

National Framework of Qualifications

Creaitoire Náisiúnta na gCáilíochtaí



*A framework for the development, recognition
and award of qualifications in Ireland*

**POLICIES, ACTIONS AND PROCEDURES
FOR ACCESS, TRANSFER AND
PROGRESSION FOR LEARNERS**

National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland



Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann

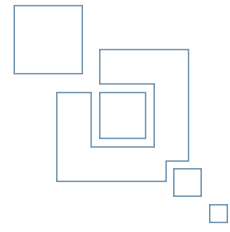


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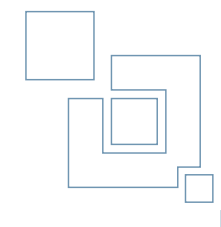


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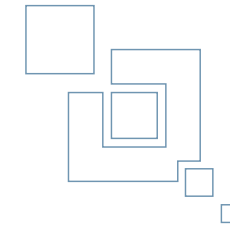


Policies, actions
and procedures
for access, transfer
and progression
for learners



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Summary

The formal determinations of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression are contained in the following main sections of this paper. This summary is included for ease of use, and is not part of the formal determinations.

Vision

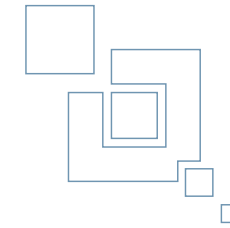
The Authority has adopted a composite vision for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression as follows:

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 their learning objectives. The National Framework of Qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry and to promote transfer and progression, so that learners are encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities.

Operational principles

Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression have been developed in accordance with seven operational principles, summarised as follows:

- programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications should accommodate a variety of access and entry arrangements
- the issues of access, transfer and progression should be addressed for all learners
- policies should be designed in the context of national policy in relation to equality, with particular regard to the relevant provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Employment Equality Act 1998
- all awards should have some associated opportunities for transfer and progression.
- awards at the same level in the Framework should be valued equally



- a learner's continued participation in learning may require opportunities for either transfer or progression at any transition-point
- the Framework concept implies that a learner achieving an award is, in principle, eligible to progress to a programme leading to another award at the next level up where there is such an award in the same or a related field of learning, and may be eligible to progress to a higher level than that.

Objectives

In line with the learner-centred vision adopted, the Authority has identified a number of objectives, focused on meeting the needs of learners in the achievement of appropriate recognition for their learning:

- 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.

Meeting objectives

The Authority will achieve its objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression by taking a number of actions as follows:

- the development of a National Framework of Qualifications
- the facilitation of change
- the development of policies to supplement the Framework development policies already established and published. These policies will relate to:
 - credit (and recognition of prior learning)
 - transfer and progression routes
 - entry arrangements
 - information provision
- the definition of sets of actions and procedures for the implementation of the policies adopted. Actions and procedures will be defined for:
 - the Authority
 - the awards Councils
 - providers of further and higher education and training.

Framework development

The primary action to be undertaken by the Authority is the development and implementation of a National Framework of Qualifications. The Framework will make it clear how awards relate to one another. This will make it possible for the learner to identify

- how, and at what point, they can enter a learning programme that will lead to an award,
- what possibilities there are for transfer to another programme, and what recognition for transfer they

will get for the knowledge, skill and competence they have already acquired,

- what possibilities there are for progression to higher level learning opportunities from their awards.

The facilitation of change

The Authority recognises that changes in systems and structures, and in attitudes, are required to address many of the issues involved in achieving the objectives of enhanced arrangements for access, transfer and progression. An anticipated outcome of the work of the Authority, in general, is a more diverse learner community, with diverse needs, throughout further and higher education and training. It is a policy of the Authority that changes should be brought about to meet these learners' needs. These changes will impact on many organisations, groups and individuals at all levels in education and training.

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

- contributing to policy-making at national level
- participation in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups
- the establishment, where appropriate, of consortia of relevant stakeholders to enable the development of consensus for change
- 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.

Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression

The Authority has defined specific policies, actions and procedures through which it will meet its objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression. They are set out under four themes:

- credit
- transfer and progression routes
- entry arrangements
- information provision.

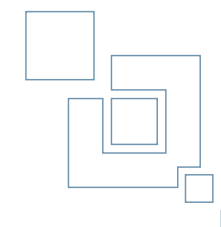
Under each of these headings, the respective roles of key stakeholders – the Authority, the awards Councils and providers – are specified.

Credit

The key policy on credit is the development and implementation of a national approach to credit. This approach will complement the National Framework of Qualifications. It will meet the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context, facilitating credit accumulation, credit transfer and processes for the recognition of prior learning. It will also accord with ongoing developments in Europe in relation to credit systems. Principles and objectives for a national approach to credit are defined. Procedures are set out for providers in relation to the specification of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning.

Transfer and progression routes

Under the heading of transfer and progression routes, it is set out as a policy approach that learners achieving awards should have eligibility to transfer or progress. Further policies are that all awards should have some associated possibilities for transfer or progression, and



that support needs of learners to enable transfer or progression should be met. Procedures are set out for providers in relation to

- identification of transfer and progression routes
- specification of requirements for transfer and progression
- the need to support learners to enable transfer and progression routes to operate.

Entry arrangements

Policy approaches are designed to extend accessibility and to focus the concept of access on the achievement of an award (rather than on entry to a programme), through the definition of factors necessary as a basis for successful participation. A further policy concerns the particular issue of entry arrangements to higher education and training by adult learners. Procedures are set out for providers in relation to

- clear, fair and consistent arrangements for entry
- appeals processes
- statements of the knowledge, skill and competence needed as a basis for successful participation
- clarity about awards demonstrating eligibility for entry.

Information provision

Policies on information provision are designed to ensure that all relevant institutions and organisations contribute to the provision of high-quality, comprehensive and accessible information for learners. Procedures define a set of information protocols to be observed by all providers of education or training programmes.

Further development and implementation

The paper concludes by setting out areas for further development and a timetable for implementation.

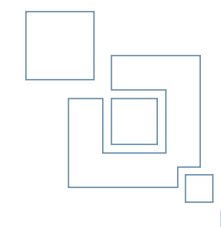
Introduction

This paper begins by setting out the vision, principles and objectives that underpin the approach of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to the task of promoting and facilitating access, transfer and progression. It then sets out the policies, actions and procedures by which the Authority will achieve its objectives, and outlines the roles of the Authority itself, the awards Councils and providers of education and training in this matter.

The paper sets out, in turn, specific policies, actions and procedures on: credit, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements, and information provision. Under each of these headings, the respective roles of key stakeholders – the Authority, the awards Councils and providers – are specified. The policies, actions and procedures set out in this paper are determinations of the Authority under sections 7 (c), 8 (d), 8 (e) and 8 (f) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. A summary of procedures that apply to providers in relation to each of the policy areas is provided in Addendum 3.

The paper concludes by setting out areas for further development and a timetable for implementation.

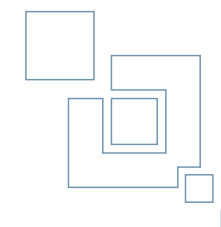
The policies, actions and procedures elaborated in this paper were developed in the context of the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications. The policies, criteria and definitions relating to the outline Framework are published in two companion documents to this paper, "Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications" and "Outline National Framework of Qualifications – Determinations made by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland".



1 Context

This paper sets out policies, actions and procedures established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in relation to the key object of promoting and facilitating access, transfer and progression. This object is defined in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, in the context of an explicit lifelong learning agenda. This agenda in turn informs the vision for the recognition of learning adopted by the Authority as the basis of its work in the document *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications – Establishment of Policies and Criteria*, published in April 2002. Building from this vision, the Authority defines a set of core values and principles and development process guidelines to underpin the establishment of a National Framework of Qualifications. The April 2002 document continues by defining the design criteria for the Framework and by setting out a number of policies which will guide the development of the Framework.

The emphasis in the Establishment of Policies and Criteria document is on the development of a national framework of qualifications. It is now necessary for the Authority to specifically address the issues of access, transfer and progression. The approach to this task is to build on the foundations already established for the development of the Framework by developing a set of policies, actions and procedures that will ensure that all learners are able to achieve recognition for their learning by accessing awards appropriate to their ambitions, commitment and capacities. This approach, therefore, shares the same fundamental vision, values, principles and process guidelines as defined for the task of framework development. Furthermore, it begins from the set of policies already set out for the Framework. The rationale for the adoption of several of these policies is the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression.



The promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression is, therefore, identified as an important task, both as a separate object of the Authority in the 1999 Act and as an essential element in the development of the framework of qualifications. A third factor in the significance of this issue is the general consensus evident in the consultation process undertaken by the Authority since its establishment, and particularly in the submissions received following the publication in November 2001 of the discussion document *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications*. A consistent view emerging in the consultations is that access, transfer and progression is a key issue to be addressed if a national framework of qualifications is to have any real meaning, and that the existing situation in relation to access, transfer and progression needs to be improved. The policies, actions and procedures set out in this paper originated in the recommendations of many stakeholders and in the context of many examples of international practice. They have been refined in the light of many comments and suggestions arising out of written submissions and discussions. They have been further shaped to take account of the emerging design of the National Framework of Qualifications.

