



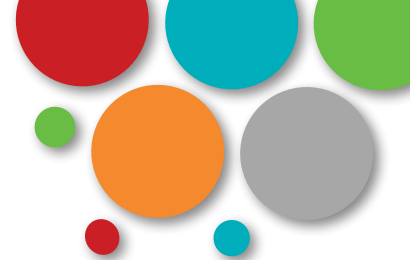
QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

Annual Report 2018





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Introduction

from the Chairperson and Chief Executive



This annual report for 2018 represents the main activities of the sixth year of QQI's business. It is the last report within the period of the organisation's second strategy statement 2016-2018. The year saw the appointment by the Minister for Education and Skills of a new QQI Chairperson, Ms Joanne Harmon and the appointment of four new Board members: Mr Blake Hodkinson, Ms Niamh O'Reilly, Professor Irene Sheridan and Dr Anne Walsh. During the year, the Board of QQI met on five occasions. Its committees continued to operate and report to the Board on their activities. The outcomes of Board and subcommittee meetings are publicly available on the QQI website.

During 2018, QQI developed and published our third strategy statement – [QQI Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 – adding value to qualifications](#). The statement refreshed the QQI mission, vision and values and adopted four priorities, focusing on: the integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); analysis and impact of measures to improve quality; collaboration and engagement; and building organisational capacity. The statement was completed following extensive internal and external consultation. We aim to enhance confidence in the quality of Irish education and training and add value to qualifications. Our success hinges on successful collaboration with stakeholders and developing organisational capacity to support sustainability, improvement and good governance.

In a significant development for the further education and training sector, QQI approved the quality assurance procedures (re-engagement) of all 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), a prerequisite to the development and rollout of institutional quality review for the ETBs in 2020. During the year, we validated new apprenticeship programmes in Auctioneering and Property Services, Craft Butchery, Original Equipment Manufacturing, and Cybersecurity.

Last year also saw the publication of the first two quality reviews of Higher Education institutions under the CINNTE process. QQI conducted dialogue meetings while visiting all the universities, institutes of technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

During the year, QQI published a review of Award Standards at Level 1-3 of the NFQ, a research study on International Trends and Development in Further Education Qualifications and a thematic analysis of reports on the



Accreditation/Approval/Review of QQI-validated Programmes of Higher Education.

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) were renewed between QQI and the Higher Education Authority (HEA), QQI and the Hong Kong Council for the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), and QQI and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the United Kingdom (QAA). An MoU was signed between QQI and the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC).

We were also pleased to organise well-attended conferences on assessment in further and higher education, and best practice in student-centred approaches in education. QQI hosted the Asia-Europe Forum on Quality and Recognition in Transnational Higher Education and the General Assembly of the Asia-Europe Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN).

The updating of QQI's legislative remit commenced when the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill was introduced in Seanad Éireann in August. The legislation will give QQI new powers to regulate the English Language Education (ELE) sector; to scrutinise the corporate fitness of education and training providers; to award the International Education Mark (IEM) to ELE and Higher Education providers and to oversee a statutory learner protection fund.

Ms Joanne Harmon - Chairperson, QQI

Dr Pádraig Walsh - Chief Executive, QQI

About QCI

QCI (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 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, community and voluntary sector, representative bodies and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| ACELS | Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services |
| AIQR | Annual Institutional Quality Reports |
| ARC | Approvals and Reviews Committee |
| CAS | Common Awards System |
| CINNTE | QCI's Higher Education Institutional review cycle |
| DAB | Designated Awarding Body |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills |
| DIT | Dublin Institute of Technology |
| DM | Dialogue Meetings |
| Eaquals | Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality Language Services |
| ELE | English Language Education |
| EMT | Executive Management Team, QCI |
| ENIC- NARIC | European Network of Information Centres in the European Region-National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESER | Executive Self-Evaluation Report |
| ETB | Education and Training Board |
| ETBI | Education and Training Boards Ireland |
| FET | Irish Further Education and Training |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEA | Higher Education Authority |



| | |
|-------------------|---|
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HET | Higher Education and Training |
| IEM | International Education Mark |
| IER | Independent Evaluation Report |
| IoT | Institute of Technology |
| IUA | Irish Universities Association |
| NARIC | National Academic Recognition Information Centre |
| NEC | National Europass Centre |
| NFQ | National Framework of Qualifications |
| NStEP | National Student Engagement Programme |
| NUI | National University of Ireland |
| NUIG | National University of Ireland Galway |
| PAEC | Programmes and Awards Executive Committee |
| PAOC | Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee |
| PMDS | Performance and Development Management System |
| PRoMiSE | Planning and Reporting Management Information System |
| PSC | Policies and Standards Committee |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| QAA | Quality Assurance Agency (UK) |
| QIP | Quality Improvement Plan |
| QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| SIC | System of Internal Control |
| SIFC | System of Internal Financial Control |
| THEA | Technological Higher Education Association |
| TNE | Transnational Education Review |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| TY Ireland | Transition Year Ireland |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| USI | Union of Students in Ireland |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| VISKA | Visible Skills of Adults |

Vision, Mission and Values (2016-2018)

OUR VISION

Extensive high-quality education and training opportunities with qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

OUR 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.

OUR 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 regards to accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.





Progress Against our Goals in 2018

We aim to ensure that we provide a high-quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. In 2018, we delivered on the final year of our Statement of Strategy 2016-18 which outlined the goals and objectives for QQI during that period.

The following sections highlight our progress to the end of 2018 in relation to our six strategic goals.

GOAL 1: *We, in association with stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop education and training programmes with clear occupational and/or educational purposes and learning outcomes for informed career and other choices.*

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

Established in 2003 as the 10-level, single national entity through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other, the Irish NFQ has contributed to better quality of qualifications facilitating portability of people's learning achievements.

Underpinned by quality assurance principles, the Irish NFQ describes qualifications in the Irish education and training system and sets out what each qualification says about what learners know, understand and are able to do. It also sets out qualifications pathways from one NFQ level to another.

The recent [review of the NFQ](#) revealed that the framework has had a positive impact on lifelong learning, mobility of qualifications, skills matching, recognition of foreign qualifications and Irish qualifications abroad. However, these effects cannot be taken for granted and work needs to continue to keep the NFQ relevant to the world of qualifications and skills. Therefore, it is our role to promote greater awareness and use of the NFQ and to ensure that it is understood by everyone. To mark the Irish NFQ's 15th birthday, we published an [interactive infographic](#) which charts the development of the NFQ since its inception.

In 2018, we also published [At A Glance: Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ](#) in an infographic format providing information regarding NFQ review background, research methodology, key findings and policy implications.

Findings from the impact assessment were used to inform the strategic direction of QQI in relation to the NFQ, reflected both in the QQI Statement of Strategy 2019-2021, and in the agreed European Qualifications Framework-National Co-ordination Point (EQF-NCP) Ireland workplan for 2018-2021.

Promoting Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Using Qualifications Frameworks

In 2018, QQI published the [Comparing Qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong](#) user guide. China is the largest source of non-EU students in the Irish education system, with Hong Kong a gateway to greater China. This guide promotes mutual recognition of qualifications facilitating the mobility of learners and employers between Ireland and Hong Kong. Using the EQF as a translation grid, the guide explains the qualifications systems of Ireland and Hong Kong. It helps students, employers and other stakeholders to compare and understand qualifications achieved in both jurisdictions. A similar project is underway with New Zealand, given the long history of labour market mobility between Ireland and New Zealand. These initiatives establish and enhance the credibility of the Irish qualification system amongst important international audiences.

