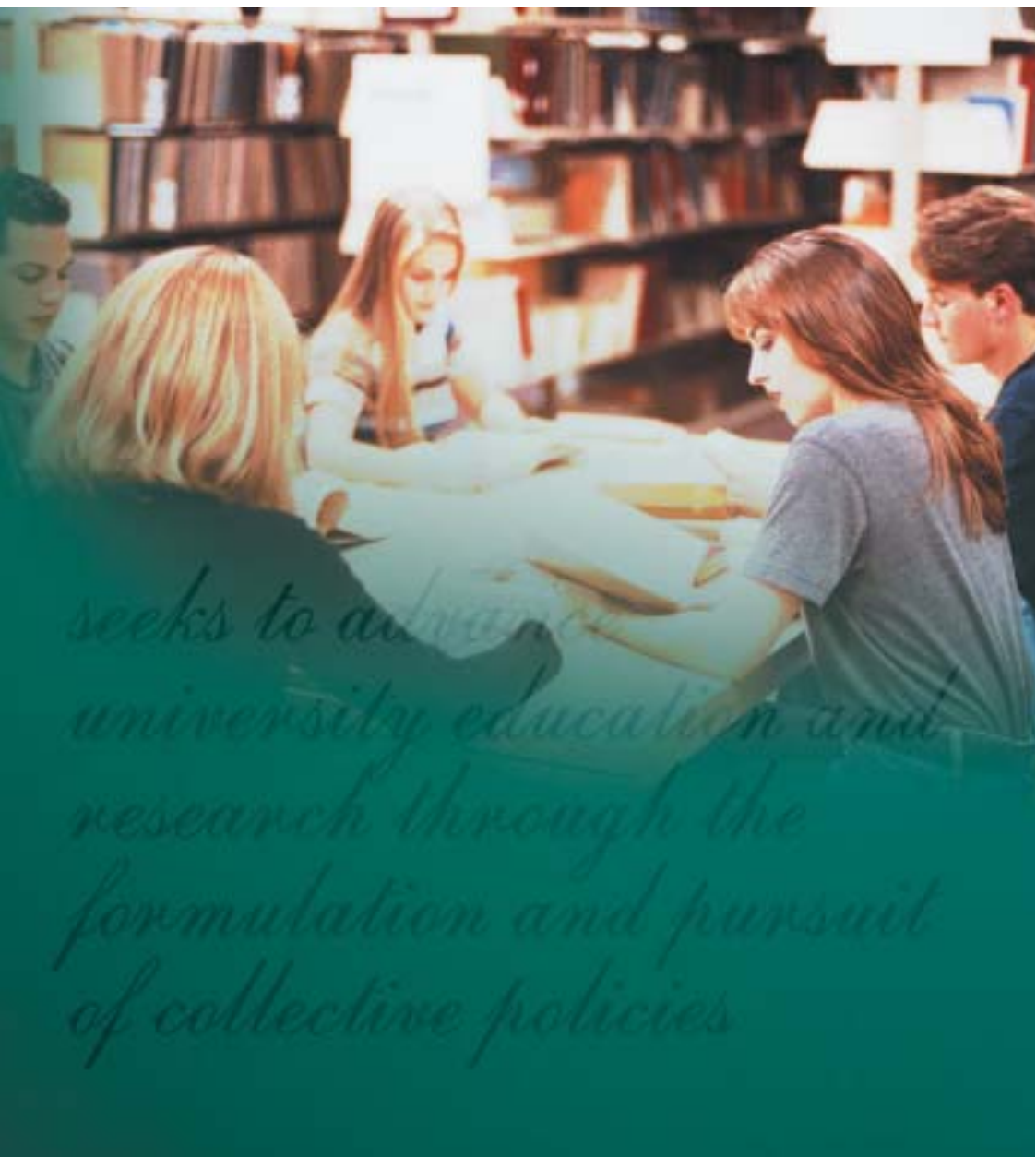


# The Universities and the National Framework of Qualifications



*seeks to advance  
university education and  
research through the  
formulation and pursuit  
of collective policies*



# The Universities and the National Framework of Qualifications

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# Preface



The launch of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 has been another important step in the process of ensuring a

seamless spectrum of educational opportunity in Ireland.

