WHITE PAPER

Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines

FOR CONSULTATION

This White Paper contains proposed policy for the production of QQI's quality assurance guidelines.

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

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

Submissions may be emailed to

consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 14 November 2014.**

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*

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

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

(1) INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

This policy sets out the approach to the development and organisation of QQI's Quality Assurance guidelines (QA guidelines). QQI's approach builds on the experience of QA guidelines in the past and the implementation of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act).

The aim of the policy is to provide the rationale and architecture for all QA guidelines issued by QQI. In summary it should explain:

» What QA guidelines are and how they should be used

» The overarching principles which will apply to all QA guidelines

» The rationale for developing a suite of guidelines for different sectors and themes.

The principles underpinning QQI policy on QA guidelines are both stated explicitly and embedded within this policy.

② LEGAL CONTEXT

The 2012 Act (Section 27(1la)) requires QQI to issue guidelines for providers for the establishment of their quality assurance procedures for their programmes and services.

The 2012 Act also requires QQI to consult with the Higher Education Authority and providers (some named; and also to generally publicly consult) on the guidelines before issuing them.

It will be necessary to issue a range of guidelines for different types of providers and also for different purposes. This is anticipated by the 2012 Act (Section 27(6la)).

③ POLICY

3.1   QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

QA is a term generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality. QA is also used to describe the enhancement of education provision and the standards attained by learners.

Quality assurance of provision is the responsibility of the provider.

QQI's role is in *external* review and public assurance of providers' quality assurance procedures and public confirmation of the implementation of those procedures. This is done through first consulting with stakeholders in the education and training and qualifications system, then issuing guidelines for the establishment of providers' QA procedures and later reviewing the effectiveness of these procedures.

QQI also has a role in working as an international agency to ensure that European norms and international effective practice are communicated to the Irish education and training community and are appropriate to the Irish context.

3.2   QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES

QA guidelines are intended to guide providers through their responsibilities for the quality of education and training and the consistency of their awards with the Framework, so they are developed in collaboration with the education and training sectors.

QA guidelines are not QA procedures or the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of QA procedures. The 2012 Act requires providers to *"have regard to"* QQI's QA guidelines (Section 28 (2)) when developing their QA procedures. QQI will similarly have regard to the guidelines when determining

protocols (prescribed mechanisms for meeting criteria[1]); criteria (things which must be demonstrated by providers in order to access services[2]); standards (thresholds for educational quality which must be met[3]); and supplementary and supporting documentation to inform providers[4] and to provide further explanation.

QQI QA guidelines:

a) Are a 'keystone' for a variety of QQI functions, services and policies including:

   ~ Validation of programmes (and re-validation)

   ~ Review of providers

   ~ Certification of learners

   ~ Authorising the use of the International Education Mark

   ~ Recognition of awards within the National Framework of Qualifications

   ~ Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

   ~ Access, transfer and progression (ATP)

   ~ Delegation of Authority to make awards (DA).

b) Communicate expectations about the quality of provision, assessment and the teaching and learning experience in the Irish education and training community

c) Bring coherence into and between different parts of the education and training system

d) Are a resource for providers' establishment of their own QA procedures. They help identify and inspire areas for enhancement, they are not solely a compliance checklist

e) Will be adapted and continuously evolve to remain fit-for-purpose for the needs of the education and training community and the qualifications system

f) Can be expected to have different purposes and different impacts in each sector and theme that they address. The impact upon a provider of the QA guidelines will depend upon the scope of their provision and the sector they operate in.

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1   For example: Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act PEL
2   For example: Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards
3   QQI policy on standards determination is in development
4   QQI will develop a comprehensive glossary

Guidelines will be issued in a '*modular*' format. Guidelines may be issued separately to address specific sectors[5] and they may also address specific themes. For example[6]:

» Guidelines for online provision

» Guidelines for voluntary higher education or further education or and training or English language training providers seeking access to initial validation.

QQI will issue common guidelines relevant to all sectors in education and training where feasible.

