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QQI Statement of Strategy 2025-27

Looking after learner interests



Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland



Foreword (by Chairperson and Chief Executive)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is pleased to present its 5th Statement of Strategy, which outlines the priorities that will guide our work from 2025 to 2027.

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) marked its 20th anniversary last year. While it is one of the longest-established and most deeply integrated qualifications frameworks globally, the NFQ has remained largely unchanged since its inception in 2003, despite the Irish education and training landscape evolving considerably. One of our key priorities during this strategic period is to take steps to future-proof the NFQ, ensuring it remains a dynamic but authoritative source for quality-assured tertiary qualifications.

Throughout the period covered by this strategy, QQI will award the TrustEd Ireland quality mark to higher education and English language education providers. This mark will guarantee that international learners coming to Ireland benefit from a high-quality educational experience.

QQI is committed to delivering trusted regulation, guidance, advice, and services that are appropriate to the needs of Ireland's diverse learner and provider landscape. Over the next three years, we will continue to share our insights, research, and analysis through our publications, our website, and both virtual and in-person events.

As education and training play an essential role in a globally connected world, we recognise the value of mutual learning and collaboration with our European and international partners. We will continue to lead national and international networks in addressing the growing threats to academic integrity, while also influencing best practices in quality assurance and qualifications through the development of stronger strategic relationships with our partner agencies.

Throughout the course of this strategy, QQI is dedicated to ensuring that we remain a resilient, inclusive and agile organisation, delivering responsive, transparent, and effective services to all our stakeholders.

Finally, QQI is fully aligned with the ambition outlined in the Statement of Strategy from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Together, we aim to enable everyone in society to realise their potential, cultivating the talents, skills, and knowledge necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world, while building a prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant society through the development of our tertiary education, training, and research systems.

Professor Irene Sheridan
Chair

Dr Pdraig Walsh
Chief Executive

Our Vision

We are committed to a vision of Ireland that delivers a flexible, responsive and quality assured tertiary education system where learners can have confidence that their learning experience will be of a high quality and their qualifications and learning will be valued nationally and internationally.

Our Mission

We promote public confidence and trust in the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's tertiary education system through:

- protecting the integrity of the National Framework of Qualifications,
- providing authoritative and comprehensive information about qualifications and learning opportunities;
- delivering trusted regulation and guidance,
- enhancing the quality of providers and their programmes and,
- influencing system change with insights and analyses.



Our Values

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

We are an **independent** public body, working within the broad framework of Government policy. We exercise our regulatory authority in a transparent, fair, impartial and objective manner.

We value our **shared responsibility** with others to ensure confidence in and continuous improvement of the quality of education and training. In partnership with others, we pursue our priorities and actions in a **consultative, collaborative** and **inclusive** manner.

We embrace and engender **trust** and **integrity** in our decision-making and in our policies, procedures and in our regulation. Our approaches are evidence-based and informed by good national and international practice.

Learning and innovation are at the heart of what we do and how we design our business systems and processes. We grow our expertise and knowledge and learn from our national and international partners to influence, guide, advise and regulate in an authoritative and responsive manner.

We value **research, insight, and analysis** to achieve our priorities and actions with positive and measurable impact.

Who we are and what we do

The National Framework of Qualifications and our qualifications system

- We promote, maintain, develop and implement the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a system of qualifications based on levels of learning achieved
 - We promote the Irish Register of Qualifications as a comprehensive database of all qualifications included in the NFQ
 - We recognise awarding bodies and include their qualifications in the NFQ
 - We monitor providers to ensure they offer learners access, transfer and progression opportunities and recognise learners prior learning achievements
 - We advise on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and Irish qualifications abroad
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Quality Assurance of Education and Training

- We issue statutory guidelines to inform providers' quality assurance procedures
 - We approve, monitor and review providers' quality assurance procedures
 - We promote awareness and maintenance of academic integrity
 - We award the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark to higher education and English language education providers who comply with a statutory Code of Practice
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QQI Awards

- We set standards for QQI Awards (qualifications)
 - We conduct due diligence on private providers to assess their fitness to offer QQI Awards or to hold the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark
 - We validate programmes of education and training leading to QQI Awards
 - We award qualifications and issue QQI Award certificates for learners
 - We administer a learner protection fund for the benefit of learners enrolled in private tertiary education providers who offer QQI Awards and for English language education providers who hold the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark
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Engagement, Insights and Knowledge Sharing

- We consult with national and international stakeholders on policy development and to inform new initiatives
 - We conduct research and analysis and report on quality and qualifications in the tertiary education system
 - We consult with learner groups and learner representatives and involve them in our core functions
 - We develop enhancement initiatives and host events to learn from and share good practice with our stakeholders
 - We partner with national and international stakeholders to support and lead system improvement which benefits learners across the tertiary education system
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Introduction and Context

QQI operates in a complex environment, working with and influenced by a wide range of institutions and stakeholders. As a statutory body, our core functions are set out in law, but our strategic priorities and deployment of resources are determined every three years in our statement of strategy, considering environmental conditions. This is QQI's fifth statement of strategy and it articulates our priorities for the period 2025-2027. This section highlights the environmental factors that have influenced its development.