In addition, QQI as the Department of Education and Skills-designated EQF-NCP for Ireland has been involved in a number of activities promoting the Irish NQF internationally, strengthening collaboration with other qualifications frameworks and various European initiatives. As EQF-NCP, QQI participated in four meetings of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF-AG) during 2018. The EQF-AG is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the EU Recommendation (2017) on the European Qualifications Framework.

QQI participated in the European Training Foundation peer-learning activity on communicating qualifications systems and qualifications (Turin, February 2018); reflected on challenges in measuring the impact of the qualifications framework ([Ljubljana, May 2018](#)); promoted policy learning opportunities from European experience at [the UNESCO and West Africa](#) conference on qualifications frameworks; collaborated closely with DIT on the [NQF-IN \(Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks\)](#) project (Dublin, March 2018 and Warsaw, June 2018) and shared our expertise on implementing the NQF policy and practice during the [NQF-Jordanian Project Delegate Visit to UCC](#) (Cork, September 2018) to name just a few.

Promoting the Irish NQF nationally and internationally is part of QQI's statutory functions. Last year, we fulfilled it through cooperating with international bodies on qualifications and promoting greater awareness and understanding of qualifications frameworks.





QQI AWARDS

Initial Access to Validation

This is the process whereby providers who have not previously had a programme validated by QQI apply to have their organisational capacity and quality assurance procedures evaluated with respect to QQI guidelines and validation policy.

In 2018, five applications were processed. The outcomes were as follows:

- Approved – 1
- Refused with recommendations – 3
- Refused Approval - 1

Re-engagement Process

This is the process whereby providers who already have a programme(s) validated by QQI apply to have their organisational capacity and quality assurance procedures evaluated with respect to current QQI guidelines and validation policy. These were the first such applications processed.

During 2018, three applications were processed to completion. The outcomes were as follows:

- HET Providers – 2 approved
- FET providers – 1 approved

Programme Validation

Programme Validation is the process whereby QQI evaluates provider programmes against published criteria. Such programmes can be new or revised following review and submitted for Revalidation.

| Processes | 2018 |
|---|------|
| New HE programme validation:- Validated | 44 |
| New HE programme validation:- Refused Validation | 1 |
| HE Re-validation*:- Validated | 98 |
| New FE programme validation:- Validated | 80 |
| New FE programme validation: - Refused Validation | 4 |

* Includes programmes revalidated by extension of current validation period.

Validation of Apprenticeships

In 2018, four new FET apprenticeships were validated.

Time Taken for Validation Process

QQI seeks to ensure that at least 90% of applications for validation are completed within 25 weeks. The time is measured between the date of receipt of a complete application and the date of a Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) Decision.

During 2018, the average duration for an application was 15.2 weeks, with the longest being 33 weeks. 93% of applications were processed in 25 weeks or less.

Infographics for Validation process

Following on from the success of the Infographics [webpage](#) for awards and certification data, QQI launched the first phase of [Validation Infographics](#) showing a graphical breakdown of the process duration data.

Briefing/Consultation

QQI Quality Assurance ran a number of training/briefing sessions for providers and others during 2018. The topics and numbers of providers attending are shown below:

| | |
|---|----|
| Re-engagement – Follow up on Pilot | 14 |
| Re-Engagement – Briefing for providers preparing applications | 38 |
| Programme Validation – Briefing for FET providers preparing applications | 15 |
| Programme Validation – Briefing for HET and apprenticeship providers preparing applications | 49 |
| Programme Review and Revalidation – Briefing for HET providers | 27 |
| Validation – Briefing for FET Providers on 2016 Validation Policy | 50 |
| Assessment – Implications for providers of Nowak Judgement on GDPR | 24 |
| Initial Access to Validation – Briefing for Applicant Providers | 23 |

Certification

In 2018, 135,365 learners received 226,438 QQI Awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. The awards were achieved across all ten levels of the NFQ, with Level 5 continuing to dominate in terms of volume.

QQI awards in 2018 (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 | 314 | 1,048 | 1,472 | 1,720 | 21,392 | 6,121 | 154 | 995 | 2,978 | 2,241 | 23 | 38,458 |
| Minor | 1,083 | 7,524 | 21,050 | 32,752 | 86,066 | 18,776 | 379 | 10 | 78 | - | - | 167,718 |
| Special Purpose | - | - | 26 | 297 | 11,911 | 257 | 854 | 418 | 335 | 82 | - | 20,180 |
| Supplemental (FET) | - | - | - | - | - | 82 | - | - | - | - | - | 82 |

Reviews of Awards and Standards

We are committed to developing NFQ standards for employers, learners, awarding bodies and policy makers. We do this through a review of existing award standards and the development of new award standards where appropriate.

In 2018, we initiated the review and development of:

- FET standards at NFQ Levels 1-4

Deliverables from this project are expected to include:

- Broad core standards aligned to the EU Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning
- Vocational specific standards in the following disciplines: science, horticulture, agriculture; construction and engineering; fine arts and crafts; hospitality and personal services; languages; retail, administration and office work; care and community work; ICT.
- Standards for Early Learning and Care (ELC).

Criteria were developed for the retirement of Common Awards System (CAS) Standards that are unused or little used. The identification and retirement of little-used or unused CAS standards is scheduled for 2019.

We also revised the Teaching English as a second or other language Levels 6-9 award standard.

In October 2018, we published [Trends and Developments in Further Education Qualifications](#). This paper provides background and context to support the development of a Green Paper on the future of qualifications.

Policy Development

In 2018 we published the following policies and policy-related documents:

- [Statutory QA Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes \(March 2018\)](#)
- [Guidelines for the National University of Ireland \(NUI\) for the Review of its Linked Providers](#)
White-Paper for consultation

NARIC Ireland

QQI hosts NARIC Ireland, a free advice service on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and part of a worldwide network of qualification recognition agencies known as ENIC-NARIC.

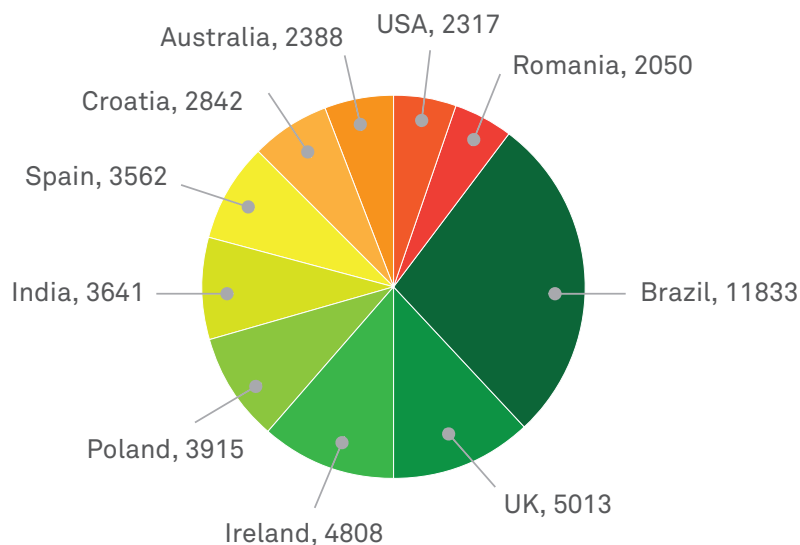
We have over 1,100 foreign awards listed and compared to similar awards at levels on the NFQ on our website. Almost 73,000 visits to the site country pages were recorded in 2018 with the top 10 countries (including Brazil in first position) accounting for 16% of all traffic. This was followed by the UK (6.9%), Ireland (6.6%), Poland (5.4%) and India (5.0%). 25,222 Comparability Statements were downloaded from the website.

