Seminar on QQI Draft QA Guidelines and Criteria for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training (30 June 2015; Ashling Hotel)

QQI RESPONSES TO GENERAL PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS ARISING AT SEMINAR

Q: Can QQI outline all the **fees** associated with services e.g. re-engagement, programme evaluation and validation, self-evaluation, certification etc.?

Response:
QQI is authorised under the 2012 Act to charge fees, with the consent of the Minister for Education and Skills and the minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, for a range of services which it provides. The consent of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has been granted for a number of these fees. These are available at the following link: http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Schedule-of-fees-for-QQI-services-as-of-July-2014.aspx. Fees for other services, including re-engagement, have yet to be determined.

Q: Small training centres may not have the **resources** to continue to engage with QQI on an individual basis. Will there be any room for small community providers that don't have a source of funding but are providing a good quality service?

Response: One of QQI's requirements is that providers must have adequate resources available to them in order to be able to quality assure in the first instance, the education and training programmes they deliver to learners. Subsequently, adequate resources are essential to continue to support and maintain the programmes offered to learners. As the national body charged with quality assuring programmes of further, and higher education and training, QQI must satisfy itself that providers are capable of providing, and maintaining such programmes to completion.

QQI is open to working with providers of any size, including groups of providers who decide to come together formally to re-engage with QQI as a consortium. We are currently considering how this can be done in the community and voluntary sector and, as one part of this process, will be asking for the views of the community and voluntary sector through the Joint QQI/ Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group.

Q: Will QQI provide templates for all **quality assurance documents** it requires in order to ensure consistency of information provided?

Response: The existing quality assurance agreements that providers operate are based on their previous relationship with FETAC. The quality assurance process developed by FETAC was in its first stage of development. In bringing all providers to the same point a template approach was often used and was very effective. As QQI has emerged and providers are now more experienced in operating their quality assurance processes, a more developmental and individual approach is required. As such we want to develop a quality assurance relationship with all of our providers that reflects their particular context and at the same time meets a consistent national standard.

QQI is currently consulting on *Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training*; that is, for providers that are not obliged by legislation to engage with QQI. This document is very important because it describes areas such as teaching, assessment and governance that QQI expects providers will have documented processes on, which are suitable to their education and training provision and to their learners. How providers have developed their quality assurance procedures to address the quality assurance guidelines and criteria, and their particular type of provision, will be looked at as part of the re-engagement process.

On an on-going basis and following re-engagement, how well these quality assurance procedures and processes are working, and if they need further development, will be considered when a provider is reviewed by QQI. Carrying out reviews of providers is a legislative responsibility of QQI.

Q: Do we need to develop our own policies for **monitoring and evaluation** of programmes? What methods are best to use?

Response: Evaluating programmes on an on-going basis is a very important part of any good quality assurance process. There are lots of ways of doing this, including through current and past student feedback. The methods a provider uses will depend on the type of programme and what it is designed to achieve. The *Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria* will indicate what QQI expects a provider will have considered when it chooses the best form of monitoring and evaluating programmes. How effective these methods are, and if they could be supplemented or developed further, needs to be kept under ongoing internal review.

Q: What are the roles of QQI and of providers in the programme **validation** process?

Response: Programme validation is the process of verifying that a proposed programme is fit-for-purpose and will allow a learner to demonstrate that he or she has met the learning outcomes required and can achieve the associated QQI award. QQI is currently developing its policy in this area. QQI has developed resources to guide providers on the development and assessment of programmes. These are available at the following link: http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Application-for-Validation-(Levels-1-6).aspx. When validation is achieved, it means a programme can be delivered for a period of 5 years. A published list of currently validated programmes is available at the following link: http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=providers. If a provider wishes to continue delivering a programme after the 5 year period, it will be required to review the programme and apply for revalidation.

QQI and providers have different roles in the validation process for further education and training programmes. Currently these roles can be differentiated as follows:

- QQI's role is to develop award standards that indicate what knowledge, skills and competence a learner will have achieved having completed a programme leading to that award. The award standards are published online in the awards directory (www.qqi.ie) in the form of award specifications. These specifications have a publication date and a review date. If an award is indicated as 'under review' a provider can still include it in a programme and apply for validation. A *Major Award* specification includes the credit value, purpose and structure of the *Major Award*. It is presented in the form of pools of components (subjects) which can be offered as one whole programme leading to the *Major Award* or offered as individual components (i.e. *Minor Awards*). Each component has a credit value that indicates the volume of learning associated with it and the specific learning outcomes and assessment techniques.
- A provider's role is to design a programme leading to whatever specific award the learner is expected to achieve. The process of programme design includes several stages including needs identification, design of programme, development of assessment and approval of the whole programme package. The process is guided by the provider's QA procedures.
- QQI evaluates the provider's application for validation based on published criteria. The application process is online via QBS. Currently there are template documents available within QBS which can be used to make an application.
- When a provider submits an application online, it receives an automated email providing details on validation fee payment. If there are questions about how much should be paid, a Provider can submit its query through QHelp; for example if a provider needs an invoice raised before they can pay the fee this can be indicated through QHelp.
- Evaluation of an application begins after the fee is received. QQI aims to process applications within 20 weeks and many are completed in a much shorter time. It does, however, depend on how soon the fee is paid and whether there are clarifications needed by the evaluators.

