

Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann
National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland



CORPORATE PLAN

2006-2008

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Chairperson's Foreword



This is the second Corporate Plan to be published by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland since its establishment in 2001. As well as documenting the Authority's plans for the upcoming period 2006-2008, the publication also contains a report on the work of the Authority over the last two years. Although the report relates principally to the work of the Authority itself, it also highlights the many activities and projects which the Authority has undertaken in partnership with national stakeholders. Such collaboration has been an essential feature of the Authority's work since its inception, and has helped to ensure that substantial progress has been made on the important national endeavour of developing and implementing the National Framework of Qualifications and the underpinning aim of creating a lifelong learning society in Ireland.

The Authority's plans for the upcoming period seek to build upon the progress that has been made to date with regard to the implementation of the Framework, and the general effort to refocus arrangements for the accessing of learning opportunities and the recognition of learning achievements upon the needs of the learners themselves. As part of this general effort, the Authority's activities in the area of recognising international awards will be expanded significantly during the lifetime of this plan. In addition, as the designated National Europass Centre, the Authority will also take on a new role in relation to the transparency of qualifications by co-ordinating and promoting the use of the Europass portfolio of documents. In all of these endeavours, collaboration between the Authority and its stakeholders will be an essential part of the change process. Over the next three years all of those involved in education and training will need to continue to work together to make the National Framework of Qualifications a reality for learners, providers and awards bodies and for society as a whole. In particular, education and training providers will face the challenge of establishing more and diverse opportunities for learners which will lead to recognition in an appropriate way in the Framework and to progression to further learning or to the labour force.

As was the case with its initial Corporate Plan, it is recognised by the Authority that there will be a need to revisit this plan during its lifetime. This will help to ensure that the work of the Authority remains focussed and that it will be responsive to national and international developments as they arise during the ongoing implementation of the Framework.

Dick Langford
Chairperson

Part I - Introduction

1 Introduction

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established on 26 February 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The arrangements for membership of the Authority are set out in the Act and provide for a broad basis of background and expertise in the membership of the Authority. The current members of the Authority are listed in appendix 1. The Authority currently has 17 members of staff. These are listed in appendix 2.

The Authority is committed to leading a cultural change in learning, the ultimate aim of which is to place the needs of the learner at the centre of the national education and training systems. To bring about this change, the Authority has a range of functions to perform, including its two principal tasks:

- To establish and maintain a National Framework of Qualifications
- To promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression.

Through the performance of these two principal tasks, the Authority aims to facilitate the creation of a more diverse learner community with more diverse needs throughout the entire span of education and training. This community will include more adults and more learners participating in part-time programmes. It will also include those in employment who are seeking to update or extend their awards, and learners

with a variety of special needs. The creation of such a community of learners will also necessitate the establishment of new entry arrangements, more systematic recognition of prior learning, new types of provision and new arrangements for progression, as learners seek to avail of learning experiences appropriate to their ambitions, commitment and capacities, and to receive due recognition for what they have achieved.

Since the publication of the Authority's initial Corporate Plan in late 2003, substantial progress has been made with regard to the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications, and in providing a good platform for the future achievement of this broader cultural change in learning. The Framework sets out the arrangements for the future of Irish qualifications. This has meant more than simply fitting all existing awards into the Framework. Rather, the awarding bodies have agreed collectively to use a set of 16 major award-types defined in terms of 'learning outcomes'. Thus the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the State Examinations Commission are developing and making awards on the basis of these award-types. As of autumn 2005, ten of the 16 Framework award-types are in use. In addition, implementation arrangements for the other six award-types to be made by FETAC are underway.

While it is encouraging to reflect on the progress which has been made to date, and which has been documented in Part II of this publication, there still remains much to be done. It is the intention of the Authority, through the themes, objectives and action lines set out in Part III of this publication, to build upon what has been achieved so far; and, in collaboration with stakeholders, to ensure that the Framework and the associated policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression deliver tangible benefits for an increasingly diverse learner community.

2. Mission Statement

The Authority will lead a cultural change, in partnership with stakeholders, with the aim of achieving

- wide recognition of outcomes of learning, and
- improved access for learners to quality learning opportunities.

Part II – Report

3 Introduction to Report

The Authority is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 to prepare a report on its activities at least every two years. The Authority published its first such report in December 2003 and this is the second report of the Authority covering the period December 2003 to December 2005.

This report relates to the operations and performance of the Authority from December 2003 to December 2005. In particular, it refers to the themes, objectives, action lines and performance indicators set out by the Authority in its Corporate Plan for the period from December 2003 to December 2006. It also has regard to the action lines for this Corporate Plan which were updated and published in June 2004. In so doing, the Authority is reporting on the implementation of the initial Plan from December 2003 to December 2005 and the revised action lines of June 2004.

This report also refers to the performance indicators which the Authority itself established. The measurement of the performance indicators is, in the first instance, a check-list that the actions to be undertaken have been undertaken. Given that the Authority's initial Corporate Plan was for a three year period and that plans for a review of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2007 are being made, the Authority did

not undertake any specific survey work for the purposes of this report. However, in the context of undertaking formal and informal consultation and submissions processes since 2004, the Authority is in a position to have a view in relation to its performance in relation to each of the indicators. The indicators will become increasingly relevant in the context of the statutory review of functions of the Authority and in particular of the review of the Framework.

The following grouping of functions of the Authority through themes has been considered helpful by the Authority in planning for the performance of its functions:

- National Framework of Qualifications
- Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners
- Supporting the Awards Councils
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology
- International Policy Engagement
- International Recognition of Awards
- Organisation Culture of the Authority.

This report is structured on the basis of the themes. In relation to each of the themes, an outline of the actions undertaken by the Authority since 2003 is set out, as too is the relationship of these actions to those in the initial Corporate Plan and the revised action lines.

4 Report on Thematic Functions and Objectives 2004-5

4.1 Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that by autumn 2006 all of the policies and criteria of the Authority in relation to the Framework will have been determined, the initial major award-types in the Framework will be fully implemented and that planning will have been completed for the commencement of a review of the operation of the Framework

This objective is well on the way to being attained by December 2005. All of the initial policies and criteria are in place for the Framework. Further policies are under development for the inclusion of statutory professional awards in the Framework. Implementation is well underway by awarding bodies and other stakeholders. Planning for the review of the Framework has commenced.

4.1.1 Further Framework development

The principal areas where actions have taken place are as follows:

- FETAC is working on the basis of having a single major award-type for each level at which it operates

- The descriptor for the higher doctorate award-type was determined in summer 2004
- Descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types were determined in summer 2004
- Draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of professional awards in the framework were published in autumn 2004
- Draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of international awards in the framework were published in autumn 2004
- Additional policies and criteria on the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework were determined in spring 2005

Arising out of the publication of the draft policies on the inclusion of awards in the Framework, consultation is underway. Consultation is also underway on the policy approach for the inclusion in the framework of existing awards made by the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission, other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, and the policy approach on the approval of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology.

4.1.2 Implementation of the Framework

The Authority has continued to work closely with stakeholders in the implementation of the Framework. The principal areas where actions have taken place are as follows:

- The Authority worked with higher education awarding bodies and providers in ensuring that coherent implementation arrangements for the National Framework of Qualifications within higher education and training were put in place by summer 2004 and announced. This included the use of the Framework by the CAO for entry into higher education and training in autumn 2005
- FETAC is working closely with the Authority and parallel arrangements for further education and training were announced in autumn 2005 with a view to implementation in autumn 2006
- The Authority has continued discussions with the universities on the inclusion in the Framework of awards made by the universities other than the major awards at level 7 to 10. The Authority commenced a series of bi-lateral meetings with the universities in spring 2005
- The Authority has facilitated linkages between the awarding bodies in the common usage of fields of learning based around the ISCED classification system
- The Authority has worked with awarding bodies, providers of education and training and professional bodies in enabling the linking/referencing of the National Framework of Qualifications to national and international sectoral frameworks
- The Authority, with the co-operation of awarding bodies, completed research on national and international practice in award classifications in further and higher education in summer 2005
- The Authority has worked closely with awarding bodies and providers of education and training in the implementation of its existing policies and criteria on the titles of awards
- The Authority established a policy approach to an overall framework directory in summer 2004 and is working with stakeholders in implementing this

4.1.3 Advocacy and Promotion

The Authority has continued to take a lead role in advocating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the development of the Framework generally and the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression. This role has included

- working with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in contributing to policy-making at national level in areas of relevance to the work of the Authority
- participation in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups
- participation in debate and discourse on issues relevant to qualifications and to access, transfer and

progression, including the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops as appropriate.

The Authority has kept its own policy approach to communications under review and has sought to ensure with stakeholders that shared communications responsibilities are being met.

In July 2004, the Authority, together with higher education awarding bodies and providers, announced the implementation arrangements for the national framework of qualifications within higher education and training.

The Authority hosted a Framework implementation conference in Galway in February 2005 with the active co-operation of stakeholders. Over 300 people attended and it was a very useful step in moving towards a fully-implemented Framework.

A new Framework website was put in place in summer 2004 and the Authority's own website was updated in spring 2005.

