

QUALIFICATIONS MATTER.

a brief guide to the
National Framework of Qualifications



I'm in ...

a few words ...

There are a number of important changes taking place in the qualifications system in Ireland. The most significant is the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications, the NFQ.

The NFQ is a system of ten levels. It is designed to incorporate awards made for all kinds of learning wherever it is gained. It puts the needs of the learner first and supports the national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society'. It seeks to eliminate education and training cul-de-sacs.

The transparent nature of the NFQ allows learners to compare and contrast qualifications and to plan their education and training and career progression. It aids employers in recognising and understanding the level and standard of qualifications, acting as a tool for identifying 'appropriate fit' qualifications for specific roles.

The international dimension of this development is important from an individual and an economic perspective. The introduction of the related initiatives of Europass and Qualifications Recognition – Ireland – which enables the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland – illustrate this.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland would therefore like to invite you to explore this introduction to the NFQ and to discover how the NFQ, Qualifications Recognition-Ireland and Europass can benefit you. To learn more about any of these topics please visit the NFQ website: www.nfq.ie.



Seán Ó Foghlú
Chief Executive
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

the origins of the National Framework of Qualifications

In 1999, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act was passed. The purpose of the Act was to put the learner at the centre of education and training in Ireland by supporting and recognising lifelong learning. The Act focused on issues such as the establishment of consistent standards in education and training, the promotion of quality, increasing access, transfer and progression opportunities and being able to recognise and compare qualifications gained both in Ireland and abroad.

In order to address these important issues, the Act proposed the development of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence, i.e., what a person knows, can do and understands at a given level.



a note on the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is an agency of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It has responsibility for developing and maintaining the NFQ.

It is also responsible for promoting and facilitating greater access to education and training and progression from one qualification to another, through the NFQ.

There shall stand *established a body to be known as Údarás Náisiúnta Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann or ... the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland ... to perform the functions conferred on it by or under this Act ... to establish and maintain a framework, being a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State (in this Act referred to as a "framework of qualifications"), based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners.*

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999

what are the benefits of the NFQ?

for the Learner ...

The NFQ can help you as a learner to plan your education and training and career progression. It allows you to compare and contrast qualifications. It helps you to make informed choices about the qualifications you choose and to recognise the progression routes that may be open to you upon completion, thereby avoiding education and training cul-de-sacs.

Qualifications that are included in the NFQ are quality assured. They meet nationally agreed standards and are subject to internal and external reviews to ensure that they maintain those standards. Education and training providers that deliver qualifications in the NFQ are also quality assured internally and externally.

Qualifications in the NFQ are recognised nationally and internationally and they will retain their value.

The NFQ will make it easier for employers (for employment or advancement purposes) and education and training institutions (should you wish to undertake additional learning) to understand your qualifications.

With a qualification in the NFQ ... you're in!



for the Employer/Recruiter ...


Correspondingly, the Framework presents benefits for employers and recruiters.

The NFQ makes it easier for you to recognise and understand the level and standard of current and prospective employees' qualifications.

The levels of the NFQ are based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. This presents a new and better way to identify the most 'appropriate fit' qualifications for a position.

As the NFQ provides a way of comparing qualifications gained abroad with the national qualifications system, it directly benefits employers and recruiters by enabling the recognition of suitably qualified applicants.

Apart from major awards, the NFQ also includes qualifications that are awarded for the achievement of smaller packages of learning. It thereby offers a concrete means of rewarding employees for their participation in continuous professional development programmes.



Qualifications Matter. So whether you're in school, returning to learning, applying for a job or thinking about taking your education and training to the next stage, it's now easier for everyone – employers and learners – to recognise and understand the national qualifications system.

the NFQ in action ...

how does the NFQ work?

The NFQ was launched in October 2003 and the process of implementing it has moved quickly. Qualifications leading to awards in the NFQ have been in place throughout higher education and training since the autumn of 2004. The FETAC system of further education and training qualifications was introduced in the summer of 2006.

The 'fan diagram' (opposite) helps to illustrate the levels on the NFQ, the awarding bodies and the major types of qualifications that are included in the new system of qualifications (e.g. Junior Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Honours Bachelor Degree etc.).

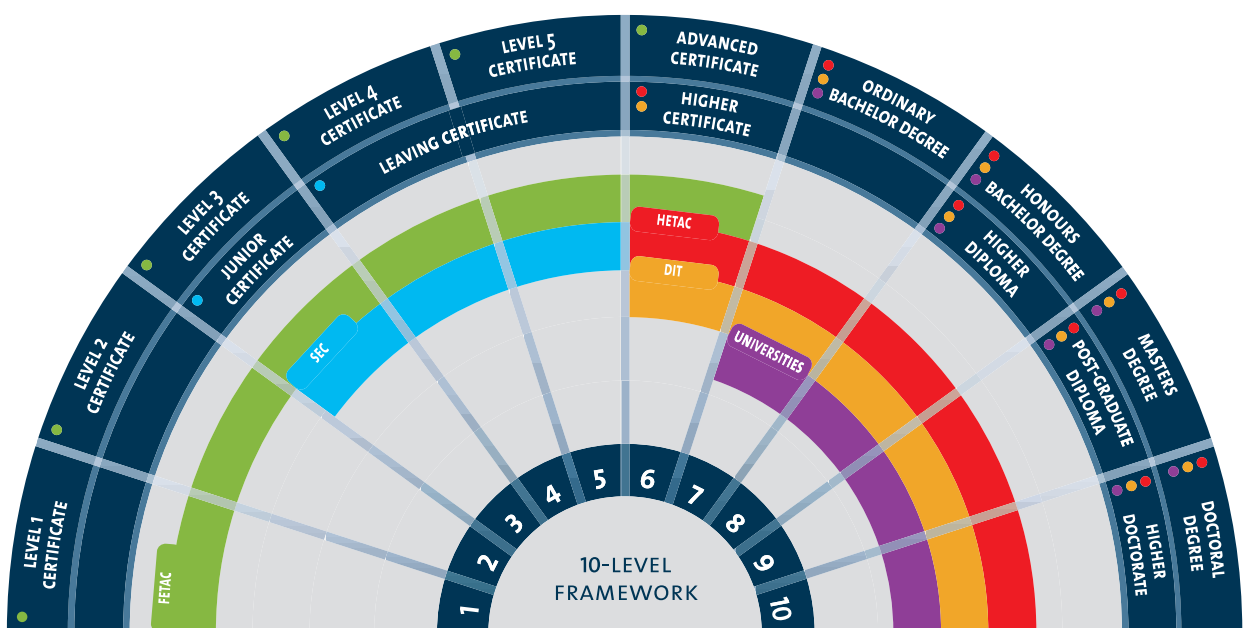
In terms of the nature and structure of the NFQ, the following points are worth noting:

