

# Annual Report

## 2023



Dearbhú Cáilíochta  
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann  
Quality and  
Qualifications Ireland



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# Introduction from the Chairperson and the Chief Executive



**Irene Sheridan**  
Chairperson, QQI



**Dr Padraig Walsh**  
Chief Executive, QQI

In QQI, we are committed to working closely with our diverse set of partners and providers to ensure high-quality, internationally recognised further and higher education opportunities. This annual report provides a summary of our work in 2023, the mid-point in QQI's fourth statement of strategy.

In April, Minister Simon Harris appointed a new Chairperson and six new ordinary members to serve on the third QQI Board.

Over the course of the year, extensive work continued on the International Education Mark

(IEM) with the publication of a series of supporting documents and guidelines and in March, QQI, in association with the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) hosted its first Artificial Intelligence Week with contributions from international experts.

With the continuing international attention and concern over academic integrity, the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), supported by QQI, held a week-long programme of online events in October with national and international speakers under the theme "Academic Integrity: A Learner's Perspective."

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which QQI is responsible for developing, maintaining and reviewing, was established in

December 2003. To mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the world's longest established national qualifications frameworks, we held a conference in the Radisson Blu Royal Hotel, Dublin in November. As the agency with statutory responsibility for monitoring national access, transfer and progression (ATP) policy, QQI also commissioned a review of ATP policy that informs how learners and education providers have engaged with the NFQ since its establishment. The report was published to coincide with the 20-year anniversary of the NFQ.

Following the experience of providers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was recognised that new modalities of education and training delivery would need to be accommodated. Informed by extensive consultation, QQI issued new Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Programmes Supported by Digital Education in March, which all providers will have to consider when developing blended or purely online programmes of education and training.

One of QQI's strategic priorities is to support capacity for flexible and innovative programme development and robust quality assurance in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). In March, we published a sectoral report pulling together the key themes and recommendations arising from the inaugural reviews of quality assurance in the 16 ETBs 2021-2022.

In line with another of QQI's strategic priorities of providing better information and opportunities for learners, a new, upgraded and responsive-technology version of the Qualifax website, Qualifax.ie, was launched in September, with the new strapline of Qualifax – every course explained. This learner-facing database is available to all as a free, impartial and comprehensive information resource for students, jobseekers, guidance counsellors, as well as parents and anyone who is helping an individual with course search.

As the current CINNTE cycle of reviews of Irish public higher education institutions comes to a close next year, and with the expected call at their meeting in May 2024 of the ministers of the members states of the European Higher Education Area for a revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), QQI commissioned a review to inform thinking on the future of the Irish and European quality assurance system for higher education. The report, Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Where do we go from here? was published in December.

The welcome, post-pandemic recovery in learner certification continued during 2023 with QQI making almost 195,000 awards (up 12% from 2022) to over 126,000 individual learners (up 14% from 2022) in further and higher education.



# About QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. It is a state agency whose non-executive members of the board are appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

We are responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. We validate programmes, make awards and are responsible for the promotion, maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). We also inform the public about the quality of education and training programmes and qualifications and advise the minister on national policy regarding quality assurance and enhancement in education and training.

Our stakeholders come from all sectors of education and training: learners; providers; employers; government departments; state agencies and funding bodies; regulatory bodies; professional bodies; qualifications awarding bodies; the community and voluntary sector; representative bodies; and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

# VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

## OUR VISION

We are committed to a vision of Ireland that offers diverse high-quality further and higher education opportunities, enabling learners to reach their full potential through achieving qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally.

## OUR MISSION

We sustain public confidence in the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's further and higher education providers and provide authoritative information on the diverse range of qualifications included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

## OUR VALUES

Our approach to our own work and how we work with our partners is governed by clear values.

We believe we have a **shared responsibility** with others to ensure confidence in and continuous improvement of the quality of education and training. We believe that the attainment of our priorities and objectives is best pursued in a **consultative, collaborative and inclusive** manner with our diverse set of partners and providers. We value and respect partnership for mutual benefit.

We are committed to working with **objectivity, transparency and sustainability**. This underpins our decision-making and our policies, procedures and activities. These are evidence-based, informed by national and international good practice, authoritative and conducted with integrity in a manner which is openly transparent and engenders trust.

We are committed to making a difference to our partners, providers and our people. We value **information, insight and impact** – the successful pursuit of goals and objectives which culminate in impacting positively, confidently and substantively on our operating environment.

We are a learning organisation. We are committed to **innovation and excellence**.





# QQI IN NUMBERS

## Validation Applications Received in 2023

### **2 new providers**

approved through Initial Access to Validation

### **48 applications**

for validation of new higher education and training (HET) programmes – 33 successful, 4 refused, 11 pending decision

### **73 applications**

for validation of new further education and training (FET) programmes – 28 successful, 1 refused, 45 in process

### **262 applications**

for differential validation of shared FET programmes, 257 successful, 4 in process

### **29 applications**

for revalidation of HET programmes were received, all of which were revalidated

### **12 successful applications**

for revalidation of FET programmes

### **29 successful applications**

for revalidation of HET programmes

### **18.2 weeks**

average programme validation process

### **126,323 learners**

received QQI Awards, up 14%

### **5,893 CAO offers**

made to QQI Award holders



## Social Media

**20 years**

of the National Framework  
of Qualifications

**20 co-  
created**

broad standards for NFQ  
Levels 1-4



**5,345  
followers,**

up 10.4%;  
engagement rate  
up 53.2%

**29 members**

of the Global Academic  
Integrity Network

**15 quality**

dialogue meetings  
with ETBs



**10,905  
followers,**

up 38.4% increase;  
engagement rate  
up 35.5%

**88%  
stakeholder**

satisfaction with the work  
of QQI

**1st Equality,  
Diversity**

and Inclusion policy  
published



**368  
followers,**

up 51.4%; brand  
awareness up 122.1%



**583  
subscribers,**

up 45%; 31,123  
views, up 29%

# Our work in 2023

## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### Priority 1 #information - better information and opportunities for learners

We will provide high quality information to school-leavers and all those seeking learning opportunities on progression pathways across and between different institutions in further and higher education by upgrading QQI's qualifications information platforms and services

#### Certification activity figures

In 2023, 126,323 learners received QQI awards, which is a 14% increase on the 2022 figures. QQI made 194,721 awards in 2023, representing a 12% increase on the 2022 figures.

#### Verification of Qualifications

This service continued to be in high demand in 2023. The reasons for such requests are varied and include proof of qualifications for employers, education evaluation services, college applications and residency requirements in other countries. In 2023, QQI dealt with over 2,500 requests from holders of awards made by QQI and its legacy awarding bodies. The volume of requests increased by over 29% on the 2022 figures.

#### Certificate Replacement Service

In 2023, 394 applications for replacement certificates were processed. This is a 58% increase on the 2022 figures. This service was introduced in 2019 and the volume of requests has continued to increase year on year.

#### Access to higher education using QQI awards

The Higher Education Links Scheme is a well-established route for holders of QQI awards to access a college course. QQI supports this scheme by providing scored results data to the Central Application Office (CAO) to enable participating higher education institutions to make offers to QQI award holders. In 2023, there were 5,893 offers made based on the QQI Further Education (FE) score. This is an increase of 6% on 2022. There were 3,001 acceptances based on QQI FE scores. This represents an increase of 15% on 2022 figures.

#### Launch and promote the new Qualifax website

During 2023, QQI updated over 15,000 courses across further and higher education and training in Ireland.

In 2023, there were 793,000 visits to the Qualifax site. Patterns of visits showed strong correlation with the school examinations results timelines and CAO deadlines during the year. The Qualifax website was redeveloped during 2023 with the new website launched in September 2023.

#### Scope & commence next phase of IRQ development including publication of IEM information, micro-credentials and links to the European databases

The Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) has been operational since 2020 at [www.irq.ie](http://www.irq.ie) and now lists over 13,000 programmes and over 11,000 qualifications included within the National

Framework of Qualifications for 250 providers. All Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) made uploads to the IRQ, ensuring that information about programmes and awards continues to be up to date and accurate.

In July 2023, QQI in association with the National Europass Centre, published the IRQ data for higher education programmes to the new Europass Qualification Dataset Register (QDR) at <https://europass.europa.eu/en>, making this information on higher education (HE) options visible at EU level. The cooperation of the designated awarding bodies continues to be critical to the comprehensive population of both these databases.

### **Mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NFAQ by hosting a sector-wide event and publishing an insight on the NFAQ**

The Irish NFAQ celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023 and to celebrate this significant milestone, QQI hosted a half day of pre-conference workshops on Thursday, 16 November and a full day conference on Friday, 17 November. The pre-conference workshops which covered topics related to communicating and promoting the NFAQ; opening access to the NFAQ to Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs); and a discussion with senior leaders across tertiary education about the future of the NFAQ. The full day conference covered topics including micro-credentials, Access Transfer & Progression (ATP), & Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Academic Integrity, Global Qualifications Frameworks and the role of the NFAQ in employment and professions. The pre-conference workshops were attended by approximately 75 participants, with in excess of 200 people attending the full day conference.

In recognition of this significant milestone, QQI is compiling a high-level report to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NFAQ, which will be published in Quarter 1, 2024. In 2023, case studies and submissions were invited from across the tertiary sector to inform the report. Additionally, interviews and research were conducted by a consultancy throughout 2023 to further inform the report and to gather perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders.

Finally, QQI has developed an interactive NFAQ web page. The site is more accessible for all types of users, on desktop and on mobile phone. The page links, by NFAQ level, to an online grid of level indicators. The site was launched as part of our celebrations marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NFAQ and received positive feedback from stakeholders and participants at the NFAQ conference.

We will play our part in ensuring that learners can achieve their potential within the further and higher education system by evaluating provider adherence to a national approach to access, transfer and progression and the appropriate recognition of prior learning

### **Building on our engagements with FET and HE stakeholders, and international engagements, scope and publish a document setting out a national approach to RPL in tertiary education**

The development of both policy and practice in the Recognition of Prior Learning continued to strengthen in 2023.

The commitment in the Programme for Government 'Our Shared Future' within further education and the Community sector to 'develop and implement a standardised system of accreditation of prior learning, taking account of previous education, skills, work experience and engagement in society' was consolidated in the context of tertiary education in the commitment undertaken by the Department of Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science (DFERHIS) in the fourth 'National Access Plan, A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028' that 'QQI scopes and publishes national approach to RPL in tertiary education'. Engagement and drafting continued in support of this work, including in respect of recognition and validation.

QQI reports on behalf of Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (DFHERIS) on progress nationally in the implementation of the 2012 recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning to the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQFAG) of the European Commission. In 2021, the commission established a Validation (RPL) Technical Expert Working Group to support the work of the EQFAG, including QQI. The work of the group concluded its contribution to the development of the European Guidelines for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. QQI continued to disseminate outputs and updates arising with relevant national networks, through focus groups to elicit national feedback and responses as appropriate, and through presentations at events hosted externally. CEDEFOP and the Commission continued work on the Country Inventory with support from QQI as members of the EQF AG and stakeholders nationally. Additionally, the European Year of Skills focused on the essential role of validation in supporting transitions for individuals and transforming sectors of industry for enhanced competitiveness.

QQI met with representatives of the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) project 'RPL in Higher Education' and with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and sectoral representatives, including statutory professional and regulatory bodies to support synergistic development and to exchange progress reports. Presentations were delivered to several continuous professional development programmes offered variously across the FET and HE sectors nationally and internationally, including with the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning 'Skillsets in transit' programme examining responses through recognition, validation and accreditation for migrants and refugees.

