



NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

REPORT ON WORK

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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

This is the third bi-annual report to be published by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland since its establishment in 2001. It contains an overview of the work of the Authority over 2006 and 2007. While the report relates principally to the work of the Authority itself, it also highlights the many activities and projects which the Authority has undertaken in partnership with national stakeholders. Such collaboration has been an essential feature of the Authority's work since its inception, and has helped to ensure that substantial progress has been made on the important national endeavour of developing and implementing the National Framework of Qualifications and the underpinning aim of creating a lifelong learning society in Ireland.

The report highlights the work completed by the Authority over the past two years. The highlight has been the completion of the initial implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications and the development of the associated progression pathways. The increasing work of the Authority on the international recognition of qualifications is also very relevant. In the same period the Authority completed reviews of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and of the Dublin Institute of Technology. The review of the Further Education and Training Awards Council is currently in its final stage. Importantly the work of the Authority itself has been reviewed and the outcomes of that process have informed the Authority's new Strategic Plan 2008 to 2012.



Paul Haran
Chairperson

REPORT ON WORK

1 INTRODUCTION

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established on 26 February 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The arrangements for membership of the Authority are set out in the Act and provide for a broad basis of background and expertise in the membership of the Authority. The current members of the Authority are listed in appendix 1. The Authority currently has 25 members of staff. These are listed in appendix 2 and the Authority's organisation chart is set out in appendix 3.

The Authority is committed to leading a cultural change in learning, the ultimate aim of which is to place the needs of the learner at the centre of the national education and training systems. To bring about this change, the Authority has a range of functions to perform, including its three principal tasks:

- To establish and maintain a National Framework of Qualifications
- To promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression
- To promote the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland.

2 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Authority is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 to prepare a report on its activities at least every two years. The Authority published reports in December 2003 and in December 2005.

This report relates to the operations and performance of the Authority from January 2006 to December 2007. In particular, it refers to the themes, objectives, action lines and performance indicators set out by the Authority in its Corporate Plan for the period from 2006 to 2008.

Themes of Authority's Work

The Authority grouped its work through the following themes in planning for the performance of its functions:

- National Framework of Qualifications
- Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners
- Supporting the Awards Councils
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology
- International Policy Engagement
- International Recognition of Awards
- Europass
- Organisation Culture of the Authority.

This report is structured on the basis of the themes. In relation to each of the themes, an outline of the actions undertaken by the Authority in 2006 and 2007 is set out and the performance indicators are addressed. A summary statement of all of the actions is set out in appendix 3.

3 AUTHORITY QUALITY REVIEW

This report also draws extensively from the findings of the Authority's review process. From November 2006 until October 2007 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland undertook a Quality Review, which was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, in association with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The review evaluated:

- how effectively the Qualifications Authority has performed its principal statutory functions since its establishment
- the suitability of the organisational structures and processes of the executive of the Qualifications Authority for the performance of its functions in the future
- the extent to which the Qualifications Authority, in the performance of its relevant functions, complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The Quality Review process consisted of the following main elements:

- Commissioning of the review, including the appointment of the external panel of experts, by the Department of Education and Science in association with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Self-evaluation by the Qualifications Authority
- Evaluation by a panel of experts
- Consideration of the report of the panel by the Qualifications Authority and the development of a plan by the Qualifications Authority to implement the recommendations in the report
- Consideration of the review report and the Qualifications Authority's plans by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Publication of Review Outcomes.

As part of the self-evaluation process external feedback was gathered through a number of diverse means as follows:

- The Authority's Consultative Group.
- An online and hard copy survey on the Authority's corporate website.
- An advertisement seeking public submissions to inform the Quality Review
- An e-mail sent to all of the Authority's stakeholders seeking submissions to inform the Quality Review
- Separate questionnaires were devised for (i) members of the external panel who conducted the review of the performance of HETAC of its functions (ii) stakeholders who interacted with the Authority on international policy matters (iii) professional bodies and international awarding bodies (iv) corporate suppliers and (v) recognition network contacts and clients. These questionnaires were available online where appropriate or were circulated via email.

