



**QQI**

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann  
Quality and Qualifications Ireland

# QQI Submission to the Department of Justice and Equality

## Integration Policy – Have Your Say

May 2014

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## Introduction

QQI is a state agency under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. It was established in November 2012 by an amalgamation of four bodies: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). QQI has assumed the statutory functions of those bodies. It has new functions to develop an International Education Mark for providers of education and training offering programmes to international students, to establish a database of programme and qualifications and a register of providers. Through carrying out this work QQI can bring more coherence between qualifications and quality assurance in further and higher education and training, build on the successes of the legacy bodies, and promote public confidence and trust.

QQI has a broad remit across education and training in Ireland. It has a key role in the qualifications system through its custodianship of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Its work concerns learners in diverse settings - schools, adult education, English language schools, vocational training and higher education and training; providers of further and higher education and training; Government departments, State agencies and funding bodies; regulatory bodies; professional bodies; qualifications awarding bodies; sectoral and representative bodies and international bodies responsible for quality assurance and qualifications.

Of particular relevance is QQI's role in facilitating the academic recognition of qualifications through its Qualifications Recognition service. This service provides a range of functions and activities that are designed to improve the recognition in Ireland of qualifications gained outside of the State and that of Irish qualifications abroad. QQI also advises interested parties on use of the NFQ for specific purposes, for example in recruitment and the allocation of grants for continuing education and training.

QQI acknowledges the continuing valuable contribution to Irish society and economy of migrants who have come to Ireland to live and work and in many cases, access further study in Ireland.

The content of this submission is organised in four parts:

1. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
2. Qualifications Recognition
3. Supporting the Quality of International Education
4. Diversity and Intercultural Training

## **The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**

The NFQ is a broad tool for rendering the education and training system more transparent and simpler to understand for everyone living in Ireland. This is particularly important for incoming migrants who lack the system knowledge and cultural capital of natives who have gone through the Irish system themselves. This can help them make decisions about education for themselves and particularly for their children. They will know which providers are quality assured and how different qualifications on offer are related to each other. The framework is one of the key planks of policies for access, transfer and progression which fall under the remit of QQI. These also include criteria relating to policies on student admissions and recognition of prior learning which have to be implemented by providers of education and training.

## **Qualifications Recognition**

The fair recognition of qualifications and previous learning is important, not only for an individual but for society as a whole. The recognition of qualifications and learning gained elsewhere is an important component in the achievement of integration and social cohesion (Integrating Ireland 2005)<sup>1</sup> and migration is considered essential as a means of addressing skills gaps (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs 2012)<sup>2</sup>. However, there is evidence to

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<sup>1</sup> Integrating Ireland 2005. International Students and Professionals in Ireland: An analysis of Access to Higher Education and Recognition of Professional Qualifications. Available from: [http://eprints.nuim.ie/469/1/Integrating\\_Ireland\\_Report\\_WGRA\\_published2.pdf](http://eprints.nuim.ie/469/1/Integrating_Ireland_Report_WGRA_published2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. 2012. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Statement of Activity 2011. Available from: [http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/EGFSN020212-Statement\\_of\\_activity-publication.pdf](http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/EGFSN020212-Statement_of_activity-publication.pdf)

suggest that migrants' skills and knowledge tend to be under-valued in the workplace (OECD 2008)<sup>3</sup>; European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP 2011)<sup>4</sup>.

Section 9 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012<sup>5</sup> requires QQI to co-operate with international bodies on qualifications and quality assurance policies and their implementation. In particular, this includes facilitating recognition of international qualifications in the State; the basis for which is the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as the latter serves as a mechanism to place such awards in the context of the Irish education and training system. Within QQI, this service is branded Qualifications Recognition.

