

# 29<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

14 June 2021 from 10:00 am to 1:00pm

MS Teams Meeting

## Meeting Note

**Present:** Anne Walsh - Committee Chair  
Barbara Kelly - QQI Executive Member  
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member  
Aileen Ponton - International Expert  
Bryan Fields - National Expert  
Niamh O'Reilly - Board Member  
Alan Power – National Expert  
Achim Hopbach, International Expert

**Apologies:** Hannah McGee – National Expert

**In attendance:** Peter Cullen – Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)  
Ann Graves - QQI Secretary  
John O'Connor, QQI (Item 6.0.1)  
Mary Sheridan, QQI (Item 6.0.2)  
Arancha Oviedo, QQI (Item 10.1)  
Andrina Wafer, QQI (Item 10.2)

The Chair opened the meeting.

### **1 Declaration of Interest.**

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

### **2 Minutes of previous meetings.**

The Minutes of the Meetings of the 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 15 March 2021, were **APPROVED** The minutes can be 'pp' signed in the Covid-19 context.

### **3 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.**

No matters arising

### **4 Standards – review and development**

No business

### **5 Strategic Approach**

#### **5.1 Chair's Report from the Board**

The Chair noted that the Board are considering activities for enhancing the effectiveness of their work. QQI will develop a stronger leadership role that will be mapped to the strategy, with clearer learning pathways and aligning policy to the strategy. Advanced training for the Board will contribute to developing efficiencies in the engagement by the members. The Board will challenge themselves to take leadership in enhancing the education landscape in Ireland.

The Chair further noted the work of the Risk Committee, who are doing a thorough job and keeping account of risks to ensure both safety and awareness of risks.

The Chair also noted the importance of the Green paper on Qualifications as a driver for the NFQ and that communications tools are key, particularly social media, in dissemination of information by QQI and encouraged members of the PSC who are active on any of the platforms to share tweets and publicise the work of the organisation.

The Chair noted that Cinnte reviews have continued and outlined the value of sharing of experiences, enhancing academic integrity by networks coming together and contributing to best practices.

The Chair noted that QQI staff continue to work remotely and that QQI has put in place supports to facilitate both access to work through ICT but also health and safety supports through HR.

The Chair further noted that the QQI 22-24 strategy is now with the Department of Education and that the focus of the Minister for Higher Education, Innovation and Science is on learners and diverse pathways. The pillars in the strategy will provide better information for learners as will the goals which also focus on supports for providers.

## **6 Policy and Guidelines – review and development**

### **6.0.1 Draft protocol for the inclusion of the awards of designated awarding bodies (DABs) in the NFQ**

### **6.0.1 Draft protocol for the inclusion of the awards of designated awarding bodies (DABs) in the NFQ**

The executive presented the paper (Draft Joint Sectoral Protocol for the Inclusion of Awards of DABs within the NFQ) and requested that the Policy and Standards Committee approve this document for structured discussion with the sector.

The executive noted the importance of ensuring that transparent procedures are in place to include awards in the NFQ and that awarding bodies and providers have procedures in place to quality assure related processes. The joint sectoral protocol will recognise the important role of the DABs in the development of the NFQ to date and provide a basis for renewed collaboration on the implementation, use and impact of the NFQ.

The executive noted that the protocol relates to designated awarding bodies (Universities and Institutes of Technology) and separate procedures will be developed for the establishment of listed awarding bodies which will include private, sectoral and professional bodies that offer qualifications in Ireland. QQI is developing a relevant policies and procedures to facilitate the establishment of listed awarding bodies and these will be presented at a future meeting of the PSC and in advance of wider consultation.

Following discussion the Committee APPROVED the draft protocol for dissemination for consultation purposes and engagement with the sector and NOTED that if there are only minor changes required following consultation the PSC recommends approval of the finalised protocol by the Board.

### **6.0.2 Briefing on preparation for the commencement of Sections 29A, 29B & 29C (Criteria to be satisfied by specified providers of education and training programmes, including**

**awarding bodies, that engage with QQI in the context of the 2012 (Amendment) Act) & Sections 64 – 67 (Protection of Enrolled Learners) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended)**

The executive presented the Briefing Document. The executive noted that the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) is engaging actively with QQI on preparation for the commencement of the amended legislation. As a consequence of a significant protection of enrolled learners (PEL) event in December 2020 the Minister is anxious to have the national PEL Fund established as soon as possible. The section 29 Regulations to assess the capacity and sustainability of providers are required before the national PEL Fund can be established. DFHERIS is working closely with QQI in preparing these.

A QQI paper on the revised legislation in respect of Learner Protection is currently being finalised by QQI. This will form the basis for the development of the Ministerial Regulations required to establish and govern the Learner Protection Fund. The paper will be made available to DFHERIS. It will inform and guide discussion on the Learner Protection Fund, the transition arrangements required from current PEL arrangements, and highlight some of the complexities and challenges arising. QQI will be responsible for establishing, maintaining, and operating the Fund. The paper therefore also addresses the challenges that the PEL Fund will present for QQI, specifically as it will require the collection of a significant amount of personally identifiable information.

The paper will be available to the PSC for discussion at its next meeting in September '21.

Following discussion, the PSC NOTED the preparations for commencement of the amended legislation and the establishment of the Learner Protection Fund and further NOTED that this will be discussed at the September meeting.

### **6.0.3 Verbal briefing on consultation on the Green Paper on the Qualifications System**

The executive noted that formal consultation on the Green Paper on the Qualifications System has not yet started, however bilateral meetings with those working on relevant areas in the DFHERIS, informal meetings and discussions with a selection of other stakeholders have taken place.

