



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

WHITE PAPER

Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards

FOR CONSULTATION

QQI White Papers contain proposed QQI policy for public consultation and information. Following publication and consideration of the outcomes of consultation, they lead to Draft QQI Policy which is adopted by the Board of QQI. Once adopted, QQI policy and procedures are developed and implemented accordingly.

This White Paper proposes policy and criteria for provider access to programme validation for providers that do not currently have a relationship with QQI. Detailed procedures and guidelines will be developed to support this policy and criteria following consultation.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the policies and criteria contained in this White Paper.

Submissions can be emailed to
consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions
is **Tuesday 27th August 2013.**

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.*

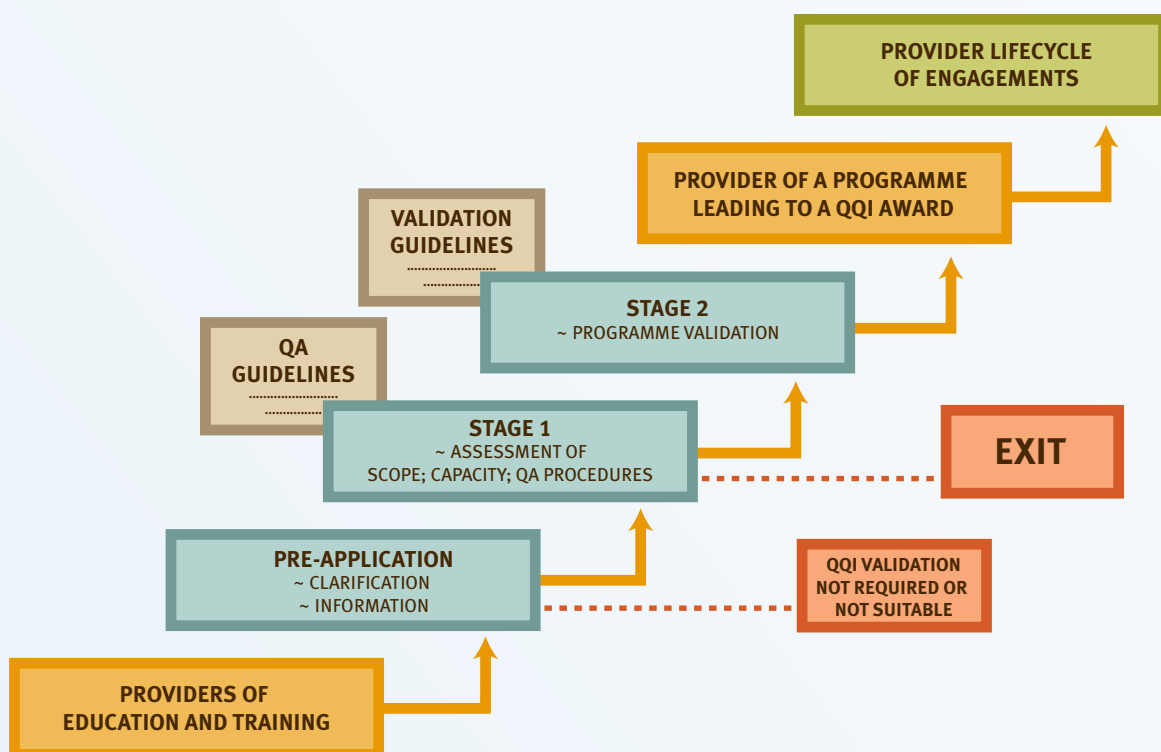
1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to set out the policy and criteria for providers of education and training programmes applying for access to QQI programme validation. This policy applies exclusively to providers who do not currently provide QQI validated programmes of education and training. This includes (but is not limited to) providers who have not previously had a programme validated by QQI, or the FET or HET Awards Councils.

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (hereafter the 2012 Act) established conditions that must be fulfilled before a provider may apply to QQI for validation of a programme of education and training. Accordingly, programme validation by QQI is a two-stage process (as depicted in diagram 1). The first stage, among other things, enables the statutory conditions to be fulfilled and the second stage is the application for validation of a specific programme(s) for awards made by QQI.

