QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

QQI
ANNUAL REPORT
2015

www.QQI.ie

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1. INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CHAIR

This annual report for 2015 represents the main activities of the third year of QQI's business. It is the final report within the period of the organisation's first strategy statement.

During the year, the Board of QQI met on seven occasions. Its four sub-committees, the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC), the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC), the Approval and Reviews Committee (ARC), and the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC), continued to operate and report to the Board on its activities. The outcomes of Board and sub-committee meetings are publicly available via the organisation's website.

2015 continued to lay the groundwork for the organisation in terms of its policy development and organisational management and also provided opportunities to innovate in a number of the areas within its diverse scope; as represented in the following report. It also saw the introduction of QQI's second Strategy Statement (2016-2018) which was produced following significant internal and external consultation.

We enter into 2016 with clear direction on how the organisation will develop and look forward to further advancing the work of the organisation in the coming period.

Mr Gordon Clark   Dr Padraig Walsh
Chair, QQI   **Chief Executive, QQI**

2. ABOUT QQI

Gordon Clark - *Chairperson QQI*, Jan O'Sullivan TD - *Minister for Education and Skills*,
Ruth Hally - *QQI Award holder* and Padraig Walsh - *CEO QQI* at the launch of the QQI Awards
at the Aviva Stadium November 2015.

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) was established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It is a state agency, with the non-executive members of the Board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

We are responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training (including English language provision) in Ireland. We validate programmes, make awards and are responsible for the promotion, maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). We also inform the public about the quality of education and training programmes and qualifications and advise the Minister on national policy regarding quality assurance and enhancement in education and training.

Our stakeholders come from all sectors of education and training: learners, providers, employers, Government departments, State agencies and funding bodies, regulatory bodies, professional bodies, qualifications awarding bodies, the community and voluntary sector, representative bodies and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

3. VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND GOALS

Vision

Our vision is to seek extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

Mission

Our mission is to:

- Promote the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training;
- Quality assure providers; and
- Support and promote a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

Values

Learner-Centred: We promote a culture of access, responsiveness, flexibility, trust and quality in education and training and qualifications. We place the learner perspective at the centre of our work and also encourage stakeholders to do so.

Improvement-Oriented: We are a learning, developing and evolving organisation, committed to continuously evaluating and improving the quality of our work. This underpins our approaches to assuring and promoting improved quality in further and higher education and training.

Collaborative: We collaborate with our stakeholders to build confidence in, and improve the quality of education and training opportunities and the recognition of qualifications.

Independent: Although we work within the broad framework of governmental policy, we are operationally independent in the performance of our functions and in our decision making. We operate with integrity and in a transparent, fair, equitable, impartial and objective manner.

Professional: We treat all persons with respect, dignity and courtesy. We work to the highest standards of public service with regard to accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.

4. PROGRESS AGAINST OUR GOALS IN 2015

We aim to ensure that we provide a high quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. In our Strategy Statement 2013- 2016 we identified six goals to assist in fulfilling our mission, the following section highlights our progress to the end of 2015 in relation to these goals.

GOAL 1 - ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE, COHERENT SET OF QQI POLICIES AND PROCEDURES WITH THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS AS A CENTRAL ORGANISING FEATURE.

Comprehensive Policy Development Programme

2015 saw the publication of consultation documents in a series of core policy areas. QQI has determined that it will develop core statutory quality assurance guidelines that are applicable to all providers and will supplement these with sector and topic-specific guidelines. At the end of 2015 it published white papers on *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines*, *Statutory Sector-Specific QA Guidelines for Independent/Private providers*, and *Statutory Topic-Specific QA Guidelines on Flexible and Distance Learning*. A similar core and supplemental approach has been taken to the area of programme validation as illustrated by the publication of white papers on *Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI* and *Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes Leading to Common Awards System (CAS) Awards*.

In terms of its quality assurance role, 2015 saw extensive engagement with stakeholders on the evolving area of higher education review. This followed the *Review of Reviews* exercise that took place in 2014 and captured the review methodologies inherited by QQI as a contribution to devising its own policy approach. The white paper *Policy for Review of Higher Education Institutions* will lead to a confirmed review policy which is anticipated to be published in the first quarter of 2016.

The National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was referenced as a central organising feature in all policy development and public consultation activities throughout 2015. So too, the NFQ has continued to be an organising feature for our work as an awarding body, in validating programmes and determining awards standards. In 2015 we began a project which will address our legislative responsibility to review the policies and criteria upon which the NFQ is based as well as the operation of the NFQ. The organisation wishes to carry out this process with a view to the future and ensuring that the Framework continues to meet national requirements.

ENIC/NARIC

Our Qualifications Recognition function, the means through which we provide advice on the comparability of international awards to the Irish NFQ was the subject of significant policy development in 2015, as part of our Comprehensive Policy Development Programme. The first policy was *Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications*[1], which relates to QQI's role in facilitating the recognition of both foreign and Irish qualifications. The second publication *Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*[2], was published in February 2015. This paper emphasises the online provision of authoritative advice regarding the academic recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland, using the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a reference and guided by principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). These policies have led to developments in practice with an increased focus on ensuring that comparability statements on qualifications from a wide range of countries are easily available through our website. A new online system was introduced mid 2015 which facilitates the user to visit www.naric.ie, identify their own qualification from a database of over 600 qualifications for more than 100 countries and

1. http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Facilitating-the-Recognition-of-Qualifications-Submissions.aspx
2. http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/White-Paper---Policy-and-Criteria-for-Facilitating-the-Academic-Recognition-of-Foreign-Qualifications.aspx

download their own comparability advice statement. At the end of 2015 over 33,000 users had visited the site and accessed a country page. The United Kingdom, Poland and Brazil featured as the top three country qualifications pages visited in 2015. NARIC Ireland also developed a promotional postcard for issue to the general public about the services provided.

