

SUBMISSION FROM QUALITY AND QUALIFICATIONS IRELAND ON THE STRATEGY STATEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS 2019-2021

4 JANUARY 2019



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Adding Value to Qualifications



Introduction

QQI welcomes the invitation (December 2018) to submit its views on the development of the new Strategy Statement of the Department. We support the intention that this ‘will build on progress to-date, allow for the implementation of recently introduced reforms and continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of the education system for all learners’. The objectives of those reforms are articulated in the Minister’s Brief, October 2018:

- to provide all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy,
- to facilitate clear and simple pathways for learners within and across the system that support lifelong learning,
- to improve the quality of the education experience and accountability for educational outcomes,
- to support diversity and inclusion, and to develop an infrastructure that supports a modern, flexible education and training system.¹

QQI’s strategic vision is aligned with these objectives and related action plans and strategies. Our vision is of *‘high quality education and training opportunities, enabling learners to fulfil their potential through achieving qualifications that are widely valued nationally and internationally’*.² Our unique position in spanning all post-secondary education and training, public and private, means that we are centrally involved in many of the reforms and developments in the system. We suggest that the Department’s new strategy statement includes a focus on four themes which we consider central to quality and qualifications.

Such is the pace and scale of reform that it we consider it timely for the Department to consider a national convention on education, echoing the process that led to the ground breaking 1995 White Paper on Education, Charting our Future. This provided a coherent foundation underpinning the structures, institutions and reforms that we see today.

¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Ministers-Brief-/ministers-brief-2018.pdf>

² <https://www.qqi.ie/News/PublishingImages/Pages/QQI’s-Statement-of-Strategy-2019-2021---Adding-Value-to-Qualifications/QQI%27s%20Statement%20of%20Strategy%202019-2021.pdf>



Integration of policy, funding and legislation for all post-secondary education and training

The post-secondary or tertiary landscape has changed significantly in recent years and will continue to do so. An array of strategies, reforms and policy interventions from the internationalisation of education, the national skills strategy, digitisation, new apprenticeships and the future of work as well as the next further education and training strategy suggest that the Department's strategy 2019-2021 should aim to integrate policies, funding and legislation in the post secondary sector in particular. This could better support learners in navigating, accessing, transitioning and progressing through education and training.

Private for-profit and not-for profit providers of education and training can access nationally recognised qualifications via QQI. It is anticipated that amending legislation will enable private awarding/qualifications bodies (such as UK and sectoral awarding bodies) to access the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)³. SOLAS and the HEA also provide some funding to private providers. It is envisaged that the updated HEA legislation will provide for a registration model for higher education institutions.

However, there remains an open policy question of whether the public interest is served by widening and deepening the State's regulatory reach into the for-profit education and training sector (albeit on a voluntary basis) and, indeed the for-profit activities of the public system.

A commitment in the Department's strategy to developing a policy position on the contribution of the private sector to education and training and its regulation, informed by contributions from the relevant stakeholders, would be helpful. This could for instance, establish parameters for QQI's work and for its collaboration with other agencies, in particular as the amending legislation (above) envisaged that QQI will examine the corporate fitness, *bone fides* and financial capacity of private providers and private awarding bodies. A clear policy position could also address the desired mix of (or competition between) public awarding bodies and non-national, sectoral and professional awarding bodies. This would inform QQI's focus on awards/qualifications and direct

³ The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018, August 2018, will amend the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, which established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/95/>)



efforts to build capacity to develop and offer awards/qualifications by appropriate bodies in the system.

Research and data infrastructure to support a modern, flexible education and training system

Sustained leadership on the part of the Department in directing investment in and the coordination of research and data on the education and training system across institutions, agencies, and government departments would be welcome. For example, rolling out a single unique identifier, in line with data protection, across the education and training system, such as the PPSN, would support lifelong learning, help track learner progression and graduate outcomes and provide a reliable evidence base for policy.

The rapidly changing world of work, skills needs, technological development, demographic change, sustainable development and the specific challenges to support equality, equity and wellbeing; skills development, lifelong learning, increased stakeholder involvement and system capacity in all sectors of education and training highlights the need for the collection, analysis, reporting, dissemination and use of high quality data and research. This all the more necessary to support learner transitions across sectors and lifelong learning

Sustained strategic investment in European and international cooperation in education and training

Our success in the internationalisation of education and training, in addressing common challenges and in learning from others will require sustained and strategic investment in international cooperation on the part of the Department and its agencies.

The potential withdrawal of the UK from EU co-operation will create additional challenges on Ireland to promote our interests in education and training. The transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications between the UK and Ireland has been strengthened by our collective participation in EU initiatives such as the European Qualifications



Framework(EQF)⁴, credit systems for VET⁵ the recognition of professional qualifications⁶ the automatic recognition of upper secondary and higher education qualifications⁷ and European level coordination of quality assurance arrangements in VET⁸. Wider European cooperation in quality assurance in Higher Education⁹ and credit system for Higher Education and Training¹⁰ and joint initiatives such as the ENIC-NARIC network¹¹, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention¹² for qualifications in the European higher education region, have strengthened trust and mutual understanding among participating countries, including Ireland and the UK. Various Brexit scenarios present the possibility of a partial or complete UK withdrawal from EU cooperation in the field of education and training.

QQI is committed to continued cooperation with its UK counterparts such as in the UK and Ireland Qualifications Frameworks and Policy Group and with the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education. Operating as NARIC Ireland, QQI has intensified its engagement with its UK counterpart. The UK and Ireland maintain and publish advice on the alignment of academic and vocational qualifications¹³. In line with Ireland's internationalisation strategy, QQI is developing the International Education Mark and has concluded memoranda of understanding with counterparts in China, Malaysia, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

The Department's strategy could include a commitment to update the referencing of the NFAQ to the EQF, delegated to QQI. The Department might also consider, with the relevant agencies, how best to influence and align with the successor to [Education and training 2020](#), the EU framework for cooperation in education and training.

⁴ EU Council Recommendation (2017) on European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/en.pdf>

⁵ Council Recommendation (2009) on European Credit System for VET (ECVET)

⁶ Directive 2005/36/EC U

⁷ EU Council Recommendation on mutual automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary level qualifications, November 2018.

⁸ The EQAVET network promotes collaboration and enhancement of QA in VET

⁹ The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is an umbrella body for QA agencies in Europe

¹⁰ The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) supports cross border mobility in higher education

¹¹ A joint European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO initiative to support ENIC-NARIC networks to implement their respective mandates

¹² Developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, ratified by Ireland and UK the Convention supports mobility and recognition of qualifications within the European region.

¹³ Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries (2017)

<https://www.qqi.ie/Documents/Qualifications%20can%20cross%20boundaries%20June%202017.pdf>