

REQUEST FOR QUOTES:

**For a thematic analysis of the higher
education institution annual quality
reports for 2023**

6 JUNE 2023



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Adding Value to Qualifications



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1 Introduction

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training in Ireland.

The functions of QQI are set out in law and include the provision of advice and information to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on matters concerning policy and practice with respect to quality assurance and improvement in education and training, as well as statutory functions in the areas of:

- External quality assurance of further and higher education and training.
- Validation of programmes and making of awards for certain providers in the further and higher education and training sectors.
- Maintaining, developing, and reviewing the National Framework of Qualifications.
- Maintaining the Irish Register of Qualifications, a database of quality assured education and training programmes and qualifications in Ireland.
- Providing advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland through the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) Ireland.
- Protecting academic integrity and addressing academic fraud and cheating within the further and higher education and training sectors.

The information leaflet - *Who we are and what we do*¹ provides an overview of the services and the organisations we work with and is available on our website, www.qqi.ie

¹ (<http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Who%20We%20Are-Booklet-August%2017.pdf>).



2 Context and Service Requirements

2.1 Introduction

QQI wishes to commission a service provider to undertake a thematic analysis of the annual quality reports (AQRs) submitted by higher education institutions (HEIs) to QQI in 2023.

Section 2.2 outlines some contextual material on the purpose and format of AQRs and salient factors pertaining to the 2023 submissions.

The thematic analysis must be delivered by **15 September 2023**.

The report will be of interest to QQI, higher education providers, educational practitioners, learners, regulators, policy makers, funders and other actors with a stake in Irish higher education.

This work is aligned with the [QQI Statement of Strategy 2022-24](#) and specifically the strategic priority on “Publishing authoritative analysis and insight”.

#INSIGHT

Objective:

We will conduct system-level analyses of the outcomes of further and higher education quality reviews to inform new and innovative approaches to institutional quality assurance

Indicator:

Ireland is viewed as a leading country in the development of innovative methodologies for institutional quality assurance

For market information purposes please note that the budget for this work is not greater than €20,000 including VAT.

Submissions of quotations should be made by email only to lbutler@qqi.ie no later than 12:00pm on Friday, 30 June 2023.



2.2 Context

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE AQRS

The **Annual Quality Report (AQR)**; formerly AIQR) forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistently with regulatory requirements.

In 2023, QQI (the Contracting Authority) received annual quality reports for the period September 2021 to August 2022 from:

- 6 private higher education institutions; and
- 16 public higher education institutions.

The reports are available online on the QQI website: [Quality and Monitoring Review Reports | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#). They can be found by selecting 'Annual Quality Report' as the 'Document Type' and 2023 as the year.

The reports have three parts: Part A, Part B and Case Studies.

Part A: Internal QA System

Part A of the AQR is intended to comprise a record of each institution's current QA policies and procedures and should provide hyperlinks to those policies and procedures. However, note well that some AQRs also report some activities under this part.

Part B: QA Activities, Developments and Enhancements and their Impact

Part B of the AQR documents and captures QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken by institutions during the reporting period and their impact. Insofar as is possible, institutions are expected to demonstrate in Part B how plans set out in the previous AQR were progressed during the reporting period – these may be plans linked to strategic objectives, to reengagement* advice, or to institutional review** recommendations.

* *Reengagement* is discussed [here](#).

** *Institutional Review* is described here: [Quality review | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)



Case Studies

Institutions were requested to provide institutional case studies, showcasing examples of best practice. The 2023 reports particularly sought case studies relating to:

- Ensuring the quality assurance and enhancement of work placements: an examination of the lessons learned and challenges ahead.
- Enhancing student engagement in partnership with postgraduate and postgraduate research students: taking a closer look at student-staff partnerships, the QA of research and/or research assessment; barriers to effective partnership.
- Ensuring that internal quality assurance can effectively facilitate and support access, mobility and progression of refugees and asylum seekers.

Other possible topics for consideration may include:

- Student survey data – its impact in effecting positive change
- Academic integrity
- Rethinking assessment
- Developmental activities related to QA and quality enhancement.

2.2.2 PREVIOUS THEMATIC ANALYSES

Annual quality reporting is well-established in the public higher education sector and thematic analyses of the AQR submissions in this sector have been produced annually for the past six years. Examples may be found in the [Our Insights](#) section of the QQI website.

