



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

WHITE PAPER

Core Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

FOR CONSULTATION

Submissions may be emailed to

labs@qqi.ie

(please put 'LABs consultation' in the subject field).

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 29th September at 5pm**

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Foreword

QQI is a statutory body with express functions relating to the inclusion of awards within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to be referred to as 'the Framework'. It has established these policies and criteria pursuant to section 55E(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the "2012 Act") as amended¹.

The inclusion of awards within the Framework is a regulatory process that determines if an award should be included within the Framework with reference to the requirements specified in Section 55E(7) and (8) of the Act. Awards which are included within the National Framework of Qualifications will be listed on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)².

Section 43 (5) of the 2012 Act requires that the following cooperate with the Authority in the implementation of policies and criteria established under S55E(1)(b):

- designated awarding bodies
- bodies operating under the Delegated Authority of QQI
- a body that makes an award under the Education Act 1998 that stands specified by the Minister to be an award that falls within this paragraph.

Listed awarding bodies (LABs) are expressly required to comply with the requirements of policies and criteria established under S55E(1)(b) for the inclusion of their awards within the Framework.

1 [Revised Acts \(lawreform.ie\)](https://www.lawreform.ie)

2 www.irq.ie

Part 1: Context

1. Introduction

These are the core policies and criteria for the inclusion of awards within the Framework. This is a regulatory process that determines if an award should be included within the Framework.

2. National Framework of Qualifications

Section 43 of the 2012 Act gives QQI the express responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of the National Framework of Qualifications. The Framework is a system of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level and of the type concerned³.

The Framework is a 10-level system used to describe the qualifications in the Irish education and training system and includes general education, further education and training (FET), and higher education (HE) awards. The ten NFQ levels are defined by the NFQ Grid of Level Indicators⁴ for each of three strands (knowledge, skill and competence) and eight sub-strands. The NFQ also includes a range of award types^{5 6}. There are five classes of NFQ awards: major, minor, special purpose, supplemental and professional.

2.1 Awards

An award is a qualification granted to a learner who has successfully completed an educational or training programme by demonstrating the necessary standards of knowledge, skill, or competence.

The terms awards and qualifications are used interchangeably by QQI in the Irish context. Any award included within the Framework is considered a qualification, even those that are presented as micro-credentials.

2.2 Award standards

Award standards refer to the knowledge, skill, or competence to be acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by a learner before a specified qualification may be awarded. The NFQ award-type descriptors are generalised standards for all qualifications included within the NFQ. They are benchmark statements about the learning achievements associated with particular NFQ award types e.g., an honours bachelor's degree.

Award standards facilitate the provision of clear statements of what enrolled or prospective learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do after a specified programme of learning.

Awarding bodies must determine a specific award standard for each of the awards it proposes to include within the Framework. The award standard for a proposed named award is elaborated in

3 [Outline National Framework of Qualifications – Determinations made by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland determinations.qxd \(qqi.ie\)](#)

4 [Grid of level indicators 2019.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

5 [descriptors-minor-spa-supplemental-awards.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

6 [Professional Award Type Descriptors.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

the statement of minimum intended programme learning outcomes agreed during internal approval processes.

2.3 Awards included within the Framework

All awards included within the Framework are based on recognised standards specified in terms of knowledge, skill or competence and expressed as learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements of what an enrolled learner is expected to know, understand and, where appropriate, demonstrate, on completion of a programme of education and training which leads to an award included within the Framework. Each award within the Framework is placed at a level in the NFQ associated with the award type and award standards to which it belongs. Awards and the associated award standards are developed by awarding bodies.

2.4 Awarding body

An awarding body is a body issuing awards that formally recognise the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.

2.5 Listed awarding body

A listed awarding body (LAB) is an awarding body that does not have statutory awarding powers of NFQ awards in the State and voluntarily seeks to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

A listed awarding body may not delegate or transfer its power to make awards that are included in the NFQ.

2.6 The statutory basis for the inclusion of awards within the framework

Section 55D of the 2012 Act permits QQI to decide whether it is appropriate that awards of certain bodies be regarded as awards that are included within the Framework.

These policies and criteria established under S55E (1)(b) of the 2012 Act support the decisions of the Authority to include awards within the Framework.

2.7 Fees

The schedule of fees is published separately.

2.8 Retrospective approval

Establishment as a LAB is with reference to the date of approval and awards approved for inclusion within the Framework will only be considered included from that date onwards. Awards made before establishment as a LAB will not be considered awards included within the Framework.

Awards previously included in the NFQ are not affected by the introduction of this policy.

Awards that previously benefitted from alignment to the NFQ can continue to reference alignment for the relevant period.

Part 2: Procedures for the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

3. Different Types of Awarding Bodies

3.1 Designated awarding bodies

The Joint Sectoral Protocol⁷ between QQI and designated awarding bodies (DABs) provides for the formal inclusion of awards made by DABs within the Framework. The protocol fulfils the relevant requirements of Section 55B of the 2012 Act and is subject to review.