- the ten NFQ levels capture all learning, from the very initial stages to the most advanced



- qualifications achieved in school (SEC), further education and training (FETAC) and higher education and training (HETAC, the DIT, the Universities) are all included
- the NFQ currently has 16 large or 'major' awards (as seen in the outer part of the diagram below). Apart from these major awards the NFQ also includes hundreds of other qualifications awarded for smaller learning achievements. These are known as 'minor', 'special purpose' and 'supplemental' qualifications
- Each level on the NFQ is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence
- each qualification that is included in the NFQ is quality assured
- every provider delivering programmes that lead to qualifications in the NFQ is quality assured.

The National Framework of Qualifications



See it at www.nfq.ie

the NFQ in action ...

are some NFQ qualifications new?

Yes. For example, the Level 5 Certificate and the Ordinary Bachelor Degree are new types of award. These awards will become more familiar features in the education and training scene in the short to medium term.

You will also notice a number of major awards featured in the 'fan diagram' (pg 9) that you are familiar with – for instance the Junior Certificate is at Level 3, the Leaving Certificate is at Levels 4 and 5 and the Honours Bachelor Degree is at Level 8.

what about other familiar qualifications that aren't appearing in the 'fan diagram'?

Some previous qualifications are not included in the NFQ – for instance the National Certificate and the National Diploma. However, these, and many other qualifications from previous systems, have already been placed on the NFQ. This means that these awards retain their equivalent value against new qualifications and that the holders of these awards are not disadvantaged by the new system of qualifications. The relevant awarding body will be able to provide information about where previous awards have been placed on the NFQ.



are ‘professional awards’ included in the NFQ?

The Qualifications Authority recently published a policy on how the awards of some professional bodies can be recognised through the NFQ. This is a voluntary process for these bodies but it is expected that more professional qualifications will feature in the NFQ in the coming years.

what about awards made in Ireland by awarding bodies based outside of Ireland?

Provision has also been made for some qualifications awarded in Ireland by bodies from other countries. This is on the basis that these bodies fulfil the criteria that have been set out by the Qualifications Authority.

what about qualifications gained outside of Ireland – can they be recognised here?

The introduction of the NFQ has aided the recognition of qualifications, not only for holders of NFQ awards travelling abroad but also for those travelling to this country with qualifications gained outside the State. Pages 12 and 13 provide an overview of two important developments in this regard, *Qualifications Recognition – Ireland and Europass*.

Award: An award (used interchangeably with ‘qualification’) records that a learner has achieved a standard of knowledge, skill and competence.

Awarding body: A national body that has the legal power to make an award in Ireland.

FETAC: Further Education and Training Awards Council. Established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. Makes all further education and training awards included in the NFQ.

HETAC: Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. Makes awards for the Institutes of Technology and other non-university higher education colleges and institutions. Has ‘delegated authority’ to the Institutes of Technology to make their own awards.

the European and International dimension

In recent years, an increased emphasis has been put on the importance of qualifications being portable and recognisable, in both a European and an international context. In this respect, the NFQ is a national initiative that is linked in with similar developments that are taking place in other countries and at an overall European level. Two of these important initiatives are Qualifications Recognition – Ireland and Europass.

Qualifications Recognition – Ireland

The Qualifications Authority is the Irish centre for the recognition of international awards which is known as Qualifications Recognition – Ireland. It represents Ireland in a European network of centres that promote the recognition of international awards throughout Europe. Qualifications Recognition – Ireland has evolved in line with the introduction of the NFQ. It facilitates the recognition of qualifications gained outside of Ireland, by comparing the NFQ with qualifications frameworks in other countries and with overall European frameworks. Applications can also be dealt with on an individual basis.

learn more at: www.qualificationsrecognition.ie

Europass

Europass aims to help individuals to have their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe, thereby increasing the mobility of both learners and workers.

Europass consists of five documents which help to describe learning achievements in a coherent manner. Included in the five documents are a Curriculum Vitae and a Language Passport. Europass also includes Supplements that explain in detail the meaning of the qualifications held by a learner.

the Europass documents

- **Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
- **Europass Language Passport**
- **Europass Mobility**
- **Europass Certificate Supplement**
- **Europass Diploma Supplement**

See them at: www.europass.ie



getting in touch ...

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the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

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the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

Website: www.fetac.ie
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the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)

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