

Policies and Criteria for the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (2026)



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agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and
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Co-funded by
the European Union

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Policies and Criteria for the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (2026)

1. Background and Context

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was first established in 2003 and was comprehensively described in the Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications¹ and the Determinations for the Outline of the NFQ published by National Qualifications Authority of Ireland² under the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

The statutory basis of the Framework was re-affirmed by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is mandated to 'keep and maintain' the Framework.

The Framework is defined in the Act as a system

- of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level, and of the type concerned within the Framework, and
- for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State.

These policies and criteria are developed in line with Section 43 (2)(a) of the 2012 Act as amended and replace the Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications and the Determinations for the Outline of the NFQ, which have been retired.

These Policies and Criteria are being developed to:

- reflect the legislative changes associated with the 2012 Act and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 including roles and responsibilities for QQI and awarding bodies
- reflect the significant developments in operation of the Framework since 2003 and its evolution as a policy instrument
- reflect advancements in national and regional qualifications frameworks

¹ [pol & crit.qxd](#)

² [determinations.qxd](#)



This document combines a series of separate NFQ related documents which have been developed in the last number of years including the Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-types, Professional Award Type Descriptors and Higher Doctorate Award Descriptors. These Policies and Criteria for the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (2026) supersede all previous policy documents and become the single source of information on the NFQ.



2. Purpose of the NFQ

The NFQ has three high level purposes which can be broadly considered as follows:

- **Communication** – supports the classification of qualifications and ensures transparency and comparability of qualifications and enables communication to end users
- **Enabling** – allows for evolution of qualifications through its flexible and inclusive approach
- **Adapting** – the NFQ can be updated from time to time, or as needed, to account for policy learning and in response to system evolution

The NFQ can be used in many ways, not limited to the education and employment sector.

However, the main policy objectives of the NFQ are:

1. To make the education and training system and its component parts more transparent and easier to understand
2. To increase the coherence of qualifications and provide clarity about the relationships between qualifications and their associated programmes
3. To promote access, transfer and progression into, within and between programmes of learning
4. To promote the recognition of learning and achievement, including those acquired through informal and non-formal learning
5. To promote lifelong learning
6. To enhance quality of learning
7. To promote the international mobility of learners and workers
8. To provide a means for translating and understanding Irish qualifications in the global context

3. Values and Principles underpinning the NFQ

QQI's vision for the NFQ is that it is a universally accepted and trusted system of levels and types of qualifications that enables a permeable, flexible and inclusive national qualifications system that values and recognises educational and training achievements through clear and consistent use of validly assessed learning outcomes.

3.1. Values

The values of the NFQ as determined at establishment are:

- Equality and accessibility
- Transparency and simplicity
- Relevance
- Quality
- Comprehensiveness

In line with these values, QQI commits to publishing information about the NFQ in plain English and in accessible and easily readable formats and will continue to explore multi-modal methods of communication to maximise the reach to end users.

3.2. Principles

Some of the original values are more sensibly framed as principles and are further developed here in combination with other principles which have emerged in the intervening period.

A. The NFQ will be inclusive and flexible in its approach to recognising and relating learning and achievement.

- The means by which the NFQ can be used to recognise learning and achievement is:
 - **Programmes of education and training can lead to qualifications included in the Framework at NFQ Levels 1 -10.** It is important to note that NFQ Level 1 has no floor, and NFQ Level 10 has no ceiling so most programmes can be validated to lead to an award at one of these levels. Programme of education training means a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship. Programmes can be of any duration or credit volume and associated with any award type;
 - **Recognition of prior learning** can be used to recognise learning and achievement of formal, non-formal and informal learning for the purposes of access, advanced entry, credit transfer and credit exemption for programmes of education and training; and for eligibility for full award.

- QQI will explore how the NFQ can best be used to recognise learning and achievement certified by some **certification bodies**, particularly in English Language Education.

B. The NFQ will be coherent and comprehensive allowing for the inclusion of diverse qualifications and the articulation of relationships and pathways between and within programmes and other processes for achieving awards

- This means that the NFQ will:
 - Continue to accommodate a wide range of qualifications from across diverse sectors, subject areas and labour markets
 - Continue to accommodate a wide range of qualifications of varying size, duration, and mode of delivery
 - Make clear the relationship between qualifications and programmes and other processes for achieving qualifications which has the impact of increasing the visibility of learner journeys and progression pathways
 - Ensuring all qualifications and the programmes that lead to them have a clear purpose and support progression in terms of employment, education or personal development.

C. The NFQ will support clarity, consistency and transparency

- This will be achieved in the following ways
 - *Clarity*: QQI will continue to maintain the NFQ infrastructure of; NFQ levels, grid of level indicators, award-type descriptors and policies and criteria; to clearly explain the outcome of programmes and qualifications
 - *Consistency*: The NFQ infrastructure and underpinning policies and criteria will consistently inform the development and award of qualifications by awarding bodies and providers to ensure there is a broad level of comparability between and across institutions implementing the NFQ.
 - *Transparency*: This will, in turn, support learners, employers and other end users of qualifications to easily understand and explain the different qualifications included in the NFQ. The Irish Register of Qualifications, maintained and implemented by QQI, will support providers and awarding bodies in making their qualifications more transparent.

