

NQF-In Project

'Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in national qualifications frameworks'

Country Report

**Including of non-formal
sector qualifications in the NQF
in IRELAND**

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Acknowledgement

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Delimitations of the Report

More than twenty-five years have passed since work began on the development and implementation of the Irish NQF, so the policy literature around it is indeed vast. In terms of this NQF-In Country Report, the focus is explicitly on how aspects of the NQF have impacted on the non-formal sector providers of education and training. Readers who desire wider information are advised to follow up the references within the report.

It should also be noted that this Report takes account only of policy documents available by the end of October 2017.

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Disclaimer:

The views and interpretations expressed in the Report are those of the authors only.

Foreword

This Country Report for Ireland is one of seven country reports prepared as an intellectual output from the Erasmus+ project: **NQF-In** *‘Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in national qualifications frameworks’*. NQF-In is a policy learning initiative aimed at providing evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders to develop organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks based on practices in the ten countries involved, of which Ireland is a partner. The other partners are Poland (lead), France, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Scotland. Three ‘silent’ partners - Luxembourg, Germany and Holland - acted as peer-reviewers and analysts of the country reports.

With regard to standardising terminology for the project and for individual country reports, the term ‘non-formal qualifications’ is defined as education and training qualifications achieved outside of the state-supported system of schools, colleges, training centres and universities. For this country report for Ireland the term ‘qualification’ is regarded as similar to, or analogous with, the term ‘award’ as used in documentation related to the Irish framework: the term ‘qualification’ does not necessarily imply a licence to practice. To aid linguistic clarity in the report for Ireland, the combined term qualification/award is used throughout.

The definition of non-formal qualifications above should not be confused with, or elided with, definitions of non-formal learning, which in the Irish context, refers to purposeful and systematic learning which is not formally assessed, accredited or awarded credits in relation to awards on the national framework. In this report, non-formal qualifications/awards are regarded as being appropriately assessed and accredited.

In Ireland it is not usual to refer to a discrete ‘non-formal sector’ of education and training, as is the case in many other jurisdictions. Nor is it usual to refer to ‘non-formal providers’. For the purpose of this country report the nomenclature of ‘private providers, and community and voluntary sector’ is taken to represent the sector of providers outside of state-supported provision. In this regard, the report uses the categories of providers already used to differentiate the state-supported providers from other **‘independent/private providers coming to QQI on a voluntary basis’**, as follows:

- Community/voluntary sector organisations
- Employers/work-based learning providers, including trade unions
- Hospital centres for nurse education
- Private providers – colleges
- Private providers – companies
- Private providers – individuals
- Public service agencies (other than BIM, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc)
- Sectoral Representative Bodies
- Skillnets
- Training for people with disabilities
- Youth services.

It is also useful to note that the term 'vocational education and training' (VET) is not used in the Irish context in the ways that it is used in many other countries with regard to either denoting where a qualification is provided or where a qualification is placed on levels of a framework. In Ireland, the term 'further education' is a collective term that includes qualifications/awards achieved outside the formal school systems which are placed between Level 1 and Level 6 (Advanced Certificate) on the framework of ten levels. Qualifications/awards from 6 (Higher Certificate) to 10 (Doctorate) are normally defined as higher education awards, whether they are provided by state-funded providers or by private and/or voluntary providers.

The Irish qualifications framework is generally regarded as one of the first generation frameworks developed in the 1990s at the same time as frameworks in Australia, Scotland, France and New Zealand. The Irish framework was initiated under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 which established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the two awarding councils for qualifications/awards outside of the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The design of the NFQ/NQF was based on groundwork prepared by TEASTAS and on influential reports related to adult education, lifelong learning and future skills needs. The Irish framework underwent compatibility assessment with The European Area for Higher Education (EAHE) in 2006, and with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) in 2009. Articulation with the three frameworks of the constituent part of the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England) was agreed in 2004.

The framework underwent its first impact evaluation exercise in 2009 and is in the process of its second impact evaluation in 2016/17. Governance, remit and policy aspects of the framework were substantially changed under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012 which established the integrated agency Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) as custodian/regulator of the framework, acting as both an integrated quality agency *and* an awarding body. Operational aspects of the framework are being adapted incrementally since the 2012 Act, and its proposed amendments, in tandem with extensive stakeholder consultation through a series of Green Papers and subsequent White Papers towards agreed policies.

For the purpose of coherent narrative in this report the years between the 1999 Act and the 2012 Act are referred to as 'the NQAI Phase'. The years since the 2012 Act are referred to as 'the QQI Phase'.

The NQF-IN project is timely for Ireland in that it provides an additional opportunity to explore the specific aspect of inclusion of non-formal qualifications/awards as an element of its impact evaluation exercise.

The authors of this report acknowledge the support and guidance of QQI in taking a proactive interest in the NQF-In project, in identifying key non-formal sector stakeholders who are 'usefully representative' to provide contributions to current debates, in framing the questions for the survey conducted among those stakeholders, and in hosting a round-table event for survey respondents to hear the outcomes and to comment upon them.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CAO – Central Applications Office

CAS - Common Award System

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

DA – Delegated Authority

DAB – Designated Awarding Body

DES –Department of Education and Science

DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

ECVET –European credit system for vocational education and training

EGFSN – Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAVET – European Association for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and training

ETB – Education and training Boards

ETBI – Education and Training Boards Ireland

EU – European Union

Fás – Foras Áiseanna Saothair - Vocational Training Authority (now re-organised as a new body – SOLAS)

FE – Further Education

FETAC – Further Education & Training Awards Council

Forfás – National Advisory Board for enterprise, trade, technology and investment in Ireland

HE – Higher Education

HEA – Higher Education Authority

HEI – Higher education institution

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

IBEC – Irish Business and Employers Confederation

ICTU – Irish Congress of Trade Unions

INMO – Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation

INOUE – Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed

IOT – Institute of Technology

IOTI – Institutes of Technology Ireland

IUQB – Irish Universities Quality Board

LMA – Labour Market Activation

NCEA – National Council for Educational Awards

NCVA – National council for Vocational Awards

NESC – National Economic and Social Council

NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications

NQAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

QQI – Quality & Qualifications Ireland

QA – Quality Assurance

QualRec – Qualifications Recognition Service

RCSI – Royal College of Surgeons Ireland

RTC – Regional Technical College

SER – self-evaluation report

SOLAS – The Further Education and Training Authority (An tSeirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna)

Teagasc – The Agriculture and Food Development Authority

TEASTAS – the interim qualifications authority before the 1999 Act

TUI – Teachers' Union of Ireland

VEC – Vocational Education Committee

WIT – Waterford Institute of Technology

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Introduction

Preparation of the Country Report for Ireland

Document analysis

All chapters of this report, except the final chapter on current debates, were prepared on the basis of formal documentation and scholarly literature available in the public domain. Sources used in the Report are acknowledged either within the text or in the sources included as an Annex. Reliable live web links could not be established for all sources, particularly where archival materials were used. Readers are advised to seek current documentation through the QQI website <http://www.qqi.ie>.

QQI advice

Supportive advice and guidance was provided by QQI in identifying how the Country Report could be useful in further development of the framework at this time while the statutory requirement of the 2012 Act are being fully achieved and while the second impact evaluation exercise is on-going.

Survey among stakeholders

For the final chapter of the report new research was conducted using a survey instrument in October and November 2016 and a round-table meeting of survey respondents, generously hosted by QQI on 5 December 2016.

The criteria for selection of the survey sample of education and training provider organisations regarded as 'usefully representative' of the non-formal, community and voluntary sector, professional and regulated occupations, and the major economic sectors of ICT, pharma., agriculture and tourism, were as follows:

Criterion 1: Have been involved with the national framework for *circa* 10 years in both the NQAI phase up to 2012 and the QQI phase subsequent to the 2012 Act.

Criterion 2: Have a wide reach geographically

Criterion 3: Have a wide reach socially, professionally and/or economically.

It was considered that the criteria would identify providers of education and training who had experienced engagement with the framework from its initial development to contemporary times, and who could reflect critically on their own narratives and experiences. So, it was reasonable to focus the survey questions on the experiences of organisations with regard to inclusion of qualifications/awards in the framework only. It was anticipated that they could expertly identify trends from their experiences both in any changing demands for their qualifications/awards to be included in the framework, and also comment on the impact of new operational and cost aspects of inclusion in the framework since the 2012 Act.

The provider organisations selected for the survey, their profiles and sizes were as follows:

Table 1.1 – Survey participants

	Non-formal provider of education and training	Profile	Size
1	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Representative organisation for 55 trade unions	Largest all-Ireland civic society organisation 832,000 members
2	Defense Forces	Military training and education	10,000 active members
3	Irish Nurses & Mid-Wives Association (INMO)	Professional organisation, trade union and training provider	All nurses and mid-wives
4	Credit Unions Ireland	Representative organisation and training organizer for credit union branches	434 branches
5	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)	Representative organisation for all regional VET training providers	16 regions
6	Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)	Trade union and professional body for teachers in VET schools, ETBs, and HE level technology colleges	Nationwide
7	<i>Get-reskilled</i> – private training provider for the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector	Work-based training for pharma. industry 'inked' with higher education nationally and globally	Global
8	Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) – as a provider linked with a private provider	HE provider with partnerships and 'linked' provision for industry, regulated occupations and professions	23,000 students, multiple linked partnerships with non-formal sector
9	The Law Society	Education, representation and regulation for solicitors. Provider of specialist legal training for other sectors.	Nationwide
10	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC)	Representative, lobbyist, policy making and training organization for employers and businesses	Nationwide
11	Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE)	Representative and campaigning body for unemployed workers, community groups and voluntary organisations	Nationwide branches, mostly urban
12	Macra na Feirme	Voluntary organisation for social and vocational development of young people in rural areas	Nationwide at local level

13	Longford Women's Link	Voluntary outreach centre for education and training in enterprise and regulated occupations using linked formal providers	Regional/rural
14	Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)	HE provider of formal training to community and voluntary groups	Regional
15	The Wheel	Central support and representative organisation for voluntary and community-based education (non-formal sector)	Nationwide service
16	ICT Skillnet	Network of HE and ICT industry for up-skilling and re-skilling	Nationwide
17	Global Knowledge: ICT training	Providers of global ICT qualifications (non-formal)	Dublin-based with international reach
18	Regional Skills Forum North-West	Consortium of employers, education and training providers, local authorities and government agencies for regional development.	Regional
19	Teagasc	The Agriculture and Food Development Authority for Green Cert., agri-training and research	Nationwide and with regional private colleges
20	Fáilte Ireland	Semi-state Tourism Development Authority	Previously a training provider
21	Chartered institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)	Professional body and training provider for Human Resource management – own awards	National and UK

All organisations were contacted initially by phone or introductory email explaining the purpose to the survey and to gain their permission to send forward the survey questions to the appropriate party/parties. Respondents were assured that their individual responses would remain confidential and that data would be summarised generically in the report. Some respondents gave oral rather than written responses. Some indicated interest in the research and its outputs and willingness to attend the round-table event but not to complete a detailed written response. These positions were respected.

The eleven questions in the survey were finalised following consultation with QQI.

The survey questions were as follows:

Question 1

How much (in estimated %) of the training 'courses/events' provided by your 'organisation/sector' is currently included in the NFQ?

Question 2

Why are some types of training not included in the NFQ?

Question 3

Has your organisation/sector arrangements in place with other non-formal sectors or organisations to have training awards included in the NFQ? If so, explain how it works.

Question 4

Does your organisation/sector have 'links' with formal providers so that you have your awards included in the NFQ? If so, explain the advantages of this arrangement.

Question 5

Does your sector/organisation have arrangements with non-Irish qualifications providers/awarding bodies? If so, explain the advantage of such arrangements.

Question 6

What is the value of having your training awards included in the NFQ? Explain how it is a good return on the time and costs involved.

Question 7

Have you experienced either growing demand or falling demand for training awards that are included in the NFQ? Can you explain why?

Question 8

Have you evidence of any changing profiles of persons/organisations seeking formal, accredited awards rather than non-formal awards?

Question 9

Have you noticed any trends in the purposes and/or usefulness of including awards in the NFQ?

Question 10

Please comment on the costs of including training awards in the NFQ.

Question 11

Please comment on your experiences of the processes and procedures of including training awards in the NFQ.

Open comments:

Round-table event

Outcomes from the survey were presented to respondent and QQI staff at a round-table event on 5 December 2016.

The survey outcomes are provided in the final chapter of this Report:

Documents and literature consulted for this Country Report.

