

# Guidance to Support an Application to be Established as a Listed Awarding Body and Include Awards in the Framework

HANDBOOK AND GUIDANCE FOR PROSPECTIVE LISTED  
AWARDING BODIES  
QQI

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## Preface

This guidance handbook is intended to help prospective Listed Awarding Bodies (LAB) apply to QQI for establishment as a Listed Awarding Body and the inclusion of awards in the Framework. The document provides an overview of the specific criteria and examples of how these might be met by a LAB.

This guidance handbook should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- *Policy and Criteria for Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body*
- *Policy and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework.*

The Gap Analysis Guidance Tool for Listed Awarding Bodies is the appropriate guidance material for developing Quality Assurance (QA) procedures and should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- *Core QA guidelines*
- *Sector specific QA guidelines for LABs*
- *Relevant topic specific QA guidelines*

References in this document to the '2012 Act as amended' encompass the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019.

Please note that those applying to be established as a Listed Awarding Body will be required to demonstrate to QQI that they meet the due diligence criteria specified in regulations under section 29B (1) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 as amended,<sup>1</sup> unless otherwise exempted as prescribed in Section 65 (6) of the Act.

As such, those subject to this requirement will be required to provide information to support a due diligence assessment as part of the application to be established as a LAB. However, this guidance handbook is designed only to support applications to be established as a LAB and inclusion of awards in the Framework. Separate guidance will be made available to support a Due Diligence application.

In order to be established as a Listed Awarding Body, an applicant must:

- Have suitable QA procedures in place that have shown regard to the QA guidelines issued by QQI. In the case of Provider and Combination LABs, these QA procedures will be formally approved by QQI.
- Have suitable Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) procedures in place that have shown regard to the Policies and Criteria issued by QQI. In the case of Provider and Combination LABs, these ATP procedures will be formally approved by QQI.
- Meet the criteria set out in the Policy and Criteria for the Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body. This will be demonstrated through a self-evaluation report and supporting evidence and the completion of an application form.

In order to have awards included in the Framework for the first time, a LAB must:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/pdf>

- Meet the criteria set out in the Policy and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework. This will be demonstrated through a self-evaluation report and supporting evidence and the completion of an application form.

## 1. Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body

### 1.1. Prerequisites

Section 3 of the Policy and Criteria for Establishment as a Listed Awarding Body sets out some pre-requisites that need to be confirmed **in advance** of submitting a full application. All prospective LABs are encouraged to contact QQI in advance of submitting to meet these minimum requirements. QQI will arrange a meeting to discuss the minimum requirements specifically and the overall application more generally.

**Please note:** examination and certification bodies<sup>2</sup> are not eligible to apply to become a LAB at this time. All LABs, including non-provider LABs, must have responsibility for the quality assurance of provision of programmes of education and training and related services leading to the award included in the Irish NFQ.

To make a submission of achievement of these minimum requirements, please complete the form provided by QQI. Please attach all supporting documentation and submit to [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)

Please note that the minimum requirements for establishment and emergent awarding bodies are different, though some requirements are repeated. A prospective listed awarding body will either be established or emergent and only need review the requirements for the relevant type. The significant differentiator is history of making awards. If **you do not** have 20 years history of making awards in Ireland, you can skip to 1.1.2

Please note that the text in black is taken directly from the Policies and Criteria documents. In some cases, the numbering will not match as the numbering relates to the numbers in the policy documents.

#### 1.1.1. Minimum requirements for established awarding bodies.

- a) Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body and its awards. The relevant public authority must have an informed position about the organisation in its capacity as an awarding body. Such relevant public authorities are the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or a DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

Please use the template provided by QQI for this endorsement. This template can be downloaded from the QQI website and must be submitted directly to [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) by the relevant endorser. If an awarding body intends to use endorsement by a relevant public authority other than those listed below, please contact QQI in advance of seeking such endorsement to confirm suitability.

- The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

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<sup>2</sup> This means those bodies that do not quality assure

- Another Government Minister
- Higher Education Authority
- SOLAS
- A statutory professional regulator (see the list of competent authorities maintained by DFHERIS- [gov - Recognition of professional qualifications \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie))
- Designated Awarding Body

In determining the relevance of an alternative relevant public authority, the term 'informed position' will be an organisation that has insight into the quality of the education offering of the proposed Listed Awarding Body. Authorities that will not be considered relevant public authorities are listed below:

- Voluntary regulators of professions
- Representative and/or member organisations
- An organisation that has provided funding or investment for anything other than the purchase or development of education and training for a specific audience would not be considered suitable to provide an endorsement.

b) A history of at least 20 years of making awards in Ireland.

Please provide evidence of making awards in Ireland for 20 years. This may be minutes of the relevant committee that approves the issuing of awards or other such appropriate documentation. Please note that for the purpose of evidencing a history of 20 years of making awards, it is appropriate to reference legal predecessors of your current organisation.

c) Evidence of meeting an identified market/learning/skills/employment/societal need.

Please provide evidence of the identified market/learning/skills/employment/societal need that your organisation meets. The identified need may be related to the following:

- Subject and content
- Proposed learning outcomes
- Mode of delivery (ie) part time, flexible, online
- Target learners (ie) professional development, marginalised groups, those not currently or adequately served by existing institutions
- Upskilling and/or reskilling
- Continuous professional development

d) Evidence of good standing as an awarding body, and specifically with reference to the proposed awards and subject areas.

Please provide evidence of good standing with the following potential stakeholders:

- Employers
- Statutory professional regulators
- Voluntary professional bodies
- Funding agencies
- Learners and graduates

You are not required to submit evidence of good standing from all of the above, but you should consider those that are relevant to your organisation. A short, signed statement from the relevant organisation will be sufficient. Please remember that these types of stakeholders are likely to meet the review team during the physical or virtual site visit at a later stage. The outcome of recent student and/or graduate surveys would be sufficient to evidence good standing with learners and graduates.

- e) Where an awarding body is primarily established under foreign law, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification and/or quality assurance authority in that jurisdiction(s) and must provide written testimony from the relevant authority or authorities confirming that the applicant is in good standing, has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns.

Please confirm all the relevant qualification and/or quality assurance authorities you are overseen by in each jurisdiction in which you operate. Please link to any published registers or other material that will confirm this. QQI may seek to confirm directly with relevant authorities regarding good standing.

- f) Confirmation and evidence of proposed LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.

Please confirm your LAB type. If you are using associated providers, please confirm all the associated providers you are currently using and will propose to offer your NFQ awards. Please confirm the scope of the awards that will be offered by these associated providers to include:

- Subject area using the ISCED<sup>3</sup> and/or ESCO<sup>4</sup> classifications
- NFQ Levels
- Award classes and types
- Mode of delivery

A prospective LAB must investigate and confirm if the proposed associated providers are relevant providers of QQI. Please note that QQI's Quality Assurance relationship is with the Education and Training (ETB) and not with individual further education colleges. If you are proposing a specific school or college as the associated provider, it might not be appropriate to consider this provider to be a relevant provider of QQI.

1.1.2. Minimum requirements for emergent awarding bodies

- a) Sufficient evidence of an emerging learning/market/societal need.

Please provide evidence of the identified unmet market/learning/skills/employment/societal need that your organisation meets. The identified need may be related to the following:

- Subject and content
- Proposed learning outcomes
- Mode of delivery (ie) part time, flexible, online

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<sup>3</sup> [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\) - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg_4_3_1)

<sup>4</sup> [The ESCO Classification | ESCO \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg_4_3_1)

- Target learners (ie) professional development, marginalised groups, those not currently or adequately served by existing institutions
- Upskilling and/or reskilling
- Continuous professional development

Please outline the evidence you have identified that this learning need is unmet (ie) outline the research you undertook to confirm that existing offerings in the State do not already meet this need.

- b) Sufficient evidence that the emergent, prospective listed awarding body has the requisite knowledge and experience to meet the unmet learning/market/societal need.

Please outline how your organisation is well placed to meet this need. Consider providing evidence of the experience and expertise of staff and any experience of meeting this learning need in other jurisdictions.

- c) Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body and its awards. The relevant public authority must have an informed position about the organisation in its capacity as an awarding body. Such relevant public authorities are the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or a DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis<sup>5</sup>.

Please use the template provided by QQI for this endorsement. This template can be downloaded from the QQI website and must be submitted directly by [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) by the relevant endorser. If an awarding body intends to use endorsement by a relevant public authority other than those listed below, please contact QQI in advance of seeking such endorsement to confirm suitability.