The RPL Practitioner Network, led by co-convenors Carol Lynch (Maynooth University) and Siobhan Magee (Further Education Support Service, Cavan and Monaghan ETB) led an expanded network steering group reflective of the 2012 recommendation, to agree a new programme of work. The network is supported by QQI through our active participation in the steering group, alongside

other agencies, and in practical support for face-to-face events.

### **Adopt and publish L1-4 broad standards and associated guidelines for implementation, monitoring and review**

The 20 broad award standards at NFQ Levels 1-4 have been co-created with the FET sector and were informed by national and European ambitions to support social inclusion and promote high-quality lifelong learning opportunities.

The key component of this project was a sectoral engagement process with key national stakeholders in the form of the national consultation. The broad award standards suite for QQI further education and training awards at NFQ Levels 1-4 is intended to bring a fresh and flexible approach to programme development for FET providers in Ireland.

### **Publish high level review of national and international trends in ATP, and existing QQI provisions & context with recommendations for future**

As part of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of NFQ and the national ATP policy that informs how learners and education providers engage with the framework, a report was commissioned to review the landscape of practice supporting ATP in Ireland. ATP has been fundamental to enabling learners to engage with the NFQ and benefit from it, providing an essential architecture of specified entry arrangements, transfer, and progression routes; the accumulation of credits; information for learners; and the recognition of prior learning.

The findings of the report, which was published in November 2023, indicate that the principles of equity and social inclusion that underpin ATP, are translated into practice in numerous initiatives by dedicated professionals. The report is informed by plentiful, but fragmented information, including policy documents, project outputs and research reports that contribute to the understanding of ATP and related practice. The report offers an insight into the dedicated and informed work of practitioners, learners, and researchers

across the tertiary landscape, both past and present and presents key findings and spotlights some exemplars of practice across the tertiary education and training sector. There are several recommendations for QQI which will be considered in the course of 2024.

## We will improve learner choice and opportunity by including an increased range of flexible qualifications including micro-credentials in the National Framework of Qualifications

### Consult with stakeholders on draft policies, processes, and procedures regarding the inclusion of Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) on the National Framework of Qualifications

A series of white papers relating to the development and implementation of the LABs scheme were published in July 2023. These white papers included two draft policies and criteria: one for the establishment of LABs and one for the inclusion of awards in the NFQ, as well as new draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for LABs. The consultation closed in September 2023. Overall, the response to the consultation was overwhelmingly positive with all responses welcoming the LABs scheme and commending the robust, rigorous policy documents underpinning it. Most submissions recognised the role of the LABs scheme in widening and expanding the NFQ with clear benefits to learners. Specifically, submissions noted that the scheme will enable learners to have greater access to regulated and recognised awards, to avail of recognition of prior learning and to benefit from ATP arrangements. While submissions were supportive of the LABs scheme generally, there were requests for clarification and consideration. The respondents recognised that although there are benefits to expanding the NFQ to include new awards, the integrity of the framework needs to be protected. The policy, criteria and quality assurance guidelines were updated and presented to the Policy and

Standards Committee (PSC) and to the QQI Board in November and December respectively. The documents were approved and will be published in Quarter 1, 2024.

A dedicated pre-conference workshop was held for LABs on Thursday 16 November as part of the celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NFQ. The workshop was designed to update prospective LABs regarding the consultation, explore the value of inclusion of awards 20 years later and to commence discussions about the responsibilities associated with being a Listed Awarding Body. The workshop was well attended with 12 prospective LABs represented, together with education consultants and international colleagues.

The approach for quality assurance of LABs was presented at the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) Annual Conference in Aveiro, Portugal in November. The opening of the NFQ with the opportunity for professional bodies to include awards as part of the LABs scheme was presented at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Professional Bodies Forum in Johannesburg in November.

## We will play our part in ensuring that all learners are enabled to access accredited qualifications in learning environments suitable to their needs including in the workplace

### Continue to implement EU Council recommendations related to the EQF and micro credentials. Monitoring impact on the NFQ

National Europass Centre (NEC) and European Qualifications Framework (EQF) National Contact Point Joint Action Project 2021-2023.

The Europass and EQF-NCP Ireland 2021-2023 project concluded in December 2023. A final report will be submitted in Quarter 1, 2024. This joint project supports the ongoing promotion and communication of the new upgraded [Europass platform](#) and the [EQF](#) to our key stakeholders

across higher and further education, and to the general public. Key EQF priorities of the project include developing a scheme for Listed Awarding Bodies and inclusion of awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); ongoing promotion of the NFQ; and the integration of the IRQ to the QDR platform and preparing for digital credentials. Representatives from QQI attend regular meetings of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group and Europass Advisory Group, both online and in-person and are involved in a number of sub-groups and working groups.

The National Europass Centre held the Annual Meeting of the EU Reference Group for Agencies of DFHERIS on 1 February 2023, in-person for the first time since before the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the 10th meeting of the group and was hosted by QQI. Representatives joined to share updates on common European activities and to establish synergies and collaborations. 67 delegates from a broad range of further and higher education agencies across Ireland attended. QQI provided updates on the Europass and EQF-NCP Ireland 2021-2023 project and a report was published providing an overview of the full proceedings.

The 'Europe is Open to You' inter-agency group met twice during 2023 to update on EU-funded project/programme activities and to identify areas for collaboration. A new version of the 'Europe is Open to You' guide was published in 2023 by Eurodesk Ireland in association with members of the 'Europe is Open to You' inter-agency group. QQI, as the National host of the Europass Centre, contributed to the development of the new version of the guide with up-to-date information on relevant mobility tools of Europass, NARIC Ireland, the IRQ, the NFQ, and the European Qualifications Framework.

In November 2023, representatives from the Irish National Europass Centre joined colleagues of National Europass Centres in Copenhagen over two days to attend pre-meetings of network subgroups (the Western Cluster and the Innovation Working Group) and to attend the annual Europass network meeting. These meetings provided the chance to hear updates and common topics of interest from other National Europass Centre

members, to discuss opportunities for collaboration, to listen and engage with information around Europass Policy, and to be informed on updates from the European Commission on the state of play at EU level and on new priorities for the next phase.

A proposal for a Europass and EQF-NCP Ireland 2024-2026 project and associated funding was submitted in December 2023

We will exercise a key role in ensuring learners have access to a wide range of new high-quality apprenticeship programmes spanning further and higher education

**Support SOLAS, the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) and other relevant stakeholders on migration of craft programmes**

In 2023, QQI continued to support SOLAS, NAO and other relevant stakeholders in developing and implementing a new single, integrated apprenticeship system.



## Priority 2 #protection – implementing strengthened regulation to protect learners

We will protect learners by promoting and maintaining awareness of academic integrity and the monitoring of those seeking to undermine it

### National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN)

The National Academic Integrity Network is a national peer-driven network of staff members from Irish higher education institutions (nominated by their registrars), student representatives, and higher education representative agencies comprising approximately 120 members.

In 2023, NAIN continued its CPD series, with masterclasses from international experts and webinars. It also published two new resources:

- NAIN Generative AI Guidelines for Educators 2023
- NAIN Framework for Academic Misconduct Investigation and Case Management 2023

Work has commenced on reviewing and revising the [NAIN Lexicon of Common Terms](#)

Throughout 2023, representatives of QQI and NAIN presented at a number of conferences and events on academic integrity in Ireland and the UK.

#### These included:

- The Irish Learning Technologists Association Conference (Dublin, June 2023).
- The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools Conference (Athlone, July 2023).
- European Network for Academic Integrity

Conference (Derby, UK, July 2023)

- ENQA General Assembly (Dublin, November 2023)
- Academic and Research Integrity Conference Ireland (Galway, October 2023)
- UK ENIC 2023 annual conference (London, December 2023)

### The Council of Europe Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education

QQI was represented as one of two national delegates at the Council of Europe Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) platform.

A representative of the Department of Education was also in attendance. Key items discussed included:

- An update on the recently adopted [Recommendation on Countering Education Fraud](#),
- The establishment of an observatory to monitor and counter education fraud,
- How assessment can be redesigned to support academic integrity.

Irish initiatives and collaborations were referenced throughout the meeting: the National Academic Integrity Network and the [Global Academic Integrity Network](#) were both highlighted by ETINED experts during discussions, and [NAIN's Lexicon of Common Terms](#) was referenced as part of an ETINED project to create a glossary of academic integrity terms. QQI's developing academic integrity policy, which will be published as a white paper for consultation in Quarter 1, 2024, was also noted by Professor Michael Draper, Swansea University/Council of Europe ETINED expert, to be an example of good practice in its contextualising of the issues within the framework of the Council of Europe recommendation on countering education fraud.

Further information about the recommendation and QQI's planned academic integrity policy can be found in a short interview with Professor Michael Draper; [Academic Integrity in 2020 and Beyond: Professor Michael Draper](#) on QQI's YouTube channel.

## Artificial Intelligence Week

QQI held its first Artificial Intelligence Week in March 2023. The programme comprised five webinars delivered by experts based in Australia, the UK, Ireland and Canada and gave providers, their students and staff advice on how to safeguard and adapt teaching, learning and assessment in light of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) developments. Further information can be found on the QQI website: [Artificial Intelligence Week](#).

## Publish a regulatory policy for Academic Integrity

QQI's work on developing an academic integrity policy commenced in 2023. The policy will detail how QQI intends to work with the other awarding bodies in the State to develop a coherent and consistent approach to academic integrity and sets out considerations for providers, as well as QQI's plans in relation to its own policies, procedures and processes. This will include:

- Expectations of providers regarding the development and review of policies, procedures and processes to maintain academic integrity and support the validity of assessment.
- The establishment of quantitative reporting on academic misconduct at a national level to support existing qualitative reporting by public and private HEIs.
- The incorporation of academic integrity considerations within QQI's policies, procedures and guidelines.

Internal meetings and early consultations with key stakeholder groups took place during 2023 – the latter included the NAIN steering committee, senior leaders from the Designated Awarding Bodies, and their representative bodies. The draft policy was approved for consultation by QQI's PSC in November 2023.

## Develop an engagement programme for Academic Integrity for QQI award providers

### Academic Integrity Dissemination

QQI's Academic Integrity Update continued to be disseminated in 2023, with four updates issued. Each update included examples of good practice by Irish education providers to support and enhance academic integrity and shared academic integrity news and resources from Ireland and further afield.

QQI and NAIN facilitated a learner workshop to discuss academic integrity (including the impact of GenAI) with learners from across Irish higher education on 6 October. Outputs from the workshop will inform QQI/NAIN communications with learners and the development of a media campaign.

QQI extended its engagement on academic integrity with stakeholders from across the Irish education system during 2023. It presented updates on its regulatory work in this space, as well as on NAIN and its activity, to professional statutory and regulatory bodies at several Finding Common Ground events during the year.

In October 2023, QQI also brought together representatives from DFHERIS, the Department of Education and the State Examinations Commission, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to facilitate discussion of academic integrity across the education system. As part of this meeting, Professor Ann Rogerson, University of Wollongong, Australia, spoke to participants about academic integrity in K-12 and post-primary education and the importance of transition points between education stages in supporting and maintaining academic integrity.

### **Expand and continue (alongside TEQSA) to manage the Global Academic Integrity Network; commence the development and publication of collective GAIN statements**

Through the Global Academic Integrity Network, founded in 2022 in partnership with TEQSA (The Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency), QQI met throughout 2023 with international peer organisations (regulators, Quality Assurance (QA) agencies, qualifications authorities, and academic recognition centres) to discuss a range of matters related to academic integrity and to hear from guest expert speakers. Topics discussed included policy and regulatory approaches in respond to GenAI developments, the business models of contract cheating service providers and diploma mills, and updates from members on developments in their own jurisdictions.

