

32nd Meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee

21 March 2022 from 10:00 am to 1:00pm

MS Teams Meeting

Meeting Note

Present: Anne Walsh - Committee Chair
Bryan Maguire - QQI Executive Member
Aileen Ponton - International Expert
Alan Power – National Expert
Hannah McGee – National Expert
Niamh O’Reilly - Board Member
Achim Hopbach, International Expert
Damien Owens - National Expert (part)

In attendance: Peter Cullen – Head of Research and Innovation (QQI Key Executive for the PSC)
John O Connor, QQI (Items 5.1,5.3)
Liliana O Reilly, QQI (Items 5.1,5.3.)
Laura Flynn, QQI (Item 11.1)
Walter Balfe, QQI (Items 8.2.1, 8.2.2)
Alga Mulhall, QQI, Minutes.

Apologies: Jim Murray - QQI Executive Member
Peter Rigney – National Expert

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Damien Owens as a new member of the Committee.

1 Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest expressed by any member.

2 Minutes of previous meetings.

The minutes of the 31st Meeting, 15 November 2021, noted.

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes which can be ‘pp’ signed in the Covid-19 context.

3 Matters arising from the minutes of previous meetings.

There were no matters arising.

4 Introduction – Damien Owens

The Chair welcomed Damien Owens as a new member of the Committee and invited him to introduce himself to the members of the PSC.

Damien Owens is a graduate of TCD, a Chartered Engineer and Fellow of Engineers Ireland. He holds the post of Registrar of Engineers Ireland and Chief Risk Officer. His role includes the setting and maintaining of academic and professional standards for the engineering profession.

The members of the PSC welcomed Damien and looked forward to working with him in the future.

5 Standards – review and development

5.1 Decision on any extension required for CAS modification required by the COVID-19 emergency which are currently due to expire in 2022.

The PSC noted the document circulated.

The Executive is seeking approval to further extend the period within which providers can use the temporary modifications of rules for awarding in Common Awards System until the end of June 2023. Such modifications are to cater for situations where a learner is unable, for valid reasons arising from the Coronavirus pandemic, to meet the certificate requirements for the major award (e.g., to complete a 15 credit work experience module) but can meet the overall outcomes by alternative means.

The Executive confirmed that this measure is only used where no practical work experience can be accommodated. There were questions about the process for approving alternative arrangements and how the process ensures that work experience is the default and avoids sliding into the alternatives being the default. The executive noted that the PSC approved an 'alert system; and that there is a need to enforce that.

The Executive welcomed the committees' comments and will explore how best to gather both provider and learner feedback.

The PSC APPROVED the extension of CAS modification required by the COVID-19 emergency up to June 2023.

5.2 Item removed from agenda.

5.3 Update to the CAS to include Special Purpose programmes credit towards a CAS major award in FET

Since the implementation of the 2017 Validation policy and criteria, FET providers have been able to submit programmes for validation leading to awards which are not part of the Common Awards System (CAS).

A number of programmes have been validated to lead to new special purpose awards which can be offered as standalone qualifications. With an enabling policy change they have the potential to contribute to the credit and learning outcomes requirements of some CAS major awards.

There have been requests to QQI, primarily from ETB providers, to enable learners holding these new special purpose awards to be able to use the credit towards a related CAS major award.

The Executive requested approval the necessary amendments outlined on a pilot basis. Minor amendments to the current QQI Standards Determination and Validation Policies would be required to support this activity. The relevant certificate requirements would also need to be amended.

The Committee asked about the length envisaged for the proposed pilot. The executive indicated that 12 months would probably be required. The Committee also asked about the intention of the pilot and whether it is to ascertain demand or test the logistics for implementation.

Discussion took place on the broader policy question that these non-CAS awards raise – what is the desired interaction between these non-CAS and CAS FET awards? The executive indicated that there is a programme of work to update standards and standards policy. QQI is seeking to provide seamless recognition between CAS and non-CAS awards. The non-CAS awards are proving popular with providers, they provide opportunities to develop innovative, flexible programmes. The increased demand is predicted to lead to subsequent learner demand to use these non-CAS credits towards major CAS awards.

The Committee noted the sensible approach the executive has taken. This approach clearly benefits learners and contributes to them progressing and achieving a NFQ Major Award

The PSC APPROVED the minor policy changes to enable the use of non-CAS QQI award credit towards a CAS major award as proposed on a pilot basis for 12 Months.

6 Strategic Approach

6.1 Chair's Report from the Board

The Chair presented a report from the meeting of the Board for noting.

The Chair noted a presentation by the HEA new CEO on the Higher Education and Authority Bill. The aim is to protect the investment in the higher education sector. Of note are the lifelong learning agenda; protecting the interests of learners, collecting statistics. Some level of resistance to the Bill is expected. It will require some level of strategic planning by HE. The Bill codifies practices that are employed across the HE sector. Its overall aim is to provide a high quality, student focused system with appropriate oversight and accountability and to enhance the confidence of stakeholders, students and the public.

The Chair noted that QQI continues to be involved in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science working arrangements in response to Covid19.

The Chair outlined the QQI statistics for 2021 in relation to certification, validation and reengagement.

In relation to “The action plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025”. The Chair outlined research being undertaken into how they operate, equity to access, and how apprentices and employers are supported during “on the job” phase.

From the QQI corporate plan the Chair noted the planned introduction of provisions for listing awarding bodies that can make awards that are included in the NFQ.