- The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
- Another government minister
- Higher Education Authority
- SOLAS
- A statutory professional regulator (see the list of competent authorities maintained by DFHERIS- [gov - Recognition of professional qualifications \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie))
- Designated Awarding Body

In determining the relevance of an alternative relevant public authority, the term 'informed position' will be an organisation that has insight into the quality of the education offering of the proposed Listed Awarding Body. Authorities that will not be considered relevant public authorities are listed below:

- Voluntary regulators of professions
- Representative and/or member organisations

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<sup>5</sup> Guidance will be provided by QQI to individual LABs regarding the suitability of proposed public authorities.

- An organisation that has provided funding or investment for anything other than the purchase or development of education and training for a specific audience would not be considered suitable to provide an endorsement.
- d) Additional support and endorsement needed from at least one further relevant public authority which must either be a funding body, or a government department/public sector agency with specific expertise and/or responsibility related to the proposed awards/subject area.

Please note that emergent awarding bodies will need a second public endorser from the list above. Please consider ensuring that this public endorser has relevant expertise specific to the area of unmet learning need. Another government minister department might be relevant if it relates to specific skills.

- e) There must be evidence of sufficient public funding for the qualifications of such an awarding body.

Where an awarding body is entering into the Irish market for the first time to meet an unmet learning need, it must have confirmed public funding.

This could be direct funding from education funding agencies such as the Higher Education Authority or SOLAS.

It might also be indirect, for example:

- where a government department has confirmed it will fund upskilling in a particular area
- a specific funding call
- collaboration with a Designated Awarding Body that includes funding

Please note there may be other sources of funding that will evidence this criterion. Please discuss with QQI.

- f) Where an awarding body is primarily established under foreign law, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification authority in that jurisdiction and must provide written testimony from that authority confirming that the applicant is in good standing has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns<sup>6</sup>.

Please confirm all the relevant qualification and/or quality assurance authorities you are overseen by in each jurisdiction in which you operate. Please link to any published registers or other material that will confirm this. QQI will seek to confirm directly with relevant authorities regarding good standing.

- g) Confirmation and evidence of LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.

Please confirm your LAB type. If you are using associated providers, please confirm all the associated providers you are using and will propose to offer your NFQ awards. Please confirm the scope of the awards that will be offered by these associated providers to include:

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<sup>6</sup> QQI intends to establish agreements with relevant regulators for the provision of this information.

- Subject area
- NFQ Levels
- Award types
- Mode of delivery

A prospective LAB must investigate and confirm if the proposed associated providers are relevant providers of QQI. Please note that QQIs Quality Assurance relationship is with the Education and Training (ETB) and not with individual further education colleges. If you are proposing a specific school or college as the associated provider, it might not be appropriate to consider this provider to be a relevant provider of QQI.

#### 1.1.3. Exemption from Due Diligence

As part of the application to be established as a LAB, applicants will be required to evidence compliance with the due diligence regulations established under Section 29B of the Act, unless otherwise exempt under Section 29A (1). Any exemptions from this requirement must be applied for at the point of confirming achievement of the minimum requirements.

Under Section 29A(1) of the Act it states ‘A specified provider, **other than a provider referred to in section 65(6)**, shall demonstrate to the Authority that it meets the criteria specified in regulations under section 29B(1) in any of the following cases...’

Section 65(6) goes on to specify the following providers

- a) A previously established University
- b) an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the Act of 1997,
- c) a technological university,
- d) the Dublin Institute of Technology,
- e) an Institute of Technology,
- f) an educational institution designated under section 5 (inserted by section 52 (e) of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 ) of the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 as an institution of higher education for the purposes of that Act,
- g) Solas
- h) the National Tourism Development Authority,
- i) Teagasc,
- j) An Bord Iascaigh Mhara,
- k) an education and training board or an institution established and maintained by an education and training board,
- l) the Institute of Public Administration
- m) a recognised school,
- n) the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland,
- o) the Royal Irish Academy of Music,
- p) Mary Immaculate College,
- q) Marino Institute of Education,
- r) a body established—
  - (i) by or under an enactment (other than the Companies Act 2014 or a former enactment relating to companies within the meaning of section 5 of that Act), or



- (ii) under the Companies Act 2014 (or a former enactment relating to companies within the meaning of section 5 of that Act) in pursuance of powers conferred by or under another enactment, and financed wholly or partly by means of money provided, or loans made or guaranteed, by a Minister of the Government or the issue of shares held by or on behalf of a Minister of the Government.

It is likely that only 65(6)(r) would apply in the case of LABs. Where this is the case, a LAB should submit a request to be exempt from due diligence (and by association, protection of enrolled learners) under Section 65(6)(r) and clearly outline if the request falls under (i) or (ii) and provide supporting evidence for same.

Please note QQI reserves the right to seek external advice on such a request.

#### 1.1.4. Intent to Include in other EU National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)

At this time a prospective LAB will be asked to indicate if it is already included in another EU NQF or if it intends to seek inclusion in another EU NQF. Please note that the UK is not considered an EU NQF despite continuing to be referenced to the EQF.

The European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group has established a standing group on international qualifications. The mandate of the Group is to oversee the implementation of a procedure for exchanging information and for notification of the EQF levelling of international qualifications in national frameworks. The objective of the procedure is to ensure that the EQF contributes to increased transparency of and trust in international qualifications in Europe.

The procedure applies the definition of international qualifications of the EQF Recommendation: 'international qualification' means a qualification awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, sector or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body that is used in more than one country and that includes learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.

The procedure is voluntary and will only be used in limited circumstances. National procedures for levelling of qualifications take precedence and the procedure simply facilitates cooperation and exchange of information across countries, as needed.

Please note that the use of this procedure may slow down an application for LABs and inclusion of awards in the Framework but has the benefit of levelling the one qualification in multiple EU countries, as needed.

#### 1.1.5. Summary of Steps

- (i) Contact QQI on [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) to request a meeting to discuss the minimum requirements.
- (ii) Meet with QQI – at this point we may discuss the full application including indicative numbers of qualifications to be submitted for inclusion in the Framework including NFQ level and award types.
- (iii) Submit minimum requirements form, supporting evidence and request for exemption from due diligence and protection of enrolled learners (if relevant) to [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)

- (iv) Submit proposed list of associated provider and associated award information as part of (iii) above
- (v) Confirm if seeking inclusion of qualifications in another EU NQF.
- (vi) Ensure the template for endorsement is completed and is submitted **directly by the relevant public authority** to [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)
- (vii) QQI will assess the evidence submitted.
- (viii) QQI will confirm the organisation's readiness to submit the full application for establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards in the Framework.
- (ix) QQI will confirm the role of the LAB in approving associated providers where they are also providers of QQI validated programmes.
- (x) QQI will confirm which associated providers are subject to due diligence assessment (to be conducted by the LAB) and protection of enrolled learners (to be conducted by QQI).
- (xi) QQI will confirm the outcome of the assessment for exemption from due diligence assessment and protection of enrolled learners
- (xii) QQI and the prospective LAB will agree dates for the following
  - a. Submission of full application
  - b. Physical or virtual site visit
  - c. Finalisation of the panel report and associated factual accuracy
  - d. Final decision
- (xiii) QQI will provide access to a dedicated SharePoint or equivalent for submission of application.

QQI will commence recruitment and training of appropriately qualified experts at this time to members of the review panel.

### 1.2. Scope of Listing

Establishment as a LAB is with reference to the awards proposed to be made by it. As such, a LAB's approved scope of provision is initially limited to:

- The NFQ level, class and type of awards, including micro-credentials, proposed to be made by it at approval stage.
- the subject/content area of awards proposed to be made by it at approval stage using ISCED and/or ESCO classification
- the intended learning outcomes
- the type of LAB – provider, non-provider or combination, and approved associated providers.

Any additional awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework after initial establishment will still need to be approved by QQI in line with relevant policy and criteria. However, new awards that are within the scope of listing will not require wider consideration of QA procedures.

All LABs will have a scope of listing. This essentially means that your approved QA procedures and establishment as a LAB provide for the inclusion of additional awards within that scope – without further consideration of the QA procedures.

Scope of listing relates to the areas outlined above. Prospective LABs may not wish to include all awards at their initial establishment but should consider submitting a range of awards that covers the overall scope of listing you are interested in achieving in the long term.

For example, if you offer awards at Levels 6-9, some which are major awards and others which are non-major awards, and some are your own provision and some are delivered through associated providers; we would recommend submitting a sample of awards that reflect the entire scope to ensure that your scope of listing is confirmed at the range which reflects your overall provision.

LABs are not *required* to submit a sample, this is simply a suggestion that may be easier in the long term.