The executive further noted that there will be a formal launch of the Green Paper in the Autumn of 2021 and Terms of Reference (TOR) for a National Forum on Quality and Qualifications to be set up are currently being drafted. A separate group will also be established to consider the future of further education qualifications system – connecting the labour market, skills and qualifications.

Following discussion, the PSC NOTED the update.

## **6.1 Policy Review Schedule**

### **6.1.1 Roadmap for review and development of policies and standards**

The PSC noted the Policy Stocktake and Roadmap circulated. The executive advised that the lists comprise existing and planned policy and standards<sup>1</sup> related documents along with information collected about plans for their review and development. It is still a working draft and there are some gaps in the information, but these will be included in the next update to the Committee.

The executive further noted that major new policies will be presented to the PSC in 2022, with a significant number of policies to be reviewed in 2023.

The executive highlighted some policies within the list that need to be formally rescinded and request the committee to (i) approve their deactivation and (ii) recommend that they be rescinded by the QQI Board.

Following discussion, the PSC APPROVED the deactivation of the relevant listed policies and RECOMMENDED that they be rescinded by the QQI Board

## **6.2 Approval of minor modifications**

### **6.2.1 Minor modifications to QQI's policy on the titling of awards**

The executive presented the paper Minor modification to QQI's policy on the titling of awards which proposed to remove the requirement from QQI's [Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2017.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#) that all higher education award titles include a specialisation.

The executive advised that this will be done on a case by case basis to eliminate redundancy, or align with customary practice by other awarding bodies, or for other stated reasons and must be approved by QQI's Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)."

The PSC APPROVED the proposed minor modification to QQI's Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2017.

## **6.3 Green Papers**

No business

## **6.4 White Papers**

No business

## **6.5 Final Decision on Guidelines**

No business

## **6.6 Policy Advice**

No business

## **7 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions**

No business

## **8 Notable new publications since the last PSC meeting**

[Postgraduate Student Engagement in Decision-Making: Fostering Connected Learning Communities](#)

NOTED

## **9 PSC Reflection**

### **9.1 Policy on Policy Development**

The executive noted that at the March '21 meeting of the PSC, a list of criteria was considered when looking at policy. The process was also discussed and there was discussion about bringing the criteria and process together into a document that will require a formal adoption. QQI will discuss the approach internally and a first draft of the document will be brought to the September meeting of the PSC for discussion.

The Committee NOTED the update.

## **10 Any other business**

### **10.1 QQI Early exploration into Micro-credentials in Higher Education, 2014-2020**

The executive presented the concept paper QQI early exploration into Micro-credentials in Higher Education, 2014-2020. The paper provides an early exploration, starting with QQI certification data, on how best to examine the state of play in the supply and uptake of HE (higher education) micro-credentials in Ireland.

The Committee NOTED the presentation, which they agreed was a very informative overview.

### **10.2 Workshop on Access Transfer and Progression**

The executive made a scene and sense setting presentation towards a review of QQI Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) policies and criteria, outlining some anticipated changes. The executive outlined the legislation and different legislative amendments and the impact this had had on ATP since QQI was established.

Recent amendments have placed providers at the heart of RPL and include an obligation for effective services and transparency for ATP. The executive noted that there are complexities and issues to consider and invited feedback from the members of the PSC.

The PSC members were invited to respond to the following questions (but were not limited by them):

- Is the background information helpful in clarifying QQI's remit? Have you additional questions?
- What questions/insights/issues did/does this information raise for you?
- What kind of change do you think is necessary for ATP?
- How can QQI best contribute to that change?

During the discussions, the following points arose

- noting the reduction in re-engagement and certification activity in respect of community education organisations, it is important that QQI provides support by encouraging the broadening of communities of practice and building links;
- QQI should encourage supports for movement of people from FE to HE and women in particular, encouraging PT provision where childcare can be an issue;
- are there drivers to ensure that providers are actively promoting ATP?
- can be hard to get reliable data on transfer, this is the case in some European countries;
- changing role of agencies in Europe: providers more and more asking for a system level role for agencies, providing opportunities for joint learning and sharing good practice—this would be on top of work with individual providers. QQI providers may appreciate an agency role in facilitating the sharing of good practice.;
- recognition of prior learning needs a measure such as credits – what relevance has credit versus learning outcomes in relation to transfer? Transfer might be a trending topic. Some may see programmes as becoming less important than the assessment of outcomes. ECTS on the other hand is from the old world and it is questionable whether it should have the same role in the future.
- how can ATP be managed in the context of professional bodies—will they buy into it? Recognition of RPL by professional bodies has sometimes been difficult.
- expertise in access is required for providers – this may result in an increased burden of work for staff, if there are applicant fees will this cause a barrier?

- many historical discussions and agreements with slippage on action plans – in order to progress, a national initiative is required including putting resources in place to do this; but this requires clarity on where responsibilities lie;
- Green Paper launch at year end needs to take on board the questions raised;

The Chair thanked the PSC for their engagement and input into the discussions. The executive noted the difficulties in formulating policy when there is uncertainty around what facilities and resources will be put in place.

The Chair thanked the members for their participation and wished everyone the best for the summer period.

The Chair advised the meeting that Aoife Sweeney – National Expert had tendered her resignation from the committee, due to a change of role within her organisation. The members wished Aoife success in her future endeavours and the Chair thanked Aoife for her contributions to the work of the PSC.

**Next meeting – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021.**

**Meeting ended**