# AWARDS STANDARDS -

# GENERIC HIGHER EDUCATION

# AND TRAINING

## GENERIC STANDARDS

The Qualifications (Education & Training) Act 1999 required the Higher Education and Training Awards Council to determine standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners "before a higher education and training award may be made".

To this end it adopted the National Framework of Qualifications' generic award-type descriptors as generic awards standards. These generic awards standards form the basis of all awards standards.

Programmes may be validated against the generic awards standards subject to being reviewed following the publication of an applicable non-generic award standard.

Award standards identify the expected outcomes of learning, inclusive of all education and training for a particular award-type. They concern the knowledge, know-how and skill, and competence that are expected from the learner who is to receive an award. They include both general standards for a particular award-type and specific standards for named awards in particular subjects or fields of learning. Learners holding awards of the same award-type should have comparable standards of knowledge, skill and competence.

The three different types of learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence) have been further sub-divided (Appendix 2). It should be possible to include all relevant learning outcomes within one or more of these strands. While it is recognised that all forms of learning cannot be accurately captured by the assessment methods available, only learning which can be assessed reliably against standards can be included.

Refer also to the policy, criteria and determinations concerning the National Framework of Qualifications.

These standards were originally determined by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in November 2003 and reissued with a new foreword by QQI in July 2014. They are QQI awards standards under section 84 (10) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012.

## APPENDIX 1

**Generic Standard**

**Higher Certificate**

| Title | Higher Certificate |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | Specialised knowledge of a broad area |
| Knowledge - kind | Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory |
| Know-how and skill - range | Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools |
| Know-how and skill - selectivity | Formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems |
| Competence - context | 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 - role | Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups |
| Competence – learning to learn | Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group |
| Competence - insight | Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others |
| Progression & Transfer | Transfer to programme leading to an Advanced Certificate (Level 6)<br><br>Progression to a programme leading to an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (Level 7) or to an Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8). |
| Articulation | |

**Generic Standard**

**Ordinary Bachelor Degree**

| Title | Ordinary Bachelor Degree |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas |
| Knowledge - kind | 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 - range | Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study |
| Know-how and skill - selectivity | Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes |
| Competence - context | Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts |
| Competence - role | 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 – learning to learn | Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group |
| Competence - insight | Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others |
| Progression & Transfer | Progression to programme leading to an Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8) or to a Higher Diploma (Level 8)<br><br>Progression internationally to some second cycle (i.e. " Bologna masters") degree programmes. |
| Articulation | |

**Generic Standard**

**Honours Bachelor Degree**

| Title | Honours Bachelor Degree |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning |
| Knowledge - kind | 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 - range | 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 - selectivity | 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 - context | 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 |
| Competence - role | Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups |
| Competence – learning to learn | Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically |
| Competence - insight | Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others |
| Progression & Transfer | Transfer to programmes leading to Higher Diploma (Level 8). Progression to programmes leading to Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma (Level 9, or in some cases, to programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree (Level 10). Progression internationally to second cycle (i.e. "Bologna masters") degree programmes |
| Articulation | |

**Generic Standard**

**Higher Diploma**

| Title | Higher Diploma |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning |
| Knowledge - kind | Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field |
| Know-how and skill - range | 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 - selectivity | 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 - context | 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 |
| Competence - role | Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups |
| Competence – learning to learn | Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically |
| Competence - insight | Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others |
| Progression & Transfer | Progression to programmes leading to Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma (Level 9) |
| Articulation | From an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (Level 7), or from an Honours Bachelor Degree (Level 8), into a new field of learning |

**Generic Standard**

**Masters Degree**

| Title | Masters Degree |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | A systematic understanding of knowledge at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning |
| Knowledge - kind | A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning |
| Know-how and skill - range | Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry |
| Know-how and skill - selectivity | Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques |
| Competence - context | Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill defined contexts |
| Competence - role | Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiate activity |
| Competence – learning to learn | Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development |
| Competence - insight | Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them |
| Progression & Transfer | Progression to programmes leading to Doctoral Degree (Level 10), or to another Masters Degree or to a Post-graduate Diploma (9) |
| Articulation | |

