

Referencing awards which have been aligned with the NFQ and communicating the status of such awards to education and training providers in Ireland

Protocols for Awarding Organisations

Purpose of these protocols

As an Awarding Organisation, you have had a number of awards you make in Ireland aligned with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) under the *Agreement for alignment and quality assurance of the awards of Ofqual recognised Awarding Organisations, awarded to learners in the Republic of Ireland, with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)*.¹ These protocols have been drafted to provide further information to Awarding Organisations regarding their roles and responsibilities under Sections 10 and 11 of the Alignment Agreement. They may be amended or further protocols may be issued at a later date, in keeping with the principles underpinning the alignment process.

These protocols aim to provide you with a simple explanation of how to reference the alignment of your awards in promotional and marketing material aimed at education and training providers in Ireland, and on award documentation, such as transcripts and the award certificate. It also sets out your responsibilities in ensuring that providers in Ireland clearly communicate this information to learners.

In addition, this document advises you as to how to reference awards which are not aligned with the NFQ in your communications with providers and learners.

¹<http://www.nqai.ie/documents/AlignmentAgreementMarch2011.pdf>

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and background to the Alignment of Awards with the NFQ

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has been in place since 2003. The NFQ is designed for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence acquired by learners. The NFQ consists of 10 levels from basic learning to Doctoral awards. For more detailed information on the NFQ please see www.nfq.ie.

The awards made by statutory Irish Awarding Bodies are included in the NFQ. There are a number of Awarding Organisations from other jurisdictions which make awards following programmes undertaken by learners in Ireland. A process has been put in place to facilitate the alignment of such awards with the NFQ. In order for these awards to be aligned with the NFQ, a number of requirements must be fulfilled, including *inter alia* a requirement for quality assurance in the home jurisdiction which is external to the awarding body itself.

Under the Alignment Agreement with Ofqual, Ofqual has undertaken to regulate Awarding Organisations party to the Agreement and their provision in Ireland in a manner consistent with how it regulates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a result, the awards made by Awarding Organisations party to the Agreement can be aligned with the NFQ.

Information regarding the alignment process is available at:

<http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentApplications.html>

Which Awarding Organisations have aligned awards with the NFQ?

A full list of Awarding Organisations and the awards that have been aligned with the NFQ is publicly available at <http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentReports.html>. Click on the Awarding Organisation link to see the report on the alignment of awards of that

particular organisation. Details regarding the awards which have been aligned with the NFQ are contained in the reports, as well as the dates from which alignment came into effect.

What are the responsibilities of Awarding Organisations with regard to informing education and training providers in Ireland regarding the status of its awards i.e. whether the awards are aligned with the NFQ or not?

It is the responsibility of the Awarding Organisation to ensure that learners are provided with clear and unambiguous information regarding the status of awards that are aligned with the NFQ.² As the Awarding Organisation, it is your responsibility to inform education and training providers that deliver programmes leading to your awards in Ireland of the status of the awards made by your Awarding Organisation i.e. whether or not the awards are aligned with the NFQ.

It is expected that you make the following information available to all your providers in Ireland:

- Information regarding the *Agreement for quality assurance and alignment with the NFQ of the qualifications of Ofqual recognised Awarding Organisations*.

Relevant information is available at:

<http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentofOfqualAwards.html>

- A link to the NQAI website where the alignment report relating to your Awarding Organisation is publicly available:

<http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentReports.html>

In addition, a separate set of protocols, entitled *Referencing programmes leading to awards which have been aligned with the NFQ and communicating the status of such awards to learners in Ireland – Protocols for Education and Training Providers*, have

²Section 10.3 of the Alignment Agreement; and also consistent with the NQAI's *Policies, actions and procedures for access, transfer and progression for learners* <http://www.nqai.ie/docs/publications/10.pdf>

been developed for use by providers. It is expected that you circulate these protocols to your providers in Ireland.

Please note that these protocols pertain to alignment information; it is a condition of alignment that other kinds of information concerning access, transfer and progression, the recognition of prior learning and credit should also be provided to learners.