As the major providers of higher education and research in the country, we – the universities – naturally have our part to play in ensuring that this Framework promotes a nationwide culture of lifelong learning across the country, based on the principles of opportunity, access, transfer and progression throughout the education sector.

The Framework will therefore also promote the ongoing development of human capital as the essential component of our knowledge-based economy.

This document is produced by the Irish Universities Association for use particularly by staff, students and stakeholders in our higher education system, in order to encourage greater understanding of the purposes of the National Framework of Qualifications and the enhanced transparency – at home and abroad - of the degrees and other awards we make.

We therefore need to apply the philosophy of the Framework within each university and throughout the sector to ensure that coherence, comparability and transparency – the key goals of the Framework – are achieved.

I would like to express our collective gratitude to Dr Caroline Hussey, former Registrar of University College Dublin, who represents the Universities on the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and who drafted this document for us.

Prof. Ferdinand von Prondzynski  
President, Dublin City University  
President, Irish Universities Association, 2005

# The Legislative Framework

Following a lengthy consultative process with all stakeholders, including the universities, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act was enacted by the Oireachtas in 1999.

The Act established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in order to develop a national framework of qualifications, to promote the maintenance of standards of awards made by further and higher education bodies, other than the universities, and to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression by learners, including at universities.

The NQAI is made up of 14 members, all broadly representative of stakeholders in learning. The Act provides that one member should be a nominee of the universities. The current Irish Universities Association (IUA, formerly Conference of Heads of Irish Universities) delegate is Dr Caroline Hussey, former UCD Registrar. The full current membership of the NQAI is listed in Appendix 1.

The 1999 Act also established two Awards Councils, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). These Councils have a range of responsibilities in relation to the making of awards, the validation of programmes and quality assurance outside the university sector. The functions and responsibilities of HETAC are very similar to those of the former National Council for Educational

Awards (NCEA), which it replaced. As well as taking over functions formerly carried out by the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA), FETAC has also taken over a range of activities from FÁS, Fáilte Ireland (CERT), BIM and Teagasc, related to the recognition of learning.

The Act gives both Councils the power, subject to approval by the NQAI, to delegate authority to make awards to designated education and training providers. Following satisfactory review of the programme(s) of education and training and of the operation and management of the provider, FETAC may delegate authority to make any further education and training award to FÁS, CERT (now Fáilte Ireland) or Teagasc, and HETAC may delegate authority to make higher education and training awards to any “recognised institution” (effectively, any Institute of Technology).

The Dublin Institute of Technology, which is empowered to make its own awards under the terms of a 1992 Act, is required by the 1999 Act to “*facilitate and assist the Authority in carrying out its functions*”. The 1999 Act also provides a role for the NQAI in relation to quality assurance procedures in the DIT.

# The NQAI and the Universities

The Act makes a distinction between the seven existing universities designated by the Universities Act 1997 and any new university which may be established in the future in accordance with the provisions of Section 9 of the Universities Act.

The power of the existing universities to make awards themselves is implicitly recognised in the 1999 legislation, and the existing universities are required by the Act to “*cooperate with and give all reasonable assistance to the Authority*”. Universities may apply to HETAC or FETAC for validation of programmes. The 1999 Act also amends sections 35 and 49(b) of the 1997 Universities Act to provide that the HEA, when carrying out a statutory review of the quality assurance procedures in the universities, must consult with the NQAI.

The NQAI has more extensive powers in relation to any potential “Section 9” university which might be established in the future, in relation to strategic planning, access, transfer and progression and quality assurance. Sections 35 and 49(b) of the 1997 Universities Act would not apply to new universities.

# A Qualifications Framework

Of the three principal objectives of the NQAI set out in the 1999 Act, the first is *“to establish and maintain a framework... for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State... based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners.”*

## What is a Qualifications Framework?

A Qualifications Framework:

- defines and describes the outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, which characterise awards and qualifications at different levels;
- defines the relationship between levels and indicates how a learner may progress from one level to another;
- positions certain key qualifications (major award-types) at the levels appropriate to them.

