Dearbhú Cáilíochta
agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
Qualifications Ireland

QQI Awards

Glossary of Terms

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AWARD RELATED TERMS

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The NFQ is a tool designed to show all Irish recognised qualifications that are available to learners and how they can be compared / contrasted / ranked. There are 10 levels from Level 1 literacy qualifications to Level 10 PhD qualifications.
www.nfq.ie

Level Indicators

Every level of the framework is identified by the type(s) of knowledge, skill and competence that any qualification at that level should include.   These attributes are set out as level indicators. NFQLevelindicators.pdf (qqi.ie)

The level indicators are generic i.e. they don't refer to any particular subject area / discipline.

Award

The qualifications on the NFQ are also called awards. An award is a formal statement given to a learner to verify that s/he has demonstrated the knowledge, skill and / or competence associated with a particular qualification. An award can be hard copy (**certificate**) or digital.

There are thousands of awards on the NFQ – from the very large to the very small.

Volume

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

Award Class

Awards are grouped into **award classes** according to their volume and purpose.

- The biggest awards are in the **Major** class i.e., major awards.
- The next biggest are **Special Purpose** class. SPAs are designed to qualify a learner to do something specific.
- The awards in the **Supplemental** class are rare. They are a top up qualification for a learner with an existing major award. For example, a person with a major award in plumbing could get a supplemental award in gas fitting.
- Major awards can have within them smaller awards which recognise that a learner has done part of the major award. These small (component) awards are in the **Minor** class. They are very common in FET but not so common in HET.

Award Type

Within each framework level and award class, you can have different award types

Awards of one type share common features which are different to other awards at the same class and level.

Example:

NFQ Level   8

Award Class   Major:

Award Type 1:   Honours Bachelor's degree

Award Type 2:   Higher Diploma

Example:

NFQ Level   6

Award Class   Major:

Award Type 1:   Higher Certificate

Award Type 2:   Advanced Certificate

See list of Award Types per level

Award Type Descriptor

An award type descriptor is a series of statements which describes the knowledge, skills and competences associated with any particular award type i.e. all Higher Diplomas or Advanced Certificates should have the attributes set out in the relevant award type descriptor.

See Award Type Descriptors

Learning Outcomes

NFQ awards are all based on learning outcomes. A learning outcome is a statement of what an award holder knows or can do.

Award Standard

The **standard** is the knowledge, skills and competences required to achieve an award at a particular NFQ level in a particular subject area / discipline.

The standard is written as a series of learning outcomes aligned with the appropriate NFQ Level indicators and award type descriptor.

The standard of a Level 5 Certificate in Interior Design is different from the standard of a Level 8 Honours Bachelor's degree in Interior Design because the learning outcomes in each award must align to the NFQ Level of the award and the award type.

QQI HET Standards are available <u>here</u>.

Named Award

A named award is an award type linked to a particular standard e.g. Advanced Certificate in Plumbing, Higher Diploma in Science. It is also known as the **Named Award Stem**. The *stem* reference relates to the fact that the named award is the first part of the award title.

Specialisation

An award standard can be broad or specialised. QQI named award standards in higher education are very broad e.g. Business, Science, Social Care. Programmes generally lead to more specialised qualifications. This is the **Specialisation** e.g., Data Analytics. This is attached to a named award stem to give the full award title e.g., Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics.

IRQ Irish Register of Qualifications

This is QQI's database of awards, providers and programmes. It draws its information from the same database that underpins QBS and QHub. Changes in either of those will be reflected in the IRQ. https:irq.ie

PROGRAMME RELATED TERMS:

Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP)

A feature of the NFQ and the legislation that established it is a commitment to access, transfer and progression (ATP). This means the parties operating the framework, awarding bodies and providers, have policies and procedures which enable learners to *Access* programmes as easily as possible, use the credit achieved on a programme to *Transfer* to another programme on the same level or *Progress* to a programme at a higher level.

The intention is to promote and facilitate a culture of lifelong learning.

Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship programme is one in which a learner is *employed* as an apprentice and facilitated to learn on-the-job and off-the-job i.e. an 'earn while you learn' model. The provider who develops the apprenticeship programme must design the learning so that a significant proportion is learnt while working, i.e. on-the-job. The off-the-job elements are covered in a combination of classroom and online delivery.

