MEETING REPORT

CONSULTATIVE FORUM

28 APRIL 2015

MEETING REPORT

Background

The third meeting of QQI's Consultative Forum took place on 28th April 2015 at the Fitzwilliam Hotel, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. 40 delegates from stakeholder organisations, representatives from QQI Board and QQI executive staff attended the Forum. See Appendix 1 for a list of attendees and Appendix 2 for the agenda.

QQI Draft Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018

The main item for consideration at the meeting was the draft **QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018**.

The draft Strategy Statement was forwarded to Consultative Forum members in advance of the meeting and members were asked to review the document and provide their comments and feedback in advance of the meeting. Feedback received was collated and presented to attendees for further consideration at the Consultative Forum itself. A summary of the feedback received both prior to and at the Consultative Forum is contained in Appendix 3.

QQI Updates

The QQI executive also provided the Consultative Forum with updates regarding a number of areas, including:

» The QQI HEA Memorandum of Understanding 2015 – 2017

» Initial Dialogue Meetings between QQI and the Institute of Technology sector

» Forum established in partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland

» Joint working group with the Community and Voluntary sector

» Developments with regard to the National Framework of Qualifications

The Consultative Forum Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Consultative Forum were agreed at the first meeting of the Forum in April 2014 and were reviewed at the meeting. Members agreed that they are satisfied with the Terms of Reference as they stand, bar one amendment. Under the 'Schedule of Meetings' heading, the meeting frequency was changed from quarterly to twice yearly. The updated Terms of Reference are contained at Appendix 4.

Conclusion

The observations and comments regarding the **QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018** provided by the Consultative Forum were very useful and assisted QQI greatly in finalising its Strategy Statement. QQI appreciates the time members set aside to review and provide feedback on the material circulated. The **QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018** will be presented at QQI's Board meeting at the end of June 2015 and once agreed will be submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills. The Strategy will be published in July 2015 and will be circulated to Consultative Forum members at that stage. We will also circulate a report on our response to the external feedback received from Consultative Forum members. This report will outline how the feedback was used to inform the final Strategy Statement.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Consultative Forum will take place in October 2015, the exact date will be advised in due course.

Appendix 1: Attendees at the third meeting of the QQI Consultative Forum – 28th April 2015

Liz Hughes
ACCA

Camilla Fitzsimons
AONTAS

Michael Hayes
CHoICE

Shane Balzan
CIMA

Brian Power
Department of Education and Skills
(Higher Education)

John McGuigan
Department of Employment and Learning
Northern Ireland

Michael Mulvey
Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

Damien Owens
Engineers Ireland

Colm MacFhionnlaoich
Enterprise Ireland

Fergal Costello
Higher Education Authority

Ian McKenna
Higher Education Colleges Association

Michelle O'Rourke
Home and Community Care Ireland

Jim Murray
Institutes of Technology Ireland

Jenny Hayes
Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

Kevin Geoghegan
Irish Council for International Students

Joe Walsh
Irish Course Providers Association

Paul Heaney
Irish Interprofessional Association

David O'Grady
Marketing English in Ireland

Aoife Kelly
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Dónal Rice
National Disability Authority

Terry Maguire
National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching
and Learning in Higher Education

Andrea Durnin
National University of Ireland

Maura Tierney
National University of Ireland

Nick Kho
NEBOSH

Joe Ausena
Pearson

Catherine Collins
Skillnets

Linda Conway
SOLAS

Aidan Kenny
Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI)

Tony Pettit
Teagasc

QQI Board

Gordon Clark

Ann Louise Gilligan

QQI

Padraig Walsh

Mary Sheridan

Bryan Maguire

Claire Byrne

Barbara Kelly

Laura Carrigan

Caoimhe MacRory

Alison Quinn

Carmel Kelly

Appendix 2: Agenda

CONSULTATIVE FORUM | 28 APRIL

AGENDA

10.45	Registration
11.00	Welcome
	Updates from QQI
	Consultative Forum

»   Review of Consultative Forum Meetings 2014

»   Review of Terms of Reference for the Consultative Forum

THEME:	QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018
11.30	Overview of QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018
	Review of feedback following consultation on the Strategy Statement
1.00	Close and Lunch

AGENDA

Appendix 3:   Summary of feedback from Consultative Forum

QQI Draft Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018
Summary of feedback from Consultative Forum

CONTENTS

Background

Responses

A total of 18 responses were received from the following organisations:

AONTAS, National Adult Learning Organisation	Ireland
Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)	Ireland
Certification Group of Skillnet Network Managers	Ireland
Department for Employment and Learning	Northern Ireland
Dublin City University	Ireland
HEA	Ireland
IBEC	Ireland
Irish Universities Association	Ireland
Longford Women's Link	Ireland
Mary Immaculate College	Ireland
Maynooth University	Ireland
National Disability Authority	Ireland
Teagasc	Ireland
The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	UK
The Irish Inter Professional Association	Ireland
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Ireland
Trinity College Dublin	Ireland
University College Dublin	Ireland

All respondents agreed to have their submissions published. This document summarises the feedback from all submissions received, as well as the feedback received at the Consultative Forum meeting held on 28th April 2015.

The summary below reflects themes, issues, comments and suggestions that were common to responses.

