

Policy Paper

QQI Policy on Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners



Introduction to the Consultation

This Policy Paper is the next step following consultation on QQI's Green Paper on a revised Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) policy¹. Feedback on the Green Paper was positive overall and reflected the findings of *From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation: A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access, Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training*. The review highlighted the need for a central, high-level policy to support consistent ATP processes and procedures across education providers and awarding bodies.

The policy sets out a shared vision and high-level principles for ATP across key areas: credit, credit accumulation and credit transfer; programme design, including entry and exit arrangements, transfer and progression pathways; information provision; data collection and provision; and embedding a culture of ATP. It also introduces principles to inform procedures for credit accumulation, credit transfer, and the identification and formal assessment of learners' previously acquired knowledge, skill or competence.

The consultation on the policy will remain open until Friday, 30 October at 5pm. Feedback can be provided through the online form. Small focus groups and meetings with key stakeholders will also be arranged during the consultation period. Written submissions will not be accepted as part of this consultation.

¹ [Green Paper on QQI Revised ATP Policy | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)

Policy on Access Transfer and Progression

1. Background and Context

Access, transfer and progression (ATP) have been central to Ireland's qualifications system since the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) published the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the original ATP policies, actions and procedures in 2003. The NFQ continues to provide an important basis for ATP by supporting the use of learning outcomes, credit and clear information for learners.

QQI was established under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012² and has statutory responsibilities for ATP. Following consultation in 2013, QQI re-issued the 2003 policy as a restatement³, confirming that its original vision, principles and objectives remained valid and relevant.

Since then, the tertiary education landscape has changed significantly. New pathways, innovative practice and greater use of credit, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and flexible provision have developed across the system. QQI's 2023 review, *From Counting to Cultivating Successful Participation*⁴, found that dedicated staff in institutions furthering ATP and flexible pathways had moved practice ahead of the existing policy and that a clearer, high-level vision and shared principles were needed to support consistency.

This policy replaces QQI's 2013 ATP policy restatement and the previous operational guidelines for a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training. It sets out QQI's policies and criteria for ATP under Section 56(1) of the 2012 Act, as amended.

The policy provides common definitions of ATP, sets out arrangements for credit, and establishes high-level principles to guide relevant providers in developing ATP procedures under Section 56(2). It may be updated as related policies, guidelines or agreements on credit and recognition of prior learning are revised.

1.1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) supports the effective operation of access, transfer and progression. QQI's statutory role in RPL sits within its responsibilities for ATP and specifies the

² [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/34/enacted/en/html)

³ [qp-20-policy-restatement-policy-on-criteria-for-atp-in-relation-to-learners-for-providers-of-fh-et.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

⁴ [qqi-insights_from-counting-to-cultivating-successful-participation-a-review-of-the-landscape-of-practice-supporting-access-transfer-and-progression-in-irish-education-and-training-2023.pdf](#)

requirement that relevant providers' ATP procedures address the formal assessment of knowledge, skill or competence previously acquired by learners.

This policy requires providers to have RPL policies and procedures in place, but it does not prescribe their detailed content. It should therefore be read alongside current national and international RPL principles, policies and guidance, including those relating to experiential learning. Awarding bodies and providers should be mindful of developments in this space and update their institutional approach to RPL appropriately.

1.2. Vision

QQI's vision for access, transfer and progression is an education and training system where every learner can understand, access and navigate clear, coherent and inclusive pathways into, through and beyond quality-assured programmes and their associated awards.

This vision is supported by a shared ATP culture, transparent policies, effective recognition of prior learning and qualifications, flexible entry and exit arrangements, meaningful transfer and progression pathways, and clear information for learners.

Through universal design, co-design, collaboration and continuous improvement, this policy supports fair, accessible and responsive pathways that value all learning and meet diverse learner needs.

2. Introduction

This is QQI's Policy for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP). It is the main reference point for relevant providers when developing institutional and organisational ATP policies and procedures. The principles guide awarding bodies and education providers in supporting clear, consistent and learner-centred approaches to ATP.

The policy applies primarily to programmes leading to awards included in the NFQ. However, relevant providers must also develop and adopt ATP procedures, in line with this policy, for all programmes they offer.

The principles are intentionally high-level so they can apply across a diverse tertiary education system. They support institutional autonomy and academic decision-making while promoting a shared vision, transparent practice, effective use of credit, and an inclusive ATP culture.

This policy does not set out compliance criteria. Most principles are intended to guide consideration and development of ATP practice. Where the policy uses 'must', this indicates a requirement, usually arising from legislation, such as requirements relating to information for learners.