4.1.4 Placement of existing and previous awards

From February 2003 onwards the Authority has been engaged in discussions with stakeholders, and particularly awarding bodies, in relation to the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework. The placement of such HETAC awards was

agreed by the Council and the Authority in March 2004. The placement of the majority of such FETAC awards was agreed by the Council and the Authority in January 2005 and the placement of the remaining ones was agreed in May 2005. The placement of former DIT awards was agreed in March 2005.

4.1.5 Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance

The Authority has supported the establishment of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network and provides the secretariat for the network. The network has agreed common principles and approaches and is a useful forum to discuss national and international issues in quality assurance.

The Authority has supported the Higher Education Authority in making arrangements jointly with the Irish Universities Quality Board for the review of quality assurance in the university sector. In this regard, the Authority assisted in the secretariat for the High Level Reference Panel established by the Higher Education Authority. The outcome of the review was published in spring 2005.

4.1.6 Framework review

Planning is underway for the review of the differentiation between further and higher education and training at level 6 in the Framework. The Authority is also planning that an initial review of the Framework and its implementation will

take place in 2006/2007. The Authority aims to have the policy approach in relation to this review determined by autumn 2006.

4.1.7 Theme 1 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 1 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – all principal actions have been or are being carried out
- The extent to which the architecture of the Framework, including the sub-strands of learning outcomes, the classes of award-types and the standards for award-types, is implemented – within higher education and training the major award-types are now being implemented and initial implementation is underway of the other award-types. Plans are underway for implementation within further education and training by autumn 2006
- The awareness and attitudes of stakeholders, including learners and employers, to the National Framework of Qualifications and its implementation and relevance to them – the awareness and attitudes of stakeholders to whom the Framework is immediately relevant has been very positive, as indicated,

for example, by the wide range of participants at the Framework conference in February 2005. At the same time, it is recognised that further work is needed to increase awareness of, and positive attitudes to the Framework

- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view of the effectiveness of the Framework in meeting its objectives – as above, stakeholders to whom the Framework is immediately relevant are positive about its effectiveness to date. At the same time, it needs to be recognised that the Framework is a long-term cultural endeavour
- The inclusion of policy approaches proposed or promoted by the Authority in national policies – there have been some positive developments here. One example is the One Step Up initiative arising from the work of the Enterprise Strategy Group. Another is the incorporation of the Framework into the recommendations of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future.

4.2 Theme 2 – Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that there will be increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners by autumn 2006 consistent with the new Framework

This objective is well on the way to being attained by December 2006. All of the initial policies, actions and procedures are in place. The implementation of this objective is related to the progress of the implementation of the Framework.

4.2.1 Facilitating implementation of policies for access, transfer and progression

Paralleling its Framework advocacy role, the Authority has taken a lead role in coordinating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression.

The Authority has worked closely with the two awards Councils, whose function it is to ensure that the procedures set down for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers under their auspices.

In winter 2004, the Authority established principles in relation to a national approach to credit and guidelines on the use of credit in higher education in a manner consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications. The Authority is also engaging with the Further Education

and Training Awards Council through the technical group on credit which the Council established in October 2004.

The Authority has consulted with stakeholders on the recognition of prior learning and established principles and operational guidelines in summer 2005.

The Authority has sought to adopt a coordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level.

The Authority has encouraged third-level institutions to open up access to undergraduate programmes for holders of further education and training awards. The institutes of technology have extended their existing scheme and the universities are also developing their arrangements. In addition, the Authority has undertaken research as a joint venture with the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities and the Higher Education Authority on arrangements for transfer and progression into undergraduate programmes leading to university awards. This research was being finalised in winter 2005.

The Authority has continued to actively represent the need to have a wider and more learner-centred information-base for learners in relation to qualifications.

4.2.2 Further policy development and implementation

The Authority has worked closely with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, within the Higher Education Authority, in the development of a National Action Plan which was published in winter 2004. The Authority is now working with the Office on the implementation of the plan. The development of a coherent policy linking the work of the Office and the Qualifications Authority has been an important policy development.

The Authority has continued discussions with the National Access Office/Higher Education Authority on a possible consortium of relevant partner organisations to address the issue of entry to higher education and training by adult learners and is considering the need for this in the context of wider changes taking place in relation to progression routes and arrangements for entry to higher education.

The Authority has continued to consult with providers in relation to the policy approach established by the Authority and the procedures that are to be implemented by providers. The strong view emerging is that it would not be helpful or necessary for the Authority to establish additional policies or procedures for access, transfer and progression. Rather, the view emerging is that the Authority should endeavour to help and support stakeholders in implementing the policies and

procedures already set out.

Many providers of education and training participated in the Implementation Conference hosted by the Authority in February 2005 and this has assisted them in the development of implementation strategies.

Consideration of the policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the universities is underway.

4.2.3 Theme 2 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 2 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – all principal actions have been or are being carried out.
- The extent to which stakeholders in learning have a positive view on the effectiveness of the policies of the Authority on access, transfer and progression for learners – stakeholders to whom the Framework is immediately relevant are positive about its potential in bringing about increased opportunities for access, transfer and progression. It has assisted in some developments, e.g.
 - consideration of the inclusion in the Framework of non-degree

- awards of the universities,
- principles and guidelines for credit and for recognition of prior learning,
- contribution to the National Action Plan for Access to Higher Education.

At the same time it needs to be recognised that the Framework, and the policies and procedures to promote access transfer and progression, are a long-term cultural-change endeavour

- Increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners – diversity is increasing and the work of the Authority and the Framework are assisting in this, e.g.
 - widening access to programmes in institutes of technology for holders of certain FETAC awards
 - increasing use of FETAC awards for entry to university programmes
- Increased information available about such diverse arrangements – the Framework is beginning to be used in the setting out of information on diverse arrangements, e.g.
 - The use of Framework level designations in C.A.O. documentation
 - The use of Framework level designations and other Framework references in the prospectuses of higher education institutions
 - The use of Framework materials by guidance practitioners

4.3 Theme 3 – Supporting the Awards Councils

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that the Authority supports the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence

The Authority and the Councils have worked closely together in the two-year period. The Authority has continued to fund the Councils and has agreed the corporate plans of each of the Councils.

4.3.1 Funding Role

The Authority, with the co-operation of the Department of Education and Science, has ensured that the Councils have been appropriately funded to enable them to perform their functions.

The Authority has allocated grants to each of the Councils within an appropriate timescale to meet the Councils' needs in terms of planning for a full-year's expenditure. The Authority and the Councils have put in place a system of information flows on expenditure and estimated future expenditure which meets the needs of all concerned.

In winter 2004, the Authority put in place and implemented an initial framework for accountability on the expenditure of the grant to the Councils and to the Authority.

The Authority advised the Department of Education and Science in relation to the level and nature of fees to be charged by the Councils by winter 2003.

4.3.2 Planning and Review

The Authority consulted with the Councils in relation to the procedures established by the Authority for the performance by the Councils of their functions and established revised procedures in autumn 2005.

The Authority has worked closely with the Councils on their corporate planning. The Authority and HETAC agreed the Council's initial corporate plan in spring 2004, and agreed its strategic plan for 2006-2010 in autumn 2005. The Authority and FETAC agreed the first review of the FETAC Strategic Plan 2003 – 2006 and the Council's outline plan for 2005 – 2007 in spring 2005.

The Authority reviewed its interim validation appeals procedures in the context of the policies on the validation of programmes being developed by the Councils and put in place revised procedures in summer 2005.

In spring 2004, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Authority agreed revised criteria and procedures for reviews leading to delegation of authority to make awards and for reviews where such delegation has already taken place. In addition, in summer 2004, the Council and the

Authority agreed an understanding on issues around research programmes within the delegation process. The Authority has implemented its role under these procedures in a timely, efficient and effective manner, and in a manner consistent with the criteria and understanding.

The Authority put in place a policy approach to its role in relation to appeals against the withdrawal of delegated authority in summer 2004.

Under section 9 of the Qualifications Act, the Authority may review from time to time the performance by the Councils of their functions. The Authority was finalising its policy approach to the review of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in winter 2005. The aim is for the review to be completed by autumn 2006.

4.3.3 Theme 3 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 3 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – all principal actions have been carried out
- The extent to which the advice of the Authority on fees is implemented – the advice is still being considered by the Department
- The extent to which stakeholders

have a positive view on the effectiveness of the Authority's appeals roles – there has yet to be an appeal to the Authority.

- The extent to which the awards Councils and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has assisted the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence – there is general support for the manner with which the Authority has assisted the Councils in undertaking their work while not interfering in the performance by them of their functions.

4.4 Theme 4 – Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that the Authority supports the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence

4.4.1 Quality Assurance

The Institute and the Authority agreed in spring 2004 the manner in which the Institute would inform the Authority of the findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures and the plans of the Institute for implementing these findings. This approach was reviewed and a revised approach was agreed in spring 2005. The Authority considered the findings

and the Institute's plans in summer 2004 and in summer 2005. The Institute is also currently reviewing the quality assurance procedures that it has agreed with the Authority.

