



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for **Reviewers and Evaluators**

[www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie)

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The intended audience for this document comprises reviewers and evaluators acting on behalf of QQI in its quality assurance processes. QQI<sup>1</sup> is privileged to have the opportunity to work with a range of external individuals, who – as experts in their areas – participate as reviewers/evaluators in QQI's quality assurance processes.

Unless otherwise specified, QQI-appointed reviewers and evaluators are expected to review and evaluate all documentation that is disseminated to them by QQI, discuss their impressions with their fellow reviewers/evaluators and, based on their evaluations and discussions, arrive at a recommendation for decision by QQI as to the outcome of the review/evaluation process.

The work of reviewers/evaluators and the panels they comprise informs, for example, QQI's determinations of applications for the validation of programmes of education and training and its reviews of the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures.

Reviewers/evaluators come from diverse backgrounds, both national and international, including, but not limited to: learners (e.g. students and apprentices), employers, staff members of providers of programmes of education and training, professional regulators, and professional practitioners.

**This document is intended for persons engaged by QQI for the:**

- evaluation of new provider quality assurance procedures (initial access);
- evaluation of existing provider quality assurance procedures for the purpose of approval (reengagement);
- validation or revalidation of a taught programme of education and training;
- validation or revalidation of a research degree programme;
- review (standard or focussed) of validation;
- cyclical review of an institution of higher education or a provider of further education and training;
- focussed review of the implementation and effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures;
- evaluation of a request for delegated authority to make awards;
- review of delegated authority;
- monitoring the implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures;
- review of procedures for access, transfer and progression; or
- any other kind of quality related evaluation or review that QQI may undertake.

QQI quality assurance processes apply in the contexts of further education and training, higher education (both of which categories include apprenticeship programmes) and English language education.

QQI's quality assurance processes always involve a provider or providers of programmes of education and training (shortened to provider or providers). The scope of processes varies. An example of a narrow angle of view is the evaluation of an application by the provider to QQI for the validation of one of its programmes. An example of a broad angle of view is the cyclical review by QQI of the effectiveness of a provider's quality assurance (QA) procedures.

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

It is essential that QQI, the public, and the education and training community can be confident that reviews and evaluations are conducted by competent persons who can offer an objective and informed opinion on the quality of education and training, research and related services, activities and processes being evaluated or reviewed and who undertake their task professionally.

QQI's reviewers/evaluators are carefully selected. The principal criteria for their selection are competence (having the expertise necessary to perform the relevant function) and independence (from the provider concerned). QQI's reviewers/evaluators are supported by appropriate training/briefing (see 3.11 below).

The remainder of this document elaborates on how QQI establishes that a reviewer or evaluator is competent and independent and sets down a code of conduct for reviewers and evaluators.

## 2 KEY POINTS – ENGAGEMENT OF REVIEWERS/EVALUATORS

The following highlights some key points to take from this document:

- To be engaged as a reviewer or evaluator you need to be competent to perform the task and independent of the provider concerned.
  - You are obliged to declare any interests that might be perceived to conflict with the independence and integrity of the QQI process. (See Appendix A, Section 2, for examples of relationships that may constitute a conflict of interest).
  - Your declaration (or the fact that you made no declaration, if applicable) may be published by QQI.
  - You should not accept an engagement if you feel that you lack the expertise necessary to perform your function.
  - You are obliged to notify QQI if you discover, following engagement, that you lack the expertise necessary to perform your function.
  - You must confirm that you have read and understood this document in advance of your engagement as a reviewer/evaluator for QQI.
- You must comply in full with your obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). QQI will ensure that personal data is not collected unnecessarily for the purposes of its review/evaluation processes. In the event that you need to request additional information from a provider or institution at a site visit, you must confirm with the provider that any documentation provided is GDPR-compliant.
- You are expected to act with integrity, diligence, objectivity, and professionalism and to respect diversity.
- Your contact at all times during the process will be a designated QQI contact. With the exception of the site visit(s), you should not at any time communicate or discuss any aspects of outcomes of the review directly with the provider.

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- Unless otherwise agreed with QQI, you are responsible for making your own transport arrangements, as well as for providing your own means of recording your impressions during the desk review in advance of and during the site visit, and when compiling the resulting report (e.g. laptop) and means of communication (e.g. mobile phone). QQI will provide you with the documentation for evaluation and appropriate report template, expenses claim form, fee claim form (where applicable), and any other documentation necessary to discharge your duties.
- The output of each review or evaluation in which you participate is a written report contributed to by you and approved through QQI's governance processes.
  - QQI will publish approved reports and reviewers are named in reports to which they contributed.
  - Other than the published report the content of the review/evaluation is confidential to the reviewers/evaluators and QQI. (See 3.2 for further details of the confidentiality requirements with which reviewers and evaluators are expected to comply.)
- If you become aware of any misconduct concerning the review or evaluation you are obliged to report this in writing to QQI without delay. (See 3.7 for further details.)
- The remainder of this document elaborates on the above points.

