Administrative expectations of providers offering programmes leading to QQI awards

Background

Introduction

Providers approved to offer programmes leading to QQI awards have established quality assurance procedures under the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012](#). These procedures include arrangements relating to academic governance and the systematic enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment. The effective implementation of these procedures involves ongoing administrative and technical interactions with QQI as an awarding body.

The administrative capacity expected of providers is reflected in policies, criteria and procedures that concretise the statutory obligations of QQI and providers. QQI works to ensure that the administrative burden of quality assurance on providers remains at a level that is sufficient but proportionate to ensure the discharge of our statutory functions and the protection of learners' interests.

Engagement by providers with QQI

QQI has established user-facing IT platforms to support the administration of our awarding functions: for example, QHub for processing validation applications and QBS for processing requests for certification. QQI issues guidelines, guidance, instructional material and template documents to support provider engagement with QQI awards services. QQI periodically arranges webinars to support providers implementing QQI policy and procedures. QQI operates an online query management service (CRM) to facilitate an efficient and responsive provider support service.

While most providers demonstrate the capacity to engage effectively with QQI awards services, QQI is experiencing a significant increase in the number of basic queries including requests for information and advice, assistance with administrative errors, and technical support. In many cases, these demands could and should be managed through the provider's internal quality assurance procedures without the need to engage directly with QQI.

High volumes of avoidable administrative interactions between providers and QQI can lead to delays in service delivery and can negatively impact learners' access to awards in a timely fashion. The nature of some of the queries received by QQI may also give rise to concerns with regard to a provider's capacity to effectively implement their quality assurance systems. Such concerns may in turn be considered by QQI when reflecting upon a provider's capacity to be devolved responsibility for evaluation (as part of the validation process) or, in future, to be delegated authority to make awards.

QQI continues to invest in its technical and human resources to provide appropriate levels of provider support for the effective and efficient delivery of its regulatory functions. It is important that providers of programmes leading to QQI awards understand and effectively manage all

administrative requirements commensurate with their status as relevant providers under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012.

This communiqué sets out the general and specific expectations for providers in terms of their administrative relationship with QQI. Key dates for programme validation and certification in 2025 are included in Annex I and Annex II.

General administrative expectations

Providers are expected to:

- ➢ ensure that:
  - o the quality assurance procedures established by the provider apply equally to all provision, including where validated programmes are offered on behalf of the provider. This also applies to the administration of all programmes.
  - o authorised centres have the skills, competence, expertise, technical capacity and other resources to ensure the effective administration of programmes and award-related actions. Standard operating procedures (including handover procedures) must be established, appropriate, and reviewed and revised from time to time, and as necessary.
- ➢ engage, develop and maintain appropriate in-house analytical capacity to interpret and use administrative data shared by QQI, including statistical data on programme and award activity.
- ➢ document structures, policies and procedures to ensure that conflicts of interest are identified and managed, and to ensure that certification activities are undertaken impartially.
- ➢ monitor and report all programme and award-related administration activity and take all reasonable steps to prevent instances of poor administration.
- ➢ report immediately to QQI any administrative activity that presents a real or potential threat to the delivery of a validated programme or the making of an award by QQI.
- ➢ adhere to PAEC submission dates.
- ➢ read all guidance and policy documents before queries are issued through CRM.
- ➢ advise QQI in a timely manner of any substantial change to the provider's company officers and directors, its legal entity, address and contact details and any changes in staff roles. This includes changes to a centre postal address, or the contact for certification (including mobile number and email address).

Specific administrative expectations

These administrative expectations apply differently to QQI awarding functions. The following sections outline the indicative administrative activity to be undertaken by providers.

Validation

QQI receives a large volume of applications for programme validation. Each application received is entered into a queue and processed based on its position in that queue. QQI endeavours to maintain a timeline of 25 weeks from formal acceptance of each application to determination, but this may vary under certain circumstances, including where applications are submitted with gaps and errors, and depending on panel members' availability, the panel's recommendations, and the like. Processing entails several steps, including:

- initial screening (document check) and invoicing (payment is required before any further steps occur).
- screening by the executive and the sharing of screening feedback (this step may occur several times, depending on the quality of the application submitted).
- establishment of an independent expert evaluation panel.
- panel review of documentation (minimum of 2 weeks).
- coordination and management of the site visit.
- drafting and finalisation of the independent evaluation report by the panel (including incorporation of any amendments for factual accuracy).
- consideration of the provider response (including all amended programme documentation) by the panel.
- determination of the application by QQI's Programmes and Awards Executive Committee.