Traditionally apprenticeships were for Craft skills i.e. construction and other trades. Now the model is being applied to a much wider range of disciplines.

Centre

Centre is an unofficial term used by QQI to designate the provider entity which applies to QQI for certificates for learners. In most cases, a provider has only one such entity and the provider and centre are effectively the same thing. This is **a single centre provider**. On QBS / QHub, such centres will be coded with 5 digits and a letter e.g. 38456G.

In a few significant cases however, large national or regional providers have many different centres. Each will have its own name, address, staff and management and will offer a selection of the provider's validated programmes.

Devolution of Responsibility (DR)

QQI can devolve responsibility for some parts of the validation process to a provider who has shown the capacity to do this reliably. A provider who has DR is responsible for those parts of the evaluation process between screening (done by QQI) up to finalisation of the panel report. For taking this on, the validation fee may be reduced.

The validation decision is still made by QQI.

Intake

An intake is an instance of a validated programme i.e. when a provider enrols a group of learners to begin a programme, that is termed an intake. It is a number i.e. how many learners. A programme will have a minimum intake and a maximum intake. These represent the lower and upper limits essential for financial and pedagogical viability of the programme.

Microcredential

A microcredential is, as the name implies, a very small qualification. In QQI terms, it is a small minor, special purpose or supplemental award. The term is often used to describe a programme leading to such a qualification.

Programme

A programme of education and training is a "Coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed and organized to achieve pre-determined learning objectives [outcomes] or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period."[1] A programme enables a learner with a particular learner profile to attain the standard for a specified NFQ award.

There can be many different programmes leading to the same award in the same way as there can be many different routes to arrive at a particular destination. The starting point, mode of travel, distance etc may all vary.

Designing a programme is like designing a travel plan i.e. planning out how to get a particular group of people from point A to point B using a particular route, mode of transport and within a particular time and with a particular driver etc.

Programme Validation

Programme validation is a QQI process designed to ensure, as best we can, that a new programme can succeed i.e., can it enable a particular profile of learner to acquire and demonstrate the learning for a particular award standard.   The newly designed programme is checked by a group of people with relevant expertise and knowledge before it can enrol any learners.

Using the travel analogy above, programme validation is checking that the travel plan designed on paper can work in practice. It is better to check this before the group of learners start out. So, a group of travel experts knowledgeable of the region being travelled will examine the plan and give an opinion as to its viability.

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[1] UNESCO (2011) *International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011* p. 78 Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf [Accessed 30 / 03 / 2023]

QQI has designed validation **criteria**. These are the checks that must be applied to every programme to ensure that it is potentially a good programme.

Programme Revalidation

A programme is validated by QQI for a maximum period of five years, and in some cases can be validated for less time. Within the period of validation, a provider enrols learners onto the programme an approved number of times per year known as **intakes**. QQI specifies when the last intake can be e.g. September 2028. Before any more learners can be taken onto the programme, that programme must be revalidated i.e. reviewed, rechecked and updated.

The revised programme has been refreshed to take account of any changes to the standard and to iron out any faults /issues that became apparent over the period in which it was being delivered.

Provider

A provider is any organisation which offers a validated programme leading to an NFQ award.

QQI records all its providers on its database. Each provider is designated by a code in the format PX9999 e.g. PE00154 is the code for Cavan Monaghan ETB.

Professional Award Type Descriptor (PATD)

Apprenticeships, and other occupationally focused programmes which include substantial amounts of work-based learning, will use the PATD as the award standard. It mandates the acquisition of professional, vocational, and applied knowledge, skills and competence relevant to a particular profession.

Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

The professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) involve communities of practice that are essential to the qualifications system. This area is of particular interest to QQI, as many higher education programmes must satisfy not only the accreditation processes of a PSRB but also the quality assurance processes of the provider institutions and QQI, the national quality assurance agency.

Where a programme being submitted for validation is designed to meet not only QQI validation criteria but also the criteria of a PSRB, this must be made clear in the application.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Because NFQ awards are based on learning outcomes, it is a feature of those awards that achievement of the learning outcomes doesn't necessarily require participation in a programme. If a learner already has acquired some or all of the learning outcomes for an award, either through work, life experience or previous education

and training, then they can ask to have that *prior learning recognised* by a provider offering the award they are seeking.

