

40th Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

24 June 2024 from 2pm to 5pm

Dr Mary Emily Dawson Room, RCSI, St Stephens Green, Dublin 2

Minutes

Present: Kevin McStravock – Committee Chair
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Hannah McGee – National Expert
Anne Naughton – National Expert
Damien Owens - National Expert
Cassy Taylor - International Expert
Achim Hopbach - International Expert

In attendance: Peter Cullen - Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
Beata Sokolowska – Item 5.1 – 5.3
Walter Balfe – Item 9.3.1
John O’Connor – Item 9.3.1
Anna Murphy – Item 12
Naomi Oldenburg
Rebecca Doyle - QQI Secretary

Apologies: Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member

The Committee Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the members and QQI staff in attendance.

1 Procedures relevant to the PSC’s functions

No business.

2 Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

3 Minutes of previous meetings.

The minutes of the 39th Meeting, were agreed and signed by the Committee chair.

4 Matters riding from the minutes of previous meetings.

No business.

5 Standards – review and development

a. Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9

The Executive presented Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9 for approval. QQI currently operates distinct approaches to the specification of award standards for QQI FET qualifications and QQI HET qualifications. In 2023, QQI contracted external expertise to engage with the sector and develop the draft Integrated Award Standards for Business at NFQ levels 5-9. A set of draft Integrated Award Standards for Business was produced, and a public consultation was held. QQI received 53 responses during the consultation. Feedback showed that the new integrated award

standards for Business were welcomed by stakeholders. The feedback received during the consultation was considered during the final draft of the award standards.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9. One member mentioned that certain areas might need to be considered further, such as sustainability, as this is only mentioned in the knowledge section. It was also recommended that more equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is included in the award standards. It was recommended by one committee member that more on digital security and artificial intelligence be included in the award standards. Following the Committee feedback, it was decided that sustainability, EDI, and digital security should be further developed in the award standards before the Integrated Award Standards are approved. It was AGREED that a revised document would be sent to Committee members in the next two weeks for approval by email.

Follow up note:

The revised documentation on Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9 incorporating the above feedback was circulated by email. Upon circulation of the updated information the Committee was requested to confirm its approval of the Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9.

By email communication, the Committee CONFIRMED ITS APPROVAL of the revised Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business Levels 5-9.

b. Level 5 Special Purpose Award Standard Physical Intervention Practice

The Executive presented a draft Level 5 Special Purpose Award Standard Physical Intervention Practice for approval. With QQI's approval, a Standards Development Group (SDG) was established to develop award standard(s) to support the enforcement of guarding requirements, which has been driven by new legislation. Consultation took place and seven responses were received. There is a practical aspect to this award standard involving the use of physical force, and it is the first time that QQI has developed an award standard addressing physical enforcement by private security guards. It is intended to include the award on the QQI Corporate Risk Register.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the Level 5 Special Purpose Award in Physical Intervention Practice. It was asked if there a prerequisite before a person can start a course leading to this award. The Executive responded that the regulator decides who can do this course and noted that Garda vetting is also required. The Chair thanked the Committee for the feedback on the Level 5 Special Purpose Award in Physical Intervention Practice.

The Committee APPROVED the Level 5 Special Purpose Award in Physical Intervention Practice.

5.3 Reinstating the use of the Special Purpose Award class on QQI's FET Certificates

The Executive presented the document entitled "Reinstating the use of the Special Purpose Award class on QQI's FET Certificates" for approval. Prior to the establishment of QQI, one of QQI's antecedents in FET, FETAC, had been using 'Specific Purpose Award' on their Special Purpose Award classed certificates. QQI continued this practice. The NFQ does not have a 'Specific Purpose Award' class. The proposed change was flagged in the public consultation on the suite of broad FET award standards at NFQ levels 1-4. The Committee welcomed the move to use the Special Purpose Award class on QQI's FET certificates and did not have any further comments to make in relation to this.

The Committee APPROVED the Reinstating the use of the Special Purpose Award class on QQI's FET Certificates.

6 Strategic Approach

6.1 Report from the Board since the last meeting

The Committee Chair provided an update from the 14 June Board meeting.