D. Quality assurance, at programme and institutional level, will underpin qualifications included in the NFQ

- Programme and institutional level quality assurance are essential to the success of qualifications included in the NFQ and is achieved by:
 - Providers and awarding bodies will develop and implement appropriate institutional and programme level quality assurance arrangements, ensuring that qualifications are designed with appropriate regard to the policies and criteria of the NFQ
 - Quality assurance arrangements will provide for achievement of full award by recognition of prior learning
 - Providers and awarding bodies will be responsible for the design, implementation and review of their own internal quality assurance procedures
 - Providers and awarding bodies will participate in external quality assurance reviews at programme and/or institutional level



4. Roles and Responsibilities

Section 43 of the Act sets out the legislative requirement for the NFQ and specifies roles and responsibilities for QQI, awarding bodies and providers.

Section 55A-I makes provision for the process by which an award acquires the status of being an award that is included in the Framework, and this section sets out responsibilities for awarding bodies, including QQI.

4.1. QQI

Section 43 of the Act sets out QQI's roles and responsibilities with regards to the NFQ. Section 43 (1) confirms that QQI will keep and maintain the Framework.

It further states that QQI will:

- review and further develop the policies and criteria on which the Framework is based,
- promote, maintain, further develop and implement the Framework as a system—
 - of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level, and of the type concerned, within the Framework, and
 - for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State,
- review the operation of the Framework,
- promote and facilitate the use by providers and awarding bodies of statements of what an enrolled learner is expected to know, understand, and where appropriate demonstrate, on completion of a programme of education and training, and
- amend the Framework from time to time as it considers necessary

Section 55A-I states that QQI will:

- establish policies and criteria for the approval of **listed awarding bodies**; and for the inclusion of awards in the Framework of listed and other awarding bodies
- following an application from an awarding body, decide if it is appropriate that an award be regarded as an award included in the Framework.
- agree and implement procedures with **designated awarding bodies** whereby the awarding body can notify QQI of its view that it is appropriate that an award be regarded as an award that is included in the Framework and QQI can express agreement with that view.

As part of its responsibility to implement the Framework, QQI has a role in advising and supporting those who wish to use the NFQ beyond its core purposes identified in Section 4 and is available to provide feedback and advice about the suitability of the NFQ for uses beyond its

intended purposes. Examples of such uses include professional regulation and/or registration, recruitment and for eligibility for student funding and supports.

4.1.1. European and Other Frameworks

QQI has a responsibility to ensure that the Irish NFQ continues to be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and to undertake re-referencing and self-certification exercises, when required.

QQI may undertake, revise and maintain bilateral comparison exercises with other national and regional frameworks in line with organisational, sectoral and national priorities.

QQI provides collects data and information to support the monitoring of the implementation of national framework, as required, and reports this to a range of national and international agencies, as requested.

4.2. Awarding Bodies

Section 43 (3) and (6) and state that each **designated awarding body** and **listed awarding body**, shall, in respect of each award that the body makes that is an award included within the Framework:

- take such steps (whether by way of co-operation or consultation with the Authority or otherwise) as will facilitate the performance by the Authority of its functions in so far as those functions relate to awards included within the Framework
- provide to the Authority such information as the Authority may from time to time require for the performance by it of relevant functions [which includes the inclusion of awards within the Framework],
- ensure that a learner acquires the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of that award within the Framework before and when the award is made

Furthermore, Section 43 (4) states that each **designated awarding body** shall ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that each award that it makes is an award that is included within the Framework.

Under Section 43 (5), each **designated awarding body**, **provider to whom the authority has delegated authority to make awards**, and **body that makes an award under the Education Act 1998** that stands specified by the Minister to be an award that falls within this paragraph,

shall cooperate with QQI on the implementation of policies and criteria established to support the inclusion of awards within the Framework.

4.2.1. Linked, associated and/or validated providers

Where an awarding body works with linked, associated and/or collaborative providers, or validates programmes of providers, it will ensure that responsibilities with respect to the NFQ are implemented appropriately and in keeping with the provisions above.

4.3. Providers of programmes of education and training

Section 43 (8) states that in respect of each such programme [being a programme that leads to an award that is an award included within the Framework], its **provider** shall ensure that an enrolled learner acquires the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of the award concerned within the Framework before the award is made.

4.4. Summary

To summarise, QQI has the responsibility to maintain, further develop and implement the NFQ as a system of levels and award-types and does this through the development of policies and criteria underpinning the NFQ. QQI facilitates the inclusion of awards of designated and statutory awarding bodies in the NFQ and approves the inclusion of awards of Listed and Delegated Authority Awarding Bodies.



5. Inclusion of Awards in the National Framework of Qualifications

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 amended the 2012 Act to provide for a new process by which awards are included in the Framework. The inclusion of awards within the Framework is a regulatory process that determines if an award should be included within the Framework with reference to the requirements of the Act. Awards which are included within the National Framework of Qualifications are published on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)³

The Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the NFQ⁴ outline the process for how awards of different awarding bodies are formally included in the NFQ.

As outlined in the Act, the NFQ is a system of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award at a particular level, and of the type concerned, within the Framework. As such only awards included in the Framework can be described in terms of NFQ Levels and/or award types. It is appropriate for providers of programmes leading to awards included in qualifications frameworks other than the Irish NFQ to describe their awards as comparable to a certain NFQ level, where such comparability is facilitated by recognition tools and supports.

5.1. General Principles for Awards that are Included in the Framework

The Act provides for different processes for including awards in the Framework dependent on the type of awarding body. However, the awards that are included share the same principles, regardless of the process undertaken. These principles are derived from existing policy that supports the inclusion of awards in the NFQ including The Joint Sectoral Protocol between QQI and Designated Awarding Bodies⁵, Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the NFQ⁶ and Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training.⁷

While it is possible to include awards in the NFQ independent of programmes, most qualifications are underpinned by a programme of education and training. This does not preclude the achievement of a qualification by another process.