Failure by a DAB to continue to comply with the Joint Sectoral Protocol will require said DAB to comply with the policy and criteria set out in Part 3 of this document and the application process described in Sections 7 and 8.

3.2 QQI

The inclusion of awards of QQI within the Framework is provided for in TBC.⁸

3.3 Bodies operating under the delegated authority of QQI

The inclusion of awards within the Framework of bodies operating under delegated authority of QQI is provided for in the *Procedures and Criteria relating to Delegation of Authority*⁹.

3.4 A body that makes an award under the Education Act 1998

These bodies are exempted from these policies and criteria.

3.5 LABs

LABs are approved for establishment by QQI in line with the *Policy and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies*¹⁰. The awards of LABs are included within the Framework in line with these policies and criteria.

4. Prerequisites before Application for Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

4.1 Establishment as a LAB

Applicants must be established as a LAB before their awards can be included within the Framework. A prospective LAB may apply for inclusion and establishment at the same time.

Establishment as a LAB is with reference to the awards proposed to be made by it, as such, the LAB may be limited in terms of the awards that can be included. The scope of listing associated with initial establishment as a LAB may need to be reviewed when considering additional proposed awards.

⁷ [Joint-sectoral protocol DABs.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

⁸ Please note that QQI awards will be subject to decisions regarding inclusion of awards within the Framework, but the policy approach is still being finalised.

⁹ Insert web link

¹⁰ Insert web link

4.2 Appropriate QA procedures

The quality assurance procedures prepared under Section 55F of the 2012 Act must be appropriate to the awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework with reference to setting standards, assessment, making awards and certification.

Furthermore, in the case of provider and combination LABs, the QA procedures established under Section 28 must be approved by QQI. A prospective LAB may apply for approval of QA procedures, where relevant, at the same time as establishment and initial inclusion of awards.

Established LABs may submit additional awards for inclusion within the Framework after initial establishment. QA procedures should be reviewed and updated to reflect the additional awards, if required.

4.3 Appropriate ATP procedures

The access, transfer and progression (ATP) procedures prepared under Section 56 of the 2012 Act must be appropriate to the awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework. Furthermore, in the case of provider and combination LABs, these procedures must be approved by QQI. A prospective LAB may apply for approval of ATP procedures, where relevant, at the same time as establishment and initial inclusion of awards.

Established LABs may submit additional awards for inclusion within the Framework after initial establishment. Consideration should be given to the need to update and review ATP procedures when seeking to include new and additional awards within the Framework.

4.4 Due diligence

Established LABs may be required to evidence ongoing compliance with due diligence regulations established under Section 29B of the Act prior to including additional awards within the Framework.

Established LABs may be required to confirm ongoing compliance of its associated providers with due diligence regulations established under Section 29B of the Act prior to including additional awards within the Framework. QQI reserves the right to conduct its own due diligence assessment of associated providers prior to allowing payments to the Learner Protection Fund.

4.5 Apprenticeships

Prior to the inclusion of apprenticeship awards within the Framework by a LAB, endorsement from the regulator appointed under the Industrial Training Act 1967 will be required.

5. Scope of Inclusion

The approval to include an award within the Framework is with reference to the information submitted by the applicant evidencing the criteria outlined in Part 3. It is the responsibility of the awarding body to ensure that any changes or modifications to the award does not affect its standing.

Where proposed changes significantly affect the award as it is listed on the IRQ, this will require approval for inclusion of a new award within the Framework. This will ensure that records are updated to differentiate the awards on the IRQ.

Major or moderate changes are any amendments that will significantly affect the standing of the award

included within the Framework include but are not limited to changes to the:

- award type, class or title
- award standard or intended learning outcomes
- the level of the award
- the credit volume of the award
- associated providers delivering programmes leading to the award.

6. Titling Conventions of Awards

LABs must ensure that the titles of awards included within the Framework are clear and coherent. Specific award titles can be determined by the awarding body in line with the relevant area of learning.

Normally, award stems will need to be in line with the conventions provided in Appendix A. Deviations from Appendix A will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Appendix A provides the award stems associated with each level.

6.1 Professional awards

LABs that utilise the professional award type descriptor in the development of the award and/or are considered a professional body may insert the stem 'professional' in advance of certificate and diploma at levels 5-9.

LABs can make a double award where a second industry or professional award and/or designation is associated with the same learning and offers additional clarity to the award provided for in Appendix A. This additional award title must be submitted as part of the inclusion of awards and will be articulated in the IRQ.

6.2 Microcredentials

Minor, special purpose and supplemental awards are considered microcredentials in the Irish NFQ.