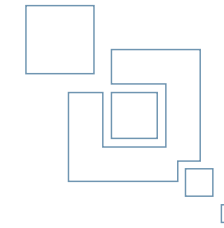
2 Vision and principles for access, transfer and progression

Definitions in the legislation

The concepts of access, transfer and progression are defined in the Qualifications Act:

- **Access** – *the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence required.*
- **Transfer** – *the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.*
- **Progression** – *the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme, where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme.*

The Authority is not charged with comprehensive responsibility for all actions that need to be taken to extend the levels of participation in further and higher education and training – its remit relates to the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression in the context of the establishment and maintenance of an awards framework. The definitions in the Act are made in this context. Nevertheless, it is necessary to expand on these definitions to ensure that actions undertaken can contribute as strongly as possible to the wider national objective of encouraging lifelong learning. The Authority has a key role to play in realising this objective.



It is considered that the concept of 'access' should apply to all learners, but particularly to the participation of under-represented learner cohorts such as those with special education needs, learners from disadvantaged communities, learners in the workplace and adult learners generally. A more appropriate definition of access for these groups needs to include programme adaptation, or the provision of in-process supports, or even the provision of new variants or formats of programmes (e.g., part-time or modular formats). It is more productive for all learners to focus the access concept on completion (the achievement of the award) rather than on entry. Access to a programme of education and training is not a worthwhile aim if the learner is then unable to achieve his/her objective of obtaining an award.

The concept of 'progression' is very much linked with that of access to learning. There is also a further dimension of progression which is not dealt with specifically in this paper – i.e., progression into an occupational field, particularly in relation to programmes that are intended to have a direct occupational outcome. Such progression concerns the relevance of awards and arrangements for taking up employment opportunities.

It should be noted that the references to access, transfer and progression in the Qualifications Act are made in the context of further and higher education and training, and do not pertain to second-level education. The policies, actions and procedures determined by the Authority in this regard are similarly relevant in the first instance to the further and higher areas. However, junior and senior cycle second-level awards are relevant to the development of the National Framework of Qualifications as the Framework is intended to accommodate all awards made in the State.

Vision for access, transfer and progression

Based on this expanded definition of the key concepts, and in line with the vision and principles already established for its work (in Establishment of Policies and Criteria, April 2002), the Authority has developed a composite vision for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression:

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 their learning objectives. The National Framework of Qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry, and to promote transfer and progression, so that learners are encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities.

Acceptance of this composite vision of access, transfer and progression implies that the learner should have available

- information and guidance
- opportunity for entry – this includes eligibility and availability of a place
- appropriate support in participation
- clarity of the process leading to an award outcome, including possibilities for transfer and progression
- arrangements for participation in a variety of modes and formats, including the possibility of achieving an award by accumulating credit for learning achievements over a period
- access as appropriate to initiatives to promote equality and combat discrimination.

The Authority, by exercising its statutory functions and by setting procedures to be implemented by other

stakeholders, can contribute to the realisation of many aspects of this vision – e.g. policies on provision of information, eligibility for entry and clarity of processes. However, it is recognised that many of the issues that need to be addressed for the full realisation of the vision require significant changes in systems, structures and attitudes throughout the education and training community and in elements of public policy. The need for some of these changes has already been identified by Government, and key initiatives in response are under way, particularly in the area of the development of lifelong learning. The Authority will adopt a lead role in identifying and, where appropriate, in co-ordinating further changes necessary.

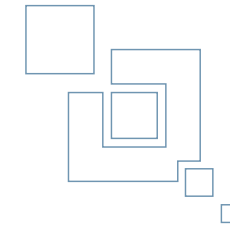
Operational principles for access, transfer and progression

Arising out of this vision, the Authority identifies a number of operational principles which will underlie its policies in relation to access, transfer and progression, and the associated procedures that will activate and implement those policies. Some of these operational principles are developed from the values and principles already set out by the Authority for its work as a whole and incorporated into its policies on transfer and progression from awards (see chapter 5 in *Policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications*).

Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression are developed in accordance with the following operational principles:

- programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications should accommodate a variety of access and entry arrangements
- the issues of access, transfer and progression should be addressed for all learners, but particularly for

- those learners who have in the past had limited access to education and training awards – those with limited levels of basic education, mature learners, older learners, learners who are unemployed or not in the labour force, workers in unskilled or low-skilled occupations, people with disabilities, those living in remote or isolated locations, members of the Traveller community or minority ethnic groups, and refugees
- policies should be designed in the context of national policy in relation to equality, with particular regard to the relevant provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Employment Equality Act 1998
- all awards should have some associated opportunities for transfer and progression.
- Awards at the same level in the Framework should be valued equally, even where they have differing access or entry arrangements, differing opportunities for transfer and progression or different purposes generally
- a learner's continued participation in learning may require opportunities for either transfer or progression at any transition-point
- the Framework concept implies that a learner achieving an award is, in principle, eligible to progress to a programme leading to another award at the next level up where there is such an award in the same or a related field of learning, and may be eligible to progress to a higher level than that. At the same time, where there is not an award at a higher level in the same or a related field of learning, the Framework concept implies that learners achieving an award are eligible for transfer to a programme leading to another award at the same level. This principle does not imply entitlement to a programme place, which may be limited by factors of supply and demand.



Equality of opportunity

In developing its policies and procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression, the Authority will work in the context of national policy in relation to equality, with particular regard to the relevant provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Employment Equality Act 1998.

The Equal Status Act 2000 includes in its measures the prohibition of discrimination in the provision of education. The nine discriminatory grounds are gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, race, age, disability and membership of the Traveller community (section 3 (2) (a-i)).

Section 7 of the Act deals with educational establishments, relating directly to 'a university or any other third level or higher level institution, whether or not supported by public funds'. Section 7 (2) states:

"An educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:

- a. the admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment*
- b. the access of a student of any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment.*
- c. any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student or*
- d. the expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student."*

Further sections of the Act make a number of exceptions, including exceptions for variable fees and the allocation of places to nationals of a member state of the European Union and other nationals, for sponsorships, scholarships,

bursaries and other awards on the basis of traditional and historic consideration, for exchange student arrangements and in relation to allocation of places to mature students. The Act includes a requirement to make reasonable accommodation for students with a disability where, without this special treatment or facilities, it would be impossible or unduly difficult to avail of the services provided. This is subject to a nominal cost exemption. The Act allows positive action across all nine grounds to promote equality of opportunity for disadvantaged persons or to cater for the special needs of people or a category of people. The Act prohibits sexual harassment or harassment on any of the discriminatory grounds. Those responsible for an educational institution are under a duty to take reasonable measures to ensure that sexual harassment and harassment does not occur.

The Employment Equality Act 1998 is also relevant. The same discriminatory grounds are referred to as in the Equal Status Act. Section 12 of the Act sets out that there cannot be discrimination in entry to vocational training and defines vocational training very broadly in terms of any system of instruction which is exclusively concerned with training for occupational activity. Positive action is allowed under the Employment Equality Act on the grounds of gender, disability, membership of the Traveller community and older people over fifty.

The Acts establish the Equality Authority with a mandate to promote equality of opportunity and to combat discrimination, and the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations which is the main locus of redress.

3 Objectives

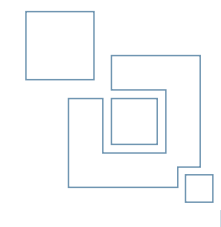
To realise its vision for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression, and to fulfil its role as set out in the legislation, the Authority has identified a number of objectives. In line with the learner-centred vision adopted, these objectives are focused on meeting the needs of learners in the achievement of appropriate recognition for their learning:

- opportunity for entry – transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements to programmes
- clarity of process leading to an award outcome, including
 - a means of identifying the relationship between different awards
 - clearly delineated transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of Qualifications
- arrangements for participation in a variety of modes and formats, including the possibility of achieving an award by accumulating credit for learning achievements over a period.
- information and guidance – accurate and reliable information to enable planning and choice of transfer and progression routes

These needs have been identified through the extensive process of consultation with the public at large and dialogue with the education and training community at all levels, undertaken by the Authority from its establishment in early 2001. To meet the needs of learners in achieving appropriate recognition for their learning, four key objectives have been set:

Objective 1

To develop an integrated National Framework of Qualifications.



Objective 2

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.

Objective 3

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.

Objective 4

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.

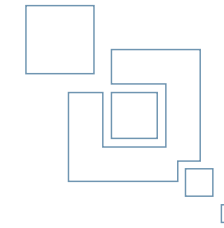
4 Meeting objectives

To meet the four strategic objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression, and in fulfilment of its role and functions under the Qualifications Act, the Authority will take the following actions:

- the development of a National Framework of Qualifications
- the facilitation of change
- the development of policies to supplement the Framework development policies already established and published – these policies will relate to:
 - Credit (and Recognition of Prior Learning)
 - Transfer and Progression Routes
 - Entry Arrangements
 - Information Provision
- the definition of sets of actions and procedures for the implementation of the policies adopted; actions and procedures are defined for:
 - the Authority
 - the awards Councils
 - providers of further and higher education and training.