³ www.irq.ie

⁴ [qp-24-core-policies-and-criteria-for-the-inclusion-of-awards-within-the-framework.pdf](#)

⁵ [Joint-sectoral protocol DABs.pdf](#)

⁶ [qp-24-core-policies-and-criteria-for-the-inclusion-of-awards-within-the-framework.pdf](#)

⁷ [qp-17-policies-and-criteria-for-the-validation-of-programmes-of-education-and-training.pdf](#)

The principles that underpin the awards that are included in the Framework are:

- **Need, relevance and purpose:** Qualifications and associated programmes should be clearly justified by reference to learner needs, societal and economic objectives, stakeholder expectations and the intended purpose of the award or programme.
- **Alignment with the NFQ and standards:** Awards should be designed and interpreted in a way that is consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications, relevant award standards, learning outcomes and appropriate descriptors.
- **Coherent design and internal governance:** Providers and awarding bodies should have clear internal procedures for approving, monitoring and reviewing awards and programmes and other processes for achieving a qualification, supported by transparent decision-making and evidence-based quality assurance.
- **Fitness for purpose and capacity to deliver:** Programmes leading to qualifications included in the NFQ should be supported by appropriate curriculum design. All processes leading to the achievement of qualifications, including programmes, should be supported by qualified staff, sufficient physical and learning resources, and implementation arrangements that are capable of achieving the intended outcomes.
- **Independent evaluation and external reference points:** External evaluation should be embedded where appropriate, including consideration of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements and other relevant external benchmarks.
- **Sound assessment and moderation:** Assessment strategies should be valid, reliable, fair and aligned with learning outcomes, with appropriate internal and external moderation, external examining and quality assurance oversight.
- **Access, transfer, progression and recognition:** Arrangements for entry, credit, recognition of prior learning, transfer and progression should be clear, equitable and suitable for the target learner group.
- **Transparency and learner information:** Learners and stakeholders should have access to accurate, accessible and timely information about awards, programmes, entry requirements, progression opportunities, assessment and certification.
- **Ongoing review and improvement:** Awards, programmes and related procedures should be reviewed regularly, informed by learner, stakeholder and external feedback, and updated to remain relevant, robust and fit for purpose.

5.2. Levelling of awards for inclusion in the Framework

The level of a new award proposed for inclusion in the Framework will be determined by reference to its intended learning outcomes and the relevant NFQ level indicators and award-type descriptor. The awarding body will provide evidence demonstrating the breadth, depth and complexity of the knowledge, skill and competence required to achieve the award, together with information on its purpose, volume, assessment and quality assurance arrangements. Levelling will consider the award as a whole and will apply an overall best-fit judgement; individual learning outcomes may sit above or below the proposed level without determining the level on their own. The levelling decision will apply to the award standard rather than to the performance of individual learners and will be agreed through the applicable procedure for inclusion of awards in the Framework.



6. Structure of the NFQ

The basic structure of the NFQ is based on levels. Each level, of which there are 10, is associated with a synopsis of level outcomes and general statements of knowledge, skill and competence known as level indicators. At each level in the Framework there is one, or more, award-types. Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor.

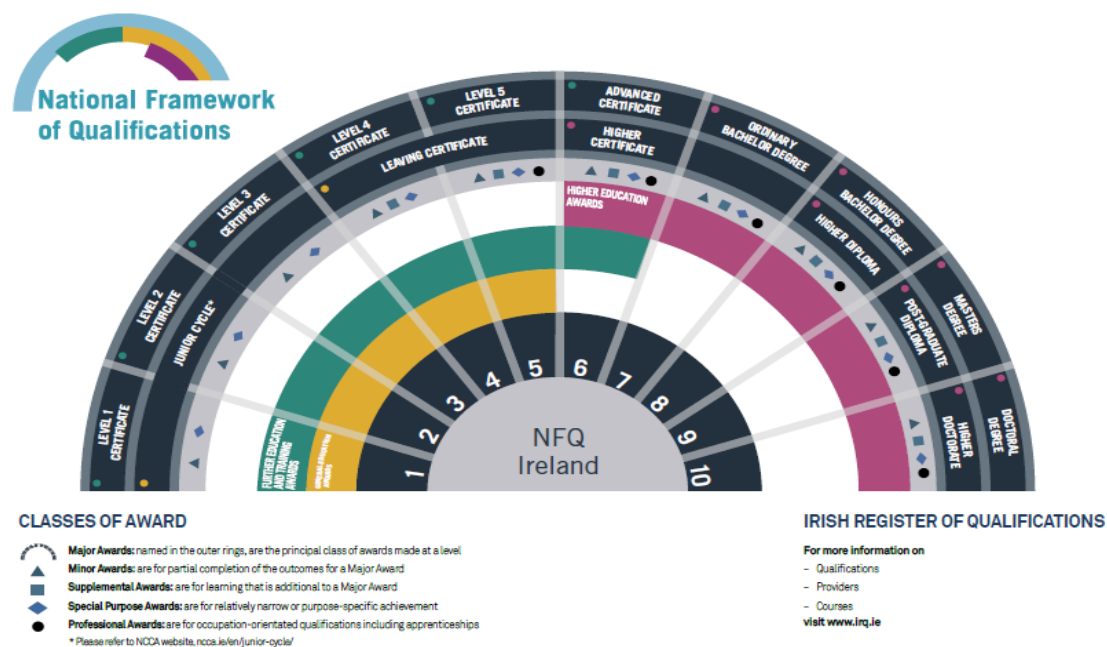
It is the responsibility of QQI to develop these award-type descriptors. For each award-type a wide range of named awards have been developed. It is the responsibility of awarding bodies to develop named awards, in keeping with the award-type descriptors, and the level indicators.