## 2.1 COMPETENCE

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QQI will exercise its judgment as to the competences required of a reviewer or evaluator considering the intended role and responsibility (in the context of a group, where applicable) and the relevant QQI standards, guidelines, codes, criteria and policies. Different QQI quality assurance processes have different competence needs.

Further details are provided in Appendix A.

## 2.2 INDEPENDENCE: AVOIDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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Reviewers and evaluators must act with strict impartiality and objectivity.

Stakeholders must have confidence that QQI reviews and evaluations are objectively valid and reliable. It is in providers' interest, and that of the public, that reviews and evaluations are conducted transparently by persons who are independent of the provider concerned (i.e. free of conflicting interests).

QQI has a firm policy of not appointing persons in any case where there is any foreseen possibility of (real or apparent) conflict between that person's interests and the independence and integrity of the process. Even the appearance of conflict of interest, where none exists, can damage the credibility of the person selected and the review/evaluation process as a whole.

Prospective reviewers/evaluators are expected to confirm in advance of their engagement that there is no conflict of interest in respect of their participation in the process in question.

Further details are provided in Appendix A, Section 2.

## 3 GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

### 3.1 VALUES

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QQI's values are as follows:

- We believe we have a **shared responsibility** with others to ensure confidence in and continuous improvement of the quality of education and training.
- We believe that the attainment of our goals and objectives is best pursued collaboratively and constructively with our diverse set of partners and providers. We value **collaborative effort** for mutual benefit.
- We are committed to working with **objectivity and transparency**. This underpins our decision-making and our policies, procedures and activities. These are evidence-based, informed by national and international good practice, and conducted in a manner which is openly transparent and engenders trust.
- We are committed to making a difference to our partners, providers and our people. We value **achievement and impact** - the successful pursuit of goals and objectives which culminate in impacting positively and substantively on our operating environment.
- We are committed to **learning and innovation** in our organisation to continuously improve our services.

QQI expects reviewers and evaluators to carry out their responsibilities in the spirit of these values. QQI expects that all reviewers and evaluators will be honest, objective, learner-centred, professional, courteous, respectful, conscientious, and diligent in the performance of their functions.

Reviewers/evaluators must not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, civil or family status, sexual orientation, or membership of the travelling community, in any of their activities or dealings.

### 3.2 CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD RETENTION

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Reviewers and evaluators involved in reviews or evaluations are bound by strict confidentiality. The report that is published by QQI is owned by QQI and is the sole public outcome of such processes.

Reviewers and evaluators are required to safeguard and preserve the confidentiality of any information obtained while carrying out the role and to share it only with QQI for the purposes of the review or evaluation. This obligation shall continue indefinitely. When the process has been finalised, the information (and any copies made) must be destroyed or returned to QQI for destruction.

Materials distributed to reviewers or evaluators are provided for review/evaluation purposes only and must not be distributed or used for other purposes. This applies equally to any copies made for review/evaluation or back-up purposes. Reviewers/evaluators must take all necessary precautions to ensure that soft or hard copies of documentation supplied do not accidentally or unintentionally become available to others (such as when using public transport or using shared devices).

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Confidentiality applies to all information without exception. The stakes are particularly high for personal information, valuable intellectual property and financial data that are not in the public domain. Confidential information should be retained no longer than necessary. Different QQI processes may have additional confidentiality and retention requirements beyond this. Reviewers/evaluators must confirm to QQI destruction of any data held.

Sensitive information should not be transmitted over unsecure channels (e.g. if sending sensitive text, reviewers and evaluators must use the secure SharePoint files sharing site provided by QQI): Reviewers/evaluators should advise their QQI contact of any technical issues they experience with SharePoint to ensure that these are resolved expediently...

Reviewers and evaluators may discuss the review/evaluation only with representatives of QQI and – where applicable – with other reviewers/evaluators and representatives of providers. If the need arises, information may be disclosed to persons other than those outlined above if QQI has given written permission to do so. The QQI report is the only proper channel for the publication of information about the review or evaluation.

## 3.3 DATA PROTECTION

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In carrying out their role, reviewers and evaluators may handle personal data, which is any information relating to an identified or identifiable person. This could be information about learners, staff or other parties. In handling such data, evaluators and reviewers are obliged to comply in full with the General Data Protection Regulation, and to ensure that:

- only personal data necessary for the review or evaluation are collected;
- the consent of the data subject has been obtained;
- the information is kept secure and only used for the purpose of the review or evaluation;
- it is not shared, either deliberately or accidentally, with third parties; and
- it is deleted once the review or evaluation has been completed.

As set out above, QQI will ensure that personal data is not collected unnecessarily for the purposes of its review/evaluation processes. In the event that reviewers/evaluators need to request additional information from a provider at a site visit, they must stipulate to the provider that no personal data be included in any documents requested, or that any personal data be redacted from the documents.

In cases where the information for review/evaluation does contain personal data, any such data must be protected by keeping it secure and using it only for the purpose for which it was collected. Furthermore, such data must be deleted as soon as it is no longer necessary.