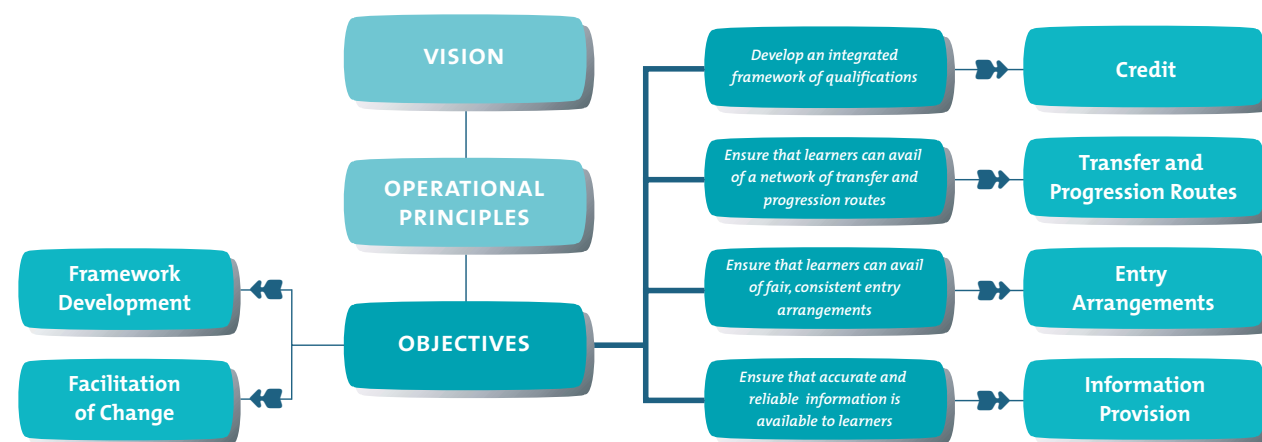
The framework development objective is already addressed through a set of published policies. This is now further developed and supplemented with the policy approaches set out in this document relating to credit and the recognition of prior learning, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements and provision of information.

The Authority is aware that the achievement of its objectives will ultimately require many changes in the education and training system at structural, institutional and personal levels. Accordingly, the Authority intends to be proactive in facilitating cultural change in the system in relation to access, transfer and progression. The role to be adopted by the Authority in this regard is set out and



the associated responsibilities of relevant stakeholders are defined. Apart from the actions and procedures identified in relation to the implementation of specific policies, the roles and functions of the various stakeholders are set out

in a composite way. These roles and functions derive from the provisions of the Qualifications Act and other legislation, as well as from established custom and practice.



5 Framework development

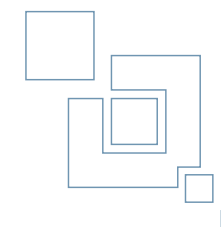
The primary action, to address the first objective as defined above, is the development and implementation of an integrated National Framework of Qualifications. The approach to this task has already been published in the Authority's document *Establishment of Policies and Criteria*, (April 2002). This action will in itself bring about significant improvements for learners in relation to opportunities for access, transfer and progression.

The National Framework of Qualifications will be based on levels. Each level will have a specified level indicator. At each level in the Framework there will be one, or more, award-types. Each award-type will have its own award-type descriptor. For each award-type a range of named awards will be developed. The development of these levels and award-types will greatly increase the coherence of the awards system in Ireland and will facilitate transfer and progression. It will be possible for there to be specific transfer and progression linkages between various award-types in the Framework.

The framework concept implies that learners achieving an award are, in principle, eligible to progress to a programme leading to another award at the next level up where there is such an award in the same field of learning (or a related field), and may, indeed, be eligible to progress to a higher level than that. At the same time, where there is not an award at a higher level in a cognate field of learning, the Framework concept implies that learners achieving an award are eligible for transfer to a programme leading to another award at the same level.

Accordingly, the National Framework of Qualifications will make it clear how awards relate to one another. This will make it possible for the learner to identify

- how, and at what point, they can enter a learning programme that will lead to an award



- what possibilities there are for transfer to another programme, and what recognition for transfer they will get for the knowledge, skill and competence they have already acquired
- what possibilities there are for progression to higher level learning opportunities from their awards.

It is also anticipated that the Framework will of itself be a factor in promoting system changes. It will enable all stakeholders to view how the whole system of education and training operates in terms of transfer and progression, and gaps and blockages will be made apparent.

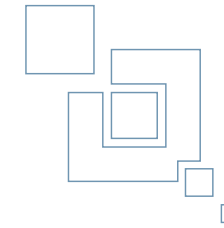
6 The facilitation of change

Building a new culture of access, transfer and progression

Changes in systems and structures, and in attitudes, are required to address many of the issues involved in achieving the objectives of enhanced arrangements for access, transfer and progression. An anticipated outcome of the work of the Authority, in general, is a more diverse learner community throughout further and higher education and training. This will include a higher proportion of adults, more learners engaged in part-time programmes, workers seeking to update or extend their awards and many learners with a variety of special needs. To enable them to match their learning ambitions with appropriate programmes and meet their personal award objectives, these new participants will require new entry procedures, new kinds of provision and new arrangements for transfer and progression. It is a policy of the Authority that changes should be brought about to meet these learners' needs. These changes will impact on many organisations, groups and individuals at all levels in education and training, and it is of crucial importance that all concerned are enabled to participate in, and contribute to, the processes of change. Furthermore, it will be necessary for funding agencies to consider the deployment of appropriate resources to encourage and contribute to such changes.

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

- contributing to policy-making at national level
- participation in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups
- the establishment, where appropriate, of consortia of relevant stakeholders to enable the development



- of consensus for change
- 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.

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. Accordingly, the aim is that the Authority will set overarching procedures for the Councils for the performance of their functions in this regard.

The functions set out in the legislation define a key, pivotal role for the Authority in the promotion of lifelong learning, and particularly in the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression. It should be noted that the Authority is not the only body responsible for this wider agenda. While the Authority has no role in relation to resource allocation, or in the provision of programmes or programme places, many other bodies have key roles. In addition, a key determinant of actual opportunities for access, transfer and progression is the level of demand for places on any particular programme. This factor is also clearly beyond the remit of the Authority.

The full effect of the actions undertaken by the Authority will depend on advances in other key areas such as learner support, educational guidance and local access initiatives

which are the responsibility of other agencies. These include the funding agencies and associated policy bodies, Government Departments and other State agencies and organisations.

It should be noted that the references to access, transfer and progression in the Qualifications Act are made in the context of further and higher education and training, and do not pertain to second-level education. The policies, actions and procedures determined by the Authority in this regard are similarly relevant in the first instance to the further and higher areas. However, awards at second-level are relevant to the development of a National Framework of Qualifications as the Framework is intended to accommodate all awards made in the State. Also, it is necessary to ensure that the transition from second-level awards to programmes leading to further and higher awards is properly articulated into any new transition arrangements that develop out of the actions of the Authority. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education and Science are, therefore, key partners for the Authority in the development of policies for access, transfer and progression and the procedures necessary to implement those policies.

7 Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression

Policies

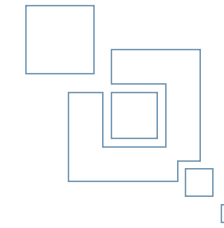
The strategy of the Authority for the promotion and implementation of access, transfer and progression is based on four policy strands. The implementation of these policies will result in a stream of procedural initiatives that will enable and promote changes in the education and training system, resulting in the enhancement of opportunities for learners to gain access to the education and training system and progress within it. Some of the policies set out here are also addressed in the document *Towards a National Framework of Qualifications – Establishment of Policies and Criteria* (April 2002), in the context of their relevance to Framework development (see sections on Learning Units and Credit Systems; Multiple Access Points, and Modular Award Structures; Transfer and Progression from Awards). They are further developed here in the context of the access, transfer and progression agenda. The policies for access, transfer and progression set out here are therefore integrated into the policy matrix of the Authority as already published. The four policy strands are:

- credit
- transfer and progression routes
- entry arrangements
- information provision

Actions and Procedures

To ensure that its policies for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression are effectively implemented, the Authority has determined a set of actions and procedures to be implemented by:

- the Authority itself



- the awards Councils
- providers of further and higher education and training.

In determining these actions and procedures, the Authority has taken into account the statutory roles already defined in the legislation for these stakeholders, as discussed above.

The actions and procedures set out in the following sections are intended to operate in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications, and it will be some time before the Framework is fully developed. In some instances, a specific development process will be required before a particular action can be implemented. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, except where otherwise indicated, the actions and procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression are intended to take effect immediately on determination by the Authority, or as soon as possible thereafter. Their implementation is not to await, for example, the validation by the Awards Councils of programmes leading to awards at the new standards to be set by the Councils.

Role of the Authority

The Qualifications Act defines the functions of the Authority, some of which are directly relevant to the access, transfer and progression agenda. One of the three objects of the Authority is to facilitate access, transfer and progression. Furthermore, the Authority is to

- determine the procedures to be implemented by providers of programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression, and publish those procedures
- ensure, in consultation with the Dublin Institute of

Technology and any new universities established, that access, transfer and progression procedures are implemented

- facilitate and advise existing universities in implementing access, transfer and progression procedures, and review their implementation in consultation with the Higher Education Authority.

