. CORPORATE MATTERS

Audit and Procurement

Audit Committee

The Audit and Procurement section provides the secretariat service to the Audit Committee. The Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2014 was approved by the Board at its meeting held on 13 February 2015.

External Audit Function

The Audit and Procurement section worked with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, to finalise the final annual accounts of the former legacy agencies HETAC, FETAC and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA). All accounts relating to the legacy agencies have now been signed off.

Internal Audit Function

The internal audit function continued to implement the 3 Year Internal Audit Plan 2013-2016 approved by the Audit Committee and the Board. The Audit Committee and the Board approved a revision to the Plan in June 2014.

The internal audit function conducted the following six internal audits during 2014:

- ICT Controls and Security
- Implementation Status on previous Internal Audit Recommendations
- Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL)
- Systems of Internal Financial Control (SIFC) 2014
- Procurement Cycle Audit
- Qualifications and Recognition Cycle

A desk review of the ICT Controls and Security internal audit report was conducted by the in-house internal auditor in November 2014. The six internal audit reports and the desk review were approved by the Audit Committee and the Board.

Risk Management

The Audit and Procurement Section is responsible for developing and managing the Risk Management function in QQI. The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies requires each

state body to appoint a Chief Risk Officer and the Head of Audit and Procurement is the designated Chief Risk Officer of QQI.

Implementation of the QQI Risk Management Framework and Risk Management Policy continued in 2014.

The Chief Risk Officer developed the QQI Risk Register internally in consultation with each Head of Section in the first quarter of 2014. The initial QQI Risk Register was approved by the Audit Committee in early April 2014 with a recommendation to introduce testing of controls in place. The Board has carried out an appropriate assessment of the principal risks and associated mitigation measures. The Board approved the initial QQI Risk Register in June 2014.

In September 2014, the Audit Committee and the Board agreed that formal internal audit Testing of Controls in Place will be carried out in respect of high level risks only. Desk reviews will be conducted, primarily by QQI's in-house internal auditor, on all of the medium level risks.

Procurement

Responsibility for the procurement function lies with the Audit and Procurement section.

QQI as a public body adheres to best practice in public procurement to which it is committed as set out in the Board approved Purchasing and Procurement Policy.

QQI is a registered buyer and user of the National e-Tenders Procurement website which is managed by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) under the auspices of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Four public procurement tender competitions were conducted under the management of the Audit and Procurement section during 2014, as follows:

1. QQI Design Services for QQI's Communication Material
2. Facilitation of QQI's Comprehensive Policy Development Programme
3. Framework Agreement for ICT Resources
4. Printing of Secure Certificates

The Head of Audit and Procurement attended a seminar on 'Awarding Public Sector Contracts within Procurement Rules' in May 2014. Training events in public procurement were attended in November and December 2014 by members of the Audit and Procurement section.

A formal internal audit on procurement was carried out by Mazars, the outsourced external internal auditors of QQI, in October 2014 as part of the 3 Year Internal Audit Plan. The internal audit reported positively on QQI's procurement activity; the report was approved by the Audit Committee and the Board in the first quarter of 2015.

Data Protection

We are committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. Data Protection is the safeguarding of the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of personal data. The Acts provide for the collection and use of data in a responsible way, and provide against unwanted or harmful uses of the data.

Audit and Procurement contributes to providing assurance over the level of compliance and assists in ensuring that we have adequate arrangements in place to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Acts.

One data protection request for access to information was received in 2014 and was processed in accordance with requirements of the Data Protection Acts.

QQI's Data Protection Officer attended a Data Protection Briefing Event presented by Billy Hawkes, Data Protection Commissioner in February 2014 and a Briefing Event hosted by McCann Fitzgerald, Solicitors in May 2014.

Responsibility for the Data Protection function in QQI transferred to the Corporate Affairs and Communications Section in the final quarter of 2014.