The Authority commenced its review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Dublin Institute of Technology in winter 2004. The European University Association has been contracted by the Authority to carry out this work and it is to be completed by spring 2006.

4.4.2 Access, Transfer and Progression

The Dublin Institute of Technology has regularly updated the Authority on the implementation by it of the procedures for access, transfer and progression established by the Authority.

4.4.3 Theme 4 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 4 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – all principal actions have been carried out
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the quality assurance review to be undertaken by the Authority – the views of stakeholders will be relevant when this has been

completed

- The extent to which the Institute and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has supported the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence – the views of the Institute are positive.

4.5 *Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement*

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that the Authority will make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches and will collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing

The Authority has made a major commitment of resources to its international work. It has taken part in many areas of work arising in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and advanced with a number of key areas of work during the Irish Presidency in the European Union, as well as continuing its work with the OECD. It is now supporting the European Commission in the development of proposals for a European Qualifications Framework, and in consultation on these.

The overall approach of the Authority, in consultation with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, has been to spearhead an

effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches rather than merely being reactive to such change. In making such inputs the Authority has endeavoured to undertake collaborative approaches with the active involvement of stakeholders and, in particular, both with the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. There is interdependency in the work of the three bodies and this is particularly reflected in the work of these organisations outside the State where the particular division of work between the three bodies needs to be carefully planned and implemented so that resource commitments are optimised.

Under the Qualifications Act, the Authority was required to co-opt two expert members, at least one of whom should have international experience. The approach decided by the Authority has been to co-opt two people with particular experience of developments outside the State – the current co-optees are Professor Anne Moran of the University of Ulster and Dr. Abrar Hasan of the OECD.

4.5.1 *Europe: Copenhagen and Bologna processes*

In relation to the Copenhagen process

- The Authority has represented Ireland on the Copenhagen co-ordination group
- The Authority has advised the two Departments involved – the

Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment – on Ireland’s input into the Maastricht Communiqué which was agreed in December 2004

- The Authority took part in a national conference in advance of the Maastricht meeting
- The Authority has participated in the technical group on credit transfer

In relation to the Bologna process

- The Authority has taken part in the national steering group established by the Department
- The Authority has been an active participant in the National Working Group on the Diploma Supplement and has supported the referencing of the Framework on the Diploma Supplement
- The Authority took part in the national conference in March 2005
- The Authority, together with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, has continued to engage in a collaborative exercise, involving Dutch, German, Flemish, UK, Irish, Spanish, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian agencies, which was entitled the Joint Quality Initiative. This group had already agreed outcome descriptors for the first cycle and second cycles of Bologna by December 2003 and agreed two further outcomes descriptors for the intermediate first cycle of Bologna and the third cycle of Bologna in

2004. These descriptors are referred to as the Dublin Descriptors as they were finalised at meetings hosted by the Council and the Authority in Dublin in 2002 and 2004

- The Authority provided expert support to the working group which published its report on a Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher education Area in spring 2005. This Framework was adopted by Ministers when they met in Bergen in May 2005
- The Authority has advised the Department of Education and Science on Ireland’s input into the Bergen Communiqué which was agreed in May 2005

4.5.2 Other European work

The Authority is also a member of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies – the Higher Education Authority and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council are also members. This Network is playing a key role in bringing about the European dimension to quality assurance which is part of the process of the implementation of the Bologna Declaration. It provides an opportunity for the development of best practice models.

The Authority also continues to represent Ireland on the Group H expert working group on the implementation of the concrete objectives, established by the European Council within the context of the Lisbon process, relating to

education and training systems in Europe. Group H concerns making learning more attractive and linking learning with the world of work and the Authority represents Ireland on the group.

The Authority, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, hosted a major conference as part of the Irish Presidency of the European Union on 8 March 2004 on common themes in European policy development in higher education and in vocational education and training. The conference recommended that a European Qualifications Framework be taken forward within the framework of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, with a view to linking together the common reference levels framework for vocational education and training and the Qualifications Framework developed for the European higher education area (Bologna process).

In winter 2004, the Commission established a technical group to develop this framework and the Authority is taking part in this.

Also during the Irish Presidency of the European Union, the Authority provided the expert assistance to the Department of Education and Science for the adoption of common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4.5.3 Wider International Work

The Authority has engaged with the OECD in work on the role of national qualification Frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Authority hosted the closing conference for this work in autumn 2005.

4.5.4 Theme 5 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 5 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – all actions have been carried out
- The inclusion of policy approaches promoted or proposed by the Authority in international policies – feedback from national and international stakeholders indicates that the Authority's inputs are valued and often impact on policies
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are informed of and can participate, as appropriate, in international developments with which the Authority has an engagement – Irish stakeholders at a national level are involved in many of the initiatives that the Authority is engaged with. Where the Authority is hosting a meeting or a conference in Ireland, there is wide participation of Irish stakeholders.

4.6 *Theme 6 – International recognition of awards*

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be that a national policy approach to the international recognition of awards will be put in place by early 2004 and that this will be implemented by autumn 2006

The policy approach was established in summer 2004 and is now being implemented.

4.6.1 *Ireland and the United Kingdom*

The Authority, with the agreement of Irish awarding bodies, agreed with UK regulatory authorities the cross-referencing of the Irish Framework to Frameworks in place in the United Kingdom in summer 2005. A leaflet setting this out has been published and dissemination of relevant information has taken place.

4.6.2 *Recognition Coordination*

An integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland was established in summer 2004 by the Authority in consultation with stakeholders. This integrated approach is operated through the Qualifications Recognition – Ireland service within the Authority. The Authority is the Irish centre for the recognition of international awards, and represents Ireland in a European Network of centres known as ENIC/NARIC (European National

Information Centre/National Academic Recognition Information Centre for higher education) and NRP (National Reference Point for vocational education and training) which promote the recognition of international awards throughout Europe.

A Recognition Implementation Group has also been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Department of Education and Science, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the universities. This group is responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

The Authority is advising the Department of Education and Science in relation to the development of a Higher Education Qualifications Recognition Agreement with China. The Authority has established an implementation group representative of stakeholders, hosted a meeting of a Chinese delegation in March 2005 and led an Irish delegation on a visit to China in June 2005.

The Authority has been designated the National Europass Centre for Ireland by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The main concept of the Europass proposal is to link separate initiatives aimed at the transparency of qualifications and

competences into a single framework, in the form of a structured portfolio of documents, known as Europass. The aim is to integrate the existing transparency tools, such as the European CV format, the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement, the current Europass-Training (to be called Europass Mobility in the future) and the European Language Passport in a coordinated framework, promoted and followed-up in each country by a single body and supported by suitable information systems at national and European level. The Authority has established an implementation advisory group.

4.6.3 Theme 6 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 6 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out – these have all been implemented
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are satisfied with the recognition policies developed by the Authority and their implementation – while the actions set out have been implemented it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the policy approaches being adopted by the Authority

4.7 Theme 7 – Organisation Culture

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2003.

The objective will be to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

This concerns the organisation of the Authority itself. The Authority has made all reasonable endeavours to meet the objective that it set for itself.

4.7.1 Corporate Governance

The Authority has continued to implement the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. It has established an Internal Audit Committee which has, inter alia, reviewed the implementation of the Code.

With effect from 1 January 2005 the Authority is a prescribed public body under the Ethics in Public Office Acts and is operating in a manner consistent with these.

In winter 2004 the Authority adopted a Code of Business Conduct for members and staff.

The Authority has endeavoured to provide value for money by ensuring that its services are provided in an

economic, efficient and effective way.

The Authority has met all of the planning and reporting requirements under the public sector modernisation programme. This has been a most helpful way to ensure that a range of corporate policy issues across the work of the Authority are addressed in a coherent and structured way.

4.7.2 Managing Financial Resources

The Authority also allocated grants to the awards Councils. The detailed information is as follows:

- A total grant of €5.6m was paid to the Further Education and Training Awards Council in 2004
- A total grant of €2.15m was paid to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in 2004.

In 2005, the following initial grant allocations for the Councils have been determined and funding is being transferred on a regular basis:

- A total grant of €5.98m for the Further Education and Training Awards Council
- A total grant of €3.06m for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

The Authority was paid a total grant in 2004 of €1.68m. The initial grant allocation for 2005 is €2.05m.

The Authority has allocated grants to each of the Councils within a timescale to meet the Councils' needs in terms of

planning for a full-year's expenditure. The Authority and the Councils have put in place a system of information flows on expenditure and estimated future expenditure which meets the needs of all concerned. The Authority reports on these matters regularly to the Department of Education and Science

In winter 2004, the Authority put in place and implemented an initial framework for accountability on the expenditure of the grant to the Councils and to the Authority.

The Internal Audit Committee completed its first internal audit review in 2004 and work on the 2005 review is well advanced.

2001, 2002 and 2003 Annual Accounts have been cleared by the Comptroller and Auditor General and have been published by the Authority.

4.7.3 Human Resources Management

The Authority formally put in place human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements, in winter 2003.

A Training Needs Analysis was put in place by spring 2004 and is being implemented on a continuing basis. As part of this implementation, a management development programme has been operating since summer 2004.