In 2018 we moved to an on-line enquiry page to ensure compliance with GDPR and added three more language versions of the User Guide to the website (Arabic, Chinese and Russian).

We also issued a newsletter highlighting our achievements for 2018.

We began work as a partner in new Erasmus+ projects with the objective of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of qualifications and processes for working with undocumented refugees, new forms of learning such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and automatic recognition.

**Fig 1. NARIC 72,910 website visits
Top 10 Page Views by Country (2019)**



Europass

QQI hosts the National Europass Centre (NEC). In 2018 the NEC, jointly with our EQF-NCP, successfully applied for funding for the period 2018 – 2020. Following approval, we continue to promote the Europass initiative and EQF-NCP reference point, which helps citizens organise their documents to make skills and qualifications easily understood abroad. We also co-hosted the EU Reference Group in Dublin along with our sister agencies of the Department of Education and Skills and published a report on the proceedings on the QQI website.

The NEC also participated in the meetings of Europass networks including the Nordic Baltic Western Cluster Group (Netherlands), the Innovation Working Group (Portugal) and Commission Network Meetings (Brussels).

Work by the European Commission on modernising Europass has begun and we are active participants in the Europass Advisory Group set up to guide this process.

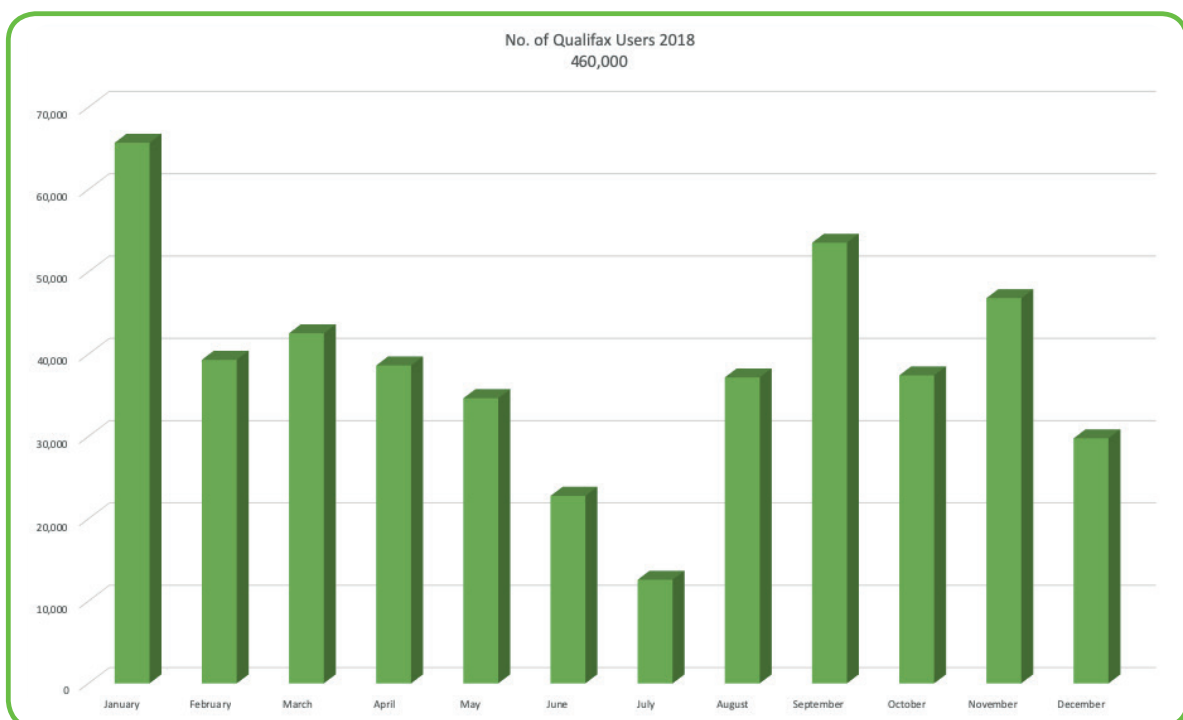
Qualifax

QQI hosts Ireland's national learner database, Qualifax, which provides information on higher and further education and training. In 2018, around 460,000 individual users accessed the website which offers comprehensive information on courses at all levels of the NFQ.

Qualifax also compiled the annual calendar of national education and training events of relevance to the guidance sector and the postgraduate listing of programmes in association with the Irish Times Postgraduate Supplement.

We also participated in the expert Steering Group for the Career Guidance Review established by the Department of Education and Skills and completed a submission to the consultation during that review on behalf of QQI.

The Information Services team has attended events at local and national level promoting our service including Higher Options, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors Annual Conference, the National School Summit and Jobs Week (operated by the Department of Family and Social Affairs).



GOAL 2: We, in association with our stakeholders, will ensure that the NFQ and its qualifications are used to develop lifelong learning pathways for personal, social and professional development.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

VISKA

Ireland, through the work of QQI, is participating in a 3-year Erasmus+ Key Action 3 funded policy experimentation project, [VISKA](#) (Visible Skills of Adults). The project addresses the need to make the skills of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and those with low levels of qualifications more visible, in order to shorten their time to employment and to support their active engagement in society. Skills Norway is leading the project in co-operation with QQI and partners from Iceland and Belgium. Cork Institute of Technology is the research and evaluation partner for the VISKA project.

In 2018 QQI, with support of expert practitioners and policy makers nationally, through workshops and electronic consultation gave feedback on the emerging tools for use in the Field Trials at the heart of this experiment. In addition, QQI co-ordinated a small-scale experiment in five sites (Donegal ETB, Galway Roscommon ETB, Louth Meath ETB, Mayo Sligo and Leitrim ETB and Warrenmount Community Education Centre) with guidance and frontline staff and third-country nationals testing the EU Skills Profiling Tool.

European Commission Festival – Unlocking Skills

In 2018, QQI was invited to participate in the European Commission Festival, Unlocking your Skills, showcasing effective practices in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Ireland was one of the locations for the Festival film which was made in the Cork Training Centre, and featured employers, employees, learners, practitioners and a representative of QQI to explain the impacts of RPL in practice.

RPL Practitioner Network

The RPL Practitioner Network met once addressing the theme of ‘Embracing the RPL Challenge’; over eighty practitioners attended along with a delegation from Estonia.

GOAL 3: To oversee an improved quality assurance system that is comprehensive and balances accountability and enhancement and promotes local responsibility

Quality Assurance

Revised Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines in Blended Learning were published in March 2018.



Education and Training Boards Re-Engagement

In 2018, QQI completed re-engagement with the Education and Training Boards through a process of reporting and dialogue on QA procedures in 2017-2018.

The agreed re-engagement process requires each ETB to develop an Executive Self Evaluation Report (ESER) addressing QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance guidelines and other QA guidelines as appropriate; and a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). From late 2017 to early 2018, each ETB submitted an ESER and QIP to QQI. A series of dialogue meetings was held between QQI and each ETB to discuss establishment of each ETB's QA procedures in line with Section 30 of the 2012 Act. The ESER and QIP submitted by each ETB was used as the basis for the process for approval of QA procedures. The Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) considered each formal request for approval of QA procedures. By June 2018, all QA procedures had been approved.

National Student Engagement

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) was launched in 2016 to develop a national vision for enhancing and embedding student engagement within Higher Education. This national programme has brought together staff and students with the aim of fostering a culture of meaningful engagement, providing space for collaboration and capacity building, for sharing ideas and for creating best practice to elevate the student voice and to implement student/staff partnerships.

To date, NStEP has rolled out a highly successful programme of Class Representative Training for undergraduate students, delivered by students. It has also led 16 institutional analysis workshops in which senior leaders, staff, and students of Irish HEIs have come together to examine student engagement practice and experiences within their setting. From these analysis workshops NStEP examined five thematic areas through projects chaired jointly by HEI staff and Students' Union representatives.

Following an evaluation of the impact of NStEP in 2018, it was identified that the programme's success would be dependent on a strategy for the future, which clearly laid out its vision and priorities. Consultation on this strategy, which will cover the period 2019-2021, is due to take place in early 2019, with the new strategy to be published by the middle of the year.

Apprenticeships

Recent developments in apprenticeships have resulted in exciting opportunities for both school leavers and learners to simultaneously gain a qualification and work experience over a two to four-year period. Apprenticeships are now offered from level 5 to 10 on the NFQ in industry sectors such as hospitality, Information & Communications Technology, engineering and construction.

The key priority in 2018 was to support both higher and further education and training providers as they transitioned through QQI's Validation of Programmes Policy. This was achieved and resulted in 12 SOLAS programmes validated and a further 6 apprenticeship programmes being validated.

In 2018, several workshops for both higher and further education and training providers were aimed at providers intending to submit an apprenticeship application for validation, with 80 to 100 attendees at each.

2018 saw the validation of an additional four new apprenticeship programmes in the areas of Original Equipment Manufacturing, Auctioneering and Property Services, Craft Butchery and Cybersecurity.

Validation Activities

Training and briefing events were held for providers as follows:

- **Providers wishing to apply for validation of FET (CAS) programmes**
 - Seventy provider representatives attended a March event which featured presentations from Further Education Support Services, Kildare Wicklow ETB, Cork ETB and Aontas.
 - A December event focused on Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcome/Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcome (MIPLO/MIMLO) development and mapping to CAS awards standards.
- **Preparing Applications for Validation**

The purpose of this event was to assist providers of apprenticeship and higher education and training programmes to transition to the 2016 validation policy.
- **Programme Review and Revalidation Processes**

In May, the Quality Assurance and Regulation Unit hosted a briefing event for providers on the pilot programme review and revalidation process. The pilot process was implemented following the publication of the new validation policy. The event was well attended and the feedback received from providers highlighted a need to review the implementation process with view to streamlining it. Subsequently, QQI established a working group comprising provider representatives and QQI staff to examine the programme review and revalidation implementation processes with a view to proposing ways of optimising efficiency without compromising their effectiveness as quality assurance processes.
- **Workshop for FET report writers**

In 2018 a working group was established to draft a new FET (CAS) independent evaluation report template and style guide for use by validation report writers. In May 2018, these were launched at a training session for report writers.

Working Groups

- **Joint ETBI QQI Collaborative Working Group for the Development of an ETB Sectoral Model for Programme Development and Validation**

The ETBI/QQI Collaborative Working Group was established to work towards the development of an ETB sectoral model for programme development and implementation of the new QQI validation policy. It was initially chaired by Anne Walsh (formerly of NUIG and now a QQI Board member) and is now chaired by Helen Murphy (WIT). Significant progress has been made by the ETBs toward establishing a collaborative framework.
- **FET (CAS) Validation Report Writing Working Group**

This group completed its work in 2018 producing a style guide for use by report writers, additional tools to assist report writers and a revised report template.



- **Higher Education Programme Review/Revalidation Working Group**

The working group was established in 2018 and has met five times since establishment. To date, the working group has agreed changes to the programme review and revalidation process and a revised template for providers' programme review reports. It is envisaged that the work of the group will be completed by mid-2019.

- **Report Writing Style Guide (HET)**

The Quality Assurance Regulation unit established a working group to agree a report writing style guide which would accompany the independent evaluation report (IER) template. The IER is an evidence-based report and the report-writing style guide was developed to assist chairpersons and secretaries of validation panels to write the independent evaluation report. The agreed style guide was forwarded to all evaluation panels. In 2019, QQI will seek feedback from secretaries and chairpersons on the usefulness of the style guide.

Additional operational procedures and supports

In addition to the various operational process improvements and resources described above, the following are also noteworthy:

- Internal QA procedures for validation were reviewed and updated in 2018
- Publication of Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators (V1, 2018).

Surveying of Validation Evaluators and Providers who Submit Programmes to QQI for Validation

In 2018 we continued to survey evaluators and commenced surveying providers who submit programmes to QQI for validation. These surveys will allow us to compile and publish an annual report that will provide a 360° view of the validation process and identify aspects of the process that work well, as well as those that need improvement.

In 2018, we published a further [report](#) and analysis on the feedback received from evaluators and in 2019 we will publish a report on the feedback received from evaluators and providers during 2018.

Thematic Analysis of Reports on the Accreditation/Approval/Review of Programmes of Higher Education

Stage 1 of this project involved an analysis of relevant reports on programmes where QQI is the awarding body. The report was published towards the end of 2018 and includes:

- Recurring strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement of programmes
- Opportunities for improvement of the relevant reports in terms of their clarity, the usefulness of the information they provide stakeholders about programmes
- Analysis of the characteristics of expert panels and their diversity

- Recurring strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement of programme re-approval/accreditation processes
- Cross-cutting analyses; and identification of opportunities for improvement.

Validation activity volume and trends

| Processes | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Links to reports |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|--|
| Focused review of programme (programme count) | | | 4 | 2 | | Report 1 Report 2 |
| New HE programme validation: (approved programme count) | 106* | 85 | 52 | 30 | 37 | Panel Reports - Validation |
| New HE programme validation (refused programme count) | | 8 | 2 | 11 | 1 | Panel Reports - Validation |
| HE Re-validation (approved programme count) | * | 86 | 29 | 11 | 60 | Panel Reports - Validation |
| New FE Programme Validation | 697 | 242 | 209 | 126 | 71 | |

*Not specifically logged as new validation or revalidation in database, pre-2015. The total of 106 for 2014 includes new programme validations and revalidations.

Volume of activity (process completions) from 2014 to October 2018 and links to published reports. Blank means zero.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS

CINNTE Cyclical Reviews

The CINNTE review cycle for public higher education institutions commenced in 2018 with reviews of:

- Institute of Technology, Sligo
- Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- Dublin City University
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Maynooth University



The Review Reports for [Institute of Technology, Sligo](#) and [Letterkenny Institute of Technology](#) were published in November 2018. To assist the promotion of the findings of the reviews to a wider audience, we also published a Quality Profile for each review, an online document that describes the main findings of the review and provides links to further information.