The provider is expected to have a mechanism to do this i.e. an RPL process. It can be simple e.g. assessment or more complex e.g. evaluation of a portfolio of evidence.

RPL may be for entry to a programme or for advanced entry to a programme where a learner has demonstrated that they have already acquired the learning outcomes associated with a module or stage.

Stream

In HET degree programmes which have core modules and multiple electives, it may be agreed with QQI that different combinations of core and elective modules may lead to different awards. These are termed streams.

It is important to distinguish between the normal use of electives within a programme i.e. facilitation of different pathways to the same award and the use of electives for streams i.e. where the pathways are sufficiently distinct (as measured in credit) to merit different award titles.

In order for a stream within a principal programme to lead to a different award, it must be entered onto QHub as a separate embedded programme.

It is important to emphasise that approval of streams needs agreement by QQI in advance.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY RELATED TERMS:

Face to Face

This is a programme delivery mode in which all direct teaching occurs in person only.

Blended

This is a programme delivery mode in which all direct teaching occurs in person and this is enhanced by online materials and activities and asynchronous interactions.

Hybrid

This is a programme delivery mode in which all direct teaching occurs using a mix of online and on-campus instruction. Online components take place synchronously, asynchronously or in combination.

Online

This is a programme delivery mode in which all direct teaching occurs online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination.

Workplace Learning

This refers to goal-oriented and quality assured assessed learning in the workplace, for example, within an apprenticeship, traineeship or practice-placement. Unfocused work experience is not relevant.

In Person Classroom/Labs

This is a teaching and learning modality which encompasses in person lectures, tutorials, seminars, classes, labs, workshops or similar on campus (or on-site) teaching and learning activities where learners and teaching staff are physically present in the same room.

Synchronous Classroom/Labs

This is a teaching and learning modality which encompasses online but synchronous lectures, tutorials, seminars, classes, labs, workshops, webinars or similar online teaching and learning activities where teachers and learners are sharing the same virtual environment in real time and able to interact using voice and/or chat functionality. It does not apply to pre-recorded lectures or demonstrations.

Asynchronous Directed

This is a teaching and learning modality which encompasses online learning activities that are required and in which effort and/or completion and/or performance are monitored and responded to. Indicative examples of this include the use of discussion boards, online collaborative environments, quiz tools and completion tracked learning activities.

Asynchronous Independent

This is a teaching and learning modality which encompasses a breadth of activities learners may undertake that support their learning, but which are not directly monitored or responded to. Indicative examples of this include reading, watching videos, listening to podcasts, participating in learning support workshops, searching academic literature, skills practice, study groups/working collaboratively with groups of other learners and the preparation of assessed CA or project work.

Work based

Work based learning takes many forms. Here the focus is on goal-oriented, quality-assured and assessed learning in the work place. This learning must be intrinsic to the programme. Unfocussed work experience is not relevant. Some examples are: Apprenticeship (statutory), Traineeship, Practice-placement, Work-based case-study, Training in the workplace.

PROGRAMME STRUCTURES AND CONTENT TERMS

Stage

A long programme, e.g., a 3-year degree, will be designed to be delivered in stages. If there are stages like this, each one is usually one year long – Stage 1, Stage 2 etc. A short programme will only have one stage.

A programme schedule will contain information about a stage – its name, volume and the modules it contains.

Award Stage

The final stage of a programme, where the learner can get the NFQ award, is called the award stage. If there is only one stage in the programme, then that is the award stage.

Credits: ECTS / FET:

The size / volume of a programme / award is measured in credits. A single credit is an estimate of how much time / effort a typical learner will have to put in to complete a part of the programme. This will be broadly divided into directed learning (led by the provider) and self-directed learning (managed by the learner). Each in turn will be further classified – Directed (classroom, workplace, online, assessment etc), Self-Directed (study, assignments, research, workplace etc.)

In HET, where the European Credit Transfer System ECTS is used, a single credit is approximately **25** hours of learner effort. Therefore, a HET award / programme of 60 ECTS will require 1,800 hours to achieve.

