

# National Framework of Qualifications

Creaitoibre Náisiúnta na gCáilíochtaí



*A framework for the development, recognition  
and award of qualifications in Ireland*

POLICIES AND CRITERIA  
FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE  
NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

National Qualifications  
Authority of Ireland

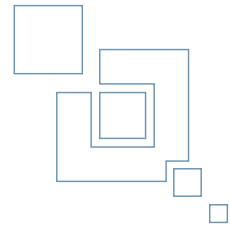


Údarás Náisiúnta  
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann

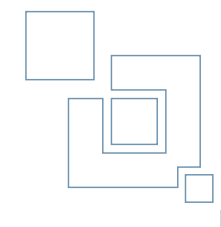


Your Plan - Your Future

*Funded by the Irish Government  
and part financed by the  
European Union under the  
National Development Plan, 2000-2006.*



Policies and criteria  
for the establishment  
of the  
National Framework  
of Qualifications



# Index

## Introduction – Policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications: context and overview

Context .....	5
Overview of policies .....	6

## Chapter 1 – Values and principles underpinning the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications

Vision for the recognition of learning .....	9
Values and principles .....	11
<i>Equality and accessibility</i> .....	11
<i>Comprehensiveness and coherence</i> .....	12
<i>Transparency and simplicity</i> .....	13
<i>Quality</i> .....	13
<i>Relevance</i> .....	14

## Chapter 2 – Process guidelines for the Authority in establishing the Framework

<i>Consultation and inclusiveness</i> .....	16
<i>Research and evaluation</i> .....	16
<i>Best management practices</i> .....	17
<i>Facilitating change</i> .....	17
<i>International dimension</i> .....	18
<i>Subsidiarity and autonomy</i> .....	18

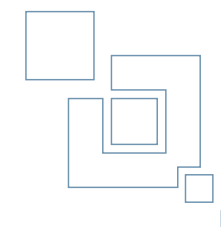
## Chapter 3 – Knowledge, skill and competence Standards

Standards .....	20
Knowledge, skill and competence as the outcomes of learning .....	20
<i>Knowledge</i> .....	21
<i>Know-how and skill</i> .....	21

<i>Competence</i> .....	22
Division of knowledge, skill and competence into sub-strands .....	22
<i>Knowledge-breadth</i> .....	23
<i>Knowledge-kind</i> .....	23
<i>Know-how and skill-range</i> .....	23
<i>Know-how and skill – selectivity</i> .....	23
<i>Competence – context</i> .....	23
<i>Competence – role</i> .....	24
<i>Competence – learning to learn</i> .....	24
<i>Competence – insight</i> .....	24
Status of the sub-strands .....	24

## Chapter 4 – Criteria for design of the Framework

Framework structure .....	25
Consultation .....	26
What makes up the Framework? .....	26
<i>What is a ‘level’?</i> .....	26
<i>What is ‘volume’?</i> .....	27
<i>What is an ‘award-type’?</i> .....	27
Development of ‘level indicators’ and ‘award-type descriptors’ .....	27
Level indicators .....	28
Award-type descriptors .....	28
Policy basis for identifying award-types .....	29
<i>Purpose</i> .....	29
<i>International comparability</i> .....	29
<i>Legacy</i> .....	30
<i>Standards of knowledge, skill and competence</i> .....	30
<i>Profile</i> .....	30
Classes of award-type .....	30



## Index

<i>Major award-types</i> .....	30
<i>Minor award-types</i> .....	31
<i>Supplemental award-types</i> .....	31
<i>Special purpose award-types</i> .....	31
Criteria for determining award-types .....	32
'Named awards' and 'field of learning' .....	33
<i>Named awards</i> .....	33
<i>Field of learning</i> .....	34

### Chapter 5 – Policies for Framework development

Policy factors determining standards .....	36
<i>International benchmarking</i> .....	36
<i>Stability of award standards</i> .....	36
<i>Learning units and credit systems</i> .....	36
<i>Titles of award-types and named awards</i> .....	37
<i>Ensuring the relevance of awards</i> .....	37
<i>Assessment methodology</i> .....	38
Policy factors associated with learners acquiring awards .....	38
<i>Programmes of education and training</i> .....	38
<i>Multiple access points, modular award structures</i> .....	38
<i>Transfer and progression from awards</i> .....	39
Policy factors relevant to how awards are received and perceived .....	39
<i>National currency and credibility</i> .....	39
<i>International comparability</i> .....	40
<i>Permanence of awards</i> .....	40

### Chapter 6 – The process of fitting awards into the Framework

### Chapter 7 – Policies and criteria for the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework

Policies .....	44
The range of existing and former awards to be placed in the Framework .....	44
Criteria and procedures .....	45
Further development .....	45

### Appendix – Summary of policies for Framework development

Factors intrinsic to the setting of standards ..	49
Factors related to learners acquiring awards ..	50
Factors relating to how awards are received and perceived .....	51

## Introduction

Policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications: context and overview

This publication brings together in a single document all of the policies and criteria relating to the outline National Framework of Qualifications that have been determined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland under section 8 (2)(a) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, over the period April 2002 – March 2003.

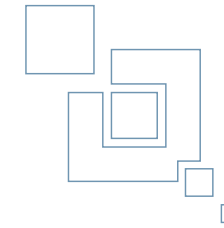
### Context

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 was enacted in July, 1999 and fully commenced in June 2001. The main objects of the Act are to:

- establish and develop standards of knowledge, skill or competence
- promote the quality of further education and training and higher education and training
- provide a system for co-ordinating and comparing education and training awards
- promote and maintain procedures for access, transfer and progression.

The Act provides for the setting up of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The Authority was established on a statutory basis in February, 2001. The Authority has three principal objects which are set out in the Act:

- the establishment and maintenance of a framework of qualifications for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners
- the establishment and promotion of the maintenance of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the existing universities



- the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision.

The Act also provides for the establishment of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), as independent bodies with their own functions, including the establishment of policies and criteria for the making of awards, the validation of programmes, and ensuring the implementation of any procedures for access, transfer and progression established by the Authority. The Act sets out separate interdependent roles for the Authority and the awards Councils. The objects of the Act are to be attained by co-operation between the three bodies and, indeed, with full involvement from a range of other stakeholders.

## Overview of policies

In November 2001 the Authority published *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications: A Discussion Document /I dTreo Chreatoibre Cáilíochtaí Náisiúnta: Cáipéis Díospóireachta*. The publication of the document was an important step by the Authority; it set a context for the development of the work of the Authority and, in particular, for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications. The purpose of the document was to explore how the Authority might approach the performance of its functions. This discussion document formed the basis of a broad consultative process. The Authority received over 80 written submissions. These have all been published by the Authority on its website ([www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie)). On 14 February, 2002 the Authority hosted a national forum at Dublin Castle. The forum was attended by over 300 delegates. It provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to consider the issues raised in the discussion document and in the subsequent consultation process.

In April 2002 the Authority published a document, *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications – Establishment of Policies and Criteria*. This presented the first determinations of the Authority following the publication of its discussion document on the Framework and the associated public consultation. The Qualifications Act requires the Authority to establish and maintain a Framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Building on this, the Authority has defined the National Framework of Qualifications 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."*

The April 2002 document sets out the core policies and criteria adopted by the Authority for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications. These encompass

- vision and principles
- process guidelines
- a definition of knowledge, skill and competence
- the basic architecture of the Framework – design criteria and development policies.

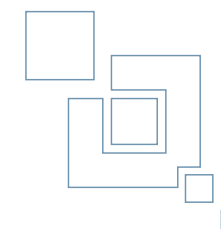
The development of the Framework of qualifications is set in the context of a vision for the recognition of learning and is in line with the broad national and European policy of promoting a lifelong learning society.

Further policies and criteria in relation to the Framework were determined by the Authority at the end of October 2002. These included policies for the division of

knowledge, skill and competence into sub-strands, for the definition of levels and level indicators, and for the determination of award-types.

Finally, the Authority determined additional policies and criteria in February-March 2003, which complete the policy-base of the outline National Framework of Qualifications. These included policies for the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework and for the definition of initial major award-types.

The specific determinations made by the Authority to define the outline Framework are summarised in a companion to this publication, *An Outline National Framework of Qualifications – Determinations made by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland*. It defines the Framework in terms of basic structure, levels and level indicators, award-types and classes of award-types, initial major award-types and the differentiation of further and higher education and training in the context of the Framework. It also defines how the standards of awards of the two awards Councils and the Dublin Institute of Technology are to be set.



## Chapter 1

### Values and principles underpinning the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications

The Qualifications Act refers to the Framework of qualifications as being for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State. Accordingly, the National Framework of Qualifications can be defined as:

*"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."*

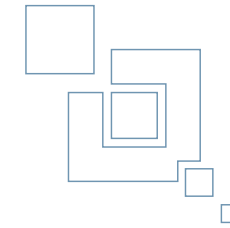
It is of note that the Authority makes no distinction between an award and a qualification in its work. The term 'qualification' is used as part of the concept of a 'National Framework of Qualifications' and otherwise the term 'award' is used.

The Framework will continue to be relevant to learners as they undertake learning throughout their lives. In this way, it can be a real step in the development of a lifelong learning society.

While the Framework is about awards, it is also learner-centred and values learning. As a result, its development will be based on certain values and principles. While the Framework will take provision of education and training into consideration, it is primarily an awards Framework.

### Vision for the recognition of learning

The establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications is a very exciting development. It addresses the long-standing problem of lack of coherence in further and higher education and training awards in Ireland. It presents a new vision for the future, with the needs of the learner taking priority. This represents a new departure in



Irish education and training, and there is a unique opportunity to further develop the awards system for education and training in an innovative and creative way, ensuring that Ireland is at the leading edge of international developments in this area.

The importance of knowledge to present-day society and economies has never been greater. We are entering an age of knowledge in which the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity has become knowledge itself. In order to be a knowledge society we must also become a lifelong learning society.

The development of a lifelong learning society is a stated national and European policy. This will determine a vision of learning, the development of which will be facilitated by the Framework. Lifelong learning is about all learning activity throughout life and has been defined by the European Commission as:

*"all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective"*

Lifelong learning is concerned with all phases and forms of learning from pre-school to post-retirement. The Framework must facilitate the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community by measuring, as appropriate, relevant learning achievements in this regard and relating them to each other. Such participation by citizens in society has become known as 'active citizenship' and has been discussed across the European Union as part of the process leading to the recent declaration on lifelong learning. The concept incorporates the mutually supporting objectives of

personal fulfillment, democratic participation, social inclusion, adaptability and employability.

The context provided by the development of a society of lifelong learning and accessibility for all should inform the nature, development and implementation of an appropriate National Framework of Qualifications. The ultimate requirement will be to have a framework that is understood by all, in which all may participate and for which all will work together in a spirit of true collaboration and co-operation. The Framework will aim to maximise the use of awards for a variety of purposes, ranging from accessing further learning opportunities to employment.

A key characteristic is the centrality of the learner within formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. This is important because of the way in which knowledge, skill and competence impact on citizens' life opportunities. The new Framework will drive the movement towards a knowledge society and lifelong learning, thereby enhancing social development and economic competitiveness. In addition, the further development of learning opportunities will also be affected by this emerging vision.