- Members of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) were circulated with a document that set out the eight standards for external quality assurance agencies (Part 3 of the European Standards & Guidelines) and the Authority's draft compliance statements for each one. Stakeholders were invited to respond to and comment upon each of the compliance statements.
- a number of key stakeholders were identified whom the Authority executive met regarding the Quality Review to explore their feedback in person.

The outcomes of the review process were published in October 2007. The Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise Trade and Employment welcomed the report of the Panel on the review of the effectiveness of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland both in meeting its statutory functions under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and, in the opinion of the expert panel, complying with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The Departments noted and concurred with the findings of the Panel, that the Authority has carried out its functions effectively in both of these areas; that it fully meets the European Standards; and, that it is well placed to progress to the next stage in the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The self-evaluation by the Authority, the comprehensive study undertaken by the Panel and the response by the Authority to the Panel's report were considered by the Departments as having been important contributions in helping to shape the future direction of policy in this area, and to have demonstrated the high level of support from stakeholders which they considered to be a feature of the Authority's work.

The Departments stated that they concurred with the findings of the Panel and the Authority's self-evaluation report in highlighting key areas for further priority development as follows:

- More active co-ordination and facilitation in progressing the Authority's access, transfer and progression policies, particularly in regard to the development of streamlined progression pathways, accreditation of prior and work-based learning, more extensive use of minor, special purpose and supplemental awards, and implementation by providers of awards at Level 1 and 2 of the Framework. In this regard, the Departments also welcomed the Authority's commitment to pursuing the development of a national database of information for learners on education and training opportunities and their associated progression routes.
- Increased co-ordination in the context of a broader national approach to quality assurance in higher education in collaboration with the Irish Higher Education Quality Network and the Higher Education Authority. In that context the Departments stated that they looked forward to the speedy inclusion of university certificate and diploma awards in the Framework.
- An enhanced communications strategy focusing on the wider dissemination by stakeholder organisations of the role of the Framework within their own institutions, as well as greater engagement by the Authority with the wider public, particularly with learners and employers, through advertising and marketing, ensuring optimum synergy in this respect between the work of the Authority and that of HETAC and FETAC.
- The continuing expansion of the service Qualifications Recognition Ireland in line with demand, and the challenge to create greater awareness of the service among migrant groups and employers. In that context the Departments welcomed the strategic emphasis being placed by the Authority on increasing the online information available for learners on the equivalence of international qualifications.
- The Departments considered that the practice of delegating representation at international meetings and fora to the Authority, the HEA, HETAC and FETAC, and the Irish Universities Quality Board as appropriate had worked well, notwithstanding the uncertainty which may

have arisen in international circles as to "who is in charge". They considered that this uncertainty may be alleviated in future where agencies make clear the context in which they are undertaking a representational role. The Departments stated that they are satisfied that the delegation of representation has not resulted in any inconsistency or deviation from emerging national and European policy in this area.

- The Departments also noted the strong emphasis placed by stakeholders on speedy implementation of access, transfer and progression policies and the removal of blockages and barriers in this area.

This report, and in particular the analysis of performance in terms of performance indicators, draws extensively on the review process and its findings. Specific references are made to the Authority's Self-Evaluation Report using the acronym SER and the associated page number. The full report, and all other material relating to the Quality Review, is available on the Authority's website – www.nqai.ie.

4 THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that by winter 2008 the Framework will be fully implemented, will have been reviewed and will be well known and understood

This objective is well on the way to being attained by December 2008. All of the policies and criteria are in place for the Framework. Implementation is well underway by awarding bodies and other stakeholders. Terms of reference for the study on the implementation and impact of the Framework have been adopted and the review process is commencing in early 2008.