Table 1.2 – Relevant NQAI-phase publications from the 1999 Act to the 2012 Act

Date of publication	Title
June 2005	NQAI <i>Principles and operational guidelines for recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training</i>
November 2006	<i>Verification of compatibility of the Irish NFQ to the QF of the EHEA</i>
June 2009	<i>Referencing of the Irish NFQ to the EQF-LLL</i>
November 2011	<i>Professional award-type descriptors (award class: professional) for the alignment of professional awards at NQF levels 7, 8 and 9</i>

Table 1.3 – Relevant QQI-phase publications since the 2012 Act

Date of publication	Title
2013	Submissions on 3 white papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Policy and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards ii. Regulations for protection of enrolled learners; implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act iii. Fees for QQI services
September 2013	Policy and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards
September 2013	QA guidelines and criteria for provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI further education and training awards
September 2013	Fees for QQI services
June 2014	Re-engagement with QQI – policy and criteria for renewed access to QQI validation for voluntary providers of further education and training

July 2014	Report of the external reviewers of quality and qualifications Ireland (QQI)
December 2014	QQI policy on monitoring
December 2014	QQI policy for making awards
December 2014	Policy for determining award standards
Feb 2015	Quality assuring assessment guidelines for external authenticators - revised
April 2015	Provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards: Application Guide
April 2015	Provider access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards: application form for initial validation leading to QQI award
	QQI consultation document: Quality assurance guidelines and criteria for providers of further education and training: Vol. 1
2015	QQI restatement of 2003 policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation of learners for providers of further and higher education and training
2016	QQI Annual report 2015
Feb 2016	Policies and criteria for the establishment of the NFQ originally published in October 2003
May 2016	QQI corporate plan
April 2016	Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training
January 2016	Core statutory quality assurance (QA) guidelines - draft statutory guidelines developed for use by all providers
April 2016	Sector-specific quality assurance guidelines: Statutory guidelines developed by QQI for independent/private providers and voluntary bodies
April 2016	Management framework agreement between the Department of Education and Skills & Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
May 2016	Feedback report following the consultation process on a series of draft quality assurance guides and white papers including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Policy on quality assurance guidelines April 2016 ii. Core statutory quality assurance guidelines April 2016 iii. Sector-specific quality assurance guidelines for independent/private providers April 2016
June 2016	Sector-specific guidelines developed by QQI for designated awarding bodies
July 2016	Sector-specific quality assurance (QA) guidelines: statutory guidelines developed by QQI for designated awarding bodies (universities, Dublin Institute

	of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
2016	Protection of enrolled learners policy
July 2016	Topic-specific Quality Assurance Guidelines White Paper

Table 1.4 – Other policy documents consulted

Date of publication	Title
2014	Dublin Institute of Technology Quality Enhancement Handbook, Chapter 13: <i>Procedures for approval of linked and collaborative provision</i>
2005	White Paper <i>Charting our Education Future</i>
2009	Framework implementation an Impact Study: Report of Study Team
May 2013 & March 2014	FETAC: Managing change to the common award system: an information note for providers, Levels 5 and 6, May 2013 QQI: Common Award System: Restatement of Policy and Guidelines 2014, Version 4.0
June 2014	EQF-LL alignment report
	ENQA external review of QQI - Report

Table 1.5 – Other literature consulted

Date	Title and author
December 2010	Person, P. (2010). <i>European lifelong learning policy: short track studies of good practice: National Frameworks of Qualifications in Ireland</i> . Halmstad University, EACEA.
2009	Raffe, D. (2009). <i>National Qualifications Frameworks in Ireland and Scotland: a comparative analysis</i> . Paper presented at European conference on educational research, Vienna, September 2009.
2011	Mernagh, E. (2011). <i>The Irish national framework of qualifications: a blueprint for change</i> . Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies 4/2011.
2011	Duff, T. (2011). <i>Reflections on Ireland's education/training policy-making process leading to the national framework of qualifications</i> . European Journal of Qualifications, Issue 2, Spring 2011 and DIT Online Journal, Level3 Issue 9, June 2011.
May 2005	Murphy, A. (2005). <i>Lifelong learning: Romance, evidence, implementation?</i> . Keynote address to Institute of Technology Apprentice Committee Conference, Dublin, May 2005.

September 2003	Granville, G. (2003). <i>Stop making sense: Chaos and coherence in the framework of the Irish qualifications framework</i> . Journal of Education and Work, Volume 16, Number 3, September 2003.
June 2016	Boland, T. (2016). <i>Reconceptualising higher education for lifelong learning</i> . EUCEN Conference, Dublin.
December 2016	Coles, M. (2016). <i>National Qualifications Frameworks: reflections and trajectories</i> . Paper commissioned by QQI in advance of the second impact assessment exercise.

Basic terms

Definitions of the most important terms used in the Country Report.

Access – refers to a learner’s ability to avail of appropriate opportunities to enter and succeed on programmes leading to awards, with recognition of learning already achieved.

Access, transfer and progression – mechanisms for non-standard entry to higher education, transfer into HE, and progression towards an award.

Adult education – a term that refers both to an ideology and to a sector of education provision.

Alignment with the NQF – aligned awards are awards from bodies other than the universities, the DIT and bodies with delegated authority which have been through a formal process of alignment with the level descriptors of the NQF. The alignment process is currently suspended pending its status with regard to the 2012 Act.

Approved provider – a provider which has achieved QQI quality assurance status.

Award – that which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard to knowledge, skill or competence.

Awarding body – an organisation designated by law to make awards.

Award type - refers to a class of named awards sharing common features and level. These include major, minor, supplemental and special purpose award types. Different award-types reflect different purposes or awards and allow for the recognition of all learning achievement.

CAO - Central Applications Office is the centralised service for processes applications for entry to initial higher education in universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education and some other higher education providers.

Common Award System (CAS) - The Common Awards System (CAS) is a system of linked further education and training (FET) awards specifications at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ or Framework) Levels 1 to 6 inclusively. The CAS awards specifications include ‘awards standards’ to be achieved before an award may be made. The awards standards are expressed as minimum expected learning outcomes. These reflect the

knowledge, skill and competence to be achieved by the learner before an award may be made.

Community and Voluntary Sector (non-formal) Working Group - QQI established a joint working group with representatives of the community and voluntary sector. The working group has been established in order to enable QQI to improve and expand its current communications with organisations that form the community and voluntary sector, and facilitate community and voluntary sector legacy providers in making an informed choice in relation to re-engagement.

Competence – acquired skills and knowledge that can be demonstrated and measured against standards.

Consortia of providers – individual providers who combine under mutually-agreed terms to engage with QQI as a combined provider with regard to quality assurance and validation of programmes.

Credit – a measure by which diverse learning achievements can be recognised; credits systems complement the NQF and the achievement of awards. Opportunities for credit accumulation enhance recognition of learning.

Delegated authority – powers to make awards.

Determining standards – the process by which the levels of knowledge, skills and competence are determined for assessment towards an award.

Designated awarding powers – providers of education and training which are not legally autonomous awarding bodies per se but who have achieved the legal status to make certain awards in the NQF.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) advises the government on current and future skills needs and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. The group brings together industry, academic and state agencies in identifying the overall skills requirements of the economy.

External authentication – the process of verifying assessment results by an outside expert individual or body.

ETB - Education and Training Board.

Fás/SOLAS – further education and training authority. Solas is the national agency responsible for funding, policy and co-ordinating training of further education programmes in Ireland.

Fields of learning/sub-fields – ISCED F 2013 codes for fields of learning and training (international standard classification of education).

Classification of Fields of Learning for QQI/FETAC standards (replaced by ISEC F 2013)

FET – further education and training is education and training other than primary or post-primary or higher education and training, usually from Level 1 - 6 inclusive on the NQF.

First provider – a person or body which organises or procures all or part of a programme, part of which is provided by another provider.

Formative assessment – assessment designed to identify learning progress and to provide feedback to learners

Green Paper – a discussion paper with outline proposals on a significant topic of particular importance to stakeholders which is designed as a consultation mechanism to attract critical and developmental back to inform a subsequent White Paper towards policy.

HEA – The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third level sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities, institute of technology and other designated higher education institutions. The HEA publishes extensive statistics on Higher Education and is the national contact point for Erasmus+ and other European funding programmes for Higher Education.

Higher education – the sector making awards from levels 6 to 10.

IEM - International Education Mark (IEM) for providers. This will be awarded to providers of education and training (including English language training) who have demonstrated compliance with a statutory code of practice in the provision of education and training to international students.

Inclusion in the NQF – the processes by which providers of programmes leading to awards can meet the criteria to be approved by QQI and listed in Qualifax/QSearch – the register of QQI awards. Only qualifications made by national bodies are included in the NQF. Graduates of qualifications included in the NQF are deemed to have acquired the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with a level of that qualification within the NQF.

Initial engagement with QQI – the process by which new providers apply to QQI for quality assurance approval to subsequently apply for validation of programmes leading to QQI awards, and/or the process by which legacy providers which failed to re-engage with QQI can re-apply.

Intended learning outcomes – the learning outcomes of a programme that can be explicitly linked to NQF level descriptors.

Internal verification – the process by which a provider evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of its assessment practices.

Learning outcomes – what a learner is expected to have achieved in terms of knowledge, skills and competences as a result of a learning experience.

Learner – an individual engaged in a learning process.

Learner-centred - an approach to education and training which puts the needs of learners above the needs of the labour market.

Legacy awards – awards that existed before the 1999 Act.

Linked provider – providers who may not be awarding bodies themselves offering programmes that lead to awards of the Irish universities, the RCSI or the DIT with quality assurance oversight by the ‘linked’ awarding body.

Legacy providers – providers of education and training which had approval before the 2012 Act.

Legacy policies – policies which applied before the 2012 Act.

Legacy voluntary providers – providers who had a relationship as providers with either FETAC or HETAC before the 2012 Act.

Major award - this award type is the principal class of awards made at each level of the NQF. At most levels, such award-types capture a typical range of achievements at the level.

Minimum capacity – baseline capacity to provide quality assured awards.

Minimum learning outcomes – the standards to be achieved for successful achievement of an award.

Minor award – the award type provides recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right.

Monitor – a person who verifies that quality assurance procedures are being implemented as agreed. The monitor may be working on behalf of the provider (local monitoring) or QQI (national monitoring). National monitoring is the process which QQI will operate to ensure that providers’ quality assurance systems are effective in maintaining and improving the quality of a validated programme.

Networks of providers – providers of education and training in a specific field who combine to engage with QQI to validate common programmes (e.g. Skillnets) who may have discrete quality assurance status with QQI.

Non-formal providers – the sector referred to as the private, community and voluntary sector providers.

Placement of awards – where awards are located on the levels of the NQF.

Professional bodies – organisations which regulate the education and training requirements of a profession.

Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC). The PAEC is part of the governance structures of QQI that have been agreed by its Board. This committee ensures programmes and awards recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications are appropriate and consistent. The committee consists of members of the QQI executive and is chaired by the CEO. The decisions and recommendations made by the committee are usually informed by external panels and by the outcomes of QQI monitoring and review activities.

Programme - a learning experience designed and offered by a provider based on predetermined national standards and leading to a QQI qualification/award.

Programmatic review – cyclical review of a programme in relation to specific quality assurance criteria.

Progression – a learner’s ability to move to another programme leading to an award at a higher level in the NQF, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Provider – an individual, organisation or institution that provides education and training.

Provider quality assurance – the criteria which applies to providers of education and training to enable them to offer programmes leading to awards in the state which are included on the NQF.

Protection of enrolled learners – a policy and quality criterion for providers which provides security that enrolled learners will not be at risk of discontinuation of their course.

QualiFax – a database of qualifications maintained by QQI.

QualRec – a qualifications recognition service provided by QQI.

Recognition of prior learning – a process and system for using prior formal, non-formal and informal learning for access, transfer, progression, and achievement of an award.

Re-engagement with QQI – the process by which approved FETAC and HETAC providers apply for quality assurance approval to continue provision with QQI.

Regulated occupations – occupations regulated by law, statute, or other formal means.

RPL – recognition of prior learning for the purpose of initial access/entry to a programme leading to an award, advanced entry to a programme leading to an award, exemption from elements of a programme leading to an award, achievement of a full award.

Second provider – a person or body which provides all or part of a programme part or all of which is organised or procured by another provider.

Self-evaluation (A) – the process whereby a provider, with the involvement of learners and the external evaluator, evaluates the quality of its programme(s) and services. The findings of self-evaluation will be published in as standard format.

Self-evaluation (B) – the process whereby an applicant for RPL systematically considers his/her evidence of learning in relation to entry requirements for a programme or sets of learning outcomes within a programme.

Special purpose award – this award type is made for specific, relatively narrow purposes, often for certification of competence in specific occupational areas.

Standards – NQF standards are benchmarked statements about the learning achievements required to attain particular NQF levels. NQF award standard are QQI specifications of the knowledge, skill and competence to be achieved before an award is made. But standards vary in their specificity. This contrasts with standards for particular awards which are always specific. Standards for particular awards are in effect determined when the relevant

programme of education and training (i.e. the curriculum) is validated. NFQ standards are supported with guidelines to assist providers.

Supplemental award – this award type is for learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.

Summative assessment – assessment that contributes to the total marks for an award.

TEASTAS – the interim qualifications body which supported the development of the Irish NQF in the 1990s.

Transfer – refers to a learner's ability to move from one programme leading to an award to another programme at the same level of the framework having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

Transition status – the status of QQI since the 2012 Act and until such time as policies and procedures have been for providers and programmes have achieved statutory approval.

Validation – the process through which QQI evaluates a programme of education and training to ensure that the proposed programme provides the learner with the opportunity to reach the standards of the award to which the programme is intended to lead.

VET/TVET – (technical) vocational education and training.

White Paper – a draft policy paper which follows on from analysis of responses to a Green Paper and which forms the basis for a policy statement.

Chapter 1: Historic Context

1.1 – The importance of education and training in the state

The Irish NQF was launched in 2003, enabled by the 1999 legislation – The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act.

The shape and rationale for the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) were influenced over the previous decades by national economic development imperatives, by powerful international bodies such as the OECD, and by developments in education and training internationally, particularly in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Specifically, the OECD reports – *Training of Technicians in Ireland*, (1964), *Council on Manpower Policy as a means of promotion of economic development*, (1964) and *Investment in Education*, (1996) contributed to significant reform of education and training provision at a national level and to a particular underpinning ideology which informed the NQF.

Because of its island position on the western fringes of Europe, its open economy, limited natural resources and small population, successive Irish governments regarded education and training as central to economic development, competitiveness and social prosperity. Of particular significance in this regard was the *1958 Programme for Economic Expansion* which shifted economic planning from protectionism to economic modernisation by industrial development, urbanisation and enhanced infrastructure and the Apprenticeship Act 1959. Both aimed to decrease dependency on agriculturally-based employment and to move to a more mixed economy in a single generation relying to a large extent on skills training for manufacturing employment. In this regard employment in agriculture fell from 50% to 15% of the workforce between the 1960s and 1990s. Industrial production grew with membership of the EC/EU from 1980 and the population became increasingly urbanised. From the 1960s onward industrial policies focused on attracting inward investment through multinational companies relying on large local workforces and tied in to locally provided education and training.

1.2 – Training for industrial development

A new training body, AnCo (*An Comhairle Oiliúna*) The Industrial Training Authority, was established in 1967 under the Industrial Training Act which compelled employers to adopt a more systematic training approach to the traditional time-served, craft model. AnCo was superseded in 1987 by Fás (The National Training Authority) under the 1987 Labour Services Act as the state provider and co-ordinator of training for employment under the direction of the Department of Employment and Labour. As unemployment levels grew to 17% of the labour force in the mid-1980s the provision of vocational education and training also grew, particularly for the unemployed. Apprenticeship numbers fluctuated with labour market needs.