Once information that includes any personal data has been collected from a provider, the reviewer or evaluator should ensure that the files and documents containing the personal data are stored securely, for example on laptops that are subject to encryption and password-protected, or in cloud storage that complies with the GDPR. As set out above, files containing personal data should not be sent by email. Hard copies of files should be stored and transported securely. Data should be treated with absolute confidence.

In the event of a data breach, the reviewer or evaluator must report the breach to the QQI Data Protection Officer immediately (see Appendix B for a list of QQI contact details) and must comply with all directions from the Data Protection Officer to address, mitigate and remedy the breach.

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On completion of a review or evaluation, reviewers and evaluators are required to return all information obtained during that review or evaluation to QQI, including any information held in hard copy. A reviewer or evaluator may, alternatively, be requested to shred it or to return it to a provider. (In such cases, the reviewer/evaluator must confirm to their QQI contact person that they have done so.) Reviewers and evaluators must at the same time also delete all existing copies of information obtained for the purposes of that review or evaluation, specifically personal data, from all devices and email systems.

Given the importance of compliance with GDPR, reviewers and evaluators are required to allow QQI to monitor and audit GDPR compliance, for example to make available on request all information necessary to demonstrate their compliance with their obligations under Article 28 of the GDPR, and to allow for GDPR audits by QQI or by another auditor mandated by QQI.

In order to ensure that QQI and the reviewer/evaluator comply with their obligations under the GDPR, it is a condition of engagement as a reviewer/evaluator on a specific review or evaluation that a GDPR Controller/Processor Agreement governing that review or evaluation is entered into. This form is available separately from QQI.

## 3.4 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

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QQI is subject to Freedom of Information legislation, and this extends to any records of the process taken by reviewers and evaluators.

Reviewers and evaluators are required to return any relevant notes to QQI on completion of the review/evaluation process in which they were involved; alternatively, reviewers/evaluators must destroy any relevant notes and records themselves and advise their QQI contact that they have done so.

## 3.5 ACCOUNTABILITY

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Reviewers and evaluators are accountable to QQI for their conduct in the context of a review or evaluation. QQI reserves the right to disengage reviewers/evaluators if necessary.

## 3.6 WITHDRAWAL OF A REVIEWER OR EVALUATOR FROM A REVIEW OR EVALUATION

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Reviewers and evaluators will frequently be involved in processes that have high stakes for providers. If a reviewer/evaluator withdraws from a review/evaluation process without notice after they have been confirmed by QQI, the process can be compromised and may have to be delayed at significant cost and inconvenience to both the provider and to QQI. It is important therefore that the reviewer/evaluator in question informs their QQI contact person as soon as the prospect of having to withdraw arises. In such cases, where feasible, QQI will endeavour to find a person with a similar background and expertise to take the place of the reviewer/evaluator who has withdrawn from the process.



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## 3.7 REPORTING MISCONDUCT

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If a reviewer/evaluator is offered a gift, benefit, reward or undue hospitality from the organisation where the review/evaluation is being conducted this should be disclosed in writing to QQI without delay. If such an offer is made within three years of the conclusion of the process, this should also be disclosed to QQI through the relevant QQI contact person.

If a reviewer/evaluator feels that the interests of another reviewer/evaluator conflict with those of the QQI process they should bring this to QQI's attention. (See Appendix A, Section 2, for more information on conflicts of interest.)

If a reviewer/evaluator observes any kind of misconduct (by any party) in the context of the review or evaluation they should alert QQI as soon as is practicable.

If the misconduct involves a member or members of QQI staff, it should be brought to the attention of QQI's Chief Executive (see Appendix B for a list of QQI contact details).

## 3.8 FEES

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QQI notes with gratitude that many reviewers and evaluators work on a pro bono basis. There are processes for which reviewers and evaluators may receive remuneration; the rate of remuneration depends on the process. Details are available separately from QQI.

## 3.9 TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE CLAIMS

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Reviewers and evaluators are required to adhere strictly to QQI regulations concerning claims for reimbursement (or partial reimbursement as applicable) of travel and subsistence expenses and to make optimal economic use of resources. Reimbursement of expenses is never automatic, and reviewers and evaluators must obtain explicit QQI approval in advance as required. Details are available separately from QQI.

## 3.10 RESOLVING PROBLEMS AND CONTACTING QQI

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As above, in the event of a data breach, the reviewer/evaluator should contact QQI's Data Protection Officer immediately (see Appendix B for a list of QQI contact details).

### **Where a reviewer or evaluator encounters a problem, they should aim to solve it as follows:**

If a reviewer or evaluator is acting on a panel and has a concern relating to its operation, they should, in the first instance, speak with the panel's chairperson explaining the matter of concern and seeking a resolution. Should the chairperson be unable or unwilling to solve the problem, or if the concern relates to the chairperson, the reviewer or evaluator should raise the matter with their QQI contact person or the relevant QQI Head of Function (reviewers and evaluators will be informed of who this is when engaged), or if unavailable, QQI's Director of Quality Assurance.

Reviewers and evaluators who are not panel members (e.g. report writers) should first raise the matter with their QQI contact person or the relevant QQI Head of Function, or if unavailable, QQI's Director of Quality Assurance.