## Why have a Qualifications Framework?

A Qualifications Framework serves a range of purposes:

- for learners, it clarifies the status of a qualification and how to progress from one qualification to another;
- for education and training providers it defines the standards, in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies, to be achieved by persons qualifying for an award;
- for employers and other stakeholders it describes the knowledge, skills and competences which can be expected from holders of a qualification.

In broader terms, the goals of a Qualifications Framework are to promote coherence, comparability and transparency across the education system, in order to encourage access, transfer and progression through the system, in the interest of developing lifelong learning opportunities and individual and collective human potential.

# The National Framework of Qualifications

The 1999 Act gives responsibility to the NQAI for establishing the policies and criteria on which a national framework of qualifications should be based.

Following its establishment, the NQAI embarked on an extensive programme of consultation with stakeholders to define the architecture of the National Framework of Qualifications. In November 2001 it launched a discussion document, *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications*, and invited responses to the issues raised in the document.

The NQAI received a large number of submissions from interested parties, and members of the NQAI met all the principal stakeholders, including IUA and the universities, to discuss their submissions.

On the basis of these consultations, and the conclusions of a stakeholder consultative group representing education and training providers, including the universities and other interested groups, a broad consensus among stakeholders emerged which enabled the NQAI to determine the outline architecture and main features of the Framework. These were published in 2003<sup>1</sup>.

The NQAI has defined the National Framework of Qualifications as *“the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured*

*and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.”*

The NQAI will undertake a Framework review in 2007.

## Framework Architecture

The main elements of the National Framework of Qualifications are as follows:

- it is a single framework encompassing all awards made in the State by the Department of Education and Science (Examinations Commission), FETAC, HETAC, DIT, the universities and other recognised awarding bodies;
- there are 10 levels in the Framework: secondary school and Further Education and Training awards are accommodated at levels 1 to 6, while Higher Education and Training awards are accommodated at levels 6 to 10. The full range of levels is shown in Appendix 2;
- the Framework is “outcomes based”. Each level is defined by a level indicator - a series of statements defining the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by the learner for an award at that level.

<sup>1</sup> NQAI, *“The National Framework of Qualifications – an overview”, October 2003.*

## Level Indicators

Each level of the Framework is defined by a set of level indicators. These are statements which define the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by a learner who qualifies for an award at that level. The indicators are defined under eight strands or categories:

1. knowledge - breadth
2. knowledge - kind
3. know-how and skill - range
4. know-how and skill - selectivity
5. competence - context
6. competence - role
7. competence – learning to learn
8. competence - insight.

Indicators for the ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications can be seen in Appendix 3.

## Award-Types

The concept of award-type is central as this is the mechanism through which individual and named awards are included in the Framework. An award-type is a class of named awards (e.g. Masters Degrees) at the same level sharing common features. Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor and for each award-type a wide range of named awards already exists or is being developed.

An award-type may be Major, Minor, Special-purpose or Supplemental. Major award-types are the principal class(es) of awards made at each level and are characterised by a broad range of learning outcomes (see Appendix 4). Minor award-types do not have the full range of learning outcomes associated with the major award-type(s) at that level. Special purpose award-types are made for specific, narrow purposes, while supplemental award-types recognise the acquisition of additional or updated knowledge, skills and competencies.

To date, the work of the NQAI has concentrated on major award-types and their placement within the Framework. All levels of the Framework are characterised by one or more major award types.

## Major Award Types

The Framework accommodates many awards or qualifications which are familiar in the context of education and training in Ireland, e.g. the Junior and Leaving Certificates, bachelor and masters degrees and doctorates. In the context of the framework, these are referred to as major award-types.

An initial list of sixteen major award types has been determined, as follows:

| <b>Level</b> | <b>Award Type</b>  |
|--------------|--|
| 10           | Doctoral Degree and Higher Doctorate                     |
| 9            | Masters Degree and Postgraduate Diploma                  |
| 8            | Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma               |
| 7            | Ordinary Bachelor Degree                                 |
| 6            | Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate <sup>2</sup> |
| 5            | Level 5 Certificate (FETAC)                              |
| 4/5          | Leaving Certificate                                      |
| 4            | Level 4 Certificate (FETAC)                              |
| 3            | Level 3 Certificate (FETAC) and Junior Certificate       |
| 2            | Level 2 Certificate (FETAC)                              |
| 1            | Level 1 Certificate (FETAC)                              |

For each major award-type there is an award-type descriptor which specifies the level of the award, its purpose, volume and descriptors of the knowledge, skills and competence acquired by learners; it also indicates pathways of progression, transfer and articulation (see Appendix 4).

