

The guidelines are applicable to designated awarding bodies as autonomous awarding bodies, responsible for their own programmes of education and training, research and related services and for any programmes offered by linked providers leading to awards made by the designated awarding body. Designated awarding bodies are required to have regard to these quality assurance guidelines when establishing, renewing and reviewing their quality assurance procedures and when approving and reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of their linked providers.

### 5.1 **Quality assurance of linked providers**

Where a designated awarding body makes an award in respect of a programme in a linked provider, it must include in its own QA procedures, procedures to **approve, monitor** and **review** the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures by each of its linked providers.

Such procedures will cover:

- Approval of the quality assurance procedures of linked providers whose programme(s) leads to an award of the designated awarding body, having regard to QQI QA guidelines as set out below.
- Monitoring of programmes leading to awards of the designated awarding body.
- Arrangements to ensure that enrolled learners can complete programmes leading to similar awards in the event that the initial provider cease to offer the programme(s) for whatever reason, including cessation of the awarding function by the awarding body. These requirements are for the protection of enrolled learners on linked provider programmes leading to awards of the designated awarding body. Those linked providers wishing to seek the International Education Mark in future will be required to have arrangements in place for the protection of enrolled learners that accord with the conditions set out in Section 65 of the 2012 Act.
- Review by the designated awarding body of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established and implemented by the linked provider under Section 37 of the 2012 Act. The review of a linked provider shall be carried out by the designated awarding body in accordance with the procedures for cyclical review established by QQI. Procedures should include the provision to send QQI a copy of the report of the review.
- The withdrawal by the designated awarding body of approval of a linked provider's quality assurance procedures under Section 39 of the 2012 Act. This will include procedures to forward notice of any such withdrawal to QQI.

- The appointment of an independent appeals person for the purposes of hearing an appeal under Section 39 of the 2012 Act.
- The hearing of an appeal under Section 39 of the 2012 Act.

Designated awarding bodies may choose to adopt the following guidelines for their linked providers, QQI *Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines, Statutory QA Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis, April 2016*.

## 5.2 Approving the quality assurance procedures of linked providers

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QQI in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities to provide QA guidelines directly to the linked providers, has directed linked providers to have regard to the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

When considering the QA procedures of linked providers, designated awarding bodies will formally ensure that the linked provider has had due regard to the following:

### **QQI quality assurance guidelines as follows:**

- *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*
- *Sector-specific Guidelines for Independent and Private Providers (that seek QA approval from QQI or a designated awarding body on a voluntary basis)* as appropriate. These guidelines indicate the broad due diligence and risk assessment that must be carried out by the awarding body approving a provider's QA procedures. They focus on the capacity of the linked provider to adequately deliver programmes leading to awards in the NFQ; compliance with legal requirements, provider resources and provider governance
- Any other topic-specific QA guidelines, as appropriate

### **Designated Awarding Body specific requirements such as:**

- Policies, procedures and guidelines of the relevant designated awarding body
- Directions on the form and manner of the publication of quality assurance procedures approved by the Designated Awarding Body (Section 33 (3)) of the 2012 Act

Designated awarding bodies should apply due diligence and be aware of any reputational risk to themselves and the sector and/or national qualifications system associated with any prospective linked providers and also during ongoing monitoring and review of established linked providers.

*The following is a summary of indicative areas that designated awarding bodies should consider when determining whether or not to make awards in respect of a programme(s) offered by a prospective linked provider or to continue making awards in respect of a programme(s) offered by an established linked provider:*

### **1) Legal, reputation and compliance requirements**

- Is the provider a legal entity, with education and training as a principal function?  
~ Is the legal entity a clearly identified legal person, having rights and responsibilities under law?

*Has the provider*

- Clearly specified its dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries?
- Has the provider declared any third-party relationships and partnerships?
- Does the provider comply with applicable regulations and legislation in all jurisdictions in which it operates?
- Is the provider in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any jurisdictions in which it operates (or in which its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrolls learners, or in which it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators?

### **2) Resource, governance and structural requirements**

- Is the provider stable and in good financial standing?
- Does the provider have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?
- Does the provider have fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision-making structures?
- Does the provider have arrangements for providing required information to the designated awarding body?
- Does the provider have capacity to deliver education and training as demonstrated through experience and track record in providing education and training programmes?
- Does the provider have sufficient resources, as well as corporate, structural and internal quality assurance systems in place, to sustainably provide education and training programmes submitted for programme approval to the designated awarding body?

### **3) Programme development and provision requirements**

- Has the provider demonstrated its ability to design, develop, provide and review programmes as appropriate and comply with the standard conditions for programme approval specified by the designated awarding body?
- Does the provider have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?
- Does the provider have fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources?
- Does the provider have structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learner achievement?
- Does the provider have arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners?

### **4) Significant changes to requirements**

Has the provider notified the designated awarding body of any significant changes to the requirements set out in 1) to 3) above following implementation.

Designated awarding body procedures set out under Section 33 (2) of the 2012 Act, will have regard to the fact that it may:

- Approve the proposed procedures of a linked provider;
- Refuse to approve the proposed procedures but make recommendations; or
- Refuse to approve the procedures.