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If, having taken the steps above, the matter cannot be resolved, the reviewer or evaluator should bring the matter to the attention of QQI's Chief Executive (see Appendix B for a list of QQI contact details). Where there is no specific procedure to deal with the issue in question, each incident will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

When reporting any other issues to QQI in writing, the reviewer or evaluator should send an email to their QQI contact person or the relevant Head of Function.

## 3.11 TRAINING FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

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QQI has a policy of providing induction for all panel members. Training events will be organised from time to time. Prospective reviewers and evaluators may be required to undertake training before they act. In general, QQI does not remunerate or reimburse expenses to evaluators or reviewers for any training in which they participate; however, there are cases where expenses for travel and subsistence may be reimbursed. Details are available separately from QQI.

Panel members are encouraged to discuss their learning needs with QQI. They will be briefed on their role and on the context within which they will be operating.

## 3.12 PROCESS-SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

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QQI conducts multiple kinds of reviews and evaluations. The precise responsibilities of a reviewer or evaluator are process specific. Typically, these will be set out in the relevant QQI policy document (or terms of reference or such like) provided to the reviewer or evaluator when engaged.

Reviewers/evaluators will receive a process-specific letter of engagement /deployment letter (this may be sent electronically).

## 4 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

### 4.1 GENERAL

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Reviewers and evaluators are expected to:

- Accept an engagement only if competent and free of interests that conflict, or may be perceived to conflict, with the independence and integrity of the process. If they discover that their interests conflict with the process, or that they don't have the required expertise, they are required to notify QQI in writing (and the panel chairperson if applicable) without delay so that remedial action can be taken.
- Invest time in preparation. Generally, review and evaluation involve the perusal of (i) documentation prepared by the provider concerned and (ii) QQI documentation. Reviewers and evaluators are expected to read and critically assess all documentation provided, unless instructed to focus only on part of it.
  - Participate in all relevant activities.
  - Question findings and evidence and try to cross-check or corroborate.
  - Conduct themselves professionally and competently always.
  - Be tolerant and courteous in engagements with others.
  - Respect the diverse cultures and backgrounds of others (see above, 3.1).
  - Possess the requisite competence in the English language to be able to discharge their duties.

### 4.2 PANELS

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Each review or evaluation is essentially unique and requires a unique mix of competences. Frequently this will require the use of a group of reviewers/evaluators, typically referred to as a panel or a team ('panel' hereafter for ease of reference). Panel size will vary, depending on the review or evaluation process. Each reviewer or evaluator in a panel may be assigned a specialised function within the panel. No panel member is expected to have all the competences required of the panel. Examples of the types of roles that might be involved in various reviews/evaluations are included below (see 4.2.1 – 4.2.5). Note that different processes will require different panel compositions.

QQI aims to ensure that there is at least 40% of each gender represented on any panel. While every effort will be made to achieve appropriate gender balance in the composition of panels, achieving an appropriate blend of expertise is the primary consideration. In higher education (and all cyclical reviews), panels will also generally include a learner (but not one enrolled by the provider concerned; see 4.2.4). Where appropriate, QQI will also include representatives from the world of work (see employer/sectoral representative; 4.2.5).

Panels operate as a team under the leadership of a chairperson. A collegial environment is necessary for the proper functioning of the panel. Panel members may contribute to any aspect or dimension of the dialogue that may occur during the review or evaluation. When doing so, it is important that panel members employed by, or enrolled with, other providers recognise that the provider being reviewed/evaluated may employ approaches other than those that are used in the panel members' own institution and that such approaches may be equally valid.

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## 4.2.1 All Panel Members

All panel members' functions include

- Reporting preliminary findings and initial impressions of the documentation submitted by the provider to the chairperson in advance of the panel meeting and site visit.
- Asking questions during meetings in a fair, constructive manner while remaining independently critical.
- Formulating clear questions.
- Resolving any disagreements with other panel members during private meetings of the panel and avoiding debating with other panel members during meetings with the provider.
- Contributing, after the site visit, to the production of the report, and to the panel's response to the provider's response to the report. In general, this requires panel members to be contactable by email and telephone during an agreed period and to respond promptly when requested.

For information on the general competences required of panel members, see Appendix A, 1.1.

## 4.2.2 Panel Chairperson

The panel chairperson is a member of the panel. Their role is to provide tactical leadership and to ensure that the work of the panel is conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner, and in compliance with QQI requirements (as expressed by its policies, criteria, codes, standards, guidelines, values and procedures).