7. International Awarding Bodies

It is expected that on initial establishment, international awarding bodies will include awards that are already being offered in the State, are regulated in their home jurisdiction, and included on the relevant national framework in their home jurisdiction.

International awarding bodies (i.e. those primarily established outside Ireland) can develop bespoke awards for inclusion within the Irish NFQ but may require additional endorsement from relevant authorities in the State. This will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

8. Preparing and Seeking Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

This section outlines the steps required in making a submission to include awards within the Framework.

8.1 Preliminary matters

A prospective awarding body must ensure that the prerequisites set out in Section 4 have been addressed as part of the application to include awards within the Framework. A request to include awards within the Framework must comply with all the requirements of this policy and criteria.

An established LAB must ensure that the prerequisites set out in Section 4 of this document have been met prior to applying to include additional awards within the Framework.

Submission of a request by an awarding body to QQI shall not imply that any of the requirements have been met.

8.2 Evaluation by the awarding body

Prior to making a request for inclusion of awards within the Framework, an awarding body is required to conduct and prepare a report on and conduct a critical and candid evaluation against QQI's criteria of the awards proposed to be included within the Framework.

Dependent on the volume and number of awards proposed for inclusion, an awarding body may choose to prepare the evaluation based on:

- individual awards
- groups of awards – to be grouped by level, award type, subject, or method of delivery. This is at the discretion of the applicant but subject to confirmation by QQI.

Where an awarding body prepares the evaluation based on groups of awards, QQI may request additional information to satisfy itself that the group approach is warranted. This request may be issued at any time during the evaluation. This sampling approach may ultimately result in the need for the awarding body to submit detailed information about each individual proposed award in the relevant group.

8.3 Supporting documentation

The documentation must include sufficient information to address QQI's criteria as outlined in Part 3.

The supporting documentation should include all key procedures, including QA procedures established under Section 55F of the Act, and informed by the guidelines issued by QQI under Section 271A of the Act. Provider and combination LABs must also submit quality assurance procedures established under Section 28 of the Act, and these are subject to approval by QQI. A combination LAB may develop one set of QA procedures to meet the requirements of both S55F and S28.

In the case of non-provider and combination awarding bodies, the supporting documentation should include the procedures for approving, monitoring, and reviewing associated providers, with reference to any QQI guidance issued.

Where an awarding body has conducted the evaluation in 5.2 based on grouping awards, supporting documentation evidencing the approach described must be provided for at least 10% of awards in each group. Such evidence may include evidence of the award approval procedure.

8.4 Associated providers

Where it is proposed that programmes leading to the awards proposed to be included within the Framework be delivered by an associated provider (s), it must be clear which associated providers are associated with each award. LABs must have approved associated providers in line with any guidance issued by QQI, with specific reference to regulations established under Section 29B of the Act. LABs may approve additional associated providers after initial inclusion of awards. QQI must be advised of these new associated providers, and they must be listed on the IRQ before an NFQ award is made to learners.

Associated providers, unless exempt, are required to pay into the Learner Protection Fund as directed by QQI.

8.5 Assembling and making the application

All requests for inclusion of awards within the Framework must include:

- a. Documentation demonstrating that the Prerequisites (4) have been satisfactorily complied with or applied for at the same time;
- b. The awarding body's evaluation report (5.2);
- c. The supporting documentation, to include sample approval processes of proposed awards (5.3);

The documentation including the awarding body's evaluation report must address the criteria. QQI may refuse a request to include awards within the Framework on the grounds that the application does not address the criteria fully. The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case. The request to include awards within the Framework must be signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.

8.6 Withdrawal of a request for inclusion of awards within the framework

Requests for inclusion of awards within the Framework may be withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. After the independent evaluation stage has started, QQI will normally progress to a determination and publish the approved evaluation report.

Eligibility for refunds will be specified in a separate fees and charges policy.

8.7 Confidentiality and the Freedom of Information Act

The documentation (including that covered by unit (5.4)) relating to inclusion of awards within the Framework will be made available confidentially to QQI staff and persons and organisations involved in their evaluation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that QQI is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation and QQI records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

8.8 Screening by QQI

QQI will screen the documentation supporting the request and if satisfied that it addresses the criteria will proceed to arrange for the evaluation of the request. If QQI is not satisfied that the documentation addresses the criteria it will inform the awarding body who may choose to make a revised submission. Passing this screening check is no guarantee that the documentation will be found to have addressed the criteria when independently evaluated.