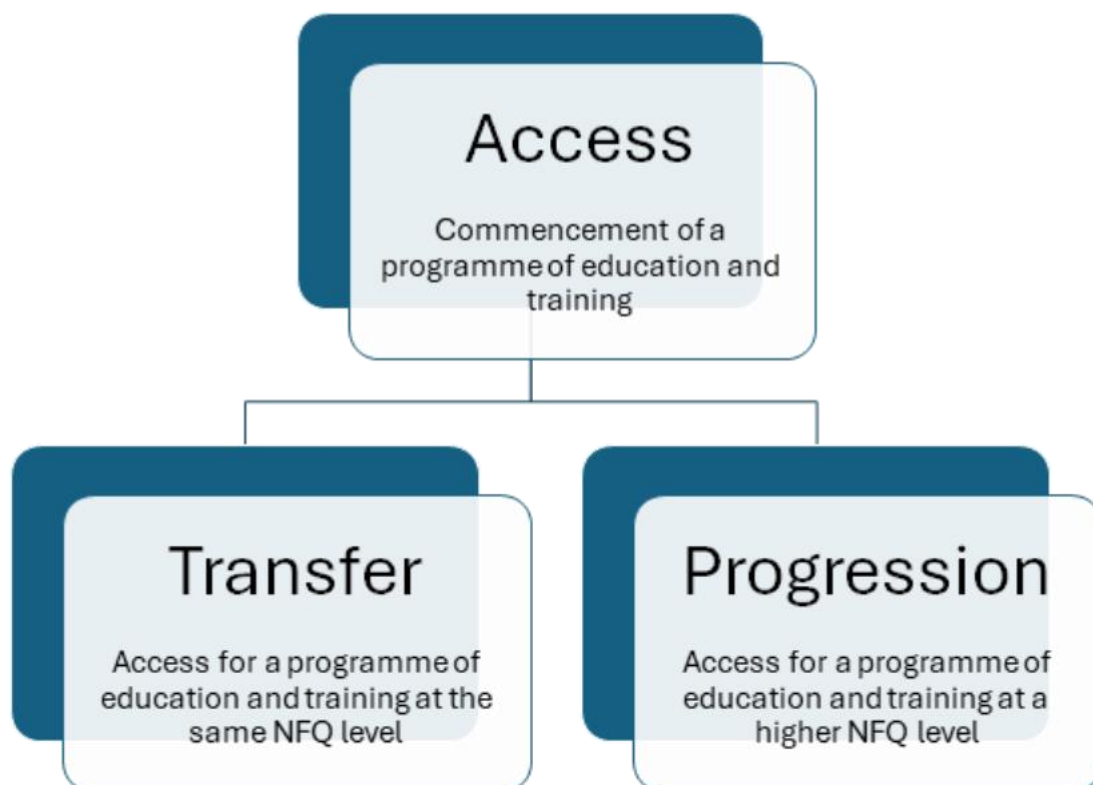


Figure 1 Access, Transfer and Progression Explainer

2.1. ATP Definitions

The definitions below are based on the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, with additional explanation to support common understanding, consistent practice, and data collection.

Although the Act does not refer specifically to the NFQ, progression refers to moving to a programme at a higher level. This will often mean a higher NFQ level, but ATP information must also be provided for programmes offered by relevant providers that do not lead to NFQ awards.

Access is the broadest concept and includes the processes that allow learners to enter education and training. Transfer and progression are specific forms of access.

Terminology	Definition
Access	The process by which a learner's previously acquired knowledge, skill or competence is recognised, allowing them to enter a programme of education and training. Access processes should include opportunities for the assessment and recognition of knowledge, skill or competence previously acquired by learners, including formal, non-formal and informal learning, and provide for advanced entry where appropriate. This meaning is distinct from wider participation initiatives, but clear and transparent access processes can support broader access to tertiary education and training.
Transfer	An access process through which a learner's prior learning is recognised, allowing them to move from one programme to another at the same level, usually associated with the NFQ. Transfer may occur within the same provider or between providers, with or without the achievement of an award. It can also support the building of qualifications, for example by combining smaller awards or units of learning towards a larger qualification.
Progression	An access process through which a learner's prior learning is recognised, allowing them to move from one programme to another at a higher level, usually but not always on the NFQ. Progression may occur within the same provider or between providers.

	Recognition of knowledge, skill or competence for progression may occur at any level.
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Table 1: Access, Transfer and Progression Definitions

Progression and Transfer routes for Major and non-major awards in the NFQ are outlined in NFQ policy and summarised below for convenience.

Title	Class of Award Type	Level	Progression and Transfer
Level 1 certificate	Major	1	Progression to programme leading to a Level 2 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate
Level 2 Certificate	Major	2	Progression to programme leading to a Level 3 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate
Level 3 Certificate	Major	3	Progression to programme leading to a Level 4 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate
Junior Certificate	Major	3	• Progression to programme leading to Leaving Certificate • Progression to programme leading to Level 4 Certificate or at a higher level
Level 4 Certificate	Major	4	Progression to programme leading to a Level 5 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate
Leaving Certificate	Major	4/5	• Progression to programme leading to a further education and training award at level 5, or at a higher level • Progression to programme leading to a higher education and training award at level 6, or at a higher level
Level 5 Certificate	Major	5	Progression to a programme leading to Level 6 Diploma/advanced/higher certificate or a higher education and training award at Level 7 or 8
Advanced Certificate	Major	6	• Transfer to a programme leading to an advanced/higher certificate • Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree or an Honours Bachelor Degree