The Performance Management Development System was put in place in spring 2004 and is being implemented since then. This has fed into more detailed individual business plans for each member of staff.

4.7.4 Knowledge/Communications Management

A new Framework website was put in place in summer 2004 and the Authority's own website was updated in spring 2005.

An electronic filing system has been developed and implemented to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of the Authority's international recognition service. Work on implementing the electronic filing system across the organisation is advancing.

4.7.5 Quality Management Systems

A Customer Service Charter was adopted by the Authority in winter 2003 following consultation with stakeholders.

The Authority determined a policy approach to its own internal quality management systems in winter 2004 and this is to be reviewed by winter 2006.

At present, the Authority does not officially come under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 legislation. Registration under the Act is expected in 2005. However, procedures in accordance with the Freedom of

Information Act have been developed and implementation arrangements are underway.

4.7.6 Decentralisation

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, planning is underway for the relocation of the Authority to Edenderry, Co. Offaly. The initial implementation plan of the Authority was finalised by summer 2004 and submitted to the Department of Education and Science. This is being kept up to date in light of developments.

4.7.7 Irish Language

The Authority is complying with its requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003. A policy on the use of the Irish Language was put in place by the Authority on 18 December 2003 and is being implemented.

4.7.8 Theme 7 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 7 in 2003. While some of these performance indicators are more fully relevant in the longer term, it is helpful to report on their implementation as follows

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out– these have all been implemented
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders have a positive view of the organisation culture of the Authority and how it conducts its business generally – the Authority regularly

gets positive feedback from stakeholder organisations about the manner in which it works. However, this is not a formal way to measure feedback and this will be addressed in the further review of the Authority's quality management systems.

5 Themes for Authority's Work 2006-2008

Seven emerging themes grouping the Authority's functions were introduced in the Authority's Corporate Plan for 2003 to 2006 when it was published in December 2003. In addition a high level objective was associated with each of these themes.

This Plan continues with the same seven themes and introduces a further one in relation to Europass. The Authority considers that while particular themes may encompass more of the functions of the Authority than others, the Authority is not setting out the themes in a hierarchy and all themes are considered vital to the Authority in performing its functions.

The eight themes are as follows:

- National Framework of Qualifications
- Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners
- Supporting the Awards Councils
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology
- International Policy Engagement
- International Recognition of Awards
- Europass
- Corporate Affairs.

Objectives for Themes

The Authority has revised and developed the high level objectives already

associated with the themes. In so doing, the objectives for the first two themes and the objective relating to the international recognition of awards have been significantly developed to take account of the anticipated implementation of policies by winter 2008. The Authority has determined the following objectives:

- National Framework of Qualifications – The objective is that by winter 2008 the Framework will be fully implemented, will be well known and understood and will have been reviewed
- Access, transfer and progression for learners – The objective is that diverse arrangements for access, transfer and progression will have been put in place for learners by winter 2008 consistent with the full implementation of the Framework
- Supporting the awards Councils – The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology – The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence
- International Policy Engagement – The objective is that the Authority will make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches and will

collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing

- International recognition of awards – The objective is to have a fully functioning and well-known international recognition service established by winter 2008
- Europass – The objective is that all elements of Europass will be available in Ireland by 2006 and in widespread use by 2008
- Organisation culture of the Authority – The objective is to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

6. Development of the Themes: Actions and Performance Indicators

This Plan elaborates each of the eight themes in turn, sets out the various action lines associated with each theme and establishes a timetable for the completion of the action lines. A series of performance indicators is also developed in relation to each theme.

In relation to the action lines, there is a marked change in the approach determined by the Authority. The action lines are more general in nature than the specific actions in relation to policy

development that were in place in the initial Authority Corporate Plan. This is because it is considered that the approach of the Authority has now moved from being one of introducing policies to being one whereby the Authority undertakes an increasing role in ensuring that the Framework is implemented and communicated. In addition, the planning for the important Framework review functions is also relevant.

6.1 Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications

The objective is that by winter 2008 the Framework will be fully implemented, will have been reviewed and will be well known and understood

This dimension of the Authority's work concerns completing the development of the National Framework of Qualifications and fully implementing it. It is also concerned with the review of the Framework. In addition, it concerns the advocacy role of the Authority in promoting cultural change in the education and training systems and in helping to shape national policy approaches.

6.1.1 Completion of Framework development

Policies and criteria for the inclusion of statutory Professional awards

The Authority aims to determine policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of statutory professional

awards in the National Framework of Qualifications by summer 2006.

6.1.2 Implementation of the Framework

Working with awarding bodies

The Authority will work with the principal awarding bodies in further and higher education and training – the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities – in facilitating the implementation of the Framework.

The Authority will also work closely with those organisations involved in schools awards – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Science – in facilitating the implementation of the Framework.

The Authority will encourage and facilitate these various bodies to co-operate in implementation arrangements.

This work will continue throughout the lifetime of the plan and will involve various actions in working with the awarding bodies on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral basis.

Inclusion of statutory Professional awards

The Authority aims to make provision for the inclusion of the awards made by

statutory professional awards in the National Framework of Qualifications by summer 2007.

Non-Statutory Professional awards

The Authority aims to encourage the development of common approaches by awarding bodies to the recognition by them of the outcomes associated with awards made by professional awarding bodies on a non-statutory basis.

Elaboration on the inclusion of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework

The existing inclusion of the Junior Certificate is at level 3 in the Framework and the Leaving Certificate is across levels 4 and 5. The possible elaboration on the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate has been the subject of some public debate. A number of issues arise in relation to the possible elaboration of this inclusion. For example, elements of either the Junior Certificate or the Leaving Certificate could be broken down to include minor awards and a particular definition of a major award. Furthermore, levels could possibly be associated with various elements of the Leaving Certificate. The Authority will aim to complete discussions on this issue with the State Examinations Commission, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education and Science by summer 2006.

Awards other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate made by the Department of Education and Science

The Authority aims to include the awards made by the Department of Education and Science and the Examinations Commission, other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework by summer 2007.

Fields of Learning

The Authority will facilitate the common use of fields of learning by awarding bodies in Framework linked activities.

The Authority will facilitate the linking of the Framework with relevant national and internationally agreed sectoral standards, with the agreement of Irish awarding bodies.

This work will continue throughout the lifetime of the plan and will involve working with awarding bodies, providers of further and higher education and training and professional bodies.

Learning Outcomes, Assessment and Award Classifications

The Authority will promote discussion and the development of common approaches across further and higher education and training in relation to

- the use of learning outcomes in a manner consistent with the Framework
- the development and recognition of

diverse approaches to assessing learning outcomes

- the use of award classifications (the manner in which the outcomes of an award are described, for example, first, second or third class honours, or merit and distinction).

This work will continue throughout the lifetime of the plan and will involve various actions in working with the awarding bodies and providers of further and higher education and training on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral basis.

Titles

The Authority will support and advise awarding bodies in implementing a policy approach to titles of awards in a manner consistent with the Framework.

6.1.3 Advocacy, Promotion, Communication and Use of the Framework

Advocacy

The Authority will take a lead role in advocating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the development of the Framework generally and the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression. This role will involve

- contributing to policy-making at national level
- participation in, and establishment and support for, national and sectoral coordinating and development groups

- participation in debate and discourse on issues relevant to qualifications and to access, transfer and progression, including the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops as appropriate
- engaging with diverse stakeholders, including those involved in the provision of learning opportunities and those in broader society including those with an employment perspective

Internationalisation of Irish education services

In the context of national policies on the internationalisation of Irish education and training services, the Authority will support the use of the Framework, the clear communication of the placement of awards in the Framework and the associated quality assurance mechanisms underpinning it, as part of the Education Ireland Quality Mark. The Quality Mark will be awarded by Education Ireland to education and training providers and will be used to promote Ireland as a centre of educational excellence.

Communications strategy

The Authority has developed a communications strategy to establish the identity of the National Framework of Qualifications and to ensure confidence in its implementation. This strategy provides for various stakeholders taking responsibility for communication of the Framework and working together in doing so. The next stage of the communications strategy will involve

raising widespread public awareness about the Framework.

The Authority will keep its own policy approach to communications under review and will continue to seek to ensure with stakeholders that shared communications responsibilities are being met. It is envisaged that significant human and financial resources will be invested by the Authority in communications.

Directory

The Authority will implement the Framework Directory by summer 2006.

Website

The Authority will continue to review and develop its Framework website. It envisages that the website will be a primary source of information for diverse groups of stakeholders about the Framework and its implementation.

Framework conferences

The Authority will host regular national conferences on the Framework, at least once every two years, to facilitate national stakeholders being updated on the implementation of the Framework and to facilitate those implementing the Framework to consult further with stakeholders.

Institutes of Technology – approval of awarding arrangements

In April and June 2003, the Authority approved, on a transitional basis, of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology with awarding

bodies other than the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. The Authority aims to consult on further arrangements in the context of developments in relation to the inclusion of professional and international awards in the Framework. The aim is to determine a revised policy approach by winter 2006 on the approval of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology.