Feedback was invited on the different sections of the draft statement; NFQ, QQI Awards, Quality Assurance, Communications and Information and High Quality Service (each of these also included areas on goals, approaches and outcomes) as well as on questions seeking:

a)   general comment

b)   whether important areas were not covered

c)   any other observations

1. Mission, Vision and Values

» Mission: It is unclear how the QQI ensure quality and what is their broad role in this regard? From our understanding: QQI promotes the enhancement of quality for accredited programmes from providers who are registered with QQI in order to make awards on the NFQ.

» Vision - It is unclear if this is the role of the QQI, or for SOLAS (For FET) Learner-centred-Clarity needed regarding: "promote a culture of access" – Access also requires access to minor awards, access requires a diversity of providers offering accreditation. In terms of QQI reengagement it is important that a range of community education providers, who meet the most hard to reach learners, can continue to provide accredited programmes on the NFQ.

Collaboration needs to be meaningful and not just about building confidence, the QQI need to be open to learn from the expertise of other stakeholders in the sector.

There needs to be openness to other stakeholders and responsive in terms of replying to submissions made and for stakeholders to see where their contributions have impacted/influenced QQI or the reasons why the views were not taken on board.

» All very well laid out and explained. The mission statement above is really two separate statements. We suggest reformatting to something like this: QQI • Promotes the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training • Quality assures providers • Supports and promotes a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders

» This section is set out very clearly. The statements are accessible and easy to read while providing clarity. Perhaps in the vision it could be made clear who the target audience for the high quality education is. It is commendable that the improvement-oriented outcome is also a value for the running of QQI.

» There has been a strong emphasis on QA in the past for further ed - the emphasis on the quality of education did appear to be as strong. Important that the quality of education provided itself is given equal priority as a goal.

» Absence of reference to international dimension within values given importance of portability and credibility for QQI learners operating in EU/ global market.

» We like the inclusive nature of the mission statement, however we would like to see professional bodies referred to explicitly. The vision and values resonate with a forward looking organisation.

» LWL welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to QQI on this strategy statement. However we would also like to emphasize that this is the latest in a number of submissions that we have been making since 2013 and to date have received very little feedback or evidence that our submissions are being taken into account. In relation to the Mission statement, LWL would question the use of the term 'quality' rather than accreditation as we would very much see QQI as a body overseeing accreditation. We feel that the Vision outlined reads more like one that would be expected from Solas/DES. In terms of values we wish to raise a number of points: Learner-centred/Promotion a 'culture of access' - how is this to be done and does it take into account the needs of the learner e.g. access to minor awards and choice of provider? We have a concern around the phrase 'collaborate with our stakeholders to build confidence' - we believe that the focus instead should be on meaningful engagement.

» The only comment I would make is that it might be worth specifically mentioning 'employers', rather than just encompassing them in 'other stakeholders'. Although I appreciate that QQI is learner-centred, it is important that QQI is seen to be engaging with employers. The recent McKinsey report on Education noted that a lack of educators and employers engaging with one another had a detrimental effect on students' work prospects.

» It is important from the outset that QQI emphasises that its mission is to support and promote qualifications systems that benefits ALL learners. While this may be implicitly implied, it is important to explicitly promote a national qualifications and awards system that is for the benefit of all. Therefore the National Disability Authority recommends including the word "all" in the missions statement:

"QQI supports and promotes a qualifications system that benefits all learners and other stakeholders."

» The National Disability Authority advises that the QQI, as with all public bodies, has a remit to ensure that its policies and procedures take into account the requirements to accommodate people with disabilities in line with the provisions of s 26 of the Disability Act 2005. Under these provisions, where practicable and appropriate, education and training for people with disabilities and others should be integrated.

For learners with disabilities, it is important that training and education are designed around the individual and their learning style. The National Disability Authority welcomes the inclusion of a learner-centred approach as part of QQI's values. For learners with disabilities, it is important that training and education are designed around the individual and their learning style.

The Disability Act 2005 established the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design within the National Disability Authority to promote Universal Design in education and standards. The Act defines Universal Design to mean the design and composition of environments so that can be accessed understood and used to the greatest extent for possible by all people regardless of their age size ability or disability. NDA would welcome a focus in strategy on universal design learning. The National Disability Authority recommends that universal design for learning is considered by QQI as a key theme in their Strategy Statement.

» One of the outcomes that we would value is that the qualifications system also responds to employment needs and supports work based learning. A focus on learning to learn is a critical area for employers.

» It is unclear who the target audience is for this strategy the QQI organisation itself, the Irish Higher Education sector e.g. the QQI's vision QQI does not provide education and training programmes, rather it validates, quality assures delivery and standards and maintains the NFQ. I would be careful with the use of the word responsiveness in the Professional value, this has not been the sector's experience in recent times.

»   Need to consider the absence of a reference to the international area in our values.

»   While an awarding body, QQI is not per se a provider of education and training. This would not be immediately recognisable in the above. It might be helpful to include some reference to QQI reviewing, assuring, enhancing and promoting providers in their varied roles.

»   The strategy relates to QQI, however, the vision relates to institutions providing education - should the vision not be to facilitate/support educational institutions in the provision of..............?

»   One of the outcomes that we would value is that the qualifications system also responds to employment needs and supports work based learning. A focus on learning to learn is a critical area for employers.

