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Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

PROPOSED NEW OCCUPATIONAL/PRACTITIONER AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTORS AT NFQ LEVELS 5 AND 6

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Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner - Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6

INTRODUCTION

Following the publication of Review of Apprenticeship in Ireland in December 2013, the Department of Education and Skills published an Implementation Plan in June 2014: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Apprenticeship-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

Among other things this requires: “SOLAS/QQI to review system for revision of existing apprenticeships with a view to acceleration of process – Q4 2014”

SOLAS and QQI have discussed a system for accelerating the revision of existing apprenticeships. The accelerated approach envisaged is the following:

1. QQI will work with SOLAS to establish occupationally non-specific NFQ award-type descriptors for IVET (initial vocational education and training) craft or occupation-oriented education and training qualifications at NFQ levels 5 and 6 by the end of November 2014. QQI and SOLAS will host a workshop event to discuss the concepts involved and the approach.
2. The review of the first five apprenticeships that is already under way will be completed in 2014.
3. SOLAS will develop national standards for the other craft qualifications in the form of intended apprenticeship (programme) learning outcomes having regard to the formational needs of the craft occupations concerned, Irish employer needs, and the new award-type descriptors.
4. SOLAS will develop corresponding apprenticeship programmes and assessment arrangements and submit these to QQI for validation
5. QQI will validate each programme in light of the award-type descriptors and other validation criteria.

The new award-type descriptors will be designed for more general application than just with the existing apprenticeships.

EXPERT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

SOLAS and QQI established a group to draft occupationally non-specific NFQ award-type descriptors for IVET (Initial Vocational Education and Training) craft or occupation-oriented education and training qualifications at NFQ levels 5 and 6. The Group Comprised:

- Stephen McManus, Former Registrar Dundalk Institute of Technology (Chair)
- Dr Anne Walsh, NUI Galway
- Joseph Noesen, Ministry of Education Luxembourg
- John Dolan, Former FÁS Curriculum and Quality Assurance Manager
- Deirdre Darcy, Project Officer, SOLAS Apprenticeship
- Lorcán Ó hÓbáin, Senior Programme Manager of Management Works, Skillnets
- Peter Cullen, QQI

OCCUPATION CONCEPT

Education and training by apprenticeship is most naturally associated with the occupation-oriented formation of a person. The key concept is that an apprentice becomes a recognised occupational practitioner through successfully completing their apprenticeship.

The occupation-oriented formation involves training by employers *in situ* with the involvement of (normally under the direct supervision of) practitioners (members of occupation’s community of practice) as well as academic formation.

This kind of formation when done well promotes natural learning because it involves motivational, emotional, social as well as didactic modes of formation. It involves the whole person. It provides an immersive learning environment. It motivates learning through the production of tangible artefacts.

Critics of the method worry about the fickleness of occupations in the context of rapidly changing technology and see unitised education (acquisition of discrete skills as required) as more useful for ensuring a flexible and adaptive workforce. While this may be intuitively appealing at first sight it does not deliver in the context of IVET—there is a benefit in the integrated formation involved in ‘becoming’ a qualified practitioner who has mastered a significant breadth of knowledge and can selectively employ a significant range of skills.

The unitised approach is perhaps more useful in the context of CVET (continuing vocational education and training).

Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner - Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6

AWARD-TYPE DESCRIPTOR

The award-type descriptor is a qualifications template. It describes the minimum knowledge, skill and competence to be expected of any qualified craft or occupational practitioner (e.g. at the end of an apprenticeship). Two descriptors are required at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 respectively.

It is considered likely that the non-technical knowledge, skills and competences will be the main differentiator between Level 5 and Level 6. The softer skills needs will likely be similar for both levels.

PROPOSAL

There are existing descriptors for professional award-types at Levels 7-8. These were determined in 2011 and are part of the NFQ. They were determined for the alignment of professional qualifications.

The occupational award-type descriptors at Levels 5 and 6 would be part of the NFQ and would be joined with the existing Professional Award-type Descriptors to form a sequence from NFQ Level 5 through to Level 9. The Level 7 Professional Award-type descriptor is included here for reference (pp 4-6) alongside the proposed new occupational award-type descriptors. The previously determined set of Professional Award-type Descriptors (NFQ Levels 7-9) are available in the QQI document entitled **“Award-type Descriptors (Award Class: Professional) For the Alignment of Professional Awards at NFQ Levels 7, 8 and 9”** and this is available from the QQI website.

	5	6	7	8	9	
	New!	New!	Existing	Existing	Existing	
	Level 5 Occupational/ Practitioner Award	Level 6 Occupational/ Practitioner Award	Level 7 Professional Award	Level 8 Professional Award	Level 9 Professional Award	

Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner - Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6

The expected learning outcomes of the proposed new descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 are set out in the following table. The grey text at NFQ Level 6 indicates text carried up from the NFQ Level 5 descriptor. Outcomes expressed in the Level 5 descriptor are to be taken as included in the Level 6 descriptor (whether or not this is made explicit in the table). Relevant parts of the NFQ Grid of Level Indicators are provided for reference in the grey panels.

Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6				
	Thread	Level 5 Occupational/Practitioner Award (new proposal)	Level 6 Occupational/Practitioner Award (new proposal)	Level 7 Professional Award <i>(Determined in 2011)</i>
		Existing award-type descriptors (and therefore award titles) can be used in conjunction with these occupational award-type descriptors provided both are satisfied. Award-titles are not otherwise regulated by this descriptor.	Existing award-type descriptors (and therefore award titles) can be used in conjunction with these occupational award-type descriptors provided both are satisfied. Award-titles are not otherwise regulated by this descriptor.	
Volume	Volume of corresponding programme	Variable	Variable	<i>Variable. Normally the volume of newly certified learning will be at least 30 (HET) credits or equivalent however, in exceptional conditions this may be waived.</i>
Purpose	The uses to which the knowledge, skill and competence will be put	The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are proper to autonomous practice at this level as a member of a well-defined community of practice, typically in a structured setting or in an organisation, as well as relevant to personal development, participation in society, the community of practice, employment and study including access to additional formal education and training	The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are proper to autonomous practice at this level as a member of a well-defined community of practice, typically in a structured setting or in an organisation, as well as relevant to personal development, participation in society, the community of practice, employment and study including access to additional formal education and training	<i>The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are proper to autonomous professional practice typically in a structured setting or in an organisation, as well as relevant to personal development, participation in society, employment and study including access to additional formal education and training</i>
Knowledge-breadth	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	<i>Broad range of knowledge</i>	<i>Specialised knowledge of a broad area</i>	<i>Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas</i>
Knowledge Kind	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	<i>Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas</i>	<i>Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory</i>	<i>Recognition of limitations of current knowledge and familiarity with sources of new knowledge; integration of concepts across a variety of areas</i>
Knowledge: breadth and kind	Knowledge scope and coherence	<i>Broad current general knowledge and an integrated body of specialised knowledge required to support a craft or occupational discipline and knowledge of its connections with related activities;</i> <i>Specialised knowledge here involves some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking with significant depth in some areas</i>	Broad current general knowledge and an integrated body of specialised knowledge required to support a craft or an occupational discipline and knowledge of the connections with related disciplines ; <i>Specialised knowledge here involves significant underpinning theory and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge</i>	<i>Broad and up-to-date general knowledge and specialised knowledge of a variety of areas comprising a professional discipline and of the connections between these areas and with related disciplines</i>
	Knowledge Structure	<i>Practical understanding facts, concepts, rules, regulations, methods, materials, tools, devices, techniques; their development and limitations; and how they are applied in current occupational activity</i>	Practical understanding of facts, concepts, rules, regulations, abstract models , methods, materials, tools, devices, technologies ; their development and limitations; and how they are applied in current occupational activity	<i>Understanding of facts, concepts, rules, models, schools of thought, methods, technology; their development and limitations; and how they arise and are applied in current professional practice</i>
	Knowledge of issues	<i>Knowledge of the context for occupational activity (familiarity with the occupational community of practice and with safety, employment, technological and regulatory perspectives) and awareness of other disciplines likely to be encountered as a member of the community of practice</i>	Knowledge of the context for occupational activity (familiarity with the occupational community of practice and with safety, employment, technological and regulatory perspectives and with relevant economic, social and environmental issues) and awareness of other disciplines likely to be encountered as a member of the community of practice	<i>Knowledge of the context for professional practice (including regulatory, economic, scientific, technological, social and cultural aspects) and awareness of other disciplines likely to be encountered as a practitioner and member of the profession</i>

Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner - Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6

<i>Know-how and skill: range</i>	<i>NFQ Sub-strand Indicator</i>	<i>Demonstrate a broad range of specialised skills and tools</i>	<i>Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools</i>	<i>Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study</i>
<i>Know-how and skill: selectivity</i>	<i>NFQ Sub-strand Indicator</i>	<i>Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to varied unfamiliar problems</i>	<i>Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems</i>	<i>Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes</i>
Know-how and skill: range and selectivity	Use cognitive and practical skills (analytical and synthetic) to solve problems	Select from a broad range of specialised skills and tools and apply them to problems arising in occupational activity and its reflective practice; problems here are usually predictable but are subject to change	Select from a comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools and apply them to the generation of creative solutions to problems arising in occupational activity and its reflective practice	Select and apply advanced skills to analyse and respond to unpredictable and complex problems arising in the profession and its reflective practice.
	Draw insightful conclusions	Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine evidence-informed solutions to predictable problems arising in occupational activity that take due account of social, field-specific and ethical insights	Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine creative , evidence-informed solutions to problems arising in occupational activity that take due account of social, field-specific and ethical insights	Prepare evidence-based conclusions that take due account of social, disciplinary and ethical insights
	Communicate and influence	Communicate information effectively, engage in the transfer of knowledge and skills within the community of practice, and justify decisions, to specialists and non-specialists, including clients	Communicate information effectively, engage in the transfer of knowledge and skills within the community of practice, and justify decisions, to specialists and non-specialists, including clients	Communicate information effectively, transfer one's knowledge and skills, and justify decisions, to specialists and non-specialists, including clients