Professional Bodies

The Authority will examine ways to introduce a coherent national debate among providers of further and higher education and training, awarding bodies and professional bodies in respect of their interdependent responsibilities with regard to accreditation and quality assurance.

6.1.4 Placement of existing and former awards

The aim is to complete the placement of existing and former awards by winter 2006.

6.1.5 Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance

Irish Higher Education Quality Network

The Authority will support the continuing work of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network. The network has agreed common principles and approaches and is a useful forum to discuss national and international issues

in quality assurance. The Authority will support their use, and work for the development of more common approaches to the different aspects of quality in higher education.

Quality in Education and Training

The Authority will facilitate the exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance in education and training. This will involve developing ways in which those involved in schooling and in further and higher education and training can work together. This will include approaches to quality assurance in the broadest sense, incorporating common approaches to the validation of programmes.

Consultation with HEA on its university quality assurance review role

The Higher Education Authority has the role of reviewing the quality assurance procedures of the universities. The Higher Education Authority must consult with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in performing this function. The Authority will continue to advise the Higher Education Authority on any future reviews.

6.1.6 Framework reviews

Level 6 review

The differentiation between further and higher education and training at level 6 relates to standards of knowledge, skill and competence. These standards have been set through the descriptors for the award-types. The key differentiating

factor between the two is the emphasis that each places on particular learning outcomes in the descriptors. The Authority will commence a review of this differentiation in spring 2006.

Overall review of the Framework

The Authority is planning that an initial review of the Framework and its implementation will take place in 2006/2007. The Authority aims to have the policy approach in relation to this review determined by autumn 2006. It is envisaged that the review process may take up to a year to complete.

6.1.7 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which the architecture of the Framework, including the sub-strands of learning outcomes, the classes of award-types and the standards for award-types, is implemented
- The awareness and attitudes of stakeholders, including learners and employers, to the National Framework of Qualifications and its implementation and relevance to them
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view of the effectiveness of the Framework in meeting its objectives
- The inclusion of policy approaches

proposed or promoted by the Authority in national policies

- The outcomes of the review processes which are to be established

6.2 Theme 2 – Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners

The objective is that improved arrangements for access, transfer and progression will have been put in place for a diverse range of learners by winter 2008 consistent with the full implementation of the Framework

The above objective summarises the following four objectives that are already part of the policies of the Authority, and which remain in place:

- To develop an integrated National Framework of Qualifications.
- To identify and realise a network of clearly signposted transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of Qualifications, and to ensure that learners are facilitated to avail of these routes
- To ensure that learners can avail of entry arrangements to all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications that are fair, transparent, and compliant with equality legislation
- To ensure that accurate and reliable information is available to all learners, through a range of approaches and formats that is accessible to a diversity of learners, to enable them to plan

their learning on the basis of a clear understanding of the awards available and the associated entry arrangements and transfer and progression routes

6.2.1 Facilitating implementation of policies for access, transfer and progression

Facilitation of change

The Authority will take a lead role in advocating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support this objective in a manner linked with the advocacy role under the Framework objective.

In the facilitation of change, the Authority will collaborate actively with the two awards Councils, whose function it is to ensure that the procedures set down for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers under their auspices. The policy of the Authority is that the awards Councils will facilitate the relevant providers in making changes in systems, structures and programmes that will be necessary in the context of the emerging new learner groups and new kinds of learning, and particularly in the context of the policies of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression.

Credit

The Authority will work with awarding bodies and providers in enabling the implementation of principles in relation to a national approach to credit and

guidelines on the use of credit in higher education in a manner consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications.

The Authority will support FETAC in the development and implementation of approaches to credit accumulation and transfer in further education and training.

The Authority, in partnership with other key stakeholders, also has an important role to play in international liaison and in the coordination of developments in Ireland with international initiatives in the area of credit. In particular, in further implementing a national approach to credit, it is necessary to take into account the recent and ongoing European initiatives.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The Authority will work with FETAC, HETAC, the DIT, the universities and related providers in enabling the implementation of the national principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning established by the Authority in June 2005. The Authority will establish a website to set out good examples of practice by spring 2006.

Transfer and Progression Routes

The Authority will adopt a coordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level. This role will be undertaken in

accordance with the principles determined in relation to eligibility to progress: that is, that all programmes should have some progression routes and that they should be adapted, where necessary, to enable progression. The role will also involve intervention to initiate processes of transfer and progression route development across the divide of responsibilities of the various awarding bodies – e.g. between awards of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and a university. Given its wide overview of the situation, the Authority will map progression routes, identify gaps and blockages in transfer and progression routes, indicate the arrangements required to bridge gaps or remove obstacles, and identify the appropriate bodies to take the necessary actions.

Entry Arrangements

In addition to the setting of procedures to be implemented by providers and the awards Councils, the improvement of entry arrangements will require action to bring about changes – for example, to remove barriers or to develop consistency in factors identified as necessary for successful participation – in areas of education and training that are not within the remit of the Councils, such as the universities, and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Accordingly, the Authority will adopt a proactive facilitating role with providers and awarding bodies outside the remit of the Councils, and a coordinating role in ensuring that the objective of

transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements, in compliance with equality legislation, is achieved for all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications.

Information Provision

The Authority will actively represent the need to have a wider and more learner-centred information-base for learners in relation to qualifications, and will participate with other key stakeholders in the development of policies in this regard.

The Authority will promote with learners their rights and entitlements to information.

6.2.2 Further policy development and implementation

National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

The Authority will work closely with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, within the Higher Education Authority, in the implementation of the National Action Plan which was published in winter 2004.

Assistance to Providers in Implementing Procedures

The Authority will consider further possible ways to assist providers in the implementation of the procedures that the Authority has determined, having regard to the role of the awards Councils in ensuring that certain providers implement the procedures.

This will include the hosting of workshops to discuss good examples of practice.

Universities access, transfer and progression review

The Authority will determine the policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the universities by autumn 2006. It will do so in consultation with stakeholders generally and, in particular, with the universities and the Higher Education Authority.

6.2.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which stakeholders in learning have a positive view on the effectiveness of the policies of the Authority on access, transfer and progression for learners
- Increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners
- Increased information available about such diverse arrangements

6.3 Theme 3 – Supporting the Awards Councils

The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and other stakeholders, including government and the social partners, and in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

Under the Qualifications Act, the Qualifications Authority was established to oversee the development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. In addition, the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council were also established as independent bodies with their own functions. Thus, there are separate interdependent roles set out for the Authority and the Awards Councils. The objects of the Act cannot be attained other than by co-operation between the three bodies and there is necessarily a close link between the work of the Authority and the work of the two Councils. This is particularly the case in relation to the first two themes in this plan. The following section of the plan concerns the planning, funding and review role of the Authority in relation to the Councils.

6.3.1 Funding Role

Funding the awards Councils

The Authority will aim to ensure that the Councils are fully and appropriately funded to enable them to perform their functions.

The Authority aims to allocate grants to the Councils by the end of April in each year. The Authority aims to further develop the information flows from the Councils in relation to their annual and estimated expenditure for each year.

The Authority will implement its responsibilities in relation to the work of the Councils under the Framework for accountability that it has put in place and revise this as appropriate should the Department of Finance issue guidelines.

Fees to be charged by Councils

The Authority will support the Department of Education and Science in relation to its planning for the level and nature of fees to be charged by the Councils.

6.3.2 Planning and Review Role

Procedures for Councils

The Authority aims to consult with the Councils in relation to the existing procedures established by the Authority for the performance by the Councils of their functions. The procedures will be reviewed following the reviews of the Councils.

Councils' corporate planning

The Authority aims to work closely with the Councils on their corporate planning. The Authority will consider the plans of the Councils when they are submitted to the Authority for approval.

Review of Councils

In undertaking its overarching quality

assurance role, the Authority may review from time to time the effectiveness of the Councils' performance of their functions. Planning for the review of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council is underway. The policy approach for the review was being finalised in winter 2005, and the aim is to complete the review by autumn 2006. The Authority also aims to have the policy approach in relation to the review of the Further Education and Training Awards Council determined by autumn 2006. It is envisaged that the implementation of the latter review will be completed by winter 2007.

Validation appeals role

The Authority will review its validation appeals procedures in the context of the policies on the validation of programmes being developed by the Councils. The aim is to do so following the reviews of the Councils.

Delegated authority role

The Authority will implement its role under the delegation procedures agreed with HETAC in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

In relation to the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Authority will aim to agree procedures with the Council should the need for such procedures arise.

6.3.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the Authority's appeals roles
- The extent to which the awards Councils and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has assisted the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

6.4 *Theme 4 – Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology*

The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Dublin Institute of Technology in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

The Authority and the Institute have a unique relationship. The Institute is a longstanding provider of education and training, as well as being an awarding body. The Authority exercises certain statutory functions in relation to the Institute's quality assurance procedures. Under the Qualifications Act there is a requirement for the Institute to agree its quality assurance procedures with the Authority and for the Authority to consider the findings arising out of the application of these procedures and to make recommendations in respect of them. In addition, the Authority is also required to review the effectiveness of

the procedures periodically and to publish the results of such a review.

