

Education and Employers

Joining forces to promote quality and innovation across further and higher education and training



A Strategic Approach
to Employer Engagement

September 2014





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Introduction

QQI was established in November 2012 by the amalgamation of the functions of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

QQI is now the national agency responsible for the **external quality assurance** of further and higher education and training (including English language provision) in Ireland and validates programmes and makes awards to certain education and training providers in these sectors. QQI is also responsible for the maintenance, development and review of the **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**.



Dr. Padraig Walsh, CEO

We published our first **Strategy Statement 2014-2016** in May 2013. QQI's mission is to promote the continuous enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training system and its qualifications, enabling learners and other stakeholders including employers to know quality when they see it.

QQI recognises the importance of quality interaction between the education and training sector and the world of work at both national and local levels. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 explicitly requires QQI to:

“inform itself of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of industry, agriculture, business, tourism, trade, the professions and the public service, including requirements as to the level of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners” (Section 9.2 (a)).

In this context we set out in this publication our strategic approach to employer engagement. The approach promotes a two way series of dialogues, engagements, and collaborations at national and local levels with a range of labour market stakeholders including employer representative bodies, Chambers of Commerce, labour market intelligence agencies, funding bodies, professional bodies, trade associations and education and training practitioners.

There are many benefits to engagement for both the education and training provider and the employer. Closer cooperation with the employment sector helps providers develop curricula that are relevant and meet the needs of individuals and society, equipping graduates with the right skills (including transferable skills) that better meet the current and future needs of employers. Ultimately, the main beneficiary is the learner transitioning from the education and training system to employment or self-employment.

It is vital that employers are more involved in education activities particularly in developing occupational standards (to ensure the qualifications meet employer's needs) and quality assurance mechanisms including validation and review panels (to enhance greater transparency and understanding of the contribution of the education and training system). It is also important that the education system clearly understands the needs and expectations of employers. Gathering employer feedback on the outcomes of the education and training system is important to ensure greater alignment between supply and demand for skills. In this context QQI welcomes the HEA/SOLAS initiative (as outlined in the Higher Education Strategy and the Action Plan for Jobs 2014) to organise regular National Employer Surveys.

There are also many challenges ahead including lack of national engagement structures, academic missions and timetables, limited resources and overall stakeholder commitment. However, the education and training landscape is changing. Government policies, European recommendations and initiatives and funding streams are actively promoting education-employer collaboration and partnerships.

There are many examples of successful cooperation between education and employers in Ireland. However the level of cooperation varies considerably across education and training providers and business sectors. It is now time to build on our collective experiences and recognise, showcase and mainstream such practices. It is also time to explore the future role of employers within the education and training system. In this regard QQI welcomes the *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland* published in January 2014, the *Further Education and Training Strategy* published in May 2014 and the enhanced collaboration between higher education institutions and the wider community including employers.

We look forward to joining forces with our academic and enterprise partners from the public and private sectors to further enhance and promote quality and innovation across the education and training sector.

Dr. Pádraig Walsh
Chief Executive

Purpose

QQI recognises the importance of quality interaction between the education and training sector and the world of work at both national and local levels.