Proposed New Occupational/Practitioner - Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6

Competence-context	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non-routine activities; transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of contexts	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Competence-role	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities; join and function within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes; take significant or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work
Competence-learning-to-learn	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment	Learn to evaluate own learning and identify needs within a structured learning environment; assist others in identifying learning needs	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group
Competence-insight	NFQ Sub-strand Indicator	Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others	Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others
Competence— Context, Role, learning-to-learn and Insight	Exercising autonomy and judgement	Apply knowledge and skills in a range of varied and specific contexts including occupational activity and learning	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions and a wide variety of contexts including occupational activity and learning	Exercise autonomy and judgement in applying knowledge and skills in a wide variety of contexts including professional practice and study
	Exercising responsibility	Exercise initiative and independence in carrying out defined undertakings arising in occupational activity, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs and for decisions in work and learning contexts	Exercise initiative and independence in carrying out defined undertakings arising in occupational activity, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs and for decisions in work and learning contexts	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making and decisions in unpredictable work or study contexts
	Working with others	Act effectively in team roles within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups Assist in the supervision of routine work or learning activities Contribute to the review and development of the performance of others;	Act effectively in team roles within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups Exercise supervision in contexts of work or learning activities; Contribute to the review and development of the performance of others; Take some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or learning activities	Act effectively in team roles and take responsibility for managing individuals and groups
	Learning and teaching	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment; Provide instruction to others Seek necessary guidance when working independently	Learn to evaluate own learning and identify needs within a structured learning environment; Assist others in identifying learning needs; Provide instruction to others Seek necessary guidance when working independently	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs; seek necessary guidance when working independently
	Attitudes	Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour at all levels including the personal, occupational, societal, and environmental	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others at all levels including the personal, occupational, societal, and environmental	Express an internalised personal world-view (see Notes below) manifesting solidarity with others at all levels including the personal, professional, societal, and environmental
Articulation and Progression		Access arrangements must include mechanisms for recognising prior learning. Progression arrangements must be established.	Access arrangements must include mechanisms for recognising prior learning. Progression arrangements must be established.	
Assessment		The minimum expected knowledge, skill and competence associated with the award must be expressed and validly and reliably assessed. This will involve integrative assessment to ensure transversal learning outcomes have been achieved.	The minimum expected knowledge, skill and competence associated with the award must be expressed and validly and reliably assessed. This will involve integrative assessment to ensure transversal learning outcomes have been achieved.	

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Consultation Workshop – 22 October 2014

SOLAS and QQI will host a workshop event to discuss the concepts involved and the approach.

The workshop will take place on 22 October 2014 in the Goldsmith Hall, Radisson Blu Royal Hotel, Golden Lane, Dublin 8. Interested persons can register for the workshop through the SOLAS website at Workshop Registration

How to respond to this consultation document.

QQI invites interested persons or organisations to make written observations on the proposed standard.

Prompts for feedback on the award standard:

- Clarity: Overall is the expected knowledge, skill and competence sufficiently clear?
- Alignment: Do you think that the expected learning outcomes align well, in terms of knowledge, skill and competence with NFQ indicators?
- Title: The award-type descriptors at Level 5 and 6 are currently labelled as being for Occupational/ Practitioner awards: do you think it is reasonable to contrast them in this way from the labelling of the descriptors at 7-9.
- Purpose: the purposes of the award-type descriptors are identical at Levels 5 and 6 and similar to the purpose statements at Levels 7-9 except that the latter has the gradation (i) autonomous professional practice; (ii) independent professional practice and (iii) advanced and/or innovative independent professional practice. Would you prefer to see the purposes of the Level 5 and 6 award-types differentiated?

- Progression: with the addition of two new descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 and 6, there would be a sequence of professional/occupational award-types running from NFQ Levels 5 to 9: do you think this will assist in the design of suitable programmes and qualifications that are matched to the needs of both learners and employers for initial professional/practitioner formation and subsequent professional/practitioner development.
- Amendment: Would you like to suggest amendments?
- Comparability: How does the general standard compare with the expectations of relevant qualifications with which you are familiar?
- Is there anything else that should be considered?

Submissions should be made by email to consultation@qqi.ie not later Friday 14 November 2014.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME FOR 22 OCTOBER CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

09:45 -10:00	Opening address (Workshop Chair)
10:00 -10:20	Reflections on the context Nationally and Internationally for the proposed new occupational award-type descriptors at NFQ levels 5 and 6
10:20 -10:30	Brief statement about how the draft descriptors were produced (Development Group Chair)
10:30 -10:50	Independent observations on the draft
10:50-11:10	Independent observations on the draft
11:10 -12:10	Group discussions (<i>Coffee and biscuits available at this point</i>)
12:10 -13:00	Plenary feedback from groups
13:00 -13:20	Plenary discussion by panel including the Development Group Chair
13:20-13:30	Closing remarks
13:30	End – Light Lunch will be provided



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