Higher Certificate	Major	6	• Transfer to a programme leading to an advanced/higher certificate • Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree or an Honours Bachelor Degree
Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Major	7	• Progression to programme leading to an Honours Bachelor degree or to a Higher Diploma, or programmes leading to awards at Level 9 • Progression internationally to some second cycle (i.e. 'Bologna Masters') degree programme
Honours Bachelor Degree	Major	8	• Transfer to programmes leading to Higher Diploma • Progression to programmes leading to Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma, or in some cases programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree • Progression internationally to second cycle (i.e.: 'Bologna masters') degree programmes
Higher Diploma	Major	8	Progression to programmes leading to Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma
Post-graduate Diploma	Major	9	May exempt from part of the programme leading to a Masters Degree
Masters Degree	Major	9	Progression to programmes leading to Doctoral Degree or transfer to another Masters Degree or a Post-graduate Diploma
Doctoral Degree	Major	10	N/A
Minor Award	Minor	All levels	Transfer to programmes leading to attainment of a part of one or more major awards Transfer to programmes leading to special purpose awards

Special Purpose Award	Special Purpose	All levels	Transfer to programmes leading to major or minor awards at the same level or above Transfer to programmes leading to supplemental awards at the same level Transfer/progression to programmes leading to related special purpose awards at the same level or above
Supplemental Award	Supplemental	All levels	Progression to programmes leading to major awards at the next level in a related field of learning

Table 2: ATP Progression and Transfer for Major and Non-Major Awards

As the NFQ is aligned to the EHEA the associated progression with short cycle, first cycle and third cycle applies. More information on the EHEA Qualifications Table can be found in Appendix 1.

Conventions supporting the recognition of qualifications and are thus relevant to proper functioning and implementation of ATP are listed in Appendix 1.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.2.1. QQI

- QQI is responsible for developing policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression under the 2012 Act.
- QQI considers and approves, or refuses to approve, ATP procedures submitted by relevant providers, other than previously established universities, and linked providers.
- QQI consults with previously established universities on their ATP procedures and supports their implementation.
- QQI reviews the implementation of ATP procedures by relevant and linked providers at least every seven years, or more often where appropriate.

2.3. Relevant providers – awarding bodies and providers

- All relevant providers must establish ATP procedures under Section 56(2) of the 2012 Act.
- Relevant providers, other than previously established universities, and linked providers must submit ATP procedures to QQI for approval.
- Previously established universities must consult with QQI when developing ATP procedures.
- Designated awarding bodies, listed awarding bodies and QQI must ensure that providers offering programmes leading to their awards, including collaborative providers, have appropriate ATP procedures that are implemented consistently and prioritise learners.

Key Responsibilities	
Providers with Awarding Powers	All providers
Develop and implement credit, credit transfer and credit accumulation systems aligned with ATP policy.	Develop institutional ATP procedures for each programme.
Ensure programme design, development, approval and review processes align with ATP policy.	Publish ATP procedures and programme-level ATP information in accessible formats.
Prioritise entry and exit arrangements, transfer pathways and progression pathways in programme design.	Communicate ATP procedures clearly and provide training for relevant staff.
Develop institutional RPL guidance for access, advanced entry, exemptions and awards.	Collect and report relevant ATP data.
Approve and review ATP procedures for linked, associated and third-party providers.	Monitor and review the effectiveness of ATP procedures.

Table 3: Key ATP Responsibilities for Awarding Bodies and Providers

3. ATP Principles

The NFQ provides the basis for an integrated qualifications system that supports lifelong learning and enables learners to take up different learning opportunities throughout their lives. ATP enables seamless transition for diverse learners and ensures high-quality information about pathways and opportunities. These principles are essential to the implementation of a system of coherent, fair and transparent pathways for learners.

ATP policy and practice should be learner centred. Learners' needs should therefore guide ATP policy, institutional procedures and their implementation.

Principle 1: Credit, Credit Accumulation and Credit Transfer

Credit is central to the operation of the NFQ because it provides a common way to describe learning volume, support recognition, and enable accumulation and transfer across education and training. Credit, including credit accumulation and credit transfer, is an essential part of ATP procedures under Section 56(3) of the 2012 Act. Clear credit systems help learners understand how learning is measured, recognised, accumulated, transferred and used towards awards.

Ireland uses two established credit systems to support the NFQ: European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS), used mainly in higher education, and FET Credit, used in further education and training. Both are based on expected learner effort and support the accumulation, transfer and recognition of learning. ECTS implementation is supported at European Level by the ECTS User Guide⁵, while FET credit is used only in the Irish context. Credit awarded to learners is referenced in the diploma and certificate supplements. More information about the operation of these systems of credit are provided in Section 4.