6.4.1 *Quality Assurance*

Quality assurance procedures

The Authority aims to continue to engage with the Institute in relation to its quality assurance procedures and to agree revised procedures with the Institute at least every five years.

Findings following implementation of quality assurance procedures

The Authority has agreed the manner in which the Institute informs it of the findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures and how such findings are considered. The Authority will consider the findings of the Institute's procedures on an annual basis.

Authority review of quality assurance procedures

The Authority commenced its review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Dublin Institute of Technology in winter 2004. The European University Association has been contracted by the Authority to carry out this work and it is to be completed in spring 2006. Planning will be in place by winter 2006 for a further effectiveness review.

6.4.2 *Access, Transfer and Progression*

The Dublin Institute of Technology will regularly update the Authority on the implementation by the Institute of the procedures for access, transfer and

progression established by the Authority.

6.4.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the quality assurance review to be undertaken by the Authority
- The extent to which the Institute and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has supported the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

6.5 Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement

The objective is that the Authority will make a proactive and influential input on behalf of the State into the development of international policy approaches on qualifications related matters, and will collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing.

6.5.1 Europe

Copenhagen and Bologna processes

The Authority will continue to make a proactive and influential input on behalf of the State into the development of European policy approaches on qualifications related matters rather than

merely being reactive to such change. In making such inputs the Authority will endeavour to undertake collaborative approaches with the active involvement of stakeholders and, in particular, both the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

The Authority will remain actively engaged with the implementation of the Bologna and Copenhagen Declarations in Ireland and will participate in national policy initiatives associated with both processes. The Authority will look at ways to proactively work with stakeholders in disseminating information on successful approaches to the implementation of these Declarations and in showing the links between national Framework-related developments and these international declarations.

The Authority will verify, in consultation with stakeholders, the compatibility of the National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area by autumn 2006.

The Authority will continue to engage with the European Commission on the development of a European Qualifications Framework. Following its adoption, the Authority will also verify, in consultation with stakeholders, the compatibility of the National Framework of Qualifications with the European Qualifications Framework, and undertake any development tasks arising

out of the alignment of the two Frameworks.

The Authority will continue to engage with the European Commission on the development of a European Credit System for lifelong learning. Following its adoption the Authority will also lead, in consultation with stakeholders, the implementation of the system in Ireland.

The Authority has gained significant experiences to date from its international work. The Authority will continue to seek opportunities to actively engage and will assist in briefing international peers on Irish developments.

The Authority will actively engage as an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

6.5.2 Wider International Work

The Authority will continue to undertake international research in relation to national frameworks of qualifications and related issues with a view to informing Irish developments and to informing international peers about Irish developments.

The Authority has engaged with the OECD in work on the role of national qualification frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The

Authority hosted the closing conference for this work in autumn 2005 and will engage with the OECD on the next stage of this work, which relates to credit accumulation and transfer and the recognition of prior learning.

The Authority will also continue to make a proactive and influential input on behalf of the State into the development of international policy approaches on qualifications related matters.

6.5.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The inclusion of policy approaches promoted or proposed by the Authority in international policies
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are informed of and can participate, as appropriate, in international developments with which the Authority has an engagement

6.6 Theme 6 – International recognition of awards

The objective is to have a fully functioning and well-known international recognition service established by winter 2008

6.6.1 Recognition Coordination National Policy Approach and

Qualifications Recognition – Ireland

An integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland was established in summer 2004 by the Authority in consultation with stakeholders. This integrated approach is operated through the Qualifications Recognition – Ireland service within the Authority. The Authority is the Irish centre for the recognition of international awards, and represents Ireland in a European Network of centres known as ENIC/NARIC (European National Information Centre/National Academic Recognition Information Centre) and NRP (National Reference Point) which promote the recognition of international awards throughout Europe.

The Authority will continue to implement this agreed policy approach throughout the life-time of the plan. The recognition service will be marketed as a single entity i.e. there will be a one-stop-shop for recognition queries and information. The title for this service is Qualifications Recognition – Ireland. A National Conference will be hosted in spring 2006.

The processing of individual queries is part of the recognition service. Such queries are received by the Authority concerning information about awards made in Ireland and their value abroad and about awards made abroad and their value in Ireland for various purposes, including both academic recognition and entrance to employment. At this stage, the Authority responds by providing information about

existing agreements and arrangements. Where this is not sufficient, applicants complete an application form and submit a required set of documents describing their qualification. The Authority then consults with a relevant awarding body which conducts the assessment of the international award and advice is made.

The Authority recognises that the development of a co-ordinated policy approach to the recognition of international awards is a new area and it will keep its implementation arrangements under review. In so doing it will seek to develop tools to measure the effectiveness of the policy approach.

Recognition Implementation Group

A Recognition Implementation Group has also been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Department of Education and Science, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the universities. This group is responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

International Recognition Agreements

Recognition agreements will be sought on a proactive basis. The Authority is advising the Department of Education and Science in relation to the development of a Higher Education Qualifications Recognition Agreement

with China. The Authority has established an implementation group representative of stakeholders, hosted a meeting of a Chinese delegation in March 2005 and led an Irish delegation on a visit to China in June 2005.

Directives on international recognition of professional qualifications

The Authority will support the implementation of directives in relation to the international recognition of professional qualifications.

Holders of awards from other jurisdictions

There are many people in Ireland that are holders of awards from other countries. In particular there are many holders of awards made by national awarding bodies from another jurisdiction that have a status in law or are otherwise recognised as having authority to make awards that have national recognition in their host jurisdiction. Indeed in many cases such awards are included in national frameworks or the equivalent in their country of origin. The Authority will seek to ensure that holders in Ireland of such awards are treated in the same manner by the State in the development of schemes or other structures that involve the use of the National Framework of Qualifications for regulatory or other purposes.

Promotion of Irish awards in other jurisdictions

The Authority will also promote the

recognition of Irish awards in other jurisdictions, both within Europe and in the wider international arena. It will do so in co-operation with Irish awarding bodies.

The Authority will support the consistent use of Irish quality assurance arrangements where Irish awards are being made outside of the state.

6.6.2 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are satisfied with the recognition policies developed by the Authority and their implementation
- The number of recognition agreements in place
- The growth in the number of requests for advice
- The reduction in the time to process requests for advice

6.7 Theme 7 – Europass

The objective is that all elements of Europass will be available in Ireland by 2006 and that there will be widespread awareness of Europass among prospective users by 2008

6.7.1 National Europass Centre

The Authority has been designated the

National Europass Centre for Ireland by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The main concept of the Europass proposal is to link separate initiatives aimed at the transparency of qualifications and competences into a single framework, in the form of a structured portfolio of documents, known as Europass. The aim is to integrate the existing transparency tools, such as the European CV format, the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement, the current Europass-Training (to be called Europass Mobility in the future) and the European Language Passport in a coordinated framework, promoted and followed-up in each country by a single body and supported by suitable information systems at national and European level. The Authority has established an implementation advisory group.

The Authority will work with the co-ordinators responsible for the implementation of each of the various tools to ensure implementation. The Authority will monitor and, as appropriate, ensure that the Europass documents are made available and issued in conformity with national and European provisions.

The Authority will coordinate the document management and promotion of Europass.

The Authority will promote and manage the information system in cooperation with relevant bodies, and participate in

the European network. A public awareness programme will be organised for spring 2006.

Management of the Europass Mobility is a direct responsibility of the Authority.

The Authority will establish and manage a national information system to collect data as appropriate on the use of each document within the Europass.

The Authority will set up and run a national internet site for Europass closely linked to the Europass Portal and other relevant sites.

6.7.2 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which the elements of the Europass are used within Ireland

6.8 Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs

The objective is to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

This section of the Plan concerns the

organisation of the Authority itself. It is of relevance that much of the organisation of the Authority must operate within an overall vision for a public sector organisation and the public policy requirements set out for such organisations.

The Authority will strive to achieve this by focusing on five key areas:

- Corporate Governance
- Managing and Controlling Financial Resources
- Human Resources Management
- Knowledge/Communication Management
- Quality Management System

6.8.1 Corporate Governance

The Authority has been informed by the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Finance in October 2001. The Code is being considered by the Department of Education and Science at present and arrangements for implementation are to issue from the Department. The Code is also being revised by the Department of Finance.

The Authority has agreed appropriate processes and procedures to ensure compliance with the Code as published. The Authority will

- Continue to review the implementation of the Code
- Operate in a manner consistent with the Ethics in Public Office Act

- Implement a risk analysis and management process
- Provide value for money by ensuring that its services are provided in an economic, efficient and effective way. This objective underpins the approach taken to all aspects of this strategic plan.

6.8.2 Managing and Controlling Financial Resources

In the context of the Authority appropriately managing its financial resources, the Authority will meet its accountability requirements and ensure that

- There is a consistency of reporting financial affairs as between the three organisations funded through the Authority. These reports will strive to be timely and accurate enabling the Authority to make the correct financial decisions consistent with its responsibility
- Financial policies and procedures are agreed, reviewed and updated as necessary in line with best practice and any changes in reporting requirements
- The internal audit function within the Authority operates fully and appropriately and provides timely reports.