In addition to these, there are several functions set out in relation to the establishment and maintenance of a National Framework of Qualifications that are relevant to the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression.

Furthermore, the Authority sets procedures for the awards Councils to follow in the performance of their functions. These procedures are relevant to access, transfer and progression. It is the intention that the Authority will incorporate into these procedures the thrust of the policy approach set out in this paper.

Role of the awards Councils

Under the Act, both the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council are independent bodies with their own functions. The roles set out for the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the two awards Councils under the 1999 Act are designed to produce an interdependent team of separate, independent bodies, capable of acting in concert to realise the aims and objectives of the legislation. The specified functions of the Councils include explicit reference to access, transfer and progression. They are to ensure that relevant providers implement the procedures for access, transfer and progression established by the Authority.

Furthermore, the Authority sets procedures for the awards Councils to follow in the performance of their functions, and these procedures are relevant to access, transfer and progression. It is the intention that the Authority will incorporate into these procedures the thrust of the policy approach set out in this paper in relation to the Councils.

It is also specified under the Act that the Councils may make awards to persons who apply and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the relevant standard. It is thus possible for a learner to achieve an award without participation in a specific programme. It is open to the Councils to seek the assistance of a provider in confirming that the necessary standard has been achieved before an award is made in this way.

Clearly, the awards Councils have a crucial role to play in realising the effect of the policies defined by the Authority to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. Significant groups of awards at all levels of the proposed National Framework of Qualifications are made under the remit of the two Councils. The Councils, therefore, form a key resource of experience and expertise which can contribute to the formulation of effective measures to achieve the policy objectives as set out, and by implementing such measures across the range of providers associated with the Councils, they will be effective at all levels of the Framework.

Accordingly, while the Authority has an overall role in developing the policy approach to access, transfer and progression, the Councils have the key facilitatory and, indeed, regulatory role in ensuring that the policies of the Authority are appropriately developed, and that the procedures set by the Authority are implemented by providers (both providers with programmes leading to the awards of the Councils and providers with delegated

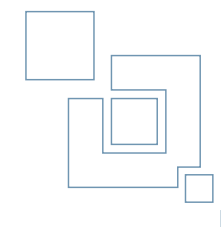
authority to make awards). While the Councils do not have a role in programme provision, in terms of either development or support, it is their role to ensure that the procedures of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers and to do so, in part, through their approaches to performing their functions in relation to validation and delegation.

Arising out of these statutory roles and responsibilities, actions and procedures have been defined to elaborate the part to be played by the awards Councils in implementing each of the policies of the Authority for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression.

Role of providers of further and higher education and training

Under the terms of the Qualifications Act and under their own legislation and charters, providers of further and higher education and training generally have their own rights and responsibilities. Providers, such as those who will have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as other providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, all have essential roles to play in meeting the objectives of the Act. It is important that the arrangements put in place in the National Framework of Qualifications and in related matters facilitate the involvement of all of these providers in attaining the objectives of the Qualifications Act.

It is also of note that it is a requirement under Section 46 of the Act that all providers of education and training are to inform learners commencing programmes of the name of the awarding body, the title of the award associated with that programme and the transfer and progression linkages for learners on attainment of the award. The



statutory requirement to provide this information is not limited to any particular groups of providers – it refers to all providers with programmes provided over a continuous period of three months or more.

A key function of the Authority is to determine procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression to be implemented by providers of programmes of education or training. Some of the policies set out below require a process of development before the Authority can fully establish procedures through which they will be implemented. However, a range of procedures have been formulated by the Authority at this stage to complement the effectiveness of the Framework. These are to be implemented in the short term by providers. They are outlined in the following sections of this document. It should be noted that these procedures may impact on providers to varying extents, as the providers are diverse in nature, in their status as awarding bodies, and in their relationship to the awards Councils.

7.1 Policies, actions and procedures – credit

Policies on credit

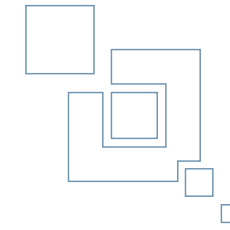
The policy of the Authority on credit is to work towards the development and implementation of a national approach to credit to complement the emerging National Framework of Qualifications. The rationale for developing a national approach to credit is that it should, in general:

- support the operation of the Framework, and in particular, complement the policies of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression
- meet the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context, facilitating credit accumulation, credit transfer and processes for the recognition of prior learning
- take account of credit arrangements already in use in Ireland, and aim to accord with ongoing developments in Europe in relation to credit systems.

The question of the form that any credit arrangements should take is under discussion. This section outlines the general approach the Authority is taking to the question of credit and the Framework.

Credit and the National Framework of Qualifications

There is considerable evidence from international experience to suggest that it is difficult for a framework of qualifications to be fully operational if there is not a facility for learners to assemble credit for learning achievements in a consistent way, and build on their achievements by making appropriate transfers to other learning opportunities. Therefore, while the National Framework of Qualifications will not itself be based on credit (it will be based on levels, with at least one major award-type defined at each level), it is acknowledged that



a national approach to credit is an essential operational support for the full implementation of the Framework.

In discussions on credit, an association is often made between the related but separate concepts of a credit system and a unitised system of awards and/or programmes. A credit system does not need to be based on a unitised awards structure, nor does a unitised system necessarily depend on the use of credit. However, credit systems work more efficiently in a situation where programmes of learning are organised on a unitised basis, enabling standardised credit values to be ascribed to packages of learning outcomes. Consequently, the introduction of credit arrangements is facilitated when programmes of learning are already unitised. In addition, the impact on management information systems, institutional organisation and culture is less disruptive than might otherwise be the case. Therefore, the Authority will encourage and promote unitised learning as a primary feature of the design of programmes leading to awards.

Similarly, modular learning approaches contribute to the efficiency of credit systems, and in turn to the effective operation of a framework of qualifications. Modular approaches involve the organisation of learning into modules that are self-contained, but can also be assembled into a larger entity. In this context, the concept of modular learning includes both modular award structures and modular programme design. Pending the development and implementation of a national approach to credit, modular learning approaches offer enhanced flexibility in the process of achieving awards. This can benefit learners. It is anticipated that the National Framework of Qualifications will intrinsically facilitate the further development and use of modular approaches in education and training in Ireland. It is a policy of the Authority to actively encourage such developments.

Credit and lifelong learning

The implementation of a national approach to credit could potentially benefit all learners. It would enable small learning achievements to be recognised, allow learners to participate in more flexible ways in education and training and ultimately achieve awards that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. For example, it is evident that a credit approach would be of crucial importance to certain learner-groups such as those engaged in non-formal and informal learning, learning on a part-time basis, and work-based learning. In identifying an appropriate policy approach, the Authority will have particular regard to learners' needs, and in particular the needs of learner groups who have hitherto had limited access to education and training awards – including those with limited levels of basic education, mature learners, older learners, learners who are unemployed or outside the labour force, workers in unskilled or low-skilled occupations, people with disabilities, those living in remote or isolated locations, members of the Traveller community, ethnic minority groups and refugees.

A particular aspect of credit accumulation and transfer is the availability of processes for the recognition of prior learning. There has been considerable work done on the development of such processes in several areas of the Irish education and training system, and prior learning attainment is accepted as a basis for entry to many programmes. It is a policy of the Authority to encourage the continuation, expansion and further development of processes for the recognition of prior learning, and to promote co-ordination and harmonisation of these by providers. In formulating this policy, the Authority has adopted a broad understanding of the recognition of prior learning. This can be for the purposes of

- entry to a programme leading to an award

- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award.

The Authority is aware that the making of a full award on the basis of the recognition of prior learning is a relatively new concept. However, the Qualifications Act does specify that learners may seek awards from the awards Councils without having participated in specific programmes. The development of processes for the recognition of prior learning could facilitate this.

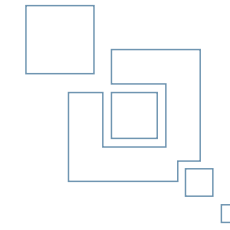
It should be noted that the Authority does not propose that the recognition of prior learning should substitute for a credit system. Rather, recognition processes are considered to be a necessary element of a functioning system of credit accumulation and transfer, with particular significance for the inclusion of learning undertaken in non-formal and informal contexts.

The European context for credit

The policies of the Authority in relation to Credit are determined in the context of recent international developments in relation to higher education and vocational education and training. In 1999, European Ministers for higher education undertook to co-ordinate their higher education policies in order to establish the European higher education area and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. The Bologna Declaration called for the *"establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned."* Building on this, Ministers for Education, meeting in Prague in May 2001 "emphasised that for greater flexibility in learning

and qualification processes the adoption of common cornerstones of qualifications, supported by a credit system such as the ECTS or one that is ECTS-compatible, providing both transferability and accumulation functions, is necessary. Together with mutually recognised quality assurance systems such arrangements will facilitate students' access to the European labour market and enhance the compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. The generalised use of such a credit system and of the Diploma Supplement will foster progress in this direction."