In addition to carrying out the normal academic requirements to fulfil their statutory quality assurance arrangements (see above), the following administrative processes are expected to be managed at provider level and with minimal support from QQI:

- ➢ Queries related to the routine use and access of the QHub submission platform.
- ➢ Queries regarding the submission of proposed programmes for validation.
- ➢ Applications for differential validation of existing (i.e. previously validated) programmes.
- ➢ With regard to **applications for new programme** or **differential validations**, it is expected that:
  - o the correct template documents are used as a basis for the application and that all applicable fields of the template(s) have been completed in full.
  - o sufficient information has been provided about the proposed programme, its governance, management and delivery, to support evaluation and a recommendation to QQI by an expert panel.
  - o all submitted documentation has been proofread and is free from typographical and factual errors.
  - o a list of all submitted documentation is provided and the documents themselves are clearly cross-referenced with each other to ensure ease of screening by QQI staff, and ease of review by panel members.

- where individuals are suggested by a provider as prospective panel members, the provider has assured itself that, to the best of its knowledge, there are no conflicts of interest with regard to their participation in the process.

Certification

In addition to carrying out all the normal academic requirements to fulfil their statutory quality assurance arrangements, the following administrative processes are expected to be managed at provider level when submitting learners for certification:

- ➢ Queries regarding submission of certification results.
- ➢ Ensuring the accuracy of:
  - o learners' personal data before submission through QBS, especially in relation to existing QQI Awards holders who have already been entered in QBS (e.g. spelling, change of surname). Personal data should be captured by centres during learners' enrolment process and/or by providers or centres ahead of the submission of learners' results.
  - o fee status (i.e. 'fee exempt', 'fee payable') before submission of learners for certification.
  - o target award and related component(s) when creating a learner group or re-using a learner group. If necessary, staff should refer to programme validation documentation to ensure the data are correct.
- ➢ Ensuring that:
  - o requests for Access IDs for relevant international students are supplied by the provider at the time of those students' registration.
  - o staff at centre level are fully aware of the CAO offer rounds and the impact on certification for relevant Level 5 and Level 6 QQI Major Awards holders.
  - o each centre's postal address is correct to ensure certificates can be successfully delivered.
  - o each centre's return address is included when sending certificates to learners to prevent return of non-delivered certificates to QQI due to learners' change of address.
  - o each centre is adequately staffed when the certificates are issued as per the key certification dates schedule. Remote working arrangements should be adjusted if necessary, so that certificates can be physically received by centres. Alternatively, centres must contact QQI via CRM to make alternative arrangements ahead of the certification deadline.
  - o a centre number is indicated on CRM queries or that centre staff are aware of their centre's number when calling QQI.
  - o centre staff dealing with certification prioritise contact via CRM to deal with administrative issues in relation to certification.
  - o staff at centre level have read the information and adhere to instructions and deadlines listed on QBS Notice Board.
  - o centre staff understand the use of and/or restrictions around retired awards, exemptions and RPL.

Monitoring and Reporting by QQI

As part of its statutory obligation to monitor the delivery of validated programmes and associated requests for certification, QQI will pay attention to the quality of administration by providers. Evidence of significant administrative failures or of persistent shortcomings in a provider's capacity to effectively administer validated programmes, including requests for certification, may lead to an escalation of regulatory actions, up to and including focused reviews of quality assurance under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012.

Communication and Engagement by QQI

To support efficiency in its work, including the provision of support and advice to providers and prospective providers, QQI's Awards Directorate intends taking a proactive approach to communication with stakeholders. This will entail the holding of periodic briefing sessions on specific topics as well as general Q&A sessions. The Awards Directorate will hold meetings with individual organisations where it deems that the circumstances of the specific case require this.

Annex I

Key PAEC dates

The PAEC meeting dates and *submission (for revalidation applications/extension requests etc)/finalising (for new validations processes) deadlines* for 2025 are as follows:

Provider submission/finalisation deadlines	PAEC meeting dates 2025
Thursday 16 January 2025	Thursday 13 February 2025
Thursday 13 March 2025	Thursday 10 April 2025
Thursday 8 May 2025	Thursday 05 June 2025
Thursday 19 June 2025	Thursday 17 July 2025
Thursday 28 August 2025	Thursday 25 September 2025
Thursday 30 October 2025	Thursday 27 November 2025

Annex II

Key certification dates 2025

Certification period	Submission deadline	Results	Certificates issued
February	12 February	16 February	10 March
April	12 April	16 April	12 May
June	12 June	16 June	28 July
August	12 August	16 August	15 September
October	12 October	16 October	10 November
December	12 December	16 December	19 January (2026)