

**Consultative Paper – Draft Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the
National Framework of Qualifications**

September, 2004

Index

	Page
Introduction	3
Section 1 Rationale	4
Section 2 Nature of Awarding Bodies	6
Section 3 Policy considerations	10
Section 4 Inclusion Type and Process for Professional Awards	16
Section 5 Inclusion Type and Process for the Awards of National Awarding Bodies from another Jurisdiction	18
Section 6 Next Steps	21
Appendix 1 Key Features of the National Framework of Qualifications and Access, Transfer and Progression	22
Appendix 2 Summary of Questions	23

Introduction

This consultative paper sets out draft policies and criteria for the inclusion of a range of awards in the National Framework of Qualifications. These awards include awards made by professional awarding bodies and those made by national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions following programmes that have been provided in Ireland.

At the initial stages of developing the Framework, the Authority received submissions from a range of organisations indicating their general support for the development of policies for the inclusion of professional and international awards in the National Framework of Qualifications. This led to specific consultations on the issue, followed by two workshops.

This consultative paper proposes a policy rationale and criteria and processes for the inclusion of a range of such awards in the National Framework of Qualifications. This takes account of overall policies in developing the Framework and the main processes for inclusion of awards in it. A policy rationale is suggested in Section I. Section II sets out the ways in which professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions are involved in awards, their legislative base and factors that are to be taken into account in developing a policy approach to inclusion. Section III sets out policy considerations and Sections IV and V put forward inclusion processes and policies and criteria to underpin these. The final section outlines the next steps in the policy process.

Section 1 Rationale

1.1. The National Framework of Qualifications

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 refers to the National Framework of Qualifications as being for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has a statutory function to determine the policies and criteria on which the National Framework of Qualifications is based. It is a 'framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State, based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners'. It is the Authority's goal that the Framework will become 'the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards'.

In developing the National Framework of Qualifications, a number of stakeholders called for professional and international awards to be included in it. This arose in consultations undertaken by the Authority following the publication of a discussion document on the Framework in November 2001. In May 2002, the Authority published a discussion paper on the inclusion of professional and international awards in the National Framework of Qualifications and received submissions on these. In 2003 the Authority held workshops on the issues. The discussion paper and reports of the workshops are available on the Authority website (www.nqai.ie).

While this consultation process was underway, the main features of the National Framework of Qualifications, the awards it contains and who makes them were determined. The Authority also determined related policies on access, transfer and progression for learners.

1.2 Why include the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in the National Framework of Qualifications?

A number of potential benefits arising from the inclusion in the Framework of the awards of professional awarding bodies and of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions, following programmes that have been provided in Ireland, have been identified in the consultation processes undertaken to date.

The principles and values determined by the Authority for the Framework set out the Authority's vision for a comprehensive, coherent and inclusive National Framework of Qualifications. The Authority recognises that many awarding bodies, in addition to those whose awards have been included in the Framework to date, have been making awards either in Ireland, or following the successful completion of programmes here, and have been doing so for many years. In many cases, these bodies have been meeting the needs of learners in a way that the State was not in a position to do at the time. This has particularly been the case in areas outside of State intervention and regulation, but such bodies have also played a key role in some areas where they have been set up by the State or funded by the State. Such bodies have played, and continue to play, a key role in the development of Irish society.

The environment is now changing. With the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications, there is now a move towards increased State recognition for all awards made in the State or following learning programmes undertaken in the State. While there is no compulsion for the inclusion of all awards in the Framework, the aim is that the Framework will become the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. Thus, from the learner's perspective, it is important that there is an opportunity to include as many awards as possible that are made in the State, or following learning programmes undertaken in the State, in the National Framework of Qualifications.

A large number of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions currently offer awards to learners in the state. Inclusion would enhance the value and possibly the transferability and use of these awards. This would increase the attractiveness of awards. Increased opportunities for access, transfer and progression are expected to flow from inclusion (given the structure of the Framework). These would benefit learners, providers and the awarding bodies.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland will be encouraging the continuing use of the Framework for various purposes by stakeholders. An example of this is the recommendation by the Enterprise Strategy Group for the establishment of a One-Step-Up initiative to encourage those in the workforce to gain qualifications at higher levels than their existing ones. The Framework can clearly only be useful for an initiative such as this where it is as inclusive as possible and appropriate.