VET training policies were greatly influenced by the employer bodies, by recommendations from Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and by the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC). However, the same decades saw a major increase in participation in higher education, driven partly by the introduction of 'free fees' and accommodation grants and by the establishing of nine regional technical colleges to support regional development and industrialisation.

Government programmes for economic expansion with balanced regional growth, led to a 1967 proposal for the establishment of nine regional technical colleges (RTCs), outside the Dublin region, to spearhead economic development and industrial expansion in areas which were not already served by the five traditional universities – Trinity College Dublin and the three national University of Ireland colleges - in Dublin, Galway and Cork. The new regional colleges were to be progression routes from the vocational education system and from apprenticeship training to provide higher level technical qualifications. The new colleges were initially under similar management to the Vocational Education Committee schools with awarding powers regulated by the Department of Education up to Higher National Diploma level in the first instance.

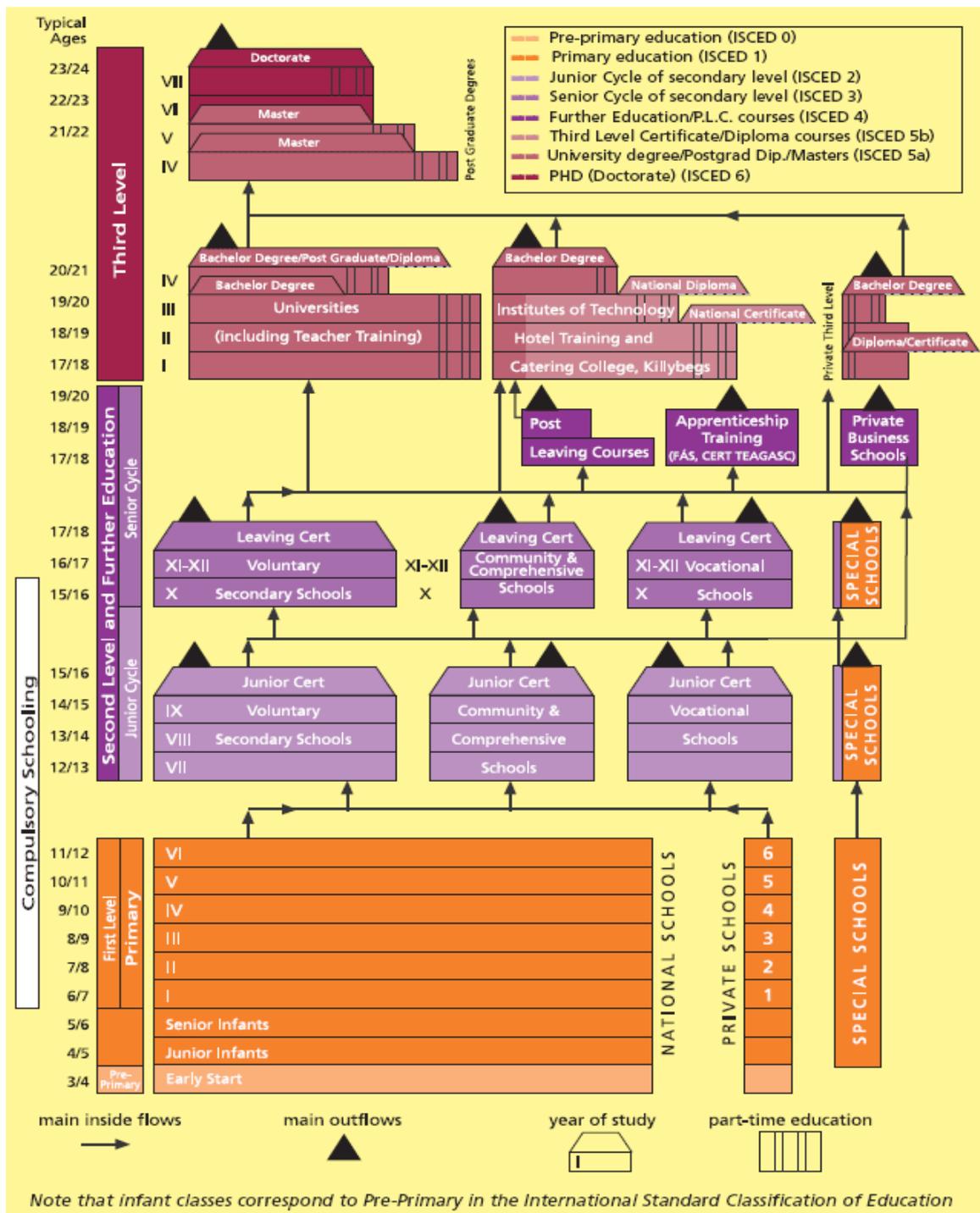
This regional technical college model reinforced the dual system of education in Ireland which clearly distinguished between private, faith-based, fee-paying secondary schools which had progression routes to professionally-oriented, fee-paying/free-fees university on the one hand, and the vocational schools and regional colleges which were largely state-funded, non-denominational and labour-market focused on the other hand. This demarcation and differentiation persisted in both reality and in perception well into the 1990s leading to a very complex landscape of awards and qualifications, with few transfer or progression routes across the two systems. The introduction of income-based free fees and the expansion of numbers attending post-compulsory education led to a blurring of the functions and provision boundaries between the RTCs and the universities. These boundaries were further blurred when a common application system for entry to higher education (CAO) was introduced and Latin was dropped as a requirement for university entry. In addition, a new type of state-funded second level education – the community college – was introduced which catered for an expanding population of young people in urban areas and which facilitated the amalgamation of private secondary schools and vocation school in smaller towns and rural areas, and thereby cutting off the historic apprenticeship routes to employment from low-income families with few resources. The community colleges had less emphasis on vocational programmes leaving gaps in local provision for young people who choose to follow a trade or craft. This gap was filled to an extent by the reformed apprenticeship system which moved from a time-served model to six phases of training – three phases in Fás training centres/RTCs and three phases on-the-job with curricula dictated mostly by employer needs.

In 1992 the Dublin Institute of Technology Act facilitated the amalgamation of several long-standing colleges into the unitary Dublin Institute of Technology with autonomous awarding powers from Level 6 to Doctorate.

The vocational training landscape of the 1980s and 1990s was further complicated by non-national providers such as the UK City & Guilds and Royal Society of Arts, in addition to training provided by a range of both Irish and UK trade unions. A further complication was the establishing of national Institutes of Higher Education in Limerick city and north Dublin city which were to be advanced technical colleges, but which became the University of Limerick and Dublin City University respectively under the 1997 Universities Act with their own awarding powers under pressure from traditional vested interests.

By the late 1990s the education and training landscape was complex, with few coherent inter-relationships or mobility across systems, as illustrated in **Figure 1.1** below.

Figure 1.1 – A complex landscape of awarding bodies and award titles.



Source: Department of Education

1.3 – Recession, emigration and mobility of qualifications

The decade from 1982-1992 was one of economic recession in Ireland. Unemployment in 1987 was 17% of the labour force and emigration of graduates, school leavers and unemployed young people posed a threat to the sustainability of civic society. During these years there were ten different Ministers for Education with little coherence of policy or long-term planning.

In 1992 the Industrial Policy Review Group (IPRG) Report urged a rethink of the dual system of vocational-university education towards a more utilitarian approach focusing on addressing skills deficits and towards partnership with industry. Their report argued that a direct industry-education interface is essential for successful economies. They urged a focus on graduate competences, job-readiness and on-the-job training elements. This view found its way into the 1992 Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* with its recommendations for lifelong learning and continuous up-skilling. Duff (2011) argues that the Green Paper further reinforced the binary divide between the traditional university model and the more utilitarian education and training model of the VECs and the RTCs. 1992 also saw the agreement of the EU Maastricht Treaty and the Single European area with resulting free movement of services, people and capital facilitated by a more coherent system for portability and mutual recognition of qualifications across borders.

Additionally, the OECD considerably influenced the direction of Irish education and training reform through their thematic reports and country reviews, most of which were quantitative, statistically-based and benchmarked to international comparators. Comparative reports were heavily drawn upon by Ministers of Education from 1992 onwards leading to the introduction of changes in the domestic context, particularly with regard to the efficiency of the binary/dual education system to underpin sustainable economic development and human capital in an increasingly global market. Criticisms of binary systems and the complexity of training systems led industry to call for a unitary and coherent system of qualifications in New Zealand and Australia and in parts of the UK in the later 1980s. Legislative and systems reforms in these countries were closely watched in Ireland and much networking resulted. The momentum to drive major education and qualifications reform had begun, leading to the initial development work towards a unified, national qualifications framework.

1.4 – TEASTAS and the foundations of the Irish NQF

The 1992 Government Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* signaled political intent to end the traditional binary divide in Irish education and to move towards a more unitary, quality controlled and integrated approach, under the assumption that more systematic human capital development would enable greater economic growth. An increased emphasis on skills and competences for a flexible labour force was also evident in the 1994 National Education Convention and in the National Development Plan 1994-1999. These ideas were also evident in the NESC report *A Strategy for Competitiveness, Growth and Employment* which expressed concern about the incoherence of the education system as a whole and the lack of a coherent education and training policy. Similar ideas were expressed in the 1995 White Paper *Charting our Education Future* which also suggested a more coherent approach to certification and qualifications outside the university system – essentially in the VET and the non-formal sector.

Collectively, these ideas led to the establishment of TEASTAS, a new Government interim authority to take responsibility for non-university third level programmes and for all further and continuing education programmes, and to combine the functions of the existing National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) and the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA). In addition TEASTAS was to become the national authority ensuring international recognition for all qualifications under its remit.

TEASTAS could have worked towards removal of the binary divide between traditional universities and other providers of education and training, including non-formal providers. However, vested interests prevailed, and the 'different missions' of the two sectors were acknowledged and continued by the Department of Education. This meta-decision was evident in the architecture of the NQF which emerged in the years following.

TEASTAS was established on an interim basis in September 1995. Its main function was to achieve co-ordination of qualifications outside the university sector and to establish a qualifications framework. Concepts of lifelong learning moved to centre stage with technologies to support a qualifications framework discussed with stakeholders, resulting in a clear decision to move to an integrated framework of qualifications by 1997, probably heavily influenced by developments in progress towards the Bologna Declaration of 1999 to harmonise higher education architecture across member states of the Council of Europe. The technologies required would include a credit system, a shared system of mutual recognition of awards and a common approach to quality assurance.

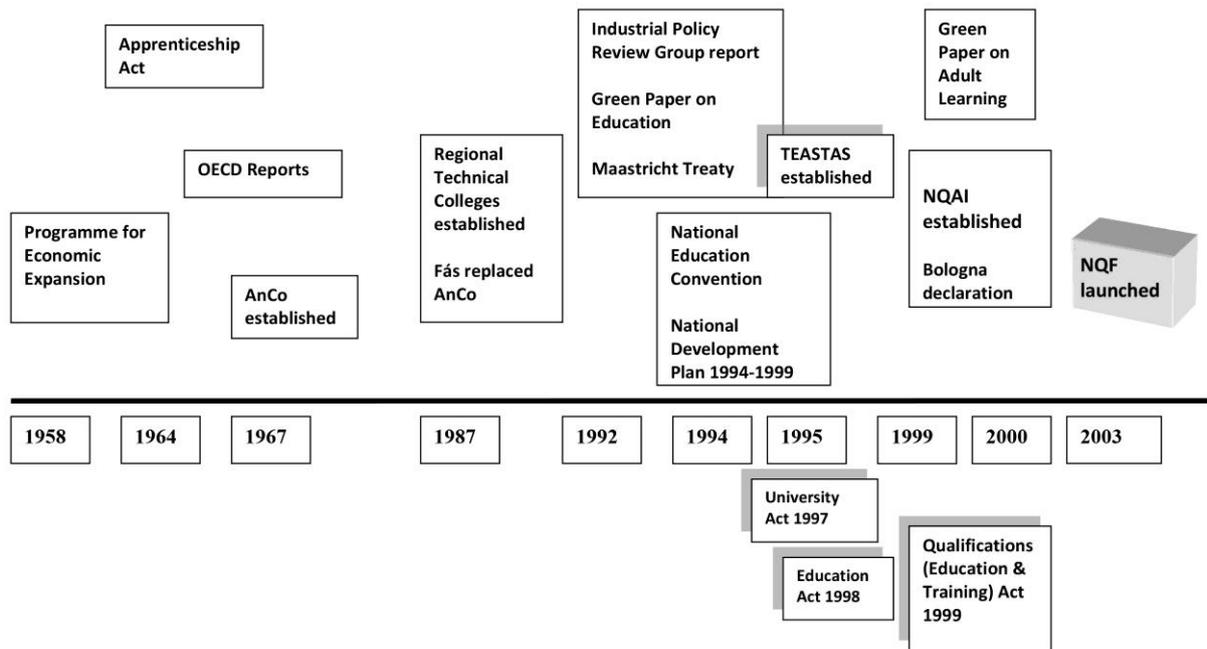
The work of TEASTAS led directly to the 1999 Qualification (Education and Training) Act which established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and started the development of the NQF which was formally launched in 2003.

The 1999 Act also enabled the setting up of two new awarding bodies – the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) to bring greater coherence and standardisation of VET awards and to HE awards outside the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

All non-formal awards to be recognised within the NQF were to come under the quality oversight of these two new bodies and to carry the logo of either FETAC or HETAC.

A summary timeline of key development, policies, reports and legislation leading to the Irish NQF is presented below in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 – Timeline



Chapter 2: National Qualifications Framework – Basic Premises

2.1 – The original goals of the NQF

The vision, principles and goals for the NQF are set out in two particular NQAI documents:

- i. *Towards a National framework of Qualifications – establishment of policies and criteria*, April 2002
- ii. *Determinations for the outline national framework of qualifications*, October 2003

The framework was designed to be ‘*the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.*’ *Determinations for the outline national framework of qualifications*, 2003 page 7.

The original goal for establishing the Irish NQF, FETAC and HETAC was that together they would bring greater coherence to qualifications awarded in Ireland and to encourage a greater focus on the diverse needs of learners. Prior to the 1999 Act there was little shared understanding of how the various awards in the state related to one another. The relationship between university awards and those awarded elsewhere in higher education as somewhat unclear, while in further education and training there were more than fifty awarding bodies in operation, including the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) and the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA).

