



**Dearbhú Cáilíochta  
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann**  
Quality and  
Qualifications Ireland

# **Integrated Broad Award Standards for Business**

## **User Guide**

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## WHAT ARE AWARD STANDARDS?

Award Standards are a support tool for providers of programmes leading to QQI awards included in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). All providers in this category should be able to demonstrate how the design and content of their programmes maps to the three strands and eight sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence that inform how awards are included in the NFQ.

NFQ Strands	Corresponding NFQ Sub-strands
Knowledge	Breadth
	Kind
Know-how and Skill	Range
	Selectivity
Competence	Context
	Role
	Learning to Learn
	Insight

**Table 1: NFQ Strands and Sub-strands of Knowledge, Know-how/Skill and Competence**

Award standards provide a reference point for providers on how each strand and sub-strand should be interpreted in the context of a particular discipline. They are designed to provide a high-level reference point and support disciplinary experts to interpret and maintain alignment with the NFQ in their programme development activity.

Award standards elaborate and expand on the descriptions of levels within the [NFQ Grid of Level Indicators](#) in the context of a particular discipline. The discipline indicators provide a fuller reference point for how a particular level of knowledge, know-how/skill or competence in the NFQ can be interpreted in the context of that discipline.

<b>Level 6</b> <b>NFQ Grid Level Descriptor Indicator</b> <b>(Knowledge Breadth)</b>	<b>Level 6</b> <b>Business Indicators</b> <b>(Knowledge Breadth)</b>
<b>“Specialised knowledge of a broad area”</b>	<p><i>Knowledge of key concepts and theories in business.</i></p> <p><i>Knowledge of core and some alternative processes and/or tools and/or methods (including digital) used in business.</i></p> <p><i>Knowledge of the role that major stakeholders and events play within the business environment.</i></p> <p><i>Knowledge of current drivers, trends and diversity within the business environment.</i></p>

**Table 2: Example of how Business Award Standard Standard Compares to NFQ Level Indicator**

The indicators also progress across the NFQ levels. This provides a fuller reference point for how learning may be expected to develop over time in the context of a particular discipline.

Sub-strand: Competence-Role

NFQ Level 5	NFQ Level 7	NFQ Level 9
<i>Capacity to work in a self-directed manner, planning and executing tasks within defined contexts.</i>	<i>Capacity to work in a self-directed manner, planning and executing substantive tasks within variable contexts.</i>	<i>Capacity to undertake and execute/oversee the execution of significant programmes of work within dynamic contexts.</i>
<i>Ability to adapt to others and participate constructively within diverse team settings.</i>	<i>Ability to adapt to others, contribute effectively and take significant responsibility for the work processes of diverse teams.</i>	<i>Ability to collaborate with, manage and lead diverse teams and individuals effectively in complex business environments.</i>

**Table 3: Example of Progress Across NFQ Levels in Indicators (Competence-Role)**

Sub-strand: Know-How & Skill-Selectivity

NFQ Level 5	NFQ Level 7	NFQ Level 9
<i>Ability to identify the social, ethical or environmental implications of business activities.</i>	<i>Ability to exercise judgement in the planning, design, execution or supervision of business activities that have social, ethical or environmental implications.</i>	<i>Ability to exercise appropriate judgment in the planning, design, execution or management of business activities that have complex ethical, social or environmental implications.</i>
<i>Ability to implement (digital) processes requiring technical knowledge/skill in defined contexts.</i>	<i>Ability to design and implement effective (digital) processes grounded in technical expertise in a range of contexts.</i>	<i>Ability to design effective and context-sensitive (digital) processes grounded in technical expertise and/or evidence-based reasoning.</i>

**Table 4: Example of Progress Across NFQ Levels in Indicators (Know-How & Skill-Selectivity)**

Award standards support disciplinary experts involved in the development and delivery of programmes of education and training to interpret and maintain alignment with the NFQ. This ensures consistency of standards across the sector. For this reason, the award standards are written at a level of generality that is intended to facilitate flexibility and variety in the design of individual programmes.

This is particularly important in the domain of business, which includes programmes that may be:

- Highly practical and applied or very theoretical
- Broadly focused or highly specialised
- Increasingly multi/trans/interdisciplinary.

Business may include programmes in sub-fields including, *but not limited to*, the following areas:

- Management and Organisation (Including: Accounting, Finance, Human Resources, Operations, Enterprise, Marketing, Strategy etc.)
- Regulatory and Control Environment (Including: Taxation, Auditing and Corporate Governance etc.)
- Information and Communication Systems (Including: Accounting, Information and Communications Technology, Business Information Systems, Process Development and Management etc.)
- Economics (Including: Sectoral and International Economics, Econometrics and History etc.)
- Operations Management, Logistics and Supply Chain
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Finance, Banking, Investment, Risk Management and Financial Technology
- Business Analytics
- Marketing and Digital Marketing

## HOW ARE AWARD STANDARDS USED?

The indicators within the award standards can be used to *guide* the development and articulation of programme learning outcomes at different levels of the NFQ. However, it is important to be aware that individual programmes are not expected to map to all of the indicators within the strands and sub-strands. Programme developers can select from, contextualise and adapt the most relevant indicators and map to these in their development of learning outcomes. The developers' goal should always be to reflect the actual characteristics of a particular programme.

It is not necessary to map to all of the indicators in a sub-strand in a programme learning outcome. In some instances, a provider may choose to map to only one of these. For example, a provider of a Level 5 programme in Customer Service may develop a programme learning outcome that clearly sets out an aspect of the learning to be achieved and demonstrated. This may align with only one of the 4 indicators provided under one sub-strand, as per the example in table 4 below.