## Minor, special purpose and supplemental award types

The Framework can also accommodate ranges of minor, special purpose and supplemental award types which the universities and other awarding bodies have traditionally made and continue to make. These award types are currently being examined in detail by the respective bodies and the NQAI in order to determine the best ways of fitting them fully into the Framework.

<sup>2</sup> *Advanced Certificate is the further education and training award-type and Higher Certificate is the higher education award-type at Level 6.*

# Implications of the Framework for the Universities

The level indicators and award-type descriptors set the overall standards of awards made by FETAC, HETAC and the DIT. The NQAI does not set standards for awards made by the Universities or by the State Examinations Commission (Department of Education and Science). However, the award-type descriptors are the yardstick which has been used to reach agreement between the universities and the NQAI for the accommodation of university awards within the Framework.

Achieving a broad consensus on the architecture of the Framework and on the descriptors of levels and major award-types constituted a major landmark in the work of the NQAI. However, implementation of the Framework now requires sustained work by the awarding bodies, i.e. the Awards Councils and education and training providers, including the universities.

The inclusion of all university awards in the National Framework of Qualifications will be of great benefit to the universities and, more particularly, to students and prospective students. The level of each award will be made clear in university prospectuses and other promotional literature. Following discussions between IUA and the NQAI, significant progress has already been made in relation to Doctoral Degrees, Masters Degrees, Honours Bachelor Degrees and Ordinary Bachelor Degrees. The current use of minor, special purpose and supplemental awards is also being examined.

# Fitting Awards into the Framework

FETAC and HETAC are currently working to develop new systems of awards in the context of the National Framework. In July 2004, it was announced that HETAC, together with the DIT, had completed a transformation of their awarding systems and that new awards would be offered at levels 6 – 10 for programmes commencing in autumn 2004, including the Higher Certificate, Ordinary Bachelors Degree, Honours Bachelors Degree, Higher Diploma, Masters Degree, Postgraduate Diploma and Doctoral Degree. The previous awards, National Certificate and National Diploma, are no longer available.

Preparation of material for publication in the *CAO Handbook 2005* focused the attention of the universities and other higher education providers on the placement of primary degrees within the Framework. Virtually all primary degrees awarded by the universities are Level 8 awards (Honours Bachelor Degree), and the IUA and NQAI agreed that they should be described as such in the CAO literature.

A small number of Level 7 degrees (Ordinary Bachelor Degree) are awarded by some universities, but these are usually “exit mechanisms” from programmes which normally lead to Level 8 degrees.

It should be noted that the distinction between Level 7 and Level 8 degrees is based on whether candidates can potentially be awarded an honours degree, rather than on the performance of an individual candidate. For example, the B.A. Hons in the NUI universities is a level 8 award; candidates for the B.A. Hons who pass their examinations but do not achieve an honours grade receive a level 8 award. However, not achieving an honours grade in the B.A. could, of course, affect a graduate’s progression to Level 9. Thus, the honours grade remains a distinction made by universities in the results classification system for awards, while the term Honours Bachelor degree is now the accepted title of the level 8 degree award.

In order for the universities to complete the fitting of their awards into the framework, three types of award still need to be addressed. These are

1. postgraduate diplomas
2. sub-degree level awards
3. legacy / historical awards.

## Postgraduate Diplomas

Among major award-types, the National Framework of Qualifications distinguishes between postgraduate diplomas at level 8 and level 9. This determination was made by the NQAI following extensive consultation with HETAC, the universities and other higher education and training providers.

The distinction is based on the view that postgraduate diplomas are awarded:

(a) on foot of conversion courses, where the outcome is the acquisition of new knowledge at the same level of complexity as the Honours degree and/or the application of existing knowledge in particular, vocational contexts (Higher Diploma - level 8), or

(b) as staging posts in, or exit points from, programmes leading to Masters degrees (Post-graduate Diploma - level 9).