6.1. The NFQ Fan Diagram

The NFQ Fan is the simplest presentation of the NFQ and is designed to support a basic understanding of the NFQ and its infrastructure.

The NFQ Fan diagram only depicts:

- the 10 NFQ Levels
- the names of each of the major award-types associated with each NFQ Level
- which of the non-major award-types are available at each NFQ Level
- the NFQ levels with which each sector is associated



6.2. Levels

The NFQ consists of 10 levels ranging from NFQ Level 1 which deals with general numeracy and literacy qualifications and is associated with some general education learning, right up to NFQ Level 10 which is associated with doctoral education.

6.3. Level Outcomes

The synopsis of level outcomes is useful in understanding the nature of learning outcomes at each level.

NFQ Level	Synopsis of Level Outcomes
Level 1	The learning outcomes relate to the performance of basic tasks in a controlled environment under supervision and the display of an ability to learn information and basic repetitive skills, as well as to sequence learning tasks. Literacy and numeracy achievements would correspond to those measured at the initial levels of international assessment systems.
Level 2	Key outcomes at this level are basic literacy and numeracy and the introduction to systematic learning. Learning outcomes relate to the ability to learn new skills and knowledge in a supervised environment and to carry out routine work under direction. Learning outcomes at this level are typically developmental rather than geared towards a specific occupation
Level 3	Learning outcomes at this level relate to a low volume of practical capability and of knowledge of theory. The outcomes relate to the performance of relatively simple work and may be fairly quickly acquired. Outcomes at this level may also confer a minimum employability for low skilled occupations and include functional literacy and numeracy.
Level 4	Independence is the hallmark of this level. Learning outcomes at this level correspond to a growing sense of responsibility for participating in public life and shaping one's own life. The outcomes at this level would be associated with first-time entry to many occupational sectors.
Level 5	Learning outcomes at this level include a broad range of skills that require some theoretical understanding. The outcomes may relate to engaging in a specific activity, with the capacity to use the instruments and techniques relating to an occupation. They are associated with work being undertaken independently, subject to general direction



Level 6	Learning outcomes at this level include a comprehensive range of skills which may be vocationally-specific and/or of a general supervisory nature, and require detailed theoretical understanding. The outcomes also provide for a particular focus on learning skills. The outcomes relate to working in a generally autonomous way to assume design and/or management and/or administrative responsibilities. Occupations at this level would include higher craft, junior technician and supervisor.
Level 7	Learning outcomes at this level relate to knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles in a field of study and the application of those principles in different contexts. This level includes knowledge of methods of enquiry and the ability to critically evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. The outcomes include an understanding of the limits of the knowledge acquired and how this influences analyses and interpretations in a work context. Outcomes at this level would be appropriate to the upper end of many technical occupations and would include higher technicians, some restricted professionals and junior management.
Level 8	Innovation is a key feature of learning outcomes at this level. Learning outcomes at this level relate to being at the forefront of a field of learning in terms of knowledge and understanding. The outcomes include an awareness of the boundaries of the learning in the field and the preparation required to push back those boundaries through further learning. The outcomes relate to adaptability, flexibility, ability to cope with change and ability to exercise initiative and solve problems within their field of study. In a number of applied fields the outcomes are those linked with the independent, knowledge-based professional. In other fields the outcomes are linked with those of a generalist and would normally be appropriate to management positions.
Level 9	Learning outcomes at this level relate to the demonstration of knowledge and understanding which is the forefront of a field of learning. The outcomes relate to the application of knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar contexts related to a field of study. The outcomes are associated with an ability to integrate knowledge, handle complexity and formulate judgements. Outcomes associated with this level would link with



	employment as a senior professional or manager with responsibility for the work outputs of teams.
Level 10	Learning outcomes at this level relate to the discovery and development of new knowledge and skills and delivering findings at the frontiers of knowledge and application. Further outcomes at this level relate to specialist skills and transferable skills required for managing such as the abilities to critique and develop organisational structures and initiate change.

6.4. Level Indicators

The Framework levels set out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Eight sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence have been defined.

The sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence have been used to generate level indicators. Level indicators are broad descriptions of learning outcomes at a given level, in terms of the eight sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence. An overall NFQ level is defined by the complete set of strand indicators for that level. A Grid of Level Indicators has been developed and published.⁸

⁸ [NFQ Grid Level Indicators.pdf](#)