The Bruges/Copenhagen process concerns Europe-wide co-operation in vocational education and training, including co-operation in relation to the recognition of awards. A major conference, held in June 2002 in Brussels with representatives of European Union Member States and the European Commission, proposed further co-ordinated policy initiatives. One of the recommendations of the conference was that an instrument for credit transfer within vocational education and training should be developed at European level. A Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer was set up by the Commission in November 2002, and the Authority is represented on this Group. A significant political impetus was given to the Bruges/Copenhagen process in November 2002 when European Union Ministers agreed a Resolution and the Copenhagen Declaration was signed by representatives of a wider group of countries, including the Member States, the European Commission, European Economic Area countries and the candidate countries for entry to the Union. The Declaration sets out priorities for enhanced co-operation, which include the recognition of competences and qualifications. In this regard, it calls for common measures on comparability and transferability, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training. Work on this will be carried forward in the Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer.



Apart from the direct references to credit systems in co-operation in the European Union, it is significant that such co-operation is consistently placed in a general context of lifelong learning, and that specific reference is made to the need to include learning undertaken in non-formal and informal environments.

Towards a national approach to credit: a developmental process

The Authority is actively investigating – with the appropriate stakeholders – options for a national approach to credit to complement the Framework. No particular design or model is identified at this stage. In this regard, a Technical Advisory Group on Credit has been assisting the Authority since August 2002. With the support of this group, the Authority has now defined general principles and objectives for an approach to credit and the Framework. It will follow a developmental process to achieve these objectives. The Authority is aware that different arrangements for credit accumulation and transfer already operate in many parts of the existing awards systems. Points of convergence between these arrangements have been identified. Progress towards a national approach to credit will be achieved by building on these points of convergence in a gradual way.

Principles for the development of a national approach to credit

The development of a national approach to credit will be undertaken based on the following general principles. The approach will

- complement the National Framework of Qualifications
- be simple
- be clear and transparent
- be cost-effective, and involve as little bureaucracy as possible

- be comprehensive.

Operating principles set out that the approach to credit will:

- support the attainment of awards, as well as indicating achievement of outcomes in smaller units of learning (i.e. the achievement of credit will indicate progress towards an award)
- maintain the quality of standards of awards in the National Framework of Qualifications
- facilitate, as appropriate, the development of the education and training systems
- enable stakeholders (including funding bodies, awarding bodies and providers) to exercise their rightful responsibilities
- facilitate the design and/or redesign of learning units and awards.

Further principles may be identified following consultation with stakeholders and as the implementation of the national approach to credit proceeds.

Objectives for a national approach to credit

The implementation of a national approach to credit will be in accordance with the following key objectives. It will:

- support and complement the National Framework of Qualifications by promoting and facilitating access, transfer and progression accommodating and facilitating change in curricula and in delivery systems
- facilitate lifelong learning by
 - enhancing the range of learning opportunities with associated recognition
 - enabling the recognition of learning in many

non-formal and informal contexts and in new formats, e.g. e-learning

- encouraging participation in learning by recognising small steps of achievement
- supporting processes for the recognition of prior learning
- provide a basis for comparison with other credit systems
- support Irish participation in European and international initiatives on credit.

Actions and procedures on credit

The Authority

The implementation of the Authority's policy in relation to credit will require action in several areas. The sequencing of these actions is important. International experience highlights the length and complexity of the development process required to build high quality systems for credit accumulation and transfer. The implementation of credit arrangements and related transfer and progression mechanisms would have significant implications for organisations and structures across the whole education and training system. It is therefore vital that all relevant stakeholder groups be enabled to participate in the process of developing a national approach to credit. As indicated above, the Authority has already established a Technical Advisory Group on Credit to assist in the review of the existing systems in place and in the identification of possibilities for development. The work of this group has enabled the Authority to set out principles, guidelines and objectives for a national approach to credit. The next stage in the development process will involve consideration of how to implement the national approach to credit. Of particular relevance will be further consideration of whether the national approach to credit will lead to the creation of a single national credit system or a national system of credit arrangements.

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

The awards Councils

The awards Councils will have a central role, acting in partnership with the Authority, in developing and implementing a national approach to credit. Embedded in the broad objectives for credit are the more immediate tasks of improving arrangements for the recognition of prior learning and encouraging modular learning approaches, given their relevance to credit as set out in the relevant policy above. These tasks will be addressed by the Councils as they develop their awards systems.

The Councils' role in the implementation of the policies of the Authority on credit is defined in accordance with the overall role of the Councils as set out earlier in this document.

In designing their award structures, the Councils will ensure that these structures facilitate the use of modular approaches to programme design and facilitate the development of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning. Pending the further development and implementation of a national approach to credit, the Councils will set out a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their award structures for the recognition of prior learning. This will assist providers in implementing further arrangements.

The Councils will also ensure that providers implement procedures set out for them in relation to the

development and publication of statements of arrangements available for the recognition of prior learning in programmes and processes leading to awards. The Councils are particularly well-placed to monitor the appropriateness and effectiveness of providers' actions in this matter.

As discussed above in the context of the statutory roles of the Councils, it is specified under the Act that the Councils may make awards to persons who apply for such and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the relevant standard. It is thus possible for a learner to achieve an award without having participated in a specific programme of learning. It is open to the Councils to seek the assistance of a provider in confirming that the necessary standard has been achieved before an award is made in this way.

Providers of further and higher education and training

It is a major undertaking to develop and implement a national approach to credit. Significant changes in the education and training system may be required to bring about the full realisation of the Authority's policies in this matter. The necessary steps towards this objective cannot all be taken at the same time. The development of processes for the recognition of prior learning should be considered as a part of this objective, and providers are the key group which will deliver the necessary changes in this regard.

The Authority considers that it is appropriate to determine interim procedures for providers prior to the implementation of a national approach to credit. These procedures relate to the specification of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning by providers of education and training programmes leading to awards. These are as follows:

- all providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and for access to a full award. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning processes can be used, ie., to enable entry to the programme, to provide exemption from programme requirements or credit towards an award, or to establish eligibility for a full award. Where the recognition of prior learning is used to enable entry to a programme, the statement of arrangements available should indicate to learners the competences needed to succeed on the programme
- in relation to providers whose programmes are validated by the Councils or who have been delegated authority by a Council to make awards, this statement of arrangements must be consistent with the policies and procedures of the relevant Council.

7.2 Policies, actions and procedures – transfer and progression routes

Policies on transfer and progression routes

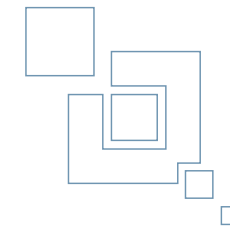
The section on framework development (above) sets out how a National Framework of Qualifications will define the relationship between awards: this in itself will contribute to improved transfer and progression. The Authority considers that additional actions are required to meet the objective of identifying and realising a network of clearly delineated transfer and progression routes through the Framework, and ensuring that learners are facilitated to avail of these routes.

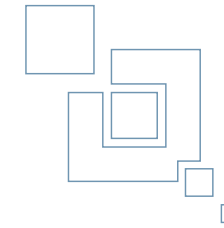
When a National Framework of Qualifications is implemented, it is anticipated that learners may need to make transitions

- between levels
- between award-types at the same level
- between named awards.

Accordingly, the Authority has adopted a policy approach based on the principle that learners achieving an award are eligible to progress to a programme leading to another award at the next level up where there is such an award in the same or a related field of learning, and may be eligible to progress to a higher level than that. At the same time, where there is not an award at a higher level in the same or a related field of learning, the Framework concept implies that learners achieving an award are eligible for transfer to a programme leading to another award at the same level. This principle does not imply entitlement to a programme place, which may be limited by factors of supply and demand.

In implementing this approach-in-principle, it will be necessary to take account of the realities that:





- many of the most commonly-used transfer and progression routes in the existing systems are based on programme-to-programme articulation protocols; these arrangements should be built upon in the implementation of the Authority's policy on transfer and progression routes
- transfer and progression routes often need to be between awards in common fields of learning
- transfer and progression routes leading to some awards with specific occupational or other relevance may allow for only a narrow range of progression options at any stage.

It should be noted that, where the policy of the Authority refers to transfer, it relates to transfer by an award-holder to a programme leading to another award at the same level. There are also situations where learners seek to transfer between programmes without completion (e.g. a learner seeking to transfer after one year of a three-year programme). This is not a transfer and progression routes issue, but it is relevant to the policies of the Authority in relation to credit.

A second policy approach in this matter is focused on ensuring that there is at least one transfer or progression route into and onwards from every programme leading to an award in the Framework, that these routes are mapped and documented and that information on transfer and progression routes is made available to learners.

A further important issue relates to the objective of ensuring that learners are supported to avail of transfer and progression routes. In some situations, it will be necessary to adapt existing programmes to provide for the support needs of learners who are making transitions. Adaptations may be required at either end of the transition link – i.e. in the programme from which the

learner wishes to transfer or progress, or in the programme they hope to enter – or both. The policy of the Authority is that all programmes should aim to meet the needs of learners. This includes those learners entering programmes through recognition of prior learning processes, as well as those transferring or progressing from programmes to further learning opportunities, whether immediately or at some later stage. The National Framework of Qualifications will be a new entity rather than an amalgam of existing awards. Consequently, it is anticipated that new transfer and progression routes will develop between awards in the Framework. The placement of some existing awards in the Framework may take some time and the alignment between these awards and new awards may not always be exact. It is recognised that these changes may bring about some situations where older awards do not have the same associated transfer and progression arrangements as new awards. In the development of a web of transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of Qualifications, the Authority will seek to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged in the change process and that the progression value of awards already held is not diminished.