The NQAI had three principal tasks:

- i. to establish and maintain a national framework of qualifications
- ii. to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression of learners
- iii. to ensure the appropriate recognition of internal qualifications in Ireland and to promote the appropriate recognition of Irish awards abroad.

The NQAI had oversight responsibility for the functions, performance reviews and strategic plans of both FETAC and HETAC. NQAI also allocated the budgets of both awarding bodies.

FETAC was responsible for providing services to vocational colleges, adult and community education and training centres, private further education and training providers, Fás, Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Authority), Fáilte Ireland (National Tourism Authority) and Bórd Íascaigh Mhara (The Sea Fisheries Board), essentially all the non-formal training providers surveyed for this Country Report. Most of these bodies had used the NCVA and NCEA in the past.

HETAC was responsible for the non-formal providers at higher education level including private colleges and professional bodies.

Professional bodies

Certain professional bodies achieved statutory powers to make awards, including:

- i. An Bórd Altranais (The Nursing Board)

- ii. The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
- iii. The Opticians Board
- iv. The Law Society of Ireland
- v. The Council of the Honourable Society of Kings Inns
- vi. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland
- vii. The National Social Work Qualifications Board
- viii. The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland
- ix. Ministry of Commerce, Marine and natural Resources
- x. Department of Telecommunications Regulation
- xi. The Irish Aviation Authority
- xii. The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

2.2 – Architecture of the NQF

The Irish NFQ is based on ten levels from Level 1 – basic education - to Level 10 Doctorate as set out in the 2002 NQAI paper: *'Towards a national framework of qualifications – establishment of policies and criteria'*.

At each level there are award-types. Each award-type has its own descriptor. Award-types at each level have specific names.

There are four classes of award-types:

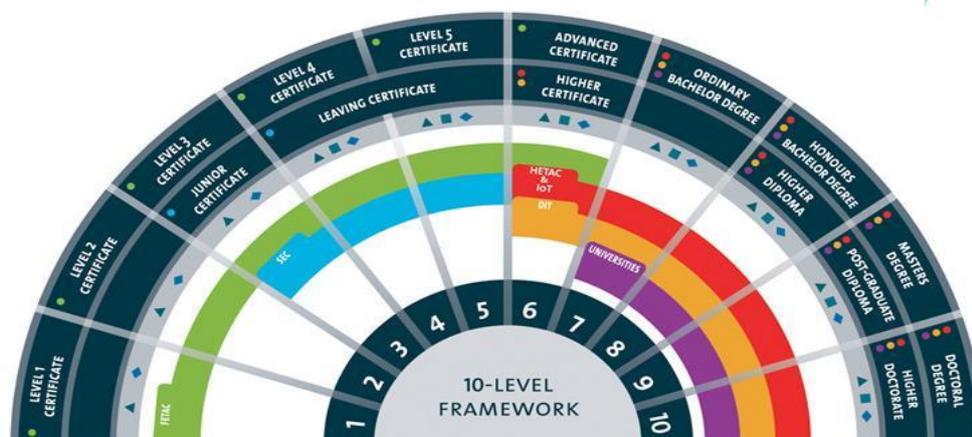
- Major award-types
- Minor award-types
- Special-purpose award-types
- Supplemental award-types.

Major award types are illustrated on the NFQ 'rainbow' (**Figure 2.1** below) at the appropriate level and with awarding bodies for each award-type in the NQAI-phase.

Figure 2.1 – Major award types

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann
National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland



AWARDING BODIES

- FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education & Science)
- HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- IIT - Institutes of Technology (make their own awards at special levels under Delegated Authority from HETAC)
- DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities

AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four types of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- Major Awards: are the principal class of awards made at a level
- ▲ Minor Awards: are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- ◆ Supplemental Awards: are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- ◆ Special Purpose Awards: are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement



For further information consult: www.nqai.ie www.nfq.ie www.qualrec.ie

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There are still fifteen award-types as follows:

Table 2.1 Award types

NQF Level	Award title	Who can award it NQAI Phase (QQI phase)
10	Doctorate	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
9	Masters Postgraduate Diploma	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
8	Honours Bachelor Degree Higher Diploma	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI)
6	Higher Certificate Advanced Certificate	HETAC, DIT, universities (QQI) FETAC (QQI)
5	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)
4/5	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)

	Leaving Certificate	Department of Education and Science
4	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)
3	Certificate Junior Certificate	FETAC (QQI) Department of Education and Science
2	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)
1	Certificate	FETAC (QQI)

2.3 – Level indicators and descriptors

Levels on the Irish NFQ are assigned descriptors in relation to strands and sub-strands using the following indicators:

- Knowledge – *breadth*
- Knowledge – *kind*
- Know-how and – *range*
- Know-how and – *selectivity*
- Competence – *context*
- Competence – *role*
- Competence – *learning to learn*
- Competence – *insight*

The specifics of each level are included in the Table below.

The outcomes at each level include those of all lower levels in the same sub-strand.

2.4 – Placement of legacy awards

NQAI conducted considerable consultation among stakeholders regarding the appropriate placement of existing and legacy awards on the new NFQ (**Figure 2.2** Below).

It is clear that there is considerable bunching of existing legacy awards at Level 6 which is the interface between higher education qualifications/awards and awards provided elsewhere.

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'H'

Title	Advanced Certificate
Class of Award-type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award-type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge - breadth	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge -kind	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas
Know-how and skill -range	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill -selectivity	Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems
Competence -context	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Competence -role	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple complex and heterogeneous groups
Competence -learning to learn	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment
Competence -insight	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression & transfer	Transfer to a programme leading to a Higher Certificate (award-type I). Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (award-type J) or to an Honours Bachelor Degree (award-type K).
Articulation	

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'I'

Title	Higher Certificate
Class of Award-type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award-type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge - breadth	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge - kind	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory
Know-how and skill - range	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems
Competence - context	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts
Competence - role	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups
Competence - learning to learn	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group
Competence - insight	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression & transfer	Transfer to programme leading to an Advanced Certificate (award-type H) Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (award-type J) or to an Honours Bachelor Degree (award-type K).
Articulation	

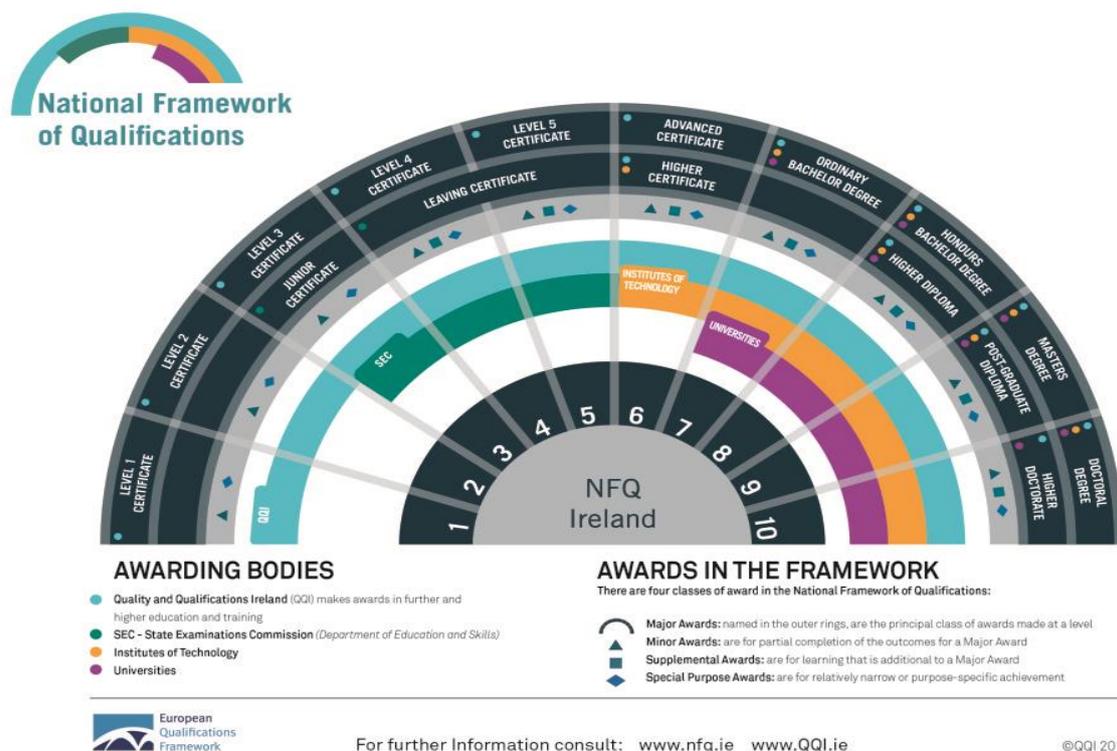
2.5 – Award titles and providers in the QQI Phase since 2012

Since the re-structuring resulting from the QQI Act 2012 the rainbow diagram looks different from the perspective of inclusion of non-formal qualifications/awards (**Figure 2.3** below)

It is obvious from the diagram that both FETAC and HETAC have gone.

It is also obvious that QQI as a provider of award titles now has a continuous span from Level 1 to Level 10. How a clear distinction between the two Level 6 awards/qualifications is to be maintained operationally or educationally has yet to be fully worked out.

Figure 2.3 – Figure



2.6 – Types of awards: major minor, special-purpose, supplemental

The Irish NQF distinguishes among four award/qualifications types: major minor, special-purpose, supplemental.

These types both reflect practices that had developed before the 1999 Act and indicate that the framework was intended to accommodate qualifications/awards that reflect a lifelong learning paradigm where flexibility of access to accredited learning might be required.

Major award titles and levels are indicated in the black bands on the diagram above.

It is clear that there are two major award types at Level 6 (equivalent to Level 5 on the EQF-LLL). The Advanced Certificate awarded by QQI is distinguished from the Higher Certificate awarded by higher education providers.

NQAI definition of minor, special purpose and supplemental awards/qualifications are as follows:

Figure 2.4 – Figure 6



Source: NQAI

Award-type descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental awards reflect their definitions.

In relation to the relevance of these award-types or the non-formal sector and their access to inclusion in the NQF, it is reasonable to assert from document evidence that the non-formal sector prefers the flexibility of 'smaller' awards for coherent programme pathways across and up the NQF. Additionally, it is easier for formal providers to negotiate awards/qualifications with the non-formal sector providers if there is a direct relationship with their own major awards. This latter point is, however, a double-edged sword as it can diminish the options available to non-formal providers when formal providers integrate smaller award to suit their own learners in the first instance and eventually give less regard to the needs of the non-formal sector.

In terms of level descriptors for each of these three award-types, considerable flexibility is provided, as illustrated in the descriptors below.



QQI

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'MINOR AWARD-TYPE'

Class of Award	Minor award
Purpose	Multi-purpose award-type that recognises attainment of part of a major award and which has relevance in its own right.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable - smaller than the major award of which it is a part
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge - kind	Variable
Know-how and skill - range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence - role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence - insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to attainment of a part of one or more major awards Transfer to programmes leading to special purpose awards
Articulation	
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes form part of those of a major award

**AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'SPECIAL PURPOSE AWARD-TYPE'**

Class	Special Purpose
Purpose	To meet specific, relatively narrow focused legislative, regulatory, economic, social or personal learning requirements
Level	Any Level – best-fit
Volume	Variable - between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Usually limited to a small number of sub-strands
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge – kind	Variable
Know-how and skill – range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence – role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence - insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to major or minor awards at the same level or above Transfer to programmes leading to supplemental awards at the same level Transfer/progression to programmes leading to related special purpose awards at the same level or above
Articulation	
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes may form part of those of a major award, minor award or supplemental award

**QQI**Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland**AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR 'SUPPLEMENTAL AWARD-TYPE'**

Class	Supplemental
Purpose	For learners who have already obtained a major or special purpose award. May be for refreshing/updating and continuous education and training with respect to an occupation/profession.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major or special purpose award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable - between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - breadth	Variable
Knowledge - kind	Variable
Know-how and skill - range	Variable
Know-how and skill - selectivity	Variable
Competence - context	Variable
Competence - role	Variable
Competence – learning to learn	Variable
Competence – insight	Variable
Progression & Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to major awards at the next level in a related field of learning
Articulation	From major or special purpose award at the same level
Link to other Awards	Learning outcomes are closely linked to those of a major award or of a special purpose award – they generally reflect a deepening of learning, up-dating or specialisation

2.7 – The shift to learning outcomes

The NQF promoted a learning outcomes basis to qualifications/award design based upon the strands and sub-strands of the level descriptors. Considerable capacity-building was undertaken among providers to fulfil this requirement through internal quality assurance systems.

2.8 – Credit systems

The NQF policy in relation to the use of credit systems was published in the 2004 document: *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Higher Education and Training*.

Higher education broadly conforms to EHEA and Bologna process norms in relation to ECTS credits, semesters and academic years.

Further education has yet to achieve a uniform credit system.

2.9 – Principles and operational guidelines for recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Throughout the 1990s there was considerable piloting of APEL/RPL models and much lobbying for a national approach.

NQAI responded by convening an RPL Working Group of stakeholders to draw up agreed *Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education*, in 2005.

Under those guideline, providers were to be responsible for the operation of RPL within their own spheres and to publish institutional policies for RPL.

It is normal practice for arrangements for RPL for access, transfer, progression, exemption from portions of a programme and for achievement of a full award/qualifications to be included in programme documents as a condition of approval.

No central RPL service is provided by QQI or any other agency.

Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning
in Further and Higher Education and Training

June 2005

2.10 – Recognition of other qualifications

However, NQAI/QQI supports a qualification recognition service, QualRec and NARIC Ireland. Holders of awards/qualifications achieved outside the state can have a statement of equivalence provided in relation to the Irish NFQ provide through QualRec for a small fee.



The Irish framework was also benchmarked to the EQF-LLL and to the EHEA Bologna framework as illustrated in the table below.