The formal recognition and valuing of all learning is an integral part of the work of the Authority. The emerging vision of the Framework and the learning that it will facilitate is that of a diverse and complex process. In addition, the structure and management of the provision of education and training is changing and subject to major influences from societal developments, communications technology and the market place. For the first time in Ireland, the Framework will aim to facilitate all learners to receive recognition and facilitate progression. The Framework will be totally open and accessible to all learners.

## Values and principles

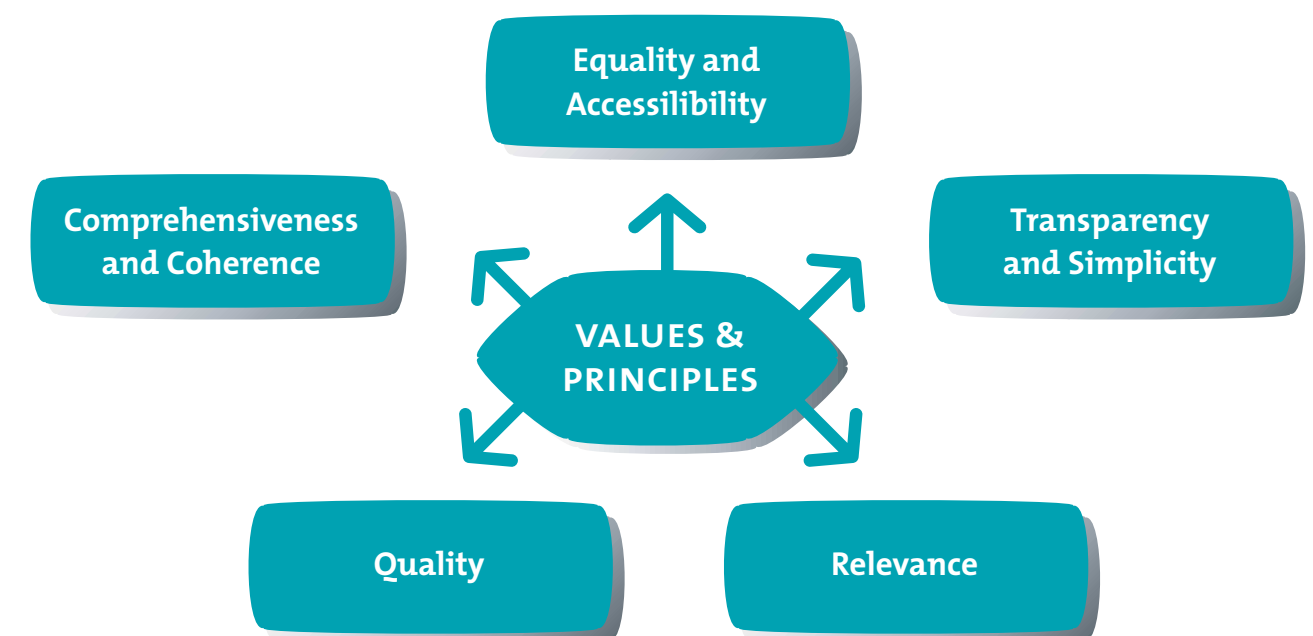
The issue arises about what form the Framework will take and how it will operate. It will need to be meaningful for all stakeholders, including learners, employers and providers. The Framework will need to provide all those involved with an understanding of how one type of award fits relative to another. It will need to facilitate the availability of opportunities for access, transfer and progression.

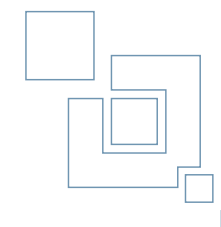
All of these requirements of the Framework are underpinned by a set of values and principles that ensures that the vision of the Framework is realised. The values and principles are not presented in a particular order or hierarchy. They should not be viewed independently and will work together for a common objective. They overlap and will be operationalised in a balanced way, depending

on the context. It is important to note that the values and principles being set out primarily relate to the development of an awards framework, rather than to the development of learning itself.

## Equality and accessibility

The Framework must contribute to building an inclusive society which offers equal opportunities throughout life to all people for access to quality learning opportunities leading to awards. The key to success will be to build on a sense of shared responsibility for lifelong learning among all stakeholders, so as to facilitate the development of a society in which everyone has the opportunity to develop their potential to the full, to feel that they can contribute and that they belong. This, in turn, will help to ensure that education and training provision is based, first and foremost, on the needs and demands of individuals.





It is vital that the Framework be accessible to all learners and able to cater for all types of awards, no matter how achieved. In particular, the Framework must cater for those learners who have in the past suffered from poor access to education and training awards. These include those who are poorly educated, older, unemployed, or not in the labour force, working in small, rather than large, companies, or working in less skilled occupational groups. In addition, other individuals and groups such as members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, refugees, minority ethnic groups and those living in rural and island locations also suffer from relatively poor access. All learning outcomes must be included in the Framework, regardless of whether they have been acquired through Irish, English or any other language. While the Framework cannot remove all the barriers that exist, it must ensure that access to relevant awards is not one of them.

Whether an award is for personal development, economic benefit or community benefit, the Framework will treat all learning fairly and consistently. It should be possible for all learning to count towards an award. There needs to be a consistent framework developed which differentiates between awards in a fair way and which relates such learning outcomes consistently to one another. This will facilitate freedom of movement for learners into and out of learning situations, irrespective of learning mode.

The recognition of previous learning achievements, including achievement that has not previously been recognised, will be an important part of the Framework. It will facilitate the inclusion of the full range of awards arising from formal, non-formal and informal learning and the availability of alternative routes to meeting entry requirements.

The Framework will support informed choices and realistic expectations on the part of learners and promote progression opportunities and equality of opportunity. It will also promote social cohesion and inclusion by making awards accessible to those who were previously marginalised.

#### **Comprehensiveness and coherence**

It has been set out that, on the basis of equality, the Framework needs to cater for all types of awards and to make clear appropriate relationships among awards which recognise the outcomes of learning. This is also important from the consideration of comprehensiveness and coherence.

The Framework needs to ensure that all relevant awards and emerging awards can be included. This will mean that the awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities are included, as well as the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. It will be necessary also to facilitate the inclusion of other awards made in the State. These will include awards by professional bodies and international awarding bodies operating within the State. The Framework needs to provide for the development of existing awards and to ensure that the possibilities for development can be included within it. The Framework must be capable of facilitating changing needs and evolving contexts, at both national and international level, and for changing awards and evolving awards.

All awards will need to be included in a coherent way, so that they have meaning relative to each other. The clarity brought about will enhance the value of awards to stakeholders. This will, in turn, accommodate an approach which provides for the development of progression routes

for learners, for example in traditional occupations and in new and emerging employment contexts.

The awards in the Framework can be relevant to employment, leisure, and personal and cultural development, and to learners from the whole spectrum of education and training activities. Recognition of learning outcomes significantly improves the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly for non-formal and informal learning.

The rate of change in occupations and technology will have to be accommodated by the Framework. In addition to this, completely new occupational sectors continually emerge and will have to be incorporated. The Authority will need to ensure that the Framework is prepared for new developments. The widely varying types of knowledge and continuing discoveries will require a framework that is stable but flexible enough to survive into the immediate future. The Framework must cater for existing and future changes in provision, knowledge and learning.

#### **Transparency and simplicity**

There is a need to ensure that all the elements that make up the Framework are fully visible. The relationships within the Framework need to be clear and easy to understand. Learners and employers need to be able to compare awards. The Framework must have clarity. This transparency will affect the development, operation and implementation of the Framework.

Transparency must exist for all the stakeholders – learners, employers, providers, community and society at large. The nature and purpose of an award and the associated progression routes building on it should be clear. This is necessary in order to support informed choices and

realistic expectations on the part of potential learners, providers of education and training, employers and other stakeholders. Transparency is required for both the awards and the structure of the Framework. The accessibility of the Framework will be enhanced if it is transparent and simple.

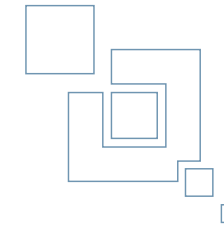
While the development of the Framework is a complex matter, the Framework itself must be clear and easy to use. The relationships within the Framework must also be clear, unambiguous and non-conflicting. Learners need to be able to identify relevant awards, compare them, and identify entry and exit points.

It is vital that the Framework is simple to use and easy to understand. Building on this, there is a need to use titles for awards that are easily understood and used in a consistent manner. Award titles need to be developed in a way which is distinct and does not cause confusion. At the same time the integrity of existing award titles needs to be evaluated and developed. Cognisance will have to be taken also of international award titles, both at European and worldwide level.

#### **Quality**

The Framework will relate to the setting of overall standards. Quality needs to underpin the setting of award standards by the Authority and indeed all of the work of the Authority. To achieve this, planned and systematic actions are necessary to provide confidence in the system. Quality processes will inform all actions of the Authority in establishing and maintaining the Framework. These will also need to allow for the achievement of excellence. Quality should permeate all aspects of learning and awards and must be a central issue in relation to the National Framework of Qualifications. It must be seen as an over-arching element.





The Framework and the Authority itself will be subject to review. This will require measures which quantify what is happening. The wide range of awarding bodies whose awards are to be included in the Framework will play an important role in any such qualification.

**Relevance**

The Framework has to be relevant to all users: learners, employers, providers and wider society. The Framework must facilitate the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community by measuring, as appropriate, relevant learning achievements in this regard and relating them to each other. In this way, the Framework will cater for the active participation of learners in society. It will recognise the capacity of all individuals for effective life management and active participation – whatever their resources or position. The attributes arising in this regard – information, participation, skills, rights and responsibilities – must be recognised by awards within the Framework. Such awards must also recognise engagement at local, national and European level and the information and skills necessary for promoting identity and inclusion. These include the social and communicative competencies that are both part of new demands which flow from changing work and study contexts, and are themselves of critical importance for living in culturally, ethnically and linguistically pluralist worlds. These competencies are not simply desirable for some, they are becoming essential for all.