Section 2 Nature of Awarding Bodies

This section looks at the nature of the involvement of various bodies in award-making to identify the issues to be taken into account in determining the Authority's policy approach to the inclusion of the awards in the Framework of professional awarding bodies and of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions following programmes that have been provided in Ireland. This includes a brief examination of the basis in legislation of the various types of awarding bodies.

Professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions have many roles. As far as the Framework is concerned, only their activities relating to making awards are relevant. They may have different roles in the awards process – they may also provide programmes, make available assessments, operate a register for membership and recognise (or accredit) awards made by other bodies.

A first step in considering the policy approach to inclusion is to determine those bodies which are deemed competent or which are recognised in legislation to make awards. The statutory responsibilities of certain bodies to determine standards and regulate professions are of particular importance.

2.1 Professional bodies

The authority and responsibilities of professional bodies in respect of making and recognising awards is often set out in legislation. Such legislation often concerns the regulation of a profession in general or entry and professional practice. As a result, professional bodies may be responsible for determining standards, quality assurance and competence requirements that are critical dimensions of awards.

Inclusion in the Framework is only concerned with awards that professional bodies actually make. These are distinct from actual membership, licence to practice and training and continuing professional development that does not result in a qualification or certification but which is relevant and recognised in the workplace. Arising from the consultation process on inclusion, it was clear that different meanings may be attached by professional awarding bodies to 'membership' and 'qualification' than those understood in terms of the National Framework of Qualifications. The term membership, when used by professional bodies, may act as a qualification which recognises someone who is 'qualified' or recognised as able to perform a particular function. A qualification or award, for the purposes of the Framework, is one which recognises learning achievement. It may also confirm the learner's ability to perform a particular function.

Statutory professional bodies

There is a wide range of statutory professional bodies in Ireland. All of these have a key role under EU directives concerning the recognition of professional qualifications which are either directly transposed into Irish Law or referenced in national legislation for specific professions or professional activity.

There is a variation in the statutory powers of such statutory professional bodies to make awards and recognise awards.

- Some have statutory power to make awards. This power is specifically set out in legislation governing the relevant profession/professional activity.
- Some may be given statutory power to ‘conduct examinations’ for the purpose of registration. This may not result in a specific award being made by the professional/regulatory body.

The EU directives concern the recognition of professional qualifications and are either directly transposed into Irish Law or referenced in national legislation for specific professions or professional activity. Sectoral directives concerning seven professions – doctor, general care nurse, dental practitioner, midwife, pharmacist, veterinary surgeon and architect – have been transposed into national legislation, although the profession of architect is not currently regulated in Ireland. General directives, which concern professions and professional activities other than the seven specific ones, are also in place. A further set of legislation concerns access to other occupations and activities that are generally regulated in other EU states, but not in Ireland.

A regulated profession is a professional activity or group of professional activities, access to which and/or the practice of which, is subject, directly or indirectly, to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions. These provisions can include professional qualifications. The extent of regulation varies from case to case. For each of these professions and professional activities, a designated authority/competent authority is listed in either EU and/or national legislation. These authorities can either be the relevant Minister, a professional body or a national authority. These designated/competent authorities have the authority (in the host member state) to recognise awards/qualifications/attestation of competence by a person from outside the state for the purpose of taking up or pursuing a regulated profession. They may also issue awards/qualifications/attestations of competence to citizens of the member state. Attestations of competence can be issued for an un-regulated profession or activity in cases where a person seeks access to a profession or professional activity that is regulated in another member state but not in Ireland.

The use of a professional title which may be limited by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to holders of a given professional qualification also comes under the general heading of regulated professions. The regulation of some of the professions in Ireland is solely concerned with regulating the use of title, e.g., Chartered Engineer, Town Planner.

The Authority suggests that only the awards made by professional bodies that have a basis in Irish law to make awards will be considered for inclusion as professional awards in the Framework.

Non-statutory professional bodies

A second broad category of professional and international bodies are those that are not-regulated or accorded a status in law to make or recognise awards but have organised themselves on an independent basis to do so. These include bodies and associations active in the sectors such as complementary health, leisure and information technology. These bodies may represent emerging professions or sub-sectors of professions – in some areas, more than one body may offer awards – or sectors that operate across national boundaries.