The panel chairperson's functions include

- Briefing the panel on the objectives and method of, and context for, the review or evaluation.
- Leading the conduct of the review or evaluation and ensuring that proceedings remain focussed in line with the agreed schedule/timeframe.
- Coordinating the work of reviewers and evaluators (so that, for example, individuals' leading lines of enquiry are identified in advance of meetings with the provider concerned).
- Ensuring that meetings are conducted efficiently and effectively.
- Ensuring impartiality and propriety.
- Diffusing disagreement and conflict when it arises.
- Establishing a positive dynamic among the panel and in engagements between the panel and the provider. This includes ensuring that interactions are constructive and non-adversarial; that the views of all participants are valued and considered; and fostering open exchanges of opinions.
- Politely curtailing evasive or circuitous responses.
- Ensuring that any questions asked or information requested of a provider are clear and sufficiently focussed.
- Summarising, at the end of each meeting, the main topics covered in the discussion to ensure that all necessary matters have been addressed.
- Ensuring that the review or evaluation tasks are completed and that there are no unresolved matters before the end of the process.
- Facilitating the emergence of evidence-based panel decisions (ideally based on consensus).
- Contributing to and overseeing the production of the panel report (which may include writing the report).
- Representing the panel views to QQI (e.g. endorsing the panel report (or any amendments or addendums) on behalf of the panel).
- Ensure that the panel report is produced within a reasonable timeline, which will be agreed in advance with QQI.

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- Ensure that all responses by the panel of reviewers/evaluators to QQI and to the provider are issued promptly and within a reasonable timeline, which will be agreed in advance with QQI.

The panel chairperson must always exercise their authority in a fair and responsible manner. For information on the competences required of panel chairpersons, see Appendix A, 1.5.

## 4.2.3 Report Writer

The report writer's role is to capture the panel's deliberations and decisions during the proceedings and help express them clearly and accurately in the panel report. It is vital that the report writer ensures that sufficient evidence is provided in the report to support the panel's recommendation.

The report writer will normally be a member of the panel. If they are not a panel member, they are still subject to the same confidentiality and independence requirements that apply to reviewers and evaluators; however, they should not ask questions of the provider at the site visit, or seek to influence the panel's decision-making. Any individual employed by, or otherwise connected with, the provider concerned in a review/evaluation may not be a report writer.

The role of the report writer includes

- Reflecting the views of the panel in the report along with evidence supporting those views.
- Articulating the findings, promptly, fairly and comprehensively in a clear, straightforward and easily understood manner that accords with QQI's requirements.
- Drafting the report in consultation with the panel members and under the direction of the panel chairperson within a reasonable timeline, which will be agreed in advance with QQI.

For information on the competences required of the report writer, see Appendix A, 1.6. In cyclical review processes, the coordinating reviewer fulfills a similar role to the report writer. For more details on the role of the coordinating reviewer, refer to the handbook for the process in question.

## 4.2.4 Learner

Where the panel includes a learner, they are a full panel member and should adhere to the functions set out for all panel members at 4.2.1. However, the learner has a number of additional functions on the panel:

- Reviewing and evaluating documentation from a learner perspective.
- Questioning the provider from a learner perspective.
- Ensuring that the learner voice forms an integral part of the review or evaluation.

## 4.2.5 Employer/Sectoral Representative

The employer representative must adhere to the functions set out for all panel members at 4.2.1, in addition to the following:

- Reviewing and evaluating documentation from an employer/sectoral perspective.
- Questioning the provider from an employer/sectoral perspective.
- Ensuring that the employer/sectoral voice forms an integral part of the review or evaluation.

## 4.2.6 Evidence

The rationale for group decisions must be stated in the report and they must be based on positive evidence. It is not sufficient to accept a proposition on the basis that there is no evidence to the contrary. Assumptions are generally unwarranted. Where there is uncertainty the group must do its best to resolve it before reaching its decision.

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## 4.2.7 Findings

Where relevant, panels' findings should be based on criteria. It is preferred that findings are based on the consensus of the panel, but where this is not possible a majority decision may be reported along with an outline of the dissenting views.

## 4.2.8 Observers of Reviews and Evaluations

Subject to the agreement of QQI, the organisation under review or evaluation, and (where appropriate) the panel chairperson, an observer may attend a review or evaluation process. A prospective observer must provide a rationale for attending and declare any relevant interests to QQI in writing. There is no fee or travel/subsistence reimbursement payable to observers.

Observers have no input in the review or evaluation and do not contribute to panel discussions and deliberations, nor do they participate in the decision-making process. The extent of their attendance may vary. In some instances, it may be appropriate that observers attend the entire process. The extent of their involvement may be modified by QQI during a review or evaluation.

Observers are subject to the same confidentiality and conflict-of-interest requirements that apply to reviewers and evaluators. They must also commit to ensuring that any observations made, and any materials accessed, as part of the process will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be used outside the process without the written consent of QQI, the panel chairperson and the provider.

## 4.2.9 Site Visit

Reviews and evaluations always involve the perusal of documentation (written material) and frequently involve a 'site visit'. The site visit is primarily an opportunity for the reviewers or evaluators to meet people who can field questions about the programme or provider under review or evaluation (thereby resolving any uncertainties from the documentation). It also provides an opportunity for members of the review or evaluation panel to work together as a team in a face-to-face setting.

It is expected that a reviewer or evaluator will arrive at the site visit with a list of specific topics that they would like to pursue through questioning, having read all the relevant documentation thoroughly. It is never acceptable for them to arrive at the site visit without having read the documentation.