Completion of Framework development

The Authority identified in December 2005 that the final part on initial Framework development related to the determination of policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion and alignment of professional and international awards in the Framework. The policies and criteria were established in summer 2006.

Implementation of the Framework

The Authority has continued to work closely with stakeholders in the implementation of the Framework. The principal areas where actions have taken place are as follows:

- The Authority has provided a forum whereby awarding bodies and providers of education and training can share perspectives in implementing the Framework across the various sectors of education and training
- New arrangements for implementation by FETAC of Framework major award-types commenced in autumn 2006
- A Framework implementation network was jointly established by the Irish Universities Association and the Authority and the first meeting took place in winter 2007.
- It has been agreed by the Department of Education and Science, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission, FETAC and the Authority that a technical exercise will commence in 2008 on the further examination of the possible elaboration of the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate in the Framework
- Cross-Framework sectoral approaches have been co-ordinated by the Authority in relation to child-care and languages.
- The Authority has worked closely with awarding bodies and providers of education and training in the implementation of its existing policies and criteria on the titles of awards

Advocacy and Promotion

The Authority has also been aware of the need to promote and influence the cultural changes required for the Framework to be implemented successfully, for example the adoption of learning outcomes as a basis for programme development and the enabling and implementation of credit accumulation processes. It has gone about this task by working with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and contributing to policy-making at a national level in areas of relevance to this objective, as well as participating in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups as appropriate.

A number of particular actions were taken in 2005 and 2006 in this area.

- The Authority developed materials for use by Guidance Counsellors in secondary schools and careers advisors in higher education institutions in order to assist them in communicating the Framework to learners.
- The Authority has also worked with FÁS to assist the development by FÁS of an information booklet to communicate the introduction of the Framework and its impact on its environment. This was published by FÁS in winter 2006. Similar work supporting the Irish Vocational Education Association is underway.
- The Authority has responded to numerous requests from stakeholders to deliver presentations on the Framework to various groups across further and higher education and training.
- In autumn 2006 the Authority began directly pursuing the third phase of its strategy: the communication of the Framework to learners and employers. A four-week campaign ensued in October 2006 which consisted of newspaper advertisements and radio advertising, tailored to address learner and employer interests.
- In winter 2006 the Authority re-designed its Framework website and reorganised the information contained within it to address the information needs of learners, employers, providers and advisors.
- In spring 2007 the Authority jointly organised a conference entitled: *Accreditation and Assessment in Irish Higher Education – The Emerging Scenario, Higher Education Institutions Implementing the National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education and the Bologna Agenda* along with the National University of Ireland Maynooth (Departments of Education and of Adult Community Education) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.
- The Authority is also seeking to advance a more coherent approach for the use of qualifications for recruitment (initially in the public sector). It is working with awarding bodies and the Public Appointments Service in the first instance.

Quality assurance

At the outset the Authority identified 'quality' as one of the fundamental values and principles upon which the Framework would be built and around which it would be implemented. This area is complex, given that the legal responsibility for assuring the quality of awards in the Framework, and the education and training provision leading to them, is shared by a variety of awarding bodies, providers of education and training and regulatory authorities, who function within distinct sectors or parts of sectors in the broader education and training system, and within distinct quality assurance traditions and cultures. As the custodian of the Framework and its values, the Authority has a legitimate interest in engaging with all of these bodies and organisations in order to promote a consistent and internationally recognised quality culture across the system, for it is upon the existence of such a quality culture that the utility and credibility of the Framework – as a tool both for comparing, contrasting and recognising qualifications, and for opening up diverse learning opportunities for prospective learners – ultimately rests.