In relation to audit and risk five risks were identified in external review;

- Inability to deliver on Corporate Plan and Strategic Statement because of lack of resources/skills
 - Mitigated by Workforce Plan – recruit, training, regular monitoring
- Insufficient funds to carry out statutory functions
 - Mitigated by early submission to DFHERIS of detailed annual budget
- Fluctuating funds across the year
 - Mitigated by robust financial management
- Risk that enrolled learners cannot complete their programmes

- Mitigated by timely implementation of PEL arrangements
- Risk that PEL arrangements may be discontinued at short notice
 - Mitigated by robust PEL insurance

Finally, there was a reminder that QQI will host a two-day 10 Year anniversary event October 18, 19 2022.

6.2 Revised Terms of Reference of the PSC

The Committee **NOTED** revised terms of reference.

7 PSC Reflection

7.1 Policy Development Framework

The Executive gave an overview of the paper “Towards the Enhancement and Codification of QQI’s Policy Governance, Coordination, Development, and Review Framework” presented for **DISCUSSION**.

The paper sets out to “outline a framework for coordinated policy development and review, detailing the roles of key committees and groups and identifying some opportunities for enhancement.” The paper outlines the purpose of policy coordination and why is it important. It then proceeds to explore how policy is developed and reviewed within QQI. It sets out enhancement opportunities. Following this discussion, it is planned to bring an updated draft of this document to the QQI Management Group for wider discussion among the executive before finalising it for adoption.

In the discussion the following points emerged:

Assessing the success or impact of policy.

Consider whether new policy is not just fit-for-purpose but whether it is necessary.

There was discussion on where responsibilities for polices currently sit and where they should be.

The coordination of enhancement.

A possible additional consideration of the paper may be the legislative versus legal bases for policies.

Discussion arose on the identification of the feedback loop, capturing input all the way up to and including post approval processes.

The Committee thanked the Executive and welcomed the paper and its insights.

8 Policy and Guidelines – review and development

8.1 Policy Development and Review Plans

8.1.1 Amended Legislation Programme: Consultation Plans/Schedules

The Executive presented a paper on the development of the International Education Mark for **NOTING**. This paper had been presented to the QQI Board with an update on the development and introduction of an International Education Mark for English language education (IEM ELE) and an International Education Mark for higher education (IEM HE).

The following points are noted

- The Minister wants significant movement on this in 2022.
- IEM is seen as key from an D/Enterprise perspective.

- Provider engagement is key but there have been some false starts since the IEM was first proposed
- HE see limited benefit from it now.
- ELE (English Language Education) is complicated. There are different groups with different views on how regulation might play out.
- QQI will be consulting with relevant agencies and government departments.
- D/Justice wants to base their process on the IEM.
- There will be two Codes of Practice one for the HE IEM and the other for the ELE IEM but some topics will need to be addressed by both e.g. the use of agents.
- PEL (Protection of Enrolled Learners) arrangements are complex. The relevant regulations will need to be approved by the Minister.

The Committee welcomed the update. There was discussion around the challenges of this work, the links of the outcome to the Department of Justice and the ongoing work in securing DEPR approval to establish the PEL fund .

8.2 Approval of minor modifications

8.2.1 Assessment and Standards amended to enable repeat for honours

The Executive presented a paper entitled “Modification to Sectoral Convention 3 on Repeating for Honours in QQI’s ‘Assessment and Standards’” to propose a minor modification to Assessment and Standards 2013 to enable learners to repeat for honours QQI higher education awards. The modification removes the embargo on repeat for honours and adds the following:

“When a module whose grade is designed to contribute to the determination of an award classification is failed on the first attempt, the maximum achievable grade shall be capped at Pass for any and all subsequent attempts and the capped grade shall be used in the determination of the award classification which is not capped at Pass.”

The Executive’s proposal requires the following two elements for consideration:

- Firstly, does the Committee deem this change minor.
- Secondly, does the committee approve the proposed change to Sectoral Convention 3.

The Committee welcomed the proposal and noted that the feedback in favour of the proposal. Discussion arose on the sector’s progression from central control to a more quality assurance approach. The independent HE Sector growth and maturity was noted, and it was noted that it is an appropriate time to take on this responsibility. This proposal will bring about sector regularisation and ensure consistency of assessment practices to learners in the HE sector.

PSC decided this was a MINOR change and APPROVED the proposal subject to the word ‘claim’ being changed to ‘request’.

8.2.2 Further Temporary Extension of Providers’ Scope of Provision and Related Amendments to Validated Programmes to June 2023

The Executive presented the above paper which sought **APPROVAL** from the Committee to further extend until end of June 2023 the period within which providers’ approved scope of provision includes the modifications to programme delivery and assessment necessitated by the social distancing measures mandated by Government to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The PSC APPROVED the extension of Providers' Scope of Provision and Related Amendments to Validated Programmes to June 2023

- 8.3 Green Papers - No Business**
- 8.4 White Papers - No Business**
- 8.5 Final Decision on Guidelines - No Business**
- 8.6 Policy Advice - No Business**
- 9 Procedures relevant to the PSC's functions - No Business**
- 10 Notable new publications since the last PSC Meeting – No Business**
- 11 Any Other Business**
- 11.1 QQI Student engagement review**

The Executive made a PowerPoint presentation setting out an overview of the Learner Engagement Review project. The key aim of the project is to establish QQI as a leader in effective learner engagement. The project plans to document the current level of engagement and apply best practice to increase engagement in areas where there currently is under-engagement. This work will support QQI in publishing insights and being supportive in establishing a learner engagement framework. A working group with representatives from, NStEP, QAA, USI, learners representing HE, FE, ELE and apprenticeships is being established.

The Committee welcomed the presentation and commended the wide variety of learner representation. Discussion on how best to support the engagement of both current and alumni was reflected upon. It was suggested that recent graduates also be included rather than only engaging with students who are still inside the system.

Next meeting – 13 June 2022

Meeting ended