A mature and settled landscape...

The Irish economy has experienced the disruptions of a global pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis and conflicts in the European neighbourhood. In the face of these challenges, it has displayed considerable resilience with the Exchequer in budget surplus and employment continuing to increase. Medium term forecasts are that the economy and employment will continue to grow.

The policy environment for tertiary education has evolved further as the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science established by Government in 2020 has brought sustained attention to the sector. Two major pieces of legislation, the Higher Education Authority Act (2022) and the Research and Innovation Act (2024) have overhauled and modernised the funding and regulatory structures for education and research. Furthermore, the development by the Department of a policy for a more unified tertiary education system has encouraged the sectors to work more closely together as part of a more joined-up system for the benefit of learners.

The tertiary education landscape has seen several changes in recent years. The long-term agenda set by the Hunt report for the higher education sector (2011-2030) has come closer to realisation with the establishment of five technological universities, each of which has engaged productively with QQI. The process of statutory re-engagement by QQI was completed in 2024 by the providers offering programmes leading to QQI awards. This process has seen consolidation in the number of active providers, currently standing at just over two hundred, over thirty of which offer higher education. The number of learners receiving QQI awards has risen steadily since 2020, with the numbers of FET awards made by QQI having almost returned to pre-pandemic levels.

By the beginning of this statement of strategy, QQI will have carried out external quality reviews of all public tertiary education providers. This offers an opportunity for QQI and the education sector to collectively reflect on our approach to quality assurance to ensure that future evaluation processes remain purposeful and add value.

... within an uncertain environment

Tertiary education through its missions of teaching, research, and supporting the development of individuals, communities and society, has a role in building the human, knowledge, and social capital to respond to current and emerging global changes which present both opportunities and challenges. These changes will require effective responses by QQI in collaboration with its partners and stakeholders, national and international.

The learner population and locus and delivery of learning continues to diversify across tertiary education. Quality assurance, learning, assessment, validation and certification systems must continue to respond to this diversity. Some learners are still impacted by the effects of the pandemic on their academic and broader student experience. Domestic and international learners face additional challenges regarding the cost of living and availability of affordable living accommodation which can impact on the quality of their learning experience and their access to and engagement with tertiary education communities.

The growing power of artificial intelligence, particularly visible in the dramatic uptake of generative artificial intelligence in recent years, poses challenges and opportunities for society in general and education in particular. These innovative technologies will have yet to be realised impacts, positive and negative, on labour markets and economies by displacing certain human activities and changing the nature of some jobs and careers. While these technologies can raise productivity and generate wealth, they can also potentially disrupt public communications, media and democratic discourse. They can pose threats to the privacy of individuals and to academic integrity, both for assessment of learning and the production of research output. Widespread availability of artificial intelligence as a learning support may also diffuse learning opportunities away from tertiary education providers thus undermining their business models and certification functions.

These technological disruptions have provoked political and legal responses, notably through the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (2024) and *AI – Here for Good – National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland*, that will be implemented over the period of this statement of strategy. The effectiveness of these responses, which include actions in education and training, data sharing and governance, remains to be seen and will inform responses at national, QQI and provider levels.

The climate emergency and the related challenges of transition to a carbon neutral economy, while mitigating the effects of climate change on society and the environment, is still the pre-eminent challenge of our era for every sector of society. In the educational sphere, providers not only have to adapt their own operations to cut down on emissions as in other industries, but also must continue to anticipate the skills needs and develop programmes to underpin transition and use their research and innovation capacity to develop our understanding of climate and biodiversity problems and address them.

The future of the globalisation that has underpinned recent decades of growth of world trade and cultural exchange is under threat in a variety of ways. A former optimism that open trade would lead to more open and democratic societies is belied by the rise of authoritarian rule, increased economic protectionism and threats to the rule of law. Even traditionally open societies have seen a decline in societal trust and growth in partisan divisions. Concern about migration has become a flashpoint for political divisions and international student mobility is sometimes caught up in the arguments and curtailed by political responses. The autonomy of educational providers and the academic freedom of students and teachers can be threatened by these developments which pose challenges to the quality of the student learning experience.

Conclusion

As the body responsible for promoting, maintaining, developing, and implementing the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), QQI interacts with all bodies responsible for making awards in the NFQ - in the schools, and public and private further education and training, higher education and English language education sectors.

The period covered within this statement of strategy will see QQI take on new responsibilities for quality assuring English language education providers and new listed awarding bodies including admitting the latter's qualifications into the NFQ. This enlargement of available qualifications will contribute to the 'responsive and diversified supply of skills' outlined by the OECD in its recent *Skills Strategy Ireland* report. The new *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark will support Ireland's ambition outlined in *Global Citizens 2030 – Ireland's Talent and Innovation Strategy* to be a first-choice destination for international learners by ensuring the quality of their educational experience.

Since its establishment in 2012, QQI has collaborated with our stakeholders to strengthen and enhance quality assurance capacity across the tertiary sector. QQI has seen considerable progress on providers' commitment to developing the quality assurance and governance systems which are critical to the integrity of the qualifications they offer.

The effective use of online learning and ensuring integrity in online assessment represent challenges, particularly with the increasing development and availability of generative artificial intelligence platforms.

Finally, there is the ambition outlined in the Department's *Statement of Strategy 2023-25* to enable everyone across society to meet their potential and develop the talents, skills and knowledge required to meet the challenges of a changing

world by developing our tertiary education, training and research systems to create a prosperous, sustainable and vibrant society. This objective presents an opportunity for QQI, given its remit spanning the entire tertiary system, to make a significant contribution.

Our priorities, actions and indicators

Over the course of this strategy, QQI will engage all key stakeholders in taking the next steps required to create a more dynamic qualifications system. By the end of 2027, learners will have a greater choice of qualifications through the inclusion of the awards of listed awarding bodies and a growing range of quality-assured micro-credentials in the NFQ. QQI commits to building on our analysis of the major awards at Level 6 in the NFQ by further reviewing and modifying the major award types in the NFQ to better serve a diverse range of learners in an integrated tertiary education system.

We are committed to ensuring a higher quality of information for learners on QQI's information platforms. Qualifax and the Irish Register of Qualifications will provide detailed information on how to access all the tertiary education qualifications included in the NFQ. QQI will also provide comprehensive information to international learners in relation to all higher education and English language education providers who hold the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark.

By the end of 2027, the Education and Training Boards will have received greater responsibility for programme development and validation and will more speedily be able to offer new programmes on a national basis. Growing confidence in the quality assurance capacity of the more established private higher education providers will allow QQI to delegate authority to these providers to make their own awards. QQI will have streamlined its Common Awards System and will offer providers of QQI Awards the ability to develop high quality programmes in a more agile and flexible manner through the availability of broad standards.

In some instances, our remit enables us to bring about a direct impact through our own efforts to deliver on our legislative remit. However, in many respects, our role is that of a key interlocutor within the wider education and training ecosystem. We will prioritise the provision of trusted regulation, guidelines, advice, and services to key stakeholders and we will conduct system-wide research, analysis, and

insight. These actions will promote greater understanding of emerging issues and will support the formulation and implementation of mechanisms to address these issues.

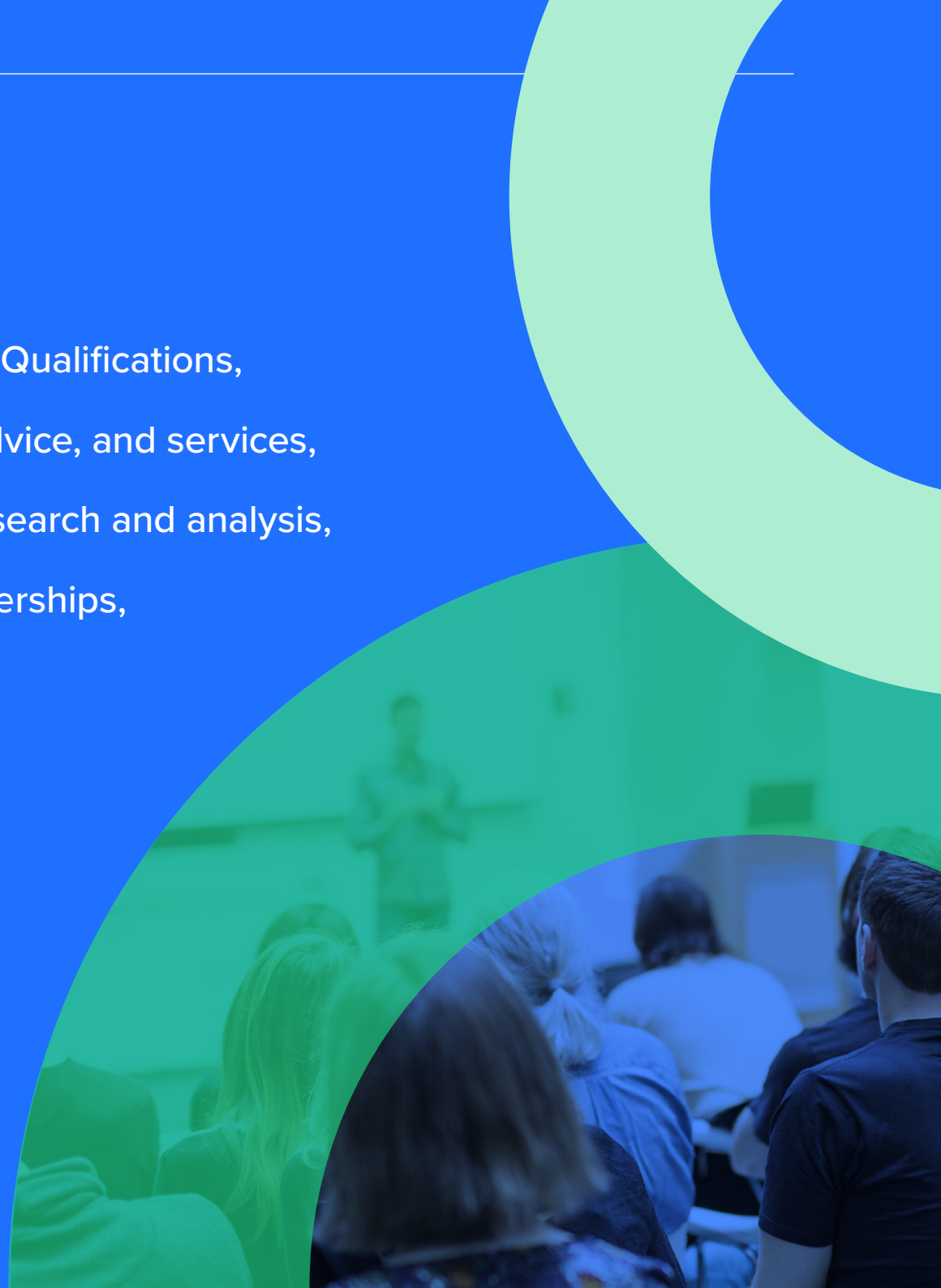
As the only agency with a remit covering all parts of the tertiary education sector, QQI will fully use both its unique position within leading international peer networks and our own independent analysis to demonstrate strong and credible thought leadership credentials in quality and qualifications matters.

With the commitment, resilience and agility of our team, prudent investment of our available financial resources and efficient use of our technological infrastructure, including harnessing the benefits of artificial intelligence, we believe we can accomplish much.

We have therefore identified the following set of key priorities to guide our work and focus our resources over the lifetime of this strategy.

Strategic Priorities

- Future-proof the National Framework of Qualifications,
- Deliver trusted regulation, guidelines, advice, and services,
- Share valuable system-wide insights, research and analysis,
- Deepen national and international partnerships,
- Create a resilient and agile organisation.



Strategic Priority:

Future-proof the National Framework of Qualifications as the authoritative information source for quality-assured tertiary qualifications

We will:

- further develop QQI's platforms to promote the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as the authoritative source of information on quality-assured qualifications including micro-credentials
- review and modify the current award types in the NFQ to better serve learners in a more integrated tertiary education system
- improve choice for learners through our recognition of listed awarding bodies and include their academic and professional awards in the NFQ
- develop an authoritative list of English language education and higher education programmes offered to international learners by providers who have achieved the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark
- complete an external evaluation of QQI's performance as an awarding body of tertiary education qualifications in the NFQ
- undertake a statutory review of individual provider adherence to access, transfer and progression policy and the appropriate recognition of prior learning

Key performance indicators:

- there are new and revised award types offered in the NFQ
- there is increased availability of qualifications in the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) and Qualifax databases
- the review of access, transfer and progression and the review of QQI as an awarding body have been published

Strategic Priority:

Deliver trusted regulation, guidelines, advice and services appropriate to the requirements of a diverse learner and provider landscape

We will:

- provide authoritative information about the quality of the public tertiary education system through a comprehensive monitoring framework using appropriate quantitative and quality tools
- engage with further and higher education providers to develop appropriate models for future institutional quality review
- update our guidelines on assessment to ensure that they reflect changing teaching and learning contexts including the use of artificial intelligence
- increase autonomy and flexibility for mature private higher education providers by granting them delegated authority to make their own awards, with effective quantitative and qualitative monitoring to ensure oversight of quality
- devolve more responsibility for programme validation and sharing of national further education and training programmes to the Education and Training Boards to enable them to develop flexible and innovative programmes for their learners
- develop quality assurance guidelines for a single system of apprenticeship, for work-integrated learning and for programmes that span the tertiary education sector
- enable greater understanding of overseas qualifications by providers, employers, and international learners, including displaced persons and refugees, through the NARIC Ireland service
- review the policy and criteria for programme validation to ensure that they are proportionate for the volume and level of the QQI award being offered
- streamline the QQI Common Awards Systems and develop more broad standards for QQI awards to enable agile programme development by providers
- conduct due diligence assessment of private providers for their fitness to offer regulated education and training and provide security to their learners by establishing the statutory learner protection fund.
- issue the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark to English language education and higher education providers who comply with a statutory code of practice for providing education to international learners

Key performance indicators:

- higher education and English language education providers demonstrate compliance with statutory codes of practice and are authorised to use the *TrustEd Ireland* quality mark
- providers achieve greater autonomy for quality assurance and awarding
- QQI has developed and implemented new award standards, quality assurance guidelines, a monitoring framework and validation policy

Strategic Priority:

Share valuable system-wide insights, research and analysis with key stakeholders

We will:

- improve our data analytics capacity to create QQI dashboards that provide systems-level indicators on quality and qualifications
- share guidance and thought leadership with providers in assessment and artificial intelligence
- publish system-level analysis of our annual monitoring and periodic evaluation of providers, using artificial intelligence where appropriate
- analyse and provide insights on QQI Awards data and trends to inform providers, policy makers, funding agencies and government strategies
- maximise the impact of our insights, research and analysis through effective communications across all platforms
- host events to disseminate our system-level analyses including a biennial conference on a key strategic theme embracing quality and qualifications

Key performance indicators:

- surveys show increased use of and satisfaction with QQI analyses, insights, events and communications

Strategic Priority:

Deepen national and international partnerships

We will:

- inform and influence education and training policy through our relationships with government, public funders, providers and their representative bodies, and other stakeholders
- lead national and international networks to combat the increasing threats to academic integrity
- assist in the development of mechanisms to effectively engage learners in the quality of their education and training through our work with a diversity of learner representative and advocacy bodies
- contribute to good practice in quality assurance and qualifications by deepening our strategic relationships with partner agencies in Europe and worldwide
- use our statutory memoranda with the further and higher education planning and funding authorities to contribute towards developing and improving the quality of an integrated tertiary education system
- partner with professional and statutory regulatory bodies to streamline national systems of professional accreditation and academic validation of programmes which lead to admission to regulated professions for learners
- support capacity-building in the Education and Training Boards in strategic partnership with funding authorities, provider representative bodies and other stakeholders
- fully integrate the English language education sector within QQI's regulatory and quality assurance frameworks, in collaboration with provider and learner representative bodies

Key performance indicators:

- QQI demonstrates greater engagement with those we have identified as key national stakeholders in system funding, learner engagement, professional regulation and English language education
- QQI demonstrates greater engagement with those we have identified as key international stakeholders in quality assurance, qualifications policy and academic integrity

Strategic Priority:

Create a resilient and agile organisation delivering responsive, transparent, and effective services

We will:

- create a diverse and inclusive workplace that identifies QQI as an employer of choice, by enabling a culture that values equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), achieving workplace quality marks and providing a technology-enabled hybrid working environment which is consistent with our climate and sustainability obligations
- build organisational agility and resilience by creating systems and structures that nurture a culture of cross-organisational knowledge-sharing, communication and project management
- implement an internal quality assurance infrastructure that includes a comprehensive data strategy and efficient records management systems
- work with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to ensure that QQI has stable, predictable, and sustainable income streams leading to greater transparency of fees and charges for QQI services, and greater value for money
- improve our services to stakeholders through user-centred design of information and communications technologies, business processes and platforms, and exploration of the potential of artificial intelligence, in line with guidance for its use in the Irish public service
- transform our learner certification from physical to digital form
- observe all relevant national and international legislative, regulatory and compliance obligations

Key performance indicators:

- QQI is an employer of choice
- QQI achieves a nationally-recognised diversity and inclusion accreditation
- surveys show increased user satisfaction with QQI services
- QQI has stable, predictable and sustainable income streams
- QQI adheres to its legislative, regulatory and compliance obligations

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