QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group

Minutes

Minutes of the seventh and final meeting of the **Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group** held in QQI Offices, 26-27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2 on Monday, 14 December 2015 at 11:00 am.

PRESENT:
For the Community and Voluntary Sector
Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (AONTAS Executive Committee)
Suzanne Kyle, Limerick Community Education Network (AONTAS CEN Steering Group)
Stuart Lawler, National Council for the Blind
Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS (Head of Strategic Development)
Sylvia Ryan, ICTU
Rachel Tucker, CTEC *(Community Training and Education Centre, Wexford)*
Nuala Whelan, Ballymun Job Centre (QA Network)

For QQI
Walter Balfe, *Provider Approval*
Colette Harrison, *Awards & Certification*
Mary McEvoy, *Legal & Compliance*
Trish O'Brien, *Strategic Planning& Communications*
Mary Sheridan, *Legal & Compliance*

Independent Facilitator
Peter Nolan

APOLOGIES
Avril Bailey, An Cosán
Sive Bresnihan, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
Deborah Brock, South County Dublin Partnership
Maria Finn, CASP *(Clondalkin Addiction Support Programme)*

1. **MINUTES OF FIFTH MEETING (CVSWG/M5), AND SIXTH MEETING (CVSWG/M6)**
   The minutes were agreed

2. **MATTERS ARISING**
   2.1 <u>Collaboration and Consortia</u>
   In terms of options available for providers to engage voluntarily in some type of collaboration with other providers in order to re-engage with QQI, the question arose as to the status of the consortium if one constituent member of a consortium is no longer able to continue to provide a programme. In other words, can the remaining member(s) of the consortium provide PEL (Protection for Enrolled Learners) in order to continue the programme and retain its QA.

   QQI outlined that it is the consortium itself which is the provider, and not the collection of constituent providers. The consortium must set out how PEL is provided across all constituent entities. If the consortium is able to continue to provide the programme in accordance with agreed PEL arrangements, then it may be possible to retain its QA.

   Other concerns which were highlighted related to the loss of autonomy of providers who opt to enter into a consortium/collaborative arrangement; fear of the unknown; and the challenges of forming new relationships.

   QQI acknowledged the challenges that collaboration brings and re-iterated the need for providers to self-assess thoroughly and realistically in terms of their capacity, resources, expertise, etc. On that basis, they can individually determine if re-engaging as a single provider or as part of a collaboration is more suitable to their circumstances and requirements.

   2.2 <u>Fees</u>
   Continuing concerns were articulated by members at the difficulties the voluntary and community sector face in trying to make decisions regarding re-engagement and collaboration, in the absence of any decision on fees.

3. **REVIEW OF ACTIONS: Terms of Reference**

   Peter Nolan referred to the Working Group's Terms of Reference and asked members for general comments and views on how they considered the Working Group had operated throughout the year.
   3.1 <u>General</u>
   Members were generally happy to have had the opportunity to meet with QQI personnel and to get a sense of how QQI operates in terms of its legislative

remit. Members considered that the establishment of the Working Group was a very positive initiative which had built further understanding between QQI and the sector. In addition, members welcomed the opportunity to engage with QQI on a face-to-face basis. This has helped break down barriers in terms of accessing information. QQI in turn, considered the Working Group to be an extremely useful means to developing a common understanding of the context/environment in which the community and voluntary sector operates. Members particularly considered the Seminar on 30th June 2015 to be extremely beneficial and hoped that engagement of this nature would continue. Members considered that the mission and objectives of the Working Group had been achieved and that the community and voluntary sector members were more informed in relation to choices and options available regarding engagement with QQI.

3.2   Communications
Whilst members generally welcomed the opportunity to communicate on a face-to-face basis with QQI via the Working Group, there was nevertheless some concern regarding the directing of queries by QQI to its on-line help desk. Members experienced frustration at trying to get answers to queries which are addressed by the online system. It was also considered unfortunate that the recent award brand launch had not featured a community and voluntary sector provider/learner.

QQI acknowledged that its communication and information provision requires further attention in 2016. It suggested that this is an area in which it would welcome the working group's advice in terms of addressing the requirements of the community and voluntary sector as a whole.

3.3   QA Guidelines
The members of the group were advised that having analysed feedback from previous consultations on the appropriate approach to quality assurance, and cognisant of the significant overlap between the various draft QA Guidelines proposed, QQI has now adopted a new approach. Arising from this new approach a core set of Statutory QA Guidelines has been developed. These will apply to all providers, both public and private providers providing programmes at all levels on the NFQ. These core statutory guidelines will be supplemented by sector specific guidelines, to include guidelines for IOTs, ETBs and independent providers. In addition, QA Guidelines for specific types of provision will also be published, i.e. research, distance learning, etc. A suite of these new guidelines were being published for consultation on Tuesday 15th December.

Some members expressed concerns regarding this development. Specifically, members were concerned that their input at the June workshop would now be wasted. QQI assured the members that their feedback had been taken on board in developing the current guidelines. QQI encouraged them to engage with the new draft documents and provide feedback where appropriate.

3.4   Fees: Parliamentary Questions & Answers
Some members were concerned regarding departmental references to the Working Group in responses to parliamentary questions regarding QQI fees.

It was agreed that QQI would contact the Department of Education & Skills with a request that it not refer to the Working Group in any additional responses to PQs on fees.

Further clarification was sought from members of the Working Group as to QQI's exact role in the matter of fees.

Mary Sheridan confirmed that under the Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012, QQI is obliged to charge fees for its services. QQI is tasked with proposing fees for ministerial consent. To date consent has been obtained for three fees i.e. Validation, Re-validation, and Award Fees. These fees are not new and have existed historically. Therefore the historic fees provided the basis for the new fees. It is important to note that it is not within QQI's remit to propose a waiver of fees for any sector.

4. **CONCLUSION**
Peter Nolan thanked the members of the Working Group for their very valuable work and for the dedication and commitment to the success of the group as evidenced by the meaningful participation in discussions, the open exchange of views and experience, and the excellent attendance record at meetings.

Walter Balfe thanked Peter Nolan for his invaluable work as Independent Facilitator to the group and paid particular tribute to his knowledge and expertise of the community and voluntary sector.

Following the exchange of seasonal good wishes the meeting concluded at 12.30pm.