These bodies play an important role in meeting market needs for awards and certification. The Authority has no function to recognise their activities (and is it possible that the inclusion of the awards that these bodies make could be interpreted as indirectly conferring authority to these bodies as awarding bodies). This consideration needs to be balanced against the needs of learners holding or seeking awards and the broader societal and labour market recognition that the awards in question have. The consultation process has shown considerable interest on the part of the bodies in question in the Framework and in preserving the value of their awards.

There is also a situation of an indirect regulation of title for a profession/professional activity. This arises where legislation may specify particular professions/professional activity only without any associated reference to awards/qualifications (e.g. the Companies Act sets out that only members of certain professions may audit company accounts). In this situation the requirements for achievement of a professional title/membership may include an examination and the issue of an award/title by a professional body which may not have specific statutory powers to do so.

2.2 National awarding bodies from other jurisdictions

These are awarding bodies based primarily in one country but offering awards to learners based in Ireland on the basis of programmes provided in Ireland. They can perhaps be described as national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which operate in Ireland. They have a range of involvements in awards. They can design their own programmes, deliver their own programmes, make the awards themselves, provide assessment, assess and certify or only certify programmes designed by other providers of education and training. In some cases, the awards of these awarding bodies are included in a framework of qualifications in the host country, where such a framework exists. In most cases in Ireland national awarding bodies operating here from another jurisdiction are UK awarding bodies.

2.3 Global awarding bodies

Global bodies are international awarding bodies that operate in a number of countries in specific sectors, principally in information technology. They are often linked to global corporations. Examples of these include Microsoft, Intel, Cisco, Lotus, Novell and Sun. The awards they offer may be product specific e.g. those developed by Microsoft or generic e.g. those offered by Comptia and ECDL. The awards that they make in Ireland sometimes lead from stand-alone programmes or from programmes that lead to (larger) national awards.

Global awards are already understood in Ireland in a number of ways. Generally, this is through diverse relationships with the awards of individual Irish awarding bodies. It is envisaged that such relationships will continue and be enhanced by the increased clarity that the Framework is bringing to the Irish awards system. There are no new policy proposals in relation to global awards in this paper.

It is suggested that

- Inclusion concerns only those awards that are made by an awarding body
- Only the awards made by professional bodies that have a basis in Irish law to make awards will be considered for inclusion as professional awards in the Framework
- Professional bodies that are organised or operate in more than one jurisdiction are considered to be national awarding bodies from their jurisdiction of origin for the purposes of inclusion of awards they make in the Framework
- The 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 the their host jurisdiction and whose awards are included in national frameworks or the equivalent may be considered for inclusion in the Framework where such awards are made following the successful completion of programmes in Ireland by learners.

Question A

Do you agree with the suggested arrangements for the professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which may seek to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications? Would you suggest that these arrangements should be changed or further amended?

Section 3 Policy considerations

A number of policy considerations arise with respect to inclusion. The values and principles of equality and accessibility, comprehensiveness and coherence, transparency and simplicity, quality and relevance underpin Framework development. These also apply to the consideration of the inclusion of the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in the National Framework of Qualifications.

3.1 Role of Irish awarding bodies

Many existing awards made by the Irish awarding bodies also meet professional and occupational needs, are recognised by professional bodies and are developed with the involvement of professional bodies. A number of global awards are also integrated in the award structures of Irish awarding bodies.

The Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council play a key role in validating programmes of education and training for the purposes of making awards. The services of the Councils are available to all providers of education and training. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 sets out a very broad definition of a programme of education and training. Essentially, a programme is defined as any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence and includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment. This has significant implications for other awarding bodies as they can enter into cooperation with the awards Councils to develop suitable named awards to meet their needs and to validate programmes as required. Indeed, professional and international awarding bodies may also link with a university or the Dublin Institute of Technology in some of these ways. While these activities are distinct from the direct inclusion of awards in the Framework, they can meet many of the needs of other awarding bodies in relation to the Framework.

3.2 Recognition of international awards

The recognition of international awards is, at present, different from their inclusion in the National Framework of Qualifications and relates to the recognition of an award made outside of the State usually following the completion of a programme of education and training provided outside the State.

Recognition of an international award is a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities. Effectively, this is taken to mean advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the foreign qualification in the context of access to learning or employment. If a formal award recognition agreement is in place it is a direct statement of comparability.