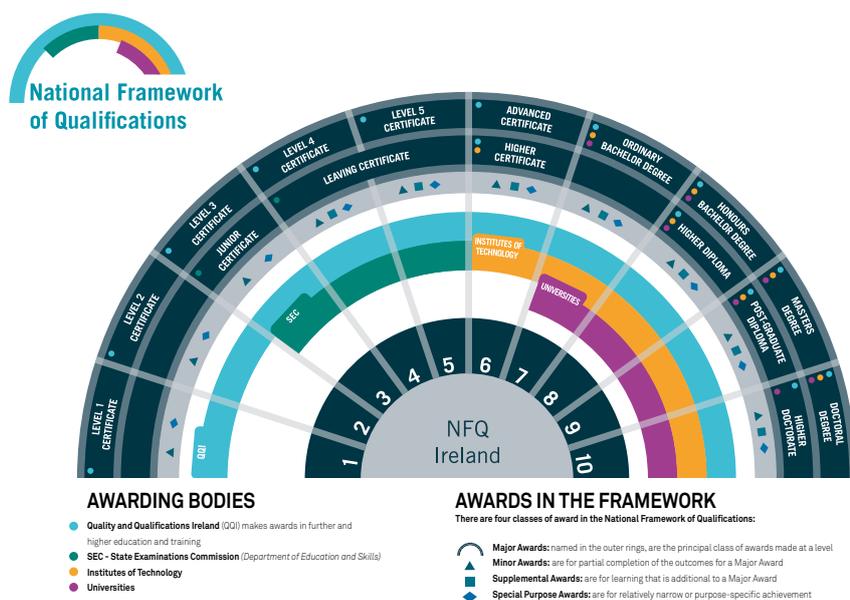
The purpose of this publication is to set out a strategic approach to how best education and employers can join forces to promote quality and innovation across further and higher education and training in the context of:

- rapid global economic and technological change
- the constantly evolving demand for new skills (specific and transferable)
- the restructuring of both the further and higher education and training sectors
- the expectations of learners participating in further and higher education and training programmes.

The approach illustrates QQI's contribution to meeting the needs of the labour market and identifies our employer engagement priorities and action lines for 2014-2016.

About QQI

QQI is the national agency responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training (including English language provision) in Ireland and validates programmes and makes awards to certain education and training providers in these sectors. QQI is also responsible for the maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).



For further information consult: www.nfq.ie www.QQI.ie

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In May 2013, QQI published its Strategy Statement and commenced a comprehensive policy development programme. As part of the consultation process, feedback was received from labour market representatives and/or relating to labour market issues. This feedback will inform policy development and will assist QQI when implementing its approach to employer engagement.



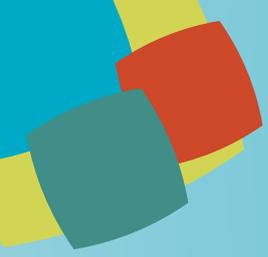
QQI as set out in our Strategy Statement¹ promotes:

- the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training system
- a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders including employers
- a culture of access, responsiveness, flexibility, trust and quality in education and training and qualifications
- collaboration with stakeholders to build confidence in and improve the quality of education and training opportunities and the recognition of qualifications
- capacity-building amongst providers through identifying, sharing and disseminating good practice
- innovation and responsiveness in qualifications and in programmes to meet employment, societal and cultural needs.

QQI places the interests and expectations of learners at the centre of its work and also encourages education and training providers to do so.

The publication of this *Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement* addresses an area that we believe requires focus and collaborative effort at this time. We believe our work in terms of enhancing quality of provision and framework development and promotion complements the work of other parties including government departments, funding bodies, labour market intelligence agencies, employer representative bodies, professional bodies, trade associations and education and training providers.

¹ http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Strategy/qqi_Strat_statement_29novfinal.pdf



What is employer engagement?

Education-employer engagement is a two way communication exchange and series of interactions between the education and training sector and the world of work. Its core feature is employer engagement. Employer engagement can take many different forms from employer's participation in classrooms; employer involvement in the development of occupational standards; work based learning; mentoring relationships; involvement in curriculum design or the accreditation of programmes; knowledge transfer, research and development and supporting start ups.

Effectively implemented employer engagement will support a change agenda, challenge current education practices, promote greater connectivity between the worlds of education and work, smooth transitions for learners and enhance the quality of education and training provision including teaching and learning practices. It will also facilitate cooperation and collaboration between providers and employers leading to greater commitment to joint action and enhanced clarity regarding their respective contributions and roles.

Employer engagement brings mutual benefits to both providers and employers including more relevant and employment focused programmes that meet the needs of individuals and society, equipping graduates with the right skills (including transferable skills) and mindsets for the current and future labour market. Ultimately, the main beneficiary is the learner transitioning from the education and training system to employment or self-employment.