The university Registrars are currently discussing the placement of diplomas at levels 8 and 9. It is obviously important that a consensus be reached, particularly in relation to similar programmes and awards offered by more than one university.

## Sub-degree Awards

Most universities, particularly through their Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education programmes, also offer a wide variety of sub-degree awards. These vary widely, within and between universities, in complexity and volume, as well as purpose.

Some university degree courses designed specifically for adult students provide staging posts where candidates may qualify for a certificate and/or diploma, so that students who might not be in a position to complete the course do not leave empty handed. These full degrees are usually level 8 awards, while the sub-degree awards could be accommodated at levels 6 and/or 7, perhaps by the use of minor awards.

While many sub-degree level awards made by the universities appear to be special purpose awards not explicitly linked to any particular degree award, a smaller number of awards are also made as a result of study courses designed to qualify mature students for entry to primary degree programmes. Some of these smaller awards may also entitle students to exemption from certain elements of the degree programme. The appropriate level for each of these awards in the National Framework of Qualifications is currently being examined. Initial discussions among the universities and between the universities and the NQAI suggest that

awards which qualify the holders for entry to degree programmes on grounds of mature years should generally be at level 5 and those that qualify holders for exemptions should be at level 6.

However, the dimension of *volume* also requires attention, since the courses leading to these awards may vary greatly in length. This will be addressed in terms of *credits*.

## Legacy / Historical Awards

A number of universities have in the past made awards which today are no longer on offer. These can be termed historical awards. Examples include the BA Pass. The holders of such awards, as well as employers and other stakeholders, need to know where they fit into the new framework of qualifications.

Legacy awards are those made by awarding bodies prior to the determination of the National Framework of Qualifications. Most university awards have continued in the context of the Framework, e.g. Honours Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate and there is a *de facto* continuity pre- and post-Framework in relation to these. Others, however, have ceased or will cease to be made, such as those of former awarding bodies, FÁS and Teagasc. These awards need to be placed in the Framework as suitably as possible, in the interest of the award holders, employers and other stakeholders. The task of placing legacy awards in the Framework is now well advanced.

<sup>3</sup> NQAI, "Principles for operational guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training", November 2004

## Professional Awards

The NQAI is currently addressing questions relating to inclusion within the Framework of awards and other qualifications offered by professional bodies.

A large number of professional bodies make awards or extend other benefits, e.g. membership, to candidates in Ireland. Some of these bodies have statutory rights and responsibilities under Irish legislation. Other professional bodies operate on a non-statutory basis.

A number of statutory professional bodies award qualifications which entitle the holder to membership of a profession. Others do not make their own awards but operate by recognising awards made by the universities or other awarding bodies; such bodies fulfill their statutory obligations by regular monitoring of the quality and standards of recognised awards.

In September 2004, the NQAI published a draft policy approach on the inclusion of professional awards in the Framework and is now consulting with professional bodies and other stakeholders. It is envisaged that inclusion in the Framework would be appropriate only for awards made by professional bodies whose responsibilities are defined by statutory instruments.

## Credit Accumulation

Where the quantity of learning outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and/or competences required for an award is significantly less than for a major award-type at the same level, it is envisaged that the award in question will be described in terms of credits to clarify its quantitative relationship to the major award.

The NQAI, in consultation with the Awards Councils, the universities and other providers, has adopted a set of “Principles for operational guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training”<sup>3</sup>. These principles are compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accommodation System (ECTS), which is already in use throughout the Irish higher education sector.

<sup>3</sup> NQAI, “Principles for operational guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training”, November 2004

# Access, Transfer and Progression

To facilitate access and progression, particularly for mature students, most universities are developing systems of credit accumulation which allow students to progress to a degree or other award at their own pace. The implementation of a national credit system within the context of the National Framework, as proposed by NQAI in November 2004, will further promote lifelong learning by facilitating the accumulation of credits obtained from different awarding bodies.

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) are also important for mature students. Most universities, formally or informally, use some form of APEL. For example in provision for matriculation on grounds of mature years recognises life experiences in addition to academic achievements. In June 2005, the NQAI adopted, in consultation with the universities, the Awards Councils and other providers, a set of principles and operational guidelines regarding the recognition of prior learning.