## 4.2.10 Reporting

QQI reviews and evaluations culminate in the production of a report that is published and includes the names, roles and affiliations of reviewers/evaluators, as well as any statements of interest that they have declared. Lists of persons who have participated as reviewers/evaluators in QQI processes may be published in QQI's annual reports.

If the review or evaluation involves a site visit, the report will normally be drafted by the panel of reviewers or evaluators subsequent to the site visit. The chair of the panel is responsible for finalising the reporting timeline.

Reviewers and evaluators must be contactable by the panel chair and secretary, and by QQI, while the report is being drafted. Generally, the provider concerned will have an opportunity to correct any factual inaccuracies in the report and formally respond to the report, and reviewers and evaluators will need to be available to respond in turn.

## 5 BECOMING A REVIEWER OR EVALUATOR

### 5.1 INITIAL APPROACH TO A PROSPECTIVE REVIEWER OR EVALUATOR

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Some reviewers and evaluators are selected through open calls, others are identified through QQI searches or through recommendations by third parties. QQI communicates with large numbers of prospective reviewers and evaluators.

Before a reviewer or evaluator is engaged to undertake each task QQI must satisfy itself that they are well matched to that task. This may require that QQI share some information about the relevant provider or programme to enable the prospective reviewer or evaluator to determine whether they have both the necessary competence and independence. Any such disclosures by QQI are limited to what QQI considers necessary to ensure a rigorous and robust review/evaluation. As outlined at 3.2, all disclosures by QQI to reviewers/evaluators are strictly confidential to the person concerned.

**Prospective reviewers/evaluators must undertake in writing to keep the disclosed information confidential before receiving it.**

### 5.2 NON-TRANSFERABILITY, PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

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Typically, reviewers and evaluators are individuals. When QQI engages an individual as a reviewer or evaluator the engagement is strictly non-transferrable, and all communications are private and confidential to the person concerned.

Where QQI engages a company to undertake a review or evaluation function this will be made explicit in writing (i.e. there will be a contractual agreement between QQI and the company in question). It must never be assumed.

### 5.3 REGISTER OF EXPERTS

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Persons who act as a reviewer or evaluator (and some who have expressed an interest) are invited to be included in the QQI Register of Experts. The Register enables QQI to allocate reviewers and evaluators to processes that match their particular experience and expertise. At present, the Register is not accessible by the general public.

It is important to note that inclusion on the Register, or selection for a particular review, does not guarantee selection to conduct a further review or an evaluation.

QQI occasionally contacts persons included in the Register to check the accuracy of data in the Register. Reviewers/evaluators are also entitled to access and – where applicable – amend any personal data retained in respect of them by QQI. This can be done by contacting QQI at [QQIQA@qqi.ie](mailto:QQIQA@qqi.ie). Persons may elect to be removed from the Register at any time. A record will be removed in full if the reviewer/evaluator concerned has requested that their details be removed from the Register, and/or if the reviewer/evaluator no longer satisfies QQI criteria for inclusion in the Register

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

All communications between reviewers/evaluators and QQI are private and confidential to QQI but records may be subject to requests to QQI under the Freedom of Information legislation. All information provided by prospective reviewers/evaluators in the completed record will be retained by QQI. This information is only used for the purposes of:

- assigning reviewers and evaluators to suitable panels for
  - validation-related processes including programme review and revalidation, and initial access to validation,
  - reengagement and approval of quality assurance procedures,
  - evaluations and reviews in respect of delegated authority
- cyclical review of an institution of higher education or a provider of further education and training or contacting reviewers/evaluators in connection with these processes,
- contacting reviewers/evaluators in connection with the updating of the Register;
- monitoring and analysing the profiles of panels (e.g. panel makeup in terms of gender balance, reviewer evaluator background, and so on) and, for example, the frequency of use of individual reviewers/evaluators;
- contacting reviewers and evaluators in relation to QQI process evaluation; and
- contacting reviewers and evaluators in relation to external reviews of QQI activities.

Only information required for the aforementioned purposes is collected. QQI's Expert Details Form is available separately from QQI.

## REFERENCE

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This code of conduct draws from:

"ENQA Code of Conduct for reviewers"<sup>2</sup>, published online, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), (retrieved March 2020).

"A Competency Framework for Governance. The knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in maintained schools, academies and multi-academy trusts"<sup>3</sup>, Department for Education, Manchester, England, DFE-00021-2017, January 2017

"Competency Model for Program Evaluators"<sup>4</sup> published online, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET), (retrieved March 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ENQA-Agency-Reviews\\_Code-of-Conduct.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ENQA-Agency-Reviews_Code-of-Conduct.pdf) retrieved 21/07/2017

<sup>3</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/583733/Competency\\_framework\\_for\\_governance\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583733/Competency_framework_for_governance_.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.abet.org/competency-model-for-program-evaluators/> retrieved 25/07/2017



## APPENDIX A

# REVIEWER COMPETENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

## 1 COMPETENCE

In general, competence may be demonstrated through the following:

- Current occupation.
- Curriculum vitae.
- Professional history or track record.
- Track record as a reviewer or evaluator if applicable.
- Experience: normally (learners excepted) a person should be in a relevant role for at least three years to have sufficient experience in that role for the purposes of participating as a reviewer or evaluator. Recent experience in a relevant area is generally also necessary—distant experience may not be sufficient to meet requirements.
- Publications.
- Reputation (e.g. citations).

