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**Public Submission on the Implementation and Impact of the  
National Framework of Qualifications and Access, Transfer and  
Progression policies: 2008**

**Respondent's Details**

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**Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of your organisation?**

On behalf of Athlone Institute of Technology

Submissions will be made public on the website of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and attributed to the author and/or their organisation unless you request otherwise.

**Do you agree that your submission may be made public?**

Yes

**Invitation to make a public submission the study of the implementation and impact of the National Framework of Qualifications and access, transfer and progression**

**A submission on behalf of Athlone Institute of Technology**

**October 2008**

Athlone Institute of Technology welcomes this opportunity to respond to the invitation from the National Qualifications Authority with views on the implementation and the early impact of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The Authority faced a considerable task in making real the ambitious programme of change heralded by the Qualification (Education & Training) Act, 1999. The National Framework of Qualifications lies at the heart of this change and the ten-level architecture decided upon has a welcome symmetry but occasions particular challenges at certain nodal points.

The Authority took some time to facilitate discussion on the optimum structure of the NFQ. This is applauded and it is the view of this institute that the time taken had the benefit of accommodating a greater level of debate and ownership. This certainly is true of practitioners although the expectations varied according to perspective. It is arguable, for instance, that the public at large were slow to come to terms with the extent of the developments and the significance of same. There was initial debate around the publicity required to support the introduction of the NFQ. The fan graphic was an inspired adoption and has assisted greatly in making the change accessible. It is understood that the institutes of technology will feature specifically on the revised version of the NFQ and this is applauded.

The impact upon learners is understandably taking somewhat longer. Giving the most complete expression to all that is implied by the governing legislation and through the Bologna process will inevitably take time and there remain points of discontinuity between the policy direction and the underlying funding mechanisms. In this respect it is proposed that building an expectation of support for life-long learning in the absence of concomitant funding is regrettable.

Accommodating all knowledge, skills, and competences within the ten levels of the NFQ inevitably has given rise to points of debate. Level 6 has never been satisfactorily reconciled and introduces an element of unwanted confusion. Similarly there are aspects of minor awards at Level 9 that occasion debate

although it is arguable that this is a factor of misunderstanding rather than an inherent structural flaw.

Learners have been facilitated in realizing a greater readability for awards and it is recognized that the NFQ has assisted in facilitating learner and employee mobility. In this respect, it is noted with no little pride that the work of the Authority and all who contribute to the work of higher education in Ireland has combined to put developments here at the heart of Europe. On the negative side, there is an element of compromise inherent in any framework with just ten levels. While this contributes on the one hand to understanding, it has engendered some confusion and there are further advances to be made in ensuring the widest public understanding of the Framework. This is a prerequisite if the Framework is to realize its undoubted potential as an element in support of employment.

The NFQ deals in learning outcomes. From the perspective of a provider, there has been a ready and generous response by staff within the institute to this fundamental cultural change and this is apparent in considerable alteration in practice in relation to such as programme development, delivery, understandings of coherence, and assessment to mention a few. It is proposed that this change has yet some way to proceed and that the full impact of the Framework and all that is entailed there has yet to be realized.

The international understanding of Irish education and awards is enhanced through the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. The standing of higher education and the increasing mobility of learners, one of the Bologna goals, is facilitated by the NFQ and if for this alone, the initiative deserves commendation. The Framework in turn has also assisted providers here in the assessment and benchmarking of awards from other jurisdictions.

One of the key tasks will be the protection of gains made and the further development and realization of this coherent system in a period of amalgamation and economic challenge.

***Dr Joseph Ryan***  
***October 2008***