Previously housed at NQAI since 2003, Qualifications Recognition at QQI hosts the Irish centre of the European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centre (ENIC-NARIC). Consisting of 55 centres, ENIC-NARIC is an international network that shares information on qualifications and education and training systems in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications internationally. The network works to implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)<sup>6</sup> which, together with subsidiary texts<sup>7</sup>, essentially details best practice in the area of recognition within the European Region. Qualifications Recognition applies principles of the LRC in providing recognition advice on all qualifications, regardless of origin.

There is a formal application process in place and the number of applications received by Qualifications Recognition rose generally in tandem with net in-migration to Ireland and peaked in 2008 at 2,027. Despite net out-migration in Ireland since 2009, Qualifications Recognition has not experienced a dramatic fall in the number of applications received (falling to 1,685 in 2012 and rising to 1,905 in 2013). It could be the case that as

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<sup>3</sup> OECD. 2008. Economic Survey of Ireland 2008. Available from: [http://www.oecd.org/document/55/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_33733\\_40418935\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/55/0,3343,en_2649_33733_40418935_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>4</sup> CEDEFOP. 2011. Lifelong guidance across Europe: reviewing policy progress and future prospects. Available from: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/18625.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Available from: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2012/a2812.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Council of Europe. 1997. Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. Available from: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/reports/html/165.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Available from: <http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=ena&d=legal>

unemployment increased; individuals were required to seek advice on recognition of their prior qualifications either to pursue new employment opportunities or to access education for upskilling. Also, it is noted that in the year to April 2013, despite overall negative net migration, non-Irish nationals changed from net outward to net inward. (CSO 2013)<sup>8</sup>. In addition, the total number of non-Irish nationals increased by 124,624 over the five years to April 2011 representing a rise of 30 per cent.

Approximately 70 per cent of applications received annually relate to higher education qualifications. Census 2011 results indicate that 30.7 per cent of non-Irish nationals hold at least a Bachelor degree (CSO 2013)<sup>9</sup>. Advice on the academic recognition of international qualifications can be used for a variety of purposes such as access to employment and further study. While Qualifications Recognition aims to provide authoritative advice on academic recognition of international qualifications, decisions regarding access are ultimately the responsibility of a potential employer, education institution or professional recognition body. It should be noted that a number of education institutions and professional recognition bodies ask potential learners and applicants to seek advice from Qualifications Recognition as a first step in their respective recognition processes.

QQI actively promotes the Qualification Recognition service whenever possible through a dedicated website, [www.qualrec.ie](http://www.qualrec.ie) with information on the service available in six different languages. This year, a new leaflet was developed to help promote the service to individual holders of international qualifications as well as a diverse group of stakeholders presented with such awards. Opportunities to write articles on the work of Qualifications Recognition for various publications including migrant newspapers and magazines have also been taken as a means of publicising availability of the service. However, it is acknowledged that further promotional activity is required, ideally in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>8</sup> Population and Migration Estimates. April 2013. Available from: <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2013/#.U3pjEtJdVXc>

<sup>9</sup> Census 2011 Results. Profile 6 Migration and Diversity – A Profile of Diversity in Ireland. Available from: <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/PR,xxxx,Profile,6,Migration,a...pdf>

Further, QQI has been involved in a number of significant developmental projects. Activities with an impact internally include a project concerned with development of a quality assurance mechanism for the Qualifications Recognition service and a project culminating in the development of best practice examples for ENIC-NARIC centres, available in the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual<sup>10</sup>. QQI was also involved in the development of The European Area of Recognition – Higher Education Institution (EAR-HEI) Manual which was launched in March 2014. The manual is essentially a collection of best practice in the recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of learning for relevant personnel at higher education institutions<sup>11</sup>. It is of note that Ireland has been to the forefront in international developments that are contributing to the recognition and transparency of qualifications across borders including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Framework) and related transparency instruments such as credit (ECTS and ECVET) in addition to tools such as Europass<sup>12</sup>. The latter initiative consists of a portfolio of five standardised documents aimed at helping individuals explain their skills and competences. The first two; the Europass CV and Language Passport are completed by the individual themselves. The Mobility document is issued to an individual upon successful completion of an organised period of learning abroad. The final documents are the Europass Certificate and Diploma Supplements; the former being a generic document providing information on a further education and training qualification while the latter document is personalised and gives details, including transcripts relating to a higher education and training qualification.