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6	LEVEL 7	LEVEL 8	LEVEL 9	LEVEL 10	
KNOWLEDGE BREADTH	Elementary knowledge	Knowledge that is narrow in range	Knowledge moderately broad in range	Broad range of knowledge	Broad range of knowledge	Specialised knowledge of a broad area	Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas	An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning	A systematic understanding of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning	A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning	KNOWLEDGE BREADTH
KNOWLEDGE KIND	Demonstrable by recognition or recall	Concrete in reference and basic in comprehension	Mainly concrete in reference and with some comprehension of relationship between knowledge elements	Mainly concrete in reference and with some elements of abstraction or theory	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory	Recognition of limitations of current knowledge and familiarity with sources of new knowledge; integration of concepts across a variety of areas	Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)	A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning	The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy review by peers	KNOWLEDGE KIND
KNOW-HOW & SKILL RANGE	Demonstrate basic practical skills and carry out directed activity using basic tools	Demonstrate limited range of basic practical skills, including the use of relevant tools	Demonstrate a practical range of practical and cognitive	Demonstrate a moderate range of practical and cognitive skills and tools	Demonstrate a broad range of specialised skills and tools	Demonstrate a comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools	Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study	Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and basic, use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct clearly guided research, professional or advanced technical activity	Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry	Demonstrate a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with a field of learning; develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials	KNOW-HOW & SKILL RANGE
KNOW-HOW & SKILL SELECTIVITY	Perform processes that are repetitive and predictable	Perform a sequence of routine tasks given clear direction	Select from a limited range of varied procedures and apply known solutions to a limited range of predictable problems	Select from a range of procedures and apply known solutions to a variety of predictable problems	Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to varied unfamiliar problems	Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems	Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing	Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques	Respond to abstract problems that require and redefine existing procedural knowledge	KNOW-HOW & SKILL SELECTIVITY
COMPETENCE CONTEXT	Act in closely defined and highly structured contexts	Act in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts	Act within a limited range of contexts	Act in familiar and unfamiliar contexts	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non-routine activities; transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of contexts	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts	Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts	Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts	COMPETENCE CONTEXT
COMPETENCE ROLE	Act in a limited range of roles	Act in a range of roles under direction	Act under direction with limited autonomy; function within familiar, homogeneous groups	Act with considerable amount of responsibility and autonomy	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities; join and function within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, transfer and function within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes; take significant or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work	Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiate activity	Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes	COMPETENCE ROLE
COMPETENCE LEARNING TO LEARN	Learn to sequence learning tasks; learn to access and use a range of learning resources	Learn to learn in a disciplined manner in a well-structured and supervised environment	Learn to learn within a managed environment	Learn to take responsibility for one's learning within a supervised environment	Learn to take responsibility for one's learning within a managed environment	Learn to evaluate own learning and identify needs within a structured learning environment; assist others in identifying learning needs	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group	Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically	Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing assessment/ professional development	Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts	COMPETENCE LEARNING TO LEARN
COMPETENCE INSIGHT	Begin to demonstrate awareness of independent role for self	Demonstrate awareness of independent role for self	Assume limited responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour	Assume partial responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour	Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others	Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others	Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them	COMPETENCE INSIGHT

This 10-Level Grid of Level Indicators forms part of the determination of the national framework of qualifications under section 7A(1) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1989. Note: The outcomes at each level include those of all the lower levels in the same sub-strand.

Figure 1- NFQ Grid of Level Indicators

The Grid shows how the outcomes in each of the sub-strands progress across the 10 levels. The level indicators support the inclusion of award-types at the appropriate level of the NFQ, based on the mix of learning outcomes.

6.5. Award-types

Award-types are central to the Framework. An award-type is a class of named awards sharing common features and level. At each level in the NFQ there is at least one award-type. Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor and for each award-type a wide range of named awards have been, and continue to be, developed.

QQI does not set the standards of the named awards of the Department of Education and the designated awarding bodies. However, it is through the award-types and their descriptors that these awards can be included in the Framework, as described in the Policies and Criteria for the



Inclusion of Awards in the National Framework of Qualifications.⁹ The NFQ level outcomes, level indicators and award-type descriptors are used to support consistency between named awards developed by a wide range of awarding bodies and providers.

The Framework is intended to enable the recognition of learning achievements, and the range of award-types facilitates this inclusiveness. Accordingly, five classes of award-types have been determined.

- Major award-types
- Minor award-type
- Special purpose award-type
- Supplemental award-type
- Professional award-type

Some award-types fulfil a broader range of purposes, and these are labelled major award-types. Other, more limited or specialised learning needs are met by minor, supplemental and special-purpose award-types.

Award Class	Description
Major	The main class of award made at each level. It represents a significant number of learning outcomes.
Minor	All minor awards are linked to a major award which allows learners the opportunity to build on their minor awards and work towards gaining a major award. It is important to note that minor awards are achievements in their own right.
Special Purpose	Specific areas of learning that have a narrow scope.
Supplemental	Learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.
Professional	These were developed to strengthen the capacity of the NFQ to resolve differences between levels of professional or occupation-oriented awards. The professional class implicitly introduced the concept that an award can have more than one class and type—e.g. a specific Honours Bachelor Degree award could be classed as both major and professional and would need to be consistent with the bachelor award-type as well as the professional award-type.

Table 1: Summary of award classes

⁹ [qp-24-core-policies-and-criteria-for-the-inclusion-of-awards-within-the-framework.pdf](#)



6.5.1. Major award-types

The major award-types are outlined in the Table below.

NFQ Level	NFQ Major Award-Types
1	Level 1 Certificate
2	Level 2 Certificate
3	Level 3 Certificate Junior Certificate
4	Level 4 Certificate
4/5	Leaving Certificate
5	Level 5 Certificate
6	Advanced Certificate Higher Certificate
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
8	Higher Diploma Honours Bachelor Degree
9	Postgraduate Diploma Masters Degree
10	Doctoral Degree Higher Doctorate

Table 2: Major award-types for NFQ Levels 1-10

6.5.1.1. Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate

The Junior Certificate is no longer awarded and has been replaced by the Junior Cycle spanning NFQ Levels 1-3, but an updated award-type descriptor has not yet been developed. The legacy Junior Certificate was placed at NFQ Level 3.

The content below is an excerpt from the original Determinations of the NFQ and describes the original process for including the Junior and Leaving Certificates in the Framework.