### **Commence regulatory engagement on academic integrity with FET providers; establish FET advisory group to inform QQI regulatory direction (including the review/revision/placing on a statutory footing of the AI Guidelines)**

QQI held two events for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) on academic integrity in February, a briefing on the legislation, followed by a workshop to discuss threats to academic integrity specific to FET learners, and approaches to provider policies.

The QQI Academic Integrity update now encompasses FET providers and learners and articles from ETBs were published in this update throughout 2023.

As part of the University of Galway/NAIN Academic and Research Integrity Conference 2023, invitations to attend masterclasses were issued to all ETB FET Directors and a number of ETB representatives attended the masterclasses and the conference itself. Academic integrity was raised during the ETB quality dialogue meetings that took place in Quarters 2 and 3, 2023 and a number of the initiatives discussed by ETBs

were disseminated across the tertiary education sector through QQI's quarterly Academic Integrity Updates. The October 2023 update included an article from Donegal ETB on their recently established Learner Governance and Management Forum and its discussions on academic integrity.

### **Expand reporting relationships and activity with global advertising and publishing platforms**

QQI continued to monitor and report instances of contract cheating promotion on advertising, publishing and social media platforms during 2023. Summaries of reporting (number of items reported/number of items removed/restricted across all platforms with whom QQI engages) were published in QQI's Academic Integrity Updates.

**We will robustly assess and monitor private providers for their fitness to offer QQI awards and provide security to their learners through our stewardship of the statutory learner protection fund.**

### **Due Diligence: Implement, deliver and monitor Due Diligence process**

A suite of regulations that underpin the execution and implementation of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Amendment Act, 2019 were drafted for ministerial approval over the course of 2023. The s.29B Capacity and Capability Criteria Regulations which detail the criteria to be applied to a due diligence assessment of a provider formed part of this suite. An end-to-end on-line application process for providers that engage with QQI, including providers seeking authorisation to use the IEM, for which due diligence is a condition precedent, was developed in 2023. This will provide an automated efficient mechanism to manage the due diligence evaluation process. Significant work was completed on the accompanying documentation to support the effective delivery of the process. The requisite proposed fees to apply to a due diligence evaluation of a provider were submitted to the

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (DFHERIS) for consideration before year end, 2023.

### **Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL): Implement and manage the approved national PEL scheme in line with legislative requirements and timeframes**

Regulations that underpin the establishment, maintenance and management of the Learner Protection Fund and regulations to prescribe the amount of the annual charge to be paid by providers were drafted for ministerial approval. Significant work has been undertaken on scoping the development of the processes underpinning the establishment and management of the fund.

We will contribute to ensuring a high-quality learning experience for international students through issuing the International Education Mark (IEM) for higher education and English language education (ELE) providers

### **International Education Mark: Publish IEM codes of practice, policies and relevant guidance for ELE and HE**

Public consultation on the policy documentation for the development and implementation of the IEM was held between November and December 2022. Following the consultation period, QQI continued to meet with provider representative bodies, individual providers and other HE and ELE stakeholders throughout Quarters 1 and 2, 2023, to discuss the scheme, documentation and the application and assessment process. The final documentation was approved by the PSC and the QQI Board in 2023:

- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners,
- Statutory QA Guidelines for English Language Education,
- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes

of Higher Education to International Learners,

- Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark.

The policy documents will take effect when the relevant sections of the legislation are commenced. During 2023, the documentation was used by HE and ELE providers undertaking their initial planning for an IEM application in 2024.

### **International Education Mark: Open the scheme for applications**

The IEM application and assessment process was developed for HE and ELE providers. The International Education Division continued to develop the ICT build for the IEM application and assessment process and phase one, the application portal, was completed and is ready to accept applications. Work on phase two progressed and is expected to be completed in early Q2, 2024. The development of resources to support providers who apply for authorisation to use the IEM began and will be completed in early Q2, 2024. These resources include guidance handbooks and videos for HE and ELE providers, IT handbooks and videos, and handbooks for assessors.

### **International Education Mark: Launch the IEM brand and develop promotional campaign**

An IEM brand, TrustEd Ireland, was developed, and feedback from the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and from HE and ELE stakeholders was positive. A communications project will be developed in 2024 to promote the brand and the IEM once the scheme is launched in 2024.

Two events were held for ELE and HE providers on the alignment of programmes and assessments to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There was an average attendance of 60 participants at each event and further enhancement events are planned for 2024.

A tender was issued in October 2023 to recruit specialist ELE consultants to carry out the assessment of ELE providers' IEM applications.

## CASE STUDY (I) QUALIFAX REDEVELOPMENT



**A key priority for QQI is to provide clear, accurate and comprehensive information for learners and it was considered that an updated, modern Qualifax website would be a key tool for delivering on this priority effectively.**

The re-development of the Qualifax website was heavily informed by a strategic review of the site undertaken in 2021 by external consultants and following wide consultation across the sector. This consultation included interaction and feedback with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, Careers Portal, Grad Ireland and SOLAS. A range of guidance counsellors across school and adult education were consulted, as well as a wide range of learners representing school leavers, further education learners and adults.

The review explored the changing landscape of education and training in the passing two decades since the launch of Qualifax and emphasised the proliferation of similar information platforms such

as CareersPortal, GradIreland and FetchCourses. It also emphasised the significant technological developments, the exponential growth in learners and learning opportunities and the changing demographics of the Irish population. However, the review identified the unique selling points of Qualifax as being the provision of information that is impartial, non-sectoral, non-commercial, comprehensive and accurate and by a state agency. The review defined the Qualifax audience in two distinct categories as learners and those that help learners including parents, guidance counsellors and adult guidance professionals. It was agreed that Qualifax needed to be a single resource that is appropriate for both audiences. This review defined Qualifax as an information tool and not a support and concluded that the navigation needs to be information centric. It was agreed that the assessment tool moved beyond the supply of information into support and guidance and was not in keeping with the suggested narrower focus of Qualifax. An agreed output of this review was to re-establish Qualifax as the best searchable database of learning opportunities in Ireland.

Separate to this strategic review and long before the Qualifax redevelopment project, an internal IT security group identified concerns about the security and stability of the IT infrastructure underpinning Qualifax. At this point, the personal user account facility was removed, reducing the risk of unauthorised access to personal data as well as ensuring GDPR compliance.

The redevelopment of Qualifax which commenced in 2022 and was completed in 2023, was heavily influenced by the findings of the strategic review. The key objective of the redevelopment was to establish a new Qualifax portal, including a full upgrade of IT infrastructure, with focused features that will work efficiently for learners and users of information about courses available in Ireland. An independent company was appointed to lead the re-development of Qualifax and was supported by an internal expert steering group of QQI staff. This group led the scoping of technical requirements which analysed existing user data, the outputs of the strategic review and internal expertise. A prototype site was developed in May 2023 with feedback invited from key stakeholders in May and August to improve the site. In May 2023, feedback was received from the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), three Education and Training Boards, the Irish Universities Association, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and a number of individual guidance counsellors across school and adult guidance. Further feedback was invited in August 2023 and responses were received from the IGC, CareersPortal, Crosscare Youth Information Services, individual guidance counsellors across school and adult guidance, individual learners and representatives of the former National Centre for Guidance in Education. A robust, rigorous system of internal testing was undertaken by a wide range of staff across QQI.

The redevelopment prioritised retaining and improving existing popular functions including the course search, course compare, subject requirements tool and the calendar of events. Users can compare up to three courses at a time and are able to share this comparison by email or through certain social media platforms. They can also save and print course searches with up to 250 courses using the download CSV file option. The navigation of the site is intuitive, keeping with modern developments and is easily accessible for learners to use. The Qualifax site is now mobile friendly and can be used across a wide range of devices.

The new website was launched in September 2023 and has received broadly positive feedback. The Qualifax team attended Higher Options Dublin and Higher Options Cork in September and October 2023 respectively and met with a high volume of learners and guidance counsellors and demonstrated the new Qualifax site, receiving lots of positive feedback. The results of a survey undertaken by the IGC was shared with QQI in November 2023 which was considered internally. As part of the communication of the new site, a comprehensive user guide and short video demonstrating the functionality of the site were developed to further support users. QQI continues to refine and update the Qualifax website in line with the priorities identified as part of the strategic review in 2021.

In late 2023, in recognition of the significant improvements to Qualifax, it was shortlisted as Education Website of the Year for the [Digital Business Ireland awards](#).

## Priority 3 #development - driving and stimulating provider development

We will support capacity for flexible and innovative programme development and robust quality assurance in the ETBs

### Develop procedures and criteria for the devolution of responsibility for validation sub-processes to ETBs

A joint workplan developed in 2023 for QQI and ETBs includes the development of procedures and criteria for the devolution of responsibility to ETBs. This workplan will commence in 2024.

### Validate new ETB shared programmes for Common Awards System (CAS) major awards

During 2023 QQI engaged with the ETBs to agree a workplan for 2024, which includes a schedule for revalidation of 12 priority programmes leading to CAS major awards.

### Commence review of existing CAS standards and develop the broad standards in at least 2 fields of learning at NFQ levels 5 & 6

In 2023 QQI published how it intends to reform the traditional Common Awards System. The first scheduled review of CAS award standards will be in the area of healthcare and is planned to commence in early 2024.

### Monitor progress in implementation of review report findings within the ETBs

### Follow Up to the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in Ireland's 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

The inaugural review of QA in all 16 ETBs concluded in May 2022, with the final visit of an expert review team to City of Dublin ETB (CDETB). In 2023 the inaugural review process required the submission of action plans and follow-up reports by ETBs, addressing the findings and recommendations of the external review team. These were completed by the requisite ETBs over the course of 2023 and these action plans, in response to the recommendations of the reports from 2022, were published on [QQI's website](#).

### Quality Dialogue Meetings (QDMs)

QDMs were held with 15 of the 16 ETBs during 2023. The QDMs provided the opportunity for mutual strategic updates, discussion on a range of quality assurance enhancement topics and activities, and for progress updates on the follow-up report arising from the inaugural review of QA in ETBs. The final QDM with the remaining ETB is scheduled to take place in Q1, 2024.

### Publish sectoral report on the inaugural review process of the 16 ETBs

Follow-up reports detailing ETBs' progress together with action plans and other QA enhancements are due for submission by each ETB 12 months after the publication of its review report. The follow-up report also gives ETBs the opportunity to submit case studies highlighting good practice. In 2023, 13 ETBs submitted their follow-up reports with the final three due in Q1, 2024. The follow up reports are published on [QQI's website](#).

The follow-up reports with case studies show both good practice and challenges in a range of QA topics across the sector. A thematic analysis of the reports will be conducted in Q2, 2024.

## CASE STUDY

### LAUNCH OF THE SECTORAL REPORT ON QA IN THE ETBs

QQI launched its sectoral report on quality assurance in further education and training in the ETB sector on 29 March 2023. At the event, co-hosted with City of Dublin ETB, colleagues from across the ETB sector were joined by national key stakeholders at Killester College of Further Education in a morning of presentations, perspectives and discussion about the inaugural review and its findings. The programme included:

- An overview of the findings of the sectoral report by the joint chairs of the sectoral report team.
- The review process from the perspective of FET learners.
- The review process from the perspective of the ETBs.
- A panel discussion on the key findings with the sectoral report team and representation from across the sector.

The [sectoral report](#) is published on the QQI website.

### Review policies for making awards and determining standards

This review forms part of a wider review of the full suite of QQI awarding policies and it is intended that this integrated approach will bring greater coherence and alignment to complimentary QQI awarding policies. Preparatory work began on this in 2023 with the review planned to commence at the start of 2024.