Where an award aims to qualify a learner for a career or certify a competence in a profession or occupation, the award should demonstrate a clear relationship with the relevant occupational or professional standards. Through strengthening the dialogue between industry, providers and professional bodies, where appropriate, the

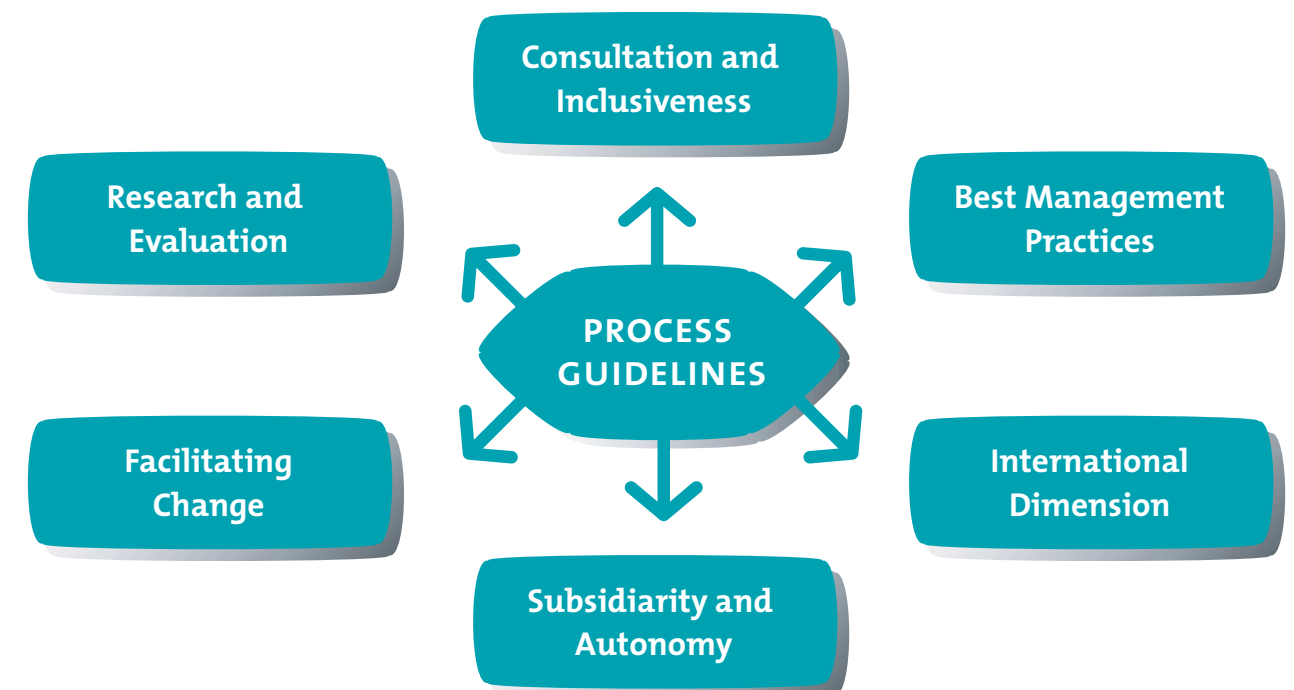
Framework will ensure the relevance of awards to the labour market and raise the skill levels of the labour force. The Framework will cater for these awards as well as for economic activity other than direct employment – e.g. self-employment, business start-up, community-based and other socio-economic activity, including personalised pathways of development.

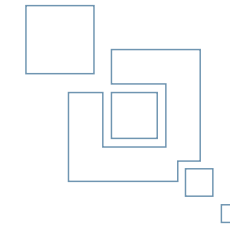
## Chapter 2

### Process guidelines for the Authority in establishing the Framework

The previous chapter was concerned with the nature of the broad values and principles underpinning the establishment of a National Framework of Qualifications. These values and principles, in the first instance, form the starting and reference point for establishing the processes that the Authority is to follow in developing the Framework.

It is vital that the Authority establish guidelines for the processes to be followed in developing the Framework. These process guidelines are concerned with how the Authority will act in undertaking the task of developing the Framework, rather than with the practical and operational elements of such work.





The process guidelines are not presented in a particular order or hierarchy. The guidelines should not be viewed independently and should work together for a common objective. They overlap and will be operationalised in a balanced way, depending on the context.

#### Consultation and inclusiveness

The membership of the Authority itself is set out in the Qualifications Act. It has a broad base, and in this way the aim is that the membership of the Authority reflects the role of the Authority.

Stakeholders will be consulted on an ongoing basis by the Authority. The range and diversity of stakeholders requires a comprehensive approach to such consultation and this is already the practise of the Authority. All important aspects of the development of the Framework have been, and will continue to be the subject of consultation.

Such ongoing consultation will ensure that the Authority has appropriate regard to the views of stakeholders as the development process unfolds. Consultation will continue after the development phase and will inform all actions of the Authority. It will be both informal and formal, including the establishment of consultative groups.

Broad consultation is vital to ensuring that the Framework meets the diverse needs of the various stakeholders. The Authority has identified a broad range of stakeholder groups. These include awarding bodies, providers of education and training, learner representative bodies, employer and employee representative bodies, trade unions, community and voluntary organisations and Government Departments and other State bodies. It is vital that ownership of the Framework is shared with all stakeholders in the system. It is equally important that stakeholders become involved in implementing the

elements of the Framework for which they have responsibility. It will be achieved by effective interaction and collaboration between the stakeholders. In the final analysis it is the Authority itself, the broad membership of which has been determined by the Houses of the Oireachtas, which will make the determinations in relation to the performance of the functions of the Authority, including the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications.

#### Research and evaluation

The actions of the Authority will be based on careful prior research. Regular review and evaluation will be undertaken to ensure the effectiveness of its work. There will be a research element to ensure that national and international developments are taken into account, while helping to inform the work of the Authority. Research, both formal and informal, can play a necessary part both in the development and maintenance of the Framework. This is particularly so in the context of new initiatives at European level. The current developments in information and communications technology, and economic and social activity in general, will require constant awareness to ensure that the Framework and its operation meet the present and future requirements of the learner and society.

All aspects of the Framework, its development and implementation, will be open to evaluation and review. The Authority itself has the key role in undertaking this task and inclusion of the views of stakeholders will be very significant in this regard. In addition, external expertise will also be involved in processes as they are developed. The ever-changing environment will require the Framework to continuously evolve and it can only meet this challenge by obtaining feedback from a system of evaluation.

#### Best management practices

Quality processes will be developed and implemented within the Authority. In the first instance, all posts in the Authority are being filled on the basis of open public competition, following best practice in recruitment. The staff of the Authority will endeavour to develop and implement quality processes. These processes will operate during both development and implementation.

The Authority will ensure that internal capacity development is achieved in order to carry out its given task. This is also necessary to ensure that the development of the Framework is successful. This will involve the development of core staff in the knowledge, skill and competence required to meet the needs of performing the functions of the Authority. It is also necessary due to the unique nature of the work and the long-term implications for the stakeholders.

The Authority will endeavour to be efficient in establishing the Framework. It will balance the benefits for learners and other stakeholders in developing and implementing various aspects of the National Framework of Qualifications against the resources required. This includes having regard to the opportunity costs of delaying the establishment of the Framework even where solutions are not absolutely perfect. In considering the efficiency of the procedures and processes, the Authority will include not just its own costs, and those of the Councils which it part-funds, but the costs to other stakeholders as well.

The costs of framework development and administration will be kept to the minimum consistent with the achievement of excellence and the maintenance of a quality process. Likewise, there will be a need to ensure that any new requirement of the Authority does not

become merely an administrative task. The Authority will endeavour to ensure that a new paper-generating bureaucracy is not put in place and that it does not become worthwhile for energy to be spent on finding ways to get around the bureaucracy rather than on enhancing quality and on improving access, transfer and progression across all learning.

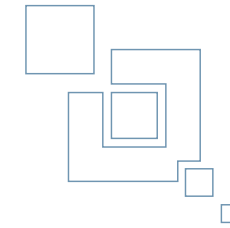
The Authority will display integrity in dealing with learners, providers and awarding bodies. It will adhere to the stated values and principles and apply them in a full and appropriate manner. It will be necessary to develop confidence in the work of the Authority so that stakeholders can take ownership of the development of the Framework. Honesty and openness will be applied to all processes involving the stakeholders.

The Authority will play a full role in meeting its requirements as part of the modernisation of the public sector. Developments in this regard will inform all of its work.

The Authority will have regard to the effective use of modern information and communication technologies in public administration and will endeavour to follow best practice to assist it in performing its functions. This will be balanced by the recognition that many for whom the work of the Authority will be relevant may not have access to appropriate information technology supports at present.

#### Facilitating change

There will be many issues relating to the implementation of the Framework. The Authority recognises that these will require significant changes in systems, structures and attitudes. The outcome will be a diverse learner community throughout further and higher education and training. This community will include a higher proportion



of adults, more learners engaged in part-time programmes, workers seeking to update or extend their awards, and many learners with a variety of special needs. These new participants will require new entry arrangements to ensure accurate matching of learner and programme, the recognition of prior learning, new kinds of provision and new arrangements for progression as they seek to meet their personal learning and award objectives. Whatever specific strategies are adopted, it is certain that it will be necessary for many groups and individuals at all levels in our education and training systems to participate in and contribute to processes of change. Furthermore, it will be necessary for funding agencies to consider the deployment of appropriate resources to encourage and contribute to such changes. The Authority will need to take a lead role in facilitating the implementation of change.

A key part of the change process will be the accommodation of awards in the Framework. This will be done in a consistent and practical manner. It will be vital to have regard to the practical consequences of the work of the Authority. The development of the Framework and the positioning of new and existing awards within it will take cognisance of the existing awards systems that are in place, while having regard to new emerging demands and the needs of framework development. There will be a linkage between the existing awards and the new. It is important that confusion be avoided. The pace of change may vary. The immediate practical implications of a national framework need to be facilitated.

#### International dimension

The Authority will be aware and informed of international developments, and will establish linkages to all relevant external systems. These linkages will be utilised both in the development of the Framework and subsequently in

its implementation. In conjunction with the awarding bodies, the Authority will ensure that all aspects of the Framework have key linkages to international systems in a way consistent with the objects of the Act. The Framework will be guided by developments in the coordination of awards systems in Europe. These include the Bologna process for higher education and the emerging broad understanding of some award-types in that regard, as well as recent developments in the understanding of vocational education and training awards across Europe, particularly in the areas of transparency and quality. As international developments take place and new initiatives arise, the Authority must be capable of recognising and responding to them. This will also include ensuring that the Framework facilitates the comparability and recognition of awards from other countries.

#### Subsidiarity and autonomy

Stakeholders in education and training have their own roles, functions, traditions and responsibilities. These are set out in the legislation, charters, orders and other legal instruments covering the establishment of each of the stakeholders, as well as, in some cases, in the public understanding of a particular stakeholder's role. These will all need to be fully recognised in the development of the Framework.

Where practicable, decisions need to be made and matters resolved in a consistent manner as close as possible to those most affected by them. In recognising that this is the case, the requirements of the Act and the statutory role of the Authority also need to be taken into account by the stakeholders. The Authority will need to acknowledge that it may take some time for all to become fully aware of the complexities involved. The Authority will establish relationships with all stakeholders whose involvement will be necessary for the successful operation of the Framework.

## Chapter 3

### Knowledge, skill and competence

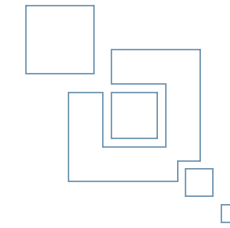
The following chapters (chs. 3-7) set out the policies and criteria that are determined by the Authority for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications. In this way, the statutory requirement on the Authority, under section 8(2) (a) of the Qualifications Act to "establish the policies and criteria on which the Framework shall be based" is being addressed.

The Act lays out certain basic features of the Framework – it is to be "a Framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State . . . based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners". Accordingly, within the Framework awards are to be based on standards. Standards are to be specified in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. Knowledge, skill and competence are properties acquired by learners.

The Act further sets as an object of the Authority to establish the standards of the awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology. A final object of the Authority is to promote and facilitate access transfer and progression of learners. Establishing the Framework is a key task of the Authority in support of this object.

It is necessary to have a common understanding of the key language used in this document and by the Authority in general. Otherwise, it will be difficult to have a full understanding of the Framework itself and the various steps in its development.

The Act refers in several places to the outcomes of education and training as the acquisition of knowledge, skill and competence. This is an implicit definition of learning outcomes for the purposes of the Act and of the



Framework of qualifications. In this section, this implicit definition is elaborated and some distinctions are made between the various kinds of learning outcomes. In practice, most awards, and certainly most outcomes of programmes of education and training, will include some mixture of knowledge, skill and competence. It is considered that there is a need to set out what is meant by:

- standards
- knowledge, skill and competence.