2. NFQ

Main areas identified:

» Community providers are not mentioned in the document

» The use of the word "valued" was questioned "We promote the NFQ so that it is understood and valued"

Comments relating to NFQ

» There is a need to explore what is meant by "valued". For example minor awards have a huge value for learners who have just returned to education and many years, it is of value in terms of recognition for their learning and as a mark of achievement. It is also a step towards a major award. Outcomes… Regarding point 1, should also be based on learner and local/community need. There is no clear link or continuity between the headings (how we do it, goals to 2018, strategic approaches, outcomes).

» Continued promotion and awareness of the NFQ levels is key. Most 2nd and 3rd level students are very aware of the levels and what they mean, but many parents, employers, employees are still not.

» How to measure and review the outcomes. I would question whether we should have a fifth column on how we 'measure and review"

» There is no mention of Universities in this Goal only Schools, Colleges and Training organisations. It is unclear if the outcomes reflect achievement of the Goal to 2018 i.e. the NFQ will incorporate CPD, the sector will receive advice on how to align CPD, how extra mural courses are to be treated into the future?

» The layout of this section makes it easy to engage with. However, the How we do it section reads more like what we do. Perhaps an extra column could be inserted titled "what we do". The strategic approaches seem like the how we do it. Might it be an idea to include an evaluation strand…how will we know that we've done it?

» There is a need for more guidelines as to the expectations on what the 'day 1 skills' of a graduate should be having achieved a given major award.   Further develop descriptors of what a graduate of particular education level (further education) should be capable of in a career context - operative, supervisory, management, sole trader management of a business.

» A time frame to 2018 to clarify how the NFQ can and should be used in support of Life Long Learning is too long and should be shortened. Cognisance should be taken of the time frame for the Teaching Council's development of a CPD Framework.

» We feel that employers will engage more with the NFQ if it includes professional as well as academic qualifications. We also feel that there is further opportunity to promote the NFQ as it is a well-established and internationally recognised educational framework. This is an important sales message particularly when attracting international students.

» The use of the term 'valued' under 'How we do it': value will have different meanings to different groups e.g. learners, providers, employers etc. What is of value to one learner (completion of a minor award) may be viewed differently by another body and therefore it is critical that this does not become a 'one size fits all' approach. Development of NFQ guidance materials: There is no mention of community providers here? Outcomes: The design and delivery of courses cannot be done in isolation and must be part of the re-engagement process. Support of lifelong learning is identified under 'Goals to 2018' however there is no mention of it in outcomes.

» While widely used in FET and HE, there is little reference to the NFQ in the Irish primary and second-level school system. For example, there appears to be no reference made to NFQ in current NCCA senior cycle subject development work underway. It would be useful if QQI could ensure during the 2016-2018 period that the NFQ becomes more embedded all parts of Irish education and training.

» Re Strategic approaches: how big a task will it be to complete a review of the NFQ? This may require variable levels of depth across award providers. Otherwise it may become a very burdensome task, outcomes point 1 restate as "All universities........

» Flexible systems of assessment are vital to ensure equitable outcomes for learners with disabilities.

The National Disability Authority recommends that QQI emphasise this in the outcomes for the NFQs by stating

» "Schools, colleges and training organisations will design and deliver courses based on the flexible assessment of student's knowledge, skills and competencies"

» The current approach of involving a broad range of providers and representative groups is very comprehensive and one that should be continued. Meetings have been inclusive, with great opportunities for interaction and debate.

» Strategic approaches: how big a task will it be to complete a review of the NFQ? This may require variable levels of depth across award providers. Otherwise it may become a very burdensome task,

» Outcomes point 1 restate as "All universities........

» Should include reference to regulatory bodies

» Use of word 'colleges' misleading

» What does 'schools' mean in this context

» Absence of learners mentioned in the Goals

» Regulation should enhance learners experience

» Context for plan in next 3 years – student demand is growing – is QQI assuring providers?

» In 'how we do it' what are the actions here?

» In outcomes – suggested we say 'flexible systems of assessment'

3. Quality Assurance

Main areas identified:

» Community providers are not included.

Comments relating to Quality Assurance

» How we do it... "We regulate private further and higher education and training" Is this beyond the remit of QQI? Should it be to regulate the qualifications (and associated processes) and rather than regulate the whole organisation. »» "We monitor and review what schools, colleges and training organisations do to maintain quality in further and higher education and training" Is this beyond the remit of QQI, should it be to monitor and review the qualifications (and associated processes) and not to monitor and review the whole organisation. »» "We work with schools, colleges and training organisations to enhance course quality" How do QQI do this? The QQI is a regulatory agency and not a support agency? »» "Develop a series of events and publications to help schools, colleges and training organisations to improve the quality of the student experience" How do the QQI plan to do this and is this happening in isolation? There is a broader move to engage learner voice e.g. National Adult Learner Forum (AONTAS and SOLAS). Is there a link here? The outcomes are unclear. What do the QQI mean by the last two points? There is no mention of voluntary providers. Why only mention guidelines for the quality assurance of eLearning, where does this link to the other policies on QA that are being developed etc? Key points are: • Where do the points link to existing QQI and FET policy? • There are guidelines for providers regarding reengagement, which are being reviewed, this is a very positive move by the QQI and we would support the continuance of this approach. It is not mentioned in this section. • Where are the community and voluntary groups within this theme? • Difficult to understand the exact actions under this point?