**Generic Standard**

**Post-graduate Diploma**

| Title | Post-graduate Diploma |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | A systematic understanding of knowledge, at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning |
| Knowledge - kind | A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning |
| Know-how and skill - range | Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry |
| Know-how and skill - selectivity | Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques |
| Competence - context | Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill defined contexts |
| Competence - role | Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiate activity |
| Competence – learning to learn | Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development |
| Competence - insight | Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them |
| Progression & Transfer | May exempt from part of the programme leading to a Masters Degree (Level 9) |
| Articulation | |

**Generic Standard**

**Doctoral Degree**

| Title | Doctoral Degree |
|---|---|
| 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 - breadth | A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning |
| Knowledge - kind | The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy review by peers |
| Know-how and skill - range | 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 - selectivity | Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge |
| Competence - context | Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts |
| Competence - role | Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes |
| Competence – learning to learn | Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts |
| Competence - insight | Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them |
| Progression & Transfer | |
| Articulation | |

## GENERAL NOTES:

- The titles used for the Generic Standards are National Framework of Qualifications determinations.

- The descriptors are all for general purpose major awards, and the purpose descriptor is common for all award-types in the set.

- The level defined for each award-type refers to the NFQ's 10-Level Grid of level indicators.

- The volume descriptor is based on an initial general understanding of small, medium and large.

- The sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence defined for each descriptor are in each case taken from the 10-Level Grid of level indicators.

- Progression and transfer possibilities listed for each descriptor are those typically associated with the particular award-type: the listing is intended to describe possibilities rather than to be prescriptive or exhaustive. In accordance with the NFQ policies in relation to Access, Transfer and Progression[1], the aim will be that the framework concept itself will greatly facilitate access, transfer and progression. It is also of note that, for each descriptor, transfer should generally be possible from a given named award to a programme leading to some other named award of the same award-type. This overall approach does not imply entitlement to a programme place, which may be limited by factors of supply and demand.

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1    Policies, Actions and Procedures for the Promotion and Facilitation of Access, Transfer and Progression, NQAI, March 2003.

## APPENDIX 2

**Learning Outcomes**

Three different types of learning outcomes have been identified – knowledge, know-how and skill and competence. These have been further subdivided as follows, in order to facilitate elaboration:

- Knowledge – Breadth; and Kind

- Know-how and skill – Range; and Selectivity

- Competence – Context; Role; Learning to learn; and Insight

These sub-strands aim to answer the following questions:

1. How extensive is the learner's knowledge?
2. What nature or quality of knowing has the learner engaged in?
3. How extensive are the physical, intellectual, social and other skills demonstrated by the learner?
4. How complicated are the problems that a learner can tackle using the skills acquired and how does a learner tackle them?
5. In what contexts is a learner able to apply his/her knowledge and skills?
6. How much responsibility can the learner take, personally and in groups, for the application of his/her knowledge and skills?
7. To what extent can the learner identify the gaps in his/her learning and take steps to fill those gaps?
8. How far has the learner integrated the intellectual, emotional, physical and moral aspects of his/her learning into his/her self-identity and interaction with others?

**Knowledge**

This is the form of learning outcome commonly identified with declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the cognitive representation of ideas, events or happenings. It can be derived empirically from practical or professional experience as well as from formal instruction or study. Such knowledge has meaning outside any specific context of application or practice. It can comprise description, memory, understanding, thinking, analysis, synthesis, debate and research. Any new knowledge is not simply added to the knowledge a learner has before, but is conditioned by the nature, richness and structure of one's previous knowledge and, furthermore, serves to modify and restructure the latter, however partially.

**Knowledge – breadth**

Knowledge outcomes are associated with facts and concepts; that is, they refer to knowledge of, or about, something. The more diverse, complex and varied the facts and concepts, the greater the breadth of knowledge and this is a matter of level. Breadth is be distinguished from the number of different facts and concepts learned, which relates to volume.

**Knowledge – kind**

The representation of facts and concepts, including ideas, events or happenings, is cumulative. The more facts and concepts are layered on top of each other, and draw successively upon each other to construct meaning, the higher the level of learning. This process is typically associated with progressively greater abstraction from concrete phenomena into theory.

**Know-how and skill**

Skill is the goal-directed performance of a task in interaction with the environment. The exercise of a skill is the performance of a task that in some way responds to or manipulates the physical, informational or social environment of the person. Know-how underpins skill but is not identical to skill. Know-how, or savoir-faire, is the procedural knowledge required to carry out a task. Know-how may be accompanied, or scaffolded, by declarative knowledge while a skill is being acquired but, unlike procedural knowledge, this declarative knowledge is not an intrinsic part of the skill. Know-how may be measured directly or implied from performance. Skill can only be measured by performance.