## Standards

The Authority's 2001 discussion document noted that award standards are just one type of standard required for the development of quality systems in the programmes of education and training. For example, providers have process or procedural standards for the delivery of education, training and services, and awarding bodies will need to develop standards for their own awarding processes. These standards are used by providers and awarding bodies respectively in the performance of their functions. A further example is a commonly held understanding which equates 'standard' with 'level' and views standards as measurements or grades of attainment for an award.

It is recognised that there are various types of standards such as those referred to above. In this document, however, the approach taken is to use the term 'standards' in reference only to the inter-related concepts of:

- knowledge, skill and competence
- levels in the Framework
- award-types
- the awards themselves.

## Knowledge, skill and competence as the outcomes of learning

In the Framework, award standards are the expected outcomes of learning, inclusive of all education and training. They concern the knowledge, skill and competence that are expected from the learner who is to receive an award. They concern both general standards (for a level in the Framework or an award-type) and the specific standards for named awards in particular subjects or fields of learning.

In the consultation process, the definition of knowledge, skill and competence was identified by various commentators as containing an important indication of the philosophy of learning underpinning the Framework. There is room for a tension to exist between a view of education and training as tightly orientated toward the achievement of specific behavioural capabilities, whether for economic or general social purposes, and a view of education and training as fulfilling broader goals of human development, only some of which may be measurable in terms of specific behavioural outcomes. The approach adopted by the Authority has been to be as broad as possible in spelling out our understanding of knowledge, skill and competence, while recognising that learning which is not assessed against standards cannot be included in the Framework.

The intention of the Authority is that all relevant and measurable learning should be covered by the Framework and that collectively the expression 'knowledge, skill and competence' should have this generality. This usage is similar to that of the European Commission in its communication on lifelong learning which encompasses "*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the*

*aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*".

It would be possible to engage in a protracted project to determine a precise meaning for the terms knowledge, skill and competence. One might observe, for example, that learning could be equated with knowledge in a broad sense and that skill and competence are subsumed in knowledge. Many skills have an underlying, implicit, knowledge component and competence includes the application of knowledge in various contexts. On the other hand, competence could be adopted as the overarching term, encompassing knowledge and skill as subsets of competence. Various project teams and individual scholars have produced valuable, detailed, analyses of these concepts and their interrelationship. Without attempting to resolve these discussions in a definitive fashion, it is important for us to make some distinctions within the overall basket of outcomes referred to as knowledge, skill and competence. This is because such distinctions will guide our further work on describing the standards for levels indicators and award descriptors.

The Authority has determined that there are three strands of learning outcome that will be used in setting standards. These are:

- knowledge
- know-how and skill
- competence.

Human learning is complex and various learning outcomes overlap. These three understandings of different types of learning outcomes are not to be interpreted as corresponding to sharply-bounded categories of knowledge, skill and competence. Rather, the overall set of knowledge, skill and competence is broken down

heuristically into these three strands of outcome. They are intended to facilitate the elaboration of indicators and descriptors rather than to define learning as such. It should be possible to include all relevant learning outcomes within one or more of these strands.

It is also important to note that not all forms of learning that contribute to enabling a learner to perform in context can feasibly or reliably be captured by the assessment methods available. While such learning is important, and may be part of the desired learning outcomes for a programme of education and training, it cannot be compared against standards and as such cannot form part of the award standards for the inclusion of awards in the Framework.

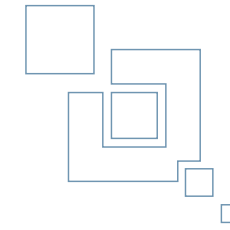
The three strands of learning outcome can be further elaborated as follows:

### Knowledge

This is the form of learning outcome commonly identified with declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the cognitive representation of ideas, events or happenings. It can be derived empirically from practical or professional experience as well as from formal instruction or study. Such knowledge has meaning outside any specific context of application or practice. It can comprise description, memory, understanding, thinking, analysis, synthesis, debate and research. Any new knowledge is not simply added to the knowledge a learner has before, but is conditioned by the nature, richness and structure of one's previous knowledge and, furthermore, serves to modify and restructure the latter, however partially.

### Know-how and skill

Skill is the goal-directed performance of a task in interaction with the environment. The exercise of a skill is



the performance of a task that in some way responds to or manipulates the physical, informational or social environment of the person. Know-how underpins skill but is not identical to skill. Know-how, or *savoir faire*, is the procedural knowledge required to carry out a task. Know-how may be accompanied, or scaffolded, by declarative knowledge while a skill is being acquired but, unlike procedural knowledge, this declarative knowledge is not an intrinsic part of the skill. Know-how may be measured directly or implied from performance. Skill can only be measured by performance.

### Competence

The practical application of knowledge and/or skill requires learning beyond their primary acquisition. The unique characteristic of competence is the effective and creative demonstration and deployment of knowledge and skill in human situations. Such situations could comprise general social and civic ones, as well as specific occupational ones. Competence draws on attitudes, emotions, values and sense of self-efficacy of the learner, as well as on declarative and procedural knowledge. Competence refers to the process of governing the application of knowledge to a set of tasks and is typically acquired by practice and reflection. Some aspects of performance in situations may depend on innate characteristics of an individual. Inasmuch as such performance is not learned it cannot be recognised as learning. Competence also encompasses the extent to which the learner can acknowledge his/her limitations and plan to transcend these through further learning. Moreover, while basic knowledge and skills can be described more or less independent of context, for the description of competence it is essential to make explicit the range of contexts in which the learner can demonstrate their competence. Competence outcomes can thus be stated in the form, "In a specified range of circumstances, a learner will be able to...".

### Division of knowledge, skill and competence into sub-strands

The Authority has determined that there are three general strands of learning outcome that will be used in setting standards. These strands are knowledge, know-how and skill, and competence. It is necessary to analyse the learning outcomes within these strands more fully. A number of sub-strands have been identified within these main strands that can be considered as the component structures of the three kinds of learning outcome. They identify the sources of order within the kinds of learning outcomes associated with awards at the various levels of the Framework. The sub-strands are based on the concepts introduced in the understandings of knowledge, skill and competence.

The main strands of learning outcome are divided into sub-strands as follows:

- knowledge
  - *breadth*
  - *kind*
- know-how and skill
  - *range*
  - *selectivity*
- competence
  - *context*
  - *role*
  - *learning to learn*
  - *insight*

The sub-strands can be summarised as aiming to answer the following questions:

- How extensive is the learner's knowledge?
- What nature or quality of knowing has the learner engaged in?

- How extensive are the physical, intellectual, social and other skills demonstrated by the learner?
- How complicated are the problems that a learner can tackle using the skills acquired and how does a learner tackle them?
- In what contexts is a learner able to apply his/her knowledge and skills?
- How much responsibility can the learner take, personally and in groups, for the application of his/her knowledge and skills?
- To what extent can the learner identify the gaps in his/her learning and take steps to fill those gaps?
- How far has the learner integrated the intellectual, emotional, physical and moral aspects of his/her learning into his/her self-identity and interaction with others?

### Knowledge – breadth

Knowledge outcomes are associated with facts and concepts; that is, they refer to knowledge of, or about, something. The more diverse, complex and varied the facts and concepts, the greater the breadth of knowledge and this is a matter of level. Breadth is distinguished from the number of different facts and concepts learned, which relates to volume.

### Knowledge – kind

The representation of facts and concepts, including ideas, events or happenings, is cumulative. The more facts and concepts are layered on top of each other, and draw successively upon each other to construct meaning, the higher the level of learning. This process is typically associated with progressively greater abstraction from concrete phenomena into theory.

### Know-how and skill – range

Skills, in both their execution and the demonstration of underpinning procedural knowledge, encompass the use

of many different kinds of tool. 'Tool' refers to any device or process that facilitates individuals having some effect on their physical, informational or social environment. Tools include cognitive and social processes as well as physical implements. Tools, and the skills to use them, range from commonplace or familiar to novel or newly-invented. The sheer number of skills acquired is a matter of volume, rather than of level. The diversity of skills is a feature of this strand that contributes to differentiation in level. The completeness of the set of skills (and associated know-how) in respect of an area of activity is another feature that helps indicate the level.

### Know-how and skill – selectivity

The performance of tasks depends on the learner having an appropriate understanding of the environment in which the tasks are performed and being aware of his/her own ability and limitations, while at the same time being able to correctly judge the fit between the demands and ability. Whereas the range of know-how and skill refers to what a learner can do, selectivity (which might also be called procedural responsiveness) refers to the judgement that the learner exercises in carrying out procedures, through selecting from the range of know-how and skills available to him/her, in accordance with his/her appraisal of the demands of the task.

### Competence – context

Human situations, whether occupational or general social and civic ones, supply the context within which knowledge and skill are deployed for practical purposes. Such situations range in complexity and hence in the demands they place upon the person acting in them. Highly defined and structured situations or contexts constrain the behaviour of the individual and require lower levels of learning. The range of responses required, and hence the extent to which a broader range or higher level of

knowledge and skill have to be drawn upon also depends on how predictable the context is. Acting effectively and autonomously in complex, ill-defined and unpredictable situations or contexts requires higher levels of learning.

#### Competence – role

For many purposes, joining and functioning in various kinds of group is a key component in putting knowledge and skill to effective use. Joining a group successfully requires individuals to adopt appropriate roles within the group. This requires the application of social skills and an understanding of the tasks of the group. Higher levels of competence are associated with playing multiple roles as well as with roles requiring leadership, initiative and autonomy. Higher competence is also associated with participation in more complex and internally diverse groups.

#### Competence – learning to learn

This strand encompasses the extent to which an individual can recognise and acknowledge the limitations of his/her current knowledge, skill and competence and plan to transcend these limitations through further learning. Learning to learn is the ability to observe and participate in new experiences and to extract and retain meaning from these experiences. While drawing on other aspects of knowledge, skill and competence, this sub-strand places an emphasis on the relationship of the learner to his/her own learning processes. This provides a basis for abstraction and generalisation that, in principle, facilitates regarding this as a separate sub-strand of competence.

#### Competence – insight

Insight refers to ability to engage in increasingly complex understanding and consciousness, both internally and externally, through the process of reflection on experience.

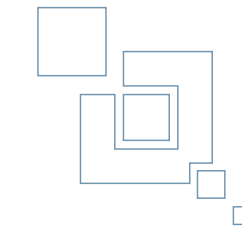
Insight involves the integration of the other strands of knowledge, skill and competence with the learner's attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive style and personality. This integration is made clear in the learners' mode of interaction with social and cultural structures of his/her community and society, while also being an individual cognitive phenomenon. A learner's self-understanding develops through evaluating the feedback received from the general environment, particularly other people, and is essential to acting in the world in a manner that is increasingly autonomous.

