WHITE PAPER

Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines

FOR CONSULTATION

STATUTORY QA GUIDELINES DEVELOPED BY QQI FOR INDEPENDENT/PRIVATE PROVIDERS COMING TO QQI ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

This White Paper contains proposed policy for sector specific quality assurance (QA) guidelines.

Following publication and consideration of the outcomes of consultation, this paper will lead to a draft policy which will be proposed for adoption by the Board of QQI. Once adopted, QQI policy and procedures are developed and implemented accordingly.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in this White Paper.

Submissions may be emailed to

consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 5 February 2016.**

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*

2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*

3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

These statutory, sector-specific, quality assurance guidelines for independent, private providers supplement the Core Quality Assurance Guidelines which are applicable to **all** providers. While the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines provide the majority of the quality assurance guidance required, these sector-specific guidelines add to the core by addressing the more specific requirements of independent private providers.

Independent, private providers should also refer to QQI's other topic-specific, quality assurance guidelines as appropriate.

1.1   WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES?

These statutory, sector-specific QA guidelines address the responsibilities of independent, private providers of higher, further and English language education and training (hereafter referred to as voluntary providers)[1] in the context of accessing the statutory, regulatory functions of QQI. These guidelines set out additional, statutory, quality assurance (QA) guidelines specific to voluntary providers that come to QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of:

» Gaining access to programme validation; and

» Authorisation to use the International Education Mark (IEM)

The approval of quality assurance procedures only has relevance in the context of a validated programme(s) leading to QQI awards and/or authorisation to use the IEM. The approval of quality assurance procedures has no standing in its own right, it does not confer any status upon a provider.

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1   This is in cognisance of the fact that under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (the 2012 Act) such providers seek to have their QA procedures approved by QQI on a voluntary, rather than compulsory basis.

1.2   TO WHOM DO THEY APPLY?

These guidelines are applicable to independent, private providers of higher, further and English language education and training that seek approval of their quality assurance procedures from QQI on a voluntary basis.

2. SCOPE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

QQI approval of the quality assurance procedures of voluntary providers pertains to those programmes leading to QQI awards and related services. This extends to the overall governance and management structures in place in the provider to support the delivery of such programmes.

The scope and complexity of the quality assurance procedures to be established by voluntary providers is typically linked to, and influenced by, the provider's context, overall goals and scope of provision.[2] This includes:

» The levels and award types in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to which the programme for which QQI validation is sought leads;

» The programme's field of learning and / or professional domain and the number of programmes offered across the different fields or domains;

» The maximum and minimum numbers of learners that can be accommodated on the programme each cycle, and the type of learners (flexible, part-time, fulltime) and the target learner groups (standard entry, mature students, international students etc.); and

» The teaching and learning modalities.

Additional QA procedures will be required if a voluntary provider wishes to change the scope of its approved quality assurance (refer to section 4 below).

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2   Scope of provision is defined here as the type and range of programmes offered, the level of such awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and related services offered.

3. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Where a provider's scale is such that it cannot support internal committees, alternative arrangements are put in place to ensure objective oversight, such as the use of external experienced expertise. Voluntary providers will ensure that academic decision-making (matters relating to education and training) is independent of commercial considerations or the undue influence of business owners.

The quality assurance procedures of voluntary providers must be supported by fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures. A voluntary provider must have QA procedures to:

» Maintain its status as an established legal entity, which is a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law.

» Support and manage a resource base sufficient to sustainably support the quality assurance system and programmes of education and training, research and related services offered.

» Manage risk.

» Ensure it is stable and in good financial standing, with a reasonable business case for sustainable provision.

» Demonstrate how it complies with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates; its general good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any jurisdictions in which it operates (or in which its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrols learners, or in which it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.

» Identify dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries and other stakeholder obligations that impact upon the capacity of the provider in any way.

» Provide required information to QQI.

» Ensure that where its capacity is in any way reduced (for example reductions in staff, resources, other education and training aspects; capacity to uphold the conditions and standards of validation or any other significant matters) QQI will be notified.

Further detail on the areas which should be addressed in quality assurance documentation is set out at Appendix A. The process by which a provider gets a programme accredited by QQI for the first time is

set out in the *QQI Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*.

4. PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Voluntary providers will have quality assurance procedures in place to:

» Establish and manage the arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to comply with statutory obligations which are set out in *Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act*.

» Have access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval.

» Support the programme design, development and approval process as set out in the *QQI Core Validation Policy and Criteria for education and training programmes*.

Additional QA procedures will be required if a voluntary provider wishes to change the scope of its approved quality assurance. Examples of where substantial changes may require additional QA procedures include:

» Where proposed programme provision is moving to a different level in the NFQ or from one field of learning to another (ISCED); and

» A further education and training provider is proposing to develop a programme leading to validation outside the Common Awards System (CAS).

5. STAFF RECRUITMENT MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The provider's quality assurance procedures for the recruitment, management and development of staff will be developed in the context of all the education and training activities and related services of the provider. This will also include those education and training activities leading to awards of awarding bodies other than QQI, such as professional bodies and local provider provision.