### Review Validation Policy and Criteria

Work on this activity commenced in 2023 and it is intended that all policies associated with the QQI Awards directorate will be reviewed and updated in an integrated manner.

We will assess the effectiveness and embedding of quality assurance within the new and evolving technological universities through our institutional quality reviews

### Approve QA procedures of new Technological Universities (TUs) following their establishment in 2021/22 TU of the Shannon (TUS), Atlantic TU (ATU), South East TU (SETU)

The QA procedures of TU of the Shannon (TUS), South East TU (SETU) and Atlantic TU (ATU) were approved by the Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) on 13 July 2023.

### Review of effectiveness of QA of established TUs through CINNTE Review

The CINNTE review cycle has been extended by a further 12 months to allow for the review of all the newly established technological universities<sup>1</sup>.

The handbook for technological universities has been updated and details of these reviews, including the composition of the expert review teams and key dates and can be found on the QQI website in QQI's Reviews Library.

<sup>1</sup> Munster Technological University (MTU), Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), South East Technological University (SETU) and Atlantic Technological University (ATU) are scheduled for institutional review in 2024. Technological University Dublin completed its review in 2022 and the report is published.



## Higher education monitoring and review

The CINNTE review cycle continued in 2023 for other publicly regulated higher education institutions (HEIs) with a notable return to on-site visits following COVID-19 restrictions. While a more sustainable approach to external review has been retained with the briefing of review teams and planning visits in HEIs taking place via MS Teams, the on-site visit has again become a central component of these reviews.

University College Cork was the first HEI to hold their main review visit on-site in March 2023. This was followed with on-site reviews in the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire in May and RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences in October. The arrangements for these CINNTE reviews, including details of the expert review teams, key dates and the published review reports, can be found on the QQI website in [QQI's Reviews Library](#).

Within the extended timeframe for the current CINNTE review cycle, the four largest independent/private HEIs, i.e. Dublin Business School (DBS), Griffith College (GCD), Hibernia College and the National College of Ireland (NCI) will also be included for institutional review. These mature and long established HEIs have been prioritised on the basis that their QA has been approved for some time following reengagement with QQI. They have been integrated into QQI's monitoring framework, and they have indicated their intention to seek the delegation of authority (DA) to make awards when this regulatory framework becomes available. Discrete [terms of reference](#), a [review handbook for independent/private HEIs](#) and a schedule for the reviews were published on the QQI website in November 2023.

The full [2024/25 CINNTE review schedule](#) is available on the QQI website.

## Institutional Review of the National University of Ireland (NUI)

The inaugural institutional review of the National University of Ireland was completed in 2023. An independent team of national and international experts completed a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the QA system of the university, recognising instances of good practice which deliver impact in the recognised colleges and linked providers of the institution, and making recommendations on areas for improvement in the coming years. The site visit was undertaken in March 2023, with the final review report published in November 2023. The NUI submitted the Institutional Implementation Plan in December 2023 and will continue to report on its implementation as part of the annual monitoring cycle.

## Focused Review

In 2023, QQI published an independent review of activities related to the withdrawal by Dublin Business School of some Applied Social Care programmes from the CORU programme approval and registration process. This was the first time a focused review had been initiated to consider a provider's QA procedures<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the [report](#) found the fundamentals of quality assurance in DBS were sound and a number of recommendations were made to support and strengthen academic oversight within the institution.

We will facilitate increased autonomy and flexibility for mature providers by enabling them to pursue delegated authority to make their own awards

**Continue progression of the Delegated Authority Policy for private providers including terms of reference and handbook for private HE reviews cycle**

**Conclude public consultation, finalise terms of reference, procedures and criteria**

<sup>2</sup> The statutory basis for focused reviews is set out in Section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012.

## Establish review schedule

QQI continues to work towards the development of a framework for the implementation of delegated authority and is taking a two-phase approach commencing with the CINNTE institutional review, before accepting requests for DA.

The process for DA requires a statutory instrument detailing the ministerial regulations of the conditions to be met by institutions seeking DA. These conditions have been completed and submitted to DFHERIS for consideration and await ministerial approval.

Details of the CINNTE institutional review and those independent/private HEIs to be prioritised for review have been included above.

We will stimulate autonomous universities to demonstrate how effectively they monitor and improve the quality of the learner experience in research and community engagement

## Complete the project on the refresh of the National Framework for Doctoral Education with the HEA and the Advisory Forum

### The National Framework for Doctoral Education (NFDE) Advisory Forum

In 2023, QQI, their co-chairs the HEA, and the members of the NFDE Advisory Forum commissioned a refresh of the National Framework for Doctoral Education. Forum members and the co-chairs agreed that this was timely considering the changes in the doctoral education landscape since 2015 and the work being progressed by the working groups to implement recommendations from the 2021 EUA Solutions study; [The National Framework for Doctoral Education in Ireland: Report on its implementation by Irish Higher Education Institutions](#). In July 2023, the refreshed National Framework for Doctoral Education was published, following sectoral consultation led by Professor

Emerita Eithne Guilfoyle, Dublin City University. The refreshed framework was launched by Minister Simon Harris, at the HEA's Research Futures event which focused on research capacity and doctoral education in Ireland.

At the event, [www.myphd.ie](http://www.myphd.ie) was also launched. This microsite, which is developed, hosted and maintained by QQI, highlights the value of a PhD for students, employers and government agencies. MyPhD.ie hosts the refreshed NFDE and includes a list of relevant national publications, including Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes and the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes.

## The NFDE Advisory

### Forum working groups included:

- the Career Profile Working Group,
- the Career Tracking Working Group,
- the Postgraduate Student Engagement Working Group.

## Annual Quality Reporting (AQR)

In 2023, QQI published annual quality reports (AQRs) covering the reporting period 2021-22.

For this period, all publicly regulated HEIs continued to submit AQRs which included three technological universities submitting an AQR for the first time. For independent/private HEIs, the size and diversity of institutions, as well as plans to review the existing monitoring framework, meant that only those HEIs intending to seek DA were asked to submit a report for this reporting period. In total, AQRs were received from 16 publicly regulated HEIs and six independent/private HEIs (four of which intend to seek DA and two voluntarily submitted AQRs). All AQRs are published on QQI's website.

QQI has continued to produce synthesis reports of the AQRs as part of its Insights Series. The synthesis of quality in higher education identifies key themes arising across the AQRs in quality development and enhancement activities reported

by the institutions. The synthesis reports highlight and disseminate good practice and identify key areas of focus for the higher education sector during the designated reporting period.

The synthesis of the 2022 AQRs was published in early 2023 and similar to previous publications included separate reports for the publicly regulated and independent/private HEIs. In contrast, the synthesis of the 2023 AQRs was published in a single report to reflect on the wider HE sector as a whole and take account of the small number of reports from independent/private HEIs. These synthesis [reports](#) are available on QQI's website.

QQI has also continued to develop and enhance the database of case studies taken from the AQRs of both public and independent/private HEIs. This resource provides rich evidence of quality assurance in action and is a valuable QA resource for sharing good practice and initiatives. This [database](#) is available through the QQI website.

While plans to review the monitoring framework are still in progress, an independent evaluation of the annual quality reporting model was completed in 2023. The [findings from this evaluation](#) are available on the QQI website and a case study (An independent evaluation of the QQI annual quality reporting model) outlining the process, is presented in this report.

In order to share more widely the sectoral findings of the AQR evaluation, facilitate peer learning for higher education staff and showcase areas of good practice in quality assurance and enhancement practices across the HE sector, an event [The 'Quality in HE: Sectoral Findings and Enhancements Showcase'](#), was hosted by QQI in October 2023 to bring key stakeholders together. This inaugural event proved popular with stakeholders across the tertiary sector and a similar event is planned for 2024.

### Quality Dialogue Meetings

As part of its monitoring function, QQI conducts quality dialogue meetings with higher education institutions. In 2023, meetings took place with the technological universities and Dundalk Institute

of Technology. The quality dialogue meetings provide an opportunity for QQI and the institutions to discuss the impact and effectiveness of quality assurance developments and enhancements within the institutions' internal quality system during the report period. Topics arising for discussion at the meetings included planning for CINNTE review, the collaboration between the TU and ETB sectors and the delivery of tertiary programmes, and topics arising from the AQRs.

## CASE STUDY (II)

### ANNUAL QUALITY REPORTING CONTEXT:



The AQR is a central strand of QQI's quality assurance monitoring and reporting arrangements for HEIs. Each HEI submits a report to QQI on an annual basis providing the following information in respect of the relevant reporting period (i.e. the preceding academic year):

**Part A:** a record of the institution's current QA policies and procedures;

**Part B:** the QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken during the reporting period and their impact, as well as planned quality enhancement activities for subsequent reporting periods.

#### Examples of good practice in quality assurance and enhancement

Annual quality reporting is well-established in the public higher education sector and QQI has produced thematic analyses of the AQR

submissions in this sector for the past six years. Annual quality reporting for some independent/private higher education institutions commenced in 2021. 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 the AQRs submitted by the independent/private HEIs.

In 2023, a number of innovations were introduced to the production and dissemination of the thematic analysis of the AQRs.

#### Format:

For 2023, a single report ([Quality in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#)) was produced, which retains discrete analyses at the subsector level but also includes an overarching system-level dimension. This enables greater consistency in the approach to analysis across the subsectors (whilst recognising their respective differences), better facilitates cross-sectoral comparison and adds an additional level of analysis of trends and developments at a system-level.

## Dissemination:

Dissemination of the analyses hitherto has primarily involved the provision of copies of the analyses to HEIs and publication on the QQI website, with key findings highlighted to a broader stakeholder base through internal and external communications channels, website news items, and social media. In addition to these channels, the findings of the 2023 analysis were presented at an in-person event, [‘Quality in HE: Sectoral Findings & Enhancement Showcase’](#), which also provided an opportunity for institutional representatives to present case studies of quality enhancement initiatives.

This development was instituted in response to a recommendation arising from of an [Independent Evaluation of the QQI Annual Quality Reporting Model](#), published in May 2023. The evaluation identified that while two thirds of the public HEIs and 79% of independent/private HEIs that engaged with the evaluation reported that the thematic analysis reports are an effective and useful reference point for them, there was an appetite among stakeholders “for the AQR and thematic analysis reports to be linked to, or followed up with, sector-wide, in-person events focused on enhancement and the sharing of good practice”. Stakeholder feedback on the 2023 event was very positive and will inform the design and delivery of future dissemination events.

## Priority 4 #insight – publishing authoritative analysis and insight

We will analyse and provide insights on QQI awards data and trends to inform providers, policy makers, funding agencies and government strategies.

### Develop and publish a three-year QQI research and innovation programme of work

#### Analysis of QQI Certification Data for 2023

In February 2023, QQI published its [Annual Analysis of QQI Awards](#). This analysis, which has been published annually since 2018, provides information on QQI awards made in 2022 by NFQ level, award class, field of learning, provider type and learner profile for FET and HE providers. The findings note that in 2022, the total number of QQI awards made increased in FET and HE relative to 2020 and 2021. These findings indicate a partial recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on awarding volumes. When analysed by award class, the number of major QQI awards in FET continued a downward trend observed since 2014, whereas the number of FET minor, supplemental and special purpose awards increased from 2020 and 2021. The number of HE QQI awards increased for all classes of award with the exception of minor awards.