8.9 Exemptions

8.9.1 International LABs

Section 55E (9) permits consultation with public bodies outside the State in the effective implementation of policies and criteria under Section 55E (1). As such, QQI at its sole discretion, may accept endorsement and confirmation from comparable regulatory authorities in other jurisdictions to support the application process. Such endorsement from a relevant public authority must assure QQI that the approval and inclusion of awards within a similar Framework is subject to rigorous oversight like that outlined in this policy and criteria. Exemptions from the full process will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

8.9.2 Domestic LABs

Where a public authority, inside or outside the State, has an informed perspective about the value and need for the proposed awards, this will be considered in lieu of or as part of the evaluation conducted under 7.5. Exemptions from the full process will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

9. Evaluation and Determination of a Request to Include Awards within the Framework

9.1 Independent evaluation

- All applications for inclusion of awards within the Framework will be independently evaluated against the criteria outlined in Part 3, though QQI may appoint an executive member to the panel. This approach is outlined below.
- At a minimum, each application will be considered by an independent review panel. It will be determined if the application demonstrates compliance with the criteria outlined in Part 3.
- As considered necessary by QQI and by arrangement with QQI, evaluators may undertake site visits (virtual or physical) as part of the evaluation. They may interview the awarding body's leadership, the programme and awards personnel and other relevant stakeholders.
- The evaluation report, which may be drafted by an independent evaluator or the Executive, must address whether the applicant meets the criteria to be established as a LAB in general and in detail. It must include one of the following overall recommendations, considering the applicable policies and criteria:
 - **Satisfactory** – meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the awards are suitable for inclusion within the Framework.

- **Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions** – specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed conditions that need to be satisfied before awards can be included within the Framework i.e., outline the minor changes necessary before a final decision is made by QQI.
- **Not satisfactory.**

Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered as not satisfactory. Nevertheless, to ensure that the process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that an applicant virtually meets the criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude “Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions” where the special conditions prescribe the changes that need to be made.

Further, in exceptional cases the ‘special conditions’ may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. All independent evaluation reports are required to provide a rationale for any proposed special conditions and recommendations to the provider as well as the overall conclusion.

In the case of a not satisfactory recommendation, a LAB can submit a new application to include the award within the Framework after 6 months.

9.2 Decision making process

The decision to establish an awarding body as an LAB and/or include awards within the Framework is the responsibility of QQI. Independent review panels make recommendations to QQI, but the final decision is made by QQI.

- Applications for inclusion of awards within the Framework will only be considered following a decision to approve the application for establishment as a LAB.
- All applications for inclusion of awards within the Framework will proceed to a detailed assessment against the criteria outlined under the criteria in Part 3 of this document. Such an evaluation may involve a virtual or physical site visit.
 - A negative determination at this stage of the process may be appealed. Applicants will not be able to progress to the assessment of its awards for inclusion within the Framework unless the appeal is upheld. Resubmission after 6 months will be permitted.
- Applicants that have been deemed to meet the criteria in Part 3 of this document, will have the proposed awards included within the Framework and listed on the IRQ.

9.3 Independent evaluators

Evaluators will be objective and independent of the awarding body, and its associated providers, making the request e.g., free of conflicting interests, and will comply with the *Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators*¹¹ Any related interests must be declared in the independent evaluation report and will be published.

Independent evaluators must be competent to make a recommendation on whether the awards should be included within the Framework. Competence means having the capacity to make and defend

¹¹ [qqi-roles-responsibilities-and-code-of-conduct_0.pdf](#)

judgements against the applicable QQI criteria. Specifically, an evaluator or an evaluation group will be selected on the basis of having the competence to justify their recommendation whatever it may be.

For the independent evaluation of requests for inclusion of awards within the Framework, the groups of evaluators will include student member(s) and will be composed in compliance with ESG standard 2.4. Independent evaluators with expertise in qualifications and/or qualification frameworks will also be integral members of the team. Typically, evaluation groups will have expertise in

- A. the operation and management of providers with awarding authority comparable to that requested;
- B. the main discipline-areas of the relevant proposed awards and
- C. generic areas including pedagogy, assessment, quality assurance, qualifications and all the other areas indicated by QQI's criteria.

QQI will exercise its judgment as to the number of evaluators that may be required in respect of the request in question and the competences required having regard to the particular awarding body and awards and the nature of the relevant proposed awards. Training will be provided to independent evaluators where QQI considers this necessary.

An evaluator who feels that they do not have the competence to evaluate an application should not accept an invitation to do so or if this realisation, or a conflict of interest, occurs following acceptance should notify QQI without delay.

9.4 Endorsement from a Relevant Regulator

In the case of international LAB's subject to comparable regulatory schemes in other jurisdictions, endorsement from a relevant regulator may be used as evidence for the inclusion of awards within the Framework. This will be agreed at the time of the application to be established as a LAB and it will be clear if inclusion of awards falls within the scope of the approach agreed.

A. Level 1 Endorsement - Applicant submits a full application.

Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing but either the regulatory scheme is significantly different or insufficient information is available.

B. Level 2 Endorsement - Applicant submits a partial application covering any outstanding criteria.

Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing and confirms that substantial components of the regulatory scheme are comparable – applicant submits a partial application to cover the outstanding criteria.