The Authority, in partnership with stakeholders, is putting in place a co-ordinated national approach to the recognition of international awards. It is aiming to bring about a consistent and coherent national approach. A detailed paper on the development of a national approach to the recognition of international awards has

been published on the Authority's website – www.nqai.ie. The general approach is as follows:

- Queries are received by the Authority concerning information about awards made in Ireland and their value abroad and 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 national awarding body which conducts the assessment of the foreign qualification.
- The recognition service is being marketed as a single service, i.e., in the future there will be a one-stop-shop for recognition queries and information. The title for this service will be Qualifications Recognition – Ireland. A distinct website within the Authority's website is being developed.
- The policy approach is consistent with the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.
- Recognition agreements will be sought on a proactive basis.
- A Recognition Implementation Group has been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Department of Education and Science. This group is responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

It is anticipated that, as the Irish National Framework of Qualifications is aligned and referenced with other national frameworks of qualifications, the awards that those frameworks contain will be able to be compared with those included in the Irish Framework. This alignment will, it is expected, offer a degree of comparability and recognition to awards made by international bodies in particular. The Authority is engaged in work on aligning/linking the Irish Framework to the relevant frameworks across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This work is advancing well and it is hoped that the outcome of the first stage of this work will be published by January 2005.

3.3 Current stage of Framework development and implementation

The current stage of developing and implementing the Framework is also relevant to the policy approach to be taken at this time. The main steps taken to-date are indicated in the Appendix 1 attached. The key structural elements of the Framework are in place – the 10 levels, sub-strands of learning outcomes and an initial set of major award-types.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council put in place interim standards for its awards and has now re-validated programmes. The Further Education and Training Awards Council aims to agree the placement of its existing and previously-made awards with the Authority in autumn 2004 and is considering the introduction of interim standards to build upon this approach.

The main phases of work currently underway are the development of standards for named awards by the relevant awarding bodies, the placement of existing awards in the Framework and the development of descriptors for minor, supplemental and special

purpose award-types. The latter will permit the certification of smaller volumes of learning outcomes and help ensure that the awards system is more responsive to the needs of a lifelong learning society.

3.4 Quality assurance

A key objective of the Framework is to promote and maintain the standards of further and higher education and training awards. A number of different arrangements are already in place, backed by legislation, to ensure the quality of education and training in Ireland. It is recognised that professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions also operate a range of procedures with respect to quality assurance both on an independent basis and on an agreed basis with other awarding bodies and providers. It is also recognised that professional bodies may incorporate ethical and other requirements in addition to those of knowledge, skill and competence in awards that they make.

From the perspective of the Framework, it is essential that quality assurance procedures are in place to make sure that standards for awards included in the Framework are achieved and maintained. There must be confidence in the capacity of the awarding body to ensure the quality of awards that they make. There are statutory quality assurance arrangements along these lines set out in relation to all of the awards that are already included in the Framework.

The question that arises is how to ensure the quality of the awards of professional awarding bodies and of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions that might be in the Framework.

3.5 Access, transfer and progression

This is a core dimension of the Framework. The objective is that the learner should be able to enter and successfully participate in a programme, or series of programmes leading to an award, or series of awards, in pursuit of his/her learning objectives. The National Framework of Qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry and to promote transfer and progression. Thus, learners will be encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities.

In this context, the Authority has defined specific policies, actions and procedures through which it will meet its objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression. These include requirements for national awarding bodies and providers covering entry arrangements, credit, transfer and progression routes and information. In addition, the initial set of major award-types determined for the Framework has in-built features of access, transfer and progression. These are set out in the award-type descriptors.

A number of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions also operate policies on access, transfer and progression, including credit. Many of those who engaged in the consultation process on inclusion of international and professional awards in the Framework made submissions supporting the need for consistency of these with the Authority's policies on access, transfer and progression.

3.6 Titles of awards

The importance of the title and identity of the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions to the bodies that make them and to learners and providers was underlined in the consultation process. It is considered that the title of the awards made by the professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which are to be included in the Framework would, in general, remain intact. However, in order to ensure consistency and clarity across the Framework, the titles of such awards included in the Framework should be consistent with the titles of other awards included at the same level in the Framework.

3.7 Requirement on certain providers to seek programme validation from Awards Councils

Under the Qualifications Act, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Vocational Education Committees and Institutes of Technology, generally and where they do not have delegated authority to make awards, are required to submit the programmes they provide for validation to either the Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Validation is the process by which either of the two awards Councils satisfies itself that a learner may attain knowledge, skill and competence for the purpose of an award.