**Know-how and skill – range**

Skills, in both his/her execution and the demonstration of underpinning procedural knowledge, encompass the use of many different kinds of tool. Tool refers to any device or process that facilitates individuals having some effect on his/her physical, informational or social environment. Tools include cognitive and social processes as well as physical implements. Tools, and the skills to use them, range from commonplace or familiar to novel or newly-invented. The sheer number of skills acquired is a matter of volume, rather than of level. The diversity of skills is a feature of this strand that contributes to differentiation in level. The completeness of the set of skills (and associated know-how) in respect of an area of activity is another feature that helps indicate the level.

**Know-how and skill – selectivity**

The performance of tasks depends on the learner having an appropriate understanding of the environment in which the tasks are performed and being aware of his/her own ability and limitations, while at the same time being able to correctly judge the fit between the demands and ability. Whereas the range of know-how and skill refers to what a learner can do, selectivity (which might also be called procedural responsiveness) refers to the judgement that the learner exercises in carrying out procedures, through selecting from the range of know-how and skills available to him/her, in accordance with his/her appraisal of the demands of the task.

**Competence**

The practical application of knowledge and/or skill requires learning beyond his/her primary acquisition. The unique characteristic of competence is the effective and creative demonstration and deployment of knowledge and skill in human situations. Such situations could comprise general social and civic ones, as well as specific occupational ones. Competence draws on attitudes, emotions, values and sense of self-efficacy of the learner, as well as on declarative and procedural knowledge. Competence refers to the process of governing the application of knowledge to a set of tasks and is typically acquired by practice and reflection. Some aspects of performance in situations may depend on innate characteristics of an individual. Inasmuch as such performance is not learned it cannot be recognised as learning. Competence also encompasses the extent to which the learner can acknowledge his/her limitations and plan to transcend these through further learning. Moreover, while basic knowledge and skills can be described more or less independent of context, for the description of competence it is essential to make explicit the range of contexts in which the learner can demonstrate his/her competence. Competence outcomes can thus be stated in the form, "In a specified range of circumstances, a learner will be able to …".

**Competence – context**

Human situations, whether occupational or general social and civic ones, supply the context within which knowledge and skill are deployed for practical purposes. Such situations range in complexity and hence in the demands they place upon the person acting in them. Highly defined and structured situations or contexts constrain the behaviour of the individual and require lower levels of learning. The range of responses required, and hence the extent to which a broader range or higher level of knowledge and skill have to be drawn upon also depends on how predictable the context is. Acting effectively and autonomously in complex, ill-defined and unpredictable situations or contexts requires higher levels of learning.

**Competence – role**

For many purposes, joining and functioning in various kinds of group is a key component in putting knowledge and skill to effective use. Joining a group successfully requires individuals to adopt appropriate roles within the group. This requires the application of social skills and an understanding of the tasks of the group. Higher levels of competence are associated with playing multiple roles as well as with roles requiring leadership, initiative and autonomy. Higher competence is also associated with participation in more complex and internally diverse groups.

**Competence – learning to learn**

This strand encompasses the extent to which an individual can recognise and acknowledge the limitations of his/her current knowledge, skill and competence and plan to transcend these limitations through further learning. Learning to learn is the ability to observe and participate in new experiences and to extract and retain meaning from these experiences. While drawing on other aspects of knowledge, skill and competence, this sub-strand places an emphasis on the relationship of the learner to his/her own learning processes. This provides a basis for abstraction and generalisation that, in principle, facilitates regarding this as a separate sub-strand of competence.

**Competence – insight**

Insight refers to ability to engage in increasingly complex understanding and consciousness, both internally and externally, through the process of reflection on experience. Insight involves the integration of the other strands of knowledge, skill and competence with the learner's attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive style and personality. This integration is made clear in the learners' mode of interaction with social and cultural structures of his/her community and society, while also being an individual cognitive phenomenon. A learner's self-understanding develops through evaluating the feedback received from the general environment, particularly other people, and is essential to acting in the world in a manner that is increasingly autonomous.

**Volume**

Volume of standards of knowledge, skill and competence refers to the amount of knowledge, skill and competence at a particular level or levels. The greater the amount of knowledge, skill and competence, the greater the volume. The volume measure does not necessarily specify the kind or mix of knowledge, skill and competence.