QQI acknowledges that there are many examples of successful cooperation and partnerships between education and employers across both further and higher education and training. It is now time to build on our collective experiences and recognise, showcase and mainstream such practices. It is also time to explore the future role of employers within the education and training system.



International context

A significant body of work has been done and is continuing to be done at an international and European level to promote greater connectivity between education and training and the world of work. This includes Europe 2020², the *Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020*³, *Re-thinking Education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes 2012*⁴, *CEDEFOP's Skills Matching Challenge: analysing skill mismatch and policy implications 2010*⁵ and the *OECD Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills policies*⁶. It also includes a number of European policy instruments and mobility tools developed to support reforms in national qualifications systems including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning⁷, the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS) for higher education⁸, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)⁹ and EUROPASS.¹⁰

In May 2012¹¹ the European Commission invited Member States to adopt measures at national level which are aimed at increasing the employability of graduates leaving the education and training system and to monitor the share of employed graduates from education and training, with a view to enhancing the evidence base for policy development on the interface between education and training on the one hand and the world of work on the other hand. It also proposed that Member States enhance cooperation between education and training institutions and relevant stakeholders in the world of work at local, regional and national level, with a view to promoting apprenticeships, internships and work placements.

The European Commission promotes dialogue, cooperation, partnerships and the transfer and sharing of knowledge across higher education. It established the University Business Forum in 2008. The Forum to date has initiated a number of policy developments relating to collaboration and engagement including Knowledge Alliances¹² and HEInnovate¹³. The latter is an online self-assessment tool for institutions interested in improving and/or assessing their performance across a range of entrepreneurial activities and parameters.

The European Commission in December 2013 published the *State of University Business Cooperation in Ireland*¹⁴ (part of a DG Education and Culture study

2 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

3 http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/entrepreneurship-2020/index_en.htm

4 http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm

5 http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3056_en.pdf

6 <https://skills.oecd.org/documents/OECDskillsStrategyFINALENG.pdf>

7 http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm

8 http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm

9 http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet_en.htm

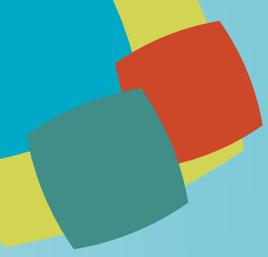
10 <http://www.europass.ie/europass/>

11 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/130142.pdf

12 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/key-action-2-cooperation-for-innovation-and-exchange-good-practices/knowledge-alliances_en

13 <https://heinnovate.eu/intranet/main/>

14 <http://www.ub-cooperation.eu/pdf/ireland.pdf>



on the cooperation between higher education institutions and public and private organisations in Europe). The study found that the most developed types of University Business Cooperation in Ireland are: (1) Collaboration in research and development (R&D), (2) Commercialisation of R&D results and (3) Entrepreneurship, with the least developed type being: Mobility of academics.

Within vocational education and training the European Commission launched a number of initiatives to promote quality employer engagement including the European Alliance for Apprenticeship in 2013. The Alliance was created to increase the quality and supply of apprenticeships across Europe and change mindsets towards apprenticeship type learning. One of the expected outcomes of this Alliance will be to reform and strengthen national apprenticeship systems. Experience across a number of Member States suggests that apprenticeship type education can improve individuals' employability and increase economic competitiveness.

Member States and social partners committed themselves in the Bruges Communiqué¹⁵ to the objective of including work-based learning in all initial VET courses. The Rethinking Education Communication and the Youth Employment Package¹⁶ acknowledge the value of VET and dual training systems in facilitating youth employment.

Given the level and extent of change required within countries and education systems international and European organisations like OECD¹⁷ and Cedefop¹⁸ are promoting whole of government approaches that address a range of issues including skill mismatches by ensuring the establishment of the appropriate conditions at national level including quality education and training provision, sustainable funding, lifelong guidance and better alignment between education and training strategies and labour market needs.