Credit accumulation includes both in-programme accumulation without certification and the stacking of short programmes or micro-credentials towards a larger qualification, with or without certification. Because credit accumulation, credit transfer and exemption can overlap, Table 4 provides non-binding guidance on how these terms may be interpreted and applied by awarding bodies and providers. The most important consideration is the inclusion of information about credit transfer, accumulation, exemption and recognition in transcripts and other qualifications documents.

The principles below build on existing approaches to credit and support a coherent approach to ATP across tertiary education.

Credit systems and compatibility

- Credit systems must operate in accordance with this policy.

⁵ ECTS users' guide 2015 - Publications Office of the EU

- The national approach to credit must be compatible with both ECTS credit and FET credit, both of which support the NFQ.
- Learning hours should be used to calculate credit which is particularly important in non-major awards and short programmes that are not associated with widely accepted credit volumes.
- Part-time study means any credit volume below a full academic year. At NFQ levels 5-9 this is normally less than 60 ECTS or 120 FET credits per academic year.
- Awarding bodies are responsible for assigning credit volumes and for regularly monitoring credit volumes.
- While the scenarios set out in Table 4, do not set maximum values for credit exemption, transfer and accumulation, institutions may choose to set such values in their institutional ATP policy.
 - Such limits must not apply to credit accumulation within a programme or credit transfer from a programme that has not been certified.
 - It is appropriate to the amount of 'new learning' required to achieve another qualification based on credit transfer and/or accumulation. There is at least 30 ECTS of new learning required to achieve a Masters qualification following credit transfer from a Postgraduate Diploma so 30 ECTS credits or equivalent FET credit might be an indicative value for major awards at NFQ Levels 5-10.
 - Credit accumulation of micro-credentials or other short programmes is likely to relate to smaller credit volumes and might be as low as 5 ECTS credits or equivalent.

Recognition, transfer and learner information

- The use and recognition of credit should provide as much flexibility for learners as possible and align with policies for RPL and the recognition of qualifications.
- Awarding bodies and providers must support common recognition of credit across further and higher education, where learning outcomes are sufficiently relevant.
- Grading conversions for non-credit-bearing learning, including Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate learning, must be fair, transparent and equitable.
- Learners must be told how much credit transfer is available, whether time limits apply, and how long previously achieved credit will be accepted.
- Any approach to the shelf-life of credit must be fair, reasonable and transparent and should support system level coherence.
- Approaches to shelf-life of credit should also support credit and programme transfer and credit accumulation and may need to take account of currency of learning reflected in a previous award.

Credit transfer and micro-credentials

- Credit transfer pathways should be considered early and not treated as an afterthought.
- Credit accumulation is vital to facilitating micro-credentialling and accumulation of credit from short programmes to lead to larger qualifications. Accumulation of micro-credentials and other small volumes of learning can be dealt with in the following ways:
 - i. **Prospective Pathway Identification:** Pathways for credit accumulation of micro-credentials should be identified prospectively and mapped out and made clear to learners. This is likely only possible within an institution. It is possible for institutions to prospectively recognise micro-credentials from another institution in their pathways and institutions should proactively engage in collaborative pathway planning.
 - ii. **Retrospective Pathway Identification:** Credit accumulation of micro-credentials can be retrospectively mapped to the achievement of a larger qualification. The learning must be coherent to the achievement of a qualification and in keeping with the Grid of Level Indicators for the overall level of the award and with the relevant award-type descriptor. If this results in a new qualification, the institution must include this award in the NFQ in line with requirements of the Joint Sectoral Protocol. This qualification must be published in the Irish Register of Qualifications to be considered an award included in the NFQ. This would be possible within and between institutions and could be made as a joint award provided that each awarding body involved in the delivery of the programme leading to a joint award continues to monitor their respective sections of programme delivery and QA. There is not necessarily a need to design a programme, beyond the existing accumulation of smaller awards, to lead to this qualification
 - iii. **RPL:** Credit accumulation of micro-credentials and other small qualifications in the Framework can be treated as a Recognition of Prior Learning for access to a programme of education and training or for the achievement of a full award but must be detailed in an organisational RPL policy. This would be possible both within and between institutions

Type	Description	When to Use	Grade/ Certification	Parameters	Certification	Additional Information
Credit Exemption	Where a learner is not required to repeat learning previously acquired via another programme(s) of study or through non-formal or informal learning. Exemptions are usually offered on a per module basis.	- Can be used to exempt learners from specific modules where the learning was undertaken in a different institution. - Credit exemption can be used when a learner presents modules from more than one programme of study for recognition. - Credit exemption should not be used within the same institution as credit transfer or accumulation is more appropriate.	Grade does not typically carry forward	Small volumes of learning acquired via another programme(s) of study measured via Irish or European credit systems. Can be used for both major and non-major awards.	The modules that are exempted should still appear on the certification record and made clear that it was exempt.	Can also be used in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning
Credit Recognition	Where a learner is awarded credit for non-formal and informal learning following an assessment of its correspondence to a	Should be used in lieu of credit exemption to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning and award credit for the learning	Can be grade neutral or use pass/fail classification where available	Any volume of non-formal and informal learning	Must be certified and awarded as credit for the relevant component(s) of the programme	