Module

Each stage of a programme can in turn be divided up into modules. This is just a logical subdivision of a programme e.g. in the first stage of a 4-year business degree, you might have a module called Introduction to Accounting. Every programme will list the modules in each stage, what each module is intended to cover and how it is to be assessed.

MIPLOs: Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes

These are learning outcomes i.e. statements of what any learner who completes the *programme* will be able to do. These MIPLOs should be consistent with the relevant standard or award type descriptor of the NFQ award to which the programme is leading. A key part of the programme design and programme validation processes is to ensure that the MIPLOs can be *mapped* to the relevant QQI standard.

In a programme, you will have a list of MIPLOs, often preceded by the sentence:

"At the end of this programme, the learner will be able to … "followed by a verb e.g., understand/critique/describe etc.

MIMLOs: Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes

Just as the programme has MIPLOs, each module will have MIMLOs i.e. statements of what any learner who completes the *module* will be able to do.

In a module, you will have a list of MIMLOs, often preceded by the sentence:

"At the end of this module, the learner will be able to … "followed by a verb e.g., understand/critique/describe etc.

MIPLOs and MIMLOs are important. Having to write them makes the programme designers work out and map what the programme is intended to achieve at a high level (MIPLOs) and then in more detail (MIMLOs). MIMLOs should reflect and be mapped to the MIPLOs so that there is coherence between the two. In this way, it is ensured that the MIPLOs can be achieved by learners.

Indicative Content

This is a narrative description of what a programme or a module will cover for a learner.

Assessment

Assessment is the process where a learner's knowledge, skill and competence are measured against the programme / module learning outcomes. This is how a provider can know whether a learner has achieved the standard for a QQI award and, if they have, then to what extent i.e., the achievement is **graded**. e.g., Pass, Merit, Distinction, Honours etc.

When a provider is designing a programme, a very important part of that process is deciding how learners are to be assessed and graded.

Embedded Programme

A programme with many modules can have another programme embedded within it, made up of a subset of those modules and leading to a different, usually smaller award.

For example, a two-year programme leading to a level 6 major award in Early Learning and Care might comprise two stages (Stage 1 and Award Stage) each having six modules i.e. a total of 12 modules.

The principal programme has 12 modules and leads to an Advanced Certificate in Early Learning and Care.

The six modules in the first stage could be an embedded programme leading to a Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care.

There could be another embedded programme comprising three modules in stage 2 which together make up a coherent package of learning leading to, for example, a Level 6 Special Purpose Certificate in Child Development.

Learners may enrol onto the principal programme or directly onto one of the embedded programmes. These are discrete programmes in their own right with their own entry criteria.

Exit Award

Where an embedded programme leads to an award which is only used by learners who enrol onto, but don't complete, the principal programme, that award is called an exit award i.e. it's for learners exiting the programme early. It gives them an opportunity to achieve an award rather than leave with nothing. Learners cannot enrol directly onto an exit award. They enrol onto the principal programme, but may exit the principal programme at a specified earlier point with the exit award.

However, if the embedded programme is advertised to learners who only want its associated award and not the award on the principal programme, then that is an embedded programme (see above) and not an exit award.

QQI PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION

Programme Descriptor

When a provider submits a new programme for validation or revalidation, it has to document all the details of the programme in a set template called the programme descriptor.

Programme Schedule

Part of the programme descriptor is a table listing all the stages, modules, stage and module credits, delivery methods, assessment methods etc. This table, called the programme schedule, is a quick way of seeing how the programme is structured and what it contains.

Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

Before sending a programme to QQI to be validated, a provider must check the programme against the QQI validation criteria. The proof that it has done this check is the self-evaluation report.

It's like doing, or asking your own mechanic to do, a pre-check on your car before sending it for an NCT.

Independent Evaluation Report (IER)

QQI does not have the subject matter expertise to make a judgement on the content, structure, and resourcing of a new programme. Hence, we ask a panel of experts to read the programme descriptor, SER and other supporting documentation and evaluate it against the validation criteria. This group of experts is a QQI panel.

The report of their findings is the Independent Evaluation Report (IER). After a PAEC decision to refuse or approve validation, the IER is published on the QQI website for all to see, including learners.

Certificate of Validation

When QQI validates a programme, it states the terms & conditions of this validation i.e., the expectations and the limitations that the provider must stick to. The statement of these limitations and conditions is called the Certificate of Validation (CoV). When a programme is validated, the CoV is published on the QQI website.

