WHITE PAPER

Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines

FOR CONSULTATION

STATUTORY QA GUIDELINES DEVELOPED BY QQI FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

This White Paper contains proposed policy for sector specific quality assurance (QA) guidelines.

Following publication and consideration of the outcomes of consultation, this paper will lead to a draft policy which will be proposed for adoption by the Board of QQI. Once adopted, QQI policy and procedures are developed and implemented accordingly.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in this White Paper.

Submissions may be emailed to

consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 10 February, 2017.**

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.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

These statutory, sector-specific, quality assurance (QA) guidelines for education and training boards supplement the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines which are applicable to **all** providers. While the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines provide the majority of the quality assurance guidance required, these sector-specific guidelines add to the core by addressing the specific responsibilities of the education and training boards (ETBs) as set in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (the 2012 Act). Education and training boards should also refer to QQI's other topic-specific quality assurance guidelines, as appropriate.

The education and training boards are those statutory authorities referred to in the Education and Training Boards Act 2013.

1.1   WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES?

These guidelines set out additional, statutory quality assurance guidelines specific to education and training boards. These additional QA guidelines address the responsibilities of education and training boards as significant public body providers in the education and training sector with responsibilities for further education and training.

1.2   TO WHOM DO THEY APPLY?

These guidelines are applicable to education and training boards (ETBs) and to any education or training institution established and maintained by an ETB. ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education and training centres delivering education and training programmes[1].

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1   The general functions of an Education and Training Board are stated under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013.

2. SCOPE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

National policy is that the provider-owned, quality assurance procedures of education and training boards will be comprehensive. This means that they will cover **all** education and training, research and related activities of the ETBs, regardless of whether or not these lead to QQI awards, other awards recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or awards of other awarding regulatory or statutory bodies, except those education activities that fall under the Education Act (1988).

The scope of the quality assurance procedures for any individual ETB will depend upon the structure of the ETB in terms of the diversity of the education and training activities and the scope of provision. Scope of quality assurance procedures is also related to the complexity of the provision, how active ETBs are in and across their local communities, engagements with other ETBs and stakeholders. This includes engagements with other parties for the purposes of provision and related services and the range of awarding, regulatory, professional or statutory bodies that ETBs may be working with or accountable to.

These sector specific guidelines have been set out in the broad context of the possibility for ETBs to seek delegation of authority to make their own awards from QQI under the 2012 Act. They refer to a sectoral approach towards the development of quality assurance guidelines recognising the high level of co-operation, collaboration and cross referencing, on many developments, including quality assurance, that exists within the ETB sector.

3. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The QA procedures for the governance and management of an ETB will operate at many levels of the organisation and throughout the different layers of the organisation. Given the distributed, diverse and evolving nature of the ETBs, it is important that a multi-layered system is in place so that quality and its assurance is being monitored in a consistent and appropriate way within and across the various constituent divisions or institutions of an ETB. These refer to the many schools, colleges, training centres and community-based, adult education services, and contracted providers that are engaged in the delivery and assessment of education and training programmes. The quality assurance procedures established by ETBs should strike a balance between the corporate responsibility of an ETB and one which respects the significant roles and accountabilities of the various centres, divisions and institutions on the frontline of education and training provision.

The QA procedures for governance and management will:

» Take account of the overall corporate responsibility of the ETB, driven and supported by the senior management of the ETB in all aspects of the strategy, governance and management of quality assurance throughout the corporate entity. The corporate commitment to quality and the development of a quality culture is essential in this regard.

» Clearly establish how the oversight of the quality assurance system is maintained with regard to specific responsibilities for quality assurance at a senior planning level, and across the educational and training institutions established and maintained by the ETB.

» Clearly establish how the oversight of the quality assurance system is maintained and operated in tandem with the local decision-making of the various education and training institutions established and maintained by an ETB.

» Clearly establish how the roles and responsibilities for quality assurance and decision-making relate to educational and training activities and the quality roles and responsibilities within these activities.

