

POLICIES AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE (PSC)
Friday 24 February 2017 – 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Denzille Lane, Dublin

Present: James Moore - Board Member and Committee Chair
Aidan Mulkeen - National Expert
Anne Marie Ryan - National Expert
Barbara Kelly - Director of Qualifications, QQI
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Roisin Sweeney – Head of Awards Standards, QQI

Conference Call: Ewart Keep - International Expert
Lucien Bollaert - International Expert

In attendance: Paul Brady - QQI Secretary
Ray O’Neill – Head of ICT (item 3.3)
John O’Connor – Qualifications and Skills Policy (item 4.1)

Apologies: Ann Louise Gilligan – Board Member
Joanne Harmon – Board Member
Catherine MacEnri – National Expert

In opening the meeting, the Chair welcomed the members.

0. Matters Arising

Chairperson report on general activities of interest to the PSC.

- 0.1 Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 from Minister of Education and skills setting out the department’s main goals and the key challenges and opportunities in its operating environment. (A copy will be circulated to the committee)
- 0.2 QQI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with SOLAS. (A copy will be circulated to the committee)
- 0.3 The Department of Education and Skills forwarded a copy of an independent report containing an organisational review of QQI. The Board and the executive are in discussions on the report

1 Minutes of Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) of 9th December 2016 (PSC/M12)

The Minutes of the Meetings of 9th December 2016 were APPROVED and signed by the Chair.

2. Matters Arising from Minutes

6.1 Focus Review of Provider QA Procedures

It was noted that arising from the type and volume of feedback received on these procedures, specifically in relation to the understanding of 'focused' review versus 'cyclical' review, it has been determined that further discussion is needed with stakeholders.

6.2.3 QA Topic Specific Guidelines on Blended Learning

Arising from further feedback received on these, the final publication of these guidelines has been held until a later stage.

3. Standards

3.1 Update on Awards Standards Review Strategy

Explanatory Memorandum

The Committee noted the review of QQI award Standards and the publication of 'Approach and Schedule Discussion Paper', which sets out a proposed approach to the review of QQI award standards across Further and Higher Education and Training. Consultation on the paper began in December 2016 and will remain open to providers, stakeholders and other interested parties until the end of March. The document is on the QQI website and there is the option to provide feedback through a Survey Monkey set of questions. Several workshops will facilitate consideration of the approach and provide an opportunity for providers, stakeholders and other interested parties to express their views and provide feedback. Some initial feedback from stakeholders includes a perceived tension between awards for employment purposes versus personal development. Members discussed the broad issues around this including experiences in Belgium and the United Kingdom. It was also noted that the review strategy gives an indication of the type and volume of standards related activity that will come back to the Committee over the next 3 years.

3.2 Update on National Skills Strategy

The members noted the paper on the National Skills Strategy (NSS) to 2025. The aims and actions of the Strategy (published in January 2016) were discussed which included the establishment of a National Skills Council, the development of the Regional Skills Fora and the Action Plan to expand the number of Apprenticeships and Traineeships in Ireland in the period 2016-2020. QQI has already completed actions assigned to it i.e. development of QA guidelines for apprenticeships.

The members noted that the Department of Education and Skills has established an internal unit to support implementation of the National Skills Strategy. It was also noted that provision for lifelong learning is included in the Strategy and discussion took place on how this is currently measured. Overall, QQI can support the National Skills Strategy through development and review of award standards and provision of data through QQI Infographics (<http://infographics.qqi.ie/>) and Qualifax (www.qualifax.ie).

3.3 Presentation of Statistics and Infographics

The members were given a demonstration of QQI Infographics. QQI has extended the QSearch service with the introduction of a visual representation of the awards data. QQI Infographics provides a visual representation of awards data that can easily be filtered on a variety of variables including year, gender, age-band, county, field of learning, award-type, and award level. It shows awards made by QQI, not institutions with delegated authority (DA) nor designated awarding bodies (DABs). The data at Levels 6-10 is largely the private HE providers. There have been discussions with the HEA on data sharing and this may progress. The members welcomed the development of Infographics and the user friendly, visual aspect to it.

4. Policy Development

4.1 Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ (interim findings)

- Explanatory Memorandum
- Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ (interim findings)
- Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ (Survey Questions)

The QQI Strategy Statement 2016-2018 commits to completing a review of the application and effects of the NFQ. In December 2016 QQI published a report titled '*National Qualifications Frameworks – Reflections and Trajectories*'. to inform debate about the possibilities and limitations of qualifications frameworks as tools for reform. A research activity was commissioned to look at the policy impact assessment of the NFQ and the Committee noted the draft interim report provided by Indecon International Economic Consultants. A survey was designed and implemented online from 12th December 2016 to 31st January 2017. The interim findings provide rich data on the responses received. The members noted the high level of participation with 781 responses from 3,823 individuals contacted. There was some discussion on the percent of responses for 'Neither Agree nor disagree' as this may indicate that some participants 'did not know' rather than agreed or disagreed with the question posed and that the level of overall awareness may need further enquiry. It was also noted that employer responses were low and they are a key stakeholder group. The members noted the considerable effort required to produce the Interim report and the volume of data included on phase one of the Indecon impact study. The next phase of the policy impact assessment is to undertake bilateral meetings with stakeholders and this will be qualitative in format and content. It is

expected that the output of the policy impact assessment will inform the agenda for QQI in coming years as to what to look at and prioritise.

4.2 Update on QQI's international activity

The members were updated on the legal and policy basis of QQI's international engagements, the principle modes of engagement and the basis on which QQI currently prioritises its engagements. QQI is building on the strong network of connections, established by its predecessor bodies, providing a deep expertise in policy related to its key functions. The members noted the importance of the European Qualification Framework in comparing individual national qualification systems. The members were provided with an update on Bologna Process, International Quality Assurance Organisations, European initiatives for recognition and mobility, Bilateral relations with the United Kingdom and prioritisation of countries/ regions for bilateral engagement including QQI's role in English Language education through its operation of ACELS.

5. Green Papers

No Business

6. White Papers

There were no White Papers for consideration

7. Any Other Business

The Chair noted that this is the final meeting for Aidan Mulkeen, National Expert, who will step down from the Committee on 19 March 2017. The Chair, on behalf of QQI and the members of the Committee, thanked Aidan for his important input into the work of the Committee to date and wished him the very best for the future.

Next meeting will take place on 28 April 2017 in QQI, Denzille Lane, Dublin2.