Annual quality reporting for private & independent higher education providers commenced in 2021, following the reengagement process for this sector. For the past two years, in addition to the thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by public HEIs, a separate thematic analysis has been undertaken in respect of annual quality reporting by the private and independent HEIs. These reports are also available on the [Our Insights](#) section of the QQI website. It should be noted that only a small subset of this sector was required to submit an AQR in 2023, pending a review of monitoring by QQI.



3 Range of Services required:

The service provider is required to complete a thematic analysis of **QA activities, developments and enhancements and their impact** as reported in AQRs submitted for the reporting period September 2021 to August 2022.

The average length of the 2023 AQRs is about 94 pages and they range from 37 to 180 pages. Much of the content is devoted to describing the HEI's internal QA system (Part A) which is relatively stable from year to year. QA activities, developments and enhancements and their impact are primarily reported in Part B of the AQRs. Part B varies significantly from year to year and is the part that past thematic analyses have primarily focussed on. However, it should be noted that in some AQRs, relevant elements of QA activities, developments and enhancements may be reported in Part A. For clarity, we do not require a thematic analysis of the descriptions of the current QA policies and procedures that are reported in Part A.

The analysis is expected to broadly follow the approach of previous years by focusing on the themes emerging from the QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken by institutions during the reporting period and their impact.

However, in contrast to previous years, QQI requires the analysis to have a system-level orientation that encompasses all of the AQRs submitted across the higher education system. The analysis will therefore be required to incorporate the AQRs of both public and private/independent HEIs within a single report but including discrete analysis of each of those sub-sectors.

Structurally, this will comprise:

- A. One chapter containing a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by public HEIs.
- B. One chapter containing a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted by private/independent HEIs².
- C. One chapter identifying any system-level trends or observations.

Within Chapters A and B, the following broad headings may be used to organise the findings:

² This chapter is likely to be more limited than previous thematic analyses of quality reporting in this sub-sector arising from the reduced number of reports to be included. This context will be acknowledged in the report.



1. Sectoral Context
2. Quality Implementation and Developments
3. Internal Quality Assurance System – Enhancement and Impacts
4. Quality Assurance Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

A selection of case studies should be included in the report as in previous years.

The thematic analysis report must be delivered to QQI as an MS Word Document and the text must be proofed and ready for publication. As in previous years, the thematic analysis will be published as part of the **QQI Insights** series. The authors will be acknowledged in the publication. QQI will be responsible for the design and layout of the report and for its publication.

4 Queries and clarifications

All queries or requests for clarification relating to any aspect of this procurement competition or of this RFQ can be submitted to butler@gqi.ie. Queries or requests for clarifications will be accepted no later than **12:00pm** on **23 June 2023** unless otherwise advised by QQI.

5 Project Plan and Contract management

Interested providers are asked to submit their proposed methodology and a project plan to indicate how they would engage with QQI. Providers should give information on the qualifications and experience of the personnel assigned to QQI.

Any changes to the proposed personnel during the term of the contract should be communicated in advance to QQI. In turn, where a requirement arises to change personnel, their replacement must be at the same level of seniority and have appropriate experience and knowledge.



6 Cost Model/Price Schedule

6.1 Pricing Schedule

Price for the production of a

thematic analysis of the higher education institution annual quality reports for 2023	Total price exclusive of VAT

6.2 Personnel

Quotations must identify the **Key Personnel** for the provision of the services. **Details on relevant qualifications, and experience and professional CV must be included with the quotation.**

Add lines for any additional project personnel.

Role in the project	Name	Time Allocated to project (Notional Days (7.5 hours per day))	Details on relevant qualifications, and experience and professional CV included with quotation? (Yes/No)	One of the Key Personnel for the provision of the services? (Yes/No)



7 Qualification Criteria

Candidates will be initially evaluated by reference to the following qualification criteria:

- a. Addressing in full the requirements set out in this RFQ.
- b. Stated ability to meet all requirements.
- c. Inclusion of all information requested.
- d. Inclusion of **2-3** relevant client references, including business name, detailed description of work, and comparability to services required.

Only those proposals that satisfy all the above qualifying criteria will be eligible for further evaluation.

7.1 Freedom of Information

Interested providers should be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, information provided by them during this public procurement competition may be liable to be disclosed.

Candidates are asked to consider if any of the information supplied by them in their RFQ response should not be disclosed because of its commercial sensitivity. If candidates consider that certain information is not to be disclosed because of its commercial sensitivity, candidates should, when providing such information, clearly identify same and specify the reasons for its commercial sensitivity. If candidates do not identify it as commercially sensitive, it is potentially liable to be released in response to a Freedom of Information request without further consultation with you. QQI will, where possible, consult with candidates about commercially sensitive information so identified before deciding on a request received under the Freedom of Information Act.

