

Group D – Draft Policies and Criteria for the Alignment with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) of the Awards of certain International Sectoral Certifying Bodies which issue certification and in some cases provide programmes in Ireland

The Authority, in its discussions on the inclusion and recognition of awards, has noted that there are a number of international sectoral certifying bodies which issue certification and in some cases provide programmes undertaken by learners in Ireland.

The Authority considers that it is appropriate to develop policies and criteria for the alignment with the Framework of the international sectoral awards made by such bodies.

The Authority considers that the alignment with the Framework of the awards of certain sectoral certifying bodies which issue certification and in some cases provide programmes in Ireland is normally a responsibility of the Authority itself and of the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, given their statutory remit. In cases where the alignment process may span Framework levels on which both Councils make awards, the Authority will work with both Councils in implementing the policies and criteria.

In some particular cases, the Authority may agree to a process, in line with the general thrust of these policies and criteria, being put in place with the support of the State Examinations Commission, the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, or by some appropriate combination of these bodies acting together or with an Awards Council.

1. Mode of Referencing to Framework

The Authority has no role in setting the standards of the international sectoral awards in question. International sectoral awards will be aligned at a level on the Framework and the alignment will specify the full title of the award, including the name of the international sectoral certifying body which makes the award. In addition, international sectoral awards will be classified in terms of award size.

2. Definition

For the purposes of these policies and criteria, international sectoral awards are defined as awards developed to meet the industry-defined certification needs of a specific sector, internationally. Generally, these awards are not part of the national awarding system of

any particular country but they enjoy wide employer and learner acceptance within many countries.

Examples of well-known international sectoral awards in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) field include the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), Oracle and Computing Technology Industry Awards (CompTIA) certification. In some cases, international sectoral certifying bodies are vendor-specific e.g. Oracle awards certification based on learning relating to Oracle software, while others are vendor neutral e.g. ECDL. There are also international sectoral certifying bodies operating outside the ICT sector. An example in the field of childcare and education is the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) which is a non-governmental organisation that makes awards across many countries.

3. Mode of Operation

International sectoral certifying bodies adopt various operational models for certification and programme delivery and management internationally. In some cases, certification and programme management is administered centrally by the international sectoral certifying body. In other cases, the international sectoral awarding body appoints a franchisee that is responsible for certification and programmes for the international sectoral awards in a particular country. In cases where the international sectoral certifying body operates a franchise model, the policies and criteria set out in this document for the international sectoral certifying body also apply to the appointed franchisee in Ireland.

4. Principles

A number of principles will underpin the process of having international sectoral awards aligned with the Framework, as follows –

- Established sectoral certifying bodies, or their appointed franchisee, will continue to make awards in Ireland without having their award-making powers subsumed into the Awards Councils awarding structures. This does not preclude international sectoral awarding bodies, or their appointed franchisee, from applying for validation of their awards directly with the Awards Councils.
- The sectoral award certification will retain its own brand and identity.

- The programme/award specification document submitted as part of the alignment application must include a set of learning outcomes for each programme/award that can clearly articulate with an NFQ level and if appropriate, with a given award-type.
- Appropriate quality assurance must be in place for the sectoral awards.
- Sectoral certifying bodies will actively consider progression opportunities for learners and seek to fulfil the Authority's policies on access, transfer and progression, including national guidelines on credit and the recognition of prior learning.
- Alignment of sectoral awards with the NFQ will be kept under review in line with national and international policy developments in the area of sectoral awards, in order to ensure consistency e.g. developments with regard to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
- Alignment of sectoral awards will normally only apply to those awards made in Ireland after the international sectoral certifying body has successfully aligned its awards with the NFQ, and not to its awards made prior to the alignment date.

5. Criteria for Alignment of International Sectoral Awards with the Framework

In order to have its awards aligned with the Framework, the international sectoral certifying body must fulfil the following criteria:

5.1 International Sectoral Certifying Body

The international sectoral certifying body-

- must be an international certifying body of qualifications i.e. provides certification which is offered in more than one country (either by international certifying body or associated franchisee).
- or its appointed franchisee must have a track record/history (at least 5 years) in education and training in Ireland and be a body of good standing/have credibility within its sector and industry.
- must ensure the nature of the relationship between the certifying body and/or its franchisee and other bodies providing training and/or assessment leading to its

certification in Ireland is documented. If the certifying rights of the applicant body are received by franchise from a global body, this must be indicated.

- must have standard setting processes or similar arrangements in place for its programmes/awards or be prepared to put in place such a process for the purposes of having its awards aligned with the NFQ.

5.2 Quality Assurance

An appropriate quality assurance system needs to be in place, essential elements of which include the international sectoral certifying body or its appointed franchisee in Ireland:

- having documented procedures in place for the assessment of learners which are fair and consistent, including internal verification, external authentication and an appeals/complaints process.
- having tracking criteria in place for managing its awards (including external monitoring of its providers, assessment monitoring, certification numbers and completion rates).
- having contingency plans in place for the maintenance and provision of award information, should the international sectoral certifying body cease provision or the agreement with the appointed franchisee not be continued.

5.3 Award Certification

With regard to the award certification put forward for alignment:

- A comprehensive programme/award specification document must be submitted for each award put forward for alignment.

The programme/award specification document must include a set of learning outcomes that can clearly articulate with an NFQ level (and if appropriate, with a given award-type) and are linked to assessment.

Rationale for new programme development/new certification may also be required.

6. Outline Process of Alignment

A Joint Committee comprising the Qualifications Authority executive, FETAC and HETAC and if appropriate, representatives of other organisations, will undertake a formal recognition process which will result in a recommendation on the alignment of the international sectoral awards with a Framework level and information regarding the size of

the sectoral award. The recommendation will be relayed to the Qualifications Authority which is the decision making entity in the process.

A 3-stage process of alignment is set out.

6.1 Stage 1

The international sectoral certifying body applies in writing to the Authority seeking confirmation of its eligibility to submit its awards for alignment with the Framework. The eligibility requirements are as per those listed under point 5.1 above.

Should the requirements for Stage 1 be attained, the process moves to Stage 2.

6.2 Stage 2

The applicant international sectoral certifying body or its appointed franchisee submits a detailed application to the Authority. This application will:

- identify all the awards made by the international sectoral certifying body in Ireland.
- identify the awards for which it is seeking alignment with the NFQ.
- provide evidence to fulfil the requirements listed under 5.2 and 5.3 above.

6.3 Stage 3

The Joint Committee will consider the alignment application and information provided during Stages 1 and 2. If appropriate, an Advisory Panel will be put in place. The Joint Committee may seek further information/clarification from the international sectoral certifying body or its appointed franchisee to support the application. The joint committee will make a recommendation regarding the alignment application and will communicate its findings to the Qualifications Authority. The final decision on alignment will be made by the Qualifications Authority and the findings will be communicated to the international sectoral certifying body. The findings will be published by the Qualifications Authority.

Alignment decisions regarding sectoral awards will be kept under review in line with national and international policy developments in the area of sectoral awards, in order to ensure consistency e.g. developments with regard to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

7. Ongoing Reporting

The applicant international sectoral certifying body or its appointed franchisee will provide information, as appropriate and when requested, to the Authority and the Council/s on its continuing awarding arrangements in Ireland in respect of education and training providers, certification numbers and/or programme completion rates.