» It would seem this is an ambitious timeframe for the stated objectives. It would be important to discuss whether we have adequate staff to achieve the ambitious strategic approaches. A strategy would be needed to communicate the International Education Mark. Again, I would question we have a 5th column for measure and review.

» The supportive role of QQI is to be commended. This could be further emphasised by including a commitment to provide advice to schools and colleges on the rigorous criteria for QQI awards. The acronym IEM should be clarified in the third column.

» Would emphasize/prioritise the 'risk based'' monitoring approach.

» The higher educational institutional review model must be effective, must be easy to use, and must be the product of timely dialogue and communication by the QQI.

» Again would like to see some reference to professional bodies, otherwise comfortable with the general premise.

» Overall, successful implementation of QA depends on: Clear guidelines and communication processes. A recognition of the role and value of community education. A recognition of the considerable experience of existing providers. In 'how we do it' more information is required as to how exactly QQI work 'with schools, colleges and training organisations to enhance course quality'. In addition, under 'strategic approaches' we would question point 4 - is it the role of QQI? In addition, ensuring 'QA procedures are sufficiently able to address innovations in education and training' must include flexibility for learners (including access to their preferred provider and access to minor awards that are identified by the learner as being critical to their own educational/social needs at the time). Finally, under 'outcomes', community providers need to be mentioned under point 4.

» There is mixed references to schools and colleges and training organizations, private further and higher education - there appears to be no reference to universities? UCD would suggest that there should be more explicit differentiation between the universities and or DABS and other providers The strategic approaches refer to greater emphasis on risk based monitoring

- there has been no communication from QQI on this aspect since it was tentatively raised in the seminar in December 2014 The 2012 Act does not make acquisItion of the IEM mandatory (although most organisations recruiting international students will apply) however, the outcomes section states ...institutions....will have an IEM.

» The Disability Act 2005 established the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design within the National Disability Authority to promote Universal Design in education for relevant courses and standards. The Act defines Universal Design to mean the design and composition of environments so that can be accessed understood and used to the greatest extent for possible by all people regardless of their age size ability or disability.

~ The National Disability Authority recommends that universal design for learning is considered by QQI as a key strategic approach in the QA of the NFQ

~ "Ensure our QA procedures are sufficiently able to address innovations in education and training through Universal Design for Learning"

~ Under "Strategic Approaches..."
Implement fair, consistent and rigorous criteria for equitable access to QQI Awards for all learners.

~ The Outcome "Schools, colleges and training organisations will have and publish better information about student achievements" requires that comparable data is gather in a consistent manner.

~ It is important that all actors involved in the ecosystem of the provision of education and training in Ireland have access to accurate data on the outcomes of persons with disabilities. There is at present a paucity of data on many aspects of the experience and outcomes of persons with disabilities in training and education. The National Disability Authority therefore advises that the QQI, in its engagement with training and education providers, requests that accurate and reliable data is gathered on outcomes achieved and experiences of persons with disabilities.
Therefore it necessary that this is emphasised in the "How we do it..." section as follows:
"We monitor and review what schools, colleges and training organisations do to maintain

quality in further and higher education and training and gather data in a consistent and comparable way on student experiences and outcomes. It is critical for learners with disabilities that any supports they require transition with them as they move through the education system.

~ The National Disability Authority recommends this is emphasised in the Strategic Approaches under as follows:

"Develop a series of events and publications to help schools, colleges and training organisations to improve the quality of the student experience as they move through the education system and transition into employment"

» Strategic approaches point 2 Focus on universities… or did you mean that you will focus less on universities than on the others that are mentioned? Same issue in points 3 and 4

Clarify what is envisaged by risk based monitoring - it is stated very baldly here

Outcomes - point 2 the term 'Higher education institutions' is used for the first time - it is a more acceptable generic term

Outcome point 4 there seems to be an implication that the information currently published is not good enough - what is the evidence for this assertion?

Outcome 5: Might better be described as technology enhanced learning, to encompass broader TLA approaches, such as blended learning

» Need to differentiate the University sector in this strategy statement. TCD support the adoption of a risk-based approach to QA and monitoring. TCD would like to see the delivery of the QA Guidelines for DAB's, and LPs as well as those for online learning in the outcomes. The online was communicated as a module to the main QA Guidelines which are still awaited by the sector. Should the first strategic approach be on the next page under QQI Awards?

» The draft refers in a blanket way to "schools, colleges and training organisations". While there is value in brevity in these statements, they can also be misleading because the role and functions of QQI differ widely within some of these rather broad categories, eg with regard to universities and other DABs. This may lead to public confusion. Given the volume of work facing QQI and the need therefore for prioritisation, IUA would like to propose, following up on previous suggestions, that QQI adopt a risk-based approach to QA and monitoring. There is also a need to develop policy and practice in the area of QA for online provision. This needs to begin during the 2016-2018 period

» Transparency in the selection of assessors and panels to review courses and standards is vital. Transparency in this is critical.

» Welcome the collaborative approach and the focus on helping providers to improve the student experience.