#### Status of the sub-strands

Not all the sub-strands are equally familiar to current users of awards. The sub-strands within knowledge and know-how and skill have long formed the basis for awards. Context and role competence are familiar for users of some types of award. The competence of learning to learn makes explicit, as outcomes, certain kinds of learning that would previously have been considered as properties of programmes and, as such, are bound up in the learning process, rather than elements to be explicitly certified in awards. Insight is perhaps the most innovative sub-strand. It is not clear to what extent this sub-strand has been taken up as an explicit objective of education and training programmes or incorporated in the design of awards. There are considerable difficulties in devising appropriate methods for assessing the attainment of such outcomes. Nevertheless, it seems desirable to make provision for such outcomes within the Framework. It is likely that this sub-strand will need further refinement as education and training practice and associated awarding practice develops. This sub-strand will need to be developed iteratively in association with practitioners.

## Chapter 4

### Criteria for design of the Framework



#### Framework structure

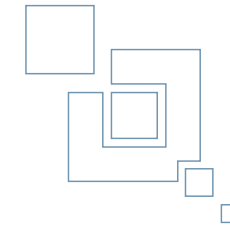
This chapter sets out specific design criteria which will be used by the Authority in the development of the Framework of qualifications. It is a vital chapter in this document, as it sets out what the nature of the Framework will be.

The National Framework of Qualifications will be based on levels. Each level will have a specified level indicator. At each level in the Framework there will be one, or more, award-types. Each award-type will have its own award-type descriptor. It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop these level indicators and award-type descriptors. For each award-type a wide range of named awards will be developed. It is the responsibility of awarding bodies to develop named awards.

Framework Structure



The diagram illustrates the relationship between the concepts of 'level', 'award-type' and 'named awards' in the Framework.



## Consultation

The process guidelines pointed out that stakeholders will be consulted on an ongoing basis by the Authority and all important aspects of the development of the Framework will be the subject of consultation. It is important to note that this chapter addresses, in particular, the development of the National Framework of Qualifications and notes that it is the responsibility of the Authority to develop the level indicators and award-type descriptors. The Authority will do so in consultation with stakeholders.

## What makes up the Framework?

There are a number of questions that need to be asked about the development of the Framework.

- what is a 'level' in the awards framework?
- what is 'volume'?
- what is an 'award-type'?

### What is a 'level'?

Levels are a series of sequential steps. Each level sets out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence acquired by learners. Levels are not in themselves standards but indicators of a range of standards and can be described in an ordered sequence. The indicators enable award-types to be matched to a level on an overall, best-fit basis, rather than by conformity to a defined set of required standards. The level indicators are a key structural element from which the Framework of qualifications is to be built.

The introduction of levels will allow comparisons between different award-types in the Framework. Levels will contribute to transparency and coherence in the Framework. Building on this, the placing of award-types at

different levels in the Framework will facilitate the development of progression opportunities.

To determine the level of a standard of knowledge, skill and competence it is necessary to analyse what a person who has attained such a standard at that level is able to do and use the output of that analysis to define the level of knowledge, skill and competence pertaining to the component parts.

Levels of award-types are quite pragmatic constructs which have developed over the years. There can be varying approaches in different countries to determine the number of levels, the range of learning outcomes associated with each level and the gap between levels. More importantly there is no necessary or logical connection between the bundles of learning outcomes packaged together within levels – nor are there necessary, shared, hierarchical positions. Is one person's ability to recite *Ode to a Nightingale* at a higher or lower level than another's ability to juggle three balls? They are simply incommensurable. One might be classed as *knowledge* and the other as *know-how* within the threefold understanding of knowledge, skill and competence set out by the Authority, but they are not of themselves associated with a level. On the other hand, they are both clearly higher level than reciting *Happy Birthday* or juggling two balls, respectively, and are both lower level than analysing the interaction of imagery and metre in *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* or juggling four knives, respectively. The assignment of knowledge, skill and competence to levels is a pragmatic activity rather than an exact science.

It also needs to be recognised that there is a distinction between level of standard of knowledge, skill and competence, as defined above, and 'level' of provision. Any programme will require overall outcome standards of a

certain level and within this there may be other outcome standards at a lower level. In other words, beginners French is low level, regardless of whether it is taken as part of a Junior Certificate course, a Post-Leaving Certificate course or a Doctorate programme, if the standard of linguistic competence aspired to is the same. However, this is not to say that 'Beginners French' may not form part of the learning programme for any particular relevant award – the composition of the learning package for this award can include, even require, some learning at this level. The point is that it does not become high level French because it is studied by someone seeking a high level award.

### What is 'volume'?

Volume of standards of knowledge, skill and competence refers to the amount of knowledge, skill and competence at a particular level or levels: the more the amount of knowledge, skill and competence, the greater the volume. The volume measure does not necessarily specify the kind or mix of knowledge, skill and competence. The concept of volume does not primarily refer to the cumulative amount of education and training undertaken to reach a level, that is, to the inputs required to achieve a set of outcomes. Rather, it refers to outcomes and the standards of these. Various systems for measuring volume make use of notional learning time for the purposes of devising a common metric across different kinds of outcome but this is not the essential meaning of the concept of volume. The concept of volume is a key to the development of a system of credit accumulation and transfer.

Not all award-types at a level necessarily have the same volume.

### What is an 'award-type'?

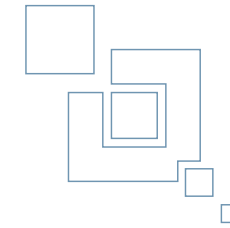
An award-type is a class of named awards sharing common features and level. Award-types can reflect a mix of standards of knowledge, skill and competence which is independent of any specific field of learning. Descriptors can be defined generically for award-types.

Award-types, even where more than one exists at the same level, will vary. For example, at present, a Masters degree and a post-graduate diploma may both be at a particular (post-graduate) level and may differ in volume. A Masters degree by course work and a Masters degree by thesis may both be at the same level but may be different award-types because they reflect different mixes of knowledge, skill and competence, rather than solely because they have different methods of assessment. There may also be diplomas which are post-graduate in time but not in level. Another example of different award-types that may be at the same level is the National Foundation Certificate of the former National Council for Educational Awards (now awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council) and the Leaving Certificate. Accordingly, an award with a very small volume could also be a credit to a further award at the same level.

## Development of 'level indicators' and 'award-type descriptors'

The National Framework of Qualifications will be based on levels. Each level will have a specified level indicator. At each level in the Framework there will be one, or more, award-types. Each award-type will have its own award-type descriptor. It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop these level indicators and award-type descriptors.

It is necessary for the Authority to define what inputs into a level indicator and into an award-type descriptor.



## Level indicators

Level indicators are broad descriptions of learning outcomes at a given level in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. The following elements are relevant to the development of level indicators:

- level indicators will reflect an ordered indication of ranges of standards of knowledge, skill and competence (see Chapter 3 above)
- the breadth of the range covered by each level will not necessarily be the same, i.e., the level indicators will not be on an interval scale
- the level indicators will work generically, not in terms of specific fields of learning.
- they will read 'standalone' – that is, each level indicator will be readable without immediate comparison with the level below it and the level above it
- at the same time, wherever possible, the language of indicators will facilitate comparison with neighbouring levels
- the indicators will be framed in terms which facilitate more detailed specification, for example, in relation to award-type descriptors
- indicators will facilitate the assignment to levels both of credit and of award-types
- it may be desirable to have more than one layer of detail in the level indicators, for example, a condensed and an expanded version
- no level will be described primarily in terms of preparation for subsequent learning
- level indicators will be neutral with respect to assessment methods.

Given the centrality of levels to the Framework, which is constituted by the number of levels it contains, new levels

cannot be added, nor existing levels deleted, without changing the Framework.

It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop the level indicators.

## Award-type descriptors

An award-type descriptor is a description of a class of named awards sharing common features and level. The following elements are relevant to the development of award-type descriptors:

- award-type descriptors will describe general standards and mixes of knowledge, skill and competence associated with the award-type
- award-type descriptors will include level and volume
- there may be more than one award-type at any given level in the Framework
- the level of an award-type will not be determined solely by the level of the highest learning contained therein
- award-type descriptors will operate independently of specific fields of learning, but will facilitate more detailed specification for named awards
- award-type descriptors may include articulation or progression characteristics
- award-type descriptors may include reference to assessment methods.

There is no fixed number of award-types for the Framework. New award-types and associated descriptors may be developed to meet the needs of learners.

It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop the award-type descriptors.

## Policy basis for identifying award-types

There are various considerations in identifying the initial set of award-types. These will be used to determine how many award-types the Authority will define. These include the purpose of the award-type, the international comparisons and the legacy of existing groups of awards that correspond to potential candidate award-types for the Framework.

Award-types should not be multiplied unnecessarily. The function of this determination is to group together similar awards for better mutual understanding and exchange among their users. The basis of distinction between award-types follows this function.

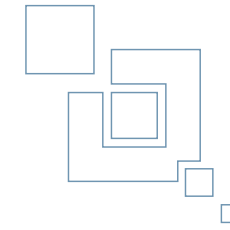
### Purpose

The purpose or purposes of an award-type are tied to the policy of ensuring the relevance of award standards, which is in turn is an expression of the principle of relevance. The purpose of an award is not the same as the subjective intention of the learner, though it is obviously a function of guidance to ensure congruence between those two. For example, a learner may be pursuing an award primarily with a view to obtaining employment, but the purpose of the award could include transfer or progression to other education and training as well. Although the Framework, in general, must facilitate the recognition of learning relating to the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community, individual award-types within the Framework may emphasise particular purposes or preparation for different forms of participation. An award is made in respect of the achievement of a planned combination of learning outcomes and, therefore, should have some purpose reflected in this plan. All awards of a given award-type should have some element of shared purpose.

## International comparability

The policy of international comparability extends to award-types. In certain areas there is an international basis for mutual recognition of classes of whole award. The international equivalences may have been established for other purposes and the 'descriptors' may not have all the relevant features of an award-type as specified for the Framework. For example, the Leaving Certificate in a minimum number of subjects is the typical basis for admission to higher education programmes in Ireland and would thus be recognised as an award for the purposes of equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities under the European Convention of 1953. Ireland is not yet a signatory to the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education (1997) but this convention extends international recognition to other awards giving access to higher education and awards resulting from higher education. Accordingly, if and when ratified by Ireland, the obligations under this convention will supersede those undertaken under previous Council of Europe agreements. The Bologna process for higher education awards and the Bruges – Copenhagen process for Vocational Education and Training are also relevant. The treaties of the European Union, and the associated directives on labour mobility, require mutual recognition of certain classes of award that provide the basis for licensure in various occupations and professions. International agreements necessarily accommodate a wide variation in the way in which awards are specified. Legacy awards and new award-types may both be acceptable for international purposes, even where domestic considerations in relation to the Framework require the introduction of new award-types and movement away from the legacy awards. What would be problematic would be to move away from the legacy awards and not to meet the international purpose





through providing an appropriate new award-type. These purposes could be in respect of marking the entry-level for higher education (matriculation), the identification of first, second and third cycle award-types of the Bologna process and the award-types required for engaging in various regulated occupations.

#### Legacy

The Framework must have regard to the legacy of existing awards systems. The standards of knowledge, skill and competence associated at present with award-types within these systems will be considered and can be used to assist in the development of descriptions for existing and emerging award-types. Legacy award-types are generally under-specified for the purposes of the Framework and generally do not have appropriate descriptors. An important factor in the generation of award-types in the past has been the locus of associated programme provision, but this is not an acceptable basis for distinguishing between award-types in the future. The use of legacy award-types to inform the development of new award-types is not the same as the process of including legacy awards in the Framework on a retrospective basis. The inclusion of these awards is a separate task for the Authority.