<i>EQF Levels</i>	<i>EHEA Framework (Bologna)</i>	<i>Irish NFQ Levels</i>	<i>Irish NFQ Major Award-types</i>
1		1	Level 1 Certificate
		2	Level 2 Certificate
2		3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
3		4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
4		5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award)* Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	First Cycle	7	Ordinary Bachelors Degree
		8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	Second Cycle	9	Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	Third Cycle	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate

2.11 – Protection of enrolled learners and the IEM

QQI has responsibility to require providers to show that Irish providers of awards/qualifications have sufficient arrangements in place to ensure enrolled learners can complete their programme without risk of discontinuation of the programme.

To protect learners enrolled with non-Irish providers, QQI requires that such providers achieve the International Education Mark standards.

2.12 The Common Award System

The Common Awards System (CAS) is a system of linked further education and training (FET) awards specifications at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ or Framework) Levels 1 to 6 inclusively. The CAS awards specifications include 'awards standards' to be achieved before an award may be made. The awards standards are expressed as minimum expected learning outcomes. These reflect the knowledge, skill and competence to be achieved by the learner before an award may be made.

Between 2011 and 2014 all existing qualifications/awards at Levels 3 - 6 were deactivated and replaced by new common awards published in an extensive data-base of tables by QQI.

New common awards are published in the form of specifications. There are now four types of specifications – certificate specifications for major awards, component specifications for minor awards, specific purpose specifications for special purpose awards, and supplemental specification for supplemental awards.

All providers wishing to offer a common award are required to develop a programme to lead to that common award and to submit the programme to QQI for validation, prior to commencing delivery of that programme.

Providers may develop programmes for validation based only on common award standards published by QQI. They cannot develop programmes based on 'mixes and 'matches' of existing and common awards.

While the CAS brings coherence to the landscape of qualifications/awards at lower levels, it also reduces the degree of 'ownership' of unique programmes among 'non-formal' providers.

The full impact of the CAS has yet to be researched.

Chapter 3: Institutional setting



3.1 – The 2012 Act and formation of QQI

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is a state agency established by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 with a Board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. QQI's functions include those previously carried out by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

QQI is answerable to the Department of Education and Skills which funds some of its running costs. It has input into policy development and provide the Department with feedback. QQI works with the Department in areas such as: Qualifications; Further Education and Training; Higher Education; Schools Inspection; Guidance; Statistics; International Relations; Teacher Education; Schools Curriculum and Examinations.

In the area of qualifications, QQI is responsible for maintaining and regulating the ten-level NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications). It is also an awarding body and sets standards for awards it makes in the NFQ.

QQI also **determines award standards** for the further education and training sector, particularly up to Level 6 which are included in the Common Award standards (CAS) database, and outside of the state-supported school system.

QQI award standards are NQF standards which may be used by bodies other than QQI and designated awarding bodies.

QQI validates education and training programmes and makes extensive awards in the further education and training sector including in the **Education and Training Boards (ETBs)**. These Boards were set up in 2014/15 to bring regional coherence to further education and training. **Figure 3.1** below.

Figure 3.1 – Education and Training Boards



QQI also makes awards in higher education mainly to learners in private providers. The universities and institutes of technology largely make their own awards empowered under separate legislation. QQI also provides advice on recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad.

As a new function, QQI publishes a **directory of providers and awards** in the NFQ.

In the area of **quality assurance**, QQI is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education and training providers in Ireland. This includes the universities, institutes of technology, Education and Training Boards and providers in the private further and higher education and training sectors availing of QQI awards. QQI publishes the outcomes of these external reviews on its website.

Another new function of QQI is to authorise the use of an International Education Mark (IEM) for providers. This will be awarded to providers of education and training (including English language training) who have demonstrated compliance with a statutory code of practice in the provision of education and training to international students.

3.2 – QQI Governance

QQI is governed by a board of ten members including the Chief Executive. Board members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Chief Executive is appointed by the Board with the consent of the Minister. Its independence is guaranteed by legislation: the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. Members of its Board include:

- At least one person with international experience related to the functions of the Board
- At least two learner representatives; one nominated by the Union of Students in Ireland.

All decisions on the validation or otherwise of programmes leading to QQI awards are made by the Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC).

QQI engages with further and higher education and training providers and institutions in the public and private sectors. It also administers the Acels recognition scheme for English language providers. In some cases, QQI engages as the awarding body and the external quality assurance body. In other cases, it acts solely as the external quality assurance body.

- QQI engages routinely with providers and institutions through its Quality Assurance and Qualifications sections, particularly in the course of:
 - Awards standards development
 - Programme validation and review
 - Monitoring
 - Certification
 - Annual dialogue meetings
 - Institutional review

Joint QQI / Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group

Of direct relevance to this Country Report QQI is the fact that QQI has established a joint working group with representatives of the community and voluntary sector – the non-formal sector. The working group was established in order to enable QQI to improve and expand its current communications with organisations that form the community and voluntary sector, and facilitate community and voluntary sector legacy providers in making an informed choice in relation to re-engagement. The community and voluntary sector is one component of the 'non-formal' sector of providers as defined by QQI in the list below.

- **Community/voluntary sector organisations**
 - Employers/work-based learning providers, including trade unions
 - Hospital centres for nurse education
 - Private providers – colleges
 - Private providers – companies
 - Private providers – individuals
 - Public service agencies (other than BIM, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc)
 - Sectoral Representative Bodies
 - Skillnets
 - Training for people with disabilities
 - Youth services.

3.3 – Re-engagement with providers of education and training awards

A major change in procedures following from the 2012 Act is that all existing non-formal providers must re-engage with QQI in order to continue to provide qualifications/awards that are included in the NQF.

The process of re-engagement and the criteria for approval are set out in the policy document: *Policy and criteria for renewed access to QQI validation for voluntary providers of further education and training*.

Re-engagement with QQI Overarching Policy for All Providers

Re-engagement with QQI Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training

The process of re-engagement is further discussed in Chapter 5 of this Report.

3.4 – Stakeholder consultations

Since 2012 QQI has undertaken extensive consultations through Green and White Papers regarding the changes required under the terms of the 2012 Act. Outcomes of these consultations are available on the QQI website.

Feedback to QQI in relation to aspects of framework development impacting on the non-formal sector are included in the final chapter of this Report.

3.5 – A ‘register’ of qualifications/awards

There is no comprehensive QQI register of approved qualifications/awards. However, a guidance tool called Qualifax is provided based on data from providers, but it is not officially regulated. QQI maintains an official list of its own regulated awards/qualifications.



Inclusion in Qualifax is not considered a legal status that implies rights or privileges.

Chapter 4: Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

4.1 – Major, minor, special purpose, and supplemental awards

All awards/qualifications approved through QQI quality assurance systems are listed in Qualifax. Each qualification/award does not have legal status *per se* unless it is regulated under separate legislation to the 2012 Act or is a result of a professional or regulatory directive.

For example, **The Green Cert.** (Level 6 special purpose award). which enable individual holders to be exempt from stamp duty when agricultural lands are being transferred within families is regulated by the Department of Agriculture.

Likewise, persons working in any capacity on a construction site is obliged to achieve a **Safe Pass Health and Safety Awareness** Training Programme certificate regulated by The Health and Safety Authority.

Qualifications/awards on the Irish NQF are not ‘free’ for use by any provider other than those qualifications/awards listed in the Common Awards System (CAS) at level 1 to 6. In any case, providers must be quality assured as providers and have achieved approval for each qualifications/award programme through the validation process and have paid the appropriate fees for these services.

All approved qualifications/ awards on the NQF are coded in relation to the provider which developed them. These codes are generally used for applications and monitoring purposes. So, it is not possible for a different provider to ‘snatch’ a qualification developed by another provider and to replicate it for themselves, beyond the specifications standards published by QQI in the CAS data-base.

Provision of major state-funded qualifications/awards in the state at higher education level is monitored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in relation to supply and demand from learners and the labour market. Qualification/award titles are likewise monitored.

4.2 – Professional and regulated occupational awards

Certain professional bodies have powers to award qualifications, as mentioned previously in Chapter 1. These bodies include the following:

- i. An Bórd Altranais (The Nursing Board)
- ii. The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
- iii. The Opticians Board
- iv. The Law Society of Ireland
- v. The Council of the Honourable Society of Kings Inns
- vi. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland
- vii. The National Social Work Qualifications Board
- viii. The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland
- ix. Ministry of Commerce, Marine and Natural Resources
- x. Department of Telecommunications Regulation

- xi. The Irish Aviation Authority
- xii. The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

QQI facilitates the development of standards for certain occupations against which qualifications/awards are developed. Recent examples of such standards are:

- i. Architecture Technician Award Standards
- ii. Award standards Level 6 craft metal fabrication
- iii. National Tourism Guide
- iv. Lifeguard Qualification
- v. Coastal Guide Qualification.

4.3 The status of alignment with the framework

In the QQI Phase certain professional bodies were facilitated in aligning their qualifications/awards with the levels of the NQF. Policy in this regard was set out in the document: Policies and criteria for recognising professional awards within the NQF, May 2014.

Alignment is the name of a process for the recognition of professional awards within the Framework and this term will be used throughout the paper. Validation of a programme of education and training to enable a Framework award to be made is an alternative route to recognition of a professionally relevant award within the Framework.

This policy and these criteria are exclusively for the alignment of professional awards. The paper includes:

- An outline of the alignment process
- An outline of the criteria for alignment
- The general conditions for alignment

The policy will be supported by more detailed guidelines to be published by QQI.

More general policy and criteria for the recognition within the Framework will be addressed by future development.

Alignment is not directly relevant to directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications—its purpose is different. Alignment of professional awards with the NFQ facilitates the recognition of the relationship between a professional award and other qualifications (of Irish or non-Irish awarding bodies) that are recognised within the Framework. Specifically, the alignment process here determines whether a professional award made by an eligible professional body can be recognised to be at a particular level in the NFQ¹ where a professional Award-type Descriptor² has been determined for this purpose.

Alignment is not currently available at NFQ level 10. At this level recognition within the Framework is only available through a programme validation process (executed by QQI [see Section 2.2] or a self-validating higher education and training provider whose awards are recognised within the NFQ) using the Framework's Doctoral award-type.

However, facilitation of the alignment process is currently suspended.

Chapter 5: Procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF

5.1 – The transition phase from NQAI to QQI

The transition phase for QQI following from the 2012 Act enables existing/legacy providers to re-engage with QQI on a temporary basis until such time as all new QQI policies and procedures have been developed, approved and operational. The transition status of all non-formal legacy providers is temporary and will expire on a specified date. This means that all awards approved from non-formal providers will run out of certification and no longer be available. It is essential, therefore, for legacy non-formal providers to 're-engage' with QQI and to be quality assured as a provider before they can have programmes approved for delivery and included in the NQF. Legacy providers have a 'one-off' opportunity to re-engage with QQI during this transition phase. The timescale for re-engagement will vary depending on agreements already in place for each non-formal provider.

5.2 – Re-engaging with QQI for approval of quality assurance arrangements

Legacy non-formal providers who wish to continue as providers must have their quality assurance arrangements approved by QQI. The legacy provider should provide evidence of its competence and capacity to meet the quality assurance requirements and criteria of QQI as their awarding body.

QQI predict that not all legacy providers will meet the minimum capacity required and will cease to be recognised as a provider entitled to use the QQI award mark.

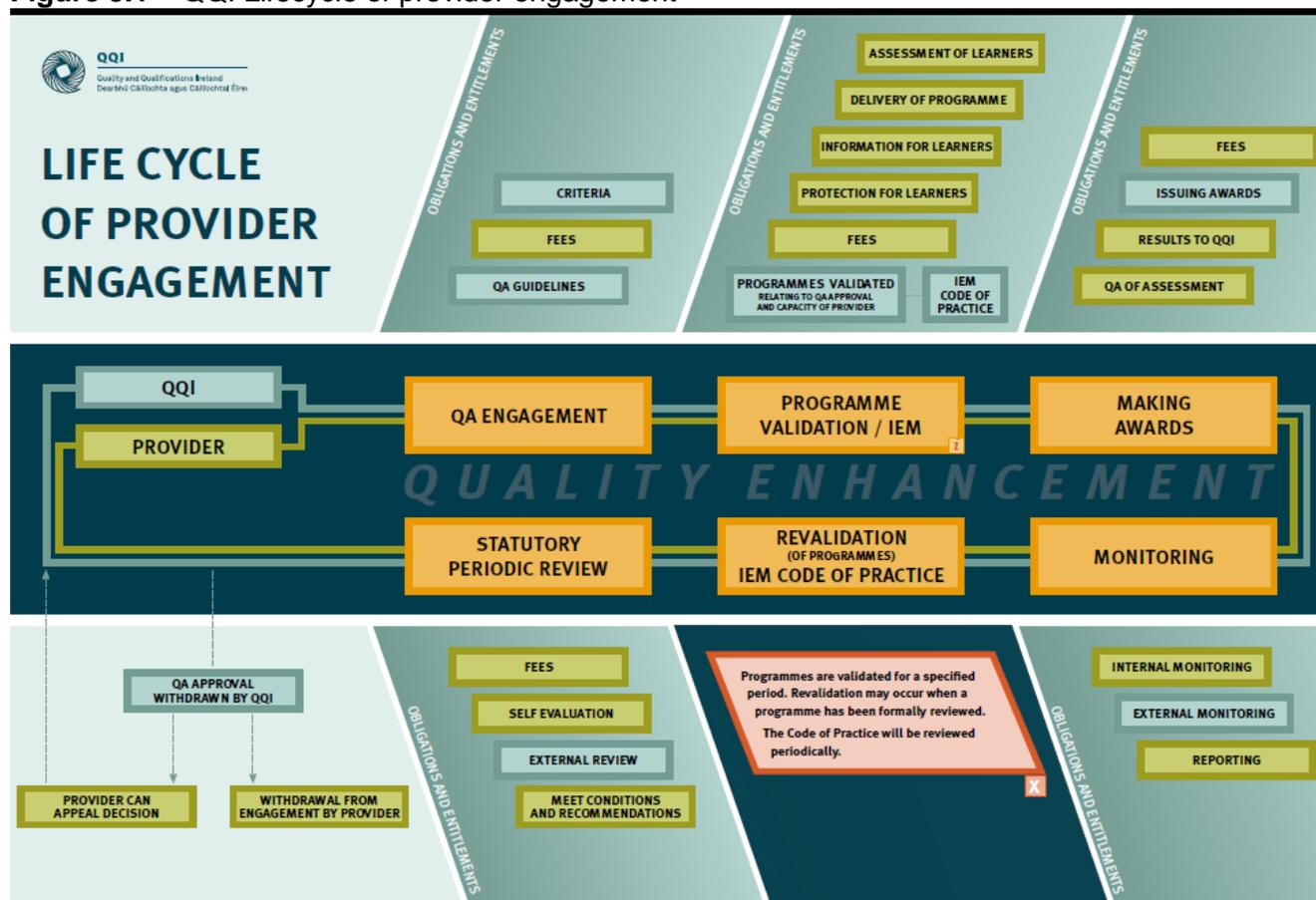
QQI also predict that small providers will need to combine in **consortia** or **networks** to achieve the scale to meet minimum capacity to meet QQI criteria.