» In the goal question over what 'improved' means in this context and how could it be measured?

» IEM is introduced for the first time here under approaches in acronym format – needs to be spelled out

» Timeframe for engagement in new review model, helping institutions to engage if there a new model developed.

» In how we do it – why are international students mentioned specifically? (ans: relates to IEM)

» Terminology is unclear in outcomes

» The goal implies existing system is not good enough maybe use 'effective' instead of 'improved'.

» Is it wise to refer to a single QA system – legislation doesn't mention a single system.

» Outcomes – re schools, college's language needs to change.

» Suggest adding 'gather data' to 'How we do it'

4. QQI Awards

Main areas identified:

» The word courses is not accurate it should read programmes of learning

» Should be a focus on occupational requirements

» The use of the term reliable was questioned – not strong enough

» Time frame needed for the policy work

Comments relating to QQI Awards

» »» "We validate courses", should this not read programmes? »» We validate courses (programmes?) »» "Complete the suite of policies and procedures to reflect the vision and mission of QQI" A timeline would be very beneficial for this, similar to previous timelines provided by FETAC »» "Greater understanding and recognition of QQI as an awarding body" Is this a point for the communication section? »» "Greater progression of major awards at Levels 5 and 6 to higher education" (this isn't stated in the goal etc. it should be learner centred progression, why is a main point? Also, further education is a qualification in itself and not just as a means for progression to higher education. Furthermore, is the role of QQI to focus on qualifications rather than progression from awards?

» Regarding the last bullet under Strategic Approaches should be done quickly and efficiently (or wording similar to that), i.e. 'Work with stakeholders to develop structures linking qualification standards to occupational requirements, where relevant, quickly and efficiently'. Much faster validation of programmes is needed.

» I would like to emphasise and reiterate the importance of an "awareness of QQI awards"

» As before the how we do, reads like the what we do, but the goals here are clear. Perhaps the strategy would benefit from timelines. There is a huge volume of work and it would be beneficial for the reader to see the planned progress over time.

» Again would prioritize the linking of qualification standards to occupational requirements Need to allow more flexibility /responsive in FE awards review to rapidly changing contexts in certain industries.

» Within outcomes progression to L5 & L6 and apprenticeship awards appear more like outputs; further is a baseline available for other outputs and what measurement tool will report on progress and achievements?

» The term "reliable" does somewhat a disservice to the qualifications that fall under the remit of QQI, we suggest adding terms such as practical and robust.

» Under 'strategic approaches', the reference to the completion of P&P needs a time-frame. Under 'outcomes' we feel that the reference to recognition of QQI would be more suitable as part of a PR strategy. In relation to validation of awards, we would like to see as part of the outcomes, greater benefits for the learner in terms of access to shared programmes. Finally, progression is always a welcome outcome but it needs to be acknowledged that for many learners, progression does not always equate to major awards and higher education.

» Under the Disability Act 2005 the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design is tasked with "assisting and promoting the introduction of the principles of universal design to courses of education and training" and liaising with "vocational and third level educational institutions and with professional bodies to" encourage the development of appropriate curricula for courses of education and training related to architects, engineers, town planners, systems analysis's, software designers, transport providers and designers of passenger transport vehicles and passenger vessels.

~ The National Disability Authority therefore has a statutory remit to influence curricula and standards in courses related to the aforementioned professions, as well as to ensure that that examinations recognised by professional bodies in such courses include material relating to Universal Design. The Centre for Excellence in University design is currently undertaking a programme to develop, promulgate and promote the use of said curriculum in relevant courses and is currently engaging with universities and Institutes of Technologies as well as relevant professional bodies such as Engineers Ireland and the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland on an ongoing basis.

~ The National Disability Authority is aware of QQI's roll in facilitating the development of standards for particular areas of practice and that these standards will become available for consultation from time to time. We are therefore available as part of our statutory remit to contribute to the production on and consultation of award standards in the areas of practice outlined above. We wish to engage with QQI in the development of such award standards and are available to sit on relevant development groups and to consult on draft award standards.

» Welcome the focus on building employer confidence and awareness in the QQI awards. Look at the area of in company, quality training programmes and gaining awards for programmes run to an agreed standard in this area.

» In addition to enhancing "work and life skills", consider enhancing knowledge acquisition and learning.

» N/A to University sector, however, under Strategic Approaches the first point completes the suite of policies and procedures, it applies to more than QQI Awards, should this Strategic Approach be under each goal

» Goals to 2018- the words personal development should feature in there somewhere.

5. Communications and Information

Main areas identified:

» Communication has been limited to date

» There has been numerous consultations and calls for submissions with no feedback or follow up on where suggestions have been taken up or not, including policy development.

Comments relating to Communications and Information

» »» "We provide a register of schools, colleges and training organisations that offer courses and make awards" It should be broader and named a "register of educational organisations that offer accredited programmes" »» "We communicate publicly about the role of QQI and provide information on the services we provide' This should be communicated to providers also »» "We work in consultation with our stakeholders to bring greater coherence to the Irish education and training sector for the benefit of learners" Is that the role of the QQI? For Further education and training, this is the role of SOLAS. »» "We will gather, share and promote information to the public on schools, colleges, training organisations, courses and awards that is comprehensive and authoritative" How is this linked to what is happening already across FET, how does this link to QUALIFAX? »» "QQI is perceived as a valuable, quality driven, open organisation capable of communicating with its stakeholders in an efficient and effective manner" The most important aspect of this is for QQI to be open to listen and learn from stakeholders. Communications has been limited. There needs to be meaningful engagement and dialogue between QQI and stakeholders for mutual benefit. There needs to be a demonstrable example of the impact of communicating to stakeholders. There have been numerous consultations and calls for submission, however, there has been no feedback on this process to the stakeholders, and not follow up on where suggestions have been take up or not. There also has been little of no visible impact of submission on policy development.