#### 1.2.1. Extending/modifying the scope of listing.

After a LAB has been established and its initial awards included within the Framework, it may seek to extend the approved scope of listing by applying to have additional awards included within the Framework. An evaluation process that looks at both the suitability of the LAB to make the proposed awards, as well as the suitability of the inclusion of these awards within the Framework will be required. The LAB may be required to modify its quality assurance procedures to the satisfaction of QCI to extend the approved scope of listing.

Approval of the inclusion of awards within the Framework alone may extend the scope to a limited extent (e.g., within the provider's existing submitted QA procedures).

Extending or modifying the scope of listing is only relevant if the additional awards submitted for inclusion are outside the initial scope. For example, if an additional award is submitted at a new NFQ level, or a new subject area this will require a review of the QA procedures submitted to ensure that the QA procedures are fit for purpose for the new type of award. This is particularly relevant for award type. For example, if your scope of listing is set at non-major awards at less than 30 ECTS credits, then requesting the inclusion of an NFQ Level 8 major award of 240 ECTS credits is a significant change that may prompt a review of QA procedures.

Please note that extending the scope of listing is a normal part of being a LAB and should not be considered a barrier to adding new awards. However, it will take longer and may incur additional costs to reflect the time and effort associated with the work.

### 1.3. QA & ATP procedures

#### 1.3.1. LAB QA procedures

QCI approval of QA procedures developed under Section 28 of the Act is only required in the case of provider and combination LABs and this approval will be sought as part of the application to be established as a LAB.

However, in the case of non-provider awarding bodies, QCI needs to be satisfied with the scope and efficacy of the QA procedures developed under S55F of the Act to be satisfied with the ability of the awarding body to make awards which protect the integrity and reputation of the NFQ. As such, the relevant QA procedures will be submitted to QCI as part of the application to be established as a LAB but are not subject to formal, statutory QCI approval.

A gap analysis tool has been developed to support all LABs to develop appropriate QA procedures.

All LABs must submit their QA procedures as part of the application to be established as a LAB and the suitability of QA procedures will be assessed as part of the consideration. However, only in the case of provider and combination LABs will the QA procedures be formally approved by QQI. This is a legislative requirement and infers no additional status on such an awarding body. Approval of QA procedures has no standing in its own right.

#### 1.3.2. Access, transfer and progression (ATP)

Provider and combination LABs must prepare ATP procedures under Section 56 of the Act, and these are subject to QQI approval.

Please have regard to the policies and criteria for ATP published by QQI in the development of these procedures. These must be submitted and approved by QQI as part of the request to be established as LAB. This is a legislative requirement and infers no additional status on such an awarding body. Approval of ATP procedures has no standing in its own right.

#### 1.3.3. Quality assurance (QA) & associated providers

Non-provider and combination LABs must outline in their quality assurance procedures developed under S55F, their process for ensuring that associated providers have QA and ATP procedures in place.

The QA procedures of the LAB must also describe the process for approving, monitoring, and reviewing associated providers and their programmes, with a clearly outlined procedure for ending the relationship with an associated provider, where indicated. The process for approving associated providers must refer to the due diligence requirements set out by QQI<sup>7</sup>.

Formal approval of associated providers in line with QQI policy and criteria is required even where the LAB has a long-standing relationship with such a provider. Where an Associated Provider is also a relevant provider of QQI, a LAB may take this as evidence of the suitability of an associated provider but only where the QQI approved QA procedures are consistent with the proposed associated provision (ie) in terms of level, award type, subject area. For example, if an associated provider is seeking to deliver a programme leading to a major award at Level 8 but is only approved to deliver minor awards at Level 6 by QQI, this would not fall within the scope of QQI-approved QA procedures and the LAB would be fully responsible for the quality assurance of the associated provider and their provision.

The QA procedures submitted to QQI by non-provider and combination LABs must include the mechanism in place for that LAB to ensure that their associated providers have QA and ATP procedures in place. Although there is no legislative requirement for approving these QA and ATP procedures, a prospective LAB may consider this a prudent step and should have a system in place for monitoring ongoing suitability of an associated provider's QA and ATP procedures.

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<sup>7</sup> This information is not yet published but will be available for the opening of the LABs scheme.

The role of the LAB in approving and monitoring an associated provider that is also a relevant provider of QQI will be confirmed following the assessment of the minimum requirements.

#### 1.3.4. Flexible, distributed, and online learning

LABs and their associated providers may make arrangements that involve flexible, distributed, blended or online learning but such arrangements must have regard to relevant QQI guidelines<sup>8</sup>. This needs to be clearly outlined in the QA procedures submitted as part of the application to be established as a LAB, and in the procedures dealing with approval and review of associated providers. Associated providers should clearly outline arrangements for such learning in their own QA procedures.

QA procedures of both the LAB and its associated providers must address flexible, distributed and online learning if involved, and this must be in keeping with guidelines issued by QQI.

#### 1.3.5. Transnational

Under Section 60(1)(b) of the Act LABs are excluded from the code of practice for learners outside the State enrolled on programmes leading to award that are awards included within the Framework. As such, LABs are restricted to making NFQ awards within the State. The awarding body can, of course, make awards outside Ireland in line with awarding powers in other jurisdictions, but must not provide a certificate indicating achievement of an Irish NFQ award. As such, a LAB may not use NFQ logos or NFQ levels on certificates issued to learners outside Ireland.

Where a programme has any on-site component including assessment, which requires attendance in person in Ireland, the NFQ award can be made to any learner. In the case of online provision only, NFQ awards can only be made to learners based in the State.

QA procedures should ensure that there is clarity around the internal processes to ensure that only eligible learners receive the Irish NFQ award. For the purposes of fully online programmes, the awarding body is expected to take reasonable steps to confirm that the learner is based in Ireland.

Attendance in person in Ireland is considered any on-site attendance in Ireland for the purposes of the programme and/or qualification that is after enrolment and before graduation. Attendance in person for the purposes of receiving the qualification as part of a graduation ceremony does not meet the threshold for receiving the Irish NFQ award if the learner is not based in the State.

To reflect the spirit of North-South Co-operation, prospective LABs may make NFQ awards to learners based in the North of Ireland.

### 1.4. Preparing for and Seeking Establishment as a LAB

A request to be established as a LAB must comply with all the requirements of QQI's policy and criteria, though it is appropriate for a prospective LAB to detail any specific criteria which are not relevant to them.

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<sup>8</sup> [statutory-ga-guidelines-for-providers-of-blended-and-online-programmes-2023.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

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

#### 1.4.1. Self-evaluation by the awarding body

Prior to making a request for establishment as a LAB, with reference to proposed awards, an awarding body is required to conduct, and prepare a report on, a critical and candid evaluation, against QQI's criteria of

- (i) the overall operation and management of the awarding body and
- (ii) the awards proposed to be included within the Framework.

A separate policy and criteria document has been developed to describe the process for the inclusion of awards within the Framework, which should be reviewed and referenced by the awarding body as part of its application to be established as a LAB and have awards included within the Framework.

The evaluation must indicate whether (i) and (ii) (above) meet the applicable criteria and include analysis and commentary clearly citing evidence and referencing this in the supporting documentation. The evaluation should describe the means and methodologies used by the awarding body for the evaluation and include a critical analysis of, and commentary on, their effectiveness.

Unsupported assertions that the criteria are met will not be accepted.

There is no template provided for this self-evaluation to recognise the different contexts in which prospective LABs operate and to recognise the different scale and complexity of individual organisations. As such, prospective LABs are encouraged to use their own approach. As part of the evaluation, please outline the methods used for the evaluation and the stakeholders consulted.

Usefully, it might be worth considering the different headings of the criteria which are:

- Systems and structures – which includes governance
- Resources – which includes facilities, human resources, faculty
- Awarding Functions

Though there are numerous criteria under each heading, a LAB may choose to evidence achievement of the individual criterion using a more global approach. LABs are encouraged to be concise and leverage the supporting evidence, where possible. A simple statement describing how each criterion is met might be appropriate, with the supporting evidence providing more detail.

If it is not clear how individual criterion have been met, the review team may request additional information and evidence in advance of the site visit.

Please remember that the self-evaluation report will be explored and corroborated in more detail during the physical or virtual site visit.

#### 1.4.2. Supporting documentation

The documentation must include sufficient information to address QQI's criteria. It must address (i) the overall operation and management of the awarding body and (ii) the awards which are proposed to be included within the Framework.

The supporting documentation should include the provider's quality assurance procedures established under Section 55F of the Act and informed by the guidelines issued by QQI under Section 271A of the Act. The quality assurance procedures of Provider and Combination LABs are also 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, reviewing, and discontinuing associated providers, with reference to any QQI guidance issued.