#### From further education and training to higher education: performance of CAO candidates with QQI FET awards

This analysis, presented through an [interactive dashboard](#), provides data and trends relating to a specific cohort of QQI FET learners who achieved a Level 5 or 6 major award in a single sitting and applied to the CAO in the same academic year. The analysis of data from 2018 - 2022 found that:

- The numbers of learners in this cohort increased in 2022 by 10% from 2021.
- The average CAO points earned by these learners in 2022 decreased from 2021 by 5 percentage points.
- In 2022, 37% of these learners earned the maximum CAO points possible under the Higher Education Links scheme (390 points), a decrease of 29% from 2021. The greater proportion of higher grades observed in 2020 and 2021 is likely to be related to factors associated with the COVID-19 experience.
- One in four achieved an NFQ Level 5 QQI award in Nursing Studies.

### Data on HE micro-credentials in Ireland 2014 – 2023

In November 2023, a new interactive [analysis of data on micro-credentials](#) in higher education was published on the QQI website. This includes data on programmes delivered by private/independent HEIs leading to QQI awards; data on the Irish Register of Qualifications; and data on the micro-credentials offered by Irish University Association (IUA) institutions via the [MicroCreds.ie](#) portal. The analysis was presented at QQI's '20 Years of the NFQ' conference on 17 November.

We will evaluate the experience of remote and blended learning and provide guidance on authentic assessment for an improved learner experience and outcome

### Publish statutory QA guidelines for blended and online programmes

In October 2023, QQI published quality assurance guidelines for providers planning to offer or already offering blended or fully online programmes. These types of programmes which, by necessity, became very common during the COVID-19 period have become popular with both learners and providers and it is certain that the norm has shifted in this direction. Hence it is essential that providers are given guidance as to how to design, resource,

deliver and assess these programmes in a quality assured manner. That is the purpose of QQI's new guidelines.

Following a tendering exercise, QQI engaged the expertise of the [National Institute for Digital Learning \(NIDL\)](#) in DCU, to draft the guidelines. Prof. Mark Brown and colleagues in NIDL have nationally and internationally recognised expertise in the field. Drawing on worldwide best practice and following extensive consultation with providers, designated awarding bodies and other national stakeholders, NIDL presented QQI with draft materials in summer 2023. Following further internal consultation and governance processes, the finalised guidelines were approved by QQI's Policies and Standards Committee and published in October 2023.

While the guidelines apply to all providers offering NFQ awards, providers offering QQI awards must have their QA procedures for blended and/or fully online programmes approved by QQI. That work will continue in 2024.

We will draw on our significant international networks of peer agencies to continue to contribute to and influence national policy

### **Engage with international agencies, networks and committees to review expiring Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and renew as appropriate**

QQI communicates and partners with national and international agencies and organisations across tertiary education, under the terms agreed in the MoUs. International MoUs which were renewed in 2023 include those with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE). Agreements are published on the QQI website.

We will publish system-level analyses and host enhancement events including an annual summit event with key stakeholders on a key strategic theme embracing quality and qualifications

### **Host Annual Events: Quality & Qualifications Conference (20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NFQ), - (see report under Strategic Priority 1), Thematic events (Assessment), ENQA General Assembly (25-27 October 2023)**

#### **Let's Talk About Assessment: Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education**

On 30 January, QQI hosted a major conference on assessment in Croke Park, with over 300 delegates registered to attend representing public and private higher education institutions; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; representative bodies; and other stakeholders. Delegates heard perspectives from students and national and international experts on topical dimensions of assessment with a view to encouraging reflection on, and innovation in, assessment practice. Recordings, presentations and posters from the conference are available; [Let's talk about assessment 2023: rethinking assessment in higher education](#).

#### **Rethinking Assessment Masterclass and Events Series**

As part of QQI's Rethinking Assessment programme, a Masterclass and Events Series was launched intending to foster expertise and innovation in assessment practice across the tertiary education sector. In 2023, QQI hosted two masterclass webinars:

- **'Rethinking Assessment Feedback'** was delivered in June by Professor Phillip Dawson, Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE) at Deakin University in Australia and focused on

the capabilities required for effective feedback in assessment.

- **'Interactive Oral Assessment'** was delivered in November by interactive oral assessment pioneer and expert, Danielle Logan-Fleming of Griffith University, Australia.

### European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) General Assembly

QQI hosted the ENQA General Assembly from 25-27 October. ENQA members and affiliates from over 80 organisations across 40 countries visited Dublin for a diverse programme of events with opening addresses from the Minister Simon Harris, Dr Pádraig Walsh, CEO, QQI, and Douglas Blackstock, President, ENQA. The programme focused on the theme of recognition, exploring the latest policy developments and approaches to ensure tangible connections between quality assurance and recognition. The presentations from the event are available on ENQA's website: [2023 ENQA General Assembly](#).

### QQI Workshop for the Technological Higher Education Sector

In March, QQI held a workshop for the technological higher education sector. The event provided attendees from TUs and institutes of technology with an opportunity to reflect on many changes to the technological higher education sector in the preceding years. Presenters and panellists, most from the technological sector, covered a wide range of topics on the extensive programme including:

- Reflections on the CINNTE review process – preparing for review and the intangible benefits of review.
- Models of academic governance within the technological HE institutions.
- Engagement and collaboration between the technological HE and the FET sectors.

### Rethinking assessment: Assessment grant-aid scheme - completion of projects by grant awardees

### Assessment and Confidence in HE Qualifications included in the NFQ – QQI Anniversary Funded Research

At the 'Let's Talk About Assessment' conference, QQI announced the outcome of its call for proposals to build momentum in assessment scholarship and/or professional development. Following an evaluation process, €374k was awarded in total to eight research projects in higher education institutions. The research projects are concerned with a variety of aspects of assessment, including: the use of technology to enhance assessment; authenticity in assessment; external peer review of assessment; and academic integrity. The research projects commenced in 2023 and are expected to conclude in 2024.

### Research Supervision: Growing Excellence Symposium

QQI and the IUA co-sponsored the inaugural symposium on Research Supervision – Growing Excellence, which was hosted by UCD on Thursday, 18 May. This was an IUA Deans of Graduate Studies initiative and the first all-Ireland event for research supervisors, focusing on contemporary challenges and solutions in research supervisory practice. International contributors included Professor Stan Taylor, Durham University, England, who presented on supervisor professionalism and recognition and Professor Bob Harris, Karolinska Institute, Sweden, who discussed leadership in supervision.

### Rethinking assessment: Review of degree classification practices in collaboration with DABs

### Analysis of variation on honours bachelor's degree classifications 2012-2022

QQI and the other degree awarding bodies are collaborating on an analysis to understand the causes of variation in the classification profile of honours bachelor's degrees, over the past decade and to provide greater clarity on the



purposes and meaning of degree classification for the general public and other key stakeholders. Terms of reference for the study were agreed in July 2023, which will include the completion of programmatic case studies and the provision of data on classification practices by higher education institutions, followed by a meta-analysis of programme and institutional data by QQI. A report of the findings of this analysis is expected in 2024.

### Rethinking assessment: Initiate a process for the updating of QQI assessment infrastructure

#### Thematic Analysis of Annual Quality Reporting

In 2023, QQI published three analyses of the annual quality reports (AQRs) submitted to QQI as part of our quality assurance framework of engagement with higher education institutions. The AQR provides information on the operation of each HEI's internal quality assurance system and on quality assurance activities, developments, and enhancements. HEIs are also invited to submit case studies of effective practice.

Quality in Irish Public Higher Education Institutions and Quality in Irish Private and Independent Higher Education Institutions, published in May, provides thematic analyses of the AQRs submitted by institutions in 2022 in respect of the 2020-21 reporting year.

In October, QQI published Quality in Irish Higher Education Institutions, which provides a thematic analysis of the AQRs submitted in 2023 (in respect of the 2021-22 reporting year). The report brings together, for the first time, analyses of quality reporting in both the public and private/independent HE sectors and includes a system-level analysis of sectoral trends in quality assurance and enhancement. The system-level findings included:

- a marked shift in emphasis away from the impact of the COVID-19 experience
- the impacts of changes in institutional designation, status and levels of autonomy across the sector

- a continued international focus
- leadership, ambition and commitment in the areas of equality, diversity & inclusion and the advancement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

### QA Guidelines on Work-integrated Learning

A project to develop Guidelines for Work-integrated Learning was launched in May 2023.

The internal project team is supported by an external steering group comprising members with expertise in the field of work-integrated learning. The FET and HE sectors, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, industry and international HE are represented on the external steering group. This group advised QQI on the development of a request for tender and will advise on the drafting of and consultation on the resulting guidelines. The project is planned to continue its work in 2024.

### QQI Insight on Assessment: Learner Perspectives

In September, QQI published an Insight report outlining the findings of focus group sessions conducted in 2022 with FET and HE learners on their experiences of and views on assessment. It identifies 12 key findings, many of which reflected common preoccupations across tertiary education but with some notable differences between the experiences of FET and HE learners. The emerging themes included assessment of group work; assessment feedback; academic integrity; assessment of work-based learning; peer assessment; and inclusion.

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

## An independent evaluation of the QQI annual quality reporting model

As part of QQI's commitment to continuous improvement in our processes, we commissioned an independent evaluation of the usefulness of the AQR model in fulfilling its intended purpose and sought recommendations on how it might be improved and enhanced. The [evaluation](#) (published in June) was informed by key stakeholders in the sector, all of whom perceive an important role for the AQR. Recommendations included the need for:

- Clarification and agreement with key national stakeholders on the future purpose and function of the AQR in the context of a changing integrated tertiary education system.
- Alignment of the process and template to this purpose.
- Adjustments to reporting requirements.
- Promotion of the AQRs and thematic analysis reports, including social media and in-person events.

## Quality in HE: Sectoral Findings & Enhancement Showcase

On 17 October, QQI hosted an in-person event to outline the findings of the thematic analysis of the 2023 AQRs and invited institutional representatives from the public and private/independent HE sectors to showcase a selection of quality enhancement case studies. The event also featured a presentation on the independent evaluation of QQI's annual quality reporting model and reflections from QQI and sectoral representatives on the findings. Recordings and presentations from the event are available: [Quality in HE: Sectoral Findings & Enhancement Showcase](#)

## Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Where do we go from here?

In the context of the evolution of the tertiary education landscape and the impending conclusion of the CINNTE review cycle, QQI commissioned a discussion paper to stimulate thinking on the future of the Irish quality assurance system.

[Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Where do we go from here?](#), authored by Professor Paul

Giller, University College Cork (UCC), includes perspectives from literature and from individuals with experience of the operation of quality assurance within Irish and international contexts. It explores concepts of quality in higher education and the various drivers and stakeholders within the quality assurance ecosystem; the benefits and costs associated with quality assurance; different approaches to the operation of formal quality assurance; new concepts for the operation of quality assurance; and considerations for the future development and evolution of quality assurance.

## Key Enabler 1 #partnership - strengthening strategic partnerships to effect system change

We will inform and influence education and training policy through our relationships with government, public funders, providers and other stakeholders

### Support strategic discussions and engagements through the Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF)

The IQQF, established by QQI in 2022, enables high-level discussion of national system-level quality and qualifications issues such as the future development of the National Framework of Qualifications and the educational quality assurance infrastructure.

The statutory awarding bodies group (SABG), which forms part of the IQQF, met three times during 2023. This group will continue to meet and the forum will expand to include representatives from other core constituencies as the forum considers further priorities.

### Publish a new HEA/QQI statutory agreement (MOU)

Throughout 2023, QQI engaged with the HEA to prepare the new HEA/QQI statutory agreement. Some areas for inclusion, following changes to HEA legislation, included designation of private independent HEIs and learner engagement. Bilateral meetings were held in February and September 2023. The current agreement expired in December 2023 and the new agreement will be published in 2024.

