Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners

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1 SUMMARY

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established in November 2012 by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act). The 2012 Act sets out the functions of QQI, which includes the establishment of a Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners (the Code) and the authorisation of an International Education Mark (IEM) for use by providers in compliance with the Code.

This statutory Code sets out expectations relating to the quality of services and supports available to international learners[1] in Ireland. It is issued under Section 60(1) of the 2012 Act.

QQI policy is developed through a consultative process involving all stakeholders. Details of the policy development process are available on www.QQI.ie. QQI policy is adopted by the Board and implemented by the executive accordingly.

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1 *International learner: a person who is not an Irish citizen but is lawfully in the State primarily to receive education and training.*

2   INTRODUCTION

The Code is a key part of national strategy[2] to ensure that international learners can expect a high quality educational experience from enrolment on a programme to completion of that programme. It is thereby intended to foster and strengthen Ireland's reputation for international education. It also supports national marketing and immigration strategies.

The Code is a comprehensive set of threshold requirements particular to the provision of education and training to international learners. These requirements specifically relate to the pastoral care, including service support and information provision, of international learners by the provider.

The Code provides a basis for the development of a comprehensive policy framework for provision of education and training to international learners by providers in Ireland. Compliance with the Code should be integrated into providers' quality assurance policies and procedures and the organisation's approach to providing a positive learner experience from the first point of engagement through to graduation or exit.

The Code recognises:

- The needs and expectations of international learners may vary or change from pre-enrolment through to graduation or exit; and

- The significant diversity in institutional missions and in practice across providers.

Not all of the requirements of the Code will apply to all providers, depending on their circumstances and services offered. Providers should identify the provisions that are relevant to their activities with international learners.

The Code recognises the role of an internationalised campus in valuing and promoting inter-cultural diversity, multi-culturalism, plurilingualism and social integration. It supports an enriched international education experience for all members and stakeholders of the provider.

The Code draws upon, and informs, international effective practice, as well as effective practice nationally.

Structure of the Code

The Code comprises criteria to be met by providers under four categories:

- General Requirements

- Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions

- Fees, Refunds and Subsistence

- Supports and Services for International Learners.

Each category is described by an over-arching principle and is supported by a series of criteria.

The following themes are found throughout the criteria in each of the categories:

- Learner integration and its importance in fostering a sense of community

- Comprehensive information provision which is transparent, clear and up-to-date

- Feedback mechanisms which enable the provider to identify issues and respond proactively

- Opportunities for the forming of academic and social networks.

Provider Resources

A list of references for the information of providers is set out at Appendix A. These resources may also be of interest to other stakeholders.

Learner Resources

A list of references for the information of learners is set out at Appendix B. These resources may also be of interest to other stakeholders.

3   CODE OF PRACTICE PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA

3.1   General Requirements

3.1.1   Protection of Enrolled Learners

For the purposes of the Code of Practice, all providers, with the exception of these expressly exempted under Section 65(5) of the 2012 Act, must have arrangements in place for the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL). Such arrangements will apply to all programmes of three months duration or longer where moneys have been paid by or on behalf of the learner, and will comply with the arrangements as set out under Part 6 of the 2012 Act. Providers must refer to the QQI Policy *Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act* for details.

3.1.2   Tax Compliance

a. Providers shall be fully tax compliant on an ongoing basis (this may be demonstrated through up-to-date tax clearance certificates valid for a 12 month period).

3.1.3   Fees

a. Providers shall have a fees policy that details the manner in which fees will be collected from learners and that incorporates a refund policy (see Section 3 for more information on Fees requirements).

3.2 Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions

> *Principle*
>
> Recruitment of learners shall be conducted in a transparent and ethical manner. Providers shall ensure that clear, unambiguous and up-to-date information is provided in their marketing and promotional materials.

Providers will demonstrate compliance with the following criteria in the areas of:

- Marketing

- Recruitment

- Admissions and Enrolment Information Provision.

3.2.1 Marketing

a. Providers shall ensure that information provided to potential international learners about themselves and their provision is clear, unambiguous and up-to-date. This shall include information about the intended purpose of the provision (e.g. to prepare a learner for further study or specific employment, etc.).

b. Providers shall be compliant with information for learner requirements set out in Section 67 of the 2012 Act; i.e. ensure that the following information is made available to learners about all programmes:

　　i. Whether or not a programme leads to an award, and if so:

- the awarding body making the award;

- the title of the award; and

- whether the award is recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications (and if so, confirm the award type and NFQ level);

　　ii. Details of the arrangements for PEL where appropriate.

　　iii. The procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression in place.

c. Providers shall ensure that information is provided in a way that is accessible to international learners. This information should support international learners in understanding all matters related to a programme prior to enrolment.

d. Providers shall accurately represent their organisation and facilities in all marketing and promotional materials.

e. Providers shall provide contact details for an appropriate person(s) to provide assistance with queries from international learners prior to enrolment (e.g. a programme co-ordinator or international officer).

 f. Providers shall clearly state attendance requirements. Sanctions for learners who do not fulfil these requirements shall be clear, including the process of expulsion[3].

 g. Providers shall state the commencement dates for all programmes.

 h. Where appropriate, providers shall provide information on "foundation" programmes for entry into academic programmes (in particular higher education programmes) or transition to new academic cultures or disciplines.