The Authority's concern with 'whole-system' quality assurance has been particularly marked in relation to higher education and training where, under the aegis of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, it has worked in a collaborative and creative manner with all the principal national stakeholders to promote a shared quality culture across the system. The network provides a forum for discussion of quality assurance issues and for the dissemination of best practice in quality assurance amongst practitioners and policy makers. It also endeavours, where appropriate, to develop common national principles and approaches to quality assurance in Irish higher education and training. The Authority

has been an active member of the network since the network was founded in 2003, and acts as its permanent secretariat. Amongst other roles in this capacity it hosts the network's website. It organised and funded the initial network conference entitled "*And never the twain shall meet*"? *Exploring Quality Assurance and Professional Accreditation / Recognition in a Changing World* in autumn 2006.

The reviews by the Authority of the performance by FETAC and HETAC of their functions referred to in chapter 6 below are also relevant.

Framework review

In winter 2007 the Authority established terms of reference for a study on the implementation and impact of the National Framework of Qualifications and the associated policies for access, transfer and progression for learners. The study will involve all stakeholders involved in Framework implementation and will last from spring 2008 until summer 2009. The Authority plans that the review of the differentiation between further and higher education and training at level 6 in the Framework will take place following the completion of the Framework study.

Theme 1 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 1 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – all principal actions have been or are being carried out
- The extent to which the architecture of the Framework, including the sub-strands of learning outcomes, the classes of award-types and the standards for award-types, is implemented – initial implementation of all elements of Framework architecture is underway by awarding bodies
- The awareness and attitudes of stakeholders, including learners and employers, to the National Framework of Qualifications and its implementation and relevance to them was explored as part of the quality review. The review statement posed in the online survey asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement that the Authority has been successful in communicating the National Framework of Qualifications to the wider public. 60% of respondents agreed strongly or slightly with the statement whilst 22% disagreed slightly or strongly. In the responses generated through review meetings with stakeholders there was a general agreement that awareness amongst the wider public is currently limited. (SER pg 18). This is a key developmental area in the Authority's next phase of corporate planning.
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view of the effectiveness of the Framework in meeting its objectives – the Authority's quality review, whilst not a review of the Framework, confirms this. It also highlights areas for deeper implementation which include capitalising on joint planning activities with other state agencies, such as the Higher Education Authority, and the Irish Universities Quality Board (SER pg 17)
- The inclusion of policy approaches proposed or promoted by the Authority in national policies – the Authority's quality review process confirms this. This is reflected, for example, in the positive views, in concluding the review process, of the Department of Education and Science and of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on the impact of the Authority's work to date.
- The outcomes of the review processes which are to be established – the reviews of HETAC and the Authority itself are now complete. The review of FETAC is to be completed in spring 2008.

The study on Framework implementation and impact is to be completed in summer 2009. The Councils expressed their satisfaction during the quality review on the manner in which these reviews were carried out (SER, pg 32).

- The Authority's central role in the IHEQN was strongly supported by fellow members of the network when questioned, as part of the quality review meetings, about how effective the Authority has been in facilitating the exchange of good practice in quality assurance between stakeholders in higher education through the IHEQN (SER, pg 22). This is a role that the Authority intends to continue and develop.

5 THEME 2 – ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION FOR LEARNERS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that improved arrangements for access, transfer and progression will have been put in place for a diverse range of learners by winter 2008 consistent with the full implementation of the Framework

This objective is well on the way to being attained by December 2008. All of the initial policies, actions and procedures are in place. The implementation of this objective is related to the progress of the implementation of the Framework. The study on the implementation and the impact of the Framework and the associated policies for access, transfer and progression which is commencing in 2008 will assist in deepening implementation.

Implementation of policies for access, transfer and progression

Paralleling its Framework advocacy role, the Authority has taken a lead role in coordinating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression.

The Authority has worked closely 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 Authority has sought to adopt a coordinating 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. The traditional web of such arrangements is gradually evolving to take account of the changes arising out of the implementation of the Framework. In the case of certain areas of the Framework (e.g., with FETAC awards), it is too early at this stage to predict how each of the desired new routes will develop or operate. Nevertheless, the Authority has identified three progression route blockages for further work:

- The Leaving Certificate
- The Level 5 Certificate
- The Advanced Certificate.