Finally, the McKinsey Centre for Government in *Education to Employment: Designing a system that works*¹⁹ analysed over a 100 education to employment initiatives across 25 countries. Their findings include a shortage of hard data. They argue that this data deficiency makes it difficult to understand which skills are required for employment and which education and training initiatives are working. They advocate that systems are best served if employers and education and training providers step into each other's worlds e.g. the involvement of labour market actors in academic governance systems and greater academic involvement in the world of work.

15 Bruges communique http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf
PIAAC results for Ireland <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/education/2012/piaac2012.pdf>

16 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1036>

17 Skills Strategy 2013, Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives - A Strategic approach to Skills Policies, OECD

18 Skills Matching Challenge: analyzing skill mismatch and policy implications 2010, Cedefop

19 http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Education-to-Employment-exec-summary_FINAL.pdf

National context

Labour market

The Irish labour market landscape is changing. In 2013²⁰ 17% of those in the labour force had lower secondary education or less. This compares to 28% in 2005. Labour force participation rates and employment rates are highest for those with the highest skills and unemployment rates are highest for those with the lowest skills. Statistics continually highlight that the relative position of those with lower qualifications in accessing employment continues to weaken.

Meanwhile, skill shortages occur in a range of sectors including ICT, business (including language), finance (risk, compliance, fraud, credit control), health, sales, transport, clerical (multilingual accounts, debt collection) and non-construction craft occupations.

Some evidence exists of mismatch between supply and demand for particular skills. For example, the high unemployment rate recorded for Irish computer graduates despite a boom in the IT sector²¹ and the continued dependence on IT graduates from other jurisdictions to meet the demand for high-end IT skills has shown a spotlight on the quality of higher education graduates. While the recently published National Economic and Social Councils *Strategic Review of Further Education and Training and the Unemployed*²² highlights issues regarding the quality, integrity, currency and relevance of some further education and training programmes - in particular specific skill training provision.

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)²³ results for Ireland (October 2013) are also revealing. The performance of Ireland in literacy is average. However, our performance in mathematics is below average and performance in problem solving in technology rich environments is at the average. The survey shows a significant gap in achievement between Ireland and the top scoring countries such as Japan and Finland.

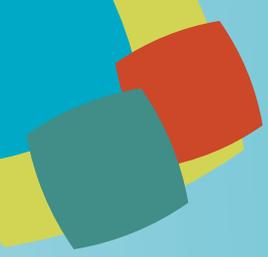
Ireland is not alone in terms of experiencing skill mismatches. Numerous international and European reports have identified similar outcomes within Europe and elsewhere including the USA and Japan. As a result and as outlined in the previous section there is growing international interest in reforming and restructuring education and training systems to promote greater connectivity between the worlds of education (including training) and enterprise/industry/business/public services - including providing young people with real on the job experience.

20 CSO Quarterly National Household Survey

21 <http://businessetc.thejournal.ie/readme/why-are-so-few-computer-science-graduates-getting-jobs-1113833-Oct2013/>

22 http://www.nesc.ie/assets/files/Sec_Non_NESC_Papers/A%20strategic%20review%20of%20FET%20and%20Unemployed_Oct13.pdf

23 <http://www.cso.ie/en/surveysandmethodology/education/piaac/>



Educational reform in Ireland

The restructuring of the further and higher Irish education and training sectors provides significant opportunities for providers, social partners/employers and state funders to review their approaches to meeting the needs of the labour market, in particular how they can best work together to achieve more coherent and coordinated outcomes and smooth the transition between the education system and the world of work.

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*²⁴ promotes enterprise and community engagement, entrepreneurship education and the development of core skills such as quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-working skills and the effective use of information technology. Significant funding is channeled from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to promote and support education-employer and community engagement and collaboration across higher education.