5.3 – Life-cycle of provider engagement with QQI

Non-formal providers which choose to re-engage as a QQI provider will have a series of inter-actions with QQI in what is called the life-cycle of provider engagement. The flow-chart below illustrates the six main phases of engagement, namely:

- i. Applying to QQI
- ii. Meeting quality assurance criteria
- iii. Achieving validation of programmes
- iv. Making awards
- v. Monitoring
- vi. Revalidation of programmes
- vii. Statutory periodic review

Figure 5.1 – QQI Lifecycle of provider engagement



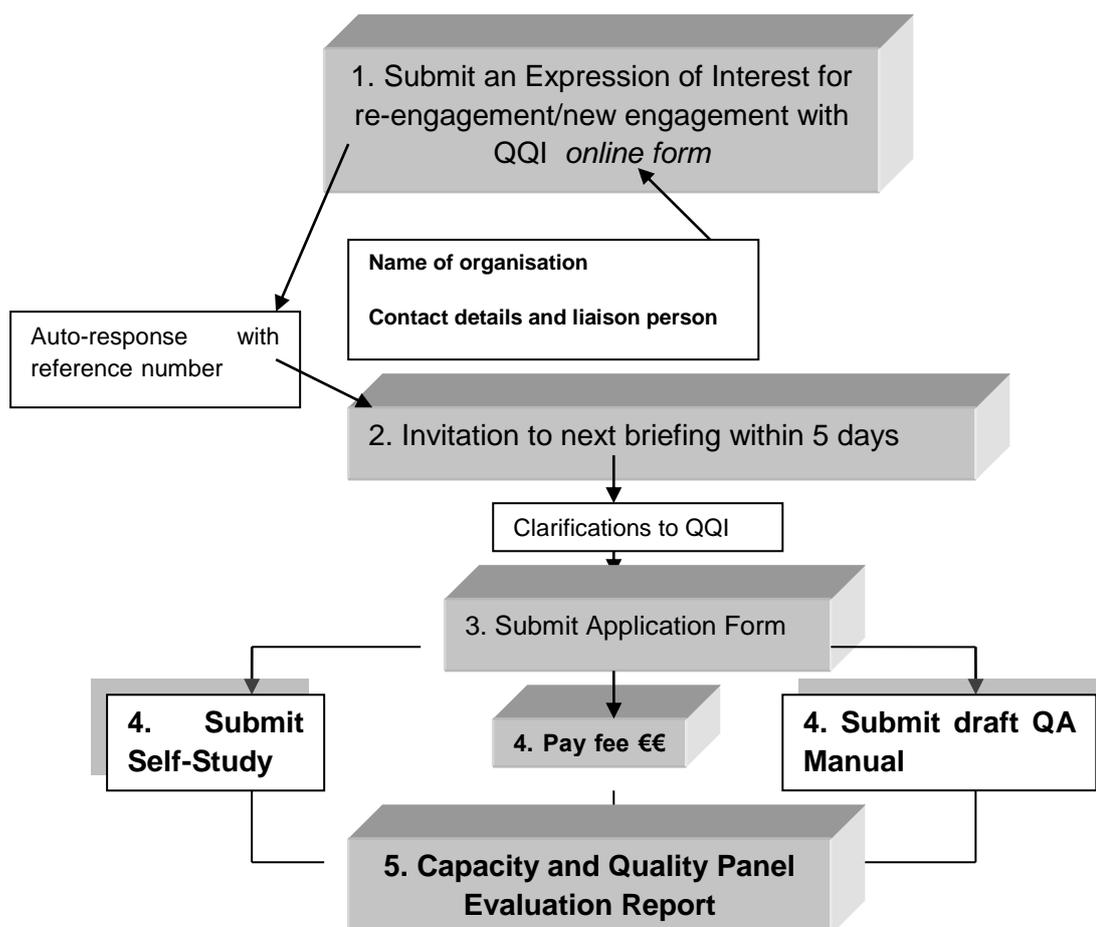
5.4 – Routes to including non-formal awards in the NQF

Non-formal providers can follow one of three routes to have their training and education programmes/qualifications placed into the NQF. The three routes are as follows:

- i. Re-engagement/renewed access as **an individual legacy/existing** provider of QQI
- ii. Becoming a **'new' provider** of QQI as an individual provider or as a member of a consortium or network and setting aside their legacy status
- iii. Becoming a **linked provider** of a Designated Awarding Body

Each of these three routes involves different processes and procedures, as detailed in **Figure 5.2** below.

Figure 5.2 – Steps in becoming a non-formal provider of qualifications.



1. Re-engagement/renewed access as an individual legacy/existing provider of QQI

The steps of re-engagement with QQI and to renew access to the NQF are as follows:

- **Step 1:** Apply to QQI indicating that the provider wishes to continue as a provider using the required application form for approval of the provider's quality assurance arrangements
- **Step 2:** Prepare full documentation within QQI deadline for re-engagement.
- **Step 3:** Pay the required fee
- **Step 4:** Submit the SELF-STUDY documentation required against QQI criteria and draft QA MANUAL of provider arrangements:
- **Step 5:** Respond to evaluators' report for either approval or rejection.
- (Submit an appeal and revised document in the event of a rejection. Wind down provision if the appeal is refused – or continue as a non-QQI provider)
- **Step 6:** Prepare programme documents for validation against QQI QA criteria and procedures outlines in your approved QA Manual.)

2. Becoming a new provider of QQI as an individual provider or as a member of a consortium or network of providers

A new non-formal provider who wishes to have their awards included as QQI awards in the NQF are obliged to follow the steps set out in the QQI document: *Initial access to programme validation*.

Potential providers are obliged to self-assess their capacity to meet QQI criteria, capacity to develop their quality assurance system and capacity to design and develop their programmes.

The process to initial engagement leading to initial validation of programmes includes information on the roles and responsibilities of QQI and of an applicant and the timetables for completing the process.

3. Becoming a linked provider with an existing Designated Awarding Body

Linked provision is currently suspended. However, in previous years linked provision could work in two ways.

1. Linked provision can be established where a provider which is not a Designated Awarding Body enters into an arrangement under which the linked provider offers a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the requirements for an award of the Designated Awarding Body.

In this model of linked provision, the Designated Awarding Body, is always responsible for the quality assurance of the award/qualification delivered by the linked provider.

2. A training provider which is not a Designated Awarding Body can negotiate provision of a qualification/award with a provider which has designated awarding powers and which quality assures the process under its own QA arrangements and which teaches the programme, with or without the direct involvement of the 'commissioning' provider. In this model there may be a tendering process to select the linked provider with awarding powers.

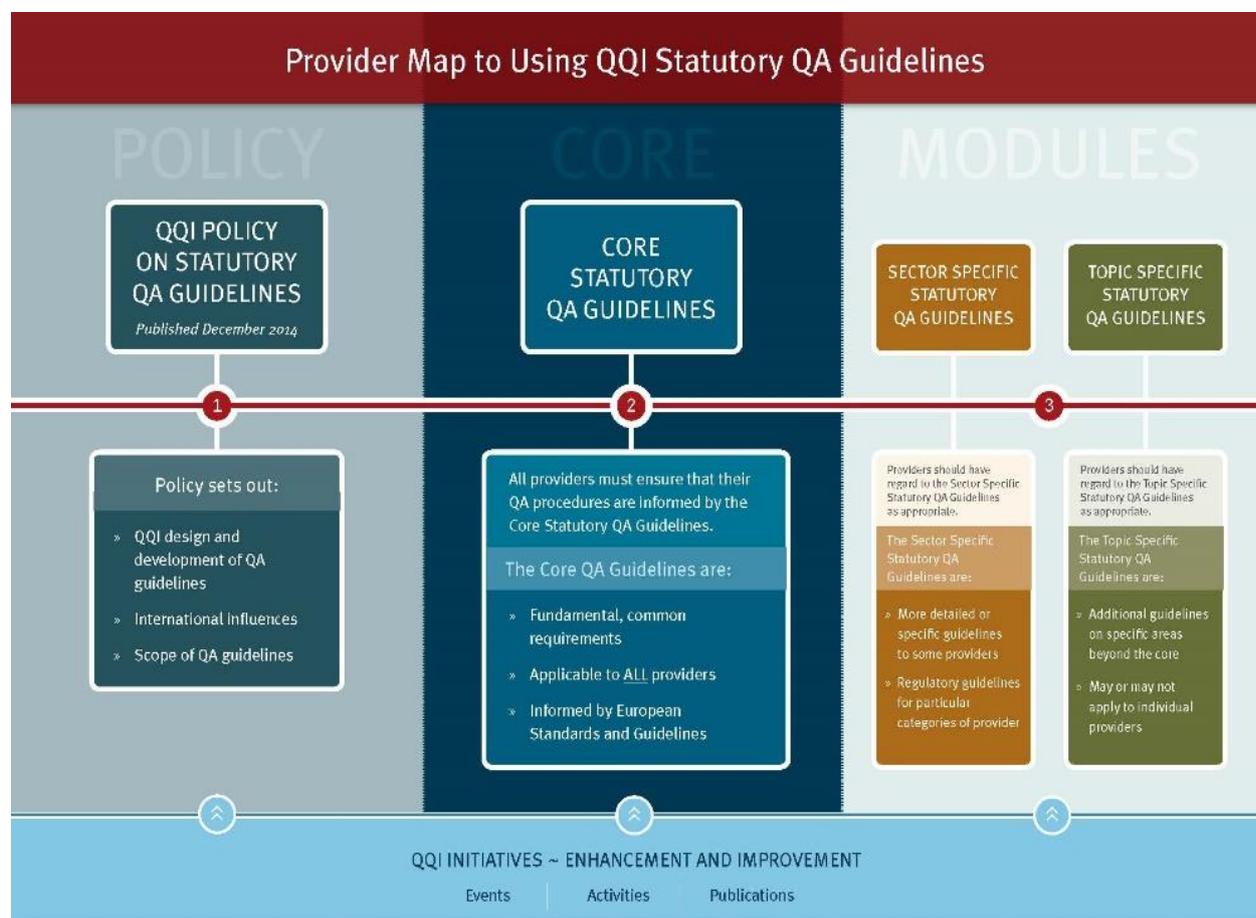
The former procedures for linked provision and the principles that guided them were outlined by The Irish Higher Education Quality Network's Guidelines for Collaborative and Transnational Provision.

5.5 – Core, sector-specific and topic specific Quality Assurance requirements

In 2016 QQI moved from the two sets of QA Guidelines for FETAC and HETAC which had been used since 2003. Under the 2012 Act QQI had become both an awarding body and a quality assurance body across the ten levels without a demarcation now between FE and HE.

Feedback from stakeholders indicated strongly that a single, unitary set of QA guidelines across all ten levels would favour HE providers unfairly. Consequently, there are now four sets of QA guidelines: statutory QA guideline; core guidelines for all providers; sector-specific guidelines; topic-specific guideline.

Figure 5.3 – Map of QQI quality assurance guidelines



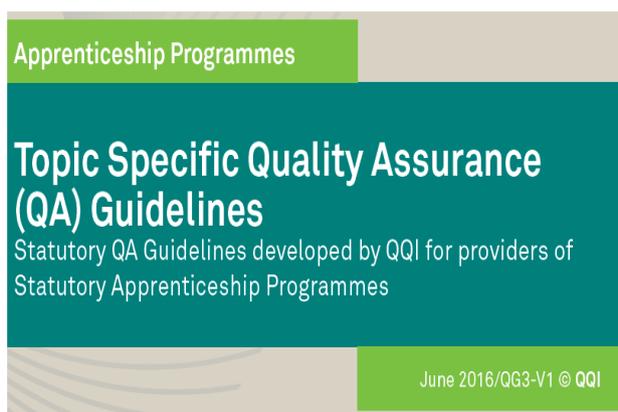
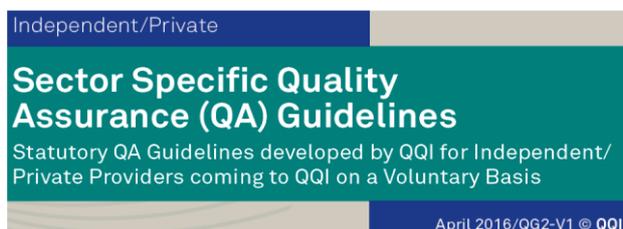
Core

Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines

Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers

April 2016/QG1-V1 © QQI

From the perspective of this Country Report the most significant QA guidelines are the sector-specific guidelines for the independent/private providers coming to QQI on a voluntary basis.



Those guidelines require non-formal providers to satisfy the QA criteria under eleven headings as illustrated in the QQI document below:

<u>SECTION 2: THE CORE STATUTORY QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES</u>	
The main areas to be addressed in provider quality assurance procedures are as follows:	
1)	Governance and management of Quality
2)	Documented approach to Quality Assurance
3)	Programmes of Education and Training
4)	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
5)	Teaching and Learning
6)	Assessment of Learners
7)	Supports for Learners
8)	Information and Data Management
9)	Public Information and Communication
10)	Other parties involved in Education and Training
11)	Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Chapter 6: Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF

6.1 – Quality assurance through the validation process

Again, it is important to note that QA requirements are initially for approval of a provider's competence and capacity to meet those requirements. If a provider successfully proves that **competence** and **capacity**, then the provider is free to apply to apply for approval to offer programmes leading to qualifications/awards.