Actions and procedures on transfer and progression routes

The Authority

The Authority will determine procedures to be implemented by providers to promote the extension of transfer and progression routes at all levels of the system, and to clarify for learners the arrangements for use of transfer and progression routes. However, these measures alone will not fully meet the objective of achieving a network of clearly delineated, accessible transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of

Qualifications: this will also require active intervention at various levels to encourage and facilitate the process of extending the network of routes. The awards Councils have a primary role to play in this facilitation, but there are elements of the system where the remit of the awards Councils does not apply.

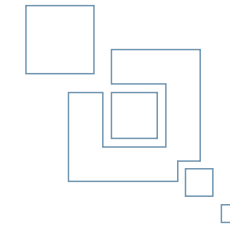
Accordingly, the Authority will adopt a co-ordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level. This may involve intervention to initiate processes of transfer and progression route development across the divide of responsibilities of the various awarding bodies, such as between awards of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and a university. As the body with the widest overview of the situation, the Authority will 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.

The awards Councils

The overarching policy approach determined by the Authority involves the Councils undertaking a number of tasks, in line with their roles as set out in the section above on policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression:

- ensuring that providers implement all procedures set for them by the Authority in relation to transfer and progression routes, by setting appropriate arrangements for validation of programmes leading to awards and through conditions that they may set in relation to the delegation of authority to make awards

- co-ordinating the identification of programme adaptations required to support achievement of awards by all learners and to facilitate transfer and progression routes
- co-ordinating the identification of appropriate transfer and progression routes across all programmes leading to awards in their remit, and the mapping of those routes
- working together to co-ordinate the identification and implementation of appropriate transfer and progression routes between awards and programmes leading to awards in their separate remits, such as transfer and progression routes between the areas of further education and training and higher education and training.



Providers of further and higher education and training

The National Framework of Qualifications will define the relationship between awards. This in itself will contribute to improved transfer and progression arrangements. In addition, the Authority will forward its objectives in relation to transfer and progression routes by working to bring about systemic changes (as discussed in the section on The Facilitation of Change, above). On an immediate basis, the Authority has determined procedures to be implemented by providers to facilitate the extension of transfer and progression routes at all levels of the system, and to clarify for learners the arrangements for use of transfer and progression routes:

- providers, in co-operation with the relevant awarding bodies, should identify transfer and progression routes into and onwards from all programmes leading to awards in the Framework
- in relation to transfer and progression routes identified, providers should also specify any particular attainments, in the awards to which their programmes lead, that are required for transfer or progression (e.g. where the achievement of a Distinction in an award is required to facilitate access to a programme leading to an award at the next level)
- providers should make the necessary adaptations to programmes to facilitate participants in making successful transitions. This procedure refers to the participation needs of all learners, but particularly those who are accessing programmes by non-standard routes, including transfer or progression into and out of programmes.

7.3 Policies, actions and procedures – entry arrangements

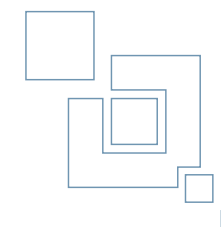
Policies on entry arrangements

To meet its third objective, of ensuring that learners can avail of fair and transparent entry arrangements to all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications, the Authority has adopted two integrated policies designed to

- encourage providers to undertake structural and procedural changes that will extend the accessibility of programmes leading to awards, and to adapt programmes to facilitate participation by more diverse learner groups
- place the focus of entry arrangements on the identification of factors necessary for successful participation.

In formulating its policies in this matter, the Authority is working from the principles that entry arrangements should be fair and transparent, that all learners should be satisfied that they have been treated justly, and that arrangements to ensure equal opportunity have been observed, including compliance with the equality legislation. It should also be noted that it is the intention of the Authority that the structural and procedural changes envisaged will result in additional or alternative entry arrangements and/or the adaptation of existing arrangements, as required to facilitate participation by diverse learner groups.

It is expected that the changes resulting from the implementation of these policies will include the adaptation of programmes where necessary to meet the needs of entrants, particularly those from under-represented learner groups, such as modular arrangements and 'bridging' (the availability of add-on



learning opportunities to meet a knowledge, skill or competence requirement in a transfer or progression route). It is also understood that a significant diversification of the learner cohort in further and higher education and training will result from the policies of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression, and from other policies of the State arising out of the lifelong learning agenda. In the context of these changes, the Authority considers that, in principle, it is generally inappropriate that programmes should be designed to facilitate the participation needs of a narrowly-defined participant group, such as those engaged in their initial pre-vocational learning experience. A diversified learning population will require diversified provision. However, it is recognised that it may be necessary that some programmes be designed as interventions to meet the specific needs of particular groups of disadvantaged learners. Such programmes may need to limit participation to a target group to ensure effective outcomes.

Inherent in this policy is the understanding that the concept of access should be focused on the outcome of the programme – the achievement of the award by the learner. Therefore, a key objective under this policy is the appropriate development of the decision-making processes by which places are made available. The factors necessary as a basis for successful participation should be identified and specified for each programme leading to an award in the Framework, and explanations of the relevant factors should be made available to learners. All applicants who can demonstrate that they have attained a basis for successful participation should be eligible to enter a programme. Where demand for places on a particular programme exceeds the number of places available, further selection procedures would apply. Such selection procedures should be transparent and fair, and should

comply with equality legislation. Transparency and fairness should also apply to decisions made on the quotas of places offered to each separately identifiable participant group (e.g., young learners, adult learners, learners with disabilities, learners from disadvantaged communities) and on how the places are made available within each of these quotas.

In addition, for programmes leading to similar awards, it is necessary to ensure that there are not wide variations in the factors identified as a basis for successful participation, even where the programmes are designed and made available by different providers.

An important codicil to this policy is the need to ensure that it does not result in the creation of new barriers to access or progression. The definition of factors as a basis for successful participation needs to be undertaken with an enabling intention rather than as a means of selecting the most able from a cohort of applicants. It is recognised that, in situations where there is a limited number of places available on a programme, it may be necessary for providers to select within the number of places being offered to each separately identified participant group.

The Authority recognises as a particular issue the need to have appropriate arrangements for entry by adult learners to higher education, including full-time under-graduate programmes. The context of lifelong learning underlines the importance of having appropriate entry arrangements in place to support the greater involvement by adults in the future at all levels of the education and training system. In this context, the transition to higher education and training is a crucial progression point for learners, and the entry arrangements associated with that transition are, therefore, of special significance.

The situation in 2003 is that adult learners can gain entry to programmes leading to higher education and training awards in three ways:

- by achieving the necessary points under the CAO Points System – this presupposes that they have achieved the Leaving Certificate award
- by availing of a link under the Higher Education Links Scheme – this presupposes that the learner has achieved a relevant award from the Further Education and Training Awards Council/National Council for Vocational Awards
- by applying for entry as a mature student – application on this basis may be supported by participation in an ‘access’ or bridging programme, and may be assessed through a process of recognition of prior learning.

Although these entry arrangements are used by many adult learners, it is clear from the consultation process undertaken by the Authority that each of them is unsatisfactory in some respects, and that taken together they do not adequately facilitate access to higher education and training by this particular learner group. The view of the Authority is that new procedures are required in relation to this particular transition to enable the policies of the Authority for progression to be properly implemented. Appropriate entry arrangements could include additional or alternative arrangements and/or the adaptation of existing arrangements, as required to facilitate participation by adult learners.

Apart from meeting the needs of learners, the improvement of arrangements for entry by adult learners will have significant benefits for higher education and training institutions. It offers possibilities for rationalising procedures and administration and for developing an

organised process for the gradual incorporation of new learner cohorts into the evolving higher education and training community.

The Authority will address the issue of entry to higher education and training by adult learners in the context of the developing national policies in relation to access, in particular the establishment within the Higher Education Authority of a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The remit of the National Office will include the enhancement of access to higher education by under-represented learner groups, including socio-economic disadvantaged groups, mature students and students with disabilities. The Authority will work in concert with the National Office to ensure the implementation of the policies set out above in relation to entry arrangements for adult learners.

Actions and procedures on entry arrangements

The Authority

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 pro-active facilitating role with providers and awarding bodies outside the remit of the Councils, and a 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

The Authority, working in concert with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education to be established within the Higher Education Authority, will seek to ensure the development and implementation of appropriate entry arrangements to higher education and training for adult learners. In this regard, the Authority is in discussion with the Higher Education Authority, in the context of the establishment of the National Office, with a view to drawing together a consortium of relevant partner organisations to address the issue of entry to higher education and training by adult learners. A consortium could identify appropriate entry arrangements and seek agreement on their implementation. Appropriate entry arrangements could be additional or alternative to existing arrangements and/or could involve the adaptation of existing arrangements as required to facilitate participation by adult learners.

