

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

Respondent's Details

Name:	Brendan McCormack
Position (if applicable):	Registrar
Organisation (if applicable):	IT Sligo
Address:	Ballinode, Sligo
Telephone:	071 91 55294
Email:	McCormack.brendan@itsligo.ie
Date:	29.10.08

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

Personal On behalf of organisation

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Yes No

Public submissions on the Implementation and Impact of the National framework of Qualifications and Access, Transfer and Progression policies: 2008

The following themes are suggested as a guide in making your submission. Please feel free to make a free form submission if you wish. Submissions should not exceed 2000 words. The themes are:

- **Expectations of the Framework**
 - that Irish awards are fully recognised internationally
 - allows providers to develop new awards that can be placed on an internationally recognised qualifications structure
 - that there is a simple system of equivalence for qualifications from all EU countries at all levels
 - that it is Bologna compatible
 - there is a common vision by all stakeholders of graduate skills and competences appropriately aligned to level of achievement
 - the framework relate skills and competences necessary for 21st century learners, this is timely and appropriate.

- **Impact on learners**
 - provides learners with a transparent overview/pathway of how they may progress their qualifications to achieve their potential this can be motivating for learners
 - enables access opportunities as the framework offers work-based learners opportunities to align experience and prior learning experience to levels.
 - modules and programmes are presented in learning outcome format which clarifies for the learner what they will be able to do when they engage with the learning experience
 - learners can carry their awards to other countries and be fully recognised for the learning achieved

- **Key strengths and key weaknesses of the Framework**
 - Strengths:
 - Expresses awards in measurable terms of outcomes and levels
 - Transparency with the scope, volume and breadth of learning involved with a programme/module.
 - Is recognised in other countries
 - Gives recognition to transferable skills sets with four sub strands competences out of eight relating to desirable skills for a knowledge society such as learning to learn and role within contexts.
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 - Weaknesses

- Other EU countries have not yet developed frameworks that we can align to.
- There is confusion with the duration of the learning and the equivalence of the learning achieved – e.g. 3 year and 4 year Level 8 awards
- Level 7 is not considered to fully meet the criteria for Cycle 1 of Bologna.
- There is a need to develop programmes which are compliant with Cycle 2 i.e. should a Level 7 (that is compliant with Cycle 1) confer eligibility to a Level 9 (Cycle 2)?
- Language of the determinants within the 8 sub strands can be difficult to interpret in a meaningful way and the progression of complexity of determinants between levels not always obvious
- FE and HE overlap is confusing and somewhat not consistent with the rationale of the framework
- While the standards developed by HETAC are very welcome and useful more templates could be useful to ensure a consistent approach in programme design to promote a model of “*Design down deliver up model of development*”. These could include programme and year outcome templates. Best practice examples would demonstrate the benefit of this model to staff.
- Programme level outcome templates could encourage alignment to NFQ sub strands to ensure the range of skill sets is included. Sligo has progressed this area using academic module manager and templates which give programme teams a common vision for their graduates.
- Year outcomes templates encourage staff to see the progression between levels and complexity development of skills. This can have two advantages.
 1. To encourage embedded awards at level 6 and 7
 2. To enable recognition of prior learning and access/transfer of learners between years and embedded levels within a level 8 award.
- Examples of “Design down, deliver up” model of programme design can be provided within different disciplines if required.

- **Impact on programmes and qualifications**

- **standards:** HETAC standards are an excellent transition to translate the determinants of sub strands into more meaningful language for programme developers as they are more transparent and comparable – i.e. comparing the volume, depth and breadth of learning achieved between Levels. From our experiences of using the standards some sub strand standards maybe misplaced, such as the “communication skills” within know-how sub strand. This would be better suited to the last four sub strands, as communication and team skills are often categorised as transferable skills and its current location in Know-how skills is confusing for academic staff.

- **learning outcomes:** has created a coherent approach for programme developers in determining what (levels of knowledge, skills and competencies) they should include in programme design. Scope for improving would be to communicate more clearly in the literature to stakeholders that learning outcomes relate to **minimum threshold** of learning.

- **assessment:** The framework has promoted the practice of constructive alignment linking the assessments to learning outcomes and thus ensuring all assessments are measured. In IT Sligo we have included both formative and summative assessment criteria within our module descriptors to address NFQ substrands that are difficult to measure solely by summative assessment modes. Assessment criteria need to be promoted so that academic staff see a direct relationship between learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Useful categories within IT Sligo experiences which demonstrate this relationship are “*Not yet competent, met learning outcomes and accomplished/exemplary*” Examples of best practice within disciplines can be provided if necessary.

– **quality assurance:** the validation of new programmes is more consistent as the expectation is that the overall programme, year and module learning outcomes and assessment strategies are clearly and explicitly stated and matched to a Level on the framework. This has also opened up opportunities for the creation of well defined minor/embedded awards. HETAC standards have been very useful in this area but also Blooms Taxonomy and verb definition tools have also been necessary to ensure a consistent approach.

- **Access, transfer and progression**

- **Expectations:** the expectation is that a provider, in proposing a new programme, will formally consider the access, transfer and progression criteria and opportunities.
- **Impact on learners:** Learners are becoming more empowered to expect and request such opportunities, which drive further programme development. There are now more routes available for progression and access for specific groups (e.g. craft workers and those with experiential learning) has been enhanced. IT Sligo has developed procedures and portfolio systems to support learners in this experience as well as Open Learning facilitators within each School to support learners and staff in this emerging area.
- **Key strengths and key weaknesses:** Providers cannot move fast enough to meet the demand of learners! For example, there is considerable additional work in considering an application for entry to a programme or for exemptions from an applicant with experiential learning as compared with a CAO applicant.

There is much work to be done in facilitating to a wider extent the progression of those with craft qualifications.

Strength would be the awareness and willingness of providers to meet these demands as they are articulated by the framework.

Recognition for skills development within the workplace which means the collective experience of students can help inform staff and other students of the working contexts within the learning environment.

- **Relevance of the Framework to employment**
 - The diploma supplement provides the employer with a clear statement of the volume, breadth and depth of learning and the level achieved.
 - Employers are still adjusting to the meaning of Levels as compared with Higher Cert, Diploma, and Degree.
 - Greater opportunities for employers to engage in programme development and to include work-related learning outcomes.
 - Four sub strands of NFQ promote skills development in transferable skills areas this is a welcome development in Science and Engineering disciplines as often referred to as “*soft skills*” however are highly sought after by employers as reported in many national skills reports.

- **Use of the Framework in public funding**
 - Only qualifications recognised on the NFQ are funded by the state
 - The one-step-up funding tends to be applied to Levels 6 and 7 only
 - Unit costing has highlighted the additional costs associated with delivering levels 6 and 7 as compared with Level 8.

- **Impact on the international recognition of qualifications**
 - Irish qualifications are more easily matched to qualifications in other countries (although this is still not simple as other countries do not have an equivalent framework)
 - The diploma supplement is valued
 - Growing demand from EU students for Irish qualifications are they can easily see the relationship with Bologna.

Please return your response to nfqstudy@nqai.ie or to

Dr. Anna Murphy
Secretary to the Framework Implementation and Impact Study Team
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
5th Floor, Jervis House
Jervis Street
Dublin 1