	component(s) of the formal programme					
Credit Transfer	Where a learner is permitted to count credit achieved at one institution towards a programme or qualification studied for at another institution, or from one programme or qualification to another in the same institution.	• Always used for programme transfer where a programme has not yet been completed and a qualification not achieved – both inter and intra institutionally. • Always used for intermediate qualifications (i.e.) Level 5 Certificate to Advanced Certificate; Short Cycle to First Cycle and Postgraduate Diploma to Masters Degree - both inter and intra institutionally. • Always used for progression from an Ordinary Degree to an Honours Bachelors Degree unless a top up qualification of 60 ECTS has been validated - both inter and intra institutionally.	Grade associated with credit transferred is maintained and translated into institutional grading, where possible	Can be used for both major and non-major awards and must be used in the examples provided. Credit transfer must always be used within an institution and should be prioritised for providers using Irish or European credit systems. Credit transfer can be used even when a learner has been certified as having achieved a qualification	Credit transfer should be clearly indicated on the certification record (including on diploma and certificate supplements).	Where translation of grading is not available or appropriate, credit exemption may be used instead. Alternatively, grade neutral grading could be used to facilitate the credit transfer.

		• Always used for minor to major awards intra institutionally • Always used where an articulation agreement facilitates advanced entry from one programme to another		on the basis of the transferred credit. Credit transfer is suitable for use in the recognition of all or part of the credit achieved in the previous programme/ qualification.		
Credit Accumulation (short programmes)	Where a learner builds up, or has the capacity to build up, two or more short/small programmes of study towards a larger qualification or credential.	• Always used for programmes labelled as micro-credentials in Ireland. • Can be used for programmes with less than 30 credits expressed in European credit systems.	Grade associated with credit accumulated is maintained and translated into institutional grading.	Credit accumulation is limited to two or more programmes of study or qualifications of 30 credits or less. Can be used towards non-major and major awards and must be used for programmes	Credit accumulation should be clearly indicated on the certification record (including on diploma and certificate supplements).	Where translation of grading is not available or appropriate, credit exemption may be used instead. Alternatively, grade neutral grading could be used to facilitate the credit transfer.

				labelled as micro-credentials.		
Credit accumulation (units of learning within a programme)	Where a learner accumulates credits during the course of their study prior to certification. Possibly on a module or stage basis.	Always used in any multi-module or multi-year programme				

Table 4: Guidelines on the arrangements for credit exemption, transfer and accumulation

Principle 2: Programme Design

Programme design is central to effective access, transfer and progression. Programmes should be designed to support flexible entry, clear exit routes, transfer and progression pathways, learner retention, and access to further opportunities.

Flexibility, collaboration, co-design, regular review and alignment with NFQ values and principles should be considered from the outset of programme design.

This principle includes two sub-principles: **Entry and Exit Arrangements** and **Transfer and Progression Pathways**. Both should be considered during programme design, rather than after programmes have been approved or delivered.

Collaboration in programme design

- Collaborative practice at programme design level is crucial and may include collaboration within providers, across providers, and between awarding bodies to identify pathways and ease transitions for learners.
- Awarding bodies should encourage collaboration from the top-down through policies and procedures that support collaborative programme design and delivery.

Flexible programme delivery

- Flexible programme delivery should be explored at the programme design phase, particularly for learner groups under-represented in enrolment.
- Any flexibility available to learners must be clearly communicated.
- Supports should be made available to learners to facilitate undertaking flexible programme provision where possible.
- Flexibility should be built into timetabling, delivery, independent learning opportunities, teaching and learning organisation, and assessment where possible.
- Part-time learners should be considered in programme design wherever possible.

Co-design and review

- Co-design approaches to programme design and review should be explored to support inclusive and innovative practice.
- Co-design may include learners, graduates, employers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders.

NFQ alignment

- NFQ values and principles must be central to programme design for programmes leading to awards on the NFQ and should also be considered for programmes that award FET or ECTS credits to enable ATP.

Principle 2.1: Entry and Exit Arrangements

Entry and exit routes should be planned during programme design. Where possible, programmes should include clear transition points and interim or intermediate awards so that learning can be recognised, communicated and used for transfer or progression.

Entry arrangements should recognise different kinds of learning and experience, including formal, non-formal, informal and uncertified learning.