We will assist in the development of mechanisms for effective learner engagement in the quality of their education and training through our work with learner representative and advocacy bodies

### National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)

In the academic year 2022-2023, NStEP trainers delivered 82 training sessions and 836 students completed modules in-person or online. 24 students were awarded 'Student Engagement Recognition Awards' across 13 institutions. The annual 'Train the Trainer' event took place in August 2023 for the 2023-24 academic year and was hosted by the College of Computing Technology (CCT) College Dublin.

NStEP continued working with QQI and USI in 2023 to recruit and train students to participate in quality assurance review panels for the evaluation of practices in higher education institutions. The annual training for student quality assurance reviewers took place in September 2023 and was held online. There are currently 58 student quality assurance reviewers within the pool. In July 2023, the Student Engagement, Belonging and Wellbeing Project was launched. This project is a collaboration between NStEP and HEA Healthy Campus and included the appointment of a Development Coordinator to lead the Student Engagement, Belonging and Wellbeing project. The project aims to create resources to better understand and model authentic student engagement in decision-making and student-staff partnerships in the enhancement of Wellbeing and Belonging. NStEP launched the 'Governance and Student Representation' online module in October 2023. This short module explores governance in Irish higher education, the importance of meaningful student representation and active membership, and includes valuable tools and resources to support student representatives sitting on institutional committees and working groups. One of these additional resources is the accompanying toolkit,

which is available on the NStEP website (a print version is available on request).

Two National Student Engagement Network events were held in 2023, with the first taking place in May at Dublin City University. This event was centred on sharing some of the case studies published in the Case Study Hub, hearing directly from the authors on their initiatives or projects, how they had progressed since publication and their next steps.

The second event was held in November at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) University of Medicine and Health Sciences. The event theme centred on belonging and wellbeing through the lens of student engagement, with a particular focus on the joint project between NStEP and the HEA Healthy Campus.

NStEP is collaborating with 25 institutions to explore and further embed student-staff partnerships and increase opportunities for student engagement across the Irish higher education sector.

NStEP welcomes interest from other higher education institutions which may wish to join the programme.

### Support the Aontas National FET Learner Forum

QQI continued to explore opportunities to work with learners in 2023. As active members, we participated in several national initiatives, including the Aontas-led National FET Learner Forum Advisory Group and The StudentSurvey.ie Analysis and Impact Group. Additionally, we played an important role in guiding the efforts of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) alongside our partners, the HEA and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

QQI sponsored and participated in the judging panels for the Aontas STAR Awards 2023 (Learner Voice category) and the USI's Student Achievement Awards Ireland 2023 (Academic Representative of the Year).

QQI worked closely with USI and NStEP colleagues on the Postgraduate Student Engagement working group, which reports to the National Framework for Doctoral Education Advisory Forum. During the year, the working group conducted a thematic analysis of current postgraduate research (PGR) student engagement nationally, with engagement from 17 institutions across the country. The working group report will be published in 2024.

### We will drive capacity-building in the Education and Training Boards in strategic partnership with funding authorities, provider representative bodies and other stakeholders

#### Participate in Transforming Learning (FET strategy) steering groups and supporting working groups

The Transforming Learning (FET Strategy Implementation) Steering Group is the group established to track the implementation of the FET Strategy 2020-24. The steering group contains representation from DFHERIS, SOLAS, ETBI (represented by membership from the ETB Chief Executives Group) and QQI.

The group, chaired by the SOLAS Chief Executive, first met in September 2021 and is scheduled to meet four times per year. In 2023, the group met on 25 April and 19 September. At the September meeting, the steering group received a presentation from BH & Associates who presented an update on the mid-term review of the FET strategy that they are conducting on behalf of SOLAS. The final meeting of the year took place on 29 November.

QQI is represented by the Chief Executive, Padraig Walsh and Walter Balfe (Head of Quality Assurance, Awards Directorate) and the group receives updates on progress with the core strategic priorities of the FET strategy:

- Building Skills,
- Fostering Inclusion,
- Creating Pathways.

QQI is also represented on a number of advisory working groups that have been established by the steering group.

We will contribute to reducing overlap in programme evaluation practices by working with professional and statutory regulatory bodies and higher education institutions

**Continue and expand Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) engagement.**

**Continue to promote endorsement of the Professional Accreditation Principles**

**Continue Finding Common Ground engagement with PSRBs (quarterly events/communications hub)**

QQI continued its Finding Common Ground programme of engagement with professional statutory and regulatory bodies in 2023 with four events (three in-person and one online). Topics discussed included academic and professional integrity, right-touch regulation, work-integrated learning (and QQI's plans for statutory quality assurance guidelines in this area), and the listed awarding body policy and process.

There were also further endorsements of the Principles for Professional Engagements with education providers during the year. These principles aim to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved in professional and academic accreditation and to reduce unnecessary administrative burden arising from duplication or overlap between such processes. Participants in Finding Common Ground events heard presentations from several PSRBs and HEIs engaging in pilot projects aimed at furthering these objectives.

We will continue to influence and contribute to good practice in quality assurance and qualifications through deepening our strategic relationships with partner agencies in Europe and worldwide

### **Five Country Qualification Frameworks Group**

The Annual Meeting of the Five Countries Qualifications Framework Group was held in person in Coventry on Thursday, 19 and Friday, 20 January 2023 and was hosted by [The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation \(Ofqual\)](#). This two-day meeting brought together qualification authorities, quality assurance agencies and government officials from the jurisdictions. The meeting was an excellent opportunity for policy dialogue and exchange across the UK and Ireland. The group promotes alignment between national qualifications systems, providing information on our mutual qualifications systems within the common travel area along with an annual updating of the 'Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries' guide.

QQI participated in a subgroup meeting of the Five Countries group regarding qualifications registers in September 2023. The experience of developing and maintaining the Irish Register of Qualifications as well as the plans for future development were presented to colleagues from the other agencies.

## CASE STUDY (III)

### 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE NFQ



2023 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Irish NFQ and to celebrate this significant milestone, QQI hosted a half day of pre-conference workshops on Thursday, 16 November and a full day conference on Friday, 17 November. The pre-conference workshops which covered topics related to communicating and promoting the NFQ; opening access to the NFQ to LABs; and a discussion with senior leaders across tertiary education about the future opportunities of the NFQ, were attended by approximately 75 participants. Over 200 people, including international representatives, attended the full day conference.

The main conference was chaired by Professor Irene Sheridan, Chair of the QQI Board. The day opened with an introduction from Dr. Padraig Walsh, CEO of QQI, that provided an overview of the development of the NFQ and landscape of the sector in the last 20 years.

The opening keynote was delivered by Dr. Grant Klinkum, CEO of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Some of the themes examined in the keynote address included the potential transformative impact of qualifications frameworks, the role of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of indigenous knowledge, and the need for deeper engagement with stakeholders.

Attendees broke into parallel breakout sessions which included panel discussions, focused presentations, and lightning talks, discussing and exploring a range of topics related to qualifications and the NFQ. The sessions covered the role and influence of the NFQ in the global qualifications framework context; access, transfer and progression and the recognition of prior learning; the role of academic integrity in qualifications systems; micro-credentials; and integrating the

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NFQ within employment, workforce planning and professions.

A report commissioned by QQI ['From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation. A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training'](#) which reviews the national landscape of practice supporting ATP was also launched at the event.

A panel discussion on the learner experience of the NFQ, provided attendees the opportunity to hear real life, powerful examples of experiences in education and personal interaction with the NFQ. Finally, key stakeholders from across the sector, Seán Ó Foghlú Maynooth University, Dr. Tomás Mac Eochagáin, Griffith College, Anne McHugh, Atlantic Technological University and Professor Billy Kelly, NAIN, provided their reflections and insights on the NFQ. Each highlighted the importance of protecting and maintaining the integrity of the NFQ and the need for continued collaboration, commitment, and cooperation in its ongoing implementation. There was a sense that the sector needs to be re-energised to enable genuine commitment to the NFQ.

Professor Irene Sheridan, in her conclusions, emphasised the need to consider whether the framework continues to serve in the changed context, and echoed calls to focus on looking to the future. In recognition of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NFQ, QQI is compiling a high-level report to provide an overview of 20 years of the NFQ with a focus on achievements to date and opportunities for the future. The report will include a wide range of stakeholder perspectives regarding the benefits of the NFQ and the role it has played in the developments in education and training over the last 20 years. This report will incorporate perspectives from the workshops and conference and will be published in early 2024.

## Key enabler 2 #excellence - building organisational excellence

We will develop and provide opportunities for our people by continuing to build an agile, engaged, responsive and motivated workforce

### QZI Learning Hub

QZI continued its Learning Hub series for internal colleagues in 2023. QZI hosts this series for its staff to help us learn more about internal and external initiatives and projects.

In 2023, we were delighted to have national contributions from the HEA who shared the results from the HEA Graduate Outcomes Survey - Class of 2021, and SOLAS who spoke about their Strategic Performance Agreements with the 16 ETBs and shared key highlights from their 2022 annual progress report. QZI colleagues presented an update on academic integrity and the Global Academic Integrity Network during the year. We also had contributions as part of the series from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) who presented on their areas of responsibility.

### Further develop and enhance staff wellbeing programme to maintain the KeepWell Mark and our standing as a top 100 company for wellbeing

QZI continues to be included in the 'Top 100 Companies leading in wellbeing' listings and significantly increased its ratings across all categories for the KeepWell Mark renewal in 2023. This is recognition of QZI's continued commitment to the wellbeing of our staff.

### Update the induction programme for new staff, in particular, the blended (online) components to enhance the experience

QZI continues to enhance the induction process for its new employees. HR treats each new staff member individually in terms of their assimilation needs including navigating the probationary period, culture and innovations. QZI also provides group and individual training for new staff over a period of time in order to maximise the effectiveness of the learnings i.e. the sessions are spread out over time so that new staff can contextualise what is being conveyed.

### Implement the new HR strategy to support delivery of the Statement of Strategy 2022-24

QZI's HR Strategy is central to all HR initiatives in QZI and is driven by the HR Manager. This is a collaborative document developed with the support of the Staff Engagement Forum and regularly reviewed and consulted on with the forum.

### Publish the QZI Corporate Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy and develop implementation plan

During 2023, the QZI Corporate Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy was developed and approved by senior management and the QZI Board. This will be implemented through a cross-organisational action plan to be developed in 2024.

We will reimagine the QZI workplace through utilising ICT for remote and blended working and embedding sustainability in our work processes

### Implement the ICT strategy to support delivery of the Statement of Strategy 2022-24

QZI piloted its blended working policy in 2023 and this policy was later approved by management. As we continue to evolve and adapt to the blended



working environment, the fostering of collaboration, creativity, well-being, and sustainability are paramount to ongoing success. In this regard, we carried out a review of our office infrastructure and design, including existing technologies and projects were commenced to create office spaces with innovative technologies which we believe will foster greater interaction among our people and between QQI and its stakeholders. The ongoing refit work is being carried out with a strong focus on sustainability and value for money by repurposing existing materials. Further enhancements are planned for 2024.

### **Further enhance and strengthen cyber security through an external security review and the accompanying staff awareness programme**

To further enhance and strengthen QQI to withstand cyber threats, QQI IT procured and planned regular penetration testing services in 2023. This commenced in Q3, 2023 and as part of this process we regularly and proactively assess our systems' resilience by simulating real-world attacks. Vulnerabilities identified during testing were recorded and are being addressed. Our focus is on swift remediation and continuous improvement.

The review of our existing Security Operations Centre (SOC)/Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) setup was completed in 2023. We have scrutinised costs, explored options, and fine-tuned our approach. The goal remains to optimise our security infrastructure while ensuring cost-effectiveness. We have made necessary amendments to align with industry best practices and emerging threats. Our SOC/SIEM stands as a robust defence mechanism, ready to detect, respond, and mitigate security incidents effectively. QQI staff awareness training and phishing simulations continued throughout 2023. We will enhance our service to learners by transforming our certification systems to digital form.