NUI Quality Assurance Guidelines

In 2018, we worked with NUI and other stakeholders to develop and consult on Guidelines for NUI Reviews. This paves the way for a QQI engagement with NUI, ultimately leading to a review of NUI in 2022.

Annual Institutional Report (AIQR)

In 2018 we received 22 Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Reports from publicly regulated higher education institutions. These were [published](#) in June 2018.

AIQR Summary Report

Every year, QQI prepares a summary of the Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Reports. This summary report highlights quality initiatives undertaken across higher education institutions and identifies common quality themes for institutions. This publication demonstrates the many quality assurance activities being undertaken within institutions, the resulting improvements made and the adherence of institutions to national and international QA guidelines and procedures.

Highlights from the 2018 [report](#) include:

- Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement activities are strategically important to Irish HEIs and are impacting on institutional governance structures, while Quality Offices or equivalent are increasingly important in terms of strategy development and implementation.
- Quality assurance reviews and initiatives are routinely analysed and disseminated at senior management meetings across institutions. More broadly, there is increased evidence of wider internal dissemination of information on quality assurance policies and procedures, results of quality reviews, and analyses of quality assurance/quality enhancement activities to inform and empower staff in relation to quality assurance.
- Data is playing an ever-greater role in improving the student experience. Institutions are harnessing data collected at local and national level to inform decision-making in key areas of strategic importance, while feedback from students, staff and other relevant stakeholders is directly influencing quality assurance initiatives.
- Irish HEIs use objective external indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of their QA policies and procedures. There is also strong evidence that HEIs are responding to feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders to enhance the quality of the student experience.
- Across the Irish HE system, institutions continue to establish a culture of Quality Enhancement with initiatives in this area showing a focus on access and transition, student retention, student supports, staff development, work-based learning, gender equality and research. Furthermore, institutions are continuing efforts to improve the student experience, with institutions focusing on the first-year experience and improving progression rates.

Dialogue Meetings

Dialogue Meetings between QQI and both the Designated Awarding Body (DABs) and Institute of Technology (IoT) sectors form part of the external quality assurance (QA) framework in Ireland. Twenty Dialogue Meetings with Higher Education Institutions took place from April to June 2018.

Sometimes the Dialogue Meeting (DM) schedule may overlap with the CINNTE Main Review Visit schedule for individual institutions. If this arises, precedence is given to the Main Review Visit and the DM is cancelled. In 2018, this happened in the case of Institute of Technology, Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

Items discussed in the 2018 round of DMs included:

- The 2016/17 Annual Institutional Quality Report
- The current operating context for each institution
- Consultation on QA policies and procedures
- System-wide developments
- General updates and current QQI projects.

Technological University Designation

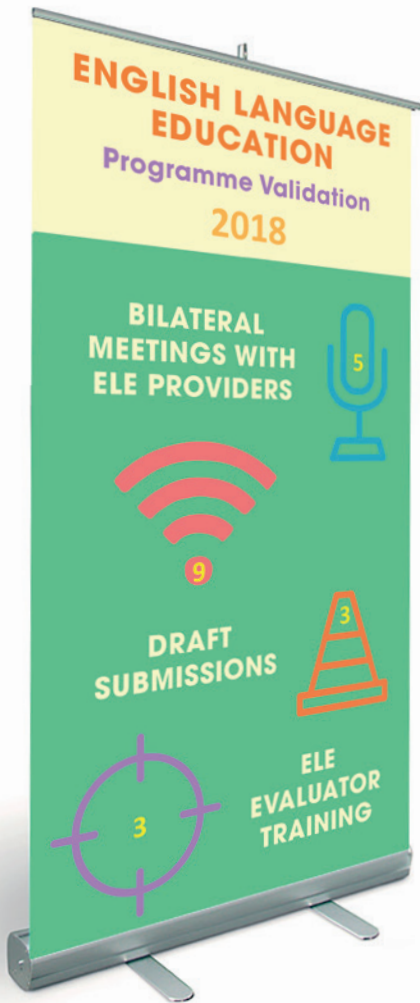
QQI was invited to nominate experts for the panel convened by the Department of Education and Skills to evaluate the Technological University for Dublin (TU4D) proposal in 2018. A representative from QQI also met with the TU designation panel to inform the application.

QQI hosted a series of discussions with the TU candidate Institutes of Technology and their representative body, THEA, on changes to the CINNTE review schedule and the AIQR process consistent with the mergers and TU designation outcomes.

English Language Education

QQI operates the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS) while inspecting and monitoring ACELS recognised providers. We validate programmes relating to QQI English Language Education programmes, and work with stakeholders to enhance, develop and share information in the English Language Education arena.

ACELS is the national scheme for accreditation of English Language services. In 2018, there were ninety ACELS recognised providers representing approximately 130 centres nationwide. Details on our monitoring activities, programme validation and communication and enhancement work are outlined in the following infographic:



GOAL 4: We will provide clear authoritative and comprehensive information to stakeholders and the public regarding QQI's roles, responsibilities and activities

Stakeholder Engagement

QQI has established a new Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Division to work across the organisation to support the business units towards a more coordinated corporate approach to stakeholder engagements. Communications is an essential aspect of our work and this new initiative was motivated by feedback from stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement aims to:

- Establish and maintain structured and purposeful corporate relationships with our stakeholders in line with our strategic objectives and priorities.
- Communicate and explain our roles and responsibilities to stakeholders in clear straightforward terms.
- Ensure that our key messages are understood by stakeholders.
- Manage our corporate relationships with high impact stakeholders (government departments, funding agencies for education and training) and collaborators.
- Promote engagement and collaboration with stakeholders.

Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)

QQI established Memorandums of Understanding in 2018 with the following organisations:

- **National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**
- to identify areas of co-operation and collaboration.
- **China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre**
- to improve the quality of higher education in Ireland and China, particularly in the area of cross-border education.

Memorandums of Understanding were renewed in 2018 with the following partners:

- **Higher Education Authority**
- to work closely together in the best interests of the Irish Higher Education system.
- **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)**, the independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education – creating a strategic alliance to enhance external quality assurance and promote the quality of higher education in Ireland and the United Kingdom.
- **Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications**, the independent statutory body to provide authoritative advice on academic standards of degree programmes in higher education institutions in Hong Kong – to co-operate and collaborate for the benefit of both parties.



Padraig Walsh, CEO QQI; Mary Mitchell O'Connor, Minister of State for Higher Education; Dr Graham Love, CEO HEA at the renewal of a Memorandum of Understanding between QQI and the HEA

Consultative Forum

The Consultative Forum was established in 2014 to allow key stakeholders provide feedback and advice to QQI on a range of issues regarding our work and our impact on the education, training and qualifications system. The Forum met twice in 2018:

- **May** - this meeting took the form of a workshop focused on 'Engaging & Contributing to QQI Strategy 2019-2021'. Outputs from the workshop informed the development of QQI's new Statement of Strategy, Adding Value to Qualifications.
- **November** - this meeting focused on the implementation of QQI's strategy with workshop sessions on Communicating QQI's Analysis and Impact, and 15 Years of the NFQ.

Membership of the Forum will be reviewed in 2019.

Communications

A full-time Communications Manager was appointed in May 2018 with responsibility for external and internal communications in the delivery of the organisation's strategic objectives. A draft communications strategy was presented to the Board in December 2018 for consideration.

An official QQI LinkedIn account was created in May 2018 and attracted almost 600 followers in its first six months. The QQI Twitter account continues to perform strongly with high engagement levels and has tripled its number of followers in 2018.



Impressions – 268.9k
Engagement Rate – 1.67%
Link Clicks – 1,226
Retweets – 769
Likes – 1,487



Followers – 593
Page Views – 319
Unique Visitors – 146



Views - 843
Subscribers - 85

QRM – Client Relationship Management System

The Communications team has worked with IT support to develop the functionality and capacity of the existing QRM system to successfully deliver high-level communications campaigns, including event notifications, registrations, surveys and The QT, QQI's e-zine.

Podcasts

QQI repeated its successful collaboration with the Irish Independent on their *Going to College* podcast series. During August, to coincide with the release of the Leaving Certificate results, we participated in four podcasts hosted by the Irish Independent. The podcasts were published on independent.ie and amplified on the Irish Independent and QQI social media accounts resulting in over 26,000 listens, an increase of almost 50% on the previous year.

EPISODE 1:

Preparing for Leaving Cert Results

EPISODE 2:

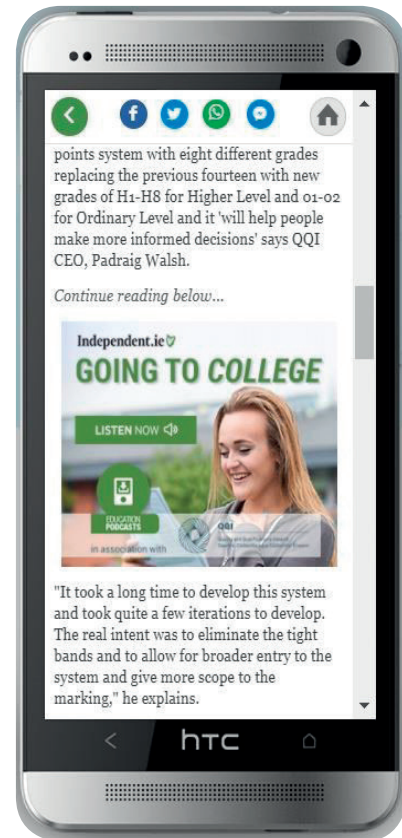
Take your time before making your decision

EPISODE 3:

What to do if you didn't get a college offer

EPISODE 4:

How to best prepare for college life



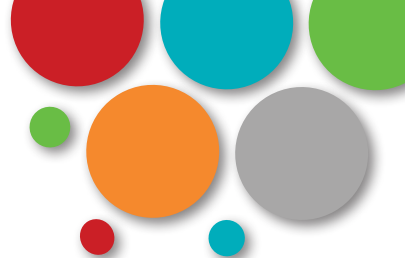
EVENTS

International Summer Leadership Academy

QQI hosted an international delegation from the US, China and the EU on a Study Visit as part of the Chain 5 network, known as the International Summer Leadership Academy (ISLA). Delegates focused on leadership in Irish education training and policy, transitions to higher education from VET and on widening participation.

Let's Talk About Assessment

In March 2018, QQI published a Green Paper on Assessment that set out a framework and context for discussing a wide range of assessment issues. It identified issues of concern and presented ideas about how some of them might be tackled. The consultation period extended until December 2018.



As part of this consultation, in November 2018, we jointly hosted two events - one with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education and the other with the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). The events were intended to provide an opportunity for people to take time out to discuss issues relating to the assessment of learners and learning. Both were well attended (approximately 170 at each event) and included internationally recognised speakers, national speakers and student speaker. Feedback from both events was very positive.

We received seventy-eight written responses to the Green Paper. We plan to publish the feedback in mid-2019 with a thematic analysis of the issues raised and options proposed along with our response.

Best Practice in Student-Centred Approaches in Education and Training

On 20 November, QQI hosted a student-centred conference in partnership with HEA, Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), IUA, THEA and the USI. Almost 200 educators and students throughout the country came together to hear the perspectives of international and national experts, students, educators and policymakers in a range of diverse areas such as student engagement practices; higher education and some further education and training approaches; international student experience; apprenticeship entry; and community engagement

Asia-Europe Forum on Quality and Recognition in Transnational Higher Education

This one-day event took place in Dublin on 18 December 2018. The forum was attended by over 100 representatives from Irish, European and Asian higher education institutions and agencies that are active or have an interest in transnational education provision between Europe and Asia.

The conference coincided with the QQI-hosted 2nd General Assembly of the Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education in Asia and Europe (CBQAN) on 19 December 2018. CBQAN aims to improve the quality of cross-border education, to build communication and cooperation platforms for stakeholders of cross-border higher education quality assurance between Asia and Europe and to promote student and academic mobility. The meeting was attended by members of the CBQAN network.

GOAL 5: *We will proactively enable and encourage QQI's staff's ability to develop, thrive and be fully engaged in their work*

Staff Development and Training

QQI continues to conduct ongoing staff engagement through its Employee Engagement Group, whose membership changed significantly in 2018 and which continues to include staff at all levels in the organisation. The work of the forum has overseen several initiatives including a Staff Engagement Survey, guidelines for working in an open plan office and the continuation of a mental health and positive wellbeing programme which included a week of focused and promotional activities leading up to the National Workplace Wellbeing Day. The Group also supported the preparation of the work for the application of the KeepWell Mark which is an evidence-based

accreditation and revolves around issues essential for a collective improvement in workplace health, safety and wellbeing.

The HR Strategy 2019-2021 was finalised and has clear objectives regarding staff engagement and staff training and development.

QQI continues to engage with the recognised trade union on matters involving terms and conditions of employment.

QQI, informed by the Performance and Development Management System (PMDS), facilitated staff training and development which included professional coaching, attendance at forums, conferences, briefing sessions and continuous professional development.

We facilitated training in relation to:

- Corporate Governance for State and Public Sector Bodies
- Internal Communications
- Certificate in Professional Irish
- Adobe photoshop and design skills
- Certificate in Data Protection
- Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies
- High Performance Leadership Programme
- Graphic Design Master Diploma
- Note-taking for meetings
- Building and running a Project Management Office
- Higher Certificate in Mathematics
- Advanced Diploma in Data Protection Law
- Time Management
- MS Access
- Payroll
- Recruitment and Selection.



GOAL 6: To enhance QQI's self-service systems, processes and technological capabilities to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service it delivers

QQI introduced new services for its customers in 2018 including an online payment system for replacement certificates and an online form for the handling of NARIC requests. The infographics service was expanded to provide more visibility of the validation process and the QSearch service was enhanced to auto publish validation and QA approval reports.