7 PSC Reflection

No business.

8 Policy Stocktake and Roadmap

8.1 Policy Stocktake – Roadmap

The Committee noted that the Policy Stocktake and Roadmap document is a working document and is being updated continuously. This document lists existing and planned policy and standards related documents along with information that has been collected about plans for their review and development. There are some gaps in the information returned.

9 Policy Development and Review

9.1 Approval of minor modifications

No business

9.2 Green Papers

No business.

9.3 White Papers

9.3.1 Draft suite of policies for QQI awarding body functions

The Executive presented the draft suite of policies for QQI awarding body functions for approval. QQI as an awarding body is unique internationally. It is an awarding body across NFQ levels and across educational levels. QQI is the national awarding body for further education and training (FET). It also acts as an awarding body for the independent higher education (HE) sector in Ireland. The four draft policies presented address core awarding processes, namely: determining awards standards; approving providers; validating programmes; and making awards. The aim of the revised policies suite is to try and make the elements look similar in style and language and operate as a coherent suite. The Executive was mindful of the National Framework of Qualifications and other key reference points when drafting the new policies. The policies are written at a high level, and there are other documents that will help support providers with these policies. In consulting stakeholders on these drafts policies, the Executive wants to learn (especially from providers) whether:

- there is anything missing from the suite of policies,
- the suite is a sensible package,
- the policies are accessible,
- the policies are likely to work.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the draft suite of policies. It commended the four policies being reviewed together and felt that it made it easier to read and review them. One member noted that in the Policy and Criteria for Validation of Programmes, Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) is a bit confusing as there is a pre-condition requiring ATP procedures and it is not clear what the difference is. In relation to ATP being a precondition and a criterion, this can be made clearer. To be able to apply for validation, a provider must have established general ATP procedures, then the programme itself must have more specific ATP procedures in place which are checked as part of the validation

process. One member commented on the international landscape and observed that some of the language in the draft policies may be unique to Ireland. The Executive responded that there is a glossary at the end of the suite and that in the consultation. Another member felt that these documents were well put together but felt that the programme level and provider level and the relationship between the two needed to be articulated more. The Chair thanked members for the detailed feedback and noted that the changes to be taken on board, mainly clarifying some areas ATP, and articulating the programme level and provider level requirements and the relationship between the two.

On that basis, the Committee APPROVED the draft suite of policies (white papers) for QQI awarding body functions for the purpose of public consultation.

9.3.2 Interim Guidelines on FET Assessment and External Authentication

The Executive presented two consultation drafts for approval

- Quality Assuring Assessment Interim Guidelines for Providers 2024
- Quality Assuring Assessment Interim Guidelines for External Authenticators 2024

The Executive indicated that QQI plans to completely overhaul guidelines on assessment in the next eighteen months or so. In the meantime, the interim guidelines aim to better align QQI's FET assessment guidelines with

- the suite of draft policies for QQI awarding body functions just approved for consultation including draft policies on validation, standards determination and making awards;
- the published quality assurance guidelines for providers of blended and fully online programmes;
- and current FET practices.

There is a huge amount of overlap between the two documents, so if approved, they might be merged prior to publication. The main change is the explicit recognition that the de facto award standard for a named QQI award is the set of minimum intended programme learning outcomes and minimum intended module learning outcomes associated with the programme that leads to that award. The Executive indicated that plan is to go out to consultation this summer.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the two drafts. The Committee commended the Executive on the documents and observed that the Memo was clear and easy to understand. A concern raised by one member was that the final guidelines when published might take a completely different approach to the changes introduced in the interim guidelines. There was a comment over the differing approaches to grading and whether this is warranted. At levels 1-3 learners are either unsuccessful or successful, while at levels 4 to 6 successful achievements are graded as pass, merit or distinction. The Executive responded that these matters would need to be considered by the full review. One member asked if the public consultation on these would be limited to the FET sector stakeholders. The Executive confirmed that it would.