Excerpt from original Determinations for the NFQ



The award-type descriptors for the Junior and Leaving Certificates are defined to enable inclusion of these awards in the Framework. These descriptors are indicative rather than prescriptive in their intent. For the purpose of inclusion in the Framework:

- The Junior Certificate is defined on the basis of published aims, objectives and outcomes associated with the Junior Certificate as an education programme, incorporating the full spectrum of options and subjects. These are consistent with the indicators at NFQ Level 3.
- The Leaving Certificate is treated as a single award incorporating the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Leaving Certificate Established and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The published general aims, objectives and outcomes associated with the various Leaving Certificate options, in their totality, are consistent with indicators at NFQ Levels 4 and 5 so the award is viewed as involving learning outcomes and standards spanning these levels.

6.5.2. Non major award-types

The non-major award-types enable the recognition of a wider range of learning achievements and facilitate inclusivity. Generic award-type descriptors have been developed for minor, special purpose and supplemental awards while professional award-type descriptors have been developed for NFQ Levels 5-9 to support the inclusion of professional qualifications in the NFQ.

6.6. Differentiation of Further and Higher Education and Training

The delineation between further and higher education and the need to confirm the associated NFQ levels was repealed with the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 and is not found in the successor Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 2012. The delineation in the 1999 Act was associated with the two separate awards councils: Further Education and Training Council (FETAC) and Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) which were dissolved as part of the establishment of QQI. The 2012 Act is silent on the difference between further and higher education awards.

A higher education institution is legally defined (under the HEA Act 2022¹⁰) as being a provider delivering at least one programme leading to a major award included in the NFQ at NFQ Level 7 and above.

¹⁰ Higher Education Authority Act 2022

The Further Education and Training Act 2013¹¹ establishes the legislative framework for the governance and delivery of FET and the Education and Training Board Act 2013¹² includes FET as a function of ETBs.

¹¹ Further Education and Training Act 2013

¹² Education and Training Boards Act 2013



7. Major Award-Type Descriptors

While all the eight sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence have been determined for the major award-type, it is not the case that all the named major awards (developed by the awarding bodies) will be as comprehensive. They may not encompass learning achievements for all the sub-strands. This will be made apparent in the named awards for each of the award-types. Also, individual sub-strands of a named major award may be at a different level to the overall level of the major award-type.

Level 1 Certificate

Title	Level 1 Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	1
Volume	Small
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Elementary knowledge
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Demonstrable by recognition or recall
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate basic practical skills, and carry out directed activity using basic tools.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Perform processes that are repetitive and predictable
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in closely defined and highly structured contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act in a limited range of roles
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to sequence learning tasks; learn to access and use a range of learning resources
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Begin to demonstrate awareness of independent role for self
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Level 2 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate.
Articulation	

Level 2 Certificate

Title	Level 2 Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	2
Volume	Medium
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Knowledge that is narrow in range
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Concrete in reference and basic in comprehension
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate limited range of basic practical skills, including the use of relevant tools
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Perform a sequence of routine tasks given clear direction
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act in a range of roles under direction
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to learn in a disciplined manner in a well-structured and supervised environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Demonstrate awareness of independent role for self
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Level 3 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate.
Articulation	



Level 3 Certificate

Title	Level 3 Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	3
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Knowledge moderately broad in range
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Mainly concrete in reference and with some comprehension of relationship between knowledge elements
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a limited range of practical and cognitive skills and tools
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from a limited range of varied procedures and apply known solutions to a limited range of practical problems
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act within a limited range of contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act under direction with limited autonomy; function with familiar, homogenous groups
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to learn within a managed environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Assume limited responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Level 4 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate.
Articulation	



Junior Certificate

Title	Junior Certificate¹³
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	3
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Knowledge moderately broad in range
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Mainly concrete in reference and with some comprehension of relationship between knowledge elements
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a limited range of skills and tools in various domains of activity – artistic, intellectual, scientific, physical and practical.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Choose from a limited range of varied procedures and apply known solutions to a limited range of predictable problems
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act within a limited range of contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act under direction with limited autonomy; function with familiar, homogenous groups
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to learn within a managed environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Assume limited responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Leaving Certificate. Progression to programmes leading to a Level 4 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate.
Articulation	

¹³ Please note that the Junior Certificate has since been replaced with the Junior Cycle spanning NFQ Levels 1-3 but an award type descriptor is not available.



Level 4 Certificate

Title	Level 4 Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	4
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Broad range of knowledge
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Mainly concrete in reference and with some elements of abstraction of theory
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a moderate range of practical and cognitive skills and tools.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from a range of procedures and apply known solutions for a variety of predictable problems
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in familiar and unfamiliar contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act with considerable amount of responsibility and autonomy
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a supervised environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Assume partial responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Level 5 Certificate or at a higher level if appropriate.
Articulation	



Leaving Certificate

Title	Leaving Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	4/5
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Broad range of knowledge
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking with significant depth in some areas. Some underpinning theory.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a moderate range of practical and cognitive skills and tools.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from a range of procedures and apply known solutions for a variety of predictable problems. Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies.
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Identify and apply skill and knowledge to a moderately broad range of contexts. Take responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities. Function within familiar homogenous groups.
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Assume partial responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Level 5 Certificate, Level 6 Diploma, Ordinary Bachelor Degree or Honours Bachelor Degree
Articulation	



Level 5 Certificate

Title	Level 5 Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	5
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Broad range of knowledge
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a broad range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to varied unfamiliar problems.
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in a range of varied, and specific contexts taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts.
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities; join and function within multiple, complex and heterogenous groups
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour
Progression and Transfer	Progression to a programme leading to a Level 6 Diploma, Ordinary Bachelor Degree or Honours Bachelor Degree
Articulation	It is possible to progress into Year 2 of a programme leading to a Level 6 Diploma as the Level 5 Certificate is an intermediate qualification of the Level 6 Diploma.