QQI will typically collect and retain this kind of information about reviewers and evaluators.

### 1.1 GENERAL COMPETENCES

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The following core competences are required by all reviewers and evaluators without exception :

- Effective at communicating.
- Interpersonally skilled.
- Team-oriented.
- Professional.
- Technically current.

The following competences are relevant to many kinds of activities. A reviewer or evaluator is likely to have competences (including comprehensive knowledge) in at least one of the following general areas:

- Leadership in the provision of education and training services.
- Teaching, learning and assessment theories and practice.
- Targeting and providing learner supports (e.g. for students with disabilities and others who may have special educational or training needs).
- Supporting international students (e.g. English language education, pastoral care).
- Programme (i.e. course) development, review or evaluation.
- Programme management and implementation.
- Provision of collaborative programmes.

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

- Provision of transnational (cross-border) programmes.
- Technology-enhanced learning, teaching and assessment.
- Operation and management of education and training services.
- Corporate governance and/or financial management and/or internal audit.
- Education and training systems in an international context.
- Qualifications systems (including access, transfer and progression factors) in national and international contexts.
- Industry, economic, social, or cultural education and training needs concerning a particular field of learning.
- Academic or professional perspectives concerning a particular field of learning or occupation.
- Academic or industrial research perspectives concerning a particular field of learning.
- Learner (e.g. student, apprentice or trainee) perspectives concerning a particular field of learning.

## 1.2 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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A reviewer or evaluator focussing on programmes is likely to have at least one of the following general competences.

- One or more of the general competences indicated in 1.1
- Practical understanding of QQI's validation policy and criteria (this may be acquired during preparation for the review or evaluation).
- Practical understanding of QQI's awards standards at the relevant National Framework Qualifications (NFQ) level and in the relevant field of learning.
- Ability to make national and international comparisons with similar kinds of programmes at approximately the same NFQ level (or equivalent) in a similar field of learning.
- Practical understanding of the context for the programme and the relevant education sector (e.g. further education and training (FET), higher education (HE) and English language education (ELE)) and sub-sector.

The following kinds of individuals are likely to participate in validation panels (this list is not exhaustive: not all panels will include all, and some individuals may meet multiple descriptors).

- An experienced teacher, lecturer, trainer or workplace mentor involved in a programme leading to an award at a relevant NFQ level (or equivalent) and in a relevant discipline.
- An instructional designer.
- A practitioner in a relevant profession or occupation.
- An employer (or their representative) of persons with qualifications at a relevant NFQ level (or equivalent) and in a relevant discipline.
- An employer (or their representative) of apprentices or trainees or a provider of internships (or equivalent).
- A programme director or equivalent.
- A person with experience in the regulation of a relevant occupation.
- A representative of practitioners in a relevant occupation (e.g. an employee of a professional body).
- An internationally recognised researcher (doctoral programme validation).

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

- A learner (e.g. student, apprentice, or trainee).
- A quality assurance manager.
- Persons holding leadership positions in the provision of education or training services in Ireland or outside Ireland.

## 1.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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A reviewer or evaluator is likely to have at least one of the following general competences.

- One or more of the general competences indicated in 1.1
- Comprehensive knowledge of the national and/ or international context for quality assurance in a relevant educational sector (e.g. HE, FET and ELE) or sub-sector.
- Comprehensive knowledge of the applicable QQI policy context (this may be acquired during preparation for the review or evaluation).
- Ability to make national and international comparisons with providers operating at similar NFQ levels (or equivalent) in similar fields of learning in similar sectors.

The following kinds of individuals are likely to participate in quality assurance related reviews.

- A person holding a leadership position in the provision of education or training services in Ireland or outside Ireland
- A person holding, or who has held, a leadership role in quality assurance in a relevant education or training context within the last three years.
- A person with experience regulating and/or quality assuring education or training services.
- A person with experience participating in evaluative quality assurance processes in education and training contexts.
- A learner (e.g. student, apprentice, or trainee).
- An employer representative.

## 1.4 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

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A reviewer or evaluator is likely to have at least one of the following general competences.

- One or more of the competences listed in 1.1
- Corporate governance in the context of education and training provision
- Financial management in the context of education and training provision
- Risk estimation in the context of education and training provision

The following kinds of individuals are likely to participate in quality assurance related reviews.

- A person holding or who has held a role related to corporate governance and/or financial management and/or internal audit in the last three years.

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

## 1.5 PANEL CHAIRPERSON

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Reviews and evaluations are often conducted by groups referred to as panels. Panels are led by a chairperson. The chairperson needs to understand the broader national context of the subject of the review or evaluation. They must understand the relevant QCI policies, criteria, codes, standards, guidelines, values and procedures.

A chairperson must be able to provide strategic leadership to a team of reviewers or evaluators.