6.8.3 Human Resources Management

The Authority is responsible for the effective management of the human resources employed by it. In this context the Authority continually works to

recruit and deploy adequate levels of staffing resources and to enhance the capability of staff in line with changing demands. Specifically the Authority will

- Implement its human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements, and keep these under revision
- Develop and expand the provision of training and development options for all staff to meet identified needs at all levels on a continuing basis
- Continue to implement its performance appraisal system consistent with best practice and the needs of a Performance Management Development System which addresses the management of work performance, career and development needs of staff
- Continue to ensure that tasks are delegated consistent with the business plans drawn up to accomplish the strategic objectives of the Authority.
- Seek to ensure that appropriate staffing resources are in place to meet the performance of any additional functions

6.8.4 Knowledge/Communications Management

Like every organisation, the Authority produces a wide variety of documents covering all aspects of its remit. The management of information and

communications is important. The following will be the focus of activity in this area:

- The continuing review and development of the Authority's websites to enhance communication on the National Framework of Qualifications, the international recognition of qualifications and Europass. Linkages will continue to be expanded to ensure that the websites operate in a user-friendly way
- The continuing development of the Authority's electronic and manual data sharing systems so that knowledge can be accessed and shared with all relevant individuals and organisations
- Further develop databases for the management of all communications both internally and externally
- Review, on a continuing basis, the communications tools used to ensure that there is consistency of approach in terms of accessibility, quality and content.

6.8.5 Quality Management Systems

The Authority strives to provide a quality service to its customers consistent with best practice and the underlying fundamentals of quality management. To this end the Authority

- Will continue to do its work in an open and transparent way continuing its practice of consultation with all interested and relevant parties
- Will set up the appropriate systems

needed to meet the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, which it is likely to be subject to within the lifetime of this plan

- Will treat everyone inside and outside the Authority with respect and equity consistent with the best practice in this area
- Continue to implement its Customer Service Charter and keep it under review
- The Authority determined a policy approach to its own internal quality management systems in winter 2005 and this is to be reviewed by winter 2006.

6.8.6 Decentralisation

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, planning is underway for the relocation of the Authority to Edenderry, Co. Offaly. The initial implementation plan of the Authority was finalised by summer 2004 and submitted to the Department of Education and Science. This is being kept up to date in light of developments.

6.8.7 Irish Language

The Authority is complying with its requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003. A policy on the use of the Irish Language was put in place by the Authority on 18 December 2003 and is being implemented.

6.8.8 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators

are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions set out above
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders have a positive view of the organisational culture of the Authority and how it conducts its business generally.

Part IV– Conclusion

7 Conclusion

This document reports in Part II on the work of the Authority over the past two years (2004-2005). During this time, the Authority has worked extensively with stakeholders both in relation to the completion of the development of the National Framework of Qualifications, and in relation to facilitating the initial phase of the Framework's implementation.

In Part III of this document the Authority sets out the plans for its work over the next three years. The Authority will continue to work with and support the education and training community in achieving the full implementation of the Framework, and in putting in place improved arrangements for access, transfer and progression for a diverse range of learners. It is envisaged that the plan would be reviewed and updated on an annual/biannual basis so that there will always be a rolling three year plan in place.

Appendix 1

Members of the Authority

Mr. Richard Langford (Chairperson)
Fr. Nicholas Flavin (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms. Inez Bailey
Mr. Jim Dorney
Dr. Abrar Hasan
Dr. Caroline Hussey
Mr. Donal Kerr
Mr. Tony McDonnell
Prof. Anne Moran
Prof. Ciarán Murphy
Ms. Caroline Nash
Prof. Joyce O'Connor
Ms. Marie O'Mahony
Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú (Chief Executive)

Appendix 2

Staff of Authority

Ms. Claire Byrne – Director of Corporate Affairs

Ms. Laura Carrigan – Assistant Staff Officer, Recognition

Ms. Lorna Conway – Receptionist

Mr. Eamon Collins – Administration Executive

Ms. Leah Foley – Administration Officer

Mr. Stuart Garvie – Development Officer

Mr. Alan Harris – Assistant Staff Officer, Europass

Ms. Carmel Kelly – Co-ordinator of Award Recognition

Ms. Celine Kelly – Assistant Staff Officer, Administration

Ms. Ann Martin – Information Officer

Ms. Mairead McMahon – Assistant Staff Officer, Finance

Mr. Edwin Mernagh – Development Officer

Dr. Jim Murray – Development Officer

Dr. Anna Murphy – Director of Framework Development

Ms. Trish O'Brien – Development Officer

Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú – Chief Executive

Ms. Yvonne Rudden – Clerical Officer

Principal actions undertaken 2004-5, and actions planned 2006-8

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications - Framework development</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Descriptor for higher doctorate award-type			Completed summer				
Descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types			Completed summer				
Publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of professional awards in the framework			Completed autumn				
Publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of international awards in the framework			Completed autumn				
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Determine policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of statutory professional awards in the National Framework of Qualifications					Summer		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications – Implementation of Framework</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Ensuring, through collaboration with stakeholders, that coherent implementation arrangements for the Framework are put in place within higher education and training, including use of the Framework by the CAO for entry into higher education and training			Arrangements announced in summer	Framework used in CAO handbook for autumn 2005 entry			
Ensuring, through collaboration with FETAC, that parallel implementation arrangements for the Framework are put in place within further education and training				Arrangements determined in autumn			
Continue discussions with the universities on the inclusion of awards made by the universities other than the major awards at Levels 7 to 10	Continuing						
Working with those organisations involved in schools awards – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Science – in facilitating the implementation of the Framework	Continuing						
Facilitating linkages between the awarding bodies in the common usage of fields of learning based around the ISCED classification system	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Enabling the linking/referencing of the national framework to national and international sectoral frameworks	Continuing						
Research national and international practice in award classifications				Completed summer			
Policy approach on overall framework directory			Completed summer				
Actions planned 2006-8							
Continuation of collaboration with the principal awarding bodies in further and higher education and training – the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities – in facilitating the further implementation of the Framework.	Continuing						
Make provision for the inclusion of statutory professional awards						Summer	
Facilitate the development of common approaches by awarding bodies to the recognition by them of the outcomes associated with awards made by professional bodies on a non-statutory basis	Continuing						
Completion of discussions on the possible elaboration on the inclusion of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework					Summer		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Inclusion of awards made by the Department of Education and Science other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate						Summer	
Promotion of discussion and the development of common approaches to the use of learning outcomes, the use and recognition of diverse approaches to assessing learning outcomes, and the use of award classifications	Continuing						
Supporting and advising awarding bodies in implementing a policy approach to titles of awards in a manner consistent with the Framework	Continuing						
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications – Advocacy, Promotion and Use of the Framework</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Advocating cultural change	Continuing						
Communications approach – ensure with stakeholders that shared communications responsibilities are being met	Continuing						
Launch of implementation arrangements for the Framework in higher education and training			Completed summer				
Review and development of website			Framework website launched in summer	Authority website updated in spring			

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Framework implementation conference				Hosted spring			
Actions planned 2006-8							
Contribution to policy-making at the national level	Continuing						
Participating in, establishing and supporting national and sectoral co-ordinating and development groups	Continuing						
Supporting use of the Framework as part of the Education Ireland Quality Mark	Continuing						
Implementation of Framework Directory					Summer		
Framework Conference						Spring	
Determine a revised policy approach on the approval of awarding arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology					Winter		
Introduce a national debate among providers of further and higher education and training, awarding bodies and professional bodies in respect of their interdependent responsibilities with regard to accreditation and quality assurance	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications – Placement of existing and previous awards</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Placing of existing and former awards of HETAC			Placement agreed in spring				
Placing of existing and former awards of FETAC				Majority of placement agreed in spring; completed summer			
Placing of existing and former awards of DIT				Placement agreed in spring			
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Completion of placing of existing and former awards					Winter		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications – Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Support Irish Higher Education Quality Network	Continuing						
Consultation with HEA on its university quality assurance review role	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance in education and training generally, including schooling and further education and training	Continuing						
<i>Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications – Framework reviews</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Level 6 review – planning	Continuing						
Initial review of the framework and its implementation – planning	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Commencement of Level 6 review					Spring		
Determination of policy approach to overall review of the National Framework of Qualifications					Winter		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 2 – Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners – Facilitating implementation of policies for access, transfer and progression</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Co-ordinating cultural change to support the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression	Continuing						
Active collaboration with HETAC and FETAC with regard to the implementation of the procedures for access, transfer and progression by providers under their auspices	Continuing						
Establishment of principles and operational guidelines for a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training			Completed winter				
Establishment of principles and operational guidelines on the recognition of prior learning				Completed summer			
Co-ordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level	Continuing						
Finalisation of research with CHIU and HEA on arrangements for transfer and progression of further education and training award holders into undergraduate programmes leading to university awards				Winter			