The recently launched *Further Education and Training Strategy's*²⁵ main focus is to provide a skilled, innovative and flexible labour force as a resource for economic growth. The intention is to put greater effort into matching further education and training provision with employer's skill needs.

The Department of Education and Skill's *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland*²⁶ and *Implementation Plan*²⁷ is also significant in this regard as it provides an ideal opportunity to promote quality education-employer collaborations from levels 5 upwards on the National Framework of Qualifications. As outlined in QQI's submission to the Review:

“There is a fundamental rationale that warrants the promotion of approaches to formation, learning, education and training (particularly in VET) that are based on learning through real tasks, in real time, for real purposes, in real environments rather than simulated ones”.

An enterprise lead Apprenticeship Council is due to be established by the end of the year (2014). The Council

“should establish sectoral sub-committees as needed. These should include experts, representative bodies for the sectors, professional bodies, trade union and education and training interests. The apprenticeship system should be integrated into whatever regional structures are developed to facilitate the ongoing co-operation of FE and HE providers with enterprise in the delivery of education and training programmes”.

QQI welcomes the *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland*. It provides a timely opportunity to consider apprenticeship in the context of growing national and international interest in dual modes of education and training and work based

24 http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_strategy_for_higher_education_2030.pdf

25 <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>

26 <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Review-of-Apprenticeship-in-Ireland/>

27 <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Apprenticeship-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

learning generally. It also provides an opportunity to explore the role played by employers in education and training and how this might develop.

Funding initiatives

A number of funding initiatives over the past decade have had a significant impact on improving the relationship between education and training and the world of work. For example:

- Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Partnership Programme offers financial support to companies who engage in collaborative research projects with Irish universities and Institutes of Technology
- a number of funding streams such as Springboard, Momentum and the STEM²⁸ Internship Programme require education-industry collaboration. However, in general, these funding initiatives relate to bolt on programmes/conversion courses for graduates and do not address the core issue regarding the relevance of mainstream programmes and the quality and work readiness of graduates
- two HEA funded collaborative projects (ACE²⁹ and REAP³⁰) actively promote entrepreneurship education and enterprise engagement respectfully within and across higher education institutions. ACE is currently being re-branded as Campus Entrepreneurship Enterprise Network (CEEN).³¹
- Skillnets³² funded from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills actively supports and works with businesses in Ireland to address their current and future skills needs. They fund groups of companies with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses. Employer needs are addressed through both the preservation and growth of jobs, focusing on skills to maintain businesses and protect jobs as well as the enhancement of new skills to create new jobs.
- Campus Engage, funded by the HEA, promotes the full implementation of higher education community engagement policy and practices, on and off campus. The Campus Engage Charter for Civic and Community Engagement, signed by 22 Presidents of Irish Higher Education Institutions, in June 2014, details the commitment of Irish higher education to community-based learning. The Campus Engage Participate Programme offers capacity building to HEI staff and community-based organisations to incorporate accredited community-based learning into their curriculum, so that students test acquired knowledge and skills to 'real life' employment based problem solving, to develop critical thinking and build applied '*work ready skills*'.

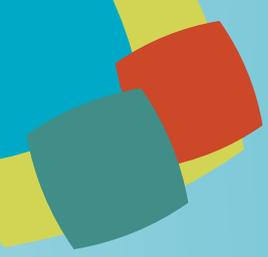
28 STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

29 Accelerating Campus Entrepreneurship. Website <https://www.dkit.ie/ace>

30 Roadmap for Employment – Academic Partnerships. Website <http://reap.ie>

31 <http://www.ceen.ie/>

32 <http://www.skillnets.ie/>
<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/>



Mobility

QQI has national responsibility for overseeing a number of European mobility tools, which enhances the employability of Irish graduates going abroad and assists holders of foreign qualifications who come to Ireland to learn or to work. This includes the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning – QQI is the National Coordination Point. QQI also hosts the National Europass Centre (NEC), the Irish ENIC-NARIC (facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and actively promotes the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad) and the National Reference Point (regarding providing information on Irish further education and training qualifications).