The Committee APPROVED the two drafts for consultation namely:

- **Quality Assuring Assessment: Interim Guidelines for Providers**
- **Quality Assuring Assessment: Interim Guidelines for External Authenticators**

Follow up:

Following on from the June PSC meeting, the Executive sent a follow up email to members to clarify a few things which were omitted from the presentation that should have been highlighted, mainly that the foreword to the interim guidelines noted that:

“The main purpose of the interim update is to better align the guidelines with QQI’s policies on validation, standards determination and making awards, its quality assurance guidelines for providers of blended and fully online programmes and current FET practices”

Members were made aware of this and were given the opportunity to respond with any questions or comments they had in relation to the above by **Friday, 19 July**.

9.4 Final Decision on Guidelines

No business

9.5 Policy Advice

9.5.1 NFQ Information Provision

The Executive presented a briefing paper on NFQ information provision to the Committee for information. The paper was drafted to inform the Committee on the day-to-day operations and planned developments within the Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities Division (QILO) concerning information provision about learning opportunities and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). There have been some areas of development, such as a new interactive NFQ fan diagram which was published on the QQI website in November 2023, twenty years after the establishment of the NFQ. The review of the Access Transfer and Progression (ATP) policy seeks to formalise existing requirements regarding information provision utilising the IRQ, information provision to learners and promotion of the NFQ. There are also changes being made to the IRQ, this will be important once the International Education Mark (IEM) is launched as the IRQ will reflect whether a provider has been awarded the IEM. The Committee welcomed the update and comprehensiveness of the briefing paper.

The Committee NOTED the briefing paper on NFQ Information Provision.

9.6 Other policy business

9.6.1 Policy Review and Development Framework

The Executive presented the Policy Review and Development Framework document for approval. An earlier draft of this document was previously discussed by the Committee. Since then, the draft has been circulated among QQI staff for feedback. The current draft has been updated, partly based on feedback from staff. A set of criteria has also been proposed for the PSC when considering policy documents.

Discussion

The Committee welcomed the Policy Review and Framework document and found that the document will be helpful to the Committee when implemented. In particular, the Committee felt that the proposed ‘criteria’ listed would be beneficial when it came to the PSC meetings. However, the Committee considered that the list would function better as prompts than criteria, so it is not so stringent. It was further suggested that an additional prompt be added to the list, that indicates that the proposed policy is clear, unambiguous and well-expressed.

The Committee APPROVED the Policy Review and Development Framework.

10 Procedures relevant to the PSC’s functions

10.1 Revised Terms of Reference

The Executive presented the revised PSC Terms of Reference to the Committee for noting. There were minor modifications made to the terms of reference. There was a change to the programme and awards executive committee, and the removal of one of the functions of the PSC.

The Committee NOTED the changes made to the terms of reference.

11 Notable new publications

- [European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning Country report Ireland](#)
- [20 Years of the Irish NFQ - A story of collaboration and co-operation](#)
- [QQI Certification Data and Analysis 2023](#)
- [Self-assessment report for ENQA Targeted Review](#)

12 Any other business

Strategy Statement

The Executive presented on QQI's draft Statement of Strategy 2025 - 2027 for noting. It was observed that the Executive had previously engaged with the Committee at last November's meeting to help develop the SWOT analysis for the new strategy. Work on the Statement of Strategy began in October last, with SWOT analysis sessions taking place with QQI Committees, workshops with the QQI Board and staff, and with key stakeholders. The Statement of Strategy 2022-2024 was the first one after the COVID-19 emergency and involved a more radical shift relative to its predecessor, there are things included the new draft Statement of Strategy 2025-2027 that were not prominent 3 years ago, for example, artificial intelligence.

The Committee NOTED the presentation on QQI's Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2027.

Hannah McGee Valediction

In her valediction as member of the PSC, Hannah McGee thanked the members of the Committee. She commented on how when she joined the Committee, it was a strange time due to COVID-19, and commended QQI on how it responded to that challenge in a practical way and helped the system. Hannah commented on how enlightening it was to be in education, and to experience how education is implemented. She reflected that the landscape is continuously changing and how QQI must continually adapt to respond to this. The members of the Committee and QQI Executive thanked Hannah McGee for her expertise on the Committee and her insight and wished her the best for the future.

Meeting ended.