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Co-ordinating role in ensuring that the objective of transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements, in compliance with equality legislation, is achieved for all programmes leading to awards in the national framework of qualifications	Continuing						
Support for a wider information-base for learners in relation to qualifications	Continuing						
Actions planned 2006-8							
Support FETAC in the development and implementation of approaches to credit accumulation and transfer in further education and training	Continuing						
Support awarding bodies and providers in the implementation of principles and operational guidelines for a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training	Continuing						
Support awarding bodies and providers in enabling the implementation of principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning	Continuing						
Establish recognition of prior learning website					Spring		
Map Framework progression routes					Summer		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 2 – Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners – Further policy development and implementation</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Work with National Office for Equity of Access in developing its National Action Plan			National Action Plan published winter				
Consider further ways to support providers in the implementation of the procedures determined by the Authority	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Assist National Office for Equity of Access in the implementation of the National Action Plan	Continuing						
Determine policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the Universities					Autumn		
<i>Theme 3 – Supporting the awards Councils – Funding Role</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Aim to ensure that the Councils are fully and appropriately funded to enable them to perform their functions	Continuing						
Establishment and implementation of an initial framework for accountability on the grant to the two councils			Completed winter				

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Advise the Department of Education and Science in relation to the level and nature of fees to be charged by the Councils		Completed winter					
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Aim to allocate grants to Councils by end of April each year					Spring	Spring	Spring
Develop further the information flows from the Council in relation to their annual and estimated expenditure	Continuing						
Implement responsibilities in relation to the work of the Councils under the Framework for accountability that has been put in place for the Councils	Continuing						
<i>Theme 3 – Supporting the awards Councils – Planning and Review Role</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Establish revised procedures for Councils				Autumn			
Approve first plan of HETAC for the performance of its functions			Plan approved spring				
Approve second plan of HETAC for the performance of its functions				Plan approved autumn			

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Approve second plan of FETAC for the performance of its functions				Plan approved spring			
Review of Authority's interim validation appeals procedures				Reviewed and revised summer			
Implement Authority's role in delegation process	Continuing						
Determine policy approach to Authority's role in relation to appeals against the withdrawal of delegated authority			Completed summer				
Finalisation of policy approach in relation to the review of effectiveness of HETAC's performance of its functions				Winter			
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Consider new corporate plans of Councils when submitted	Continuing						
Determine policy approach in relation to the review of effectiveness of FETAC's performance of its functions					Autumn		
Implement review of effectiveness of HETAC					Autumn		
Implement review of effectiveness of FETAC						Winter	

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Review existing procedures for the performance by the Councils of their functions (to be undertaken following the review of effectiveness)							Winter
Review Authority's validation appeals procedures in the context of the policies on the validation of programmes being developed by the Councils (to be undertaken following the review of effectiveness)							Winter
<i>Theme 4 – Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology – Quality Assurance</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Develop and agree policy approach to the way in which the Institute is to inform the Authority of findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures			Agreed spring	Revised spring			
Consider findings arising out of the application by the Institute of its quality assurance procedures			Considered spring	Considered summer			
Develop and agreed policy approach to the review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Institute			Agreed summer				
Commence review of effectiveness of quality assurance procedures			Commenced autumn				
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Complete review of effectiveness					Spring		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Consider findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures on an annual basis					Autumn	Autumn	Autumn
Agree revised quality assurance procedures						Summer	
<i>Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement – Europe</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches, particularly in relation to the Bologna and Copenhagen processes	Continuing						
Represent Ireland on the Copenhagen Co-ordination Group	Continuing						
Advised the Departments of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on Ireland's input into the Maastricht Communiqué			Communiqué agreed winter				
Participation on the Copenhagen Working Group on Credit	Continuing						
Participation in the National Steering Group on the Bologna Process	Continuing						
Participation in the National Working Group on the Diploma Supplement	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Participation on the Joint Quality Initiative and in the development of the Dublin Descriptors			Descriptors Completed autumn				
Provision of expert support to the Working Group that drafted the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area				Framework adopted summer			
Advised the Department of Education and Science on Ireland's input into the Bergen Communiqué				Communiqué agreed summer			
Host a conference during the Irish presidency of the European Union on the common themes in European policy development in higher education and in vocational education and training			Hosted spring				
Participation on the Technical Group established to develop a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning	Continuing						
Provision of expert assistance to the Department of Education and Science on the adoption of common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning during the Irish Presidency of the European Union			Principles adopted summer				
Actions planned 2006-8							
Verification of National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area					Autumn		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Engage with European Commission on the development of a European Qualifications Framework and, following its adoption, verify its compatibility with the National Framework of Qualifications	Continuing						
Undertake development task arising out of the alignment of European Qualifications Framework and the National Framework of Qualifications	Continuing						
Engage with European Commission on the development of a European Credit System for lifelong learning	Continuing						
<i>Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement – Wider International Work</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Undertake international research in relation to national frameworks of qualifications and related issues with a view to informing Irish developments and to informing international peers about Irish developments	Continuing						
Engagement with OECD in work on the role of national qualifications frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning on behalf of the Departments of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Hosting of closing conference on first stage of OECD work on the role of national qualifications frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning				Conference held autumn			
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Continued engagement with OECD on the next stage of the work on the role of national qualifications frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning	Continuing						
<i>Theme 6 International recognition of awards – Ireland and the United Kingdom</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Referencing of the Irish framework to frameworks in place in the United Kingdom				Referencing leaflet published summer			
<i>Theme 6 International recognition of awards – Recognition Co-ordination</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Develop an integrated national policy approach to recognition of international qualifications in Ireland			Approach published summer				
Implement policy approach through Recognition Implementation Group and Qualifications Recognition-Ireland service	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Represent Ireland in ENIC-NARIC and NRP	Continuing						
Host ENIC-NARIC Conference				Hosted summer			
Develop international recognition agreements	Continuing						
Assist Department of Education and Science in development of Higher Education Qualifications Recognition Agreement with China				Completed autumn			
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Host national conference on international recognition of qualifications					Spring		
Support implementation of directives in relation to international recognition of professional qualifications	Continuing						
<i>Theme 7 – Europass</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Establish Europass implementation advisory group				Spring			
Co-ordinate Europass implementation	Continuing						
Launch National Europass Centre website				Launched summer			

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Work with co-ordinators responsible for implementation of each of the various Europass tools to ensure implementation	Continuing						
Monitor availability of Europass documents	Continuing						
Ensure Europass documents are issued in conformity with national and European provisions	Continuing						
Co-ordinate the document production and promotion of Europass	Continuing						
Organise public awareness programme					Spring		
Manage Europass mobility	Continuing						
Collect data on the use of Europass	Continuing						
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Corporate Governance</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Establish an internal audit committee to review Authority's implementation of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies			Completed winter				
Adoption of a Code of Business Conduct for members and staff			Adopted winter				
Operate in a manner consistent with the Ethics in Public Office Acts	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Provide value for money by ensuring that Authority's services are provided in an economic, efficient and effective way	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Continue to review its implementation of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	Continuing						
Implement a risk analysis and risk management process	Continuing						
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Managing and Controlling Financial Resources</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Appropriate management of its financial resources	Continuing						
Ensure consistency, accuracy and timeliness in reporting of financial affairs between the Authority and the two awards Councils	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Ensure financial policies and procedures are agreed, reviewed and updated as necessary in line with best practice and any changes in reporting requirements	Continuing						
Ensure internal audit function continues to operate fully and appropriately and provides timely reports	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Human Resources Management							
Actions undertaken 2004-5							
Determination of human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements		Completed winter					
Undertake and implement a training needs analysis			Completed spring				
Develop and expand the provision of training and development options for all staff to meet identified needs	Continuing						
Set up a performance appraisal system consistent with best practice and the needs of a Performance Management Development System			Completed spring				
Actions planned 2006-8							
Continue to implement human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements	Continuing						
Continue to implement performance appraisal system consistent with best practice and the needs of a Performance Management Development System	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Continue to ensure that tasks are delegated consistent with the business plans drawn up to accomplish the strategic objectives of the Authority	Continuing						
Seek to ensure that appropriate staffing resources are put in place to meet the performance of additional functions	Continuing						
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Knowledge/ Communications Management</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Development of new Framework website and update Authority's website			Framework website launched summer	Authority website updated spring			
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Continuing development of internal data sharing systems and databases for the management of communications	Continuing						
Further development of databases for the management of all communications both internally and externally	Continuing						

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Quality Management Systems</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Develop a Customer Service Charter		Adopted winter					
Develop internal quality management approach and plans for self-evaluation			Developed winter				
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Continue to work in an open and transparent way, continuing practice of consultation with all interested and relevant parties	Continuing						
Set up appropriate systems required for dealing with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act	Continuing						
Continue to implement Customer Service Charter and keep under review	Continuing						
Review policy approach to internal quality management system					Winter		

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Decentralisation</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Develop initial implementation plan			Finalised summer				
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Implementation of Government policy	Continuing						
<i>Theme 8 – Corporate Affairs – Irish Language</i>							
<i>Actions undertaken 2004-5</i>							
Develop policy on use of Irish language		Completed winter					
Ensure compliance with requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003	Continuing						
<i>Actions planned 2006-8</i>							
Continue to implement policy on use of Irish language	Continuing						