## The Role of the NQAI

The 1999 Qualifications Act obliges the NQAI to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. In particular, the NQAI is charged with developing and publishing procedures to be adopted by the universities and other providers of education and training for access, transfer and progression. Specifically, the NQAI is required to *“facilitate and advise universities in implementing the procedures”* and, in consultation with the HEA, to *“review the implementation of these procedures by the universities”*.

## Transfer and Progression

The National Framework of Qualifications itself is an important instrument in promoting and facilitating transfer and progression because it will bring increasing clarity to the learning outcomes associated with each award. Together with the development of a transparent credit system and progress towards the issuing of detailed transcripts (the Diploma Supplement) by all higher education and training providers, as agreed across Europe through the Bologna Process, the Framework will make it easier for learners to demonstrate the level of knowledge, skill and competence they have achieved.

Similarly, education and training providers, including the universities, will be able, by reference to the Framework, to provide intending students with clearer information on the status of each award and possible progression pathways available to recipients of awards.

Many issues remain to be addressed by the universities and NQAI concerning transfer and progression, particularly in relation to developing transparent pathways of progression from level 7 to 8.

Because of the impact of the Equality Act and the Freedom of Information Act on the transparency of procedures used by universities to select students for admission to postgraduate programmes, difficulties are not anticipated in relation to transfer and progression from level 8 to levels 9 or 10.

## Access

The main focus of the NQAI's interest in access to university relates to the development of alternative pathways of access for both school leavers and mature students.

Currently, the Leaving Certificate (established or vocational programme) is virtually the only pathway by which school leavers can enter university. Students who take the Leaving Certificate Applied or who perform poorly in the LCE or LCVP are effectively barred from entering university until they reach the age of 23. However, the universities are exploring alternative pathways based on the former NCVA level 2 award (now replaced with a new FETAC award at level 5 designed to Framework specifications) and most are piloting alternative modes of admission to specific programmes. In addition, the IUA, the HEA and the NQAI are currently completing research on these pathways and their potential.

All universities allow matriculation on the grounds of mature years to students aged 23 or over, and most primary degree programmes reserve some places for mature students. As the cohort of school leavers declines, the universities will probably wish to recruit larger numbers of mature students, and there are national targets in this respect. IUA has identified a number of problems relating to admission of mature students, including:

- the procedures used for the selection of mature students are not always transparent and little feedback is given to unsuccessful applicants;
- the number of mature students entering programmes other than the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is very small because many potential applicants lack the basic scientific and/or mathematical knowledge and skills required for entry to programmes in scientific disciplines.

The universities are currently addressing these and other issues relating to the admission of mature students, in order to develop procedures which are more consistent and transparent, and to identify appropriate pathways to degree programmes in Science and Technology.

In order to encourage more effective access policies, a rethinking of financial support for part-time students and part-time programmes will be critical in terms of extending mature student access to the universities. IUA will continue to make representations to the HEA to address these inequalities. There is likewise considerable scope for improved provision of information regarding alternative routes of access to higher education.

# Quality Assurance

The NQAI has statutory responsibility to promote the maintenance of standards of awards made by the Awards Councils, the DIT and, in the future, any new university set up under section 9 of the Universities Act. This responsibility is discharged by reviewing the implementation of procedures by FETAC, HETAC and the DIT.

The NQAI does not have a role in quality assurance in the universities, except to the extent that the HEA, when reviewing quality assurance procedures in the universities, under sections 35 and 49(b) of the Universities Act, must consult the NQAI. This occurred during the 2004/05 Review of Quality Assurance in Irish Universities, commissioned by the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the HEA and undertaken by the European University Association (EUA)<sup>4</sup>. The NQAI assisted the HEA's high level reference panel established to oversee the effectiveness of this review.

The IUQB is a non-statutory body established by the universities in 2002 and plays an increasingly important role in coordinating QA procedures in the universities, identifying best international practice and representing the universities nationally and internationally on issues of quality assurance. The IUQB, NQAI and IUA are members of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network<sup>5</sup>, together with other stakeholders in Irish higher education.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.iuqb.ie>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.iheqn.ie>

# The Way Ahead

The National Framework of Qualifications is now firmly established across the Irish education system and is already having positive effects in terms of encouraging greater transparency and coherence, with benefits for users, providers and other stakeholders.