Active participation at a European level enables QQI to contribute to and influence European policy and approaches and helps promote Irish qualifications abroad. Pdraig Walsh, CEO of QQI, is currently President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). QQI also hosts the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Secretariat.

Realities of effective employer engagement

Employer engagement in education is vital to create a more responsive system and to help bridge the demand and supply for labour. It is particularly important that employers are involved in developing occupational standards (to ensure qualifications meet employer needs) and participate in provider's quality assurance processes, including validation and review panels (to enhance transparency and understanding of the contribution of the education and training system).

In April 2014 QQI issued over 100 invitations to employers and employer representative bodies to participate in its consultation process on Facilitating the recognition of qualifications in Ireland. This is an area that directly impacts on employers, particularly when recruiting persons who hold qualifications made outside the state. QQI received a total of 11 responses.

In general it is difficult to engage employers in the education system. They may not see the advantages of engagement. Some may find the education and training system too complex and bureaucratic. The current economic climate is a significant challenge to employer engagement and may even change the emphasis employers are likely to give to training and development.

Different industrial, business and community sectors take different approaches to working with the education sector. Some sectors actively engage e.g. through professional, trade and/or representative bodies, others do not and are more dependent on the education sector to supply their skill needs.

It is also important that the education system clearly understands the needs and expectations of employers. A national employer survey is an important tool to help ascertain employer's views regarding the outcomes of the education and training system. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* recommends that a national survey of employers should be taken on a regular basis and used as

part of an assessment of quality outcomes for the system. The *Further Education and Training Strategy (2014)* also sets out the need for more research on skills. A pilot national employer's survey did take place in 2012³³. The survey (which was limited to higher education) found that while companies were generally satisfied with the range of skills of higher education graduates there was lower satisfaction with specific skills including written communication, business awareness and entrepreneurship skills. Employers also expressed concerns regarding the speed at which course content changes were made to meet changes required within the workplace. Half the companies surveyed did not feel that there was adequate engagement between employers and higher education.

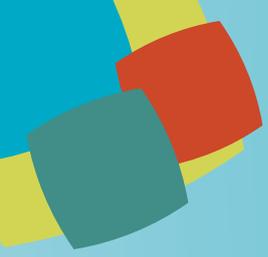
The recently published *Action Plan for Jobs 2014* sets out the need for regular national employer surveys as a priority. Therefore the HEA/SOLAS National Employers Survey 2014 initiative is welcomed.

There is a need for both education providers and employers to further invest in the development of meaningful and sustainable relationships. Skillnets, ACE/ CEEN, Campus Engage and REAP are good example of sectors coming together to cooperate and collaborate to enhance the employability skills of their respective learner cohorts. Also, recent innovative approaches to programme design and delivery include more customised education-industry engagements. For example, in the private sector:

- the partnership between Lidl and Dublin Business School in the development and delivery of a 3 year Retail Management Degree (Level 7) programme (validated by QQI) which includes a significant (50%) work-based learning component
- the Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) offer a number of programmes (validated by QQI) for payroll personnel. The programmes were designed following consultation with payroll professionals in industry and the public sector and are delivered in the main in the work-place.

33 http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_employers_survey_pilot_report_0.pdf





How comparable bodies in other jurisdictions operate?

When developing strategies, approaches or policies it is helpful to observe practices in other jurisdictions. The UK is an interesting example given it is our nearest neighbor and the high level of labour mobility between us. We share a common language and there is a significant number of UK education and training providers operating in Ireland.

The Higher Education Academy in *Pedagogy for employability (2012)*³⁴ identifies a number of activities related to employer engagement currently in operation across the UK. This includes the requirement on English higher education institutions since 2010 to articulate their position in relation to student employability through the provision of an “employability statement” for prospective students.