- Validation is for a period of up to 5 years, so it is expected that a provider is thinking in the long term and strategically to ensure its programme portfolio is fit-for-purpose and relies on evidence-based decision-making (e.g. past certification data is an important source of information).
- By developing programmes on a *Major Award* basis, a provider is then showing foresight in being able to offer individual components and a *Major Award* to learners that may wish to pursue this route. As a result, a provider doesn't have to keep coming back to QQI for validation every time a new opportunity or need arises.

A validation fee is payable in respect of every programme or suite of programmes in a single field of learning which is submitted for validation. Therefore, a single validation fee will apply where a provider submits a number of programmes, which may lead to both major and minor awards, at different levels on the Framework and in a single field of learning, as a single submission, i.e. a suite of programmes in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 3, 4, & 5.

The rules governing validation are currently as follows:

- There is a limit on the number of validation applications that can be processed at a given Framework level before a provider is required to submit for a *Major Award.*
- It is possible for providers to collaborate on developing a programme but they must each make their own application for validation. This is because, ultimately, the validation process is ensuring each provider takes responsibility for the quality assurance of their own programme.

Exemptions:
- Providers are expected to be able to advise learners on the awards they can achieve. Where a learner already has achieved awards, the provider can guide them on the exemption process by referring to the following information sources:
  Common Award System (CAS) Exemptions
  Exemptions with Relevant Non-QQI Qualifications

Q: What forms of **collaboration** are available to providers when they are re-engaging?

Response: Collaboration between providers can be considered to be an overarching term that includes a number of different elements, including sharing good practice; sharing resources; co-delivering programmes; and establishing a legal consortium. A lot can be done by working together more closely without necessarily entering into a formal agreement, however, for re-engagement it is the concept of consortium that is of most relevance.

A *consortium* describes a group of providers coming together to form a legal entity and

identifying a lead provider as the party responsible for ensuring that each member provider is fulfilling its quality assurance responsibilities as agreed with the consortium and with QQI. The manner in which this model will operate is currently being established. It may present advantages in terms of pooling resources amongst providers whilst ensuring that responsibility for quality assurance is retained at the level of the provider and assured by the lead provider; who in turn is accountable to QQI on behalf of the consortium.

Q: What **definition of 'community and voluntary'** is QQI applying to providers?

Response: All education and training providers that agreed their quality assurance procedures with FETAC, selected a category from a specified list which they felt best described their organisation. The categories were:

- Community/Voluntary Sector Organisations
- Employer/Work-based Learning providers
- Hospital Centres of Nurse Education
- Private Providers – Colleges
- Private Providers – Companies
- Private Providers – Individuals
- Public Service Agencies (other than BIM, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc)
- Sectoral Representative Bodies
- Skillnets
- Training for People with Disabilities
- Youth Services

Some of these categories are clear- e.g., Skillnets. Other providers, for example Youth Services, could also be categorised as Community / Voluntary Sector Organisations. In addition, some Community /Voluntary Sector Organisations, because of the nature of their business, could equally be classified as Private Companies.

The 2012 Act which established QQI specifies the types of providers that must engage with QQI, e.g. schools and Education & Training Boards (ETBs) – these are obligatory providers. All other education and training providers have a relationship with QQI by choice and are therefore considered voluntary providers. As a result of this, there is no need to categorise providers from the perspective of engaging with providers on quality assurance and qualifications matters. In order to be equitable and transparent QQI will apply its policies to all voluntary providers consistently.

As a result, QQI has not been required to adopt any definition or criteria to identify a community and voluntary sector provider to date.

Q: What **support** is available to providers from QQI?

Response: QQI recently re-designed its website and hopes to build on this in order to provide clearer and more easily accessible information about its policies and their implementation. This is an on-going task. We have also placed a particular emphasis on the organisation of targeted briefings and seminars as part our consultation and implementation processes. Likewise, we want to emphasise quality improvement events which provide opportunities for providers to come together to discuss areas of common interest.

The individuals in QQI responsible for functions such as standards development, validation and certification are very often in direct communication with providers on specific issues arising. We have also developed a **QHelp** link on www.QQI.ie which includes a number of responses to a wide range of queries. We add information to this system on a regular basis. Queries sent through the ***Contact Us*** part of our website are assigned internally to the appropriate section and responded to in order. This system allows the sender of the query to track its progress. On the secure part of our website (QBS), which is accessible by providers, there is a range of tools/ guides to various processes. We intend that in using all of these methods collectively we can continue to bridge the information gap that can arise between QQI and providers.

Q: When will QQI know the **timeframe for re-engagement**?

Response: QQI is currently gathering views on its ***Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training Providers***. These will need to be finalised before re-engagement can commence. All of the providers that QQI has a relationship with, in the public and private and further and higher education and training sectors, will re-engage with QQI and agree quality assurance under the 2012 Act. QQI will manage this process with providers over a period of time. It has agreed that re-engagement will not commence with community and voluntary providers until at least the middle of 2016. Advance notice will be given to individual providers. In the meantime, it is very much encouraged that providers would begin considering the draft QA Guidelines and Criteria document and identifying, documenting and addressing any areas within their own quality assurance procedures and processes which may require attention in the light of those guidelines.