- RPL is central to admission, advanced entry, exemptions and recognition of certified, non-formal, informal and uncertified learning.
- Where Ireland has recognition agreements or treaties in place, institutions must take account of them.
- Entry routes should be fair, logical, consistent, clearly communicated and open to a variety of routes, including CAO, advanced entry, RPL and further-to-higher education pathways.
- Minimum entry requirements and shortlisting criteria should be considered during programme design and should allow flexibility in how learners demonstrate relevant knowledge and skills.
- Admissions policies and procedures should support flexible, transparent and evidence-based assessment of a learner's background and experience.
- Exit routes should include clear award provision at exit or transition points, where possible, to support later transfer, progression or re-entry.
- Exit awards and re-entry arrangements must be clearly communicated to learners.
- Any use of automated systems (such as those using Artificial Intelligence) to determine entry to programmes must be limited⁶. If AI is to be used in decision making processes around admissions, learners must be provided with details of the role of the AI system in decision making⁷. If automated systems are being used in any capacity, they must be designed to recognise and accommodate a wide range of entry routes and must include mechanisms for strict assessment and oversight from relevant staff, allowing for the ability to obtain human intervention in any automated decision-making processes⁸ to ensure that learners entering from non-traditional routes or seeking RPL/advanced entry arrangements are not disadvantaged.

⁶ The use of AI systems in admissions to education and training is defined a high-risk system for AI use under Annexe III of the EU AI Act

⁷ Article 86: Right to Explanation of Individual Decision-Making | EU Artificial Intelligence Act

⁸ Art. 22 GDPR – Automated individual decision-making, including profiling - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

- Learners must be informed if the information which they provide is to be used by an AI system/automated decision-making process⁹.

Principle 2.2: Transfer and Progression Pathways

Transfer and progression pathways should be considered during programme design so that they are useful, realistic and easy for learners to navigate.

Progression is already well established in tertiary education, but transfer should also be recognised as a key ATP pathway. Transfer options and existing pathways should be clearly defined, promoted and communicated to learners.

Where possible, transfer options should be identified for specific programmes or areas of study during programme design, for example between related disciplines.

Where learners enter a pathway made up of smaller volumes of learning leading to a major award, institutions should make completion timeframes clear and plan transfer or progression options if the pathway changes or is no longer available.

- Transfer should be recognised as a key part of ATP, including its role in credit accumulation.
- Award-type transfer and progression pathways should be considered during programme design.
- Transfer routes should not disadvantage learners and should follow the same entry arrangements used for learners accessing the programme for the first time.
- Programme transfer, both within and between institutions, should be prioritised at key transition points and published where available.
- Providers and awarding bodies should collaborate within and across institutions to develop clear and accessible transfer and progression pathways.
- Collaborative practices should have support from the top-down to ensure consistency of collaborative approaches
- Where common transfer or progression pathways exist, learners must be given clear information about them.

⁹ The use of AI systems in admissions to education and training is defined a high-risk system for AI use under Annexe III of the EU AI Act; Article 86: Right to Explanation of Individual Decision-Making | EU Artificial Intelligence Act

⁹ Art. 22 GDPR – Automated individual decision-making, including profiling - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

⁹ Art. 14 GDPR – Information to be provided where personal data have not been obtained from the data subject - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

⁹ Article 50: Transparency Obligations for Providers and Deployers of Certain AI Systems | EU Artificial Intelligence Act

- Pathways for transfer and progression should be consistent, logical and incorporate RPL.
- Where pathways consist of smaller volumes of learning leading to a major award, completion timeframes must be explicit, and transfer or progression routes must be available if completion is no longer possible in the original institution.
- It is the responsibility of the institution to arrange transfer and progression opportunities for learners if a pathway is ended by that institution.

Principle 3: Information Provision

Clear, accessible information is essential for learners to understand and navigate access, transfer and progression. Providers must give learners information on programmes leading to awards included in the NFQ, including information on the ATP procedures that apply.

This information should cover entry and exit routes, ATP procedures, RPL arrangements, programme flexibility, learner supports, transfer and progression pathways, and sources of further advice. ATP information should be clear, comprehensive, accessible and designed with learners in mind so that learners can find, understand and use it effectively.

Accessible ATP information

- ATP policy should be a central policy around which related admissions policies and procedures are built or coordinated.
- Awarding bodies' ATP policies, and associated provider policies and procedures, must align with QQI's ATP policy.
- Co-design with end-users should be used when developing information systems, structures and documents to ensure they are useful and understandable.
- Information on ATP procedures, entry arrangements, advanced entry, flexible delivery, RPL and alternative exit awards must be clear, accessible and universally designed.
- ATP policies and procedures should support tools that improve the readability and comparability of awards.
- Statements in relation to the professional and/or statutory regulation of a programme by a regulator must be accurate and in keeping with language that is acceptable to that regulator.
- Awarding bodies and providers should make it clear how many places are available in a particular programme and the percentages available for different cohorts of learners and different access routes.

Statutory programme information

In line with Section 67 of the 2012 Act, providers must make clear whether a programme leads to an award included in the NFQ or not. Where a programme does not lead to an NFQ award, learners should receive clear information on available transfer and progression pathways. These requirements apply to micro-credentials as well as full programmes.