6. ASSESSMENT OF LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Providers will have quality assurance procedures structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners that comply with the QQI policy protocols conventions and guidelines on Assessment. These refer to:

» *Assessment and Standards (Revised 2013)*

» *CAS assessment guidelines*

» *Assessment, protocols and conventions (planned 2016)*

7. EUROPEAN COMMITMENTS

These guidelines are underpinned by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), May 2015. The quality assurance procedures of voluntary *higher* education and training providers must have regard to:

» Any European standards, guidelines, directives or policies adopted nationally; and

» The *European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, October 2014 (approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015), as appropriate (in addition to the QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (Revised 2012)).

The quality assurance procedures of Voluntary Further Education and Training Providers must have regard to: The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (Reference Framework).

8. CERTIFICATION

Voluntary providers must establish quality assurance procedures to support the management and integrity of learner results data which provides the basis for making and certifying QQI awards. Voluntary providers must also have procedures for the maintenance of records in this regard.

9. OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

This section refers to other parties with which a voluntary provider is involved. The quality assurance procedures established by voluntary providers in respect of collaboration with any other providers or parties should have regard to the overall suite of education and training provision offered by the other partners or providers and other parties with whom the voluntary provider is engaged.

Where a voluntary provider organises or procures a programme which is provided in whole or in part by another provider, the voluntary provider must establish and agree appropriate QA procedures with that provider.

This section refers to the quality assurance of collaborations with other providers. Voluntary providers must have procedures to approve collaboration arrangements with other providers and monitor and review the effectiveness of those arrangements. Providers should apply due diligence and be aware of any reputational risk to themselves and the sector and /or the national qualifications system associated with particular, prospective providers, awarding bodies and other third parties with whom they are considering entering into collaboration arrangements.

The following is a summary of indicative areas that voluntary providers should consider before determining whether to enter into a collaborative arrangement with another provider:

Legal, reputation and compliance requirements

» Is the provider a legal entity, with education and training as a principal function?

   ~ Is the legal entity a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law?

» Has the provider clearly specified its dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries?

» Has the provider declared any third-party relationships and partnerships?

» Does the provider comply with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates?

» Is the provider in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any jurisdictions in which it operates (or in which its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrols learners, or in which it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators?

Resource, governance and structural requirements

» Is the provider stable and in good financial standing?

» Does the provider have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?

» Does the provider have fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures?

» Does the provider have arrangements for providing required information to the voluntary provider?

» Does the provider have capacity to deliver education and training as demonstrated through experience and track record in providing education and training programmes?

» Does the provider have sufficient resources, as well as corporate, structural and internal quality assurance systems in place, to sustainably provide education and training programmes?

Programme development and provision requirements

» Does the provider have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?

» Does the provider have fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources?

» Does the provider have structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learner achievement?

» Does the provider have arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners?

Collaboration on provision will be considered as part of the QQI programme validation process for programmes leading to QQI awards.

These quality assurance arrangements in respect of any collaborative provision must comply with the quality assurance requirements underpinning the QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Provision and Joint Awards 2012

APPENDIX A

DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

The table below indicates the areas which should be addressed in quality assurance documentation. In all these areas the aim should be to reflect, observe, plan and act, and then repeat this cycle.

Table 1: Areas to be addressed in quality assurance documentation

AREAS TO BE COVERED BY QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	EXAMPLE SUB-AREAS TO BE COVERED BY QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
Governance	» mission; policy and planning; organisational structure; relationships and collaborations; corporate governance; management principles and accountability
Administration	» strategic planning and planning; » financial resources and development; » human resources, including coordinating performance management and development; » facilities and equipment; » library and information resources; » record management and data protection; » management/student information systems; » accessibility; » general learner supports and services; » management of legislative and regulatory compliance; » communication and cooperation with industry and the public service; » communication and cooperation with society; » innovation and knowledge transfer services
Information and Communication	» repository of quality assurance policy and procedures; » repository of regulations and codes of practice; » QA-related information on website; » ICT in the context of programme provision (e.g. Moodle, VLE)

AREAS TO BE COVERED BY QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	EXAMPLE SUB-AREAS TO BE COVERED BY QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
Institutional Research	» supporting institutional review; supporting quality assurance; and » supporting policy development and planning
Academic Management	» strategic planning; » information for students (and prospective students); » coordinating programme development; » coordinating programme approval processes; » managing assessment and standards; » managing validation processes; » managing programme re-validation processes (formerly programmatic review); » maintaining and archiving learner records (including awards and diploma/certificate supplement data); » external examining
Teaching and research provision, including collaborative and transnational provision	» standards; » approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; » assessment of students; » evaluation by students; » benchmarking (national and international comparisons); » quality assurance of teaching staff; » learning resources and support; » information systems; » institutional research (analysis of information for QA purposes); » public information; » teaching and learning support; » external examining