

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland (QQAI)

an amalgamated agency responsible for overseeing changes in the
qualifications and quality assurance of Irish further and higher education



Higher Education and
Training Awards Council
Comhairle na nDámhachtainí
Ardoideachais agus Oiliúna



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Some background on Irish education

- Ireland - Population of 4.5 million
- High HE participation (60% of school-leaving cohort)
- >90% attend public higher education institutions
 - 7 public universities
 - 14 public institutes of technology
 - Several teacher training colleges
 - Some private HE providers

Some background on Irish higher education

- 'University' is a protected title in Ireland
- Irish universities enjoy significant academic autonomy (ranked 1st in recent EUA academic autonomy table)
- Open market approach
 - no licensing system for HEIs
 - Significant presence of UK awarding bodies

Government Announcement

October 2008

- Amalgamation of four bodies responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in further (vocational) and higher education
- Part of a campaign to merge, abolish or re-integrate state agencies

Motivation for amalgamation

- General public/media mistrust in relation to self-regulation or (perceived) light regulation
- To save money
- Outcomes of external reviews of agencies
- Sub-optimal operation and duplication of tasks of small agencies



National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)

- Established 2001
- Responsible for the **10 level** National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) – established 2003
- NFQ covers
 - general (school) education – **levels 3-5**
 - Further (vocational) education – **levels 1-6**
 - higher and professional education – **levels 6-10**



Further Education and Training Awards Council

- Established 2001
- Responsible for Further (vocational) Education and Training
- Agrees QA procedures with providers (>1000)
 - Vocational public post-secondary
 - Community and voluntary sector
 - Public and private training providers
- Develops standards
- Validates programmes (through a common awards system - CAS)
- Makes awards (certification)



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Higher Education and Training Awards Council

- Established 2001
- Responsible for Higher (non-university) Education and Training
- Agrees QA procedures with providers (>50)
 - 13 Public Institutes of Technology
 - Private HE providers
 - Private training entities
- Develops standards
- Delegates authority to providers to make awards
- Makes awards (certification)



Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)

- Established 2002 by the 7 universities
- Incorporated in 2006
- Funded by HEA (funding body) and 7 public universities
- Responsible for periodic (5 yearly) audits of universities
- Mix of mission-based and standards (ESG) based evaluations
- IRIU review cycle 2009-2012 (5 of 7 universities evaluated)

Chronology of events

- 2001 – FETAC, HETAC and NQAI established
- 2003 – Launch of National Framework of Qualifications
- 2004 – OECD Review of Higher Education
- 2006 – Review of HETAC for ENQA membership
- 2007 – Review of NQAI
- 2007 – Review of FETAC
- 2008 – Review of IUQB
- 2008 – Announcement of merger
- 2010 – CEO of QQAI appointed
- 2011 – National Strategy for Higher Education published
- 2011 – QQAI legislation published

Parallel changes in further education landscape

- Abolition of State training agency (FAS)
- Establishment of further education and training funding body (SOLAS)
- Amalgamation of 33 regional Vocational Education Committees into 16 Education and Training Boards

Parallel changes in higher education landscape

- Implementation of recommendations in 2011 National Strategy for Higher Education
 - Development of regional clusters of HEIs
 - Mergers of Institutes of Technology
 - Establishment of Technological Universities
 - ‘Strategic Dialogue’ with HEA on ‘system’ priorities

QQAI legislation

what will it mean for institutions?

- Legislation largely merges current legislative responsibility of 4 existing bodies
- Largely preserves university autonomy on curriculum and awarding powers
- No prescription of QA procedures – builds on experience to date (post 1995)
- Introduction of QQAI International Education Mark for providers

Challenges for QQAI

- Executive (8 members) Board rather than representative (14-18 member) Boards
 - Stakeholders may feel they have lost their voice at the table
- Possible confusion of roles of HEA (funding body) and QQAI re performance and quality
- Providing a service with 20% less staff by end 2014 compared to end 2010

Mitigating risks for QQAI

- Extension of system of IUQB annual dialogue visits to other QQAI HE providers ('no surprises')
 - Development of trust-based relationships
 - Risk-based compliance
- Further delegation of awarding authority to institutions based on track record and capacity
 - Recognition that 'primary responsibility' for quality lies with provider (ESG principle)
 - Fitness for purpose model of QA