C. Level 3 Endorsement - Applicant submits minimal application

Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing and an MOU [or other more relevant agreement] is in place with QQI – applicant submits a short application with relevant data required.

10. Declaration of the Outcome

10.1 Certificate of inclusion

Inclusion of the awards within the Framework will be included communicated to the provider by the issues of a certificate of inclusion. The certificate will include details of the award included within the Framework including but not limited to:

- A. LAB
- B. Award title
- C. Award level and type
- D. Credit volume
- E. Award standard
- F. Learning outcomes
- G. Approved associated providers
- H. Awards made after x date will be included.
- I. Review date
- J. Specific cooperative arrangements for review with international regulatory bodies

10.2 Publication of the independent evaluation report

The approved evaluation report alongside the determination of the request for inclusion of awards within the Framework, together with the certificate of inclusion, is a substantive product of the process. It will be published after closure of the appeal period unless the determination to refuse the request for inclusion of some or all the awards is appealed, in which case the report will be published if the appeal is unsuccessful. In some cases, the awarding body's self-evaluation report may be published subject to the awarding body granting permission especially if it demonstrates exemplary practice.

10.3 Irish Register of Qualifications

LABs, and their NFQ awards, including certified learning outcomes statements, will be published on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) website.

Minor changes to the information published on the IRQ will be permitted.

10.4 Exclusion of award

Where inclusion of an award was approved on the grounds of fraudulent or false information, the award will be excluded from the Framework, and this will be published on the IRQ.

11. Duties, Conditions and Obligations

The duties, conditions and obligations of LABs and their associated providers are outlined in detail in the *Policy and Criteria for Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body*.

Some conditions are specifically relevant to inclusion of awards within the Framework including:

- A. It is expected that once an award is included within the Framework, it will continue to be included and that the awarding body will take appropriate steps to ensure the award continues to be up to date and relevant to the need of learners and other stakeholders.
- B. Ongoing inclusion of awards is dependent on sufficient evidence of ongoing need for the award, suitability of the award and evidence of ongoing review and update of the award to be evidenced at time of review.
- C. All offerings in Ireland or to students based in Ireland by the listed awarding body and its associated provider(s) of a programme leading to the award must lead to an NFQ award. Programmes leading to the award can only be offered by associated providers, and not any other third parties.
- D. LABs are not permitted to make NFQ awards to learners outside Ireland.
- E. LABs must provide information and data about awards included within the Framework in the requested format for timely publication on the IRQ on an annual basis.
- F. LABs must cooperate with QQI, including the provision of information, in relation to its functions to include awards within the Framework. Required information includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Number of awards made each year
 - b. Enrolment and completion rates
 - c. Access, transfer and progression information
 - d. Data about RPL applications and decisions
- G. LABs must notify QQI immediately of any risks, issues, information, or concerns that affect/may affect the integrity of the NFQ, the integrity of Framework awards or the reputation of a LAB, associated provider or Framework award.

12. Exit Awards

If a LAB proposes to offer exit awards as part of an NFQ award, these must be approved for inclusion within the Framework by QQI before being awarded to students.

Exit awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework must be in keeping with award type descriptors and level indicators and represent a coherent achievement of learning relative to the proposed award. The LAB must develop specific award standards for each exit award.

13. Appeal Against Refusal or Conditions

Applications for inclusion of awards within the Framework may appeal refusal or any conditions applied by lodging an appeal with the Appeals Panel.¹²

14. Offence

It is an offence to present an award as one that is included in the NFQ, if it has not been approved by for inclusion by QQI or is not an award of a statutory awarding body.

15. Joint Awarding

A LAB may only enter a joint awarding relationship with another awarding body that has authority to make awards included within the Framework and has the authority to make the relevant Framework award. Joint awarding must be provided for in the LABs quality assurance procedures.

A LAB must outline in the application to include an award within the Framework any such request to make a joint award. Such joint awarding relationships must be approved by QQI and must be detailed in the IRQ.

¹² [Appealing a decision made by QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)

Part 3: Criteria for the Determination of the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

16. Introduction

The criteria outline the requirements that must be satisfied for awards to be included within the Framework. It is necessary to address the criteria and the evidence requirements when requesting inclusion of awards. There is some overlap between the topics addressed by these criteria and those addressed by criteria for the establishment as a LAB, quality assurance guidelines and such like.

17. Criteria for Meeting Reasonable Requirements of Learners and Others

Section 55E of the Act specifies that these criteria should have regard to the reasonable requirements and needs of learners, industry, agriculture, business, tourism and trade, the professions, and the public service.