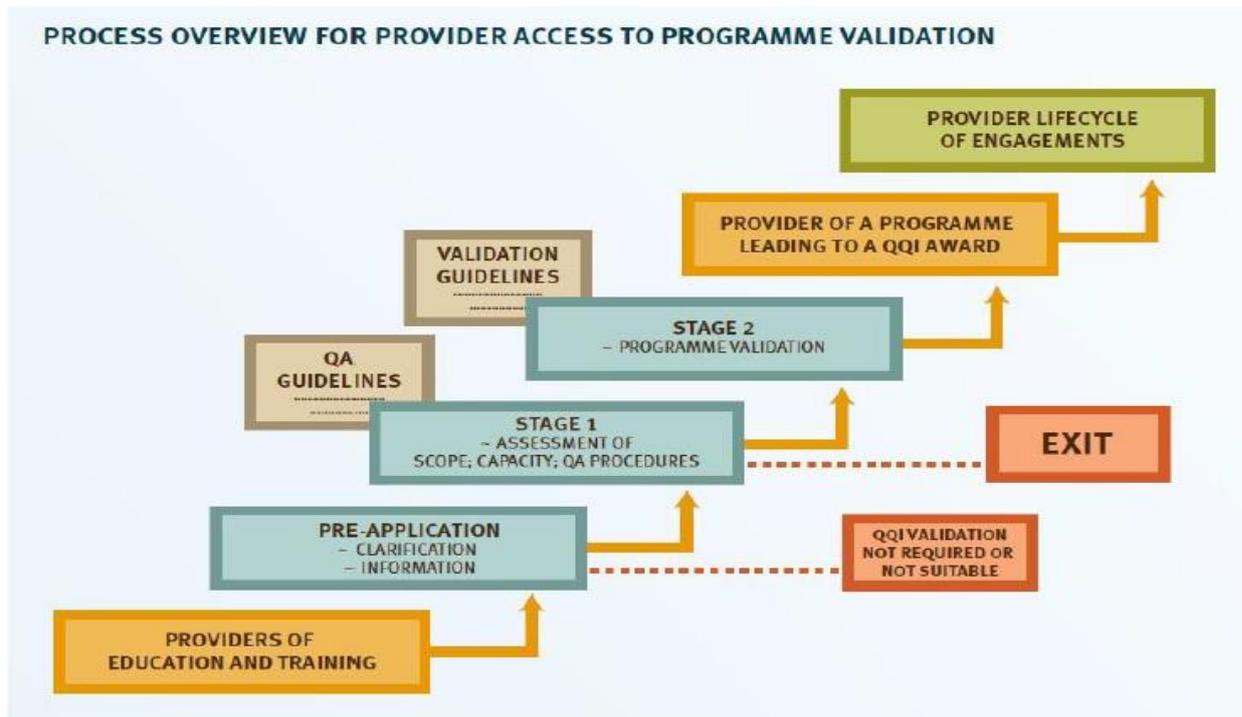
The process to achieving approval to offer qualifications/awards is called the **validation** process.

All providers of QQI qualifications/awards must apply for access/permission to provide such programmes. Guidance is available on the process and how to apply for permission to submit programmes for validation.



The steps in applying for 'provider access' to programme validation are outlined in the flow-chart below (**Figure 6.1**)

Figure 6.1 – The process of achieving quality-assured status as a QQI provider and the process for achieving validation of programmes leading to QQI qualifications/awards are inter-twined in a system of lifecycle engagement.



The significant changes in the processes and procedures for both quality assurance and for validations of programmes leading to qualifications/awards since the 2012 Act and the formation of QQI have caused significant unease among QQI providers from the community and voluntary sector in particular.

Policies and procedures have been issued incrementally, sometimes after lengthy delays. New procedures require new resources and more time on the side of providers. They also cause delays in re-engagement and renewed approval of existing programmes.

These issues are evident in the feedback from non-formal stakeholders to Green and White Papers issued by QQI and in the responses to the survey questions for this Country Report which are commented upon in the final chapter under 'current debates'.

Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

April 2016/QP:17-V1 © QQI

Chapter 7: Costs of including non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF

7.1 – Defining costs

In relation to costs, there are two main cost aspects to inclusion of qualifications/awards by the non-formal sector in the Irish NQF:

- i. costs of fees to QQI,
- ii. staff costs in relation to on-going life-cycle of engagement with QQI for provider quality assurance and for validation of programmes.

While the schedule of QQI fees are set at Ministerial level, provider staff costs vary depending on the size and extent of their training provision. In every case of approved provider status there will be a base-line of costs for maintenance of quality assurance records and for on-going compliance with QQI Providers who are in the process of re-engagement with QQI with regard to continuing as legacy providers, or who are engaging with QQI as a new provider, will accrue significant costs in staff time and resources. Staff time and resources are required to perform the **Self Study Report**, to draft a provider **QA Manual** and to organise the application process.

In addition, the self-study report must indicate how on-going staffing will be provided to meet QQI QA requirements until the subsequent cycle of review and re-validation of qualifications/awards.

A reasonable bench-mark of staff costs are civil service pay scales in 2016. In those pay scales a full-time QA Officer is likely to attract a minimum salary of €30,00 to €35,000 per year. A part-time QA Officer would cost at least €20,000 per annum. Additional costs of office space, IT equipment and materials need to be factored into the staff budget costs.

For providers working on a cost-recovery model income can be generated from learner fees to meet staff costs.

If provision is state-supported then costs to the provider are reduced.

However, for non-formal providers in the voluntary, non-profit sector, such staff costs are beyond reach. Such providers argue that providers in the non-formal sector which support civic society and are working as a 'public good' should be exempt from QQI fees at least, as was the case in the NQAI phase. The arguments here are more ideological and principles-based than financial. Much lobbying has been done in this regard.

The fees and costs issue have become a major deterrent for non-formal providers seeking to include their training in the NQF. The option of forming **consortia of providers** to share costs is not attracting the support of individual providers on a significant scale to date. As a result, some legacy providers are choosing to withdraw from inclusion in the NQF, to inventing their own awards, or to seeking less costly international qualifications/award. These developments are commented upon in the final chapter on current debates.

7.2 – QQI schedule of fees

The fee structure currently operated by QQI is set out below using QQI sources only.

 QQI Quality and Qualifications Ireland Dearbhú Cálíochta agus Cálíochtaí Éireann	
Schedule of Fees	
Determined by QQI, with the consent of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform - Section 80 2012 Act	
1.1 Fees for the submission of quality assurance procedures for approval in respect of new providers (Section 80 (a))	
Fee	Applicability
€10,000	Fee for new providers of Higher Education and Training (HET) programmes.
€5,000	Fee for new providers of Further Education and Training (FET) programmes.
<i>Note: The applicable programme validation fee will also be payable. See 1.2 below.</i>	
1.2 Fees for an application for validation of a programme (Section 80 (e))	
1.2.1 Standard Validation	
Fee	Applicability
€10,000	Fee for higher education and training programmes leading to major awards and non-major awards with 60 credits or more
€5,000	Fee for higher education and training programmes leading to non-major awards with less than 60 credits
€2,000	Fee for further education and training programmes leading to major awards and to special purpose, supplemental or component awards with 50% or more of the credit value of a major award
€1,000	Fee for further education and training programmes leading to special purpose, supplemental or component awards with less than 50% of the credit value of a major award

Note 1: A single validation fee may apply where an application comprises one or more programmes in the same field of learning. Where a validation visit extends beyond one day an additional fee of 50% will be payable.

1.2.2 Fee for the devolved validation process

The fee in respect of programmes validated under the devolved validation process will be charged at 50% of the standard fee.

1.2.3 Fee for validation of a programme leading to a Joint Award

The fee in respect of the validation of programmes leading to joint awards will be charged at not less than 50% of the main fee, but with the possibility of it equalling the full fee, in accordance with the particular circumstances and specifically to the complexity involved.

1.2.4 Fee for overseas validation

All overseas validations will be charged at full cost, to include travel and subsistence for panel members and members of the QQI executive.

1.3 Fee for the review and continuing validation of a programme (Section 80 (f))

Fee	Applicability (Note 1)
€1,500 minimum	Fee for providers of Higher Education and Training and Further Education and Training programmes. A charge of €1,500 will apply to the first programme, with an additional fee of €500 for each additional programme, subject to a maximum of €5,000 for each suite of programmes reviewed in a single programmatic review event. ¹

Note 1: This fee is for reviews conducted under a process managed by the provider. QQI may decide that a *de-novo* validation is required on the expiry of the validation of a programme. In the event that the review leading to the revalidation of a programme, or suite of programmes, is conducted by QQI, the fee applicable to the validation of a programme under Section 44 will apply.

¹ The term suite of programmes is used to describe the programmes in a single unit or department, or in a field of learning.

1.4 Fees for the making of awards by QQI (Section 80 (g))

Type of Award	Fee
<i>Major awards</i>	
Level 1 - 3	Zero
Level 4*	€50
Level 5*	€50
Level 6*	€80
<i>Component awards</i>	
Level 1 - 3	Zero
Level 4*	€20
Level 5 & 6*	€20
<i>Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards</i>	
Level 1 - 3	Zero
Level 4*	€40
Level 5 & 6*	€40
Higher Certificate	€100
Ordinary Bachelor Degree	€150
Honours Bachelor Degree	€200
Higher Diploma	€200
Post-graduate Diploma	€200
Masters Degree	€200
Doctoral Degree	€200
Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental awards	€50

*Waivers in respect of further education and training award (certification) fees are available to social welfare recipients and/or medical card holders. Providers should have a procedure to verify that a learner satisfies the exemption criteria and should retain this evidence. Waivers also apply to learners at certain centres, i.e Youthreach and VTOS centres

1.5 Fees for the making of Joint Awards (Section 80 (h))

Fees in respect of the making of joint awards will be not less than 50% of the fee for QQI awards. See Section 1.4 above. In some circumstances, the fee may equal that of a QQI award. The specific circumstances will be taken into consideration when determining an appropriate fee.

Chapter 8: Current debates on further developments

8.1 – Structure and content of this chapter

This chapter is structured into four parts which are somewhat discrete in their own rights but which are indicative of the range of tensions among stakeholders with regard to the direction the Irish NQF has taken to date, and the likely future direction in the immediate term. The parts are as follows:

1. Feedback to QQI on future policies and procedures
2. Findings from the NQF-IN survey
3. Preparation for the second framework impact evaluation study
4. Looking forward in 2003 – predications and warnings.

In order to draw upon qualitative and quantitative data for the first three parts of this chapter only documents available in the public domain or in responses and data from the survey among non-formal provider stakeholders conducted for this report are drawn upon. In the final part there is an attempt at a fifteen-year meta-analysis regarding the overall performance of the Irish NQF using predictions and foresight warnings made by Granville in 2003.

As stressed in the first chapter, the Irish NQF is more than twenty-five years old when the development phase is added to the implementation phase. A qualifications framework, as with any organisational system, is subject to the tides of time. The frameworks design and ideology emerged from very specific adult education ideologies of the early and mid-1990s, pragmatic needs to education and training, from the need to re-skill and up-skill, from spaces left open to it by the confining legislation of the Universities Act 1997, and from meta-policy recommendations from the OECD and EU. The original framework reflected a particular 'learner-centred' ideology which pervaded policy and pedagogical literature at the time, giving the non-formal sector a place at the table in a more powerful way than heretofore. This 'place' reflected the model of partnership government that had maintained both industrial and civic peace during the recession years of the 1980s and 1990s. During the NQAI Phase of the NQF the non-formal sector built its capacity to influence policy within the guidelines and procedures for inclusion of qualifications/ awards in the framework through FETAC and HETAC. The sector also built its capacity to use the technologies of the NFQ – types of awards, credits, learning outcomes, RPL, arrangements for access, transfer and progression, to form efficient and effective linkages, collaborations and partnerships with the formal sector. The sector also learned to 'align' their own professional and occupational qualifications with the framework without being explicitly included within it. Fees for inclusion of qualifications/award in the framework through FETAC were nominal only.

So, from the perspective of this Country Report, there is logic in discussing only the debates about the changes since the 2012 Act which impacted on how the non-formal sector now engages with QQI in relation to inclusion in the framework. As stated in Chapters 6 and 7, the 2012 Act and its consequences obliges private and voluntary providers (essentially the non-formal sector) to re-engage with the framework under radically different terms and conditions. It is those terms and conditions that are being debated currently and which are

likely to be central to the outcomes of the second framework impact evaluation study which started in late 2016 and is due for completion in early 2018.

8.2 – Feedback to QQI on future policies and procedures

Since 2014 QQI has conducted extensive stakeholder consultations on future policies through Green and White Papers. Of relevance to this Report are responses from non-formal sector with regard to the following White Papers:

- *Re-engagement with legacy providers; overarching policies*
- *Policies and criteria for further education and training legacy voluntary providers continuing access to validation learning to QQI awards*
- *Policy and criteria for higher education and d training legacy voluntary providers continuing access to validation leading to QQI awards.*

Of the twenty-two feedback submission received, eighteen were from non-formal providers. The other four were from representative organisations of the formal sector. Only two of the non-formal providers were also respondents to the survey conducted for this Report.

So, what were the organisational and financial issues commented upon by the non-formal sector providers in their responses to the QQI policy papers from the perspective of organisational and financial aspects?

With regard to the current fees schedule the following points were raised by providers:

- voluntary, non-profit providers should not have to pay fees to QQI on a common fees schedule since they were not obliged to pay such fees under in the NQAI phase.
- Where state funds are available to provider qualifications the rate of funding does not allow for the fees paid to QQI for re-engagement, for validation of programmes or for life-cycle engagement and QA provision.
- Fees for provision of programmes to marginalised groups should not become a sources of revenue for the state through QQI fees.
- The fee structure is discriminatory against non-profit providers who cannot enter into consortia.