» Describe what role(s) and responsibilities exist for coordinating quality assurance activities and governance of teaching and learning both locally in the various educational or training institutions established and maintained by an ETB; and at the senior corporate level within an ETB. These should include collaborative quality assurance activities and cooperative developments with ETBI, with other ETBs and with other education and training bodies and stakeholders.

4. PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

An ETB is responsible for the design, development, approval and monitoring, and review of all programmes, including programmes leading to QQI awards.

In addition to (or by encompassing) regular, periodic review of programmes, ETBs should undertake quality reviews of staff performance, training, academic, administrative and service areas or units as appropriate in all constituent centres and colleges. It may also be useful to undertake thematic reviews of institution-wide issues as part of the regular cycle of internal evaluation.

Periodic quality review should be understood in the context of a range of other mechanisms in education and training institutions, with which they must interact and which they must support if they are to be fully effective. Integrated, corporate approaches to quality improvement should be designed to eliminate unnecessary duplication, reduce burden, to promote synergies and support the management system.

In addition to the explicit quality measures envisaged by QQI's core QA guidelines and these sector-specific guidelines it is important to recognise that well-established mechanisms such as the external authentication system; institutional self-evaluation and analysis and strategic planning functions can and should contribute significantly to quality.

The quality assurance procedures in place will have regard to:

» Support for the programme design, development and approval and monitoring process.

~ Where programmes are being developed to lead to QQI awards the development process should be informed by the QQI validation criteria, as set out in the *QQI Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training, April 2016*[2]. Addressing these at an early stage in the process will increase the likelihood of a smooth passage through the validation process.

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2   *Core policies and criteria for the validation of education and training programmes* and *Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes leading to Common Awards System (CAS)*

~ Where programmes are being developed to lead to awards of other awarding bodies[3], the development process should be informed by the relevant validation criteria. Arrangements with these other awarding bodies must be formally documented and QQI must be notified before each such arrangement is entered into.

» Preparation of applications for validation of programmes leading to QQI awards. This includes for example:

~ Recognising that validation involves an evaluation and this is separated from the programme development process.

~ Allowing sufficient time for validation.

~ Differentiating between different types of processes e.g.:

» *Programmes with a sharable curriculum*

» *Programmes based on a shared curriculum*

» *Programmes leading to CAS awards*

» *Programmes leading to non-CAS awards*

~ Identifying the criteria that ETB centres (staff and non-staff resources) must meet to provide a programme validated by QQI for provision by the ETB centres

» Determining the capacity of each ETB centre to provide a given programme of education and training. Such procedures will include:

~ Assessment of the capacity of the centre to provide a validated programme; and

~ Reporting by the centre to the ETB on any change in its capacity to provide QQI validated programmes. Notification to QQI Where a centre is no longer meeting the conditions or resources required for validation.

» Planning for all provision within a centre. Capacity to provide a new programme may be limited by the other programmes a centre already provides. The set of programmes provided by each centre will at all times be within its overall capacity. Suitable procedures are in place for planning for provision.

» Supporting and enabling the formal collaborative design and development of shared curricula across the ETB sector for programmes leading to QQI awards and the approval processes as set out in the *Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training, April 2016*.

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3   (see section 48 of the 2012 Act)

» ETB corporate planning and oversight. This includes monitoring and reporting on the totality of programme provision in the context of the programme lifecycle[4] across all centres operated by the ETB, having regard to educational, employment, social and cultural needs. These should include for example:

~ Planning, development and maintenance of resources required to ensure capacity to support programme provision and quality at the point of delivery (in the ETB centre/institutions);

~ Staff planning, performance monitoring and capacity development having regard to the need for vocational trainers to keep up-to-date in their vocational skills (in addition to any pedagogical skills);

~ Development and planning of systems to promote quality teaching and learning in all relevant learning environments (e.g. workplace, flexible distributed (e-learning), classroom, and practical training environments) and monitor this at centre level and ETB level;

~ Development and planning of systems to oversee the implementation of procedures for the assessment of learners to ensure fairness, consistency and fitness-for-purpose and monitor this at centre level and ETB level

~ Matters relating to employment that may require, for example, systematic engagement with employers, social groups, cultural groups and educational institutions who provide prospective destinations for completed learners (ETB graduates)

» Additional QA procedures that will need to be established in the event that an ETB wishes to change the scope of its approved quality assurance. Such procedures should refer to the monitoring and recording mechanisms in place for the existing scope, and procedures for extending such scope at the level of the individual centre/institution and at the ETB corporate level. Examples of where substantial changes may require additional QA procedures include:

~ Where proposed programme provision is moving to a different level on the NFQ.