QQI also continues to host a range of other projects promoting mobility and transparency of qualifications across Europe, including the National Europass Centre and the European Qualifications Framework National Contact Point (EQF-NCP). The National Europass Centre, with the support of the ENIC- NARIC and the EQF-NCP, led a range of initiatives in 2015 promoting synergy between activities and promotional work with the core objective of making it easy for stakeholders nationally to be informed and to benefit from this work at a European level.

GOAL 2 - PRIORITISE LEARNERS IN OUR POLICIES AND ACTIONS AND IN OUR RELATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

QQI engages with leaners through:
- Our governance structures, with the inclusion of two learner representatives on the QQI Board and one on the Approval and Reviews sub-committee;
- Consultation with representative groups;
- The routine involvement of learners in our review, accreditation and evaluation processes;
- The stated expectation in our statutory quality assurance guidelines of learner involvement in provider review, accreditation and evaluation processes;
- The development of quality improvement projects that are learner oriented; and
- The delivery of services that seek to meet the needs of learners.

These interactions take place on a regular basis as part of our Board and sub-committee meetings and during the consultation and development of policy under our Comprehensive Policy Development Programme. They are also achieved through quality improvement projects, such as the National Student Engagement Programme described below, and our focus on supporting learner mobility through qualifications recognition.

National Student Engagement Programme

QQI, in conjunction with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) made significant progress in 2015 on the advancement of a quality improvement project which is focussed on the provision of training for student representatives in higher education institutions that are engaging with quality review, accreditation and evaluation processes and increasing the capacity of institutions to provide quality engagement opportunities.. The ground work undertaken in 2015 will lead to a pilot project in 2016 conducted in collaboration with institutions and their students' union representative bodies.

RPL Network

In 2012, an EU Recommendation was passed, providing for citizens of member states to avail of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (known as recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Ireland), by 2018. QQI reports on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills to the EQF Advisory Group on progress towards this agenda. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 places RPL in the remit of providers and programmes, and in that of QQI in the context of awards. The Department of Education and Skills together with QQI is reflecting on how to best ensure continued national progress in RPL. As part of these discussions, QQI, with the active support of Institutes of Technology Ireland, the Irish Universities Association, Education and Training Boards Ireland and the National Centre for Guidance in Education, invited RPL practitioners to meet

and explore options for the establishment of a practitioner network in February 2015. Almost 100 people across further, higher and professional education and training attended and discussed the potential value of a network. Feedback was positive, indicating that practitioners wanted to develop a strong coherent voice to shape and inform policy nationally, and to share expertise, knowledge and practical toolkits with each other so as to better meet learner needs. QQI undertook to develop this thinking further and to support the establishment of a network, in collaboration with volunteers from across a wide range of sectors. A small working group was established to propose a way forward for 2016. It comprised of representatives of Cork Institute of Technology, Maynooth University, the Further Education Support Service and QQI at the core, and drew on support from Dublin Institute of Technology, Teagasc, SOLAS, RIAI and the National Centre for Guidance in Education.

Qualifications Frameworks - Making connections in the interests of learners

Qualifications frameworks incorporate statements of knowledge, skill and competence that describe the anticipated attributes of a learner holding a qualification at a given level. QQI is responsible for the promotion, maintenance, further development and implementation of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. We are also the designated National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework. As part of our promotional activity we develop communications materials to support this activity on a continuous basis.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) are overarching systems that link different countries' qualifications systems together. Ireland has collaborated closely with other European countries to ensure that qualifications frameworks are connected internationally. The formal relationships that have been confirmed between the Irish NFQ and other international qualifications frameworks greatly support the ability of QQI to provide advice on the recognition of qualifications. NARIC Ireland also promotes qualifications attained in Ireland and supports individuals abroad wishing to describe and compare their qualifications.

Qualification Recognition Queries

In 2015, the number of general qualification recognition queries received through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system amounted to 800. Formal applications for academic recognition in 2015, received via emails and phone contact, amounted to 2,100. Common queries about general recognition of Irish qualifications related to early years' education certification, legacy certificates, exemptions, apprenticeship and craft qualifications, in Ireland and abroad.

The NARIC Ireland foreign qualifications database provides advice on the general academic recognition of a foreign qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award-type at a level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This advice is downloaded in the form of a one-page comparability statement. By December 2015 there were statements on 651 qualifications available from 107 countries.

QQI also hosts a range of projects promoting mobility and transparency of qualifications across Europe, including the National Europass Centre, the European Qualifications Framework National Contact Point (EQF-NCP), and the ENIC-NARIC centre for Qualifications Recognition. As an example of activity in this area, NARIC Ireland represented Ireland at events convened for ENIC-NARIC centres to assist in preparations for responses to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

National Diploma Supplement/Certificate Supplement

The National Diploma Supplement is a European Union document that is issued to graduates of higher education institutions along with their parchment and transcripts of results. This document aims to facilitate learners in gaining fair recognition of their Irish qualifications abroad by providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies a student pursued and successfully completed. QQI continues to promote the National Diploma Supplement as part of its Europass role. The Certificate Supplement for further education and training awards is directly available to learners from the awards page of the QQI website for levels 4, 5 and 6 of the NFQ.

Qualifax

Qualifax is an extensive database of programmes originally developed by the career guidance community. Over 15,000 courses are currently listed in the database and some 550,000 website users were recorded as using the site during the year. In 2015 QQI staff attended key events such as the Annual Conference of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and Higher Options in its promotion of Qualifax to learners and their advisors.

GOAL 3 - QUALITY ASSURE PROVIDERS AND SUPPORT THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION

The Lifecycle of Provider Engagements Process

The Lifecycle of Provider Engagements process has been established to identify the range of engagements that will exist between QQI and a provider following the approval or establishment of its quality assurance. It differs between voluntary and obligatory providers.

The 2012 Act clearly differentiates between providers with their own statutory requirements who are obliged to engage with QQI and all other providers that engage with QQI on a voluntary basis. Obligatory providers are providers with a prescribed legal obligation to seek QQI validation. Voluntary providers are all other providers that decide to engage with QQI on a voluntary basis for the purpose of seeking QQI validation and external QA.

Establishing the lifecycles of provider engagements clarifies QQI's role as an external QA agency and the responsibilities of providers in providing public accountability and public confidence in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The Lifecycle of Engagements has been introduced to education and training providers seeking initial access to QQI awards. The concept became more tangible for legacy providers with the publication in 2015 of White Papers on core and supplemental Quality Assurance Guidelines. This has provided the basis for progressing to the publication of policy in 2016 and the self-evaluation by providers to identify and address gaps in their current quality assurance arrangements prior to formal re-engagement.

Quality Assurance of Providers
Initial access to programme validation

In 2015, 79 expressions of interest in the initial validation process were received. We held 6 briefings for the interested education and training providers.

Applications for Initial Access to Programme Validation were received from four education and training providers - three in further education and training and one planning to offer a higher education programme. Two of the applicants were approved, one was refused with recommendations and as yet has not resubmitted its draft Quality Assurance procedures and the final applicant is in process.

Monitoring

A total of 83 providers were monitored during 2015. This monitoring activity consisted of desk review of provider documentation (81 FET and 2 HET). Providers offering the Boom Sprayer Pesticide Application Component Award at Level 5 were a particular focus for monitoring, with approximately 10 site visits taking place to observe assessment practices undertaken by providers. Monitoring follow-up was undertaken with providers as appropriate during the year where monitoring issues arose.

Programme Validation

QQI conducted a review of its validation and re-validation policy and procedures which proposed the need for a consistent system of validation across further and higher education and training. We have continued to implement changes based on the recommendations arising, including ensuring that protection for enrolled learners (PEL) arrangements are in place prior to the validation timeframe commencing.

The level of programme validation activity in 2015 is indicated below:

Sector	Providers	Programmes
Further Education and Training (NFQ Levels 1 -6)	100	243
Higher Education and Training (NFQ Levels 6-10)	12	142
Total	**112**	**385**

Table 1: 2015 Validation activity in FET and HET

The higher education and training figures above include programmes revalidated following programme review; revalidation is a periodic review of a validated programme. The revalidation process for the FET sector is not yet established.

Annual Institutional Reports and Public Higher Education Providers

In 2015, the requirement to complete an annual institutional report was expanded to include the ten designated awarding bodies (the universities, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)) and the thirteen institutes of technology. Each institution prepared an annual institutional report, highlighting the key quality activities of the institution in the previous year. The reporting period was adjusted from an annual calendar year to an academic year. Accordingly, the reports provided for 2014 reflected this changeover and were for a shorter eight-month period of January to August 2014. In October, a summary analysis of the individual reports of the designated awarding bodies was published on our website. During 2015 we progressed with the development of an online template for the reports which will be rolled out in 2016.

Review of Reviews

QQI conducted a review of the institutional review models used by the legacy agencies (IUQB, HETAC and NQAI) and published a Review of Reviews Report in 2014. Informed by this process, QQI published a Review of Higher Education Institutions White Paper in July 2015 and produced a report on the feedback gathered as part of this process in December 2015. It is anticipated that QQI will publish a final policy in this area in the first quarter of 2016.

English Language Training Organisations Recognition

ACELS

ACELS is the national, voluntary scheme for English language teaching organisations (ELTOs). It is a non-statutory service of QQI that will be superseded by the International Education Mark (IEM).

In 2015 the ACELS Recognition Committee met on six occasions and a meeting of ACELS inspectors was held on 16 June 2015. 100 providers currently holding ACELS recognition received annual renewal of recognition application forms and were listed on the ACELS website for 2015: www.acels.ie. In 2015, 35 inspections of recognised English Language Training Organisations took place. The purpose and number of the inspections is elaborated upon below:

- 18 'additional centre' inspections;
- 13 'change of academic management' inspections;
- 3 'change of premises' inspections; and
- 1 'follow-up' inspection.

The English language teacher training providers of the Certificate in English Language Teaching (CELT) and Prep ELT programmes continued to be moderated and reviewed.

International Education Mark

The establishment and implementation of an International Education Mark (IEM) is provided for under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. We have progressed policy development in this area including a Code of Practice which was published in the summer of 2015. A High Court case in December 2014 relating to the connected policy area of international student immigration regulations has impacted on the anticipated implementation schedule for the IEM. It has also led to a further examination of the 2012 Act in order to ensure that the bases upon which the IEM will be introduced are sufficiently secure. We are continuing to engage with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) regarding the IEM and will work towards its introduction as soon as practicable.

Supporting the enhancement of the quality of education and training provision

EQAVET

QQI has continued to provide the secretariat to support the implementation of EQAVET (European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training); and the EQAVET network. This Network, which brings together the EU Member States, Candidate Countries, the social partners and other key stakeholders in a community of practice, which aims to improve the quality assurance of vocational education and training (VET) in Europe so that it is seen as an attractive option for learners, is responsive to labour market needs and contributes to providing worthwhile employment opportunities for young people.

2015 has marked the following significant milestones:

- The success of the QQI tender to continue to provide the European secretariat to the EQAVET network for the period 2016-2017;
- The adoption of a strategic plan 2016-2017 which aims to strengthen and deepen the implementation of EQAVET across European VET systems and its use by VET providers;
- Building on European work in adult education and the learning outcomes approach for VET in order to provide guidance to Member States on how EQAVET can support a culture of quality assurance in both of these areas;
- The recognition of quality assurance in VET as contributor to the new EU skills agenda developed as part of the transfer of responsibilities of VET from the European Commission DG Education and Culture to DG Employment;
- Commencement of work on exploring the contribution that EQAVET can make to supporting the quality assurance of work based learning and apprenticeships in order to meet the wider European strategic objectives in these areas; and
- The continued work on supporting the monitoring of the EQAVET related Bruges deliverables for VET and the new mid-term deliverables outlined in the Riga Conclusions in June 2015 as part of ET 2020 work programme.

Education and Training Board Ireland QQI Forum

The ETBI QQI Collaborative FET Forum was established in 2014 in partnership with the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). The Forum became more fully established in 2015 as a very useful and important means of sharing information and clarifying policy and its implementation. The Forum, met 10 times in 2015 and has representation from QQI, ETBI, the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the Further Education Support Service (FESS). The Forum has become a key part of the co-ordinating structure through which QQI and the ETB sector work collaboratively on a range of operational, developmental and strategic matters in relation to qualifications and quality assurance.

Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN)

QQI continued to act as secretary to the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) in 2015. The IHEQN provides a forum for the discussion of quality assurance/quality improvement issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland. It comprises membership from the DIT; the HEA; HECA; IOTI; IUA; NUI; QQI RCSI; USI and the Department of Education and Skills.

GOAL 4 - COLLABORATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO CREATE GREATER COHERENCE WITHIN IRELAND'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS AND WITH ITS QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

Consultative Forum

The purpose and mission of the QQI Consultative Forum is to enable collaboration with stakeholders in order to create greater coherence in the education and training system; and to contribute to the development and implementation of an enhanced education and training and qualifications system through consultation and meaningful dialogue between QQI and stakeholders.

QQI engages with a wide range of stakeholders within the education and training and qualifications system; the Consultative Forum provides an important single platform for representative stakeholders to come together on matters of common interest. The terms of reference, stakeholder nominee organisations to the Forum, and meeting documentation is published on our website[3].

The Consultative Forum met twice in 2015 on the following dates:
- 28 April 2015
- 09 November 2015

The main item for consideration at the April meeting was the QQI Strategy Statement 2016–2018. The draft statement was forwarded to Consultative Forum members who were asked to review the document and provide their comments and feedback in advance of the meeting. Feedback received was collated and presented to attendees for further consideration at the Consultative Forum itself. A summary of the feedback received both prior to and at the Consultative Forum is available in the meeting report.

The focus of the November meeting of the Forum was the draft core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines which were published for formal public consultation the following month. Statutory quality assurance guidelines set out those elements which providers will have regard to when establishing, or updating their own QA procedures. The Forum looked specifically at the core QA guidelines which are relevant to all providers and explained QQI's intention to develop supplemental sector and topic-specific quality assurance guidelines.

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3. http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Consultative-Forum-.aspx

Collaboration with public sector bodies

In relation to liaising with relevant public sector bodies to support appropriate use of the NFQ, QQI continues to work with the Department of Social Protection, SUSI (Students Universal Support Ireland), PAS (Public Appointment Service) and Teagasc. Collaboration with external agencies and stakeholders such as, the Department of Justice has also taken place around the formulation of new policies and approaches in light of new initiatives and government policies.

2015 was another important year for further education and training with the ongoing implementation of the FET Strategy, the operationalisation of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the work of the Apprenticeship Council. QQI is playing its part in the implementation of the FET Strategy through:

- Its membership of the Apprenticeship Council;
- The implementation of the professional award-type descriptors, which meet the needs of apprenticeship programmes;
- The development of a White Paper on Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeship; and
- The validation of apprenticeships.

Management Framework Agreement with Department of Education and Skills

The first Management Framework Agreement (MFA) between the Department of Education and Skills and QQI was established in 2015. The MFA sets out the management and accountability framework between the Department and QQI. The purpose of the MFA is to provide enhanced arrangements for communications, reporting and liaison between the two bodies.

Memorandum of Understanding between the Higher Education Authority and QQI

The MOU between QQI and HEA which was agreed by the QQI Board in December 2014 was formally launched in the Department of Education and Skills in April 2015[4]. A significant element of the MoU is collaboration with the higher education sector as a whole. The view of both organisations, and of the Department, is that the MoU should be tangible in terms of how the relationship between QQI and the HEA can evolve. As a result, it includes a number of identified actions to support the realisation of stated objectives over the next three years. These include an annual presentation by the CEO of each organisation to the Board of the other. In November 2015 the CEO of QQI met the HEA Board. The CEO of the HEA is scheduled to meet the QQI Board in early 2016.