It is likely that an applicant will refer to their own internal QA procedures many times throughout the self-evaluation process. Where a formal policy or procedure is not in place, an applicant should describe their approach for managing certain functions or responsibilities. Where possible and practicable, these approaches should be formalised into formal policies and procedures.

The following supporting documentation **must** be submitted as part of the full application<sup>9</sup>:

- QA procedures
- ATP procedures (for provider and combination LABs)
- List of awards proposed, to be included including the following information:
  - Award name
  - Subject area using ISCED and ESCO
  - NFQ level
  - Award class and type
  - Associated providers (where relevant)

**Please note:** this information may need to be submitted again at the end of the process to ensure that the information is provided in the format required for uploading to the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ).

- Any policy or procedure referenced in the self-evaluation report (a link to a published version of the policy or procedure is appropriate). LABs should give consideration to publishing policies and procedures as this contributes to transparency and supports the provision of information to learners which is a statutory responsibility.
- Any reviews of associated providers

Applicants should consider submitting the following:

- A template or sample contract with an associated provider
- Any internal and/or external reviews undertaken in the last 5 years.
- Strategic statements and/or corporate plans
- Risk management plans
- Learner surveys
- Any QA enhancement activities

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<sup>9</sup> Please note that the evidence of meeting minimum requirements is also required to be submitted, but will be formally submitted to QQI in advance of a full application.

#### 1.4.3. Making the application

The request for establishment as a LAB and to make awards that are included 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.

Please ensure that the CEO or equivalent signs the application. A simple cover note to confirm that the self-evaluation report and supporting document represent a full and honest account of the organisation and evidence the achievement of the criteria is sufficient.

QQI may provide access to a SharePoint location or equivalent for you to upload the application. Where hyperlinks are provided in the report, applicants should compile an appendix document which lists and hyperlinks to all the documents in a single place. Where a copy of the supporting documentation has been provided, please provide a table listing all the documents included in supporting document and an indication of the criteria to which they relate. Please email [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) to confirm that all relevant documentation has been uploaded and formally notifying that your application to be established as a LAB is complete.

Please note that the initial application to be established as a LAB includes the request to include awards within the Framework, and to that end at this point, the self-evaluation and supporting documents described under Part 2 of the Policy and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies will be submitted.

#### 1.4.4. Collaboration with other regulators

Section 55E(9) permits consultation with public bodies outside the State in the effective implementation of policies and criteria under S55E(1). As such, QQI may accept endorsement and confirmation from comparable regulatory authorities in other jurisdictions in lieu or as part of the application process. Such endorsement from a relevant public authority must assure QQI that the prospective LAB 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.

Where a public authority, inside or outside the State, has an informed perspective about the applicant awarding body, this will be considered in lieu of or as part of the evaluation conducted under 5.4. Exemptions from the full process will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

QQI plans to put formal agreements in place with known regulators both inside and outside the jurisdiction. However, this will be at the will of the relevant regulators. As such, exemptions from the full application will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. QQI will discuss further with affected awarding bodies at the meeting to confirm minimum requirements.

At a minimum, all these awarding bodies will be required to undergo due diligence assessment (unless exempt) and submit robust QA procedures and ATP procedures. International awarding bodies should pay particular attention to the approval and monitoring of associated providers and the limitations on transnational awards.



Such awarding bodies should still conduct a high-level self-evaluation against the criteria as the CEO will still be required to confirm that the LAB is in compliance with the policy and criteria.

#### 1.4.5. 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.

QQI will only screen the application for completeness. This step does not constitute confirmation of the quality of the application submitted. QQI may ask for additional information at this stage and this information will need to be provided before the application is referred to the independent panel for further evaluation.

Please note that a separate online application for due diligence assessment may need to be completed at the same time. An application will only be considered complete when both the upload outlined here, and the due diligence application are complete.

QQI will confirm the completeness of both applications. Assessment of suitability for establishment as a LAB will proceed in a parallel process.

Please note that an application can only be withdrawn before it is referred for independent evaluation.

#### 1.4.6. Summary of Steps

- i. Develop QA & ATP procedures (if relevant) in line with all QQI guidelines.
- ii. Compile list of awards for inclusion in the Framework initially including
  - a. Name of award
  - b. Class and Type of award
  - c. NFQ Level of award
  - d. Credit volume.
  - e. Learning Outcomes
  - f. ATP arrangements
  - g. Associated providers
- iii. Conduct self-evaluation against criteria for both establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards in the Framework
- iv. Approve QA and ATP arrangements of associated providers, as relevant
- v. Conduct due diligence assessment of associated providers, as relevant
- vi. Compile all relevant supporting documentation
- vii. Complete application form
- viii. Submit information online for due diligence assessment of the LAB, as required.
- ix. Option to request a meeting with QQI to discuss the application before final submission by emailing [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)
- x. Upload to QQI provided SharePoint location or equivalent
- xi. Email [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) to confirm submission of application
- xii. QQI screen for completeness & may request additional information
- xiii. Additional information to be uploaded and notified by emailing [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)

- xiv. Referred for independent evaluation only when QQI confirm the application is complete.

Please note that, although the Inclusion of Awards is dealt with in the next section of this handbook, the evaluation of the criteria and information regarding awards will be submitted at the same time as the request to be established as a Listed Awarding Body.

#### 1.5. Criteria to be Established as a Listed Awarding Body

The criteria outline the requirements that must be satisfied to be established as a LAB. It is necessary to address the criteria and the evidence requirements when requesting establishment as a LAB. There is some overlap between the topics addressed by these criteria and those addressed by criteria for the inclusion of awards within the Framework, quality assurance guidelines and such like. However, these criteria go well beyond quality assurance and the purview of typical quality assurance units. For example, corporate and academic governance and management (and not just QA of same) feature strongly in the criteria. The criteria must be addressed when requesting establishment as a LAB.

Non-provider LABs may need to reference their associated providers to evidence achievement of all the criteria listed and this is appropriate. It is important that non-provider LABs ensure that all associated providers are fulfilling the standards expected in the provision of education and training programmes leading to awards within the Framework.

These criteria do not prescribe a certain governance and management structure but seek to identify principles associated with such structures that will give necessary assurance to QQI of the capability and capacity of a prospective LAB to make NFQ awards.

Applicants are invited to describe their existing governance structures and explain how these meet their needs with reference to history, scale, size, and complexity. If a particular criterion is not relevant, an applicant is encouraged to explain the rationale for this. The same evidence may be used repeatedly to demonstrate compliance with different criterion

The self-evaluation is conducted against the criteria outlined in this section. The advice provided below is not exhaustive and should be considered as a guide. Prospective LABs should determine themselves the best way to evidence achievement of each criterion. The potential evidence suggested is only indicative and may not be suitable or relevant to all prospective LABs. Prospective LABs are requested to consider the criterion and provide the evidence that best supports their own circumstances and application.

##### 1.5.1. Systems and structures

- a) The scope of the awarding body's quality assurance procedures established under Section 28 and/or Section 55F of the 2012 Act (as amended), as implemented, encompasses the awards and classes of awards proposed to be made if approved as a LAB.

This criterion relates to the QA procedures developed by the prospective LAB. It emphasises the connection between the QA procedures and the awards proposed for inclusion in the Framework. The QA procedures should be appropriate to the NFQ levels, award types, credit volumes and learning outcomes associated with the proposed awards.

##### *Evidence – QA procedures*

- b) The awarding body has clear, documented internal processes for the quality assurance of its associated providers.

This criterion relates to the processes for the approval, monitoring, review and discontinuance of associated providers. Where an associated provider is also a provider of QQI validated programmes, it might be possible to take QQI approval of QA procedures as evidence of suitability and this can be described in the QA procedures.

***Evidence** – QA procedures; sample contracts with associated providers; examples of reviews of associated providers; sample evaluation of suitability of an associated provider; evidence such as agendas, minutes and/or terms of reference from committee tasked with overseeing associated providers*

- c) The awarding body has a clear and realistic strategy for the educational, training and research awards or classes of awards and related services that fall within the scope of the awards proposed to be made.

The awarding body needs to outline its plan for the awards proposed for inclusion in the Framework and the associated programmes and related services. This plan should consider learner enrolment numbers, offerings of the award and associated programmes (including frequency and duration) and related services. Related services may include information and library services; learner support; learner welfare; teaching and learning systems; staff development etc.

***Evidence** – strategic plan; corporate plan; projected learner enrolment numbers; schedule of programme offerings; budgets & financial planning*

- d) The awarding body has effective structures & systems for governance, management & administration with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for awards and related services.