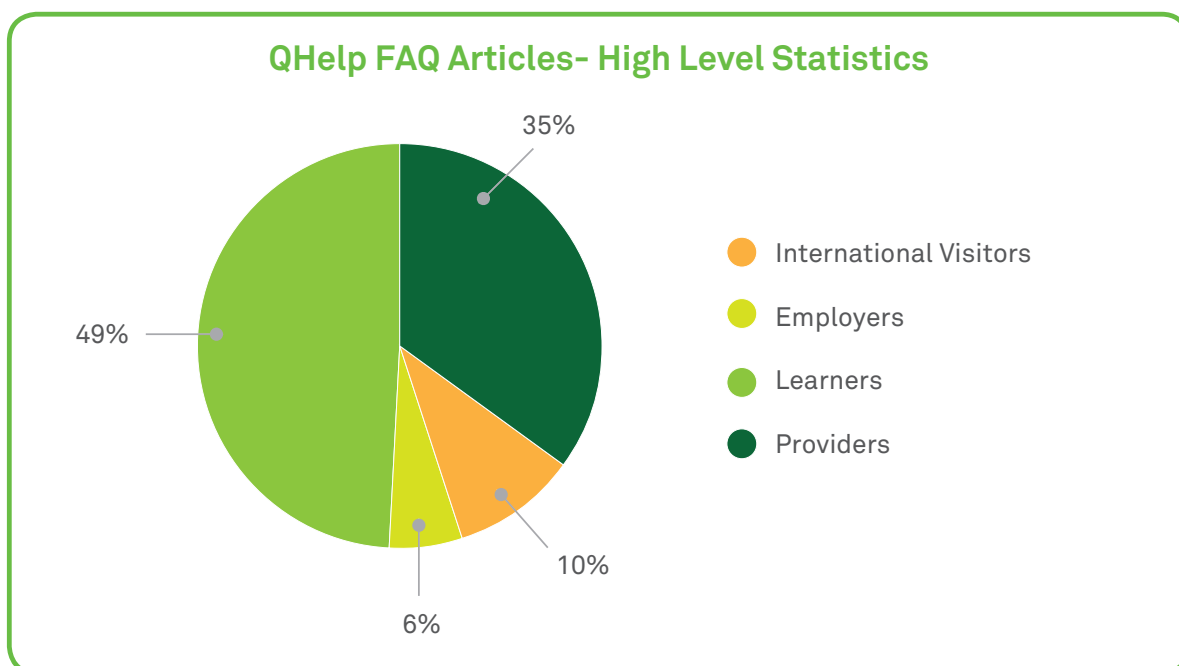
Work also commenced on a number of projects which will become available in 2019 including an online fees calculator for programmes an Irish register listing courses, programmes and providers and an online service for providers to support programme validation. QQI further developed its relationship management system to manage internal and external communications and events.

A number of security measures were also put in place to reduce the risk of service downtime for both customers and QQI staff.

Queries Received Through QHelp

To answer queries, QQI uses an online system called QHelp, which is accessible through our website. Those submitting queries register their details and submit their query. In 2018 we received 9,716 queries through this system.

Our QHelp service also provides a number of articles which aim to provide answers to frequently asked questions. The number of unique page visits to this service in 2018 was 149,281 analysed as follows:



Governance

QQI Board

QQI is governed by a Board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Board is responsible for the approval of financial accounts, policy, strategy statements, corporate plans and annual reports. The Board makes decisions in relation to a number of functions including but not limited to:

- Approval of all policy and approaches to policy
- Strategic planning, corporate planning and approval of annual reports
- Approval of accounts
- Withdrawal of approval of quality assurance procedures
- Withdrawal of programme validation
- Delegation of authority to a provider to make awards
- Withdrawal or variation of delated authority to make awards

It also has functions in relation to programme validation, joint awards, and access, transfer and progression. A number of sub-Board committees assist with academic and other key areas of governance which are serviced by Board members. See the section on sub-Board governance for more information, p. 29-30.

The Board Members are:

- Ms Joanne Harmon (existing Board Member, appointed Chairperson with effect from 13 March 2018)
- Dr Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Dr Barbara Brittingham (International expert)
- Ms Mary Danagher
- Mr. Oisín Hassan (USI nomination)
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson (appointed 13 March 2018)
- Mr Thomas McDermott
- Ms. Niamh O'Reilly (appointed 13 March 2018)
- Prof. Irene Sheridan (appointed 13 March 2018)
- Dr. Anne Walsh (appointed 13 March 2018)



In 2018, the Board met on the following dates:

- 23 February
- 27 April
- 16-21 May (incorporeal meeting)
- 22 June
- 21 September
- 7 December
- 21 December (incorporeal meeting)

Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

QQI is in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016).

Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2018 QQI Board Meetings

| | 23 February 2018 | 27 April | Incorporeal Meeting 16-21 May | 22 June | 21 September | 7 December | Incorporeal Meeting 21 December | Max | Attendance |
|---------------------|------------------|----------|-------------------------------|---------|--------------|------------|---------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Joanne Harmon | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 7 | 7 |
| Padraig Walsh | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 7 | 7 |
| Barbara Brittingham | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 7 | 6 |
| Mary Danagher | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ ** | ✓ | 7 | 6 |
| Oisín Hassan* | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 7 | 6 |
| Blake Hodkinson | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6 | 6 |
| Thomas McDermott | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ ** | ✓ | 7 | 7 |
| Niamh O'Reilly | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6 | 5 |
| Irene Sheridan | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6 | 6 |
| Anne Walsh | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6 | 6 |

* USI Representative, term of office runs from 1 July to 30 June each year.

** attended via phone conferencing

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 2018. Expenses include the following categories: accommodation, travel, flights and subsistence. Board members' travel and subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total Board expenses in 2018 were €26,906* (2017: €23,141).

Remuneration and Expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €143,749* in 2018 (2017: €138,695). The Chief Executive received no performance related pay during the period. The Chief Executive's pension entitlements do not extend beyond the standard entitlement in the model public sector defined benefit superannuation scheme. The Chief Executive incurred vouched expenses of €5,633* in 2018 (2017: €2,780).

QQI's audited Financial Statements are available from the publications library on the QQI website – www.qqi.ie.

** These figures are extracted from the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2018.*

SUB-BOARD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Audit and Risk Committee

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure and support the Board in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and aspects of governance, by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Board's and Accounting Officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances.

Members: Due to the size of the Board, membership of the Committee is comprised of two Board Members and one external non-Board Member (as opposed to three Board Members as required by the Code of Practice): Thomas McDermott (Chairperson) and Blake Hodgkinson and Tony Mealy (non-Board Member).

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

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 2018.

Members: Pdraig Walsh (Chair), Barbara Kelly, Carmel Kelly (from 11 April 2018), Angela Lambkin, Bryan Maguire, Karena Maguire (to 22 February 2018), John O'Connor, Deirdre Stritch, Róisín Sweeney, Andrina Wafer (to 22 February 2018).



Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

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 2018.

Members: Anne Walsh (Chairperson) (from 4 July 2018), Lucien Bollaert, Bryan Fields, Ewart Keep (to 19 March 2018), Barbara Kelly, Daire Keogh, Bryan Maguire, Niamh O'Reilly (from 4 July 2018), Aileen Ponton (from 4 July 2018) and Ann-Marie Ryan.

Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

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 2018.

Members: Barbara Brittingham (Chairperson), Ken Carroll, Liz Carroll (to 9 April 2018), Maureen Conway (to 9 April 2018), Peter Cullen, Mary Danagher, Paul Lyons, Anne Mangan (to 9 April 2018), Gerard Morgan (from 12 September 2018), John D. Mulcahy (to 9 April 2018) and Gina Quin (from 12 September 2018).

Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The ARC makes decisions and recommendations about the approval of quality assurance procedures; the International Education Mark; delegated authority and approves for publication the findings of quality reviews conducted under section 42 of the Act. The ARC met six times in 2018.

Members: Ailsa Crum, Colette Harrison, Oisín Hassan, Marie Kehoe O'Sullivan, Geraldine Larkin, Martin Lyes, Kevin Ryan (Chairperson), Irene Sheridan (appointed by the QQI Board in April 2018), Mary Sheridan.

Human Resources and Organisation Committee

The purpose of the Human Resources and Organisation Committee is to assist and advise the Board in order to reinforce its own governance and oversight in the areas of HR and the organisation. The Human Resources and Organisation Committee did not meet during 2018.

Members: Joanne Harmon (Chairperson), Mary Danagher plus one vacancy.

Corporate Matters

Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee is supported by three members of the Executive. The Committee held five meetings in 2018 on the following dates:

- 27 February
- 26 April
- 12 June
- 22 October
- 22 November (incorporeal meeting)

Internal Audit Function

QQI has a three-year internal audit plan which commenced in 2017. Internal audits are to be carried out on all the key corporate and business functions of QQI. The following internal audits were completed in 2018:

- Human Resources Policy Review
- Records and Document Management System
- Protection for Enrolled Learners
- Annual Review of the System of Internal Control (SIC) 2017
- Qualifications and Recognition (including NARIC) Cycle
- Awards and Certification Cycle
- Financial Reporting Cycle
- Mazars (outsourced internal auditors) Summary Report on Implementation of Recommendations from the Internal Audit Reports 2015-2018.

External Audit Function

In 2018 an invitation was issued to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in line with the revised *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, September 2016* whereby it recommends that the Board and the Audit Committee should have a discussion with the external auditors at least once a year, without executive members of the Board or employees of the State body present, to ensure that there are no unresolved issues of concern. The C&AG deferred attendance at the meeting pending completion of the Financial Statements 2017.



Risk Management

The QQI Risk Management Policy sets out the policy, processes and procedures for managing risk in QQI. This is implemented in line with the revised **Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, 2016**. The newly appointed Board (2018) approved the Risk Management Policy and a revised Risk Appetite Statement at its meeting in June 2018.

Risk Register

The Risk Register was extensively reviewed by the Executive throughout 2018. Risks on the Risk Register were assigned a single risk category in accordance with the risk categories identified in the Risk Appetite Statement. The five risk categories identified by the Board in 2017 remain unchanged in 2018, namely:

- Financial stability and Viability
- Knowledge, Skills and Competencies
- Stakeholder Relationships and Engagement
- Corporate Support Services
- Reputation.

Principal Risks

The Board carried out an assessment of QQI's principal risks. The principal risks are listed below along with the main controls in place to mitigate them. Whilst these are similar to the top five risks identified in 2017, the likelihood of their occurrence is less in 2018.

Risk No. 1: Risk of insufficient funds due to the variable and fluctuating nature of QQI income streams.

Mitigated by the appointment of a Finance manager; reconfiguration of the Financial Management System (FMS) to enable the recognition of expenditure at section, unit and project level; monitoring of income against prior year to identify variances; production of monthly management accounts; consideration of management accounts and financial matters by EMT; approval by Programme Board of programme and project budgets; revised ICT budget for 2018 and input into annual DES budget process.

Risk No. 2: Risk that QQI cannot discharge its business remit due to manpower and skills gaps.

Mitigated by monitoring and tracking of unit activities and deliverables via PROMISE; regular reporting to the Board on progress on the delivery of the Corporate Plan; Regular communication with DES on resource requirements and associated impact on QQI's statutory remit; development of Strategy Statement 2019-2021 with consideration of the remit of QQI and the pending amendment legislation; and Board approval of an implementation plan to deliver the Strategy Statement.

Risk No. 3: Risk that QQI IT systems, document management, and operations are not fit-for-purpose or GDPR compliant.

Mitigated by approval of Revised Project Plan by the Programme Board outlining a broad range of prioritised actions with corresponding timeframes; Completion of Staff Briefing Sessions on GDPR; Continued work on amalgamation of databases; Completion of GDPR Readiness Assessment by EMT.

Risk No. 4: Risk that QQI business systems are compromised due to external malicious attacks

Mitigated by monitoring of suspicious activity through improved intrusion detection systems; Comprehensive evaluation of IT Security and Controls by external security specialists; Oversight and Implementation of recommendations through the ICT steering group on a monthly basis.

Risk No. 5: Risk that QQI is found to be operating ultra vires following successful legal challenge.

Mitigated by acquisition of legal advice when devising policies to implement functions; Briefing of panels, experts and decision-making committees on legal basis for regulatory actions; Adoption by the executive of conservative courses of action in circumstances of dubious vires.

Summary of 2018 Financial Results

In 2018, QQI received €11.3 million comprising State Grant, fee income, EU funding and other. For the same period, expenditure was €11.0 million. Pay and pensions costs in 2018 amounted to €5.45 million.

Data Protection

QQI is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. Data Protection is the safeguarding of the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of personal data. The Act provides for the collection and use of data in a responsible way and provide against unwanted or harmful uses of the data. QQI maintains 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 Act.

Protected Disclosures

Section 21 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires that every public body should establish and maintain procedures for the making of protected disclosures by workers who are, or were, employed by the public body and for dealing with such disclosures. No reports were made by QQI workers under the QQI Protected Disclosures Policy in the 12-month period to 31 December 2018.

Two reports were received by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) under Section 7 of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 in the 12-month period to 31 December 2018. These disclosures were not from employees of QQI and relate to a worker or workers employed in an entity that falls within the remit of QQI whereby such a disclosure can be made to a prescribed person in QQI under S.I. 339 of 2014.

One disclosure was concluded following assessment of the information received. The second disclosure was received in late December 2018. Its assessment will continue into 2019 as a result.



Complaints of Service

During 2018, QQI received no complaints of service.

Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreements

QQI reports on its outcomes to its parent department, the Department of Education and Skills, through a Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA). This is a requirement under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016. The PDA, which is developed and agreed annually, is linked to objectives contained in QQI's Corporate Plan which is derived from the QQI Strategy Statement 2016-2018. QQI met with the Department on 21 March, 26 June and 11 December 2018 to review progress under the PDA.

Under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, Government Departments are also required to have written Oversight Agreements in place with State Bodies under their aegis. These Oversight Agreements normally cover a three-year period. The Oversight Agreement for 2018-2021 was signed in March 2018 by the Chief Executive of QQI and the Deputy Secretary General for the Department of Education and Skills. The PDA and the Oversight Agreements are reviewed on an annual basis.

Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Bill, 2018

This Bill was published in August 2018. Under its provisions QQI will be enabled to introduce an International Education Mark for higher education and English language, include the qualifications of a wider range of awarding bodies in the NFQ, scrutinise more closely the corporate profile and financial capacity of private providers and establish a learner protection fund. QQI welcomed the Bill and submitted observations in response to a call by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills in October. The Bill was introduced in the Seanad and proceeded to committee stage in December 2018. QQI's executive has commenced planning to implement the Bill when it becomes law.







QQI

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