~ Where an ETB intends to become involved in the design and development of a programme leading to programme validation outside the Common Awards System (CAS).

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4   As referenced in the QQI *Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training, April 2016.*

5. LEARNER RECORDS AND CERTIFICATION

Procedures established by the ETB will ensure the reliability and integrity of learner records and results of learner assessment. These records should be secured indefinitely by the ETB. The systems used to store these records, whether developed by an individual ETB or shared with others, should be subject to periodic testing. Quality assurance procedures in place support the management of learner records and the integrity and efficiency of other processes which provides the basis for making and certifying QQI awards and those of other awarding bodies with whom it has arrangements.

6. OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

6.1 ETBS COLLABORATING ON A NATIONAL BASIS

The ETB legislation refers to, and facilitates, formal, collaborative and/or shared development as set out in sections 21 to 23. The Quality assurance procedures for an ETB establishes formal procedures for:

» The collaborative development of such shared or cooperative arrangements as they impact on many matters which are core to any provider owned quality assurance system for example:

~ Management Information Systems

~ Proposals for new awards standards

~ Leadership performance and professional development

~ Consistency of achieved standards for the same QQI awards across ETBs through, for example, assessment strategies and instruments/external authentication/appeals

~ Peer Review and Benchmarking

~ Shared curriculum development and review

~ Centres and ETBs will still have to self-evaluate / self-monitor at national level

» Procedures to inform the *operating arrangements* and outcomes of any such collaborative or cooperative arrangements and how they will be managed within and across the ETBs in the context of supporting quality assurance systems.

6.2 ETBS COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROVIDERS, PARTNERS AND OTHER AWARDING BODIES

ETBs are required to have regard to core statutory quality assurance guidelines and to these sectoral, quality assurance guidelines when:

» Establishing, renewing and reviewing their own quality assurance procedures; and

» Evaluating the quality assurance procedures of other providers or partners with whom they are engaged in the delivery of programmes leading to their own or joint awards.

This section refers to the quality assurance of collaborations with other providers. Procedures established by ETBs will ensure that collaborative arrangements with other providers and partners are approved and the effectiveness of those arrangements will be monitored and reviewed. Additional guidance on the areas to be considered in such procedures can be found in the QQI *Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Provision and Joint Awards 2012*. These guidelines indicate the broad due diligence and risk assessment to be carried out in respect of providers seeking access to awards in the NFQ. They focus on the capacity of a provider to adequately deliver programmes leading to awards in the NFQ (in this case, in collaboration with an ETB); compliance with legal requirements, provider resources and provider governance.

In summary, providers seeking to offer programmes with an ETB through a collaborative arrangement or seeking to continue to offer programmes under an existing collaborative arrangement are compliant with the following:

Legal, reputation and compliance requirements

» An established legal entity, with education and training as a principal function.

  ~ The legal entity must be a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law.

  ~ The legal entity must be established in the European Union and have a substantial presence in Ireland.

» Have clearly specifed dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries.

» Declare any third-party relationships and partnerships.

» Comply with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates.

» Be in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any jurisdictions in which it operates (or in which its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrols learners, or in which it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.

Resource, governance and structural requirements

» Be stable and in good financial standing.

» Have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision.

» Have fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures.

» Have arrangements for providing required information to the ETB.

» Have capacity to deliver education and training as demonstrated through experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes

» Have sufficient resources, as well as corporate, structural and internal quality assurance systems in place, to sustainably provide education and training programmes.

Programme development and provision requirements

» Demonstrate its ability to design, develop, provide and review programmes as appropriate and comply with the standard conditions for programme approval.

» Have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff.

» Have fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources.

» Have structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent fit-for-purpose assessment of learner achievement.

» Have arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners.