

## *Collaborative Provision of Programmes leading to QQI Awards*

Collaborative provision is the term used to describe the scenario where two or more providers cooperate on delivery and assessment of a programme leading to a QQI award.

In collaborative provision, there are two roles:

**First Provider:** this is the provider who has the validated programme and who is responsible for its quality assurance.

**Second Provider:** this is the provider (there could be more than one) responsible for specified parts (e.g., recruitment of learners; delivery of all or part of the programmes etc.) but under the quality assurance and oversight of the first provider.

The second provider may or may not have other programmes of its own validated by QQI, but those programmes fall outside of the collaborative arrangement and are subject to the second provider's own QA procedures.

### **Responsibilities of First Provider**

Section 10.2 of QQI's Core QA Guidelines sets out in broad terms what **first providers** should do if they wish to have collaborative arrangements i.e., a first provider should have procedures to:

- Carry out **due diligence** checks on any second provider to ensure that
  - The second provider has the capacity, resources, and expertise to carry out those parts of the programme which the first provider wishes to delegate.
  - The second provider's activities and legal status are such that they would not cause reputational damage to the programme or to the first provider
- Establish and agree an **MoU** with a second provider(s) on any first provider programme which is to have collaborative or sub-contracted elements. The MoU should clearly specify the roles and responsibilities of both first and second providers in respect of that programme. The MoU should be formal, legally binding if necessary, and capable of dealing with all aspects of the relationship, including cessation.
- **Monitor** the parts of the programme carried out by the second provider to ensure adherence to the validated programme and to the MoU.
- **End the collaboration** if and when monitoring and quality assurance provides evidence that programme validation criteria are not being met.
- Include the MoU with any **application for new or differential validation** where the programme will involve collaborative provision.
- **Enter learners for certification.** Note that any learner group entered for certification need to be associated with a validated programme. As the first provider is the one which has the validated programme, it is the only one which can enter learners. It also needs to sign off on the results for certification following a Results Approval Panel or Exam Board.

### **Responsibilities of Second Provider**

The second provider must

- **Formally contribute to an MoU** setting out the respective responsibilities of the first and second providers.
- **Follow the validated programme** of the first provider.
- **Accept monitoring and quality assurance** processes applied by first provider.

### Getting approval for collaborative provision

Before getting a programme validated for collaborative provision, a potential first provider must submit its QA procedures for collaborative provision to QQI for approval.

This can be done as a standalone application (generic procedures and templates) or as part of an application for validation of a collaborative programme i.e., the generic procedures can be evaluated as well as those specific to the programme to which they have been applied in the first instance.

Once approved, a provider can subsequently submit further applications for validation of a collaborative programme(s). Each must show that the relevant QA procedures have been applied i.e., due diligence checks carried out and an MoU agreed.

**A programme cannot be offered collaboratively without prior approval from QQI. If a provider wishes to amend the conditions of validation by entering into a new collaboration post validation, permission must be sought from QQI.**

### Why would a provider want to be a first provider?

The most common reasons why a provider would want to enlist the help of other providers in the delivery of its programme(s) are as follows:

1. **Sub-Contracting:** The provider may have a programme which is envisaged to be in high demand and the provider's own resources wouldn't allow it to meet that demand. Sub-contracting other providers could be a way to address that issue. It's important to note though that, since validation will be required, the demand should be shown to be sustainable and not just a temporary surge.
2. **Transnational Provision:** This is where the programme is validated to be delivered overseas through a local provider with the capacity and infrastructure appropriate to that country. The first provider in this scenario must also be approved for transnational provision. To date this is unique to a small number of HET programmes.

### Why would a provider want to be a second provider?

The most common reason why a provider would agree to contribute to a programme under the direction and quality assurance of another provider is that it relieves that provider of the responsibilities of QA and validation for that programme.

Ultimately, if a provider *only* operated in this way, i.e. had no programmes validated by QQI, then it would no longer have a relationship with QQI. For a small company which may not have the scale or capacity to be a 'provider' but which is good at training, this may be an attractive scenario and a price worth paying.

### What are the *disadvantages* of being a first provider?

Being a first provider does impose considerable additional responsibility on a company. It must take on responsibility for the work of another company in respect of the collaborative programme. It must have the agreed intent and means to insist on quality as delivered by that other company.

### What are the *disadvantages* of being a second provider?

A second provider loses a degree of autonomy in respect of any collaborative programme because it must follow the validated programme of the first provider and adhere to the agreed quality assurance procedures.

The second provider also cannot claim / advertise the programme as its own. It must make explicit for learners and the public that the validated programme belongs to the first provider.