To accommodate the needs of learners and other stakeholders and to realise all the benefits of the National Framework, the universities are working to ensure that all our awards fit appropriately into the Framework, and that improved access, transfer and progression continue to be facilitated. This will require concerted work between the universities and other tertiary education providers and cooperation between all the partners in education if we are to meet the challenge of strengthening our culture of lifelong learning in Ireland.

The National Framework of Qualifications has already been useful in developing a transparent guide to the comparison of qualifications between the UK and Ireland<sup>6</sup>. In the context of the development of an overarching European Qualifications Framework, within the Bologna Process, the Irish qualifications framework will also become an essential tool for the mobility, transfer and progression of students and graduates across Europe.

For further information:

Irish Universities Association:  
[www.iaa.ie](http://www.iaa.ie)

National Framework of Qualifications:  
[www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie)

National Qualifications Authority  
of Ireland:  
[www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie)

<sup>6</sup> NQAI, "Qualifications can cross boundaries - a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland", June 2005.

# 1. Members of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

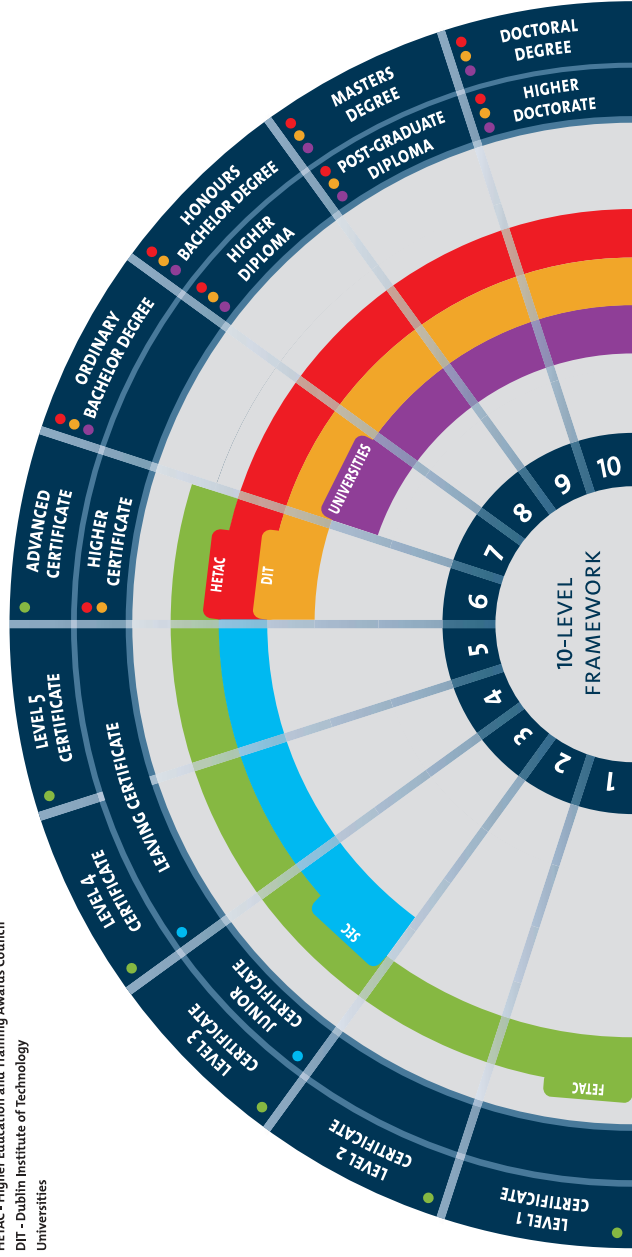
(as of August 2005)