The awards Councils

The overarching policy approach determined by the Authority involves the Councils undertaking a number of tasks, in line with their roles as set out in the section above on 'Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression':

- ensuring that providers develop and apply transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements to all programmes, in accordance with the policy of the Authority and in compliance with equality legislation
- providing the co-ordination between providers that is needed to support the effective development of entry processes based on factors required for successful participation. The Councils will have a key

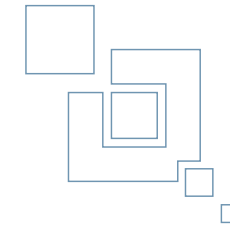
input into ensuring that providers have appropriately determined the basis for successful participation

- satisfying themselves, as part of their procedures for validation of programmes or for delegation of authority to make awards, that the Authority's procedures for access, transfer and progression in this area are being implemented.

Providers of further and higher education and training

The Authority has determined procedures for providers in this area, building on the policy approaches set out above. In this context, entry is understood as being entry on initial access or by transfer or progression. Providers will be required to ensure that:

- entry arrangements are clear, decisions on allocation of places on programmes are transparent, and all applicants are treated in a fair, equal and consistent manner
- appropriate arrangements are made for an appeals process
- for every programme, prospective learners have available statements of the knowledge, skill and competence needed as a basis for successful participation, and there is comparability in the factors defined for similar programmes
- for each programme, there is clear definition of the awards in the Framework that are recognised as demonstrating eligibility for entry and, where relevant, the attainments required in these awards.



7.4 Policies, actions and procedures – information provision

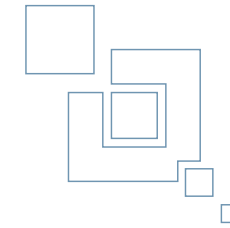
Policies on information provision

A key objective in the strategy to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression is that all learners should have accurate and reliable information available, 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. It is a policy of the Authority to ensure that all institutions and organisations involved – including providers and awarding bodies – contribute to the provision of high-quality, comprehensive information to learners at all levels. Information should be available in formats that will ensure that it is accessible to a diversity of learners.

This policy has a firm legal basis, as it is a requirement under Section 46 of the Qualifications Act that all providers of education and training are to inform learners commencing programmes of the name of the awarding body and the title of the award, and of the transfer and progression linkages for learners on attainment of the award.

This policy complements other policy initiatives underway at present. A significant development in this regard is the recommendation in the report of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning that a National Learning Line be developed as a single national source of learning information, with a linked integrated guidance system. The Authority supports the concept that learners should have available, in a nationally co-ordinated manner, information on:

- education and training opportunities
- costs and subsidies available to support learning
- job-related labour market information on requirements and qualification routes for different careers, areas of job growth and development.



In the international context, the Authority is generally supportive of the emerging concept, associated with European initiatives in relation to the recognition of awards, of developing certificate and diploma supplements as instruments to promote transparency of awards. It will be a policy of the Authority that the information provided in such certificate and diploma supplements should include appropriate information about the placing of the award in the National Framework of Qualifications and a description of the transfer and progression opportunities associated with the award.

Actions and procedures on information provision

The Authority

The Authority will actively represent the need to have a wider information-base for learners, and will participate with other key stakeholders in the development of policies in this regard. If necessary, the policies, actions and procedures established by the Authority in relation to information provision will be adjusted to ensure that they are in concert with the provisions of any new systems or structures emerging in the areas of information and guidance for learners.

The awards Councils

The overarching policy approach determined by the Authority involves the Councils undertaking a number of tasks, in line with their roles as set out in the section above on 'Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression':

- Councils will ensure that information protocols as set out by the Authority are observed by providers under their remit and that there is consistency in the information provided in relation to awards and

programmes leading to awards made by the Councils

- Councils will support the Authority in co-ordinating the assembly of such information to provide a wider information-base. This task will have to be undertaken in a way that will enable integration with existing or emerging systems and structures for guidance and information for learners
- in any supplementary document issued (i.e. certificate or diploma supplements developed to promote transparency of awards), Councils will provide for the inclusion of information about
- the placing of the award in the National Framework of Qualifications – the name of the awarding body and the title, award-type and framework level designation of the award
- the transfer and progression opportunities associated with the award.

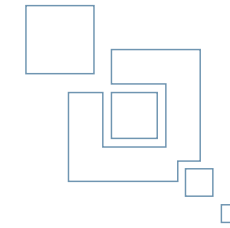
Providers of further and higher education and training

To ensure the maximum effect of the Framework in promoting transparency and clarity for learners, the Authority has determined procedures to be followed by providers to ensure that learners and prospective learners are able to get comprehensive information on the possibilities for access, transfer and progression in a clear, straightforward and consistent manner. These procedures are formulated as information protocols to be observed by all relevant providers as defined in the legislation:

- all providers are to inform learners commencing programmes of the name of the awarding body and the title, award-type and framework level designation of the award associated with that programme
- all providers, for each and every programme, will publish in a standard and accessible format:
 - the arrangements for eligibility to enter, including

a statement of the knowledge, skill and competence needed by the learner as a basis for successful participation on the programme

- arrangements to assess learner's eligibility to enter
- further selection arrangements, where these apply
- a statement of arrangements available for recognition of prior learning, for entry to each of their programmes and for access to an award
- possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with the programme, including any relevant specific progression linkages
- details of learning support available for specific learner groups such as learners with disabilities, or learners whose mother tongue is not English
- all information and publicity documentation referring to a programme leading to an award will include a statement of the arrangements for entry, and a description of the transfer and/or progression possibilities into and out of the programme
- any supplementary document (i.e. certificate or diploma supplement to promote transparency of an award) issued by providers with independent awarding powers will include information about:
 - the placing of the award in the National Framework of Qualifications – the name of the awarding body and the title, award-type and framework level designation of the award
 - the transfer and progression opportunities associated with the award.



8 Further Development and Implementation

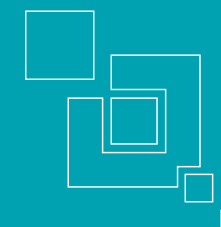
The policies, actions and procedures set out in this document will be implemented by the Authority in the context of the development of the National Framework of Qualifications as a whole. It is anticipated that developments in 2003 will take place in the schedule set out below. Further details in the implementation schedule will be the subject of discussions with stakeholders after the publication of these policies, actions and procedures.

By end 2003

- Policy development to be completed on two specific issues:
 - arrangements for credit accumulation and transfer
 - consortium to identify and realise appropriate arrangements to facilitate transition to Higher Education and Training by adult learners
- Further policies, actions and procedures determined by the Authority in the light of policy development in relation to credit and adult learner transitions.
- Key development work underway in relation to transfer and progression linkages between major award-types.

Implementation timetable

The actions and procedures set out in this paper are intended to operate in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications, and it will be some time before the Framework is fully developed. In some instances, a specific development process will be required before a particular action can be implemented. Nevertheless, except where otherwise indicated, the actions and procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression are intended to take effect immediately on determination by the Authority, or as soon as possible thereafter. Their implementation is not to await, for example, the validation by the Awards



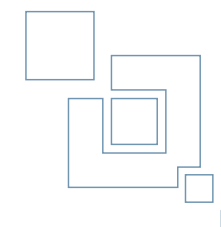
Addenda

Councils of programmes leading to awards at the new standards to be set by the Councils.

It should be noted that procedures determined for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression are to be implemented by:

- providers with programmes validated by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, or with delegated authority from a Council
- the Dublin Institute of Technology
- the universities.

In due course, and in ways consistent with the rights and responsibilities of the various providers and their relationships with the Awards Councils, the Authority will define reporting arrangements for establishing the progress made by providers in implementing procedures as set out.



Addendum 1

From: Establishment of Policies and Criteria (April 2002), Schedule to Chapter 6 – Detailed Policies; also Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (October 2003), Chapter 5.

Policies previously established by the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression

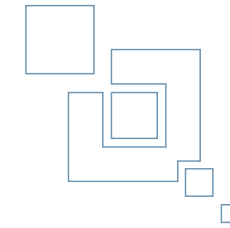
Multiple access points, modular award structures

Many of the features that could be built into an awards framework to promote access, transfer and progression are greatly facilitated in the context of modular approaches to programme design and delivery. The design of the Framework will facilitate the further development of modular approaches and structures. A linked issue is that the Framework will facilitate multiple access points to programmes. This includes entry to multi-year programmes at differing stages and also the possibility of programmes having more than one entry point in the year. In general, the design of the Framework will allow for possible future structures and practices that accommodate more flexible entry arrangements, including modular award structures and entry at various points to programmes leading to awards. It will also facilitate learners interrupting their studies, while earning credit for the learning outcomes already achieved. These issues are linked to the facilitation by the Framework of a system (or systems) of credit accumulation and transfer.

Transfer and progression from awards

One function of awards is to facilitate the progression of learners into a programme of learning leading to a subsequent award. Awards are also intended, of course, to facilitate learners moving directly into employment or some other role in society. However, a framework has a particular function to support transfer from one award to another. This includes progression to awards at a higher level than those already attained.

Awards vary in the range of options for further learning to which they lead. Currently some awards made in respect



of programmes of education and training in Ireland do not offer progression options to further programmes and awards. A second group of awards offers progression opportunities along relatively specialised routes, for example within a single discipline or economic sector. A third group of awards offers a wide range of progression opportunities to diverse programmes of education and training. The Leaving Certificate and the Bachelors degree are examples of the latter class of award.