The awarding body should outline its academic and corporate governance and management structure. This should include relevant committees and the associated terms of reference and meeting schedule. It should include named roles with responsibility for academic governance and quality. The relationship between academic governance and management should be clearly defined. It should be clear which committees have responsibility for awards, programmes, and related services.

***Evidence** – diagram of academic governance, corporate governance and management structures. Terms of Reference for relevant committees & job descriptions for relevant roles. The submitted QA procedures may provide sufficient evidence.*

- e) The awarding body has necessary and sufficient infrastructure and systems in place for information and data management, including but not limited to, learner records. Systems must ensure that learner records for Framework awards are maintained even in the event the awarding body ceases to be a LAB.

Please describe your system for information and data management and learner record maintenance. QQI is seeking to understand the reliability of your existing systems for information and data management; compliance with GDPR; ability to provide necessary data to QQI on a regular basis and the overall suitability of the infrastructure. LABs will be required to hold records of awards issued in perpetuity and have systems in place to replace certificates and confirm graduates and awards to verifying agencies including employers.

If you are planning developments to your IT system in the future, please describe these plans. If your existing systems are inadequate, please outline your assessment of the suitability of your system and necessary developments.

**Evidence** – data management policies; internal procedures relevant to data and learner records; assessment of existing platforms and tools used for data, information and learner records.

- f) The overall operation and management related to awards are sound.

Please describe the overall operation and management of systems, procedures and process related to awards. This includes programme development and approval, programme review systems, assessment, certification and others. LABs are invited to outline which aspects of operations and management relate to awards.

**Evidence** – QA procedures, programme approval & review procedures, systems for learner feedback; external examination policies. All policies and procedures relevant to awards and associated programmes.

#### 1.5.2. Resources

- g) The awarding body's financial management is robust, and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of relevant awards and programmes leading to these awards.

Please describe your system for evaluating the financial viability of offering awards and the programmes that lead to those. Please outline how you finance your system of monitoring quality and standards. QQI is looking for evidence of sufficient financial commitment to quality and standards.

**Evidence** – financial planning systems; strategic planning; historical evidence of resourcing quality and standards; may include evidence of staff and associated budgets.

- h) The awarding body, where relevant, has sufficient human resources who are available and competent to educate and train, to facilitate learning and to assess learners within the scope and scale of provision in respect of the proposed awards for inclusion within the Framework.

Please outline the staff associated with oversight of quality. Please describe your system for recruiting, training and managing staff associated with teaching, learning and assessment of learning. This system should outline how you ensure staff have the relevant experience and expertise to undertake the tasks allocated to them. Please outline your overall staffing plan and how this is sufficient to service the awards proposed for inclusion in the NFQ and the associated programmes. Please outline any risks associated with your approach to human resources and how these risks are managed.

In the case of non-provider or combination LABs, you may need to provide evidence of arrangements for associated providers in relation to this criterion.

**Evidence** – *staffing plans; recruitment & selection policies; CVs of relevant staff; risk management. Please redact personal and sensitive data if providing CVs.*

- i) The intellectual, physical, social, and cultural environments (including real and virtual learning environments) are supportive of, and conducive to, learning and the formation of learners and are safe and monitored.

Please outline your physical and online environments that are relevant to learning and assessment and how these are suitable for the described types of delivery. Consider explaining any specific consideration for the target learners. Please describe your system for ensuring all learning environments are safe and any monitoring of online environments.

You may wish to describe the ownership and/or rental arrangements in place for physical environments and the longevity of these arrangements.

Please describe how you monitor/ensure this in the case of associated providers.

**Evidence** – *QA procedures; teaching & learning policies; rental agreements;*

- j) Library and other information services are sufficient, and appropriate to the student profile and the programmes associated with the proposed awards.

Please describe the physical and virtual learning and information services. Outline how these are appropriate for the target learners, the type of awards and the subject areas. For example, an awarding body primarily dealing with employed adults may offer different types of learner supports to those dealing with unemployed adults returning to learning for the first time. In the case of associated providers, please describe how you monitor/ensure this.

**Evidence** – *named individuals with responsibilities for learning environments and information services; committees and/or working groups with responsibility for learning environments and information services; IT security for online services*

- k) The awarding body must ensure it has sufficient student support services in place, which are appropriate to the student profile and the programmes associated with the proposed awards.

Please describe the support services for students that are in place. This might include health and welfare supports; career guidance and advisory services; wellbeing and fitness; academic supports; access and disability services and others. Not all LABs will require all support services in place, but an application should describe the suitability of the supports provided to the student profile. Awarding bodies should give evidence of how these supports are in keeping with equality, diversity and inclusion policies that are in place.

**Evidence** – list of support services; student feedback re: support services; staffing; committees and/or working groups with responsibility for student services; named individuals with responsibilities for student services; evidence of monitoring need to expand student services

- l) There must be evidence that general physical resources are operated and managed in a way that is consistent with the mission of the awarding body.

It should be clear that resources are managed in a way that promotes and protects the quality and standards of the awards and programmes and enhances the student experience. Other relevant aspects of an awarding body's mission should be described here.

**Evidence** – strategic plan; financial & resource planning; staffing; historical evidence of commitment to the area; committees or working groups concerned with student experience; student feedback

#### 1.5.3. Awarding functions

- m) An awarding body must have procedures in place for determining award standards that are consistent with the NFQ and for assigning the appropriate NFQ level and award class type to their own awards.

QQI is looking for evidence that the NFQ has been firmly embedded into existing systems and that there is a commitment to the promotion, maintenance and implementation of NFQ in line with agreed policies.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of NFQ; development of resources to support implementation of NFQ.

- n) An awarding body must have rigorous systems in place for programme approval and review that ensure the specification of learning outcomes, NFQ level, applicable

award type, award class, volume in terms of credits and appropriate and coherent titling.

QQI is looking for evidence that the NFQ has been firmly embedded into existing systems and that there is a commitment to the promotion, maintenance and implementation of NFQ in line with agreed policies. There should be a mechanism for ensuring internal consistency of learning outcomes. It should be clear which committee and/or person has responsibility for ensuring consistency of credits, titling, levelling and selection of award types. The programme approval process should given consideration to a wide range of topics including but not limited to teaching, learning environment and opportunities, assessment and pedagogy.

*Evidence – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of NFQ; development of resources to support implementation of NFQ; committees and working groups*

- o) The awarding body is responsible for the development and maintenance of the award and the specific award standards and must have systems in place to ensure that award standards are upheld.

Each LAB is responsible for the development of a specific award standard for each named award. This standard must be compatible with the NFQ grid level indicators and the award-type descriptors. There should be a documented procedure for the development, review, and maintenance of specific award standards. Please also evidence how the assessment and certification procedures ensure that learners achieve the award standard.

*Evidence – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of NFQ; development of resources to support implementation of NFQ; committees and working groups*

- p) Programme approval and review systems and procedures must account for alignment of the expected learning outcomes with the relevant NFQ descriptors.

QQI is looking for evidence that the NFQ has been firmly embedded into existing systems and that there is a commitment to the promotion, maintenance and implementation of NFQ in line with agreed policies. There should be a mechanism for ensuring consistency of learning outcomes within the institution.

*Evidence – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of NFQ; development of resources to support implementation of NFQ; committees and working groups*

- q) Reviews of programmes, or equivalent institutional procedures, include an evaluation of intended and achieved programme learning outcomes as assessed against the specific award standard, award type and level on the NFQ.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a procedure for monitoring and reviewing programmes on a regular basis and this procedure considers not just teaching and learning but also the suitability of the learning outcomes and their continued appropriateness to the NFQ. Any changes to learning outcomes must result in a consideration of the impact on the award standard, award class and type and NFQ level.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of NFQ; development of resources to support implementation of NFQ; committees and working groups

- r) Reviews of programmes, or equivalent institutional procedures, include evaluation of data related to academic misconduct and academic integrity.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a procedure for reviewing programmes on a regular basis and this procedure considers not just teaching and learning but also academic misconduct and academic integrity. QQI is seeking assurance that there is active management of academic misconduct and academic integrity to protect the integrity of the NFQ and awards. It would be prudent for awarding bodies to consider and make reference to guidance issued by the National Academic Integrity Network.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; internal training and awareness of academic integrity & misconduct; policies related to academic integrity and misconduct; systems for data; examples of management of such incidents.