17.1 Need for the award

- A. The awarding body must clearly outline how the proposed award contributes to providing choice to learners with specific reference to existing offerings in the State.
- B. The awarding body must clearly outline the target learner group for the proposed award and describe how the awarding body and the proposed award meet the needs of this specific group.
- C. The awarding body must clearly outline how the proposed award meets the needs of any of the following; industry, agriculture, business, tourism and trade, the professions, and the public service.
- D. The awarding body must provide evidence of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders to include learners, employers, and relevant groups outlined in 16.1(d) to support the need for, suitability and sustainability of the proposed award.
- E. The relevant awarding body must provide relevant evidence or informed predictions of learner achievement; completion and attrition statistics; and progression to employment or otherwise.
- F. Where available, the awarding body must provide relevant evidence regarding access, transfer, and progression; recognition of prior learning; and general admission.

18. Appropriately Referenced to the NFQ

Awards of LABs need to be designed in keeping with the policy and criteria underpinning the National Framework of Qualifications¹³ with specific emphasis on appropriate use of levels, award-type descriptors and learning outcomes.

¹³ [National Framework of Qualifications | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](http://www.nfq.ie)

18.1 Design of awards

- A. The awarding body will use the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as the principal reference point for the development of the associated specific award standard.
- B. The awarding body will ensure that proposed awards are articulated in terms of clear award standards. These award standards must be appropriately referenced to NFQ descriptors.
- C. Awards must be expressed in terms of minimum intended learning outcomes which are in keeping with the award standard and the NFQ descriptors.
- D. Minimum intended learning outcomes must be appropriate to the award title, credit volumes, relevant occupational standards, and proposed delivery method.
- E. Awards must be allocated a level on the NFQ that is in keeping with the award standard, the NFQ descriptors and the intended learning outcomes.
- F. Awards must be allocated a class of award that is in keeping with the award standard, the NFQ descriptors and the proposed learning outcomes.
- G. NFQ Awards must be expressed in terms of credit volumes, appropriate to the level of the award and will normally be in keeping with agreed conventions as outlined in Appendix A. It is appropriate to continue to award any relevant professional designation awards as an additional award title.
- H. Awards must have coherent and appropriate award titles that are in keeping with any agreed titling conventions and act as a clear source of information for learners, employers and other key stakeholders.
- I. The awarding body must clearly outline how the award level, class and credit volume meet the needs of target learner groups and relevant key stakeholders.

18.2 Internal decision making

- A. Awards will be designed in accordance with institutional arrangements for award/ programme/qualification development and review, and there must be evidence of consideration by institutional governance structures.
- B. In the evaluation of a new award, the awarding body must provide evidence of consideration of the alignment of the intended learning outcomes with the relevant NFQ descriptor.
- C. Reviews of awards and standards must include an evaluation of intended and achieved learning outcomes as assessed against the relevant award standard.
- D. Where available, the awarding body will provide evidence of the most recent review of the award, which may include associated programmatic review, and its award standard. Each proposed award should have been reviewed no more than 3 years prior to submission for inclusion within the Framework.
- E. The awarding body will outline how learner and other stakeholder feedback has been invited and used in the development and review of the award and its associated standard and learning outcomes.

19. Relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Approval and/or Accreditation

LABs must clearly outline and describe any necessary or relevant external approvals required from professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies.

19.1 External evaluation

- A. The awarding body must outline any planned and/or required professional, statutory, or regulatory approval/evaluation of individual awards and/or the associated programmes, required for the purposes of employment or industry requirements.
- B. The awarding body must outline any agreed external evaluations of proposed awards (and associated programmes), including outcomes of such external evaluation.
- C. The awarding body must outline how the relevant individual awards have been designed, approved, and reviewed with such external evaluation in mind, with a clear description of any requirements which conflict with these policies and criteria.

20. Assessment

LABs must have appropriate and rigorous assessment practices in place for awards included within the Framework.

20.1 Assessment, external examining and other QA personnel

- A. The awarding body must outline the assessment methodology for proposed awards with the intended learning outcomes acting as a reference for the establishment of assessment of standards.
- B. The awarding body must outline the assessment approach ensuring that learner performance is assessed against the relevant standard and that qualifications are awarded based on achieved learning outcomes.
- C. The awarding body must outline how the assessment approach and learner performance inform the determination of award classification.
- D. The awarding body will describe the relevant internal and external moderation in place for the proposed award and outline how it has contributed to reliable assessment practice in the case of the proposed award.
- E. The awarding body will outline how independent, external examiners' advice on award standards has been used to improve and update the proposed award standard.
- F. The awarding body will outline how the assessment approach meets the needs of the target learner group and other key stakeholders.

21. Admission and Access to Awards Included within the Framework

21.1 Access, Transfer & Progression

- A. The awarding body must outline the arrangements for accessing programmes leading to the award, including arrangements for the recognition of prior learning, transferring, exiting, and progressing to other awards/programmes.
- B. The awarding body must outline the outcome of reviews of proposed entry requirements and arrangements for access, transfer, and progression.
- C. The awarding body must outline how the admission requirements and arrangements for access, transfer and progression meet the needs of the target learner group and other key stakeholders.