Programme Status

As a programme moves through the validation process and beyond, QQI moves it from status to status so that we can track its Life Cycle from Draft to Expired.

QUALITY ASSURANCE RELATED TERMS

Academic Integrity

"Academic integrity is the commitment to, and demonstration of, honest and moral behaviour in an academic setting." (https://writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/resources/academic-integrity/). This includes all assessment submitted for academic purposes. Responsibility for demonstrating academic integrity lies with the learner.

So, academic integrity is what is expected of a learner who is being assessed.   The opposite of academic integrity is cheating in an assessment. It is a serious issue now worldwide and an 'industry' has built up to help students cheat e.g., so called 'essay mills'.

QQI now has a statutory basis for the prosecution of those who:
- facilitate cheating by learners;
- advertise cheating services by companies such as 'essay mills' or by individuals; and publish advertisements for cheating services.

The new legislation was a direct response to the emerging threat of contract cheating and other forms of online academic fraud in higher education.

Providers are expected to develop an approach to teaching and assessment which promotes academic integrity and good academic practice amogst learners and minimises the risk of cheating. QQI encourages providers to direct learners to the academic writing and related advice and resources within their own institution, as well as to information contained in the QQI video: Your own work, Your own degree, Your own achievement! (qqi.ie).

Mode of Delivery

Mode of delivery refers to the way in which a learner can engage with a programme. There are a number of possibilities as outlined in this table:

Face to Face – All direct teaching occurs in person only
Blended – All direct teaching occurs in person and this is enhanced by online materials and activities and asynchronous interactions.
Hybrid – Direct teaching occurs using a mix of online and on-campus instruction. Online components take place synchronously, asynchronously or in combination.

> **Online –** All direct teaching occurs online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination.

> **Workplace Learning** – Goal-oriented and quality assured assessed learning in the workplace. For example, within an apprenticeship, traineeship or practice-placement. Unfocused work experience is not relevant.

PAEC (Programmes and Awards Executive Committee)

QQI has **governance** of its own processes i.e., a way of overseeing that it is following its own policies and obligations properly and efficiently. The governance must be carried out by people not involved (independent) of the process they are overseeing.

The PAEC oversees programme validation and reengagement and makes the final decision on whether a programme is validated, or a provider is approved.

PAOC (Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee)

The PAOC is another part of QQI's governance system. It serves as a second check on any validation process that led to a refusal of validation. As this can be a very significant outcome for a provider, it is important that it be seen to be a fair and proper outcome. If the PAOC has any query about the validation report / process, it can refer the decision back to the PAEC to look at again.

Even if the PAOC confirms the refusal of validation, the provider can still appeal the decision if it feels it was not a fair process.

Scope of Provision

'Scope of provision' refers to the range and type of programmes that a provider is approved to offer. It includes the lowest and highest level on the NFQ at which a provider can offer awards; what award types can be offered; and how and where they can be delivered. An example is: Casey Training Solutions is approved to offer Minor and Component Awards at Levels 5 and 6 on the NFQ in the area of Healthcare delivered via face-to-face and blended learning modes. Casey Training Solutions can submit programmes for validation to QQI within this approved scope of provision. Through reengagement, QQI determines whether a provider's QA procedures and organisational capacity are adequate to support that provider's current or proposed (if different) scope of provision. A provider may submit applications for programme validation within its approved scope of provision.

Extension to Scope of Provision

A provider's scope of provision as approved through reengagement is not fixed permanently. A provider can seek to have that scope increased or decreased if its business strategy changes. For example, a provider approved to deliver programmes face-to-face may decide that it wishes to commence offering programmes via blended learning. To do so, that provider will first need to have its QA procedures for blended learning approved i.e., extend its scope of provision to include blended learning. If a provider wishes to amend its scope of provision outside of the reengagement process, it should contact staff at the QQI Awards Unit at qqiqa@qqi.ie.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION TERMS

ELE: English Language Education

This term refers to the activity and industry of **teaching English** to non-native speakers. It's a term used mainly in Ireland; its equivalent internationally is ELT.

ELT: English Language Teaching

QQI uses this term mainly to refer to the activity of training TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) teachers.