### **Commence project towards the digitalisation of certification services**

In 2023, we drafted a policy paper on options for digitalising student records currently issued by QQI. Subject to appropriate corporate approvals, planning for technical implementation will commence in mid-2024 and will include the scoping of public procurement solutions.

### **We will optimise our value to our stakeholders through the strategic use of purposeful and impactful communications**

#### **Publish QQI Stakeholder Survey feedback**

#### **Partnerships Survey**

In 2023, QQI commissioned its second partnerships survey with the research conducted by Opinions, who carried out the 2020 survey. The online survey was circulated to QQI's contacts list and thirteen 45-minute interviews were conducted by Opinions with a number of representatives from across the tertiary and English language sectors.

The headline feedback received through the survey and interviews with QQI's partners across the system confirmed they are generally satisfied with the work QQI does and the improvements it is making. 88% of respondents reported satisfaction with the work QQI is doing, while 84% described QQI as 'very important' in the execution of their roles in their organisations. 80% responded that QQI's performance in terms of its mission was good or excellent.

QQI would like to acknowledge the time and contribution of both survey respondents and participants in the interviews and to thank them for sharing their perspectives. QQI will endeavour to address any challenges raised and looks forward to working with colleagues across the tertiary system to continue to build stronger partnerships and system improvements.

We will demonstrate best practice in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and adherence to relevant legislative and regulatory obligations

### **Publish QQI Records Management Policy**

A new QQI Records Management Policy was developed and published internally in March 2023 and was later reviewed and enhanced in October 2023. Implementation of the policy is underway and the policy provides a framework for a wider programme of integrated projects focused on information & quality governance in QQI.

### **Review and optimise QQI's Business Process Management System**

This project is a multi-year enhancement project to review and improve existing processes and to optimise processes connected to new functions. Work continued in 2023 with the development of a new process template design and the accompanying review, improvement and consolidation of existing processes.

### **Compliance with Code of Practice**

QQI complies with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016). QQI completed and submitted its annual compliance return to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science during 2023.

#### **QQI adheres to the Public Spending Code by:**

- having a Purchasing and Procurement Policy that clearly sets out the requirements and authority levels of purchasers,
- ensuring all non-routine items of expenditure support the delivery of QQI's strategic and corporate plan,
- ensuring value for money for all expenditure,
- undertaking audits of procurement and purchasing to ensure adherence with best practice,

- encouraging staff to be aware of the cost of services so as to avoid unnecessary expenditure.

### **Scope a project on self-evaluation ISSCoP certification for QQI awards-related data**

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) requested that QQI, as a state agency involved in the production of statistics, apply for the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP) certification. Currently, QQI's primary statistical outputs are based on QQI certification data. The application is centred on practices pertaining to this dataset. The ISSCoP certification process spans all parts of the statistical process, namely:

- Data collection (primarily managed by the Qualifications Standards & Certification division),
- Data processing (partially managed by IT in the design and extraction of a learner achievement dataset from QBS),
- Data analysis (managed by the Research and Innovation division),
- Dissemination and promotion of statistical outputs (managed by the Research and Innovation division with support from IT and Communications).

The Research and Innovation Division is coordinating this project, working together with the relevant divisions.

#### **There is a significant undertaking, involving several stages:**

- Preparation.
- Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ).
- Examination of the SAQ by a review group in the CSO.
- Recommendations and Feedback.
- Certification Decision.

In addition to ensuring that QQI processes for the production of statistics meet best practice, this project will have the benefit of enhancing QQI's internal QA arrangements in relation to statistical inputs and outputs.

It is intended that the project will be finalised by Quarter 3, 2025.

## **Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**

QQI reports on outcomes to its line department, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science through a Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA), a requirement under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The PDA, which is developed and agreed annually, is linked to objectives contained in QQI's Corporate Plan, which is derived from the QQI Strategy Statement 2022-2024. An associated three-year Oversight Agreement (covering the period 2021-2023) was also developed. QQI meets several times a year with department officials to review progress under the agreements.

## **Review and update our internal audit function to support the delivery of the approved internal audit cycle**

### **Internal audit function**

Internal Audit Plan 2022 - 2024

QQI has a three-year rolling internal audit plan 2022 - 2024, that is reviewed annually. Internal audits are carried out on all the key corporate and business functions of QQI on a cyclical basis.

### **External audit function**

Invitation to the Comptroller and Auditor General to meet with the Audit and Risk Committee.

In 2023 an invitation was issued to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in line with the revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, September 2016 whereby it recommends that the Authority and the Audit and Risk Committee should have a discussion with the external auditors at least once a year to ensure that there are no unresolved issues of concern. An officer from the contractor engaged by and on behalf of the C&AG attended on-line a meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee in 2023.

# Governance Structure

## QQI Board

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Non-executive members are appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The QQI Board is responsible for the approval of financial accounts, policy, strategy statements, corporate plans and annual reports. The board makes decisions in relation to a number of functions including but not limited to:

- Preparation and adoption of the strategy statement,
- Strategic direction and planning, corporate planning and approval of annual reports,
- Approval of financial accounts,
- Approval of all policy and approaches to policy,
- Withdrawal of approval of quality assurance procedures,
- Withdrawal of programme validation,
- Delegation of authority to a provider to make awards,
- Withdrawal or variation of delegated authority to make awards.

It also has functions in relation to programme validation, joint awards, and access, transfer and progression. A number of sub-board committees assist with academic and other key areas of governance and include QQI board members among their membership.

The term of the third QQI Board commenced on 3 April 2023 following the appointment of six new board members and the appointment of a new chairperson.

## Membership:

- Professor Irene Sheridan (Chair) (from 3 April 2023)
- Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms Marianne Doyle (from 3 April 2023)
- Dr. Sean Duignan (Ordinary member with international experience related to QQI's functions) (from 3 April 2023)
- Dr. Sharon Feeney (from 3 April 2023)
- Mr Blake Hodgkinson (reappointed from 6 November 2022)
- Ms Clodagh McGivern (USI nomination) (to 30 June 2023)
- Mr. Kevin McStravock (from 3 April 2023)
- Ms. Anne Naughton (from 3 April 2023)
- Mr. Bryan O'Mahony (USI nomination) (from 1 July 2023)
- Ms. Maria Ward (Ordinary member representative of learners) (from 3 April 2023)

## Record of Attendance by Board Members at 2023 QQI Board Meetings

	22 May 2023	19 Jun	3-17 Jul  (Incorporeal Meeting)	22 Sept	4 Dec	Max	Attended
Irene Sheridan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Padraig Walsh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Marianne Doyle	✓	✓	✓		✓	5	4
Sean Duignan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Sharon Feeney	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Blake Hodgkinson	✓		✓	✓	✓	5	4
Clodagh McGivern*		✓	-	-	-	2	1
Kevin McStravock	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Anne Naughton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5
Bryan O'Mahony*	-	-	-	✓	✓	2	2
Maria Ward	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	5

In addition to the five board meetings outlined above, two board induction sessions were held on 22 May and 19 June 2023.

\* USI representative, term of office runs from 1 July to 30 June each year.

## Gender balance in QQI Board membership

As of 31 December, the board had five (50%) female and five male members (50%). Therefore, QQI met the government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards. However, it should be noted that the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) nominee usually serves a membership term of one to two years and therefore, changes more frequently than the other members of the QQI Board.

The following measures are planned to address and improve gender balance on QQI's board:

- The gender balance on the board will continue to be monitored.

## Performance evaluation

Prior to the term of the second QQI Board ending, the board decided, instead of carrying out its annual review of effectiveness, to carry out an exercise on its reflections of its five-year term. This was conducted in Quarter 4, 2022. As the third board only commenced its term in April 2023, the planned external review of the effectiveness of the QQI Board and its committees will take place in 2024 instead to allow the new board time to establish itself.

## Sub-board governance

A number of sub-board committees provide specific expertise to academic and other key areas of QQI operations:

## Audit and Risk Committee

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide an independent assessment structure and support the QQI Board in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and aspects of governance, by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the board's and accounting officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances. The Audit and Risk Committee met four times in 2023.

The Terms of Reference of the Audit and Risk Committee were updated in February 2023 and approved by the board in May 2023. The responsibilities of the Audit and Risk Committee as set out in its Terms of Reference and inter alia comprise:

- Financial Reporting,
- Internal Control,
- Risk Management,
- Internal Audit,
- External Audit,
- Other Reporting.

## Membership and attendance

Due to the size of the QQI Board, membership of the Audit and Risk Committee is comprised of two board members (one of whom is the chairperson of the committee) and three external non-board members (as opposed to three board members as required by the Code of Practice).

Blake Hodkinson (chair)	4/4
Kate Cullen (non-board member)	2/4
Pearl Cunningham (non-board member)	3/4
Marianne Doyle (board member)	1/1
Walter Johnston (non-board member)	3/4

## Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) makes decisions regarding the validation of programmes leading to QQI awards. The decisions and recommendations of the committee are informed by external expertise and recommendations, normally provided in the form of external panel reports and the outcomes of monitoring and review activities carried out by QQI. The PAEC met six times in 2023.

### Membership and attendance

Padraig Walsh (chair)	6/6
Órla Barry	5/6
Andrea Durnin	6/6
Mary Grennan	6/6
Barbara Kelly	5/6
Jim Murray	6/6
John O'Connor	6/6

### Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) considers QQI draft policy and makes recommendations to the QQI Board regarding the approval of these policies in line with the organisation's strategy. It also considers and may act on recommendations from the executive to determine standards of knowledge, skill and competence for education and training awards or to endorse subject guidelines concerning knowledge, skill and competence which are expected for higher education awards. The PSC met four times in 2023.

### Membership and attendance

Kevin McStravock (chair)	2/2
Achim Hopbach	3/4
Bryan Maguire	3/4
Hannah McGee	4/4
Jim Murray	4/4
Anne Naughton	2/2
Damien Owens	3/4
Alan Power	3/3
Cassy Taylor	4/4

### Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC) reviews and analyses the activities of the PAEC, providing advice and making recommendations on its decisions. It will also confirm or refer back decisions of the PAEC, as appropriate. The PAOC met twice in 2023.

### Membership and attendance

Sharon Feeney (chair)	1/1
Billy Bennett	1/2
Cróna Gallagher	1/1
Mark Kane	1/2
Mary Meaney	1/1
Brendan O'Dea	2/2
Seán Rowland	1/2
Maria Ward	1/1

### Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) makes decisions and recommendations about the approval of quality assurance procedures; the International Education Mark; delegated authority; and approves for publication the findings of quality reviews conducted by QQI. The ARC met four times in 2023.

### Membership and attendance

Sean Duignan (chair from 26 Sept. 2023)	2/2
Irene Sheridan (chair to 17 July 2023)	2/2
Fiona Farr	3/4
Laura Flynn	2/4
Carol Hanney	4/4
William Kelly	3/4
Clodagh McGivern	1/2
Anna Murphy	4/4
Ronan O'Loughlin	4/4
Bryan O'Mahony	1/2
Gerry O'Sullivan	3/4
Tony Pettit	2/4

## Human Resources and Organisation Committee

The Human Resources and Organisation Committee assists and advises the QQI Board in order to reinforce its own governance and oversight in the areas of HR and the CEO performance. The Human Resources and Organisation Committee met once during 2023.

### Membership and attendance

Irene Sheridan (Chair)	1/1
Sharon Feeney	1/1
Blake Hodkinson	1/1



# Corporate Matters

## Finance

In 2023, QQI received €12.007\*million from State Grant, fee income, EU funding and other sources.