The QAA³⁵ acknowledges the important role played by employers and has published a *Quality Code (chap 10) Managing higher education provision with others* (this includes employers)³⁶; *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education Guidelines (2012)*³⁷, work based learning guidelines and results of employer surveys. The QAA’s subject benchmark statements all make reference to the expectation that graduates will develop employability skills through their programme of study and it is expected to be evidenced at validation.

Across the UK numerous reports/research papers continue to reiterate that structured work experience and work based learning (WBL) approaches are key tools in developing both initial and continuing employment for graduates. More recent innovations include embedding WBL into the curriculum and the assignment of academic credit for skill development gained on placement and the involvement of students as academic partners in managing the placement.

Ofqual³⁸ has also invested significant time and effort engaging employers. It has established a Standards Advisory Group to support its role in relation to qualifications and assessment standards. This includes, but is not limited to, matters concerning comparability between regulated qualifications, international comparisons, validity, reliability, and predictability and setting standards.

In its Annual Report and Accounts for 2012-2013 Ofqual raised concerns regarding the vocational qualifications system in the UK, particular in terms of whether it fully supports the development of the skills the economy needs, including through apprenticeships. Ofqual is putting in place plans to further improve their regulatory arrangements for vocational qualifications, and are in discussion with the UK Government as to how the system can be developed further.

34 http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012.pdf

35 <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

36 <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-B10.aspx>

37 <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.aspx>

38 <http://ofqual.gov.uk/>

Strategic approach

Building strategic relationships

QQI, consistent with its Strategy Statement and evolving policy development programme, will promote the enhancement of a quality, innovative and enterprising culture and practice across further and higher education and training provision. This includes working in partnership with labour market stakeholders and education and training providers to ensure that qualifications are relevant, of high quality and enhance graduate employability by meeting the changing needs of the workplace.

The current restructuring of both the further and higher education and training sectors is timely in this regard and provides significant opportunities to progress change, challenge current perspectives and practices, enhance connectivity between education and training providers and employers and promote greater cooperation and collaboration and commitment to joint action.

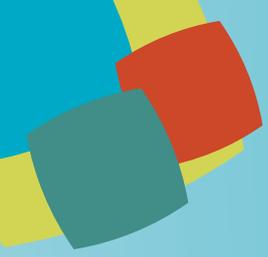
Key principles underpinning our approach

- a clear focus on meeting the needs and expectations of learners
- ensuring the quality and relevance of education and training qualifications in the context of rapidly changing work environments
- enhancing employer's understanding of and accessibility to the qualification system

Objectives

QQI has identified the following employer engagement objectives:

- inform ourselves of the needs of the labour market
- engage and collaborate with labour market stakeholders
- undertake and/or participate in relevant research activities
- enhance the employability of further and higher education graduates



Actions 2014-16





Outputs

Publication series

In development

Education and Employers - A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement	One of our first employer engagement tasks is now completed, namely the development and publication of this strategic approach to employer engagement.
Enterprise Engagement – QQI's role	This publication will review (and clarify for external audiences) QQI's current engagement, interactions and interfaces with enterprise (including development, intelligence and funding agencies), industry and employers.
Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education (EEE) Guidelines for higher education	HETAC launched draft Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education (EEE) Guidelines in April 2012. They are currently in use in a range of Higher Education Institutions. QQI will commence an evaluation of the draft Guidelines in Autumn 2014 and publish revised guidelines for general use across the higher education sector by 2016.

Under consideration

The need for further guidance material (e.g. relating to work-based learning, work placement/extended work experience, employer engagement) will be discussed with stakeholders in the context of the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland and the Further Education and Training Strategy.

Consultation dialogues

To ensure QQI's engagement approach and actions reflect the needs of the labour market QQI will undertake a series of consultation dialogues with labour market stakeholders including government departments, funding agencies, employee representative bodies, professional bodies, sectoral bodies and associations and Chambers of Commerce.