Finance

A new online Purchase Order (PO) System was developed and piloted in 2014. The system went live on 1 January 2015. The benefits of the system is that line sections and units generate their own POs which are authorised in line with set financial limits and public procurement rules. Confirmation of delivery of goods and services and final scanned invoices are also carried out online locally.

In the Finance Unit, the new system has streamlined the matching of invoices to POs and batch processing has eliminated the requirement to post invoices on an individual basis to the Financial Management System. In addition, the paper based system of authorisations has now been eliminated. The PO system will also support devolved budgeting which is now expected in Q4 2015.

Summary of 2014 Financial Results

QQI received exchequer grant funding in the amount of €5.5m in 2014. Non-Exchequer income received during the period amounted to €5.97m, of which €0.64m represented funding from the EU Commission for specific projects administered by the Authority and €1.1m in relationship fees from institutes of technology and universities.

Relationship fees were approved by the Minister for Education and Skills and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in 2014 and will continue to be charged annually. Total income received in 2014 amounted to €11.47m.

Pay and pension costs in 2014 amounted to €5.5m and non-pay costs amounted €5.115m for the same period.

Governance Forum

QQI is a member of the Governance Forum which promotes good governance in the public interest and provides advice, training, information and supports on good governance across the public sector. QQI attended a number of Governance Forum events in 2014 including:

- Meeting the Governance expectations of funders
- Role and responsibility of the Board and individual members
- Evaluating the performance of the Board and Committees
- Transparency, Communications and Reputation
- Finance for Board Members
- Strategy in the public interest [Padraig Walsh, CEO of QQI presented a paper at this event]
- Realising the benefits of Risk Management
- Audit Committees and internal audit

APPENDIX

Publications	
Irish Educational System Diagram	January
Annual Institutional Review Report	February
QQI Self-Evaluation Report for the External Review for Reconfirmation of Full Membership of ENQA	February
English Language Training Framework	March
Corporate Plan 2014	March
Review of Reviews	April
Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland Report	April
Employer Engagement	April
Strategy Statement 2014-2016	April
EQF Referencing	May
New National Framework of Qualifications Fan	June
Report on White Paper Consultation	August
QQI E-zine	October
Education and Employers E-zine	October
Global Fan	December
Green Papers	
Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications	March
White Papers	
Policy and Criteria for Further Education and Training Legacy Voluntary Providers Continuing Access to Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards	February
Re-Engagement with Legacy Providers: Overarching Policy	February
Policy on Authorisation to use the International Education Mark	May
Fees for QQI Services	July
Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards	July
Regulations for Protection of Enrolled Learners: Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act	July
Policy for Determining Awards Standards	September
Policy and Criteria for Making Awards	September
Code of Practice for Providers of Programmes of Education and Training to International Students	September
Policy on Monitoring	September
Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines	September

White Papers	
Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Providers of English Language Teaching	September
Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications	December

Policies published	
Policy and Criteria for the Delegation of Authority to the Institutes of Technology to make Higher Education and Training Awards (including joint awards)	May
Policy and Criteria Recognising Professional Awards within the National Framework of Qualifications	May
Re-engagement with QQI: Overarching Policy for All Providers.	June
Re-engagement with QQI: Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training	June
Re-engagement with QQI: Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Higher Education and Training	June
Policy on Monitoring	December
Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines	December
Policy and Criteria for Making Awards	December
Policy for Determining Award Standards	December

HET Named Awards	
Counselling and Psychotherapy – Awards Standards	May
English Language Teaching - Awards Standards	May
Professional Master of Education – Award Standard	May
Architecture - Awards Standards	July
Art and Design - Award Standards	July
Business - Award Standards	July
Computing - Award Standards	July
Engineering - Award Standards	July
Generic Major Awards - Awards Standards	July
Nursing and Midwifery - Awards Standards	July
Provisional Standards for Bachelor of Law and Master of Law Degrees	July
Science - Award Standards	July
Social Care Work - Awards Standards	July

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