



**QFI**

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# CONSULTATIVE FORUM



---

7 OCTOBER 2014

---

MEETING REPORT

# Introduction

The second meeting of the Consultative Forum was held on 7 October in the Fitzwilliam Hotel, Dublin. The mission of the Consultative Forum is to contribute to the development and implementation of an enhanced further and higher education, training and qualifications system through consultation and meaningful dialogue between QQI and stakeholders. QQI welcomes the opportunity to facilitate this engagement and thanks the stakeholder nominees to the Forum for their active contribution to the process. The terms of reference, nominees to the Forum and meeting documentation are published on QQI's website and a copy of the agenda is included in the Appendix.

# April Meeting Report and QQI Update

Dr Padraig Walsh, Chair to the Consultative Forum opened the meeting and welcomed delegates.

At the April meeting and through the follow up survey, members of the Forum suggested that a thematic focus should be adopted for the Forum meetings. A number of themes and mechanisms for identifying themes were proposed at this meeting and are noted in the meeting report; including the potential establishment of sectorial sub-groups/working groups with a steering group to steer the work of the Forum.

The Chair acknowledged the feedback outlined in the meeting report. He highlighted the strength of the Forum as being cross sectorial and at this early stage in the establishment of the Forum, he noted the benefit in maintaining the cross sectorial approach rather than segmenting the Forum into sectorial sub-groups. It was felt also that establishing a steering group at this early stage could skew the agenda and mission of the Forum. Dr Walsh noted that the Forum is an important single platform for all stakeholders across the education and training and qualifications system to come together within a common theme. He noted the Forum is a collective entity and it is intended to foster and develop a collective ownership of the Forum. QQI currently engages directly with a range of different stakeholders within sector specific contexts.

Dr Walsh provided the Forum with an update on QQI's new Award Brand, the development of a new website and on QQI's Comprehensive Policy Development Programme, drawing specific attention to the current White Papers for consultation.

# Forum Meeting Theme: Industry and Employer Engagement

Consistent with the proposed thematic approach to the Forum, the theme selected for this meeting, as identified in the emerging themes from the April meeting report was: Industry and Employer Engagement. Bryan Fields, Director of Strategy and Research, SOLAS, outlined the key elements of the FET strategy; Mary-Liz Trant, Head of Skills and Enterprise Engagement, HEA, outlined the HE engagement strategy and Barbara Kelly, Head of Industry and External Partnerships, QQI, outlined QQI's employer engagement strategy and new guidelines. The presentations are available at <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Consultative-Forum-.aspx>

# Discussion and Feedback

*Within four break-out groups, in the context of the overall theme and presentations, the Forum members were asked to consider the following questions specifically and any other emerging issues and challenges.*

- 1) What are the critical employer engagement issues for your organisation?
- 2) How best can we work together to maximise efforts and results?
- 3) What are the key themes to work on e.g. employability?
- 4) How can we best assess impact?

*The following is a summary of the Forum discussion and feedback from the groups.*

- » Realistic expectations are needed on the speed at which change can happen and new skills be acquired or developed. The education system is based on medium to long, rather than short term planning, but some of the measures of performance are based on short term, performance based funding.
- » The voice of the learner is important; it is the responsibility of providers to make sure learners are prepared for a career. Short-termism in curriculum policy is reducing the likelihood of people being equipped properly.
- » What is the employer's incentive to engage with the education and training sector? What are the benefits? Large and smaller employers have different needs and resources for engagement. How can collaborative objectives be drawn from different employers, how do we build a community of practice with employers? Is the system and engagement geared towards larger employers rather than the SME?

- » Members noted the variation in different sectors and within sectors, local companies have their own culture. In the farming sector, it was noted that students may become employers themselves, there are diverse requirements in this sector. In other sectors, chartered accountancy for example, it was noted that there may be very set regulations governing programmes and in-built employer engagement already as part of the general provision.
- » The representative from the disability authority informed the Forum that a comprehensive employment strategy on employing people with a disability will shortly be going to the cabinet committee on disability.
- » Employers need a confidence in the education and training system; decreasing investment at all levels has impacted on standards.
- » QQI needs to take on board the views of many different regulatory authorities. What is the key driver for employers? What brings employers to seek training and what are the drivers? One example could be a change in the regulatory regime. How can companies be incentivised to train staff? There is potential research to be conducted here by QQI. It was acknowledged that some employers do not have an interest in training staff.
- » Within FET and the Common Awards System (CAS), the following was noted in particular:
  - ~ there are opportunities for embedding of vendor qualifications in the awards, this would be welcomed.
  - ~ the award structures and specifications need to be more flexible.
  - ~ the issue of the work experience component needs to be explored further. What does it contribute? In some cases it is an integral part of a programme in others, it is an add on and not integrated. If we are increasing more employer involvement in programmes and placement, the credit value for work experience has to be revisited. The issue of quality assuring this work experience and work based learning also needs to be looked at. How does the provider or QQI quality assure this?

- » In relation to key issues that concern employers, the Enterprise Ireland representative noted that for the employers they engage with, skills are not currently identified as one of their top ten issues. There are other drivers. Yet, talent is a key issue for rapidly expanding companies and skills is of concern but it is not an Enterprise Ireland function. How does Enterprise Ireland find out what skills requirements and issues are?
- » There is a need to educate employers about recognition and generic skills and to focus on skills gaps.
- » A representative from the English language sector noted there is a skills pool here in Ireland, 60% of these learners are from European economic area and are eligible for work.
- » It was noted that there is some displacement of further education and training graduates by higher education and training graduates, with 48% of clerical jobs being filled by HE graduates.
- » The representative from the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland, noted a counter-trend in the UK, with certain professions going back to recruiting at an earlier level; this is driven by the cost of fees so for example, learners now join a company and become an accountant that way. He proposed to send the NI Employees Skills Survey for circulation to Forum members. [This has since been circulated]
- » The IOTI are carrying out a lot of engagement at local and regional level with employers and have noticed a certain level of frustration with providers at present. The IOTI representative to the forum agreed to circulate a link to a range of case studies on employer engagement within the sector, compiled by their RDI office. These are available at: <http://www.ioti.ie/rdi/delivering-impact-for-industry>.
- » The National Disability Authority representative, agreed to forward information on new NDA guidelines when available.

## Close

Dr Pdraig Walsh, Chair, thanked members of the Forum for their contribution. QQI agreed to follow up and circulate information to the Forum as proposed by specific representatives. QQI will also be undertaking a follow-up survey to invite suggestions on proposed themes for the next meeting of the Forum which will be held in April 2015.



---

## Appendix 1: Agenda

---

### Consultative Forum

#### Agenda

7 October 2014

9.30 Registration

10.00 Welcome

*Dr Pdraig Walsh, CEO QQI and Forum Chair*

April Meeting Report

*Marie Gould, Provider Relations Manager, QQI*

QQI Comprehensive Policy Development Programme Update

*Dr Pdraig Walsh*

#### **Theme: Education and Employer Engagement**

10.30 FET Strategy

*Bryan Fields, Director of Strategy and Research, SOLAS*

HE Engagement Strategy

*Dr Mary-Liz Trant, Head of Skills and Enterprise Engagement, HEA*

QQI Employer Engagement

*Barbara Kelly, Head of Industry and External Partnerships, QQI*

11.30 Break Out Groups

12.30 Feedback and Discussion

1.00 Close and Lunch

# AGENDA