|                      |  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Mr Richard Langford  | Chair  | National Qualifications Authority of Ireland   |
| Ms Inez Bailey       | Director<br>Nominated by   | National Adult Literacy Agency<br>the Minister for Education & Science as<br>representative of Community & Voluntary<br>Organisations  |
| Mr Jim Dorney        | General Secretary<br>Nominated by  | Teachers Union of Ireland<br>Irish Congress of Trade Unions  |
| Mr Tony McDonnell    | President<br>Nominated by  | Union of Students of Ireland<br>the Minister for Education and Science as a<br>Representative of Learners                              |
| Fr. Nicholas Flavin  | Nominated by   | the Minister of Education & Science  |
| Mr Donal Kerr        | Regional Director<br><br>Nominated by  | FÁS, The National Training and Employment<br>Authority, Sligo<br>the Tánaiste and the Minister for Enterprise,<br>Trade and Employment |
| Dr Caroline Hussey   | Nominated by   | Irish Universities Association   |
| Ms Caroline Nash     | Assistant Director<br>of Enterprise  | Irish Business and Employers Confederation   |
| Ms Marie O'Mahony    | Accreditation Officer<br>Nominated by  | National Accreditation Board<br>Forfás   |
| Prof. Ciarán Murphy  | Professor<br><br>Chair   | Business Information Systems,<br>University College Cork,<br>Higher Education and Training Awards Council                              |
| Prof. Joyce O'Connor | President<br>Chair   | National College of Ireland<br>Further Education and Training Awards Council   |
| Dr Abrar Hasan       | Head of Education<br>and Training Division<br>Co-Opted by the<br>Authority Members | Directorate for Education OECD   |
| Prof. Anne Moran     | Dean of Faculty of<br>Social Sciences<br>Co-Opted by the<br>Authority Members      | University of Ulster   |
| Mr Seán Ó Foghlú     | Chief Executive  | National Qualifications Authority of Ireland   |

## 2. National Framework of Qualifications diagram

### KEY

- FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education & Science)
- HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities



The diagram illustrates the National Framework of Qualifications. The 10-level structure is shown as segments in a 'fan'. The Framework contains a set of 16 award-types for which descriptors have been published. The award-types are listed in the outer rings of the diagram.

The diagram also illustrates the various awarding bodies whose awards are included in the Framework. These are shown as bands extending across the levels of the Framework as appropriate.

### 3. Level indicators for National Framework of Qualifications

|   | Level 1   | Level 2  | Level 3   | Level 4  | Level 5   |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Knowledge - Breadth</b>              | Elementary knowledge  | Knowledge that is narrow in range  | Knowledge moderately broad in range   | Broad range of knowledge   | Broad range of knowledge  |
| <b>Knowledge - Kind</b>                 | 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   |
| <b>Know-how and skill - Range</b>       | 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 limited range of practical and cognitive skills and tools   | Demonstrate a moderate range of practical and cognitive skills and tools                         | Demonstrate a broad range of specialised skills and tools   |
| <b>Know-how and skill - Selectivity</b> | 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  |
| <b>Competence - Context</b>             | 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 |
| <b>Competence - Role</b>                | 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                                 |
| <b>Competence - Learning to Learn</b>   | 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 own learning within a supervised environment                    | Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment  |
| <b>Competence - Insight</b>             | 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  |

| Level 6   | Level 7  | Level 8   | Level 9   | Level 10  |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| 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 knowledge, at, or 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  |
| 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   |
| Demonstrate 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 tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely 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 |
| 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 expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge   |
| 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  |
| 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 | 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   |
| 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 academic/professional development   | Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts   |
| 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   |

## 4. Award-type descriptors

Example of an Award-type descriptor

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Title</b>                            | Honours Bachelor Degree  |
| <b>Class of Award-type</b>              | Major  |
| <b>Purpose</b>                          | 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.  |
| <b>Level</b>                            | 8  |
| <b>Volume</b>                           | Large  |
| <b>Knowledge - breadth</b>              | An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning   |
| <b>Knowledge - kind</b>                 | Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)  |
| <b>Know-how and skill - range</b>       | 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  |
| <b>Know-how and skill - selectivity</b> | Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing   |
| <b>Competence - context</b>             | 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  |
| <b>Competence - role</b>                | Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups  |
| <b>Competence - learning to learn</b>   | Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically  |
| <b>Competence - insight</b>             | Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others  |
| <b>Progression &amp; Transfer</b>       | Transfer to programmes leading to Higher Diploma.<br>Progression to programmes leading to Masters Degree or Post-graduate Diploma, or in some cases, to programmes leading to a Doctoral Degree Progression internationally to second cycle (i.e. "Bologna masters") degree programmes |