For the same period, expenditure was €13.056\* million. Pay and pensions expenditure in 2023 amounted to € 6.433\*million (including FRS17 adjustments)\*.

## Board Member payments

Members of the QQI Board act entirely in a voluntary capacity and therefore no fees were paid to members of the board in 2023. Expenses are paid for accommodation, travel, and subsistence in line with rates set by the Department of Finance. Total board expenses in 2023 were €5,864\*.

## Remuneration and expenses of the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive received salary payments of €168,644\* in 2023. No performance-related pay was received during this period. The Chief Executive's pension entitlements do not extend beyond the standard entitlement in the model public sector defined benefit superannuation scheme. The Chief Executive incurred vouched expenses of €2,302\* in 2023.

\* These figures are extracted from the draft QQI Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023.

QQI's audited financial statements are published on the QQI website – [www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie).

# Risk Management

QQI continued to manage risk in line with the Risk Management Policy, revised in June 2022. The corporate risk register was revised and reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Executive Management Team (EMT). Local risk registers were introduced at directorate/divisional level. It was considered and approved by the Audit and Risk Committee and the QQI Board at regular intervals. Particular attention was given to the potential loss of corporate memory, sufficient financial resources, the introduction of the International Education Mark, cybersecurity, the transition to blended working and records management. It is noted that the pilot blended working policy was successfully implemented in 2023 and that this significantly reduced the likelihood and impact of the associated risk to organisational effectiveness.

## Principal Risks

At the February 2024 meeting, the Authority assessed the principal risks and their mitigations to QQI for 2023. These are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. QQI's principal risks and mitigations, 2023

Rank	Risk description and mitigations
1	<p><b>Risk of loss of corporate memory due to high levels of staff retirement within the next two years (2023/24).</b></p> <p>Mitigated by a more balanced management structure, roll-out of management development programmes, the use of a capability's framework for recruitment with the aim of achieving a balance of grades and skillsets, based on business needs and organisational priorities.</p>
2	<p><b>Risk of insufficient financial resources to deliver on objectives in Statement of Strategy due to unpredictable levels of income from services and potential reduction in core grant.</b></p> <p>Mitigated by budgetary controls, monthly reports and review of management accounts, proposed revised funding model and reserves retention policy for consideration by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and continued engagement with DFHERIS on fees for existing and future QQI services.</p>
3	<p><b>Risk that the ICT system is compromised due to a cybersecurity event.</b></p> <p>Mitigated by controls to ensure secure access to QQI resources and systems, external independent security centre, regular incident review and vulnerability scanning, robust regular backups, implementation of an action plan for cyber security resilience and work on disaster recovery.</p>
4	<p><b>Risk that an effective record management system is inconsistently implemented organisation wide due to a lack of adequate buy in and appropriate management support.</b></p> <p>Mitigated by a programme of work overseen by the Programme Management Office, initiation of projects on a records management policy, business processes, and classification system.</p>
5	<p><b>Risk that the transition to blended working will lead to diminished organisational effectiveness due logistical difficulties and inadequate facilities.</b></p> <p>Mitigated by staff surveys, completion of IT and office works to facilitate staff return and introduction of a pilot blended working policy.</p>

## Data protection

QQI is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. The Acts provide for the collection and use of data in a responsible way and provide against unwanted or harmful uses of the data. QQI maintains oversight of its level of compliance to ensure that we have adequate arrangements and infrastructure in place to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Acts.

## Protected Disclosures

Section 21 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires that every public body establish and maintain procedures for the making of protected disclosures by workers who are, or were, employed by the public body and for dealing with such disclosures.

## Statement of compliance with the Act

### QQI confirms that:

- it has established internal reporting channels and procedures in accordance with the Act.
- as a Prescribed Person, it has established external reporting channels and procedures in accordance with the Act.
- it has provided to the Minister information required under the Act in accordance with Section 22 (1) for 2023.

### Reports of Protected Disclosures 2023:

1. *No reports of Protected Disclosures were made to QQI by QQI employees.*
2. *Three reports of Protected Disclosures made to the Chief Executive of QQI as a Prescribed Person.*

Of these, one report was assessed and closed as it was found not to concern matters in respect of which the Prescribed Person is prescribed; one report was assessed, and matters found to be within QQI's competence were followed up and satisfactorily addressed using QQI's internal processes. This report was subsequently closed. The third report was underdoing assessment at the end of 2023.

## Complaints of service

During 2023, QQI received no complaints of service.

## Internal controls

QQI operates a system of internal control which is a process, effected by the QQI Board, Executive Management Team, and other personnel, designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of objectives in the following categories:

- Risks to fulfilling QQI's statutory obligations and achievement of objectives as outlined in the Statement of Strategy.
- Reliability of financial reporting.
- Compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- All financial transactions meet regularity and propriety standards as defined by the C&AG.

## The Control Environment

The control environment operated by QQI incorporates internal financial controls policies, processes and procedures, human resources management, the risk management framework and risk register process, ICT security and controls processes, the processes and procedures for the making and certification of awards and the overall management and direction of the organisation by the CEO and Directors. The Audit and Risk Committee continued to operate its oversight role within QQI in accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

There were no material breaches of internal controls in 2023.

## Fraud

No instances of fraud or suspected fraud were disclosed or discovered during 2023. Neither were any instances of fraud reported to HR, the Chief Executive, the Internal Auditor or the Audit and Risk Committee during the year.

## Synopsis

The system of governance, risk management and internal control in QQI is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve aims and objectives. The senior management within QQI is responsible for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework. The Audit and Risk Committee's monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of the internal and external auditors.

The committee engaged Deloitte to conduct an external independent annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal controls for 2023 as required by the Code of Practice. The report is scheduled for presentation to the Audit and Risk Committee for consideration and approval at the January meeting, 2024 and recommended to the QQI Board for consideration at its February 2024 meeting.

## Energy efficiency and environmental policy statements

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 gives legal underpinning to climate action by the public sector. It requires all public bodies to perform their functions in a manner consistent with national climate ambitions. QQI has adopted the Public Sector Climate Action Plan 2021 and put in place a Climate Action Roadmap in which is set out QQI's targets to:

- Reduce GHG emissions by 51% in 2030.
- Increase the improvement in energy efficiency to 50% by 2030.

### Progress to date:

1. Became a paperless office.
2. Reduced office space by relinquishing leases.
3. Minimised energy usage by managing the use of our office spaces (in the blended working environment) so that unoccupied spaces are not lit or heated.
4. Replaced all lighting with energy efficient LED systems, the estimated power saving per unit is 66%.

5. QQI supports the bike to work scheme and provides facilities for cyclists including shower facilities and secure areas to lock bicycles.
6. We support the TaxSaver scheme to incentivise our staff to use public transport.

QQI has plans to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel heating by moving from gas to more energy efficient alternatives in the short term.

## Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

All public bodies in Ireland have a responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.

QQI is committed to establishing and maintaining a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion to support its work in enhancing and regulating quality in tertiary education and training. As a regulatory body, we play a critical role in fostering an equitable and inclusive society where diversity is recognised, appreciated, and harnessed for the collective good.

In 2023, QQI developed and published its first [equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#). A cross-organisational working group will develop an implementation plan in 2024 to assess and address equality and human rights issues relevant to QQI's purpose and function.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1

### Validation Decisions Made during 2023, including applications received prior to 2023

Sector	Decision Type	Outcome	Programmes
HET	New Validation	Validated	81
		Refused Validation	4
	Revalidation	Validated	29
	Extension/Modification	Validated	49
	Total - HET		<b>163</b>
FET	New Validation (Original)	Validated	85
	New (Shared)	Validated	247
	New Validation	Refused Validation	2
	Revalidation	Validated	12
	Extension/Modification	Validated	13
	Total - FET		<b>359</b>
<b>Overall Total</b>			<b>522</b>

## APPENDIX 2

### Apprenticeships

Sector	Decision Type	Outcome	Programmes
FET	Revalidation	Validated	12
	Extension/Modification	Validated	4

## APPENDIX 3

Validation Type	Provider	Programme
Revalidation	Cavan & Monaghan Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Original Equipment Manufacturing Engineering
Revalidation	City of Dublin Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Auctioneering and Property Services
Revalidation	Fast Track into Information Technology	Advanced Certificate in Computer Networking
Revalidation	Fast Track into Information Technology	Advanced Certificate in Computer Programming
Revalidation	Mayo Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Sales
Revalidation	Mayo Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board	Level 5 Certificate in Craft Butchery
Revalidation	Retail Ireland Skill net	Advanced Certificate in Retail Supervision
Revalidation	Solas	Advanced Certificate in Craft - Carpentry and Joinery
Revalidation	Solas	Advanced Certificate in Craft - Electrical
Revalidation	Solas	Advanced Certificate in Craft - Metal Fabrication
Revalidation	Solas	Advanced Certificate in Craft - Plumbing
Revalidation	Solas	Advanced Certificate in Craft - Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
Extension	Fast Track into Information Technology	Advanced Certificate in Cybersecurity
Extension	Galway & Roscommon Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Arboriculture
Extension	Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing
Extension	Mayo Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board	Advanced Certificate in Sales

# Glossary of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence	ELE	English Language Education
AQR	Annual Quality Report	EMT	Executive Management Team
ARC	Approvals and Reviews Committee	ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ATU	Atlantic Technological University	EQAF	European Quality Assurance Forum
ATP	Access, Transfer and Progression	EQF	European Qualifications Framework
C&AG	Comptroller and Auditor General	EQF AG	European Qualifications Framework-Advisory Group
CAO	Central Applications Office	EQF NCP	European Qualifications Framework-National Coordination Point
CAS	Common Awards System	ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
CCT	College of Computing Technology	ETBs	Education and Training Boards
CDETB	City of Dublin ETB	ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
CEAIE	China Education Association for International Exchange	ETINED	Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Learning	FE	Further Education
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages	FET	Further Education and Training
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	GAIN	Global Academic Integrity Network
CRADLE	Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning	GCD	Griffith College Dublin
CSO	Central Statistics Office	GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
DA	Delegated Authority	GenAI	Generative Artificial Intelligence
DABs	Designated Awarding Bodies	HCI	Human Capital Initiative
DCU	Dublin City University	HE	Higher Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science	HEA	Higher Education Authority
DBS	Dublin Business School	HEI	Higher Education Institute
		HET	Higher Education and Training



HR	Human Resources	PDA	Performance Delivery Agreement
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	PEL	Protection of Enrolled Learners
IEM	International Education Mark	PSC	Policy and Standards Committee
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors	PSRB	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
IQQF	Irish Quality and Qualifications Ireland	QA	Quality Assurance
IRQ	Irish Register of Qualifications	QDM	Quality Dialogue Meeting
ISSCoP	Irish Statistical System Code of Practice	QDR	Qualification Dataset Register
IUA	Irish University Association	QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
LABs	Listed Awarding Bodies	RCSI	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
NAIN	National Academic Integrity Network	SABG	Statutory Awarding Body Group
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre	SAQ	Self Assessment Questionnaire
NAO	National Apprenticeship Office	SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
NCI	National College of Ireland	SETU	South East Technological University
NEC	National Europass Centre	SOC	Security Operations Centre
NFDE	National Framework for Doctoral Education	SIEM	Security Information and Event Management
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications	TEQSA	The Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
NIDL	National Institute for Digital Learning	TUs	Technological Universities
NSTEP	National Student Engagement Programme	TUS	Technological University of the Shannon
NUI	National University of Ireland	UCC	University College Cork
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority	USI	Union of Students in Ireland
PAEC	Programme and Awards Executive Committee		
PAOC	Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee		







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