The MoU is intended to stand for the period 01 January 2015 - 31 December 2017. The focus for 2015 was on setting the foundations for realising the MoU and in so doing facilitating engagement between colleagues in the two organisations so that we can better understand each other's objectives and functions. The MoU also refers to the establishment of a forum between QQI, HEA, DES, IUA and IOTI. The Forum was established in 2015 and met 4 times. The group determined that a focus on data, a matter that is addressed in the MOU, would be appropriate as an initial topic to advance as part of the forum's collective interest.

Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills

QQI, in collaboration with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Léargas, the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and Euroguidance participate in the Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills. The aim of the Irish Reference Group is to promote efficient connections between initiatives that work across education and training and a wide range of stakeholders. Following the publication of 'Education and Skills: Working Together to bring

4. The final published version of the document is available on the QQI website at the following link: http://www.qqi.ie//Pages/Memorandum-of-understanding-.aspx.

Opportunities across Europe Home to you[5]', the network continued to meet and collaborate in 2015. QQI was pleased to receive strong positive feedback from the European Commission on the Reference Group. Further details are available on the Europass website: www.europass.ie.

Enterprise engagement

In 2015 we further developed our relationship with employers as outlined in *Education and Employers: A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement* through our membership of the Apprenticeship Council and the Regional Skills Fora. QQI's standards development work (see below) was informed by the findings of the National Employer Survey. In conjunction with HEA and SOLAS we participated in a follow up qualitative study with employers to better anticipate labour market needs. We also participated in the Steering Group for the OECD Review of Entrepreneurship in higher Education. In 2015 employers were further engaged across a range of our activities including as members of review and validation panels.

Standards Development

The development of awards standards is, by its nature, an inherently collaborative process. It leads to significant engagement between QQI, providers, representative bodies, regulators, employers, learners and other parties.

New standards finalised and published in 2015

NFQ Level 5:

- Certificate in Office Informatics
- Specific Purpose Certificate in Shallow Water Pool Lifeguarding Operations,
- Specific Purpose Certificate Implementing Food Safety Management Systems
- Component Certificate Maths for Information Technology

NFQ Level 6:

- Component Certificates in Newswriting and Editing and Sub-Editing
- Specific Purpose Certificate Designing Food Safety Management Systems

Standards for Pre-Higher Education Foundation Awards for International Students were also published at Level 5 and Level 8 of the NFQ.

Review of standards finalised and published in 2015

The following standards were reviewed and published:
NFQ Level 5

- Certificate in Media Production
- Certificate in Film and Television Production

NFQ Level 6

- Advanced Certificate in Film and Television Production
- Specific Purpose Certificate Beach Lifeguarding Operations,
- Specific Purpose Certificate Deep Water Pool Lifeguarding Operations
- Specific Purpose Certificate Inland Open Water Lifeguarding Operations

Other Awards Standards Activity 2015

An expert group led by Teagasc continued the process of reviewing the NFQ Level 5 and Level 6 awards in agriculture under terms of reference agreed with QQI. This process will conclude in 2016.

An expert group led by Fáilte Ireland commenced the review of NFQ Level 6 Special Purpose awards related to tourism guiding under terms of reference agreed with QQI. This process will conclude in 2016.

An expert group started the process of developing awards standards for Architectural Technology at NFQ level 6,7,8 and 9 under terms of reference agreed with QQI. This process will conclude in 2016.

GOAL 5 - PROVIDE RELEVANT, TIMELY AND COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION AND QUALIFICATIONS

Communications

In February 2015 the first awards made by QQI under its award brand were issued to learners. To create a real understanding and recognition of the QQI Award brand by learners, providers and all stakeholders, QQI launched its 20-month marketing campaign. The slogan *QQI Award – Know it when you see it*, was specifically developed to use across all elements of the campaign, which includes a planned and continuing activity of radio and print advertising, digital marketing and a suite of promotional materials for learners and providers. A QQI Award brand micro-site was developed and provides information on the campaign activities, downloadable promotional materials and learner video and award brand guidelines and logo access for providers.

A central part of the awareness campaign is to stamp the QQI brand on the consciousness of the Irish public; a public that for many years, and in a wide variety of learning contexts, was accustomed to hearing the previous award brands.

A highlight of campaign activity came with the official launch of the QQI Award at the Aviva Stadium in November 2015, where invited providers and other stakeholders joined the Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan T.D. as she presented learners representing all ten levels of the NFQ with commemorative parchments.

Further phases of the campaign are planned through 2016 and into 2017.

Queries received through QHelp

On a more routine level, QQI is seeking to continuously improve its response to public queries regarding its functions and services. QHelp is available via QQI's website and provides an online means of submitting queries. The number of queries received in 2015 via this online method totalled 11,532. The breakdown of the categories of enquirer is available below:
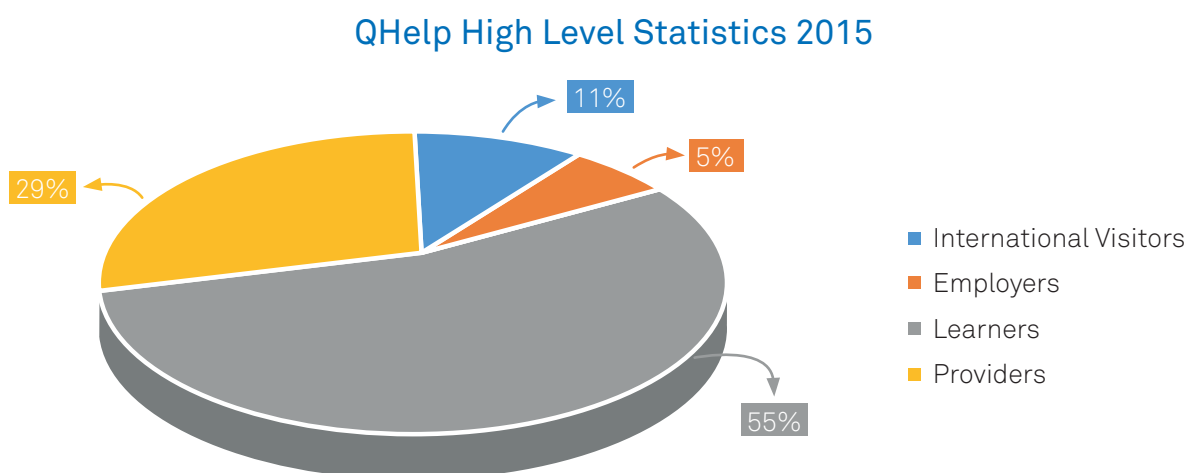
QHelp High Level Statistics 2015

Table 2: Categories of QHelp enquirers in 2015

Statistics

We provide statistics annually on awards made directly by QQI. Statistics are also available in downloadable form from the "Downloads" area in QSearch on our website[6]. The 2015 award statistics are available via a new initiative[7] called Infographics, a more visual representation of our data, which is available on our website.

QQI Awards

In 2015, approximately 164,187 learners received over 172,381 QQI certificates at levels 1-9 on the NFQ. The awards were achieved across all ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) with Level 5 continuing to dominate in terms of volume.

Level	Award Type	2015
1	Major	334
2	Major	1,011
3	Major	1,976
3	Special Purpose	21
4	Major	2,241
4	Special Purpose	525
5	Major	20,775
5	Special Purpose	12,338
6	HE Minor	422
6	Major	6,213
6	Special Purpose	4,697
6	Supplemental	9
7	HE Minor	26
7	Major	679
7	Special Purpose	545
8	HE Minor	92
8	Major	3,003
8	Special Purpose	731
9	HE Minor	269
9	Major	1,003
9	Special Purpose	31
10	Major	18

QQI Awards (disaggregated) in 2015; by award type and by NFQ level.
(All Tables exclude awards which were achieved via providers who have delegated authority).

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6 FET	Level 6 HET	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10	Total
Major	334	1,011	1,976	2,241	20,775	5,981	232	679	3,003	1,003	18	37,253
Minor	664	7,297	28,799	35,864	129,249	19,404	422	26	92	269	-	222,086
Special Purpose	-	-	21	525	12,338	3,773	924	545	731	31	-	18,888
Supplemental	-	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	9
Totals	**998**	**8,308**	**30,796**	**38,630**	**162,362**	**29,167**	**1,578**	**1,250**	**3,826**	**1,303**	**18**	**278,236**

6. http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=dataexports
7. http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Launch-of-QQI-Infographics---view-data-as-pictures.aspx

The FET sector saw an even distribution by gender of learners who achieved QQI awards in 2015, where 48% of the learner cohort are female and the corresponding 52% are male. The HET sector saw more females than males achieve awards where 55% of the learner cohort are female and the corresponding 45% are male.

EUROPASS

The National Europass Centre, with the support of the ENIC- NARIC and the EQFNCP, led a range of initiatives promoting synergy between activities and promotional work with the core objective of making it easy for stakeholders nationally to be informed and to benefit from the work at European level www.europass.ie.

Activities in 2015 included the promotion of Europass through attendance at public events, participation in workshops (national and international) and the convening of a national EU Reference representative group of the Department of Education agencies where information and sharing of experiences took place. QQI also supports and promotes the Certificate and National Diploma supplements issued to graduates of further and higher education and training institutions along with their certificates and transcripts.

QQI was pleased to receive strong positive feedback from the European Commission following submission in March 2015 of the Project Report for the previous year. The Commission recommended that 'the business philosophy with explicit formulated objectives, priorities, challenges and planned output should be distributed also to the other National Europass Centres', and noted the successes of the project, including the establishment of the Reference Group for EU initiatives in education and skills within QQI, the implementation of transnational initiatives and production of the Europass video 'Showcase your skills'.

GOAL 6 - BUILD AN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE TO ENABLE QQI TO PERFORM SUCCESSFULLY

Finance

In 2015, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General signed off on the Audit of the 2014 Financial Statements and the accounts have been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. In 2015 the Finance Unit implemented a new on-line purchase order system which has streamlined purchasing and is in keeping with public procurement rules. Building on the batch processing of payments that was introduced in 2014, the purchase order system further streamlines the payments process, reduces paper and improves search and retrieval processes. QQI had issues with many of its aged debtors in 2013 which was impacting on cash flow and staff time. This was addressed in 2014 and continued in 2015 bringing aged debts within manageable levels.

QQI received exchequer grant funding in the amount of €3.6m in 2015. Non-Exchequer income received during the period amounted to €6.7m, of which €0.69m represented funding from the EU Commission for specific projects administered by the Authority and €1.1m in relationship fees from institutes of technology and universities. Total income received in 2015 amounted to €10.26m. Pay and pension costs in 2015 amounted to €5.56m and non-pay costs amounted €5.27m for the same period.

Human Resources

In response to internal and external factors, QQI carried out an organisational restructuring in 2015 that resulted in significant changes to reporting and operational arrangements. As part of the process, revised job descriptions were agreed for all posts. We will continue to review our structures in the context of shifting priorities.

In 2015 QQI commenced the drafting of its first Human Resource Strategy to cover the period 2016 to 2018 which is in keeping with the overarching organisational strategy. The process of developing the strategy has been collaborative and includes the establishment of a representative staff advisory committee which has ensured that all staff have an opportunity to contribute to the strategy. The draft strategy is scheduled to be submitted to the Board on 15 April 2016 for its endorsement.

Information Communications and Technology

In 2015 QQI provided a new public service to complement its existing publication of awards related statistics. The new service is called *QQI infographics*. QQI Infographics provides a visual representation of awards data that, through simple clicks, can easily be filtered on a variety of variables including year, gender, age-band, county, field of learning, award type, and award level. The data set includes QQI awards from 2007 right up to the current year. This includes both further education and training awards and higher education and training awards. It does not include awards where the award making authority has been delegated. This service represents an innovation in eGovernment and in Service Delivery.

A new *online service to provide information on the recognition of awards* was also introduced in 2015. QQI now provides an on-demand service for learners and workers providing for download a statement of comparability. The new NARIC Ireland service is provided through QSearch.qqi.ie. The online service has reduced the resources required to respond to routine requests and allowed staff to pursue further research on more unusual qualifications presented.

QQI has *moved several of its services from its datacentres to the cloud*. This has enabled QQI to cancel one datacentre contract; reduce the level of support within its IT team and reduce costs. It has also easily facilitated QQI to provide high availability services both to external stakeholders and staff.

We have also *supported e-government initiatives* by providing self-service systems to empower customers and stakeholders to carry out business and access information on their own initiative. QQI has done so by:

- Making continued improvements to QQI's QSearch service facilitating increased self-service for providers; and
- Undertaking continued work on the retirement of old technologies and systems and consolidation of existing systems thereby reducing the technology landscape and associated support whilst also improving value for money through savings in annual costs.

Planning and Project Management

In order to enable QQI perform successfully, we introduced an interactive database in 2015 that tracks and monitors planned corporate objectives and activities as set out in our yearly corporate plans. Each section updates its progress on activities via the database. The Strategic Planning and Communications Unit is responsible for working with business sections to ensure updates are recorded on the database. QQI also introduced a new reporting structure to enhance the corporate plans and tracking of same. Each quarter we report to the QQI Board on our progress to date on work that has been completed, on track, deferred, or at risk. QQI also works with the Department of Education and Skills in line with its Management Framework Agreement.

Membership

QQI is a member of ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Dr Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive of QQI is the current President of the association, which promotes European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

The main policy and decision-making body of ENQA is the General Assembly, which is composed of the member organisations of the Association and has European ministerial representatives and stakeholders as observers. On 22-23 October, QQI hosted the 6th annual ENQA General Assembly which took place at the Dublin Castle Conference Centre.

The themes of the GA Seminar included the outcomes of the "Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education" (QACHE) project, trends in quality assurance in the USA, and understanding the revised European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) as ENQA membership criteria.

ENQA General Assembly hosted by QQI in Dublin Castle October 2015.

5. GOVERNANCE

QQI Board

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) describes the composition of the Authority (hereafter and normally referred to as 'the Board') which governs Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The Board members are:

- Mr Gordon Clark (Chair)
- Dr Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (International expert)
- Ms Una Buckley (Learner representative)
- Dr Margaret Cullen (Chairperson, Audit Committee; to 23 January 2015)
- Ms Mary Danagher
- Mr Kevin Donoghue (USI nomination; to 30 June 2015)
- Dr Ann Louise Gilligan
- Ms Joanne Harmon
- Mr Jack Leahy (USI nomination; from 1 July 2015)
- Mr Thomas McDermott (Chairperson, Audit Committee; from 15 June 2015)
- Mr James Moore

In 2015, the Board met on the following dates:

- 8 January 2015
- 13 February 2015
- 24 April 2015
- 12 June 2015
- 25 August 2015 (Incorporeal Meeting)
- 25 September 2015
- 27 November 2015

2015	8 Jan	13 Feb	24 Apr	12 Jun	25 Aug	25 Sept	27 Nov	Max	Present
Gordon Clark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6	6
Barbara Brittingham	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	7	5
Una Buckley	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	7	5
Margaret Cullen***	✓**							1	1
Mary Danagher	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓	✓**	✓	7	7
Kevin Donoghue*	✓	-	-	-				4	1
Jack Leahy*					✓	✓	-	3	2
Ann Louise Gilligan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7
Joanne Harmon	✓	✓**	-	✓**	✓	✓	-	7	5
Thomas McDermott***					✓	✓	✓	3	3
James Moore	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	7

* USI Representative, term of office runs from 1 July to 30 June each year
** attended via phone conferencing
*** resigned from the Board with effect from 23 January 2015/
   appointed to the Board with effect from 15 June 2015.

▮ Not applicable

Board Member payments

Members of the Board of QQI act entirely in a voluntary capacity and no fees were paid to members of the Board in 2015. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, flights, taxis and sundry items. Board members' travel and subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total Board expenses in 2015 were €8,640.

Remuneration and expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €136,276 in 2015. No bonus payments were made to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive incurred expenses* (cash and credit card) of €1,524 in 2015. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, subsistence (vouched), rail travel, flights, taxis and sundry items.

QQI Sub-Board Governance Structures

Audit Committee

The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure to measure and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of its internal control procedures, including the internal audit function within QQI. The Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2015 was approved by the Board on 12 February. The Committee met five times in 2015.

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The function of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) is largely to make decisions regarding the validation of programmes leading to QQI awards. The decisions and recommendations of the Committee are informed by external expertise and recommendations, normally provided in the form of external panel reports and the outcomes of monitoring and review activities carried out by QQI. The PAEC met six times in 2015.

Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee

The mission of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC) is to review and analyse the activities of the PAEC, and on that basis to provide advice and make recommendations to the PAEC on the fulfilment of its mission. It will also confirm or refer back decisions of the PAEC, as appropriate. The PAOC met three times in 2015.

Policies and Standards Committee

The mission of the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) is to apply its expertise to considering QQI draft policy and make recommendations to the Board regarding the approval of these policies in line with the organisation's strategy. It also considers and may act on recommendations from the executive to determine standards of knowledge, skill and competence for education and training awards or to endorse subject guidelines concerning knowledge, skill and competence which are expected for higher education awards. The PSC met four times in 2015.

Approvals and Reviews Committee

The purpose of the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) is to perform such of the Board's functions as to ensure that providers, to which it grants access to external quality assurance, the International Education Mark, and delegated authority, have met and continue to meet, the associated criteria. The ARC met four times in 2015.

6. CORPORATE MATTERS

Audit and Procurement

Audit Committee

The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure to measure and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of its internal control procedures, including the internal audit function within QQI. The Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2015 was approved by the Board on 12 February. The Committee met five times in 2015.

External Audit Function

The Governance and ICT and HR, Employee Engagement and Finance units worked with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for the audit of the QQI Financial Statements 2014.

Internal Audit Function

The internal audit function continued to implement the 3 Year Internal Audit Plan 2013-2016 approved by the Audit Committee and the Board in June 2014. The following audits were completed in 2015:

- Financial Reporting Cycle
- Payroll and Personnel Cycle
- Revenue Cycle
- Provider Initial Access to Programme Validation Cycle
- Programme Validation Cycle
- Update on the Status on previous Audit Reports
- Audit of Risk Register Controls
- Legal Compliance Cycle
- Systems of Internal Financial Control (SIFC) 2015
- Qualifications and Recognition Cycle

Risk Management

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies requires each state body to appoint a Chief Risk Officer; the Head of Legal Affairs and Risk is the designated Chief Risk Officer of QQI. Implementation of the QQI Risk Management Framework and Risk Management Policy continued in 2015.

The Chief Risk Officer commenced a review of the QQI Risk Register in the final quarter of 2015. This followed an internal restructuring which required the reassignment of risks to new risk owners. Internal consultation was commenced with each Director and Head of Section during this period. In accordance with a decision of the Audit Committee and the agreement of the Board, formal internal audit Testing of Controls in Place are carried out in respect of high level risks only. Desk reviews are conducted, primarily by QQI's in-house internal auditor, on all of the medium level risks.

Procurement

QQI as a public body adheres to best practice in public procurement to which it is committed as set out in the Board approved Purchasing and Procurement Policy. QQI is a registered buyer and user of the National e-Tenders Procurement website which is managed by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) under the auspices of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Five public procurement tender competitions were conducted under the management of the Audit and Procurement section during 2015, as follows:

I. Quality Assurance process for Test of Interactive English exams;
II. RFP for Mono printer and colour multifunction devices;
III. Application Support Services;
IV. Multi-Party Framework Agreement for the Provision of Financial and Risk Appraisal of Applicant Providers; and
V. Technical Dialogue / Market Soundings regarding Financial Appraisal / Commercial Evaluation of Applicant Providers of Education & Training.

Data Protection

QQI is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. Data Protection is the safeguarding of the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of personal data. The Acts provide for the collection and use of data in a responsible way, and provide against unwanted or harmful uses of the data. QQI keeps oversight of its level of compliance and assists in order to ensure that we have adequate arrangements in place to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Acts.

Finance

In 2015, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General signed off on the Audit of the 2014 Financial Statements and the accounts have been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. In 2015 the Finance Unit implemented a new on-line purchase order system which has streamlined purchasing and is in keeping with public procurement rules. Building on the batch processing of payments that was introduced in 2014 the purchase order system further streamlines the payments process, reduces paper and improves search and retrieval processes. QQI had issues with many of its aged debtors in 2013 which was impacting on cash flow and staff time. This was addressed in 2014 and continued in 2015 bringing aged debts within manageable levels.

Summary of 2015 Financial Results

QQI received exchequer grant funding in the amount of €3.6m in 2015. Non-Exchequer income received during the period amounted to €6.7m, of which €0.69m represented funding from the EU Commission for specific projects administered by the Authority and €1.1m in relationship fees from institutes of technology and universities. Total income received in 2015 amounted to €10.26m. Pay and pension costs in 2015 amounted to €5.56m and non-pay costs amounted €5.27m for the same period.

Governance Forum

QQI is a member of the Governance Forum which promotes good governance in the public interest and provides advice, training, information and supports on good governance across the public sector. QQI attended a number of Governance Forum events in 2015 including on:

– Governance themes;
– Good governance – promoting the right culture and leadership;
– Role and responsibility of the board and individual members;
– Communications;
– Governance of regulation;
– Risk Management; and
– Audit Committees.