Internal Quality Assurance Policy
Relating to QQI's External Quality Assurance of Providers of Education and Training
January 2017

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of the internal quality assurance (IQA) policy is to provide a description of the internal quality assurance approach in QQI to those functions concerned with external quality assurance of providers of education and training. The policy serves as the primary reference for the implementation, maintenance, monitoring and review of IQA and can be used for training and audit purposes.

2.0 Scope of IQA

The IQA of external quality assurance services for providers is underpinned by QQI's commitment to continual improvement and is based on a cycle of planning, implementation, review and action.

External quality assurance of providers incorporates a broad range of functions and related processes. These include, but are not be limited to:

- Initial access to programme validation (which encompasses approval of new provider QA procedures)
- Programme validation and revalidation and sub-processes within these
- Delegation of authority to make awards
- Cyclical institutional reviews of provider QA procedures, including review of delegation of authority to make awards where appropriate
- Focused institutional reviews of provider QA procedures
- Focused reviews of programme validation
- Annual monitoring processes for providers
- ACELS (accreditation of English language services, a non-statutory function of QQI)

3.0 Vision for IQA

QQI is committed to consistently delivering a high quality service to its stakeholders and to continuously improving. As set out in its Strategy Statement for 2016-18, the external quality assurance of providers will be conducted in a manner that is improvement-oriented, collaborative, independent, professional and learner-centred.

3.1 IQA Policy Statement

This policy statement on internal quality assurance sets out the principles underpinning the approach to IQA of the external quality assurance of providers.

QQI is committed to delivering a quality service. This commitment is evidenced through:

1. The establishment of an approach to internal quality assurance that focusses on continuous improvement by monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of our processes, procedures and service provision.

2. A commitment to meeting the needs of our stakeholders within the timeframes established through our policies and procedures.
3. The development and establishment of performance standards and service delivery standards against which to measure our progress. These will be expressed and reflected in our policies and procedures.
4. A commitment to ensuring that all staff have the necessary skills and resources required to deliver consistently on our service promises.

QQI will work in an integrated, co-ordinated manner, towards stated objectives. It will monitor progress to ensure that it consistently delivers quality services for stakeholders, and continuously improve upon that service.

QQI will monitor its process outputs and review its policies and procedures at appropriate intervals.

QQI values the concept of working in partnership with its stakeholders in continually striving for improvements in service quality. We will seek the views of our stakeholders (including providers, reviewers / panel members, learners) and use their feedback to develop further our quality objectives.

This IQA policy will be reviewed annually initially and will be communicated and made available to all relevant staff. Quality objectives will be established annually to drive improvements. Training and development of staff will be an integral part of the strategy to successfully implement the IQA policy.

The successful implementation of this IQA policy is dependent on each member of staff taking responsibility for ensuring adherence to QQI policies and procedures. The benefit to staff will be clear documentation of procedures, publication of reports; agreed targets and metrics, an opportunity to input to the further development or refinement of procedures; and an agreed set of performance standards.

4.0   IQA Process

QQI applies a systematic approach to internal quality assurance to ensure consistency and quality of service offered to stakeholders. To this end, a number of approaches suitable to the external quality assurance of providers are adopted. These are set out below.

Elements of IQA Used

- A designated IQA Manager is in place who is responsible for development and review of IQA policy and for co-ordinating IQA activity;
- Have a "Quality Manual" with documented procedures for major, recurrent (non-once-off or ad hoc) internal activities. Defined rules for significant internal processes and procedures ensure that consistency of procedures is prioritised. Documented procedures will normally be reviewed every two years;
- Procedures subject to regular monitoring and review:
  - o The source, documented procedure is in "read only" format; users have to refer to the soft copy version as the mandatory checklist is only available in that format. This is to ensure that out-of-date hard copies of procedures aren't in use by staff and that the check list is completed each time a procedure in implemented;
  - o When staff leave or join the units responsible for external QA of providers, they are asked to review the documented procedure to ensure continuing accuracy and effectiveness;

- o All changes to the documented procedures must be signed-off by the process owner;
- o All procedures are subject to cyclical monitoring and review (annually in the initial period). External triggers such as ENQA reviews and internal audits may determine the timeframe for reviews of procedure documents and the clock for review will be reset from this activity.
- Processes are subject to internal audit, which is overseen by an independent audit committee;
- All major outputs of processes, such as validation and review reports are published to the QQI website;
- A system is in place for collecting, analysing and implementing feedback on procedures from external review team members and other experts used
- A system is in place for collecting, analysing and implementing feedback on procedures from staff members
- Undertaking regular reviews of QQI policies and criteria, normally every two years. Policy "owners" are responsible for undertaking this review process and implementing any changes deemed necessary. Revised policy and criteria are subject to approval by the Policy and Standards Committee and the QQI Board.
- Strategic objectives and targets for specified periods are defined and agreed locally and organisationally that are stored, updated and accessed in the PROMISE database.
- Regular staff meetings are held
- A PMDS system is in place
- Reporting to Board and other relevant sub-Board committees
- Projects that introduce significant changes or new initiatives are subject to formal project governance through QQI's programme board
- Engagement and consultation with stakeholders through formal consultation process on new or revised policy and criteria and through the QQI consultative forum;
- Involvement and co-operation in international networks
- The conduct of risk assessment and participation in organisational risk management systems;
- Undertaking regular, scheduled external reviews as part of organisation reviews by ENQA and the Department of Education and Skills