DIAGRAM 1:

PROCESS OVERVIEW FOR PROVIDER ACCESS TO PROGRAMME VALIDATION



The qualifications system depends on the education and training system which, in turn, depends on the existence of a range of providers of programmes of education and training. Those involved in the education and training system share a responsibility to ensure that:

- » The system is robust.
- » It responds dynamically to changing demands.
- » It can satisfy a multiplicity of needs.

Among other things, this implies a need for a diverse range of providers. There is also a need for mechanisms to deal with the establishment of new providers; for existing ones to grow; and for unsatisfactory ones to be curtailed or refused accreditation.

QQI quality assures the providers of programmes that it validates. It is important for applicants to appreciate that QQI sets standards for awards. It does not, as some other awarding bodies do (including some who are recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications [NFQ]), develop or provide programmes to providers; or learner assessment support to providers. Providers seeking access to validation must take responsibility for the development, maintenance, provision and internal quality assurance (QA) of their own programmes and the procedures for the assessment of learners enrolled on those programmes. There is, therefore, a minimum capacity that must be in place before a provider may access programme validation. This capacity may depend, for example, on the award-type, NFQ level and field of education and training.

In order for a provider to seek access to QQI validation of its programme, education and training must be a principal function of that provider.

Programmes of education and training take place in a variety of contexts for many purposes. Not all of them can or should be validated by QQI. They do not all require recognition within the NFQ either.

1.1 LEGAL INTERPRETATION

The meaning of validation is described by Section 2(2) of the 2012 Act:

For the purposes of this Act, a programme of education and training is validated where the Authority confirms under section 45 that the provider of the programme has satisfied the Authority that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award of the Authority being offered in respect of that programme.

Before a new programme can be validated a provider must apply to QQI under Section 44 of the 2012 Act and meet a number of conditions. To meet its responsibility under the 2012 Act, QQI is obliged to assess the capacity of each provider to be assured that it can meet the conditions set out in Section 44(5) of the 2012 Act. Among these pre-conditions are the following:

- a. *the provider has established procedures for quality assurance under section 28,*
- b. *the provider has established procedures for access, transfer and progression under section 56,*
- c. *the provider has complied with section 65 in respect of arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners, if applicable.*

It is also a pre-condition that a provider who organises or procures a programme of education or training developed by another provider or person shall consult with that provider or person prior to applying programme validation.

2 POLICY AND CRITERIA

QQI policy is to evaluate providers to ensure that they have, within the scope of access to programme validation sought, the capacity to provide programmes that may be validated and meet their responsibilities under the 2012 Act.

Through this policy and its implementation QQI is assuring learners, stakeholders, funding agencies, national and international audiences that a provider who is successful in having a programme(s) validated by QQI has taken responsibility for and has the capacity to provide learners with a well-supported learning experience which allows them to achieve the learning outcomes for the type and level of QQI award sought.

2.1 SCOPE OF THE PROVIDER'S PROVISION

Access to validation is bounded. The scope of access sought by a provider determines the boundary within which the agreement of quality assurance and applications for programme validation may be made to QQI. The scope includes:

- » The NFQ levels and award types to which the programme leads.
- » The programme's field of learning and/or professional domain.
- » The maximum and minimum numbers of learners that can be accommodated by the programme cycle.
- » The target learner groups.
- » The teaching and learning modalities.
- » The location(s) where the programme will be provided to enrolled learners.

A substantive change in the scope of provision by a provider who has gained initial access to validation (for example seeking to have a programme validated at a different level on the NFQ) will necessitate a re-assessment of capacity.

2.2 CRITERIA FOR ACCESS TO PROGRAMME VALIDATION

An application for access to programme validation within a specified scope will be assessed against the following criteria.

2.2.1 PROVIDER CAPACITY

A provider must, within the scope of access sought:

- » Be an established legal entity with education and training as a principal function.
- » Have sufficient resources; and corporate, structural and internal QA systems in place to ensure a sustainable basis to provide programmes of education and training that can reasonably be submitted for validation by QQI.
- » Demonstrate the ability to design, develop, provide and review programmes.