Research

QQI will participate in or commission as is appropriate research projects that promote quality education-employer collaboration.

QQI participated in a project lead by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) to explore the role of employability in external quality assurance across 4 countries (Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland, Germany (Westphalia)). CHEPS (the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente) was commissioned to undertake an exploratory study. CHEPS published its final report *Employability of professional bachelors from an international perspective*³⁹ in august 2014.

Showcasing

To help keep education and training providers and employers informed of best national and international engagement practice, QQI plans to showcase examples of effective and innovative collaborations and partnerships.



³⁹ <http://doc.utwente.nl/91636/1/ProBE%20final%20report%20Employability%20of%20professional%20bachelors.pdf>

Measuring impact and effectiveness

Once implemented, it is important to know the impact and effectiveness of QQI's employer engagement approach and the extent to which it impacts on people (QQI's board, executive, expert panels, education and training providers, teachers, programme developers, learners and employers) and processes (strategy statement, governance, policies, guidelines and criteria).

QQI plans to internally evaluate (and enterprise proof) on an on-going basis the level and extent of employer engagement across the organisation. We will also measure and analysis the range of employer engagement projects and activities that QQI participates in nationally and internationally. The qualitative impact may be hard to measure but it is important through surveys and/or research activities to capture the added value (if any) of such engagement.

The quality, relevance and employment outcomes of qualifications recognised in the NFQ also needs to be evaluated. This can be achieved in a number of ways including programmatic and institutional reviews and employer surveys. The findings of such reviews and surveys will inform QQI's future policy development and employer engagement activities.



An invitation to employers

QQI acknowledges that employers play a key role in ensuring education and training programmes and the qualifications to which they lead are relevant, fit for purpose and meet the needs of the current and future workplace.

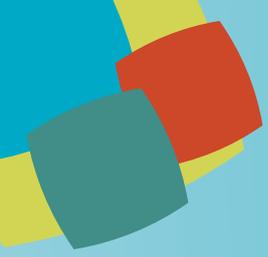
In the interest of better matching education outcomes with employers needs QQI invites you to inform yourselves about and more actively participate in activities related to quality and qualifications.

Therefore if you are an employer and

- require further information
- wish to engage more actively with the education system
- want to promote an innovative workplace learning experience or practice
- are considering organising an education-employment event you think may be of interest to us or
- wish to provide comment or feedback to QQI on aspects of our work

Please contact Barbara Kelly, Head of Industry and External Partnerships
bkelly@qqi.ie

QQI looks forward to hearing from you and joining forces with you and other stakeholders – to enhance quality and innovation across further and higher education and training.



Glossary

CHEPS	Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skill Needs
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
IUQB	Irish University Quality Board
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
VET	Vocational education and training
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
NEC	National Europass Centre
NCP	National Coordination Point
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Useful links

Education and Training Providers

<http://www.ioti.ie/>
<http://www.iua.ie/>
<http://www.etbi.ie/>

Employers

<http://www.ibec.ie/>
<http://www.chambers.ie/>
<http://www.sfa.ie/>
<http://isme.ie/>
<http://www.amcham.ie/>

Europe

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/entrepreneurship-2020/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/130142.pdf
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3056_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

Funded projects

<https://www.dkit.ie/ace>
<http://reap.ie>
<http://www.campusengage.ie>
<http://www.skillnets.ie/training-networks>
<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/>

Funders

<http://www.solas.ie/>
<http://www.hea.ie/>
<http://www.skillnets.ie/>

International

http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Education-to-Employment-ex-ec-summary_FINAL.pdf
<http://doc.utwente.nl/91636/1/ProBE%20final%20report%20Employability%20of%20professional%20bachelors.pdf>

Market intelligence

<http://www.idaireland.com/>
<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/>

UK

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx>
<http://ofqual.gov.uk/>
<http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/annual-report-and-accounts/all/>
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012.pdf
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/quality-code-B10.aspx>
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.aspx>

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