21.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- A. The awarding body must outline the specific arrangements for RPL for the award including the validation of informal and non-formal learning.
- B. The awarding body must outline the arrangements, if relevant, for making an award purely on the basis of RPL.

21.3 Credit

- A. The credit volume proposed for the award is in keeping with the level, award type, award class, award standard, NFQ descriptors and the accepted credit ranges.
- B. The credit volume, and the associated workload, is appropriate to the needs of the target learner groups and key stakeholders.
- C. The proposed assessment methodology is appropriate to the proposed credit volume of the award.

22. Provision of Information to Learners

- A. The award title promotes public understanding of the expected demands and outcomes of the qualification type and is in keeping with titling conventions for major and non-major awards.
- B. Public information about proposed awards is clear, comprehensive, and consistent with provisions of Section 67 of the Act.

Part 4: Review, Withdrawal or Variation of LAB

The process for review, withdrawal or variation of listing is outlined in the *Policy and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies*.

23. Preparation for a Review

As part of its preparation for a review under Section 55G of the Act, a listed awarding body should ensure that all awards, including associated award standards and learning outcomes, have been reviewed and where indicated, updated at least once in every seven-year period. Evidence from internal and external moderation should support any such updating. LABs should be able to evidence the ongoing need for and suitability of each award included within the Framework and provide supporting evidence for consideration and actioning of feedback from learners, employers, and other key stakeholders.

24. Outcome of Review

Following a review conducted under Section 55G of the Act, QQI may withdraw approval of QA and/or ATP procedures which may affect the LAB's ability to continue to make awards included within the Framework.

Following such a review, the Authority may decide that it is no longer appropriate that an awarding body's name continue to be included in the list of awarding bodies either with respect to all of the awards of the body, or some of the awards of the body.

The grounds for such a decision specified in Section 55H (3) include:

- Having regard to the QQI Policy and *Criteria for Establishment as Listed Awarding Bodies* it is no longer appropriate to include the body in the list of awarding bodies or the conditions imposed should be varied.
- The awarding body concerned failed to comply with one or more of the conditions imposed under Section 55F (7)(f)
- Other circumstances exist in respect of the awarding concerned which the Authority considers provide a reasonable justification by it to either fully or partially delete the awards of the body from the list.

A variation of the listing of a listed awarding body may result in (i) a full deletion, (ii) a partial deletion and/or (iii) the application of new conditions.

- A full deletion results in the name of the listed awarding body being removed from the list, which has the effect of removing all awards from the Framework.
- A partial deletion is where some awards cease to be included within the Framework.
- Conditions may be placed on the LAB.

24.1 Effect of Full or Partial Deletion

As outlined in Section 55I (1), all awards cease to be considered as awards that are included within the

Framework in the case of full deletion. Only the specified awards cease to be considered awards that are included within the Framework in the case of partial deletion.

As specified in Section 55I (3), awards made after full or partial deletion continue to be awards within the Framework in the case of students who were enrolled on programmes leading to that award prior to the deletion.

24.2 LAB-Initiated withdrawal or variation

LABs may seek to voluntarily remove themselves from the list of awarding bodies or seek to voluntarily withdraw some awards from the Framework. LABs seeking voluntary removal of any sort should engage with QQI to plan for this. It may be necessary to continue making Framework awards for a period for those learners already enrolled.

Appendix A: Award Title and Credit Conventions

Framework Level	Major Awards		Minor Awards ¹⁴		Special Purpose Awards ¹¹		Supplemental Awards ¹¹	
	Title	Credit Value/ Credit Range	Title	Credit Value/ Credit Range	Title	Credit Value/ Credit Range	Title	Credit Value/ Credit Range
1	Level 1 Certificate	20	Component Certificate Level 1	5, 10				
2	Level 2 Certificate	30	Component Certificate Level 2	5,10				
3	Level 3 Certificate	60	Component Certificate Level 3	5,10,20	Level 3 Special Purpose Certificate	5-60	Level 3 Supplemental Certificate	5-60
4	Level 4 Certificate	90	Component Certificate Level 4	5,10,15,20	Level 4 Special Purpose Certificate	5-90	Level 4 Supplemental Certificate	5-90
5	Level 5 Certificate	120	Component Certificate Level 5	5,10,15,30	Level 5 Special Purpose Certificate	5-120	Level 5 Supplemental Certificate	5-120
6 ¹⁵	Advanced Certificate	120	Component Certificate Level 6	5,10,15,30	Level 6 Special Purpose Certificate	5-120	Level 6 Supplemental Certificate	5-120
6	Higher Certificate	120	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	180	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
			Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
8	Honours Bachelor Degree	180-240	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
	Higher Diploma	60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
9	Masters Degree	60-120	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
	Postgraduate Diploma	60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
10 ¹⁶	Doctoral Degree	n/a						

¹⁴ All these award types are considered micro credentials.