» A greater awareness of QQI's formation, role and function is also key as the general public were just getting used to FETAC /HETAC even though they were operational for many years.

» It is important with this agenda to stress the need for adequate if not generous budgets to achieve the stated goals.

» It might be an idea in column one to outline where these reports/registers etc are available and where they will be published. The communication opportunities provided by social media could also be included here.   The overarching Communications Strategy is referred to in Strategic approaches, perhaps this should be a bullet point of its own, the strategy should include a plan for clarifying and promoting the role of the QQI to the general public.

» Would emphasize   the importance and benefits of having QQI staff assigned to act as relationship co-ordinators and exchange of information meetings with specific sectors of the education -this has been working well to date.

» An organisation chart for QQI with the names and contact details of the those responsible for the various functions would be a useful addition to the 'Business Sections' area of the QQI website. The absence of this information seems somewhat incongruous. Its inclusion would be seen as supporting the first outcome above "Greater awareness and understanding of our roles and functions".

» No mention of Higher Education

» No reference to EU VET initiatives or EQF.

» Again would like to see some reference to professional bodies. We suggest to use the term international as opposed to foreign. We also suggest incorporating employers in the strategic approach section.

» Under 'how we do it' we recommend replacing 'offer courses and make awards' with 'offer accredited courses and make awards' Point 2 under 'goals to 2018' is unclear and we are

unsure as to what this actually means in practice. Point 4 under 'outcomes' is very much internal to QQI. From a communications perspective, clear information flows and regular updates will go a long way to ensuring that all parties are aware of what is required of them. LWL welcomes the approach to digital communication as previously, it has been very difficult to access information on the website. Lack of information also leads to a vacuum, which encourages private consultants to enter the 'market' and attempt to fill this vacuum. As outlined earlier, it is also important that QQI feedback on submissions received.

» It is critical that all information provided by QQI aligns with best practice for Universal Design. The National Disability Authority has a series of best practice guidance documents on developing, writing and publishing information online and in print format that can be accessed, understood and used by the widest range of stakeholders possible. These include national standards and easy to use guidance documents :

~ Universal Design of Written Communication

~ Universal Design for the web

~ NSAI Standard to Universal design in customer engagement

~ http://www.universaldesign.ie

~ The National Disability Authority recommends emphasising this in the "Strategic Approach" for Communication and Information as follows;

~ "Devise and implement a digital communications and information plan for QQI.ie based on Universal Design principles to maximise our online investment and ensure stakeholders are finding the information they need easily and intuitively"

» The word "universities" does not appear above; Higher Education Institutions proposed as a more appropriate term

» This element of the strategy is crucial, not just for the learner and the general public, but also for providers. It is our experience that QQI communication to providers is currently only

undertaking in response to provider queries seeking updates and timelines. It would be helpful if QQI could endeavour to provide more information, further in advance, regarding current and planned developments and timelines.

» I would like to see something here about the commencement of Quality Enhancement Seminars /Networking opportunities/Capacity Building where good practice can be shared across the sector.

» The language of the QQI needs to continue to be a plain language one as over use of technical language among qualifications agencies is an obstacle to deeper engagement by learners and employers.

   Continuing to involve stakeholders, as is currently happening, is welcomed as a very positive step.

» The lack of communication from QQI over the past four months puts a number of the objectives in this section immediately into tension

» Outcomes – 3rd bullet point remove the words 'capable of'

» How we do it – 2nd point re publishing reports very passive – need to develop further

» Suggestion that 'foreign' should be replaced with international and 'Irish' with domestic

» Post-secondary – first time we hear this term is here – no consistency with language used elsewhere in document

» Under how we do it – we provide a register – is that an outcome?

» Should the qualifications database be referenced?

» Language doesn't convey consultation and collaboration

» Not enough reference to our international work

6. High Quality Service

Main areas identified:

» Happy to see staff development included

Comments relating to High Quality Service

» We feel there needs to be something in this strategy about being responsive i.e. speed of responses and implementation of changes

» It would be important to state the links here with the HR strategic plan

» It is to be commended that the organisation goal is to improve collective employee skills and not just focusing on the individual. Could focus on providing a high quality customer service in this section also.

» No comment -it is comprehensive

» Similarly issue of benchmarking current performance and attitudes and future measurement of change.

» It is refreshing to see that staff are included so much in the development of a high quality service, their buy in will ensure success.

» It is critical that QQI take on board the experience of existing providers, particularly with regard to adopting a learner-centered approach. Delivery of a high quality service seems to be very much focused on the internal processes of QQI and not on the external service user or.

» A focus on minimising bureaucracy and administrative delays in developing framework standards and approving programmes submitted should continue to be a focus.

