QQI Community and Voluntary Sector Joint Working Group

Minutes

Minutes of the first meeting of the **QQI Community and Voluntary Sector Joint Working Group** held in QQI Offices, 26-27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2 on Tuesday, 3 March 2015 at 11:00 am.

PRESENT:
For the Community and Voluntary Sector
Sive Bresnihan, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
Deborah Brock, South County Dublin Partnership
Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link (AONTAS Executive Committee)
Maria Finn, CASP *(Clondalkin Addiction Support Programme)*
Gaye Kelly, An Cosán
Suzanne Kyle, Limerick Community Education Network (AONTAS CEN Steering Group)
Stuart Lawler, National Council for the Blind
Niamh O'Reilly, AONTAS (Head of Membership Services)
Sylvia Ryan, ICTU
Rachel Tucker, CTEC *(Community Training and Education Centre, Wexford)*
Nuala Whelan, Ballymun Job Centre (QA Network)

For QQI
Marie Gould, Provider Relations
Colette Harrison, Quality Assurance Services
Karena Maguire, Quality Assurance Services
Mary McEvoy, Provider Relations
Mary Sheridan, Provider Relations
Trish O'Brien, Provider Relations

Independent Facilitator
Peter Nolan

APOLOGIES
None

1. **WELCOME**

   Dr. Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive of QQI welcomed the members of the QQI Community and Voluntary Sector Joint Working Group, and thanked them for agreeing to participate in this important work. Padraig outlined the many relationships that QQI has with its diverse range of stakeholders, including national and local groups, representative bodies, providers and learners. He informed the group of QQI's current process of engaging with stakeholders at all levels, and especially those hard to reach sectors. Padraig welcomed the engagement by QQI of independent facilitator Peter Nolan and the extensive experience which Peter brings to the group. Peter will provide independent facilitation to the Joint Working Group and attend meetings and other preparatory/planning meetings with the QQI executive. Padraig acknowledged the key role that the community and voluntary sector would play in shaping and informing QQI policy, and also acknowledged the challenges that faced both QQI and the community and voluntary sector. He thanked all those present for their commitment to engage with QQI and assured the Joint Working Group of QQI's desire to progress collaboration and engagement between the community and voluntary sector.

2. **OPENING REMARKS: Working Group Facilitator**

   The Joint Working Group's facilitator Peter Nolan briefly outlined his background as part of the senior management team of Dublin Inner City Partnership and his professional experience informing the design and implementation of EU Lifelong Learning initiatives throughout the Member States. Peter outlined the rationale for his role within the group, which is to ensure a broader more inclusive process of collaboration and engagement, to help identify and address operational issues and to build a trust based relationship between the community and voluntary sector and QQI.

3. **INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS**

   Members of the Joint Working Group were invited to give a brief outline of their professional background and an overview of their expectations as members of the group.

4. **GROUP TASK 1**

   The members split into three separate groups to discuss the following topics:
   (a) My understanding of Quality….
   (b) My understanding of Assurance….

   Following discussion the following points were noted:

- Not all learning results in a quality experience.
- Standards must be fair and consistent.
- Learner feedback needs to be structured in a meaningful way so that a quality learning experience can be achieved.
- The context within which teaching and learning is delivered within the community and voluntary sector needs to be understood by QQI. This was viewed by members as of particular importance in terms of time-scale and resources regarding quality assurance processes, submissions and responses to QQI consultation papers, collaboration with other providers, and the payment of fees.
- QQI's understanding and definition of 'Quality' and 'Assurance' needs to be communicated clearly and with more detail
- QQI needs to provide clarity to the community and voluntary sector as to what it [QQI] requires from the sector in terms of re-engagement.
- The rationale for providers to undergo QQI's quality assurance process (again) needs to be communicated clearly by QQI.
- Discussions at meetings need to be structured. More succinct goals need to be stated with clear outcomes.

5. **GROUP TASK 2**

The three separate groups discussed the draft Terms of Reference of the Joint Working Group.

Following discussion the following points were noted:

- Inadequate time was afforded to discussing the draft Terms of Reference in any meaningful way.
- Members felt it is not the role of the Joint Working Group to determine the criteria by which the community and voluntary sector is identified. This is already available.
- QQI is unclear as to which providers are correctly classified as community and voluntary sector, as this has been self-selecting process to date and due to the complexity surrounding various funding initiatives.
- The Joint Working Group will help inform the correct categorisation of providers as community and voluntary.
- QQI's communications strategy with the community and voluntary sector needs to be improved and expanded upon.
- The legislation [2012 Act] dictates that QQI must approve the quality assurance arrangements of all providers following the publication of quality assurance guidelines

It was agreed that QQI would review the draft Terms of Reference with a view to incorporating the group's suggestions as appropriate, and would circulate to the members for discussion and agreement at the next meeting.

In addition, it was agreed that a document drafted by the AONTAS Community Education Network, outlining scenarios for QQI reengagement of community education legacy providers would be circulated to members.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

QQI has a comprehensive range of responsibilities for external quality assurance and qualifications in Irish further and higher education and training. Access by voluntary providers[1] to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is dependent upon a quality assurance (QA) approval process which some providers may or may not choose to engage in [this is what makes them voluntary providers]. For voluntary providers, the core of re-engagement is the approval and review of effectiveness of their QA procedures by QQI under Section 30 of the 2012 Act. It is important to note that while some providers did have a QA agreement in place with the former Awards Councils, the QA procedures and capacity of some legacy voluntary providers may not meet the new QQI QA criteria. Equally, some providers may decide not to reengage with QQI.

It was generally acknowledged by both the Working Group and QQI that there are challenges to be faced by all parties regarding the re-engagement process. The diversity of providers, operating contexts, learner types, capacity, fees and funding are factors that must be taken into account in developing practical policies. Both QQI and the Joint Working Group acknowledged that neither side has all the answers to all of the questions. It was agreed therefore that meetings need to be carefully structured so as to enable meaningful interaction with clearly defined goals and achievable outcomes.

Finally, it was agreed that as a fundamental basis for interaction between QQI and the community and voluntary sector, QQI would issue draft quality assurance guidelines and provide details of the reengagement process to the Joint Working Group in the first instance as part of the consultation process with the sector.

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[1] The Act distinguishes between 'obligatory' providers that are required to formally agree their quality assurance procedures with QQI and 'voluntary' providers who may or may not choose to engage directly with QQI.

7. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2015

It was envisaged that the Working Group may meet up to six times in 2015. QQI will issue a poll to members with a view to scheduling a date in March/April that suits the majority.

8. REVIEW AND CLOSE

Peter Nolan thanked the members for their very valuable contributions and acknowledged their honesty in expressing their expectations. Members of the Joint Working Group agreed that there was no quick-fix solution to the issues and challenges identified. Engagement within the Joint Working Group helps to highlight the concerns and issues which providers in the community and voluntary sector face and the Group has the potential to achieve clarity on these matters over the course of the year. The following actions were agreed:

- Draft revised Terms of Reference to be amended and re- issued before next meeting.
- AONTAS CEN Paper to be circulated before the next meeting
- Draft QQI QA guidelines to be issued to the Joint Working Group
- QQI to issue a poll for scheduling next meeting of the Joint Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 13:00pm.