¹⁵ Levels 1-5 and the Advanced Certificate at Level 6 operate under the FET credit system

¹⁶ Levels 7-10 and the Higher Certificate at Level 6 operate under the ECTS credit system

Appendix B: Glossary of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms

2012 Act ('the Act')	Qualifications And Quality Assurance (Education And Training) Act 2012 (as amended)
Access, transfer and progression (ATP)	Access, transfer and progression (ATP) describes the pathways available to learners to enter, transfer between and progress from programmes of education and training, which are the main route to achieving awards and qualifications.
Apprenticeship	An apprenticeship is a programme of structured education and training which formally merges and rotates learning in the workplace with learning in an education/training centre. ¹⁷
Assessment	Learner assessment (specifically assessment of learning) means inference (e.g. judgement or estimation or evaluation) of a learner's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard based on appropriate evidence. Self-assessment is included in this.
Award	An award (qualification) which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.
Awarding body	A body issuing awards that formally recognises the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.

¹⁷ Higher Education Authority (HEA). Apprenticeships. [online] Available at: <https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/apprenticeships/>.

Award standard

Award standards identify the expected outcomes of learning, inclusive of all education and training for a particular award type. They concern the knowledge, know-how and skill, and competence that are expected from the learner who is to receive an award. They include both general standards for a particular award type and specific standards for named awards in particular subjects or fields of learning. Learners holding awards of the same award type should have comparable standards of knowledge, skill and competence.

Award type

The National Framework of Qualifications features four award classes – major, minor, special purpose and supplemental. Professional award types are also available and are mainly used in conjunction with another award type.

Combination listed awarding bodies (LABs)

Organisations operate a combination model whereby they deliver some of their own programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework and engage associated providers to deliver other programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.

Credit volume

The size of learning behind an award is called its volume. Volume is measured in credits e.g. 15 credits or 240 credits.

Designated awarding bodies (DABs)

Some providers have been granted authority to validate their own programmes and issue their own awards by legislation. These are called designated awarding bodies (DABs). The universities, the National University of Ireland, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), institutes of technology (IoTs) and technological universities are DABs.

ESG

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred credit system designed to make it easier for students to move between different countries. ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. ECTS also helps with the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes, and makes them more transparent.¹⁸

FET

Further education and training

HET (HE)

Higher education and training (Higher education)

Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)

The Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) is Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI's) database of awards, providers and programmes.

Joint awarding

Two or more awarding bodies, with awarding powers, can make a single award to a learner.

Learning outcomes

A learner's knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. Learning outcomes outline what a learner is expected to know, be able to do and understand at the end of a learning process.¹⁹

Listed awarding bodies (LAB)

A listed awarding body is an awarding body that does not have statutory awarding powers of National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) awards in the State and voluntarily seeks to have their awards included within the National Framework of Qualifications.

¹⁸ European Commission. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). [online]. Available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system>.

¹⁹ Cedefop, 2017. Defining, writing and applying learning outcomes: a European handbook. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/566770>.

Micro-credentials

Microcredentials refers to a qualification (award) arising from a 'small' package of learning, where 'small' refers to the credit associated with the award. Minor, special purpose and supplemental awards are considered microcredentials in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) ('the Framework')

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system. The NFQ shows how General Education Awards, Further Education and Training and Higher Education Awards are mapped against the 10 levels of the framework.

NFQ award-type descriptors

An award type descriptor is a series of statements of general learning achievement which describes any award of a particular type.

NFQ grid of level indicators

A 10-Level Grid of Level Indicators which forms part of the determination of the National Framework of Qualifications. The grid shows how the outcomes in each of the eight sub-strands progress across the ten levels. The level indicators set out in this grid are intended to enable Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to place award types at appropriate levels within the Framework, based on the mix of learning outcomes they contain.²⁰

Non-provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)

Organisations that engage other providers, called associated providers, to deliver the programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.

Programme

A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.

²⁰ Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), 2019. National Framework of Qualifications Grid of Level Indicators. [pdf] Dublin: QQI. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/NFQ%20Grid%20Level%20Indicators.pdf>.

Provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)	Organisations delivering their own programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.
Provider	A 'provider of a programme of education and training' is a person who, or body which, provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
QA	Quality assurance
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education in Ireland.
Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process to evaluate the skills and knowledge a person has gained through life outside formal education and training.
Relevant provider	A relevant provider is defined under section 1 of the 2012 Act (as amended). They include universities; technological universities; institutes of technology; the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI); providers whose programmes have been validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); providers with delegated authority from QQI to make awards; providers authorised by QQI to use the IEM; linked providers; and listed awarding bodies providing one or more programmes leading to its own awards that are included within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

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Submissions may be emailed to

labs@qqi.ie

(please put 'LABs consultation' in the subject field).

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 29th September at 5pm**