### Indicators for NFQ Level 5 Business

Sub-strand: Competence-Insight	
<p>Ability to identify the ethical implications that arise in the context of particular challenges, situations and events.</p> <p><b>Awareness of own values and world view and capacity to reflect on how this influences own behaviour and reactions in the business environment.</b></p> <p>Awareness of the emotional, personal, cultural and social dynamics of particular activities, challenges or situations in a business environment.</p> <p>Ability to propose contextually sensitive initiatives in business environments.</p>	<p><b>Programme Learning Outcome</b></p> <p><b>Upon successful completion of the programme, learners will be able to apply reflective practice strategies to their analysis of challenging interactions with customers.</b></p>

**Table 5: Example of Learning Outcome Mapped to One Indicator in One Sub-Strand**

In other instances, a provider may wish to map to two or more indicators in a particular sub-strand. For example, a provider of a Level 7 programme in Digital Marketing may develop a learning outcome that clearly sets out the nature of learning to be achieved and demonstrated in that programme. This may align with two of the indicators provided under one sub strand, as per the example in table 5 below.

Indicators for NFQ Level 7 Business	NFQ Level 7
<p><b>Sub-strand: Know-How &amp; Skill Selectivity</b></p> <p>Ability to utilize strategies for defining and responding to problems, generating ideas/solutions and drawing upon technical or domain expertise.</p> <p><b>Ability to design and implement effective (digital) processes grounded in technical expertise in a range of contexts.</b></p> <p>Ability to exercise judgement in the planning, design, execution or supervision of business activities that have social, ethical or environmental implications.</p> <p><b>Ability to use a range of communication strategies and tools and communicate effectively for a range of purposes to diverse audiences, including peers and supervisors, in the relevant subfield(s) of business.</b></p>	<p><b>Programme Learning Outcome</b></p> <p><b>Upon successful completion of the programme, learners will be able to develop and create digital content to support effective marketing campaigns via web and social media.</b></p>

**Table 5: Example of Learning Outcome Mapped to One Sub-Strand**

In many cases, providers may wish to develop learning outcomes that map to indicators in multiple sub strands. This is because a programme learning outcome may refer to:

- Knowledge *and* skill
- Knowledge *and* competence
- Knowledge *and* skill *and* competence
- Skill *and* competence

For example, a provider of a Level 5 programme in Workplace Health and Safety may develop a learning outcome that clearly sets out the nature of learning to be achieved and demonstrated in that programme. The provider may align with indicators in two distinct sub-strands, as per the example in table 6 below.

<p>Indicator for NFQ Level 5 Business Sub-strand: Knowledge Kind</p> <p><b>Knowledge of the broad implications of sustainability and climate change for business.</b></p>	<p><b>Programme Learning Outcome</b></p> <p><b>Upon successful completion of the programme, learners will be able to identify significant environmental hazards and risks in the workplace and make suggestions for how these could be reduced or eliminated.</b></p>
<p>Indicator for NFQ Level 5 Business Sub-strand: Know-How &amp; Skill-Selectivity</p> <p><b>Ability to identify the social, ethical or environmental implications of business activities.</b></p>	

**Table 6: Example of Learning Outcome Mapped to Multiple Sub-Strands**



A further example of a provider mapping to multiple sub-strands is provided in table 7 below. In this case, a provider of a Level 8 programme in Operations Management may decide to include a focus on sustainability in their programme learning outcomes. This may align with indicators in multiple sub-strands.

<p>Indicator for NFQ Level 8 Business Sub-strand: Knowledge Kind</p> <p><b>Knowledge of the current and emerging implications of sustainability and climate change integral to the relevant subfield(s) of business, informing evaluative appraisal.</b></p>	<p><b>Programme Learning Outcome</b></p> <p><b>Upon successful completion of the programme, learners will be able to propose ways to enhance sustainability performance and reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of operations strategies, justifying specific measures in relation to projected impacts.</b></p>
<p>Indicator for NFQ Level 8 Business Sub-strand: Competence-Insight</p> <p><b>Ability to identify and assess the ethical implications of both action and inaction in response to challenges, situations and events.</b></p>	
<p>Indicator for NFQ Level 8 Business Sub-strand: Know-How &amp; Skill-Selectivity</p> <p><b>Ability to exercise appropriate judgement in the planning, design, execution or management of business activities that have complex social, ethical or environmental implications.</b></p>	

**Table 7: Example of Learning Outcome Mapped to Multiple Sub-Strands**

In all cases, it is important that providers work to develop learning outcomes that are specific to individual programmes. This is emphasized within QQI's Policy for Determining Awards Standards (2014):

*While QQI awards standards and corresponding awards specifications are more or less specific, the intended programme learning outcomes to be acquired, and where appropriate demonstrated, before a named award associated with a validated programme may be made, must always be specific and sufficiently detailed to communicate the award-holder's knowledge, skill and competence to a prospective employer or an educational institution for the purpose of helping the award-holder gain access to, transfer to or progress to, a particular programme of education and training (p.4).*

#### HOW WERE THE BUSINESS AWARD STANDARDS DEVELOPED?

The Integrated Award Standards for Business were produced following a process of phased consultation with an expert reference group. The expert reference group was composed of over 40 subject matter experts working in the tertiary education sector (inclusive of both further and higher education and training). The expert reference group members were drawn from public and independent/private institutions and also included industry representatives.

The Integrated Award Standards for Business are based on the level indicators and award type descriptors of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). They span NFQ levels 5 – 9.