The Authority considers that in the world of lifelong learning all awards should yield some options for transfer or progression. The Authority and its stakeholders value awards with a relatively narrow range of transfer and progression opportunities and awards with a wide range of transfer and progression opportunities. Indeed, the two groupings outlined here may not be formally defined or differentiated from each other. Particular award-types may be hybrids, being semi-specialised. The basic principle of recognising learning by quality-assured standards means that, regardless of the award context in which learning is initially recognised, it should be further recognised in the context of any other award in the Framework. Learning is thereby portable from one award to another. Accordingly, where existing awards are not linked to further awards for transfer and progression, new transfer and progression routes will be facilitated.

All awards within the Framework will have transfer and progression features built into them. Those with a very wide range of progression options correspond to what were referred to in the discussion document as ‘portal awards’. The usefulness of this concept to the development of the Framework is still being explored. It might serve a function in opening progression routes to more learners. On the other hand, it might lead to an unnecessary differentiation from awards which are not

portals. It is worth noting that many other national systems are actively considering how best to integrate specialised and generalised awards. Ongoing discussion on this topic needs to recognise the various uses to which awards are put by learners, employers, providers and the general public. Progression to further awards is not the only purpose of awards.

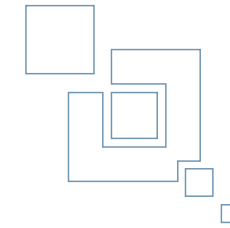
Addendum 2

From: Establishment of Policies and Criteria (April 2002); also Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (October 2003), Chapter 1.

Principles previously established by the Authority in relation to equality and accessibility

The Framework must contribute to building an inclusive society which offers equal opportunities throughout life to all people for access to quality learning opportunities leading to awards. The key to success will be to build on a sense of shared responsibility for lifelong learning among all stakeholders so as to facilitate the development of a society in which everyone has the opportunity to develop their potential to the full, to feel that they can contribute and that they belong. This, in turn, will help to ensure that education and training provision is based, first and foremost, on the needs and demands of individuals. It is vital that the Framework be accessible to all learners and able to cater for all types of awards, no matter how achieved. In particular, the Framework must cater for those learners who have in the past suffered from poor access to education and training awards. These include those who are poorly educated, older, unemployed, or not in the labour force, working in small, rather than large companies, or working in less skilled occupational groups. In addition, other individuals and groups such as members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, refugees, minority ethnic groups and those living in rural and island locations also suffer from relatively poor access. All learning outcomes must be included in the Framework, regardless of whether they have been acquired through Irish, English or any other language. While the Framework cannot remove all the barriers that exist, it must ensure that access to relevant awards is not one of them.

Whether an award is for personal development, economic benefit or community benefit, the Framework will treat all learning fairly and consistently. It should be possible for all learning to count towards an award. There needs to be a consistent framework developed which differentiates between awards in a fair way and which relates such learning outcomes consistently to one another. This will



facilitate freedom of movement for learners into and out of learning situations, irrespective of learning mode.

The recognition of previous learning achievements, including achievement that has not previously been recognised, will be an important part of the Framework. It will facilitate the inclusion of the full range of awards arising from formal, non-formal and informal learning and the availability of alternative routes to meeting entry requirements.

The Framework will support informed choices and realistic expectations on the part of learners and promote progression opportunities and equality of opportunity. It will also promote social cohesion and inclusion by making awards accessible to those who were previously marginalised.

Addendum 3

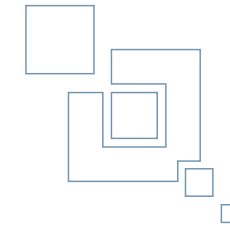
Summary of procedures determined by the Authority for providers in relation to the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression

The procedures set out in this Addendum are determinations of the Authority under sections 7 (c), 8 (d), 8 (e) and 8 (f) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

Under the terms of the Qualifications Act and under their own legislation and charters, providers of further and higher education and training generally have their own rights and responsibilities. Providers, such as those who will have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as other providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, all have essential roles to play in meeting the objectives of the Act. It is important that the arrangements put in place in the National Framework of Qualifications and in related matters facilitate the involvement of all of these providers in attaining the objectives of the Qualifications Act.

It is also of note that it is a requirement under Section 46 of the Act that all providers of education and training are to inform learners commencing programmes of the name of the awarding body and the title of the award associated with that programme, and of the transfer and progression linkages for learners on attainment of the award. The statutory requirement to provide this information is not limited to any particular groups of providers – it refers to all providers with programmes provided over a continuous period of three months or more.

A key function of the Authority is to determine procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression, to be implemented by providers of programmes of education or training. Some of the policies determined by the Authority will require a process of development before the Authority can fully establish procedures through which they will be implemented. However, a range of procedures have been formulated at this stage to complement the effectiveness of the Framework, and to be implemented in the short term by providers, as outlined below. It should be noted that these



procedures may impact on providers to varying degrees, as the providers are diverse in nature, in their status as awarding bodies, and in their relationship to the Awards Councils.

The procedures set out below should be interpreted in the context of the overall policies of the Authority for the promotion and facilitation of Access, Transfer and Progression.

Credit

It is a major undertaking to develop and implement a national approach to credit. Significant changes in the education and training system may be required to bring about the full realisation of the Authority's policies in this matter. The necessary steps towards this objective cannot all be taken at the same time. The development of processes for the recognition of prior learning should be considered as a part of this objective, and providers are the key group which will deliver the necessary changes in this regard.

The Authority considers that it is appropriate to determine interim procedures for providers prior to the implementation of a national approach to credit. These procedures relate to the specification of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning by providers of education and training programmes leading to awards. These are as follows:

- all providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and for access to a full award. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning

processes can be used, ie., to enable entry to the programme, to provide exemption from programme requirements or credit towards an award, or to establish eligibility for a full award. Where the recognition of prior learning is used to enable entry to a programme, the statement of arrangements available should indicate to learners the competences needed to succeed on the programme

- in relation to providers whose programmes are validated by the Councils or who have been delegated authority by a Council to make awards, this statement of arrangements must be consistent with the policies and procedures of the relevant Council.

Transfer and progression routes

The National Framework of Qualifications will define the relationship between awards. This in itself will contribute to improved transfer and progression arrangements. In addition, the Authority will forward its objectives in relation to transfer and progression routes by working to bring about systemic changes (as discussed in the section on The Facilitation of Change, in the Authority's policy paper on Access, Transfer and Progression). On an immediate basis, the Authority has determined procedures to be implemented by providers to facilitate the extension of transfer and progression routes at all levels of the system, and to clarify for learners the arrangements for use of transfer and progression routes:

- providers, in co-operation with the relevant awarding bodies, should identify transfer and progression routes into and onwards from all programmes leading to awards in the Framework
- in relation to transfer and progression routes identified, providers should also specify any

particular attainments, in the awards to which their programmes lead, that are required for transfer or progression (e.g. where the achievement of a Distinction in an award is required to facilitate access to a programme leading to an award at the next level)

- providers should make the necessary adaptations to programmes to facilitate participants in making successful transitions. This procedure refers to the participation needs of all learners, but particularly those who are accessing programmes by non-standard routes, including transfer or progression into and out of programmes.

Entry arrangements

The Authority has determined procedures for providers in this area, building on the policy approaches set out above. In this context, entry is understood as being entry on initial access or by transfer or progression. Providers will be required to ensure that:

- entry arrangements are clear, decisions on allocation of places on programmes are transparent, and all applicants are treated in a fair, equal and consistent manner
- appropriate arrangements are made for an appeals process
- for every programme, prospective learners have available statements of the knowledge, skill and competence needed as a basis for successful participation, and there is comparability in the factors defined for similar programmes
- for each programme, there is clear definition of the awards in the Framework that are recognised as demonstrating eligibility for entry and, where relevant, the attainments required in these awards.

Information provision

To ensure the maximum effect of the Framework in promoting transparency and clarity for learners, the Authority has determined procedures to be followed by providers to ensure that learners and prospective learners are able to get comprehensive information on the possibilities for access, transfer and progression in a clear, straightforward and consistent manner. These procedures are formulated as information protocols to be observed by all relevant providers as defined in the legislation:

- all providers are to inform learners commencing programmes of the name of the awarding body and the title, award-type and framework level designation of the award associated with that programme
- all providers, for each and every programme, will publish in a standard and accessible format
 - the arrangements for eligibility to enter, including a statement of the knowledge, skill and competence needed by the learner as a basis for successful participation on the programme
 - arrangements to assess learner's eligibility to enter
 - further selection arrangements, where these apply
 - a statement of arrangements available for recognition of prior learning, for entry to each of their programmes, and for access to an award
 - possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with the programme, including any relevant specific progression linkages
 - details of learning support available for specific learner groups such as learners with disabilities, or learners whose mother tongue is not English
- all information and publicity documentation

referring to a programme leading to an award will include a statement of the arrangements for entry and a description of the transfer / progression possibilities into and out of the programme.

- any supplementary document (i.e. certificate or diploma supplement to promote transparency of an award) issued by providers with independent awarding powers will include information about:
 - the placing of the award in the National Framework of Qualifications – the name of the awarding body and the title, award-type and framework level designation of the award
 - the transfer and progression opportunities associated with the award.

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