2.2.2 DETAILED CRITERIA

A provider must comply with, within the scope of access sought:

A. Legal and compliance requirements:

- » Be an established legal entity.
 - ~ The legal entity or personality must be clearly circumscribed and have a base in Ireland.
 - ~ Dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries must be clearly specified.
 - ~ Any third-party relationships and partnerships must be compatible with the scope of access sought.
- » Comply with applicable regulation and legislation in all jurisdictions where it operates.
- » Be in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate); or enrolls learners; or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, QA agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.

B. Resource, governance and structural requirements:

- » Have a sufficient resource base.
 - ~ Be stable and in good financial standing.
 - ~ Have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision of programmes.
- » Have fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures.
- » Have appropriate communication and marketing strategies.
- » Have QA procedures that meet QQI's criteria for agreement and continuous improvement.
- » Have appropriate continuity planning and risk management arrangements.
- » Have a secure and robust learner records system that is compatible with QQI information requirements.
- » Have arrangements for providing required information to QQI.

C. Programme development and provision requirements:

- » Have education and training capacity demonstrated by:
 - ~ Experience and track record¹ in the provision of programmes of education and training.
 - ~ A fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff.
 - ~ Capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the 2012 Act.
 - ~ Fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources.
- » Have access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval.
- » Have structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners.
- » Have arrangements for the protection for enrolled learners that meet QQI's criteria (where applicable).

Providers must demonstrate that they meet these criteria through a self-assessment process and submission to QQI of supporting documentation.

¹ This does not imply a requirement to be a registered provider with another awarding body or a previously established provider of education and training for a period of time. It will not discriminate against new organisations or businesses. However, experience of the design, delivery and assessment of education and training is an important factor in delivering quality assured programmes.

3 PROCESS FOR PROVIDER ACCESS TO INITIAL VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES LEADING TO QQI AWARDS

A provider who is subject to this policy and who wishes to submit a programme for validation must first apply to QQI for access to validation (Stage 1 as described in Diagram 1).

3.1 KEY ELEMENTS OF STAGE 1

The key elements in the process are:

- » Pre-application engagement with QQI.
- » Self-assessment against the criteria for access to validation by the applicant and preparation of the application for submission to QQI.
- » QQI assessment of the application against the criteria for access to programme validation.
- » Follow-up by the applicant and by QQI.

Each application will be assessed against the criteria for access to programme validation in a fair, open and transparent manner. Independent experts capable of acting without conflicts of interest will conduct the evaluation of each application. A fee will apply.

Successful completion of Stage 1 enables a provider to apply to QQI for validation of a programme within the scope of access granted.

Successful completion of Stage 1 of the access to programme validation process does not, in itself, confer any status on the provider, other than to confirm that the provider is eligible to progress to Stage 2 of the process i.e. programme validation.

If a provider is unsuccessful at Stage 1 (i.e. fails to agree QA, ATP and PEL), any subsequent application will only be possible after a prescribed time interval and an associated fee will apply.

3.2 THE SECOND STAGE

A provider who has successfully completed Stage 1 may apply to QQI for validation of a programme within the scope of access granted. If the scope of a provider's provision changes in subsequent validation applications, a re-assessment of the provider's capacity (Stage 1) may be required.

The programme validation process has a number of key stages:

- » Applicants successful at Stage 1 submit the programmes that they have designed and developed.
- » QQI processes the application according to its Validation Policy and Guidelines².
- » QQI and the applicant follow-up on the outcomes of the process as set out in the policy and guidelines.

3.3 DECISION REVIEW PROCESS

Applicants who are refused access to programme validation may make observations to QQI within a specified timeframe of receipt of formal notification. Following consideration of these observations QQI will either uphold its decision or propose a remedial course of action with a view to reconsidering the matter at a future date.

3.4 APPEALS

The 2012 Act Part 7 provides for appeals procedures. Appeals may be made in the following circumstances:

- » Refusal to validate (because access to validation is a prerequisite for validation).
- » Refusal to agree QA procedures.
- » Refusal to approve procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners.
- » Refusal to approve arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners.

² Programme validation for specific programmes leading to awards on the NFQ will be processed using enhanced legacy FET and HET Awards Council policy and processes.

4 REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The policy, process and criteria on access to programme validation will be reviewed two years after the date of adoption by the Board or earlier if necessary.

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