- Learners must also be given information on NFQ level, credit volume and professional regulation requirements, where applicable.
- Centralised ATP information should be considered to make related policies, procedures and widening participation initiatives easier to find and use.

- Where guidance services are available, learners should be told what support is available and how to access it.
- The Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) should be used as a central resource for information on ATP, entry routes and exit routes.

Principle 4: Data Provision and Collection

Data helps show how access, transfer and progression work in practice. Clear and consistent data enables awarding bodies, providers, researchers and policy makers to assess ATP approaches, identify barriers and improve learner pathways.

Data also supports QQI's statutory role in monitoring and reviewing ATP implementation. Common data guidelines can help show how learners move through the NFQ and support evidence-informed decision-making.

The areas below are not intended to create unnecessary reporting burdens. Providers and awarding bodies should collect this information mainly to understand and improve ATP practice. QQI may also use it as part of regular review activities.

Data for ATP improvement

- Use data to support the implementation and improvement of ATP.
- Keep IRQ information accurate and up to date for programmes leading to awards included in the NFQ, and for other programmes if this option becomes available.
- Collect data across all aspects of ATP.
- Include early exit from programmes in completion data and record whether exit leads to an award.
- Record numbers of learners not permitted access, transfer or progression, where feasible. This is likely to apply first to direct applications and may not include routes such as CAO.
- Support cooperation between awarding bodies and providers to improve data collection.
- Use data from awarding bodies and providers to assess the impact of ATP procedures within awarding bodies and nationally.

Common data standards

- Awarding bodies and providers should consider recording qualification information and learning opportunities in line with the European Learning Model (ELM). A common data model can make qualification data easier to interpret, transfer and compare, and can support ATP, including RPL of certified learning.

Specific data

- Section 13 of the 2012 Act specifies that relevant providers and others will provide any information to QQI that is required for the performance of its functions which includes information in respect of completion rates.
- Other such data that might be requested includes but is not limited to:
 - Numbers of applicants and entrants generally and by specific entry routes
 - RPL applications and outcomes

- Recognition decisions with regards to qualifications recognition
- Numbers of transfers; programme and institutional level
- Trends in credit exemptions, recognitions, transfers and accumulation between programmes
- Completion rates; attrition rates and trends of reasons for attritions

Principle 5: Culture of Embedding ATP

Effective ATP depends on an institutional culture that embeds access, transfer and progression across policy, practice, communication and programme delivery.

Learners should experience joined-up information, procedures and supports across related policies, systems and processes.

Inclusive design and learner information

- Use universal design and co-design in ATP policies, procedures, information systems, communication, programme design and delivery.
- Provide clear, comprehensive and accessible learner information on ATP-related policies and procedures, including admissions and RPL.

Leadership, collaboration and communication

- Use institutional leadership to support consistent ATP policy and practice, while enabling initiatives and improvements at all levels.
- Encourage collaboration within and between institutions, supported by policies that promote communication and shared pathway development.
- Provide relevant staff with clear communication and training on ATP policy, pathways and practice, (this includes but is not limited to, people responsible for: admissions, guidance, teaching, programme leadership, communications, student representation and information systems).

Admissions practice

- Review admissions policies regularly to support flexible, transparent and evidence-based pathways. This may include contextual admissions practices that consider a learner's circumstances, background and experience when assessing their potential to succeed.

4. Operational Guidelines for Implementing Credit in Tertiary Education

Credit is central to recognising learning and supporting access, transfer and progression. A clear credit system shows how learning is measured, earned, accumulated, transferred and communicated to learners.

Credit systems or arrangements used by relevant providers must:

- be simple, clear and comprehensive;
- be compatible with ECTS or FET Credit, as appropriate;
- support learner participation, mobility, access, transfer and progression;
- recognise learning outcomes in smaller units of learning and support progress towards awards;
- maintain the standards and quality of awards included in the NFQ;
- support comparability and recognition of tertiary education and training awards;
- support programme, learning-unit and award development or redesign;
- accommodate changes in curricula and delivery systems;
- respect provider and awarding-body autonomy in programme design, award systems and regulations;
- assign credit to units of learning and whole awards in the context of the NFQ;
- support credit transfer where achieved credit may contribute to another award;
- contribute to a widely understood credit currency across tertiary education and training; and
- be compatible with institutional awards regulations and QQI's ATP policy.

To support coherence between credit systems and the NFQ, the following implementation guidelines apply:

- 1 FET credit equals 10 hours of notional learner effort. 1 ECTS credit equals 20–30 hours of notional learner effort. A 2:1 FET-to-ECTS calculation must be used when comparing credit volumes across further and higher education.
- Credit volumes should be calculated on the same broad assumption of learner effort. A full-time academic year is normally 120 FET credits or 60 ECTS credits.
- Credit is earned only after appropriate assessment and successful achievement of the specified learning outcomes.
- Learning outcomes should be informed by the NFQ grid of level indicators.
- NFQ award types include indicative credit volumes based on FET Credit and ECTS.
- Learners should be able, where appropriate, to use credit earned for one award towards another award at the same, higher or lower NFQ level. Receiving

providers or awarding bodies determine how previously achieved credit is recognised for exemptions, transfer or progression, informed by the guidelines in Table 4.