3.2.2 Recruitment

 a. Prior to enrolment, providers shall ensure the availability and provision of all relevant financial information

 b. Providers shall ensure that the learner is made aware of any insurance required or advised; e.g. medical or travel insurance.

 c. Providers shall ensure that any contractual arrangements entered into, in future, with a recruitment agent incorporate the principles of the London Statement, and that any existing contracts will be amended appropriately when scheduled for renewal[4].

 d. The contract between the provider and agent shall include a termination clause in instances where the agent does not comply with the principles of the London Statement or is found to have acted in an unethical fashion to the detriment of international learners.

 e. Providers shall conduct due diligence on the track record of agents in relation to learner protection issues prior to entering into a contractual agreement.

 f. Providers shall ensure that agents are in possession of accurate and up-to-date information regarding the provider and its provision.

 g. Providers shall have in place a process for reviewing the activities of agents to ensure that the agent is operating within the spirit of the Code and the London Statement.

 h. Providers shall have arrangements for PEL in place prior to the recruitment of learners (please see General Requirement 1.1).

3.2.3 Admissions and Enrolment Information Provision

 a. Providers shall clearly specify entry requirements for international learners.

 b. Providers shall clearly specify English language proficiency requirements for applicants whose first language is not English.

 c. Providers shall provide a timely written response to an international applicant who is refused admission.

3 Visa required students may be subject to greater scrutiny of attendance to ensure compliance with the immigration regime of the State

4 The "London Statement" is a high-level statement of principles and best practice among agents dealing with international learners,

3.3   Fees, Refunds and Subsistence

Principle

Providers shall provide all learners with clear, unambiguous and up-to-date information on all study costs, including subsistence and accommodation. Providers shall inform learners about fees and other costs associated with undertaking a programme of study in Ireland.

Providers will be assessed against and asked to demonstrate compliance with the following criteria in the areas of:

- Tuition and tuition-related fees
- Additional costs

3.3.1   Tuition and tuition-related fees

a. Providers shall provide information on compulsory fees for the full duration of the programme from registration and admission to graduation or exit from the programme. Where fees may change, this shall be clear to applicants in information provided.

b. Providers shall provide information on the collection or payment of fees (including sanctions for late payment and debt collection for moneys owed).

c. Providers shall establish a fees structure that supports the mission of the organisation and reflects the costs associated with quality provision.

d. Providers shall ensure that there are no additional fees or unexpected charges that international learners have not been made aware of.

e. Providers shall issue a receipt to international learners upon receipt of payment of fees which will include a breakdown of fees paid.

f. Providers shall establish and publish a policy on full and partial refunds. This policy shall outline the conditions under which a refund will be granted (e.g. a refused visa application in the case of a non-EEA learner).

g. Providers shall provide information on any financial supports or resources that exist within the organisation, or nationally, for international learners.

3. 3.2   Additional Costs

a. Providers shall provide information on the full cost of studying in Ireland.

b. Providers shall furnish prospective learners with information regarding the average cost of living (e.g. food, transport, medical care) for the course duration.

c. Providers shall provide information on:

    i. Fees for accommodation services, if offered by the provider, or for placement with a host family

    ii. Fees for complaints and appeals procedures as relevant (e.g. rechecking of exam results)

    iii. Any other costs related to provision of student services as considered relevant by the provider.

3.4 Supports and Services for International Learners

Principle

Providers shall foster a supportive environment which supports the well-being and integration of all learners into the student body and ensures a positive learning experience for all learners.