QQI has recently closed a public consultation on a green paper entitled ‘Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications’ with the aim of informing new policy development in the area of recognition. The paper discusses QQI’s role in facilitating recognition of international qualifications and posed questions concerning the future direction of the service to best meet the needs of a broad range of stakeholders. Analysis of the feedback is underway. In parallel with the consultation process, a survey was designed and distributed to past users (from 2009 to date) of the Qualifications Recognition service in April 2014. A total of 917

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<sup>10</sup> Available from [www.eurorecognition.eu](http://www.eurorecognition.eu)

<sup>11</sup> Available from: <http://eurorecognition.eu/News.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> Further information is available at [www.europass.ie](http://www.europass.ie)

responses were received (14.46% response rate). Some preliminary analysis has been completed. The majority of respondents were educated up to third level (37.32% received comparability advice to NFQ Level 9 and 33.37% to NFQ Level 8) prior to their arrival in Ireland. The largest percentage of past users (40% of males and 60% of females) of the service are in their mid-thirties. The majority of past users availed of the Qualifications Recognition service to assist in accessing unregulated work and/or further study in Ireland. Respondents reported that having personalised statements of comparability improves employment prospects and often allows for seamless access to further study and State grants. The importance of increasing the transparency of international qualifications by placing them in the context of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was highlighted on numerous occasions. The survey results also indicate that the Qualification Recognition service is perceived by the majority of the respondents as efficient, professional and user-friendly. However, the survey and anecdotal evidence suggest that issues exist in terms of professional recognition (while not detailed) that require exploration.

QQI also promotes the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad. This can facilitate circular migration patterns where those who have lived and studied in Ireland can return, temporarily or permanently to their country of origin. Paradoxically, the freedom to return may often facilitate better integration for long term immigrants than feeling trapped in their host country because of non-recognition in their country of origin.

## **Supporting the Quality of International Education**

QQI supports the quality of international education in Ireland. QQI is responsible for developing a statutory Code of Practice for international students and authorising the use of an International Education Mark by those providers who comply with the code. Coming to Ireland as a student, either for English language or other subjects is a common pathway for immigrants. It is hoped that by improving the quality of the educational experience offered to international students, they can experience better integration into Irish society, regardless of how long they stay.

## **Diversity and Intercultural Training**

An appreciation and understanding of interculturalism is a vital component in promoting integration. QQI accredits a number of education and training programmes relating to interculturalism and continues to quality assure a number of registered providers who have developed programmes in this area.

## **Concluding Comments**

The National Framework of Qualifications as a central organising feature of QQI's work places the learner at the core of our activities. As explained earlier, the NFQ can help all individuals living in Ireland understand the education and training and qualifications systems. The NFQ is also used as the tool through which international qualifications are placed in the context of the Irish education and training system. QQI is currently considering the future direction of the Qualifications Recognition service in an effort to match available resources to the most efficient means of trying to meet a wide range of stakeholder needs. QQI will continue to advocate the fair recognition of international qualifications through active participation in the ENIC-NARIC Network and developmental projects. However, it must be appreciated that QQI offers advice on the academic recognition of international qualifications and this does not constitute recognition for the purposes of employment or further study. A further dimension of promoting integration in respect of QQI's work is its involvement in promoting the quality of international education and the accreditation of programmes relating to interculturalism.

QQI notes the re-establishment of the Cross Departmental Group on Integration in March 2014 charged with reviewing the State's approach to the integration of migrants. QQI looks forward to liaising with the Group concerning its current activities detailed earlier and possible future collaboration in these areas as a means of helping promote migrant integration.

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