	It is possible to progress into Year 2 of a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree or Honours Bachelor Degree where articular arrangements are in place or there is sufficient coherency of learning following an assessment.
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Advanced Certificate

Title	Advanced Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Formulate responses to well defined abstract problems
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Utilise diagnostic & creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often taken responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form and function within, multiple complex and heterogenous groups
Competence	Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment



- <i>Learning to Learn</i>	
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression and Transfer	Transfer to a programme leading to a Higher Certificate. Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree or to an Honours Bachelor Degree
Articulation	

Higher Certificate

Title	Higher Certificate
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	6
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Specialised knowledge of a broad area
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Formulate responses to well defined abstract problems



Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skills and knowledge in a wide variety of contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often taken responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form and function within, multiple complex and heterogenous groups
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others
Progression and Transfer	Transfer to a programme leading to an Advanced Certificate. Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree or to an Honours Bachelor Degree
Articulation	

Ordinary Bachelor Degree

Title	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	7
Volume	Large
Knowledge – <i>Breadth</i>	Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Recognition of limitations of current knowledge and familiarity with sources of new knowledge; integration of concepts across a variety of areas
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study.



Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes; take significant or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others
Progression and Transfer	Progression to a programme leading to a Higher Diploma or an Honours Bachelor Degree; Progression internationally to some second cycle degree programmes
Articulation	

Honours Bachelor Degree

Title	Honours Bachelor Degree
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	8
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)



Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Utilise advanced skills to conduct research or advanced technical or professional activity accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts.
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogenous groups.
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Express a comprehensive, internalised personal world view manifesting solidarity with others.
Progression and Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to the Higher Diploma at NFQ Level 8. Progression to programmes leading to Post-graduate Diplomas and Masters Degrees, or in some cases, to programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree. Progression internationally to second cycle degree programmes.
Articulation	



Higher Diploma

Title	Higher Diploma
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	8
Volume	Medium
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity.
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Utilise advanced skills to conduct research or advanced technical or professional activity accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts.
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups.
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Express a comprehensive, internalised personal world view manifesting solidarity with others.



Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to Post-graduate Diplomas and Masters Degrees, or in some cases, to programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree. Progression internationally to second cycle degree programmes.
Articulation	From an Ordinary or Honours Bachelor Degree into a new field of learning

Master's Degree

Title	Master's Degree
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	9
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	A systematic understanding of knowledge at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and illdefined contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiative activity



Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree, or transfer to another Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma.
Articulation	

Post-graduate Diploma

Title	Postgraduate Diploma
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	9
Volume	Medium
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	A systematic understanding of knowledge at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts



Competence - <i>Role</i>	Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiative activity
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them
Progression and Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to a Masters Degree.
Articulation	May be exempted from part of a programme leading to a Masters Degree.

Doctoral Degree

Title	Doctoral Degree
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This is a multi-purpose award type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training.
Level	10
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning.
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of quality to satisfy review by peers.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with a field of learning; develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials.



Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts.
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them
Progression and Transfer	
Articulation	

Higher Doctorate

Title	Higher Doctoral Degree
Class of Award-Type	Major
Purpose	This award largely recognises excellent and distinguished contributions to learning. It may be used for career progression to advanced levels of academia and research.
Level	10
Volume	Large
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	The systematic development of a large and coherent body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning.
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	The creation and interpretation of seminal knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of quality to satisfy review by peers.
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Bring to publication the output of scholarly work in the production or application of knowledge in a form that admits to scholarly assessment



Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Make a substantial and sustained contribution to the application of knowledge and skill, perhaps in novel contexts
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Acts as a recognised leading authority, influencing others in a field of learning over a period of time
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them
Progression and Transfer	None
Articulation	This award is never based on a provider's programme and, as such, is not subject to validation but is assessed by the awarding body for each individual learner. Normally, the learner already holds a first doctorate or equivalent for some period of time prior to becoming a candidate for the higher doctorate



8. Non-Major Award-Type Descriptors

8.1. Background

The policies and criteria for the framework established by the Authority set out that, as well as major award-types, there are four other kinds of award- types in the framework. The non-major award-types enable the recognition of a wider range of learning achievements and facilitate inclusivity.

Generic award-type descriptors have been developed for minor, special purpose and supplemental awards (ie) not specific to an NFQ Level or specific type of award. Named awards will be generated by awarding bodies based on the generic award-type descriptor and with reference to the grid of level indicators for the specific NFQ Level.

The descriptors are intended to enable as wide an array of awards as possible to be developed at different levels of the framework.

8.1.1. Purpose and Relationships

The non-major awards, their purpose and relationships are outlined in the table below. Purpose of the award-type is key to differentiating between major, and non-major award-types.

Award-type	Purpose	Relationships
Minor	provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right	Always linked to a major award
Special purpose	specific, relatively narrow purposes	May comprise learning outcomes that also form part of major awards
Supplemental	learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.	Always build upon a previous award

8.1.2. Volume

Volume is, along with purpose, one of the main ways to differentiate between these award-types and the major award-types. Volume has two dimensions - volume of learning outcomes and

comprehensiveness of sub-strands. Both dimensions will be smaller for the minor, supplemental and special purpose award-types than for the major award-types. The volume, in both learning outcomes and comprehensiveness of sub-strands, of non-major award-types is quite variable across the named awards developed by awarding bodies as these can be any size, just smaller than major award-types. The volume of learning outcomes will vary across fields of learning as well as across levels.