7.2 Tax Clearance

It will be a condition of the award of any contract under this RFT that the successful candidate shall for the term of any such contract, comply with all EU and domestic taxation law and requirements, including but not being limited to Circular 43/2006 issued by the Department of Finance. This Circular and further information is available at www.finance.gov.ie and www.revenue.ie.

Prior to the award of any contract pursuant to this RFQ, the successful candidate shall be required to supply its Tax Clearance Access Number and Tax Reference Number to facilitate online verification of their tax status by QQI. By supplying these numbers, the



successful candidate acknowledges and agrees that QQI has the permission of the successful candidate to verify its tax cleared position online.

Further information can be obtained by contacting:

Revenue Commissioners

Collector Generals Office

Francis Street

County Limerick

Ireland

Telephone No: +353 (0) 61310 310 or 1890 203 070 or www.revenue.ie.

You may also contact your local tax office if you are an Irish Company.

7.3 Withholding Tax

Where applicable, payments shall be subject to Irish 'Professional Services Withholding Tax' at the prevailing rate (currently at 20%) as laid down by the Revenue Commissioners in Ireland. Non-residents may be able to reclaim such deducted Tax from the *Office of the Revenue Commissioners in Ireland, International Claims Section* located currently at *Government Buildings, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, Ireland*. (Tel: 353-1-6733533).

7.4 Conflict of Interest

Any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest on the part of a contractor, individual employees, agents, or subcontractors of a contractor must be fully disclosed to QQI as soon as the conflict or potential conflict is or becomes apparent. In the event of any conflict or potential conflict of interest, QQI may invite candidates to propose means by which the conflict might be removed. QQI will, at its absolute discretion, decide on the appropriate course of action, which may in appropriate circumstances include eliminating a contractor from the competition or terminating any contract entered into by a contractor.



7.5 Award Criteria

The contract will be awarded based on the most economically advantageous submission in accordance with the following award criteria and the weightings below:

	Criteria	Weighting	Maximum Score	Minimum Score Required
A	Proposed methodology and plan	35%	350	210
<i>Candidates should detail their proposed methodology to demonstrate how they will meet the requirements set out above. An understanding of quality assurance in higher education and the conduct of high-level qualitative analyses in higher education should be demonstrated.</i>				
B	Technical Merit of Personnel Assigned and experience of effectively delivering a similar service in the education sector	35%	350	210
<i>Candidates should provide information on the personnel contributing to the service indicating each person's precise role and responsibilities. CVs demonstrating each person's expertise for the role proposed must be provided. Candidates should detail their relevant experience.</i>				
C	Service Delivery	10%	100	60
<i>Candidates should provide evidence of the timeliness of their service and ability to meet deadline.</i>				
D	Cost of the Contract	20%	200	120
<i>Candidates are required to provide <u>fixed-price</u> quotations exclusive of VAT.</i>				



Qualitative criteria will be scored using the following baseline scoring system (see * below).

80% to 100%	A response with very few or no weaknesses that demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the requirements and assurance that the candidate will deliver to a high standard.
60% to 79%	A response which demonstrates a good understanding of requirements and gives reasonable assurance of delivery to a good standard.
40% to 59%	A response where reservations exist. Lacks full credibility/convincing detail, and there is a significant risk that the response will not deliver a successful outcome for QQI.
20% to 39%	A response where serious reservations exist. This may be because, for example, insufficient detail is provided, and the response has fundamental flaws, or is seriously inadequate or seriously lacks credibility with a high risk of non-delivery.
0% to 19%	Response completely fails to address the criterion under consideration.

***Note 1:** A candidate may be awarded any baseline score between 0 and 100% under criterion (A) to (C).

NOTE 2: The lowest cost quote that also meets all the minimum requirements of the **qualitative** award criteria (A) to (C) above will receive the maximum score achievable under criterion (D). The scores of the other valid quotes will be calculated using the following formula:

Lowest Cost Quote meeting minimum requirements	A
Cost for the Quote being evaluated	B
Maximum Points available for Cost	200
Formula employed	$\frac{200 \times A}{B}$

NOTE 3: Candidates should ensure in their quote that they provide detailed information in respect of all aspects of the contract award criteria as stated above. This will enable QQI to assess fully the extent of their offers.