Providers will be assessed against and asked to demonstrate compliance with the following criteria in the areas of:

•   Pastoral Supports and Services

•   Academic Supports and Services

•   Staff Training

3.4.1 Pastoral Supports and Services

a. Providers shall designate appropriate personnel to be responsible for inquiries about pastoral care issues from international learners (e.g. course co-ordinator, counsellor or international officer).

b. Providers shall offer orientation information prior to learners' arrival (e.g. transport and accommodation services).

c. Providers shall ensure that inductions offered to learners also meet the particular needs of international learners (including inter-cultural awareness).

d. The induction programme shall be provided to all cohorts of international learners that register or enrol at various times of the year, including learners that access programmes through advanced entry.

e. Providers shall provide information on all integration opportunities available to international learners and encourage learners to avail of those opportunities.

f. Providers shall ensure that international learners are aware of opportunities to participate in, and be represented at, engagements between the provider and the student body.

g. Providers shall have mechanisms in place to support international learners financially in instances of personal or other emergency or hardship.

h. Providers shall facilitate and encourage feedback from international learners on the delivery of any supports and services. This includes informing learners about complaints processes for these services.

3.4.2   Academic Supports and Services

a. Providers shall offer academic induction that is tailored to the needs of international learners. Inductions shall be provided to learners and cohorts that enrol at different points during the year, including those accessing programmes though advanced entry.

b. Providers shall ensure the information provided at academic induction is easily accessible throughout the academic year and shall offer reminders of this information at key points during the year (e.g. in the lead up to examinations or submission of assignments).

c. Providers shall ensure, where possible and appropriate, that there is a balance of learners of different nationalities (including domestic learners) in different learning settings (e.g. classrooms, tutorials, project-work etc.).

d. Providers shall offer support to international learners with English as a second language within the learning environment.

3.4.3   Staff Training

a. Providers shall ensure that staff are provided with training and support regarding intercultural competence to facilitate an appropriate and effective delivery of services to international learners.

4 APPENDIX A: PROVIDER RESOURCES

Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment, and Work Place Relations (2007) National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007, retrieved 23 June 2015: **https://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2010C00313**

Dutch Code of Conduct with respect to international students in Dutch higher education (2013), retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.nuffic.nl/en/about-nuffic/code-of-conduct**

European Association for International Education (EAIE), International Student Mobility Charter, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.eaie.org/home/in-the-field/policy-advocacy/international-student-mobility-charter**

Eurobarometer: **http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm**

Education in Ireland: The Education in Ireland brand is managed by Enterprise Ireland the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. It promotes Ireland as a quality destination for students.

Higher Education Authority: **www.hea.ie**

Higher Education Liaison Officer Association (HELOA) (2011), retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.heloa.ac.uk/**

International Association of Language Centres, Code of Ethics, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.ialc.org/code-of-ethics/**

International Education Association of South Africa, Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by South African Higher Education Institutions, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.unisa.ac.za/Default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=19146**

Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) (2009), Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.iheqn.ie/publications/default.asp?NCID=154**

National Student Survey: **http://www.studentsurvey.ie/**

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (2013), Caring for international students: the Code of Practice for Pastoral Care, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/caring-for-international-students/**

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 2012, International students studying in the UK - Guidance for UK higher education providers, retrieved 23 June 2015: **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/International-students-studying-in-the-UK.aspx**

Statement of Principles for the Ethical Recruitment of International Students by Education Agents and Consultants (The London statement) (2012), retrieved 23 June 2015: http:**//www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/landmark-international-code-ethics**

UK Council for International Student Affairs: **http://www.ukcisa.org.uk**

5 APPENDIX B: LEARNER RESOURCES

Accreditation and Co-ordination of English Language Services (ACELS):**www.acels.ie**

Citizens Information, a national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy to the public on the broad range of social and civil services: **www.citizensinformation.ie**

Department of Education and Skills: **http://www.education.ie/en/**

Department of Justice and Skills: **http://www.justice.ie/**

Education in Ireland; information on studying in Ireland: **http://www.educationinireland.com/en/**

Euraxess Ireland which helps researchers and their family to plan and organise their move to a foreign country, providing help in all matters related to mobility: **www.euraxess.ie**

Euroguidance which promotes mobility, helping guidance counsellors and individuals to better understand the opportunities available to European citizens throughout Europe: **http://www.euroguidance.ie**

Europass; an initiative which aims to help learners ensure their skills and qualifications are clearly and easily understood in Europe:**www.europass.ie**

European Qualifications Framework; a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels:http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97

Irish Council for International Students; an independent organisation advocating for the rights of all international learners in Ireland: **http://www.icosirl.ie/student_information**

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service: **http://www.inis.gov.ie/**

National Framework of Qualifications; a system of ten levels and is used to describe the Irish qualifications system: **http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-%28NFQ%29.aspx**

Qualifications Recognition; information on the academic recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland: **www.qualrec.ie**

Qualifax, the National Learner's Database which provides Information on further and higher education and training courses: **www.Qualifax.ie**

SOLAS; the Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland, responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating training and further education programmes: **www.solas.ie**

Student Finance; source of information on financial support for further and higher education: **www.studentfinance.ie**

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www.QQI.ie

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