Accordingly, provision in State funded providers, other than the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, in further education and training and higher education and training, is generally to lead to an award from either the Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council or for which authority to make the award has been delegated by such a Council.

This requirement for such publicly funded providers of education and training to submit programmes for validation does not take away from their freedom to also seek to have awards made by other awarding bodies – any such awarding would be in addition to, but not instead of, awards from the Further Education and Training Awards Council or the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Where such providers also have arrangements with an international awarding body or a professional body, the inclusion of any such professional or international awards in the Framework does not remove any requirement to submit programmes for validation to the Councils.

3.8 Implementation issues

It is, at this stage in the development of the Framework, difficult to predict the extent to which professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions will seek to have their awards included in it. In addition, existing implementation raises important issues of resources and capacities.

There is little international practice in the area of inclusion of awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in national frameworks of qualifications. The ways in which awarding bodies relate to the State in Ireland differ from that of other jurisdictions. In school and vocational education and training in the UK, for example, awarding bodies are first reviewed with a view to

recognising them as being competent to offer qualifications. If successful, they can then submit qualifications for inclusion in the national qualifications framework.

The interest of the Authority in encouraging the development of awards to meet learner needs, in encouraging the recognition of learning in all contexts and in encouraging the development of alternative pathways of learning needs to be balanced against its interests in ensuring that the learning that is recognised in the Framework meets the associated standards and requirements of quality assurance, and access, transfer and progression for learners.

It is suggested that

- One of the major aims of the Framework is to recognise learning achievements. For this reason, an open approach to the inclusion of awards made by professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in the Framework will be adopted.
- There can be no formal requirement put in place by the Authority for professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions to include their awards in the National Framework of Qualifications.
- A voluntary approach will be taken to inclusion. It is a matter for the professional awarding body and the national awarding bodies from another jurisdiction in question to decide whether to seek inclusion.
- Given the current stage in the development and implementation of the Framework, only major awards will be eligible for inclusion on an initial basis. It is considered that the implementation of award-type descriptors for minor, supplemental and special purpose awards will, over time, facilitate the inclusion of other awards in the Framework.
- The inclusion process should safeguard the autonomy of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions and the value and integrity of awards that they make.
- Quality assurance procedures must be in place to make sure that standards for the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions included in the Framework are achieved and maintained. It is suggested that this should be agreed on a case-by-case basis with the awarding body in question. This will take account of existing arrangements and roles of the relevant awarding bodies and providers.
- The Authority's policies on access, transfer and progression should be endorsed by professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in respect of awards to be included in the Framework
- The titles of the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions should generally remain intact and should be consistent with the titles of other awards included at the same level in the Framework.

Question B

Do you agree with the suggested approach set out above for the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which may seek to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications? Would you suggest that these arrangements should be changed or further amended?

Section 4 Inclusion Type and Process for Professional Awards

4.1 Type of inclusion

At the current stage of developing the Framework, one type of inclusion of professional awards in the Framework is suggested. Such awards may be included at a level in the Framework. This type of inclusion is analogous with that of the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework through placement at a level – more detail on the rationale for the inclusion in the Framework of existing and former awards can be found in Chapter 7 of the publication of the Authority 'Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications'. It is anticipated that, as the Framework and associated awards are developed, professional awards could be included under existing or new award-types.

For inclusion by level, the learning outcomes associated with the award and those set out for each level of the Framework are considered. This type of inclusion is currently applied to existing and former awards made by the awards Councils.

4.2 Processes of inclusion

A two-stage process of inclusion is suggested.

Stage 1

- Based on the proposals in the previous sections, the professional awarding body applies to the Authority for eligibility to submit its awards for inclusion in the Framework. Providers of education and training may not submit such awards for inclusion, other than where the provider is also the awarding body.
- The key issues to be considered are the status and responsibilities in law of the professional body with respect to awards.
- Only those awards that are made in Ireland will be considered.
- The quality assurance arrangements that the professional body has in place will be considered as part of this stage of the process.

Stage 2

- The awarding body submits a detailed application to the Authority. This application will identify:
 - the award(s) in question
 - the level at which it is proposed that the award be included
 - rationale for inclusion
 - the applicant will submit the award in a format that specifies the outcomes in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. These will refer to the sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence identified for the Framework.