» Title of this indicates something very different with an external focus – should review title and amend to reflect the content

» Approaches are somewhat aspirational in this area

» Should possibly be amended to "delivering a high quality efficient service"

» Engagements with other state agencies should be noted here – need to show QQI works with other agencies

» Appropriate decision making at appropriate levels

» No mention of cost or affordability here – there is a monopoly of providers, does QQI have a role in preventing this?

» Developing people – people should be developed as appropriate and applied to full potential

» Reengagement with providers – cost implications with this process should be identified in this plan

» Need to include quality customer service

» Stakeholders are wider than the public

» Consider revising to - A comprehensive approach to ensure that all aspects of the organisation work together and with other members of the state…..

7. General Comments of respondents regarding the strategy statement

» In terms of the overall Strategic Statement it lacks cohesion and a clear direction. • It would be useful to identify and name the environmental changes within further education and QQI. For example, there appears to be an overlap between the role of SOLAS and the proposed actions for QQI. • Interdepartmental/agency collaboration is required, particularly noting the role of SOLAS. • The structure of the document is unclear: how we do it; Goals to 2018; Strategic Approaches: Outcomes. There is no common link between the topics. Would be useful to state clearly the goal in relation to the theme, what are the objectives of this goal, how the objectives will be achieved and the outcome/including how it will be monitored. • The flow of the document is not clear and the direction of the organisation is not clearly articulated

» See statements above, please note the suggestion that there should be a 5th column in each of the 5 strategic goals evaluating measure and review outcomes.

» The consultation tool is very effective, that is reading the section and being able to comment directly on the pdf. In general, the aims, outcome and strategies are clearly written in plain English.

» Overall the draft QQI Strategy Statement is very clear, well focused on the key issues and supportive of education providers and learners.

» Draft Strategy Statement has been well thought out however when cross referenced to previous Comprehensive Policy Development programme update legacy issues appear to have completely disappeared - is this an accurate reading of progress to date or have they been integrated or been re branded?

» General: This is a comprehensive strategy statement that outlines the goals and objectives of the QQI clearly. We believe that this will be positively received by QQI stakeholders. Specific: We would prefer to see acknowledge of professional bodies within the document.

» We feel that the document would benefit from some restructuring. It might be more effective to structure along the lines of Aims, Objectives and Outcomes rather the current format. In any case, the QQI goals should be the first item to be clearly outlined. We also feel that the document needs to keep all communication-related goals/objectives under a communications and PR section. The communication-related items appear to be widely dispersed throughout the different sections.

» It is important that the strategy is followed by a more detailed plan showing timelines for the achievement of the goals set out

» Need to provide visibility that the University sector is part of the scope of this strategy by referring to Universities and not just Schools, Colleges and Training Organisations'.

» Make more specific mention, where applicable, to relevant provider groups, eg universities. The current reference to "schools, colleges and training organisations" is too broad and in cases misleading.-The deadlines for responding to this draft statement were hopelessly short. If QQI seeks considered responses from a range of stakeholders, including large providers such as universities and representative groups, then adequate time must be provided for those responses to be generated and fed back in.

» Contradiction in tone in statement – seems to be a move towards regulatory instrument and maybe this should be mentioned.

» Where areas of document are black and white they should be explicit and aspirational elements should be separated – document needs to be clearer

» Subsidiarity – this principle should come through strongly, i.e. that QQI considers in any instance whether it is most appropriate for it, or for those institutions over which it has oversight, to undertake actions, with a focus on ensuring decision-making happens at the lowest level of the system consistent with delivery of quality system outcomes.

» In higher education, the challenges of diminishing funding, and increasing student numbers place particular pressures on the maintenance of quality and its enhancement that I think are different from most other periods. In particular there is a role for QQI to provide assurance to the wider public that the HEIs are continuing to deliver quality education for their students, and to have particular regard to institutions where the growth in students is very high over a short period, where there are issues around student retention etc.

» Remove 'stakeholders' from document and refer to 'the public'

» Very progressive to include staff consultation as part of the process and it is to be commended.

8. *Areas that are not covered*

» QQI re-engagement for voluntary legacy providers is a key process that providers are facing over the course of the Strategy Statement timeframe and should be referred to. • Should training organisations not be called 'education and training organisation' • Community and voluntary organisations should be specifically named in relation to providers (e.g. private providers are mentioned often).

» It would be good to know how QQI are going to measure, if the outcomes detailed in this Strategy Statement, have been achieved or not.

» As above. Perhaps there should be a link to some of the strategic goals in other partner organisations for example HEA

» Plans to expand delegated authority at FE level as it is provided for in the QQI establishment act.

» QQI's Powers. There is no mention in this draft of the QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018 that, as of now, QQI has no express power under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (2012 Act) to recognise (within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)) qualifications of awarding bodies other than those included in the initial NFQ of 2003 or mentioned the 2012 Act. This has implications for the achievement of the outcomes across most, if not all, of the areas of QQI's work. It seems fundamental that this issue is addressed as a matter of priority and that a specific goal should be included in the final version of the QQI Strategy Statement 2016 – 2018.

» Comprehensive Policy Development programme update provided insight into Irish, including advent of SOLAS, and European education and training landscape in a manner not articulated in current draft document.