- Awarding bodies and providers must give learners clear information on credit systems, credit accumulation and credit transfer within and across institutions, including relevant admissions and RPL policies.
- Credits achieved must be recorded in student transcripts and relevant Europass transparency and mobility tools, such as the diploma supplement, certificate supplement or mobility document

5. Implementation

Relevant providers are expected to update their own institutional policies and procedures for ATP in line with the provisions of this policy within a reasonable timeline of its publication. The approval of, or consultation about, such procedures will be incorporated into routine monitoring and evaluation processes implemented by QQI in due course.

QQI will seek to collaborate with other relevant state agencies already collecting learner data to improve the quality of data about ATP, where possible. Principles around data collection and provision should assist institutions in assessing their own implementation of ATP. Collection and use of this data can help drive developments and improvements and will also provide a strong foundation for reporting on ATP policy, practice and developments and improvements as part of routine monitoring and evaluation. Such data may form part of periodic or other reports to QQI as part of QQIs broader responsibility for oversight of quality assurance, including but not limited to, ATP.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Access	The process by which a learner's previously acquired knowledge, skill or competence is recognised, providing eligibility for admission to a programme of education and training. Access incorporates both transfer and progression.
Advanced Entry	The process by which a learner's previously acquired work and/or educational experience is recognised allowing them to enter onto a programme at a more advanced point in the programme (for example: in a second or subsequent year of a multi-year degree programme)
Co-Design	A collaborative design approach where multiple stakeholders actively participate in design and development phases of the design process.
Credit	A means of measuring, recognising and communicating the volume of learning associated with a qualification or programme. Usually associated with hours of notional learner effort. Credit can be classified as either specific credit or general credit: • Specific credit: Used in the case of credit transfer where the grade associated with the credit moves along with the credit itself. This is commonly used in transfer processes. • General credit: Used in the case of credit transfer or credit accumulation where the credit is grade neutral.
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)	The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool developed by the European Commission and used in the European Higher Education Area for making studies and courses more transparent. It helps students to move between countries and to have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognised. ECTS allows credits taken at one education institution to be counted towards a qualification studied for at another. ECTS credits represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload.

Exit Award	An exit award is a qualification in its own right which is available on partial completion of a programme of study to which a learner has enrolled. It is usually not available for direct enrolment. Learners should be facilitated to re-enter at the point of exit should they seek to return to the programme (except in the instance of the exit award being given when all other methods of a learner meeting the requirements of the programme have been exhausted)
Further Education and Training credit (FET Credit)	A credit system which is used to communicate the workload of most programmes offered by further education and training programmes in Ireland where 1 credit is equal to 10 hours of approximate learner effort.
Progression	An access process through which a learner's prior learning is recognised, allowing them to move from one programme to another at a higher level, usually but not always on the NFQ.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	For the purposes of the ATP Policy, RPL is understood as a process which allows for formal recognition of knowledge, skills and experience including knowledge, skills and experience achieved in non-formal/uncertified education and training. It is a separate process to credit exemption/ transfer or advanced entry, which is applied in the case of formal, certified learning. RPL can include formal recognition of experiential learning (RPEL). RPL can be used for the purpose of access to programmes, to seek exemptions from parts of programmes or awards, and in some cases to directly certify partial and full awards.
Transfer	An access process through which a learner's prior learning is recognised, allowing them to move from one programme to another at the same level, usually associated with the NFQ.
Universal Design	The design and composition of an environment, building, product, or service so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

6. Appendix 1

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Qualifications Table

The EHEA qualification table¹⁰ is a tool developed by Nuffic, Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education, to support automatic recognition of foreign qualifications in the EHEA.

¹⁰ European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Qualifications table

The table provides an easy overview which qualifications fall in one cycle or European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level and could be automatically considered for general access to the next level.

The qualifications are organized by Bologna cycle and corresponding EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Conventions for Recognition

There are a number of treaties/conventions on recognitions to which Ireland has signed up to (or to which Ireland has applied to be a part of). These agreements set out parameters for recognition. Namely, that a qualification obtained in one country can give the holder of the qualification to be considered for further studies at the same level or higher level in another participating country without requiring lengthy and separate recognition procedures.

These conventions are:

- Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education¹¹
- Lisbon Recognition Convention¹²
- Multilateral Treaty on Automatic Recognition (Originally formed by the Benelux (and Baltic countries)¹³
- Treaty on the Functioning of the EU¹⁴ (for EU qualifications only)

¹¹ [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

¹² [Lisbon Recognition Convention - Higher education and research](#)

¹³ [Ireland applies to join the Multilateral Treaty on the Automatic Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications](#)

¹⁴ [The mutual recognition of diplomas | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament](#)