- s) There is commitment to the implementation of formal, structured feedback as part of its review and development of awards included within the Framework and associated programmes.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a commitment to feedback. This should outline systems for eliciting and responding to feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including staff, learners, employers, industry, funders etc. and include examples of acting on such feedback.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; programmes development procedures; committees and working groups; systems for inviting feedback

- t) Arrangements for accessing programmes leading to Framework awards (including arrangements for the recognition of prior learning where possible); transferring from ; exiting from; and progressing to other programmes are documented at the outset in programme materials and clearly communicated to the learner.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a commitment to access, transfer and progression (ATP) and RPL which are core components of the NFQ. There should be documented access, transfer, progression and exit pathways from each award and



associated programme. This should be clear to all learners. It must be clear if RPL is used to support ATP and a clear documented procedure for same.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; ATP procedures; RPL policies; examples of applications and decisions re: RPL

- u) Assessment policies and regulations are in place to ensure the validity, reliability and manageability of assessment and engagement with learners and to ensure award standards are maintained and that qualifications are only awarded to learners who have successfully achieved the learning outcomes.

QQI is looking for evidence that assessment is valid, robust and reliable.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; assessment procedures; relevant committees and working groups; training for staff designing assessments

- v) Assessment methodologies are appropriate to the NFQ level and class of awards and aligned to learning outcomes and award standards.

QQI is looking for evidence that assessment is robust and reliable. Awarding bodies must include reference to academic integrity and the importance of revising assessment regulations in response to technological and cultural changes. Prospective LABs are encouraged to join the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and consider adopting the principles and guidelines developed by NAIN.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; assessment procedures; relevant committees and working groups; training for staff designing assessments

- w) Clear, objective assessment criteria are associated with professional components of programmes leading to Framework awards, including but not limited to placement, internship, professional training, or any similar activity and all of the associated learning outcomes are properly assessed.

Where professional components are mandatory and required for achievement of an award, these professional components must be associated with learning outcomes, be assessed in line with assessment procedures and be credit bearing. The same principles must apply to this type of assessment as others in terms of validity, objectivity, reliability and robustness. Where assessment of professional components is undertaken by non-academic staff, these individuals must be trained and supported to undertake this role appropriately.

**Evidence** – QA procedures; assessment procedures; relevant committees and working groups; training for staff designing assessments

- x) Internal and external moderation is used to ensure reliability of assessment practices.

Please describe your systems for internal and external moderation or examining.

*Evidence – QA procedures; assessment procedures; relevant committees and working groups; procedures for internal and external moderation; appointment criteria for external examiners; systems for monitoring both external examiners and the overall process; mechanisms for acting on outcomes of both internal and external examination or similar; recruitment and selection process for external examiners; minutes of meetings by governance bodies demonstrating consideration of the outcome of external examining*

- y) Where available, there is evidence of consistency between the actual learning outcomes achieved by learners and stated learning objectives and the minimum (and other) intended programme learning outcomes.

In the case of operational programmes, provide evidence of achievement of learning outcomes relative to the intended learning outcomes and/or describe systems in place for this activity.

*Evidence – QA procedures; assessment procedures; relevant committees and working groups;*

- z) Quality assured arrangements for access, transfer and progression that facilitate accessible and inclusive pathways to qualifications are implemented. Pre- and post-programme entry activities are consistent with QQI policies and criteria on access, transfer and progression<sup>10</sup> and with quality assurance guidelines on learner admission, progression and recognition.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a commitment to access, transfer and progression (ATP) and RPL which are core components of the NFQ. There should be documented access, transfer, progression and exit pathways from each award and associated programme. This should be clear to all learners. It must be clear if RPL is used to support ATP and a clear documented procedure for same. Where RPL for award is possible, a clear process and the associated quality assurance must be described.

Diploma and certificate supplements are an important aspect of existing ATP policy and implementation of European Policy. Awarding bodies should provide templates for these documents and confirm processes for issuing.

*Evidence – QA procedures; ATP procedures; RPL policies; examples of applications and decisions re: RPL; template diploma and certificate supplements.*

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<sup>10</sup> National Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression [ATP Policy Restatement FINAL 2018.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

- aa) The awarding body has procedures in place for the recognition of qualifications already achieved and/or of learning acquired in non-formal or informal settings consistent with the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>11</sup> and with relevant European Policy<sup>12</sup>.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a commitment to access, transfer and progression (ATP) and RPL which are core components of the NFQ. There should be documented access, transfer, progression and exit pathways from each award and associated programme. This should be clear to all learners. It must be clear if RPL is used to support ATP and a clear documented procedure for same.

*Evidence – QA procedures; ATP procedures; RPL policies; examples of applications and decisions re: RPL*

- bb) The awarding body operates transparent systems for credit accumulation and credit transfer consistent with QQI policy for NFQ levels 1-6 and with the Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Credit in Irish Higher Education<sup>13</sup> and with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (ECTS)<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup>. This extends to professional practice arrangements.

QQI is looking for evidence that there is a commitment to implementation of credit systems and that there are internal systems for allocating credits to awards and associated programmes. There should be a system to ensure internal consistency of learning hours allocated to indirect learning (ie) outside formal class environments. The allocation of credits should be credible and in keeping with learner capacity (ie) 60 ECTS credits in one academic year is considered an achievable workload for a full-time student.

Please note that the Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Credit in Irish Higher Education document is a legacy document that may be rescinded in due course as QQI is developing new policies in this area.

*Evidence – QA procedures;*

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<sup>11</sup> The Lisbon Recognition Convention is the main legal instrument on the academic recognition of qualifications in Europe <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

<sup>12</sup> See EU Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

<sup>13</sup> Principles and operational guidelines for credit in higher education have been adopted by QQI. [principlesandoperguidelinesgreen.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](https://www.qqi.ie/principlesandoperguidelinesgreen.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> ECTS has been adopted by most of the countries in the European Higher Education Area and adopted as the national credit system [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en)

<sup>15</sup> [ECTS users' guide 2015 - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en)

- cc) The awarding body is committed to the publication of reports on (i) inclusion of new awards within the Framework, (ii) periodic reviews of the LAB and its awards and (iii) reviews of associated providers.

QQI expects transparency in relation to the operations of a LAB with specific reference to quality. Internal and external reports must be published.

*Evidence – QA procedures; committees and working groups*

1.6. Summary

A prospective LAB will only undergo the application to be established as a Listed Awarding Body once. QQI wishes to be satisfied that a LAB has the capacity and capability to make awards on the Framework and contribute to the shared responsibility of all awarding bodies to uphold in integrity of the NFQ. A robust, comprehensive set of QA procedures will cover most of the criteria in this section and as such, it is worth spending time on its development. However, QQI will seek evidence that these QA procedures are being implemented and are well understood by relevant staff. This may be difficult to evidence in the application but will certainly be further explored and corroborated as part of the physical or virtual site visit. Applicants are encouraged to spend time socialising the concepts related to establishment as a LAB; training staff regarding the NFQ and its role in award and programme development and developing resources, where needed, to support staff in its ongoing implementation. All of this would be relevant evidence to show suitability to be established as a LAB.

## 2. Inclusion of Awards in the Framework

There is much overlap between the introductory sections of the Policy and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework and that outlined in Part 1 of this document. Only items which are new will be addressed in this section of the handbook.

### 2.1. 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.

It is possible for a LAB to include an apprenticeship award in the Framework, but this will require endorsement by the National Apprenticeship Office. Apprenticeships are only formally available at Levels 5-9 on the Framework, in line with the professional award-type descriptor. However some universities have designed apprenticeships at NFQ Level 10 – it is unlikely that a LAB will be approved to provide an apprenticeship at this level without significant evidence to support the need for such an award.

### 2.2. 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 of the Policy and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework. It is the responsibility of the awarding body to ensure that any changes or modifications to the award do 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.

A LAB is free to make minor amendments to an award without requiring notification to QQI. Where amendments affect the information listed on the IRQ, it will require the submission of a new award to QQI. A LAB is responsible for identifying what changes will fundamentally affect an award's inclusion in the Framework and listing on the IRQ. The items listed above require mandatory notification to QQI. Learning outcomes are a fundamental component of a qualification so any changes to the learning outcomes are considered a change requiring submission of a new award to QQI.

### 2.3. 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 of the Policy and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework. Deviations from Appendix A will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Appendix A provides the award stems associated with each level.

The titles available for Major Awards are specifically named in the NFQ. At Levels 1 -5 the available major award stems are Level 1 Certificate, Level 2 Certificate and so on. There are 2 major award stems at Level 6 - Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate. At Level 7, Ordinary Bachelor Degree while at Level 8 Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma. The Postgraduate Diploma and Master Degree at Level 9. Finally, Doctoral Degree at Level 10.