» At present there is a Joint QQI/Community & Voluntary Sector Working Group which is looking at a lot of the aspects of this statement from the community education perspective and perhaps the statement could be looked at in light of the progress being made in this forum.

» Only, as previously mentioned, in order to be seen to help bridge the skills gap identified by reports like McKinsey, to show engagement with employers and industry.

» The Government will shortly approve and publish the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, a 10 year strategy including 3 year programme of actions covering education, training and employment, with a large focus on education, further and higher education and training. The strategy commits to ensuring access to mainstream education, training and employment to enhance employment opportunities for all persons with disabilities. It incorporates actions for implementation by Departments of Education and Skills; Social Protection; Health; Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; and also by Solas, HSE and other key stakeholders, and will continue to be an integral part of the National Action Plan for Jobs.   It is important that QQI Strategy is aligned with the goals and actions in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy which will be monitored by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and the Cabinet Committee for Employment

» Affordability/Cost to the learner is not included – the intention is that the various steps are taken to ensure that it does not lead to higher costs. At entry level and personal development. Costs are regulated – people have to be able to demonstrate where costs are regulated. We are not responsible for regulating fees we have a responsibility to ensure the quality of what you're getting is the same.

» Issue of cost and accessibility is an important one – increasing cost of reengagement – validation etc.

9. Any other observations

» As previously stated, while LWL welcomes the opportunity to make these submissions, it is important that feedback is provided as there is no evidence that our submissions are being incorporated in any meaningful way. The use of the term 'statement' does imply a somewhat aspirational document - clarification on how this statement is to be monitored will be required.

» Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this process.

» There seems to be a lack of connection between the work QQI is currently undertaking and the content of the Strategy Statement. The Statement doesn't appear to reflect the current policy changes that QQI are developing, particularly in relation to reengagement.

» The consultation period for this document (and others) is very short. Institutions received the document late on 9 April with a deadline of 20 April - effectively 6 working days to consult (impossible to do in the time frame given) and respond.

» It is important that the strategy is followed by a more detailed plan showing timelines for the achievement of the goals set out.

Appendix 4:   Terms of Reference

QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

CONSULTATIVE FORUM

TERMS OF REFERENCE

MISSION

The mission of the QQI Consultative Forum is to contribute to the development and implementation of an enhanced further and higher education and training and qualifications system through consultation and meaningful dialogue between QQI and stakeholders.

PURPOSE

1) The Consultative Forum will advise QQI on organisational and operational matters underpinned by QQI policy. The Consultative Forum is not a decision-making body and is not a formal committee.

2) In particular, the Forum will offer advice to QQI with regard to general issues regarding the work of QQI, focusing on the impact of its work on stakeholders. The Forum will *inter alia:*

   (i)   Advise on QQI communication to different target groups;

   (ii)   Act as a pre-policy development 'sounding board';

   (iii) Discuss QQI's strategy statements and associated annual work plans;

   (iv)   Provide QQI with feedback on the impact of QQI's comprehensive policy development programme and associated policy implementation process from the perspective of its stakeholders;

   (v)   Highlight to QQI emerging issues and trends relevant to stakeholders;

   (vi)   Other relevant issues as they arise.

TRANSPARENCY

» The outcomes of the Consultative Forum meetings will be communicated to the QQI **Board** and **Executive** and the meeting notes will be made **publicly available** via the QQI website.

» The QQI Executive may present consultation feedback to the Consultative Forum for observations.

» The QQI Executive may establish **Consultative Forum Working Groups** comprising of Forum members, and external representatives as appropriate. Such working groups will be established on the basis of a defined task and a defined timeframe within which it must present its final report to the Forum.

COMPOSITION

The Consultative Forum will include representation from across the further and higher education and training and qualifications system. Composition of the Consultative Forum will consist of:

» Representatives of public and private further and higher education and training providers including the research community;

» Community and voluntary education sector representatives;

» Employer representatives;

» Labour market actors (e.g. trade unions, teacher representative bodies);

» Representatives of occupational associations (professional recognition bodies, regulatory bodies);

» Learner representatives;

» Government departments and agency representatives;

» Funders of education and training;

» International education and training awarding bodies;

» Member(s) of QQI Executive.

In addition, members of the QQI Board are welcome to attend the Consultative Forum meetings.

Members of the Consultative Forum will have a two year term of office.

[43]

INDIVIDUAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Dr Padraig Walsh, QQI Chief Executive, will fulfil the role of Chairperson for the Consultative Forum.

The QQI executive will provide the Forum's secretariat.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

It is envisaged that the Consultative Forum will meet twice a year from the date of establishment. In addition, the Consultative Forum may be convened on an ad hoc basis if the need arises.

The QQI Board will meet with the Consultative Forum on the date the Forum first convenes and on an annual basis thereafter.

CONSULTATIVE FORUM REVIEW

1. The Terms of Reference for the Consultative Forum will:

    (a) be approved by the Board

    (b) be discussed by the Forum at its first meeting

    (c) initially be reviewed by the Forum at the end of the first year and thereafter every two years by QQI

2. Recommendations to modify the Terms of Reference can be made at any time by the Consultative Forum itself or by the QQI Executive or Board

3. Recommendations to modify the Terms of Reference will require approval by the Board.

TERMS OF REFERENCE