The overall package of learning outcomes for a named award must correspond to those of the award-type to which it belongs. It is considered that a similar variation in volume of learning and of sub-strands should also obtain for other classes of award-types. On this basis, it is a matter for the awarding bodies, in the context of their overall responsibilities for determining standards and developing awards, to set out any further details or requirements concerning the volume of named awards.

8.1.3. Titling

The titles of named awards of minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types are important. The titles of these awards should be consistent with the titles of major award-types and should be clearly distinguished in a consistent way from named major awards and from each other so as to enhance understanding and avoid any confusion. These distinctions should be signalled in supporting documentation and communication about the award-types, e.g., in certificate and diploma supplements.

8.1.4. Levelling

Minor, supplemental and special purpose awards may often specify standards for fewer than the eight sub-strands. In some cases, their focus may be narrow and only a small number of sub-strands may be defined. If only one sub-strand is defined for the award then the level to which the award-type is allocated is decided on the basis of that strand. If more than one sub-strand is defined, a best-fit principle will apply. This will take into account the purpose and context for developing the award (and, where relevant, its link to other awards).

8.1.5. Micro-credentials

The non-major award-type descriptors can be used to support the development of micro-credentials and/or micro-qualifications leading to awards included in the NFQ.

8.2. Minor Awards

Minor awards, while having relevance in their own right, are always part of at least one major award. They facilitate the recognition of part of the learning outcomes of a major award. The range of learning outcomes they specify will have relevance in its own right. These awards will always be smaller in volume than the major award of which they are a part. Awarding bodies may develop their own approaches about what is the smallest part of a major award that is to be recognised as being a minor award. It is recognised that while constituent parts of a major award may be recognised as a minor award, awarding bodies may also allocate credit to parts (or units) of an award as a way to recognise the achievement of particular learning outcomes. Thus, awarding bodies may use minor awards and credit as distinct tools to recognise learning

Class of Award	Minor Award
Purpose	Multi-purpose award-type that recognises attainment of part of a major award and which has relevance in its own right.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable – smaller than the major award of which it is part
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Begin to demonstrate awareness of independent role for self
Progression and Transfer	Transfer to programmes leading to attainment of a part of one or more major awards



	Transfer to programmes leading to special purpose awards
Articulation	
Link to other awards	Learning outcomes form part of those of a major award

8.3. Special Purpose Awards

Special purpose awards are standalone and have a distinct identity which reflects their clearly defined purpose. There is no requirement that they be linked to a major award. They may however be integral to a major or minor award. A special purpose award will always be significantly smaller in volume than a major award. A special purpose award may also relate to more limited strands of learning outcomes than a major award. It is possible that a special purpose award could, for example, focus on discrete skills (concentrating on the skill strands of learning outcomes) only.

Class of Award	Special Purpose
Purpose	To meet specific, relatively narrow focused legislative, regulatory, economic, social or personal learning requirements
Level	Any level – best fit
Volume	Variable – between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Role</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Variable
Competence	Variable



- <i>Insight</i>	
Progression and Transfer	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
Articulation	
Link to other awards	Learning outcomes may form part of those of a major award, minor award or supplemental award

8.4. Supplemental Awards

Supplemental award-types are for learning that is additional to a previous major or special purpose award. In general, these are at the same level as the awards to which they are additional and the learning outcomes within the individual sub-strands are usually at the same level as in the previous award.

Class of Award	Supplemental
Purpose	For learners who have already obtained a major or special purpose award. May be for refreshing/updating and continuous education and training with respect to an occupation/profession.
Level	Generally, the same level as the major or special purpose award to which it is linked
Volume	Variable – between small and medium
Comprehensiveness	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Breadth</i>	Variable
Knowledge - <i>Kind</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Range</i>	Variable
Know-how and skill - <i>Selectivity</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Context</i>	Variable
Competence	Variable



- <i>Role</i>	
Competence - <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Variable
Competence - <i>Insight</i>	Variable
Progression and Transfer	Progression to programmes leading to major awards at the next level in a related field of learning
Articulation	From major or special purpose award at the same level
Link to other awards	Learning outcomes are closely linked to those of a major award or of a special purpose award – they generally reflect a deepening of learning, up-dating or specialisation

8.5. Professional Award-Type

The professional award-type descriptors support the inclusion of more professionally and/or vocationally oriented qualifications in the NFQ. The professional award-type must be used in conjunction with another award-type (ie) major, minor, special purpose and supplemental. If it is used with a major award, then it must be used in conjunction with the specific major award-type descriptor (ie) Advanced Certificate, Bachelors Degree etc.

Note: *Professional Award-Type Descriptors to be included in final version of this document following focused consultation process.*



9. Conclusion

These policies and criteria provide a single, clear and authoritative basis for the continued implementation of the NFQ. By setting out its purposes, values, structure, award-types and the respective responsibilities of QQI, awarding bodies and providers, the policies and criteria support a coherent, inclusive and trusted qualifications system. Their consistent application will help ensure that qualifications remain transparent, quality assured, relevant and capable of supporting recognition, progression, mobility and lifelong learning.

Appendix 1: Policies replaced by these Policies and Criteria

These policies and criteria supersede the following policy documents:

- Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications
- Determinations for the Outline of the National Framework of Qualifications
- Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-Types
- Professional Award-Type Descriptors
- Higher Doctorate Award Descriptors

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