NFQ Level	NFQ Major Award-Types	Min Credit Volume
1	Junior Cycle Level 1 Certificate	n/a 20 FET credits
2	Junior Cycle Level 2 Certificate	n/a 30 FET credits
3	Junior Cycle Level 3 Certificate	n/a 60 FET credits
4	Leaving Certificate Level 4 Certificate	n/a 90 FET credits
5	Leaving Certificate Level 5 Certificate	n/a 120 FET credits
6	Advanced Certificate Higher Certificate	120 FET credits 120 ECTS credits
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	180 ECTS credits
8	Higher Diploma Honours Bachelor Degree	60 ECTS credits 180-240 ECTS credits
9	Postgraduate Diploma Masters Degree	60 ECTS credits 60-120 ECTS credits
10	Doctoral Degree	n/a

Non-major awards are minor, special purpose, supplemental and some professional awards. There is a general guideline about the titling of non-major awards in higher education.

At levels 6-9, non-major awards that are greater than 60 ECTS credits (or equal to 60 ECTS credits where no major award is available at the same volume of learning) should be titled **Diplomas**, while non-major awards of less than 60 ECTS credits should be titled **Certificates**.

All award titles need to specify a subject area, e.g. Higher Certificate in xx. LABs can propose their own subject area, but this should provide clarity and transparency to learners about the content of the qualification.

#### 2.4. 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 NFQ 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.

For non-major awards, it is possible to use the term Professional Certificate or Professional Diploma (these must still comply with the credit volumes above). This is only possible if the LAB is a professional body (demonstrates representative, membership or specific professional training responsibilities) and/or uses the professional award-type descriptor in the development of its specific award standard. The use of the term "professional certificate" or "professional diploma" is limited to levels 5-9. LABs are encouraged to include the NFQ Level in the title to clearly articulate the complexity of the learning associated with the qualification (ie) Level 7 Professional Certificate in xx.

Although it is possible to combine a professional award and a major award, there is very little evidence in an Irish context of the use of "Professional" in the award stems of major awards such as Honours bachelor's degree or master's degree. For now, LABs are encouraged to use the term "professional" in the specification of the award (ie) a Master Degree in Professional Accounting.

The formal inclusion of awards in the Framework is limited to the awards described above (ie) major awards and titling conventions for non-major awards. QQI understands that many existing LABs have recognisable, professionally valued awards with titles that do not conform with the titling conventions provided for in this document. In such cases, the LAB can continue to make its own award alongside the NFQ award recognising the same learning. The additional award title must be submitted as part of the application and will be included in the IRQ. This will only be possible where the awarding body can evidence the importance and recognition of their own award title and it must be clear that it is one qualification with both an academic and professional award. L

#### 2.5. Micro-credentials

Minor, special purpose and supplemental award types can be used to develop micro-credentials in the Irish NFQ.

The NFQ facilitates small volumes of learning at all levels of the Framework but as yet, specific award-type descriptors have not been developed. The non-major award types can be used for the development of micro-credentials. There is no definitive credit volume associated with micro-credentials, but generally considered to be between 5 and 25 ECTS credits and 5 and 50 FET credits. It is possible for a LAB to propose “Level x Micro-credential in x” as the award stem where there is a clear advantage.

#### 2.6. 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.

In the initial application to be established as a LAB and to have awards included in the Framework, the international LAB should only include awards that are already being offered in Ireland and are included in their home qualifications framework.

Following establishment, it is possible for an international LAB to design awards specifically for the Irish market, but it must be clear there is a market for the award. Where public funding is expected either through SOLAS or the HEA, their endorsement may be required.

#### 2.7. 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.

Students sometimes enrol on programmes of learning leading to an award in the NFQ but for a variety of reasons, are unable to fully complete the award in question. QQI encourages recognising acquired learning, where appropriate, through the issuing of a qualification that is appropriate to the content and volume of learning undertaken. However, all such awards termed “exit awards”, must be explicitly included in the NFQ.

For example, it is common for a master’s degree to have an exit award of a Postgraduate Diploma. Similarly, it is possible to issue non-major awards in line with 2.3 and 2.4 above. In proposing an exit award, a LAB must be able to demonstrate a discrete and coherent achievement of learning relative to the NFQ level, award type and credit volume.

Awarding bodies are encouraged to consider the level of learning at each stage/year of a programme. Typically, a Level 8 Honours Bachelor’s Degree is 240 ECTS credits and 4 academic years, but not all learning in the programme is delivered at Level 8, rather a mix of Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8. Awarding bodies are encouraged to be critical about the learning outcomes associated with earlier stages of programmes and consider the NFQ grid level indicators when assigning a Level to an exit award.



## 2.8. 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 LAB's 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.

Joint awarding is possible and is more common in recent times. As the Irish NFQ is a relatively closed system, not all providers and awarding bodies have the authority to make a joint award of an NFQ award. A LAB is welcome to propose a joint award with another body, but that body must have the authority to make the award. QQI will require confirmation from that other body of the intent to offer joint awards. Please ensure QA procedures outline the system for managing the relationship and the quality of such joint awards.

Please contact QQI for further advice about joint awards.

## 2.9. 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) 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.

There is no template provided for self-evaluation against the criteria for inclusion of awards in the Framework in recognition of the different contexts in which prospective LABs operate and to recognise the different scale and complexity. As such, prospective LABs are encouraged to use their own approach. As part of the evaluation, please outline the methods used for the self- evaluation and the stakeholders consulted.

QQI recognises that some awarding bodies may be submitting a high volume of awards for inclusion in the NFQ. Where it is unreasonable to make a detailed submission for each individual award, it is possible to make a submission based on a grouping of awards. This grouping may be done by NFQ level, award type (ie) major versus non-major or delivery. It is suggested that you discuss this with QQI at your initial meeting. The sampling strategy utilised by an awarding body must be described in detail and the suitability and appropriateness of the sampling strategy must be explained.

## 2.10. 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 27(1)(a) 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 Section 55F and Section 28.

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.

On initial establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards, the QA and ATP procedures will be required. Please note that for the inclusion of **additional** awards, the QA and ATP procedures must also be submitted.

Supporting documentation evidencing the **implementation** of QA procedures for the inclusion of awards is required. This means that for individual awards you must submit evidence of the process from beginning to end for the proposal of an award, design, development and approval. In the case of inclusion of existing awards (ie) award existed before seeking establishment of a LAB, evidence of application of NFQ and LAB criteria to the awards is necessary. Such evidence may include programme development documents; minutes from committee meetings; stakeholder feedback etc.

In the case of grouped awards, you must submit supporting documentation for at least 10% of the awards submitted (ie) if you submit 10 awards as part of a group you should submit example documentation for at least one award. At a minimum, documentation must be submitted for at least one award per grouping. The awarding body selects the sample of awards, noting that QQI may request information on additional awards.

## 2.11. 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.

For each award, list the associated providers that will deliver the programme. Confirm that each associated provider has been approved by the LAB. It may be sensible to provide

evidence of this approval including minutes of the relevant committee/board meeting in which the approval was ratified.

#### 2.12. Making the application

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.

Please ensure that the CEO or equivalent signs the application. A simple cover note to confirm that the self-evaluation report and supporting document represent a full and honest account of the organisation and evidence the achievement of the criteria is sufficient.

QQI may provide access to a SharePoint location or equivalent for you to upload the application. Where hyperlinks are provided in the report, applicants should compile an appendix document which lists and hyperlinks to all the documents in one single place. Where a copy of the supporting documentation has been provided, please provide a table listing all the documents included in supporting document and a rough indication of the criteria to which they relate. Please email [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) to confirm that all relevant documentation has been uploaded and formally notifying that your application to be established as a LAB is complete.

#### 2.13. 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.

QQI will only screen the application for completeness. This step does not constitute confirmation of the quality of the application submitted. QQI may ask for additional information at this stage and this information will need to be provided before the application is referred for further evaluation.

Please note that an application can only be withdrawn before it is referred for independent evaluation.

#### 2.14. Summary of Steps

Please note that these steps relate only to the inclusion of additional awards in the NFQ after establishment as a LAB.

The application for inclusion of initial awards is conducted at the same time as establishment as a LAB and is outlined in 1.4.6 above.