Aligned Awards

It is expected that with regard to the awards of your Awarding Organisation that have been aligned with the NFQ, the following information will be given to providers –

- The name of the Awarding Organisation which will make the award;
- The title of the award;
- The status of the award i.e. that the award in question is aligned with the NFQ;
and
- The NFQ level at which the award is aligned.

In general, the preferred wording for making reference to aligned awards is the following:

“Award X is aligned with level Y of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)”

Non-Aligned Awards

It is expected that with regard to awards made by your Awarding Organisation offered by the provider which have not been aligned with the NFQ, the following information will be given to providers –

- The name of the Awarding Organisation body which will make the award;
- The title of the award;

- The status of the award i.e. that the award in question is not aligned with the NFQ; and
- An explanation as to why the award in question has not been aligned (e.g. it is not included in the Framework in the UK and therefore cannot be aligned).

It is essential that the Awarding Organisation ensures that there is no reference to an Irish NFQ level on the award documentation when the award is not aligned with the NFQ.³

The award certification relating to non-aligned awards should not refer to alignment i.e. the fact that the award in question is not aligned with the NFQ should not be stated on the award document.

Why does information regarding alignment of awards with the NFQ need to be conveyed to education and training providers and learners in Ireland?

In order to ensure that learners understand how the NFQ can help them to make decisions about their education and training, it is important that learners fully understand the status and the associated progression opportunities of the awards they are undertaking. For this reason, it is important that Awarding Organisations convey information regarding the alignment of awards with the NFQ to education and training providers and learners.

What logos or graphics can I use on my marketing material and certification relating to aligned awards?

The “Framework diagram” illustrates the NFQ, its levels and award-types and can be included in your promotional and marketing material to illustrate how the aligned

³ The only situation when a Framework level should be included on the award information is when the award is included in the UK Framework (NQF or QCF) but the award has not been aligned with the NFQ. It should be clear as to which qualifications framework the level is referring.

awards fit within the Irish education and training system. Please email info@nqai.ie if you require a softcopy version of the Framework diagram to use in your promotional material.

The diagram should not be altered or customised for use in promotional activities without prior permission from the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

Awarding Organisations and providers are not entitled to use the logo of the NQAI, or that of any future amalgamated body in any marketing materials or documentation associated with aligned awards, nor are they entitled to refer to a particular relationship between the Awarding Organisation and the NQAI e.g. that the Awarding Organisation or the award is approved/regulated by the NQAI.

Are there examples of how Awarding Organisations can reference alignment with the NFQ on award documentation?

Award documentation includes the transcripts of results and the final award certificate. An example of how to reference an aligned award on award documentation is given below. If you require further information or would like to check whether the information you are providing to education and training providers or learners regarding aligned/non-aligned awards is appropriate, please email info@nqai.ie

Are there examples of how education and training providers can reference alignment with the NFQ in promotional material?

Examples of how providers can reference alignment with the NFQ in promotional material is included in the separate set of protocols aimed at providers; *Referencing programmes leading to awards which have been aligned with the NFQ and communicating the status of such awards to learners in Ireland – Protocols for Education and Training Providers.*

Sample Award Document 1- Aligned Award

<p style="text-align: center;">Example Awarding Organisation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Awarding Organisation) Level 3 Diploma in X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Awarded to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This award has been aligned with Level X of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). For more information see http://www.nqai.ie/applications.html</p>

Sample Award Document 2 – Non-aligned Award (not recognised by Ofqual)*

<p style="text-align: center;">Example Awarding Organisation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Certificate in X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Awarded to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p>

* **Note** – No reference is made to the award not being aligned with the NFQ on the award document and no reference is made to a level.

Sample Award Document 3 – Non-aligned Award (recognised by Ofqual)*

Example Awarding Organisation

(Awarding Organisation) Level 3 Diploma in X

Awarded to

This award is included at Level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework /
Qualifications and Credit Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

* **Note** – No reference is made to the award not being aligned with the NFQ on the award document