- the consideration of an application will have regard to standard setting approaches, award standards, programme validation arrangements, quality assurance and assessment procedures applied or monitored by the applicant body to ensure that the learning outcomes can be achieved.
- Procedures for access, transfer and progression operated by the applicant body will also be taken into account.
- Detailed procedures for the consideration of applications would have to be determined with the involvement of Irish national awarding bodies.
- Review arrangements will be put in place by the Authority in consultation with the awarding bodies whose awards are already in the Framework.
- An appeals mechanism will be put in place – this will be a process review.

Question C

Do you agree with the type of inclusion set out above for the awards of professional bodies? Do you agree with the processes set out? Would you suggest the processes should be changed or further amended?

Section 5 Inclusion Type and Process for the Awards of National awarding bodies from another jurisdiction

5.1 Type of inclusion

The 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 and whose awards are included in national frameworks or the equivalent may be considered for inclusion in the Framework where such awards are made following the successful completion of programmes in Ireland by learners.

At the current stage of developing the Framework, it is suggested that the inclusion process for these awards would build upon the process being put in place for the recognition in Ireland of awards made outside of the State usually following the completion of a programme of education and training provided outside the State.

The Authority, in partnership with stakeholders, is putting in place a co-ordinated national approach to the recognition of international awards. It is aiming to bring about a consistent and coherent national approach. Through the recognition service advice is provided on the comparability of foreign qualifications in the context of access to learning or employment.

The Authority envisages that the process of the inclusion in the Framework of the awards of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in the Framework will parallel this process. It is envisaged that inclusion will be a possibility where the learning programme leading to the award has been provided in Ireland. If the learning has not been provided in Ireland, then it is not appropriate to include the award in the Framework.

It is anticipated that, as the Irish National Framework of Qualifications is aligned and referenced with other national frameworks of qualifications, the awards that those frameworks contain will be able to be compared with those awards in the Irish Framework. This alignment will, it is expected, offer a degree of comparability and recognition to awards made by international bodies in particular.

The Authority is engaged in work on aligning/linking the Irish Framework to the relevant frameworks across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This work is advancing well and it is hoped that the outcome of the first stage of this work will be published by January 2005. In discussions undertaken by the Authority to date, the bulk of international awarding bodies which have shown an interest in having their awards included in the Framework have been those whose awards are already included in frameworks in the United Kingdom. It is considered that the framework referencing work that is underway will be of assistance in clarifying understandings of UK awards in Ireland.

It is envisaged that the inclusion of an award in the Framework will be on the basis of either inclusion at a level or as being comparable to a named award of a particular major award-type.

5.2 Processes of inclusion

A two-stage process of inclusion is suggested.

Stage 1

- Based on the proposals in the previous sections, the national awarding body from another jurisdiction applies to the Authority for eligibility to submit its awards for inclusion in the Framework. Providers of education and training may not submit such awards for inclusion, other than where the provider is also the awarding body.
- The key issues to be considered are the awarding body's status in law or how it is otherwise recognised as having authority to make awards that have national recognition in its host jurisdiction and included in its national framework or equivalent.
- Only those awards that are made in Ireland or following the successful completion of programmes provided in Ireland will be considered.
- The extent to which the awards of the national awarding body from another jurisdiction are already covered by international referencing of qualifications or recognition agreement will be relevant.
- The quality assurance arrangements that the awarding body has in place will be considered as part of this stage of the process.

Stage 2

- The awarding body submits a detailed application to the Authority. This application will identify:
 - the award(s) in question
 - the level at which it is proposed that the award be included and the comparability with a named award of a particular award-type, as appropriate
 - rationale for inclusion
 - the applicant will submit the award in a format that specifies the outcomes in terms of knowledge, skill and competence. These will refer to the sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence identified for the Framework.
 - the consideration of an application will have regard to standard setting approaches, award standards, programme validation arrangements, quality assurance and assessment procedures applied or monitored by the applicant body to ensure that the learning outcomes can be achieved.
- Procedures for access, transfer and progression operated by the applicant body will also be taken into account.
- Detailed procedures for the consideration of applications would have to be determined with the involvement of Irish national awarding bodies, in the same manner as is used for the recognition of international awards.