- i. Approve the awards internally for proposal to QQI for inclusion in NFQ
- ii. Confirm that the proposed awards are in line with scope of listing
- iii. If an extension to scope of listing is required, review and update your QA procedures.
- iv. Notify QQI of intent to submit additional awards for inclusion
- v. QQI to provide access to SharePoint location or equivalent for upload of documentation
- vi. Submit QA & ATP procedures (if relevant) in line with all QQI guidelines.
- vii. Compile list of awards for inclusion in the Framework including:

- a. Name of award
- b. Type of award
- c. Level of award
- d. Credit volume.
- e. Learning Outcomes
- f. ATP arrangements
- g. Associated providers
- viii. Conduct self-evaluation against criteria for inclusion of awards in the Framework
- ix. Compile all relevant supporting documentation
- x. Upload to QQI provided SharePoint location or equivalent
- xi. Email [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie) to confirm submission of application
- xii. QQI screens for completeness & may request additional information
- xiii. Additional information to be uploaded and notified by emailing [labs@qqi.ie](mailto:labs@qqi.ie)
- xiv. Referred for evaluation only when QQI confirms the application is complete.

## 2.15. Criteria for the Determination of the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework

### 2.15.1. 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.

QQI is seeking to confirm that the awards proposed for inclusion in the Framework are adequately meeting the needs of the sector. As such awards proposed for inclusion need to evidence how they add value to the qualifications system. Awarding bodies are encouraged to consider 'meeting needs' in the widest possible context (ie) target audience, method of delivery, expertise, professional representation, RPL and ATP arrangements etc.

In the case of existing awards being offered in advance of establishment as a LAB, it should be relatively easy for an awarding body to provide this evidence. In the case of proposing additional awards, QQI is looking for evidence of your understanding of the sector and the methodology for scoping, proposing, and designing new awards. Engagement with relevant stakeholders is particularly germane for this section and evidence of stakeholder engagement should be provided throughout.

#### 2.15.1.1. 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. Please provide evidence of the assessment you have done of existing offerings in the State. Where it is not possible to conduct such an assessment due to lack of information, please outline this. How does the proposed award respond to the identified learning gap?
- 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.

QQI is seeking evidence that you understand the target audience for this award and how the proposed award meets their needs. This could be regarding the mode of delivery (ie) flexible, remote or subject area for upskilling/new regulatory requirements for an employment sector.

- 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.

QQI is seeking evidence that you understand how the award connects into wider society. What is the future employment and or learning opportunities for graduates on completion of this qualification? There may be other sectors including the voluntary and community sectors, and awarding bodies are invited to explain how the awards meet the needs of sectors not specifically addressed in the criterion.

- d) The awarding body must provide evidence of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders to include learners, employers, and relevant groups outlined in 17.1(d)<sup>16</sup> to support the need for, suitability and sustainability of the proposed award.

Who did you consult in the development of the award? How did this engagement inform the development and review of the qualification and its associated programme? Please consider representing industry, agriculture, business, tourism and trade, the professions, and the public service as part of this consultation.

- 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.

Where an award has already been offered, please provide data about student enrolment numbers, completion rates, attrition rates and data about their progression into employment or additional study. Please consider explaining high attrition rates and actions taken to respond to this.

Please outline your predictions for this in the case of new awards. What is your rationale? Please describe your systems for monitoring graduates on completion. If not yet in place, what is your plan for this?

- f) Where available, the awarding body must provide relevant evidence regarding access, transfer and progression; recognition of prior learning; and general admission.

Where an award has already been offered, please provide data about access, transfer and progression, RPL and general admission. Where are students coming from and where do they go next? Do you accept applications for RPL – how many received, how many successful and explanations for unusual trends? What are your application numbers, how many are accepted, what are general admission criteria? What are reasons for not granting admission?

If you are not currently monitoring this data, what is the plan?

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<sup>16</sup> 17.1 (d) is a reference to the Policies and Criteria for inclusion of awards in the Framework

### 2.15.2. Appropriately Referenced to the NFQ

Awards of LABs need to be designed in keeping with the policy and criteria underpinning the National Framework of Qualifications<sup>17</sup> with specific emphasis on appropriate use of levels, award-type descriptors and learning outcomes.

The conceptual implementation of the NFQ is captured in the establishment of a LAB. This section seeks to understand the actual implementation of the NFQ into your internal systems. This is integral to the inclusion of awards in the Framework. The Guide to Referencing Qualifications to the NFQ should be useful for this section and any outputs of this activity can be considered as evidence of the criterion below.

#### 2.15.2.1. 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.  
*Evidence that the grid level indicators and award-type descriptors are clear in the 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.  
*Evidence that each proposed award has an associated specific award standard developed by the LAB.*
- c) Awards must be expressed in terms of minimum intended learning outcomes which are in keeping with the award standard and the NFQ descriptors.  
*Evidence that each proposed award is articulated in terms of learning outcomes.*
- d) Minimum intended learning outcomes must be appropriate to the award title, credit volumes, relevant occupational standards, and proposed delivery method.  
*Evidence that the articulated learning outcomes are appropriate to the award title, credit volume, occupational standards and delivery method. For example, a 240 ECTS credits award will have significantly more complex learning outcomes than a 30 ECTS credits award at the same level.*  
*Where relevant occupational standards are in place, QQI expects to see these inform the development of the learning outcomes. This is particularly relevant where an award and its associated programme are subject to external professional, regulatory and/or statutory approval.*
- 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.  
*The NFQ level should be clearly aligned to the learning outcomes. An NFQ level is not necessarily higher than the award required for entry. For example, an award is not automatically Level 9 simply because learners need a Level 8 qualification to enter.*

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<sup>17</sup> [National Framework of Qualifications | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](https://www.qqi.ie)

- 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.  
The use of major or non-major awards must be logical. The selection of the non-major award type (ie) minor, special purpose or supplemental must be logical and have appropriate reference to other awards as needed. If using “professional” in the award title, the use of the professional award-type descriptor must be clear.
- 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.  
Professional designations or professional awards that will be continue to be awarded alongside the NFQ award must be clearly highlighted. The currency and recognition of such an award title must be demonstrated. It will not be appropriate to allocate designations to additional awards proposed for inclusion (ie) existing designations can continue to be offered.
- 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.  
Titling of awards must be in keeping with guidance provided and the use of the terms professional and/or micro-credential must be explained and supported. Award titles must provide clarity to learners and must be in keeping with the expertise and scope of listing of the LAB.
- 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.  
It is expected that the target learners and relevant stakeholders are outlined as part of Section 2.15.1. Please ensure that the award level, type and credit volume are appropriate for the target learners. For example, where existing employees need to upskill in a particular, narrow area; a 240 ECTS credits award may be unnecessarily large, whereas a 20 ECTS credit, special purpose award might be sufficient.

#### 2.15.3. *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.  
The QA procedures submitted as part of approval to be established as a LAB will set out the arrangements for internal approval of awards prior to submission for QQI for inclusion. There must evidence that such a procedure has been implemented.

#### ***Evidence: committee meeting minutes***

- 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.  
The QA procedures submitted as part of approval to be established as a LAB will set out the arrangements for internal approval of awards prior to submission for QQI for

inclusion. There must evidence that such a procedure has been implemented. Clear, unequivocal consideration of the NFQ must be clear in the internal deliberations of this. Where relevant, evidence of conducting a mapping/analysis exercise should be provided.

- c) Reviews of awards and standards must include an evaluation of intended and achieved learning outcomes as assessed against the relevant award standard. 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.  
It is expected that all existing awards proposed for inclusion will have been reviewed in the last three years. If this requires an additional review in advance of submitting for inclusion, QQI expects this activity to be undertaken. There is no prescribed approach for review but should be conducted in line with the QA procedures submitted for establishment as a LAB. A review should, at a minimum, encompass consideration of the currency and appropriateness learning outcomes and the extent to which these have been achieved by learners. It should also consider changes to regulatory, legislative and employment landscapes that may warrant updated learning outcomes. Reviews should include feedback from learners, graduates, employers, and other key stakeholders.
- d) 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.

2.15.4. 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.

Relevant external approvals must be identified at the outset. QQI may seek to conduct a joint review with the relevant regulator to streamline and strengthen the process.

Where an existing award is already approved by such an external body, please confirm this to QQI and confirm that inclusion in the NFQ does not materially effect such an approval.

*2.15.4.1. 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.

Where there is any potential link to professional or other statutory regulation, it must be documented here. Please outline the relevant bodies that may conduct such an external evaluation and provide contact details should QQI wish to make direct contact.

- b) The awarding body must outline any agreed external evaluations of proposed awards (and associated programmes), including outcomes of such external evaluation.



If an external evaluation has been undertaken, either mandatory or voluntary and either compliance or enhancement focused, this must be reported to QQI. Please provide evidence of the outcome of the review.

- 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.

Where an awarding body is subject to such a review, it must consider the potential conflicts of the requirements of the external body and these requirements. Please document the conflicts and outline how you propose to manage these. Even where no conflicts arise, evidence of such an evaluation must still be provided.

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