#### Standards of knowledge, skill and competence

The fundamental basis for defining award-types must be the existence of distinct standards of knowledge, skill and competence. The overall standards for an award-type enable it to be placed on a level in the Framework. Reference must be made to the particular set of learning outcomes associated with the award-type. Standards for award-types will be based on at least one, and typically more than one, sub-strand of knowledge, skill and competence.

#### Profile

The coherence or balance between the various sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence can form a basis for defining an award-type. This profile reflects the purpose of an award-type. It includes the relative levels of the outcomes specified within each of the sub-strands. Although an award-type is defined at a specific level, it can include learning outcomes from levels above and below that level.

#### Classes of award-type: major, minor, supplemental, and special-purpose

The Framework is intended to enable the recognition of all learning achievements and the range of award-types provided will have to facilitate this inclusiveness. Not all combinations of achievement, at a given level, are of equal importance. Some award-types fulfil a broader range of purposes and these are labelled major award-types. Other, more limited or specialised, recognition needs are met by minor, supplemental and special-purpose award-types.

#### Major award-types

Major award-types are the principal class of awards made at each level. At most levels, such award-types capture a typical range of achievements at the level. They include outcomes from many of the sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence appropriate to the level. An example of this is the honours bachelors degree at its level. This could be referred to as a major award-type at that level. A major award-type is expected to have significant progression options to higher-level awards, as well as options for transfer to other awards at the same level. Awards of the major award-type may also prepare learners for direct transition into employment. While named awards of major award-type relate to learning in a particular field, such awards share in the general purposes

of their award-type. An award of a major award-type usually represents a significant volume of learning outcomes. The set of learning outcomes for such awards should be coherently planned to meet the purposes of the award.

Major award-types include many of the awards made in respect of young people and others receiving their initial education and training. Major award-types are important instruments of public policy as they are the primary means of identifying the outcomes of such education and training, which is substantially underwritten by public funds.

The Authority's policy on the titles of award-types and named awards applies particularly to major awards. It is important that users of awards (learners, employers and others) can link an award to other awards of the same major award-type and are enabled to identify clearly the level in the Framework to which the award belongs.

#### Minor award-types

A minor award-type will provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, without achieving the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. The range of learning outcomes will have relevance in their own right. The minor award will also be a means of identifying the knowledge, skill or competence previously acquired by the learner.

Minor award-types may not have been designed with a distinct purpose and, in this way, they may be distinguished from special purpose award-types. A minor award-type will be part of the learning outcomes associated with one or more major award-types at a given level in the Framework. The combination, number or

volume of outcomes achieved may be variable. A minimum achievement in learning required for a minor award can be set. The nomenclature adopted for minor awards will clearly differentiate them from major awards. Minor awards may be combined with other learning outcomes towards the achievement of a major or special-purpose award. Minor award-types may contribute towards the accumulation of credit for major award-types, subject to the policies and regulations governing the use of credit to be developed by the awarding bodies in the Framework.

#### Supplemental award-types

Supplemental award-types are for learning which is additional to a previous award. Programmes leading to such awards may be described as refresher, updating or continuing education and training. In some cases there may be regulatory requirements for such awards in order for learners to retain a licence to practice granted in respect of the initial award. Such supplemental awards are not at a higher level than the initial award. Learning of this type has not traditionally been explicitly recognised in the formal systems of awards. In some cases, where it cumulatively reaches a sufficient volume, it may have been deemed to merit an award at a notionally higher level than the initial award simply because it was subsequent in time to that award, rather than because it explicitly demanded outcomes at a higher level.

#### Special-purpose award-types

Special-purpose award-types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes. They may comprise learning outcomes that also form part of major awards. However, where there is a need for separate certification of a set of outcomes, this should be a separate award. For example, there is a statutory obligation for construction workers to have certification of their competence in health and safety

(Safe Pass). Such certification may be a component of a broader award in some part of the field of construction, but it has a stand-alone function also. The introduction of a common national credit transfer and accumulation system, such as currently being explored by various awarding bodies with the support of the Authority, would facilitate the articulation of such special purpose awards with awards of the major award-types being determined by the Authority and made by awarding bodies. Nevertheless, there will continue to be legal requirements, economic incentives and personal desires for separate awards which are not merely parts or modules of some bigger award.

Much of the demand for professional and international awards in the marketplace of qualifications derives from the specificity of such awards. The class of special-purpose awards would include many of these. One of the characteristics of such awards is that they have little or no articulation with unrelated awards, even where these are at the same level. One of the functions of the Framework is to provide such linkage. Special-purpose awards may provide a basis for transfer into more broadly-based major awards at the same level and thus progression on to higher level awards or they may provide direct progression to further narrowly-based special-purpose awards.

By their nature, it is not so likely that the common branding of special-purpose awards will be as important as in the case of major awards. They derive their currency from the particular context of their use, such as in individual fields of employment. The named award will be dominant and it may be difficult to assure the same uniformity of titling as proposed for awards of the major award-types. The commonality of special-purpose awards is largely restricted to their level in the Framework. This commonality is important inasmuch as it indicates where the awards may be useful for transfer purposes.

If these certification activities reflected by special-purpose awards are left out of the Framework, the potential for articulation with major awards is reduced. Many of the important learning activities and achievements of learners would be left out of the Framework. Stakeholders, such as employers may feel that the Framework is ignoring an important functional set of awards. There are resource implications in quality assuring some such special-purpose awards, particularly those that are of low volume. Special-purpose awards are also likely to be quite variable in volume, varying for instance, from field to field. Over time it may become necessary to introduce further distinctions between special-purpose awards based on volume.

### Criteria for determining award-types

Building on the above, the following are the criteria for determining award types:

- major award-types will be provided at each level of the Framework
- a distinction may be made, at a given level, between major award-types whose primary purpose is progression to learning at a higher level (though such awards have broader relevance also) and major award-types whose primary purpose is to prepare learners to use their knowledge, skill and competence directly in the workplace, community or wider society (though such awards should also support progression)
- award-types will include major award-types consistent with the commitments made under international agreements, the Bologna process and other relevant international processes
- minor award-types, corresponding to major award-types, will be provided where demand for recognition of partial achievement exists

- supplemental award-types will be provided, where demand exists, for learners who have already obtained a major or special-purpose award-type at a given level and field
- a special-purpose award-type will be provided at each level where there is a regulatory, economic or social requirement for the recognition of specific, relatively narrow sets of learning outcomes.

Award-types for awards made under Section 50 of the Education Act (1998) are determined from time to time by the Authority, following discussions with, and with the agreement of, those exercising the awarding function under that Act, in a manner consistent with the policies and criteria of the Authority, and the level indicators.

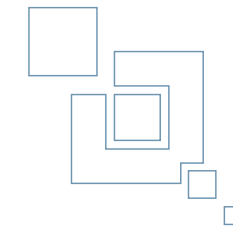
### ‘Named awards’ and ‘field of learning’

#### Named awards

It has been set out that, within the Framework, awards are to be based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Knowledge, skill and competence have a concrete expression within individual named fields of learning. A named award is a way to recognise such concrete expressions. The standards therein are described in terms of level and volume, consistent with an award-type. For each award-type a range of named awards will be developed.

There are two principal questions that need to be asked about the standards presented for the purposes of an award. These are:

- does the overall package of standards of knowledge, skill and competence correspond to a particular award-type, which reflects the level, volume and mix of the standard of knowledge, skill and competence?

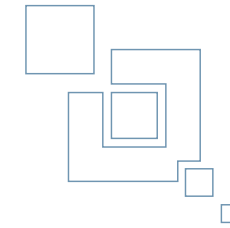


The diagram illustrates the components of a ‘named award’.

- in what area or field of learning are the standards of knowledge, skill and competence?

Named awards may include reference to occupations, economic sectors or subjects. Examples of existing named awards are National Vocational Certificate Level 2 in Business Studies – Secretarial; National Craft Certificate – Motor Mechanic; National Diploma in Construction in Architectural Technology; Master of Philosophy in Medieval Language, Literature and Culture.

Named awards of a given award-type may be grouped into clusters of related awards. For example, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council currently groups its named awards of the National Certificate award-type into 10 principal clusters (Arts, Business Studies, Computing, Construction Studies, Design, Engineering, Humanities, Science, Social Studies and Technology). In 2001, the Council made 114 named awards of this award-type.



It is the responsibility of awarding bodies to develop named awards.

#### Field of Learning

The Authority's 2001 Discussion Document set out that there will be a need to group particular awards within the Framework to assist in the setting of standards. Most existing Frameworks group awards in particular ways, for example:

- economic sectors
- specific occupations
- fields of learning
- subjects

It is considered that there is no single method of carving up the universe of learning for the purposes of setting standards of knowledge, skill and competence which can be applied across the board. In particular, different divisions may be more or less relevant at different levels of the Framework. Accordingly, the Authority will use different ways of grouping awards as necessary.

Taking account of the above, it is considered that as an overall organising structure within which to ensure that all fields of learning are had regard to, the Authority will refer to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the related classification developed by Eurostat and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) building on this. The sectoral and occupational fields will be referred to, particularly where there are relevant career pathways extending across multiple levels of the Framework.

An important issue is that, in order for learning to be

credited for an award, it is necessary that there should be appropriate coherence to the award as a whole, or to a part of the award. This is particularly relevant for progression to further learning opportunities and for links to employment.

## Chapter 5

### Policies for Framework development

The development of the Framework will be guided by a number of policies that are the essential features which will input into the development of the Framework.

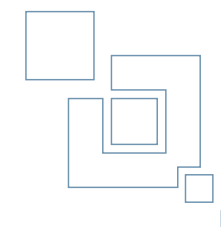
These policies relate to the development of the Framework and are summarised in the appendix at the end of this publication. The Authority will build on these in developing its approach to implementing the Framework, once developed. This approach will recognise the roles of the various stakeholders in learning, including, awarding bodies, providers, employers and learners. The Authority will also be setting further procedures for the Awards Councils to follow in the performance of their functions, particularly in relation to their role in determining the standards of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners for each of their awards and for awards made under delegated authority.

The Authority has determined three sets of policy factors that need to be considered. These are:

- factors intrinsic to the setting of standards
- factors related to learners acquiring awards
- factors relating to how awards are received and perceived.

The rationale for adoption of many of these design features derives from the key object of the Authority to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. The development of an awards framework incorporating these features will intrinsically contribute to this object, in that it will make it clear how awards relate to one another. This will make it possible for the learner to identify

- how, and at what point, they can enter a learning programme that will lead to an award
- what possibilities there are for transfer to another



programme, and what recognition they will get for the knowledge, skill and competence they have already acquired

- what possibilities there are for progression to higher level learning opportunities from their prior awards.

The effectiveness of the Framework in this regard will be enhanced by the implementation of additional strategies to promote access, transfer and progression. These will be the subject of further development and will include the determination by the Authority of procedures for access, transfer and progression to be implemented by providers of education and training.

## Policy factors determining standards

### International benchmarking

Many Irish awards currently enjoy international recognition through the explicit linkage of standards of Irish awards with international practice. This is accomplished through, for example, the conferral of the awards of international examining and awarding bodies in some education and training programmes in the State and through the employment of internationally-based external examiners for others. The design of the Framework will ensure that the existing international currency of Irish award-types is built upon.