## 1.6 REPORT WRITER

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The role of the recording secretary is to make a record of the site visit proceedings. The precise skills required to do this will depend on the nature of the review or evaluation.

The report writer's role is to coordinate the drafting of the panel report so that it reflects the views of the panel and meets QCI's reporting requirements. They must understand the relevant QCI policies, criteria, codes, standards, guidelines, values and procedures.

Report writers must be capable of writing clear, succinct, accurate, reasoned and publishable reports that meet QCI's specific requirements and can be understood by the multiple intended audiences.

## 2 INDEPENDENCE

In order to ensure that the panel's independence is maintained, in circumstances outside of the site visit, reviewers/evaluators should communicate with the provider only through their QCI contact.

The primary responsibility for disclosing interests that may conflict or lead to conflict rests on the prospective reviewer/evaluator. Prospective reviewers and evaluators are asked to declare in writing any relevant interests and potential conflicts of interest prior to engagement. Declarations, including null declarations, will generally be published by QCI; this may be in the report that arises from the process in question.

Further, prior to the engagement of a panel for a particular process, the provider concerned will be notified in advance of the identities of prospective reviewers/evaluators and asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest. Note that this is not an opportunity for the provider to object to panel composition on any grounds other than the existence of a conflict of interest in relation to a member (or members) of the panel – the task of establishing a panel of reviewers/evaluators is QCI's alone.

Where a potential conflict of interest is discovered after the engagement of a reviewer or evaluator, they should disclose this in writing, in consultation with the panel chairperson (if participating in a panel), to the nominated QCI contact.

If the discovery is by somebody other than the reviewer or evaluator, that person will be expected to disclose the information, in consultation with the panel chairperson if applicable, to QCI.

Normally, a reviewer or evaluator should take no further part in the review or evaluation once a conflict of interest has been discovered. The QCI executive will rule on the continuing eligibility of the reviewer or evaluator following discovery of an apparent conflict of interest.

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

The following outline requirements are indicative. Different, more detailed, requirements apply in respect of some processes, e.g. validation, and these will be communicated separately.

Independence could be compromised, or perceived to be compromised, in the following scenarios. The scenarios are indicative and are not an exhaustive set:

- Persons holding, or who have held, an appointment in the organisation where the review/evaluation is being conducted (e.g. employees, consultants, guest lecturers, external examiner duties, research supervision, etc.), including persons who retired from their employment with the provider concerned. *Normally, former employees, governors, directors, consultants and graduates (except for learner representatives) of a provider are not eligible to serve as members of a review/evaluation group for that provider, but if a period of five years has elapsed since the prospective reviewer/evaluator's relationship with the provider has ended, an exception may be made.*
- Persons who have had long-standing service, or who are retired from employment with the provider concerned. *Such individuals should not normally be engaged as reviewers or evaluators.*
- Persons who participate, or have participated, in joint projects including research initiatives with the provider concerned. *Such individuals should not normally be engaged as reviewers or evaluators. Such individuals should inform QQI prior to involvement in the review or evaluation process of that provider. QQI will determine whether the person can be involved.*
- Persons with family or other relationships with any members employed by or attending the provider concerned. *Such individuals should inform QQI prior to involvement in the review or evaluation process of that provider. QQI will determine whether the person can be involved.*
- Persons with a direct financial interest of any sort in the provider concerned, including the holding of shares in a company associated with the provider concerned. *Such individuals should not normally be engaged as reviewers or evaluators.*
- Persons who are direct competitors with the provider concerned. *Such individuals are not automatically excluded but must be capable of functioning objectively.*
- Persons who have accepted, or plan or expect to accept, a gift, benefit, reward or undue hospitality from the provider concerned. *Such individuals should not normally be engaged as reviewers or evaluators.*

Exceptional circumstances should be brought to QQI's attention for adjudication on a person's suitability.

## 2.1 CONSULTING

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As a matter of policy, QQI recommends that persons appointed to an assessment, review or evaluation panel on behalf of QQI should not normally serve as consultants to the provider concerned for a grace period of at least one year after the completion of the relevant assessment. Any proposed or appointed person who envisages such a relationship with the provider developing within that timescale should inform QQI of this relationship before becoming involved in the review or evaluation process.

For some processes, follow-up beyond the review/evaluation report may be required. In such cases, any reviewers/evaluators involved should inform QQI if they intend to act as a consultant to the provider or have any other working relationship with the provider.

# ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR REVIEWERS AND EVALUATORS

## 2.2 QQI PERSONNEL

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Members of the QQI Board or any of its committees are not appointed as reviewers or evaluators on the basis that they may have a separate role in the determination of the outcome.

Members of the QQI executive may arrange to attend any review or evaluation.

## APPENDIX B

### QQI CONTACT DETAILS

Person/Department	Contact Details
Chief Executive Officer	ceo@qqi.ie
Data Protection Officer	dpo@qqi.ie
Education and Training Board Reviews	etbm-r@qqi.ie
Higher Education Reviews	hereviews@qqi.ie
Quality Assurance - QQI Awards	qqiqa@qqi.ie

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR  
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