- Review arrangements will be put in place by the Authority in consultation with the awarding bodies whose awards are already in the Framework.
- An appeals mechanism will be put in place – this will be a process review.

Question D

Do you agree with the types of inclusion set out above for the awards of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions? Do you agree with the processes set out? Would you suggest the processes should be changed or further amended?

Section 6 Next Steps

The Framework was launched in October 2003 and is in the process of being implemented. A number of developments are on-going – the placement of existing and former awards made by the awards Councils, the development of standards for named awards and the communication of the Framework.

Given the state of play with development, implementation and communication of the Framework, the following timescale and overall approach to determining the policies and criteria for inclusion is suggested:

- the consultation paper will be published in September 2004
- submissions will be invited up to mid-January 2005
- consultative workshops will be hosted in spring 2005
- in early 2005, the Authority will pilot the suggested approaches with 2-3 professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions who may volunteer to explore the issues before policy is finally determined
- the Authority will consult directly with professional bodies in Ireland that have the statutory power to make awards
- policies and criteria will be determined in July 2005

This paper advances policy proposals on how the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland might approach the inclusion of the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions in the National Framework of Qualifications.

There is a provision on the Authority's website to download a response form to this paper. The website of the Authority is at www.nqai.ie. All those submitting responses are requested to try and return this form as their submission to the Authority, or as part of their submission. Written submissions are requested. The Authority would also request that, if possible, submissions would be made electronically. The intention is that all of the submissions made to the Authority will be publicly available on the website and may also be distributed by the Authority. In this way the views of each of the various stakeholders can be apparent to other stakeholders

At this time, the Authority is not seeking applications from awarding bodies for the inclusion of their awards in the Framework.

Appendix 1

Key Features of the National Framework of Qualifications and Access, Transfer and Progression

While the consultation process on including professional and international awards was underway, the Authority reached a number of determinations concerning the national Framework of qualifications. It was formally launched in October 2003. The Framework comprises ten levels. Each level sets out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners. These are described in a grid of level indicators which are the principal element of the Framework. They indicate the overall standards associated with awards to be made at each level and enable award-types to be placed in the Framework. A set of 16 major award-types has been determined for the Framework, with at least one at each of the ten levels. They reflect a mix of standards of knowledge, skill and competence which is independent of any field of learning. For each award-type, a range of named awards will be developed by the awards Councils and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Qualifications Act established two awards Councils - the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Their role is to develop policies and criteria for making further/higher education and training awards, to validate programmes leading to those awards and to implement such policies. The Framework of qualifications sets the overall standards of the awards of the two awards Councils and the Dublin Institute of Technology. The universities and the Department of Education and Science are responsible for setting the overall standards of their awards. These will also be accommodated in the Framework of qualifications.

The National Qualifications Authority is also developing policies on access, transfer and progression to support the Framework. In general, these will be implemented by the Authority, the awards Councils and providers of education and training. Their objective is to enable learners to enter and successfully participate in programmes leading to awards and to promote transfer and progression. These policies will relate to credit and the recognition of prior learning, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements and information provision. These general provisions must also be facilitated in the development of awards that will be included in the Framework.

The issue of including awards that currently exist or previously existed in the Framework is being addressed. In order to ensure an inclusive Framework and to safeguard the interests of learners who have already achieved or are presently working towards such awards, the awards Councils, in conjunction with the Authority, are involved in a placement process for existing and former awards that were previously made by NCVA, NCEA, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc. The placement of many of the awards made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (and the NCEA) was determined in March 2004 and it is expected that further awards will be placed in 2004.

The Authority has also developed descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types. It is envisaged that these descriptors will encourage the recognition of a wide range of learning achievements by awarding bodies.

Appendix 2 Summary of Questions

The following are the questions identified in this paper:

Question A

Do you agree with the suggested arrangements for the professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which may seek to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications? Would you suggest that these arrangements should be changed or further amended?

Question B

Do you agree with the suggested approach set out above for the awards of professional awarding bodies and national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions which may seek to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications? Would you suggest that these arrangements should be changed or further amended?

Question C

Do you agree with the type of inclusion set out above for the awards of professional bodies? Do you agree with the processes set out? Would you suggest the processes should be changed or further amended?

Question D

Do you agree with the types of inclusion set out above for the awards of national awarding bodies from other jurisdictions? Do you agree with the processes set out? Would you suggest the processes should be changed or further amended?