The Framework will be guided by developments in the coordination of awards systems in Europe. These include the Bologna process for higher education and the emerging broad understanding of some award-types here, as well as recent developments in the understanding of vocational education and training awards, particularly in the areas of transparency and quality, across Europe. Framework development will also have regard, where practicable, to the international practice in framework

design while being a unique national framework and within national traditions of education and training. Within individual fields of learning there are important international standards that will serve as points of reference. Examples are the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the Washington, Sydney and Dublin Accords on Engineering.

### Stability of award standards

There should be confidence among all stakeholders that a learner holding an award at a given level and another learner with an award at the same level have both attained comparable standards of knowledge, skill and competence, regardless of when or where that award was made. This does not exclude the possibility that the substance of knowledge, skill and competence will change or that the overall package is the same between two different awards of the same type. Substance will be continually updated by awarding bodies setting the standards for named awards and correspondingly by providers making available programmes of education and training. In some instances, e.g., universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, these roles overlap.

### Learning units and credit systems

The concept of lifelong learning implies that learners should be able to undertake units of learning at varying rates of progress, and perhaps not all in a continuous process. This, in turn, implies that it should be possible for the learner to receive recognition for their learning achievements in units far smaller than many existing awards. It will be policy that the design of the National Framework of Qualifications will facilitate the development of a system (or systems) of credit accumulation and transfer, based on learning units. However, the development of such a credit accumulation system will take some time and is linked to, but not part of, the National Framework of Qualifications.

### Titles of award-types and named awards

The Authority's 2001 *Discussion Document* highlighted the wide variety of titles of award-types and named awards currently in use. In many cases there is some consistency in the use of titles of award-types – for example, the use of Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate. However, there is considerable confusion in respect of awards prior to Bachelors and in post-Bachelors study prior to Masters, leading to, for example, Higher Certificate or Higher Diploma. Also, for example, award-types with certificate and diploma as part of their title are made for a diverse range of achievements, by various providers and awarding bodies. Some of these bodies have internally coherent mechanisms for differentiation among awards of different title. Others do not. The Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate are well-recognised awards using the word 'certificate'. 'Foundation' has also been commonly used in award-type titles, for example, this was used by the former National Council for Vocational Awards and the former National Council for Educational Awards.

In some cases there is internal consistency in the way in which the terms are used with respect to award-types or groups of award-types, with the stated aim of providing for a ladder of progression. An example is the use of National Certificate and National Diploma according to criteria defined by the former National Council for Educational Awards. An alternative usage also maintains a consistent relationship between the terms but relies on volume rather than level to differentiate between them. An example is the National University of Ireland's recent standardisation of terminology in respect of sub-degree awards where a certificate is awarded for a minimum of 15 credits and diploma for a minimum of 30 credits but with no implication that the extra credits are at a higher level. Similar distinctions prevail with respect to post-graduate certificates and post-graduate diplomas in the

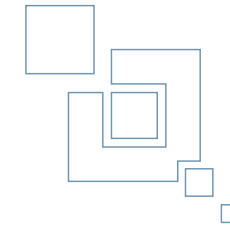
universities. In the Scottish framework the post-graduate (and graduate, i.e. pre-degree higher education work undertaken by learners who already hold degrees) nomenclature is standardised around a volume concept.

There are also further issues in relation to the titles of named awards. These can often relate to the incorporation of the field of learning or occupational relevance of an award. Marketing can be very relevant to this issue. Many programmes and awards are often re-branded and retitled with a view to increasing their attractiveness. This can lead to confusion for learners and employers where marketing can input into the title of a named award rather than an accurate and consistent description of the contents of the named award.

The Authority considers that it is important that titles of award-types and named awards, incorporating associated fields of learning and occupational labels should be as clear and consistent as possible. The Authority also considers that titles of award-types should be used in a way to consistently reflect volume, as appropriate.

### Ensuring the relevance of award standards

The Authority considers that the Framework must facilitate the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community by measuring, as appropriate, relevant learning achievements in this regard and relating them to each other. The standards of knowledge, skill and competence determined by the Authority will include reference to the attributes relating to the participation of citizens in society – the mutually supporting objectives of personal fulfillment, democratic participation, social inclusion, adaptability and employability.



### Assessment methodology

A variety of appropriate methodologies may be used to measure knowledge, skill and competence. Indeed, it is in the interests of learners that a diverse range of assessment methodologies is available for the purposes of demonstrating attainment of standards. The Framework will not presuppose a uniformity or harmonisation of assessment methodologies leading to all awards. The Framework will accommodate awards made on the basis of pass/fail outcomes, and awards made on the basis of graded outcomes.

### Policy factors associated with learners acquiring awards

#### Programmes of education and training

Many learners follow formal programmes of education and training. Such programmes typically include learning outcomes, the attainment of which make a learner eligible for an award. Programmes may also include assessment methods which verify that the learner has achieved the stated learning outcomes. It is very often efficient for an awarding body to formally recognise a programme of education and training, thereby devolving responsibility for the assessment of learning to the provider of the programme, subject to appropriate quality assurance arrangements. This process is referred to in Ireland as validation of a programme.

Awards made to learners in respect of successful completion of programmes so recognised are in no way superior or inferior to awards made for learning which is demonstrated independently of any provider of education and training. Awards are based on standards of learning outcomes which are independent of the format or context of provision of related education and training.

Awards made to learners in respect of completion of programmes can have differing outcomes. There can be a number of outcome grades. In other words, even where someone has attained the standard of knowledge, skill and competence to attain an award, a specific grade can be assigned.

Furthermore, the Authority notes that it can be possible for different grades to be assigned on the completion of a programme. It is possible that the difference in standards represented by different grades can lead to awards which may be at different levels in the Framework. For example, in the Scottish framework of qualifications, some school examination grades result in awards at a particular level where other grades in the same examination result in awards at another level. The Authority considers that the Framework should have the flexibility to allow for such developments, if necessary.

#### Multiple access points, modular award structures

Many of the features that could be built into an awards framework to promote access, transfer and progression are greatly facilitated in the context of modular approaches to programme design and delivery. The design of the Framework will facilitate the further development of modular approaches and structures. A linked issue is that the Framework will facilitate multiple access points to programmes. This includes entry to multi-year programmes at differing stages and the possibility of programmes having more than one entry point in the year. In general, the design of the Framework will allow for possible future structures and practices that accommodate more flexible entry arrangements, including modular award structures and entry at various points to programmes leading to awards. It will also facilitate learners interrupting their studies, while earning credit for the learning outcomes already achieved. These

issues are linked to the facilitation by the Framework of a system (or systems) of credit accumulation and transfer.

#### Transfer and progression from awards

One function of awards is to facilitate the progression of learners into a programme of learning leading to a subsequent award. Awards are also intended, of course, to facilitate learners moving directly into employment or some other role in society. However, a framework has a particular function to support transfer from one award to another. This includes progression to awards at a higher level than those already attained.

Awards vary in the range of options for further learning to which they lead. Currently some awards made in respect of programmes of education and training in Ireland do not offer progression options to further programmes and awards. A second group of awards offers progression opportunities along relatively specialised routes, for example within a single discipline or economic sector. A third group of awards offers a wide range of progression opportunities to diverse programmes of education and training. The Leaving Certificate and the Bachelors degree are examples of the latter class of award.

The Authority considers that in the world of lifelong learning all awards should yield some options for transfer or progression. The Authority and its stakeholders value awards with a relatively narrow range of transfer and progression opportunities and awards with a wide range of transfer and progression opportunities. Indeed, the two groupings outlined here may not be formally defined or differentiated from each other. Particular award-types may be hybrids, being semi-specialised. The basic principle of recognising learning by quality-assured standards means that, regardless of the award context in which learning is initially recognised, it should be further recognised in the

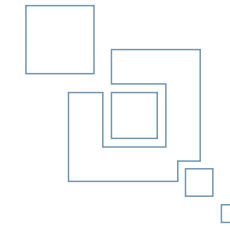
context of any other award in the Framework. Learning is thereby portable from one award to another. Accordingly, where existing awards are not linked to further awards for transfer and progression, new transfer and progression routes will be facilitated.

All awards within the Framework will have transfer and progression features built into them. Those with a very wide range of progression options correspond to what were referred to in the Authority's 2001 *Discussion Document* as 'portal awards'. The usefulness of this concept to the development of the Framework is still being explored. It might serve a function in opening progression routes to more learners. On the other hand, it might lead to an unnecessary differentiation from awards which are not portals. It is worth noting that many other national systems are actively considering how best to integrate specialised and generalised awards. Ongoing discussion on this topic needs to recognise the various uses to which awards are put by learners, employers, providers and the general public. Progression to further awards is not the only purpose of awards.

### Policy factors relevant to how awards are received and perceived

#### National currency and credibility

It is considered vital that the wide range of existing award systems in the State is taken into account in the development of the Framework. No attempt has been made in the past to put in place a National Framework of Qualifications in the State. There have been at least seven public award systems in operation. There have been systems in place in the former National Council for Vocational Awards, in FÁS, in CERT/National Tourism Certification Board, in Teagasc, in the former National Council for Educational Awards, in the Dublin Institute of



Technology and in the Department of Education and Science. The universities, generally, have a single system in place, although there are variances among individual universities. The aim in establishing a National Framework of Qualifications is to put in place a single coherent framework for all awards in the State. This is not merely throwing all of the existing awards frameworks into a single new framework – rather it is a matter of critically looking at the existing awards frameworks and at the demands from society as a whole for awards and developing a new framework appropriate to the needs of all. As part of Framework development, the standards of knowledge, skill and competence associated at present with award-types within these systems will be considered and can be used to assist in the development of descriptions for existing and emerging award-types. Learners holding awards at present must have reassurance that their learning and awards will not be devalued by the introduction of the new Framework.

#### International comparability

A major advantage of a National Framework of Qualifications is the prospect of increasing the international comparability of the learning achievements of learners in the State with their peers internationally. Many countries have frameworks of qualifications in place and in others such frameworks are emerging. It is commonly the case that there are separate but linked frameworks in countries for schools awards, for further education and training awards and for higher education and training awards. In some cases, the award frameworks for two of these groups of awards are developed as a single framework. Various countries are currently attempting to specify their award-types in terms of the standards attained by a typical learner. This makes it opportune for the emerging Irish framework to take account of these developments. The transfer from the

Higher Education Authority to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland of the NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) functions, and the Authority's role as the national reference point for vocational qualifications will facilitate the implementation of international comparability.

#### Permanence of awards

The Authority notes that, at present, awards once made are not revoked and do not expire and considers that it is vital that this continues to be the case. However, where awards have been made in the past, although the award still stands as a permanent record of the learner's attainment at a particular point in time, further learning may be required for access to a particular employment or progression to a programme of education and training. The Authority notes that professional or regulatory bodies make demands as to the currency of the knowledge, skill and competence recognised in an award which confers a licence to practise or equivalent access to employment. As any such demands do not relate directly to the award itself, which has already been made, such issues are not directly relevant to the Framework or to the work of the Authority.

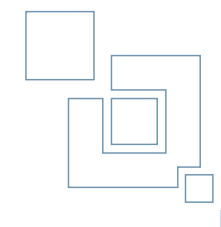
## Chapter 6

### The process of fitting awards into the Framework

It is the role of the Authority to determine the level indicators and the award-type descriptors. These will form the basis for the setting of standards for named awards by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

In relation to school and university awards, the aim is that the level indicators and the award-type descriptors in the Framework will be developed in a way that will facilitate the inclusion of these.