With regard to quality assurance requirements, feedback contained the following common themes:

- Quality assurance models favour the formal higher education sector.
- Implying that only non-formal sector provider with good track records can re-engage with QQI suggests a lack of trust in the whole sector.
- A waiting time of up to a year from initial re-engagement to permission to provide qualifications is too-long.
- The criteria for meeting QQI standards are not fit-for-purpose for all types of non-formal providers.
- Not-for-profit non-formal providers do not have the infrastructure, capacities or resources to explore forming consortia of providers to have their qualifications/awards included in the NQF.
- Members of such consortia would not have autonomy as providers in their own right.

- The lead partner on a consortium would be responsible for the quality assurance of all partners: an unreasonable burden in expense and human resources.
- Being a member of a consortium would reduce the freedom to apply for state funding as a discrete provider.
- Ownership of consortium products would become an issue.
- The status of 'registered provider' needs to be restored, or at least re-defined in relation to the term 'recognised provider'.
- The growing perception that QQI favours HE providers is causing small VET level providers to leave the field of formal qualifications.
- Non-traditional adult learners will lose out in the new organisations, quality assurance and fees regimes.

'There is a growing perception that there is a bias towards the HE sector and that QQI are keen to significantly reduce the number of providers in the FE sector. This is a huge concern for voluntary and not-for-profit providers that often cater for learners in a specialised/niche area and it is crucial that these learners are protected. Commercial providers will not be interested in catering for this type of learner as it would not be financially viable. Timescales of re-engagement and agreeing QA procedures with legacy providers will have to be very clear, with plenty of notice given to allow providers sufficient time to manage and plan this process, e.g. if there will be fees for five yearly reviews of QA processes, again this will have to be very clear from the outset – e.g. options for staged payments should also be offered to smaller providers.' – Submission by Skillnet Network Managers – Certification group.

8.3 – Findings from the NQF-IN survey

The criteria for selection of respondents to the NQF-In survey and the methodology were outlined in Preparation of the Report above and are not repeated here.

Data from the survey are presented below using the same headings as at the Round-table event:

Value of inclusion in the NQF

- a. For organisations/companies with qualifications 'linked' to HE, 'value' includes credibility, an objective standard, national and international recognition, benchmarking, progression pathways, RPL, due 'respect' to learning systems that existed before the NQF.
- b. For global sectors such as IT and HRM, the NQF is of less value than sectoral training qualifications
- c. For some employers/organisations, short, specific, in-house training is more valued than formal NQF-related awards
- d. Courses are easier to market to learners if they have an NQF level.
- e. NQF awards have a degree of transparency.
- f. NQF awards and progression opportunities give perceived parity of esteem between workers in public service and in the private sector.
- g. Perception and reality of quality control.

QA requirements and procedures

- a. Linked' award providers using the QA of their 'partner' organisation are 'untroubled' about QA requirements whether they are self-funded or assisted by state funding
- b. Small organisations not 'linked' to a state-funded provider experience current QA requirements of re-engagement as bureaucratic, onerous, time-consuming, complex, frustrating, expensive and unwieldy.

Costs and return on investment

- a. Organisations/companies with 'linked' provision pay for inclusion in the NQF as negotiated with the main provider.
- b. Some organisations select their linked provider by tender.
- c. Small organisations experience fees, staff costs, and time, as close to, or actually, unsustainable unless there is state aid.
- d. Small organisations can offer NQF awards only through consortia or sectoral arrangements. Such arrangements can cause tensions when a particular organisational/sectoral ethos may be compromised.

Flexibility versus restrictiveness

- a. In general, the time-delays, procedures and costs associated with including small awards in the NQF are prohibitive.
- b. The framework model of major awards is too-exclusive of 'combined' models using different types of awards to meet credit requirements.
- c. Combining related minor awards from the same provider into major awards is useful for work-based learning.

Parallel systems

- a. Organisations with well-established training awards may not benefit from inclusion in the NQF, particularly if they are in regulated professions of occupations with their own CPD pathways.
- a. Global sector qualifications operate efficiently outwith NQFs or meta-frameworks.
- b. Concern that QA requirements, costs, fees and inflexibility are driving some organisations to seek 'non-national' qualifications.
- c. Small organisations with few resources may prefer an internal award system with internal credit systems for CPD.
- d. 'Non-national' systems with a perceived 'favoured' status can compete unfavourably with local organisations.

Trends

- a. Costs and new procedures are stretching the resources of smaller providers beyond sustainability, unless there are state 'schemes' to off-set costs.
- b. Sectoral occupational regulation is increasing demand for obligatory qualifications and increasing 'linked' provision by outreach and mixed modalities.
- c. 'Clearing house' models of provision are emerging to manage QA and costs, possibly with linked providers from the formal sector.
- d. LMA/Springboard initiatives have changed how the framework operates among private and public providers. The impact of such initiatives on the non-formal sector

and on perceptions of the value of such qualifications is not yet fully explored. But there may be a reason to ask why there is a perception that only upward progression in the NQF is assumed in such initiatives when lateral or downward mobility might be more appropriate for re-skilling.

- e. Linking state-funding to framework awards has changed practices in several ways, some positive, some less so.
- f. There is no clear evidence that commercial companies regard NQFs as vehicles for 'lifelong learning' or are interested in the concept. Pragmatism is the motivator for training opportunities.
- g. Demand for particular courses may have no connection with its inclusion in the NQF – it may be totally related to labour market and employment trends and economic incentives.
- h. Young learners are more keen to gain NQF awards than older learners.
- i. Some sectors are considering whether inclusion in the NQF is worthwhile at all unless it is through flexible and responsive partnerships.
- j. Changing the criteria for state supports, such as the Back to Education Initiative, may confine learners to lower levels of the frameworks.
- k. Limited support for part-time courses restricts access to an NQF award for newly-regulated occupations.
- l. Some confusion between QA paperwork requirements and paperwork related to QQI as an institution.
- m. Some contradiction between a state agency demanding CPD from a specific profession and the lack of appropriate benchmarks and awards to formalise it through another agency.
- n. Large companies may recruit graduates and conduct in-house training thereafter – with or without NQF levels.
- o. Expanding companies value NQF-related training for staff development and CPD.
- p. Small companies seldom have the time or money to engage in NQF-related training, even if they perceive a value in it.
- q. Large voluntary organisations with little funding may prefer peer-to-peer knowledge transfer models rather than expensive formal training, especially since the recession.
- r. Perception that QQI is un-supportive of small providers and unwilling to consider the 'public good' factor in its fee model.
- s. There is a perception that attaching state funding only to NQF awards greatly reduces opportunities for unemployed people to get vital training locally and in particular fields. It can also result in inappropriate placement of learners on the basis of available funding. This raises questions about the role of QQI and the NQF in such instances, regardless of Government policy.
- t. The switch from FETAC/HETAC to QQI awards, and links to the EQF is confusing for many and is prompting some sectors to look into international accreditation in the first instance and NQF recognition thereafter.
- u. The timeframe for approval of new QQI awards – from one to two years – is too-long for industry or sectoral training, regardless of the value of NQF standards.
- v. QQI and the NQF have become too-totalising: it is not necessary for the NQF and QQI to be involved in all formal training. A different model is required.
- w. Highly sought-after occupational awards from non-formal providers outwith the NQF may be 'sought' by a formal provider as a module/s within a larger award, with the

successful learner achieving both the formal credits towards a formal award on the NQF and the occupational award.

- x. Professions regulated under specific legislation may be obliged to engage with the NQF in particular ways only.
- y. The status of 'aligned' with the Framework is currently unclear.

Preparation for the second framework impact evaluation study

The second framework impact evaluation study was started in late 2016 and is to be completed in late 2017. The final version of the Country Report will take account of the outcomes of that study.

To generate critical thinking, in November 2016 QQI published a paper they commissioned from Mike Coles, international framework expert and member of QQI Board, Mike Coles. Coles' think-piece, *National Qualifications Frameworks: reflections and trajectories*, is a meta-analysis of global trends and possible futures for qualifications frameworks generally.

The think-piece is intended to stimulate expansive thinking among stakeholders regarding what kind of framework options and priorities they might consider for the next phase of the Irish NFQ. In the paper Coles outlines the growth of up to 160 national, meta, professional and sectoral and regional frameworks. He notes the emergence of remote certification of learning across borders, and the emergence of 'badges of achievement', linking the growth in frameworks to free trade agreements and the mobility of workers.

With regard to future framework types, Coles imagines common future framework levels being acknowledged globally but not necessarily with totally similar national frameworks. He calls this model a likely Stage 5 NQF. Such frameworks are likely to have a common set of benchmarked levels but which are likely to be locally funded and locally quality assured. He predicts that NQFs will be less 'hard-nosed'. Coles also predicts that Stage 5 NQFs are likely to be more remote from national governments and be managed by agencies with more freedom to consult stakeholders with regard to future changes.

With regard to what frameworks have failed to achieve to date, Coles argues that they have not created 'the seamless whole for the education and training systems that many expected', and that they have not removed barriers to progression such as in the way credit is used differently across VET and HE.

Of particular relevance to this Report is the following claim:

'Most NQFs have failed to make improvements to qualifications that can accommodate learning from education and training that has taken place in the non-formal and private sectors.' (Page 21)

With regard to quality assurance of qualifications, Coles seems to recommend a separation of management of the architecture of an NQF from quality assurance of it:

"..it is possible to see these quality assurance processes and their governance as independent of the national frameworks. The role of the NQF cans be seen simply as

establishing the levels and level descriptors which qualifications must meet. The way in which these qualifications are designed, assessed and certified are all independent of the NQF and can be quality assured independently of an NQF. (Page 24)

One of the key questions about frameworks raised by Coles, is whether a framework is primarily for **coherence** of qualifications/awards, or for **regulation** of those qualifications/awards. This point is also taken up in the Foreword to the Coles paper by John O'Connor, Head of Quality and Skills Policy, QQI, who also facilitated the NQF-In survey and round table event. O'Connor lists a number of ways the NQF is currently being used which were not necessarily foreseen when it was established under the 1999 Act. He argues that the main function of the NQF is not only in regard to making all awards more coherent in relation to each other, as follows:

'To-day, the NQF is used in many different ways, such as to give value to and recognise learning achievements; to develop new qualifications; to offer advice and guidance about learning pathways; to report on qualifications attainment; to better match skills and jobs; to regulate access to occupations; to approve courses and qualifications for public funding; and to facilitate the international portability of qualifications'.

Significantly O'Connor also notes that the **regulatory** functions of the NQF has increased and that is now frequently used to 'confer an advantage or to ration access to a public benefit'. O'Connor warns that policy makers and practitioners must be alert to how the NQF is used and to the effects, opportunities and risks that such usages represent. These sentiments were also evident in the feedback submission to QQI White Papers above.

8.4 – Looking forward in 2003 – predications and warnings

In the collective development of any new social or organisational system there will invariably be power struggles, ideological tensions, compromises and pragmatic solution. This was the case for the development of the Irish NQF. Power positions had already been achieved by the university sector under the 1997 Act which preserved their autonomy and allowed them to engage with the future NQF on a voluntary basis on their own terms and in their own time. The adult and community education sector and the VET sector had campaigned robustly for an inclusive framework and had expectations that it would evolve. The economic and labour market sector perspectives were well represented through national and international policy reports and their expectations for a 'Knowledge Society' based on credentials were well signaled.

The NQF that emerged in 2003 tried to 'make sense' of these competing expectations, although there was enthusiastic support generally for the consultative processes used by NQAI from the start. There was support for the technical 'tools' of levels, level descriptors, placement of awards, award titles, award types, credits, RPL, learning outcomes and progression pathways.

Few academics published critical work on the framework model and its potential weaknesses in the early years. One exception to this was Gary Granville, National College of Art and Design, who published an article in the Journal of Education and Work in 2003 'Stop making sense': *chaos and coherence in the formation of the Irish qualifications*

framework'. In that article Granville asks if the design of the Irish NQF was deliberately logical and coherent as a 'sense-making', inclusive mechanism as was originally intended and lobbied for by the VET and adult education sectors and all their sub-cultures throughout the 1990s. Granville argues that the framework could never have been 'light touch' as was expected and that it would inevitably create new, hard boundaries between sectors instead of reducing them. Those boundaries would determine formally who was in the framework, where they were in it, and who was excluded. He predicted that the innovatory practices of the 1990s were most likely to come under threat in a framework that was dominated by school and university norms and qualifications types. He predicted that the school Leaving Certificate examination (Level 5) and the bachelor degree (Level 8) would become the portal qualifications that would dominate the framework and the status of all qualifications within it.

'The delicate structural relationships between courses and qualifications that emerged in the unplanned and chaotic manner over some 20 years may be irreparably damaged in the transfer into a new national system, if that process of transfer is not sensitively handled.'

Granville further argues that the NQF became an exercise in bureaucratic sanity at the expense of innovative practice and visionary leadership. In his view the NQF consolidated the highly differentiated education and training systems that had existed for thirty years between the schools and universities on the one hand and the VET and non-formal sectors on the other hand. He also argues that the learning outcomes paradigm was highly challenged by the school and university systems as reductionist, utilitarian and functionalist, suitable for VET but not for them. These worldviews and positionalities were consolidated in the 1997 University Act and the 1998 Education Act before the NQF became active. It could be argued that the room for operational freedom for the NQF was already curtailed by those two acts before its own act in 1999 and that ground had already been staked out. Granville suggests that the NQF as an administrative instrument could hijack the educational system it was designed to serve, particularly with regard to the non-formal sector.

Writing in 2002/2003 Granville conceded that the Irish NQF was still in an early stage of incremental evolution, warning:

'...if it is too weak (it) will be a purely technical mechanism: if it is too-strong, it may overpower the nuanced set of varied learning experiences from which it has grown....The need remains for shade and ambiguity in the qualifications process to cater for those groups and individuals who remain on the margins.'

Given the data from the feedback submissions to QQI White Papers and the NQF-In survey it is difficult to escape a perception that in the QQI Phase since the 2012 Act much innovatory practices have been 'colonised' by the norms of higher education. It is not surprising that HE is comfortable with the framework as it is, and that non-formal providers 'linked' to HE are less uncomfortable than the non-formal sector generally. The sector least comfortable, ironically, is the community and adult education sector which drove many of the innovations which led to the NQF in the 1990s. How this sector will continue to engage with the qualifications framework in the future is still difficult to predict.

Annexes

Legal Acts

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999

Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012

End of Country Report for Ireland