3.3   APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

QQI QA guidelines will be developed by building on the existing QA guidelines[7]. QQI can also determine effective practice by adopting guidelines issued by other bodies.

Key to development is collaboration and consultation with the education and training community and stakeholders in the qualifications system. QQI will:

» Reconfigure the existing guidelines to comply with legal requirements

» Develop guidelines that are in line with European and Irish policy on education and training

» Address any gaps that may arise out of the implementation of the national strategies for further and higher education and training[8]. For example:

  ~ Clusters and strategic alliances in higher education

  ~ Innovations in provision that require different kinds of QA guidelines

  ~ Reviews of the existing guidelines by QQI and their implementation

» Adopt guidelines for its own purposes and for the education and training community as and when required.

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5   This concept underpins the architecture of the QAA's "*UK Quality Code for Higher Education*" which is organised into modules called "*parts*" and "*chapters*".

6   Appendix A lists the QA guidelines modules that are currently being used for QQI services.

7   The guidelines under which procedures saved by Section 84 of the 2012 Act are considered existing for this purpose

8   The "*National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*" and the "*Further Education Strategy 2014 – 2019*"

In summary the approach to the development of QA guidelines is collaborative and evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

3.4   CONTENT

Not including the prescriptions of the 2012 Act and European norms the full suite of guidelines must address (but not be limited to):

a) Provision and other services offered by providers

   ~ Programme design

   ~ The learning environment (including teaching and research)

b) 3rd party engagements

   ~ Transnational and collaborative provision

   ~ Linked providers.

3.4.a International and European Influences

QQI's QA guidelines will reflect Ireland's commitment to international best practice, EU directives and policy commitments. Notably:

» The European Higher Education Area – including the _Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area_

» European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training – _European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET_

3.4.b Prescription and Aspiration

Where the activity or sector being addressed warrants detailed and prescriptive guidance, this may be provided for within the guidelines. Where the area being addressed by the guideline is, for example; less mature or poses a greater risk to learners or the education and training system in general, the guidelines may be less of an aspiration and more of a statement of expectation. This does not imply compliance oriented guidelines, but that more guidance is seen as necessary.

3.5   CONTINUAL DEVELOPMENT

QQI will not simply issue guidelines and then consider them completed (notwithstanding the fact that guidelines, as issued are in full effect until replacement guidelines are issued). Guidelines will be continually redeveloped and updated in order to keep up with the evolution of the education and training landscape. The guidelines will change as public policy changes, providers innovate and QQI's priorities change.

QQI's role in this sense is to assess the effectiveness of the guidelines and to organise their on-going development in collaboration and consultation with the sectors.

APPENDIX A
QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES

Issued by QQI to date

1. Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards (Higher Education and Training) [QQI, September 2013]

2. Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards (Further Education and Training) [QQI, September 2013]

Active Guidelines Inherited and Adopted by QQI

1. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (3rd edition) [ENQA, 2009, soon to be updated]

2. Principles of Good Practice in Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement for Irish Higher Education and Training [IHEQN, 2005]

3. Principles for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Higher Education and Training [IHEQN, 2007]

4. Common Principles for Follow-through on Quality Improvements identified through Quality Reviews [IHEQN, 2010]

5. Common Principles for Student Involvement in Quality Assurance/Quality Enhancement [IHEQN, 2009]

6. Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions [IHEQN, 2009]

7. Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning [AHEAD, 2009]

8. Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures [HETAC, September 2011]

9. Core Validation Policy and Criteria (Revised) [HETAC, 2013]

10. Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training [NQAI, 2006]

11. ECTS User's Guide [European Communities, 2009; soon to be updated]

12. Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications [NQAI, 2003]

13. Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Award-Types [NQAI, 2004]

14. Policy and Criteria for the making of Higher Education and Training Awards [HETAC, 2004, to be replaced by QQI policy soon]

15. Policy and Draft Guidelines on Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards [HETAC, October 2008]

16. Awards Standards (series) [HETAC, various]

17. Irish Universities' PhD Graduates' Skills [IUA, 2008]

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