Other awards made by professional bodies and private awards bodies within the State will be considered in relation to the Framework in due course. The view emerged in the consultation process that many such bodies were keen to see their awards included in or aligned with the Framework. This aspiration is welcomed by the Authority and its other stakeholders. However, there is considerable technical and legal development work to be done on this issue. Important distinctions need to be made, for example, between professional awards that are purely a recognition of the learner's achievement of standards of knowledge, skill and competence (that is, awards in the sense used in the National Framework of Qualifications) and those which confer de jure or de facto licence to practise. The respective roles of professional and private awarding bodies relative to the public awarding bodies (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology, universities and the Department of Education and Science) need to be explored. Mechanisms for including the views of employers and providers in this work are also relevant. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has published further consultative papers in relation to these issues.



## Chapter 7

### Policies and criteria for the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework

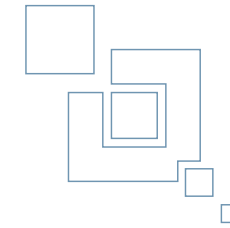
This chapter outlines policies and criteria for the placement, in the National Framework of Qualifications, of some existing and former awards made prior to the implementation of the Framework. Existing and former awards are those awards that were made either before the determination of the Framework, or after its determination, but prior to implementation of the new Framework standards for award-types.

The Framework will include:

- awards, of recognised award-type, made by the awards Councils or the Dublin Institute of Technology – the overall standards of these awards are determined by the Authority
- awards, of recognised award-type, as agreed between the Authority and the universities, or between the Authority and the Department of Education and Science.

In this way, the main groups of awards made by public bodies in the State in the future will be included in the Framework. However, there remains the question of how to place in the Framework those awards which were made prior to the implementation of the Framework.

The role that the Authority set out for the Framework is to provide a means 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. However, this role would not be fulfilled if the legacy of awards made prior to the determination of the Framework were ignored. It is important for the many learners who already hold awards that their learning achievements continue to be valued. These learners should find a place for their awards in the Framework wherever possible. It will also be important for



the relevance of the Framework that employers and others using the Framework are able to relate the Framework to awards with which they are familiar.

## Policies

The Framework is constructed around standards of knowledge, skill and competence. To maintain the integrity of the Framework, it is vital that the process of placing existing and former awards involves an examination of those awards in terms of the learning outcomes that can be associated with them. Such an emphasis on learning outcomes is a relatively recent conceptual development. Not all relevant awards will have been constructed with explicit learning outcomes in mind, nor will they specify outcomes in terms of the strands of knowledge, skills and competence used in developing awards for the Framework. For existing and former awards it may be necessary to infer learning outcomes on the basis of evidence from various sources.

The relevant sources of evidence for the learning outcomes or standards associated with existing and former awards include:

- programme descriptions and curricula
- assessment and examination guidelines and papers
- published and unpublished reports on the standards of awards
- historic equivalences with other awards
- placement of the award (or related awards) in other frameworks or systems of qualifications
- transfer and progression opportunities associated with the award
- conferral of eligibility to seek licence to practise a trade or profession
- typical career pathways of award holders.

A consideration of these factors will lead to a determination of the most appropriate placement or 'best fit' of an existing and former award in the Framework.

The placement of an existing or former award in the Framework does not imply that someone holding such an award has achieved all of the outcomes associated with a new, framework-based, award-type at the same level. Existing and former awards may not have been designed with the same purposes in mind as new award-types and consequently the necessary outcomes may not have been achieved. For this reason, the provisions for access, transfer and progression associated with new awards in the Framework do not necessarily apply to all awards placed at the same level. At the same time, wherever possible the provisions for access, transfer and progression will be extended to holders of existing and former awards.

## The range of existing and former awards to be placed in the Framework

The relevant existing and former awards to be placed on the Framework are those made by bodies referred to in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), namely:

- National Council for Vocational Awards
- National Council for Educational Awards
- FÁS
- National Tourism Certification Board
- Teagasc
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Further Education and Training Awards Council awards under Sections 12(3) or 12(4) of the Qualifications Act
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council awards under Sections 21(3) or 21(4) of the Qualifications Act

- existing and former awards of Dublin Institute of Technology
- various former awards of the Department of Education and Science
- various former awards of the universities.

The major award-types of the Department of Education and Science, and of the universities, that are included in the Framework are deemed by those bodies, with the agreement of the Authority, to be in broad continuity in terms of standards of learning outcomes with those same awards made by the Department and the universities in the past. Historically, these awarding bodies have striven to maintain consistent standards over time through applying a range of quality assurance mechanisms. The standard setting procedures continue and develop from those that have been applied in the past. These standard setting functions have been placed on a statutory basis in the Education Act (1998) and the Universities Act (1997) respectively. The placement of the existing and former awards of the Department and the universities will be agreed with the Authority on the same basis as the inclusion of future awards of these bodies in the Framework.

## Criteria and procedures

The key criteria for the placement of existing and former awards are the learning outcomes associated with those awards. The sources of evidence for the standards of learning outcome associated with an award will be examined by current awarding bodies.

A set of related awards in various fields of learning may be placed at the same level, provided that they have shared standards. However, if there is evidence that the standards of learning outcomes for a single type (or title) of award

vary significantly across fields of learning, or programme provider, or on any other dimension, then more detailed work will be required to place subsets of individual awards at appropriate levels in the Framework.

Awards will be placed at levels in the Framework on an overall 'best fit' basis, with no judgment made or implied about the attainment of any specific learning outcome by individual holders of the award.

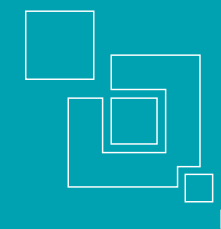
Specific grades or measures of attainment may be associated with the placement of awards at levels. An existing or former award may be associated with more than one level in the Framework, depending on the grade attained.

The current awarding bodies will advise the Authority in relation to the placement of awards at specific levels in the Framework. Former awarding bodies may be requested to assist the awarding bodies in this work. The placement will be agreed between the Authority and the awarding body in question.

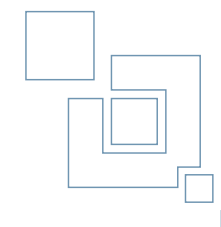
## Further development

The aim is that the awarding bodies advise the Authority as soon as possible after the determination of the outline National Framework of Qualifications about how existing and former awards should be placed in the Framework. However, it is recognised that it may not be possible to make advice in relation to all such awards at the same time. In some cases, the advice of awarding bodies in relation to placement may only be generated as the bodies move to set standards for new framework awards.





# Appendix



## Appendix

### Summary of policies for framework development

It is important that the development of the Framework is guided by a number of policies. These policies are the essential features which will input into the development of the Framework.

The policies set out in this appendix relate to the development of the Framework. The Authority will build on these in developing its approach to implementing the Framework, once established. This approach will recognise the roles of the various stakeholders in learning, including, awarding bodies, providers, employers and learners.

The Authority has determined three sets of policy factors that need to be considered. These are:

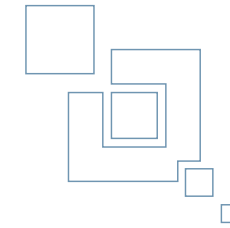
- factors intrinsic to the setting of standards
- factors related to learners acquiring awards
- factors relating to how awards are received and perceived.

This appendix summarises the policies that have been determined by the Authority. The Authority's determination is set out in more detail in Chapter 5 above.

The rationale for adoption of many of these policies derives from a key object of the Authority, which is to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. The development of an awards framework incorporating these features will intrinsically contribute to this object, in that it will make it clear how awards relate to one another.

#### Factors intrinsic to the setting of standards

The first set of policy factors relates directly to the determination of standards.



The issue of stating the standards in terms of knowledge, skill and competence is discussed in Chapter 3 above.

Benchmarking award standards internationally is an important issue. The design of the Framework will ensure that the existing international currency of Irish award-types is built upon. The Framework will also be guided by developments in the co-ordination of award systems in Europe. These include the Bologna process for higher education and the emerging broad understanding of some award-types here, as well as recent developments in the understanding of vocational education and training awards, particularly in the areas of transparency and quality across Europe.

Stability of awards standards is also an important policy issue. While programmes of education and training and specific outcomes relating to awards will change over time, the Authority considers that all stakeholders need to be confident that a learner holding an award at a given level and another learner with an award at the same level have both attained comparable standards of knowledge, skill and competence, regardless of when or where that award was made.

It is vital that the Framework facilitates the development of a system or systems of credits for learning units. The Authority has determined that the design of the National Framework of Qualifications will facilitate the development of a system (or systems) of credit accumulation and transfer, based on learning units. The development of such a system or systems will take time and will clearly be linked to, but not part of, the Framework.

The Authority considers that it is important that there is coherence in titling of award-types and named awards.

Titles of award-types and associated named awards, incorporating fields of learning and occupational labels should be as clear and consistent as possible. The Authority also considers that the titles of award-types should be used in a way that consistently reflects volume, as appropriate.

The Authority considers that the Framework must ensure the relevance of awards standards. The Framework will facilitate the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community. This will be achieved by measuring, as appropriate, relevant learning achievements in this regard and relating them to each other.

The Framework will accommodate a variety of assessment methodologies and will not presuppose a uniformity or harmonisation of assessment methodologies leading to awards.

### Factors related to learners acquiring awards

The second set of policy factors relates to learners acquiring awards. There should be no restrictions on the ways in which learners can attain the standards of knowledge, skill and competence relating to an award. Accordingly, the Framework will accommodate award-types based on knowledge, skill and competence acquired through on-the-job learning, non-formal and informal learning, as well as through formal programmes.

The successful completion of programmes of education and training is one way for learners to attain learning outcomes. It is very often efficient for an awarding body to formally recognise a programme of education and

training, thereby devolving responsibility for the assessment of learning to the provider of the programme, subject to appropriate quality assurance arrangements. This process is referred to as validation of a programme. Awards made to learners in respect of the successful completion of such a programme are in no way superior or inferior to awards made for learning which is demonstrated independently of any provider of education and training. Awards are based on standards of outcomes, which are independent of the format or context of the provision of related education and training.

The design of the Framework will facilitate the further development of modular approaches and structures. The Framework will also facilitate multiple access points to programmes and allow for possible future structures and practices that accommodate more flexible entry requirements.

The Authority considers that all awards should yield some options for transfer or progression. The Authority and its stakeholders value awards with a relatively narrow range of transfer and progression options and awards with a wide range of transfer and progression opportunities.

### Factors relating to how awards are received and perceived

The third factor relates to how awards are received and perceived by various user communities and over time.

As part of framework development the wide range of existing award systems in the State will be taken into account. The standards of knowledge, skill and competence associated at present with award-types within these systems will be considered and can be used to assist in the development of descriptions for existing

and emerging award-types. The development of the Framework will not simply be a matter of fitting in all of the existing award-types relative to each other.

The development of the Framework will have regard to the comparability of the Framework to the Framework or frameworks that are in place in other States.

Permanence of awards is an important issue and the Authority notes that, at present, awards once made are not revoked and do not expire and considers that it is vital that this continues to be the case.

notes