QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group

Notes

Notes of the sixth meeting of the **Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group** held in Behan House, 10 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2 on Monday, 2 November 2015 at 10:30 am.

PRESENT:
For the Community and Voluntary Sector
Avril Bailey, An Cosán
Deborah Brock, South County Dublin Partnership
Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (AONTAS Executive Committee)
Patricia Howlin[1] CTEC *(Community Training and Education Centre, Wexford)*
Suzanne Kyle, Limerick Community Education Network (AONTAS CEN Steering Group)
Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS (Head of Strategic Development)
Nuala Whelan, Ballymun Job Centre (QA Network)

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

Independent Facilitator
Peter Nolan

APOLOGIES
Sive Bresnihan, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
Maria Finn, CASP *(Clondalkin Addiction Support Programme)*
Stuart Lawler, National Council for the Blind
Sylvia Ryan, ICTU
Rachel Tucker, CTEC *(Community Training and Education Centre, Wexford)*

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[1] Patricia Howlin deputised for Rachel Tucker, who was unable to attend on this occasion.

PRELIMINARY

The meeting incorporated a workshop on collaborative models at which the community and voluntary sector members of the working group discussed the possible types of collective and collaborative engagements that providers may have with each other and the various issues arising from these. The intention of the workshop was to provide members with an opportunity to consider the opportunities and challenges presented by different forms of collaboration versus operating as an individual relevant provider[2] in the context of re-engagement and otherwise.

Five possible collaborative scenarios *(attached)* were provided by QQI as an aid to the discussions as follows:-

Scenario 1: Status Quo
Scenario 2: Consortium
Scenario 3: Provider and Centres
Scenario 4: Network
Scenario 5: ETB

The outcomes from the *Workshop* were presented to QQI for further discussion by the full Working Group.

SCENARIO 1: STATUS QUO

This scenario represents the present situation whereby providers currently operate independently of each other. Each provider has a direct relationship with QQI in terms of agreeing quality assurance (QA), re-engagement, programme validation, and certification. In this scenario each provider pays re-engagement fees, programme validation fees etc.

The group was concerned that 'funding' and 'fees' would be seen as the driving forces behind the re-engagement process. Some members considered that the funding and fees issue will determine whether consortia will be considered by providers, rather than quality assurance imperatives. Some members expressed concern that a provider's capacity to pay fees might influence QQI in determining providers with whom it would re-engage.

QQI outlined that a provider's capacity to provide programmes is not determined by QQI solely on the financial resources of a provider, although the sustainability of providers is a matter of key importance. Consideration is also given to such matters including the availability of human resources, appropriate expertise and experience, and the demand for programmes.

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[2] Under the 2012 Act that established QQI, all providers for which QQI has quality assurance oversight are 'relevant providers'.

SCENARIO 2: CONSORTIUM

This scenario depicts the coming together of a group of providers that are currently delivering programmes leading to QQI awards to pool their resources and responsibilities to create a **new consortium Provider**. The new consortium Provider will be a legal entity, assuming responsibility for the QA of the participant providers. The new consortium Provider deals directly with QQI in terms of re-engagement, programme validation, and (potentially) certification on behalf of the group. This scenario is likely to result in reduced re-engagement and validation fees; the participant providers may, nevertheless, be liable for the funding and maintenance of the new consortium Provider.

Members considered that there is little funding to support the development of such a sustainable consortium as it would require significant resources for a sector which is already financially stretched. Other concerns related to the legal status of the new consortium and the impact on the employment of individuals working for this new consortium Provider. In addition, members considered that accountability and liability of the new consortium Provider could pose major challenges. There were other concerns regarding how such a consortium would approach validation if each participant provider is offering different programmes. Conversely, the issue of participant providers offering the same programmes was seen as problematic in terms of funders viewing this as a duplication of services, lack of diversity of provision, and lack of learner-centred provision. Other concerns related to legacy providers offering shared programmes with ETBs and how this might be accommodated within a new consortium. Some members expressed concern that a consortium approach to re-engagement was a mechanism for QQI to 'weed out' and prevent smaller providers from re-engaging with QQI, as part of a wider national policy.

The executive reaffirmed that size is not the factor in determining capacity from a QQI perspective. QQI also confirmed that concerns that QQI may be acting as an agent for a wider national policy are unwarranted. QQI confirmed that it is only aware of national policy regarding the community and voluntary sector as it is represented in the FET Strategy. In addition, it was clarified that under the 2012 legislation all relevant providers must re-engage with QQI and this process is in no way particular to the community and voluntary sector. As such, QQI's primary responsibility and interest is in assuring quality provision of education and training across the further and higher education and training system.

SCENARIO 3: PROVIDER AND CENTRES

This scenario depicts the coming together of a group of providers, currently offering programmes leading to QQI awards, to pool their resources and responsibilities to appoint a **Lead Provider** from the participant providers. The Lead Provider will deal directly with QQI in terms of QA, re-engagement, programme validation, and (potentially) certification on behalf of its participants. This scenario is likely to result in reduced re-engagement and validation fees; the participant providers may, nevertheless, be liable for the funding and maintenance of the Lead Provider.

Again, similar concerns to those raised regarding scenario 2 were highlighted in terms of resource implications in developing and maintaining the Lead Provider. Loss of independence was also considered to be significant especially in the context of the types of programmes offered.

SCENARIO 4: NETWORK

This scenario depicts the coming together of a group of providers to share their resources and expertise in order to, for example, develop programmes. The providers will deal individually with QQI in terms of QA, re-engagement, programme validation, and certification. Providers will retain their autonomy whilst sharing expertise and good practice. Under this scenario each Provider will be liable for re-engagement and validation fees, and will also be responsible for its own QA.

Some members relayed positive experiences of such sharing of expertise. Members also expressed concerns, however, regarding the limitations that such a network might impose on the type of programmes developed and possible logistical implications.

SCENARIO 5: ETB *(Education & Training Board)*

This scenario depicts the coming together of one or more providers who enter into a relationship with an ETB Provider. The ETB assumes responsibility for the participant providers' QA and programme validation, and deals directly with QQI in terms of re-engagement, programme validation etc. The participant providers are not be liable for re-engagement or validation fees as the relationship is between the ETB and QQI.

Members raised issues regarding a loss of autonomy in terms of programmes, tutors and learners. There is also a concern among some members regarding the reluctance of some ETBs to work with the community & voluntary sector.

QQI commented that the ETBs are newly established and as such are still evolving. In addition, it acknowledged that the community & voluntary sector itself is a very diverse group undergoing significant change.

SUMMARY

The five proposed collaborative scenarios presented to the Working Group by QQI were intended as an aid to the deliberations and discussions regarding a provider's choice to collaborate or not with other providers/entities, for the purpose of re-engagement and ongoing delivery of education and training programmes awarded by QQI. QQI acknowledged that such collaborations can be challenging for any group of providers in terms of resources, legalities, funding, fees, and autonomy.

One of QQI's primary roles is the oversight of the quality assured programmes of further and higher education and training that it awards. It is important to note that under the 2012 legislation, <u>all</u> relevant providers must re-engage with QQI.

NEXT MEETING

The next and final meeting of the *Joint QQI/Community & Voluntary Sector Working Group* will be held on 14 December 2015. An agenda and further details will follow in due course. It was agreed that how learning could be shared from any early examples of collaboration, following the winding down of the working group, would be discussed at that meeting.

The meeting concluded at 1:00pm