The Authority is working with stakeholders in addressing these routes.

The Authority published a country background report in summer 2007 on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Ireland. This was completed as part of an OECD activity on the “Recognition of non-formal and informal learning” in which Ireland participates. The report was drafted with the assistance of an Advisory Group and, in particular, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. The aim of the report is to document and review the current scenario in Ireland regarding the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning. An expert review team, appointed by the OECD, is now to visit Ireland in spring 2008 as part of a review process.

The Authority has undertaken research, as a joint venture with the Irish Universities Association and the Higher Education Authority, on current arrangements for transfer and progression into undergraduate programmes leading to university awards. This research was published in autumn 2006.

Another area of interest to the Authority is the need to have a wider and more learner-centred information base in relation to qualifications, as an aid to learners identifying access, transfer and

progression opportunities. It has been involved in a number of discussions at a national level with a view to meeting this objective. In winter 2007, following a request from the Department of Education and Science, the Authority agreed with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors to take over responsibility for the Qualifax database with effect from January 2008.

The Authority has worked closely with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, within the Higher Education Authority, in the development and implementation of the National Action Plan which was published in winter 2004.

Theme 2 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 2 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – all principal actions have been or are being carried out.
- The extent to which stakeholders in learning have a positive view on the effectiveness of the policies of the Authority on access, transfer and progression for learners – the Authority's quality review process established through its online survey that 84% of respondents agreed strongly or slightly that the work of the Authority had helped to increase the diversity of access, transfer and progression arrangements and the same percentage of respondents agreed that it had contributed to national debate on issues relevant to this policy area. Only 4% and 2% disagreed with these statements respectively (SER, pg 25).
- Increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners – diversity is increasing, as illustrated in the examples below:
 - broad access to programmes in institutes of technology for holders of certain FETAC awards
 - increasing use of a diversity of awards for entry to university programmes
 - progression routes for Advanced Certificate under development in winter 2007
- Increased information available about such diverse arrangements – the Framework is increasingly used in the setting out of information on diverse arrangements, e.g.
 - The use of Framework level designations in C.A.O. documentation
 - The use of Framework level designations and other Framework references in the prospectuses of higher education institutions
 - The use of Framework materials by guidance practitioners

77% of respondents to the quality review online survey agreed that the Authority's work had increased the availability of information for learners, while only 2% of respondents indicated that they disagreed (SER, pg 26).

6 THEME 3 – SUPPORTING THE AWARDS COUNCILS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and other stakeholders, including government and the social partners, and in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

The Authority and the Councils have worked closely together in the two-year period. The Authority has continued to fund the Councils, has reviewed the performance by HETAC of its functions and is finalising the FETAC review.

Funding Role

The Authority, with the co-operation of the Department of Education and Science, has ensured that the Councils have been appropriately funded to enable them to perform their functions. A particular challenge in relation to the funding for a major FETAC information technology project across 2007 and 2008 has been met. There remains a challenge in securing the necessary financing for communications campaigns to raise awareness concerning the Framework and the international recognition of qualifications.

The Authority has allocated grants to each of the Councils within an appropriate timescale to meet the Councils' needs in terms of planning for a full-year's expenditure. The Authority and the Councils have continued to implement a system of information flows on expenditure and estimated future expenditure which meets the needs of all concerned.

The framework for accountability on the expenditure of the grant to the Councils and to the Authority has continued to be implemented on an agreed basis by the three bodies.

Planning and Review

Under section 9 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland may from time to time review the performance by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of their functions. It was originally envisaged by the Authority that the HETAC review would take place in 2006-7. However, in autumn 2005, the Council requested that the Authority would undertake the review, both in advance of the projected 2006-7 timeline, and in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* adopted in Bergen in May 2005 by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the Bologna signatory states.

The review comprised

- Establishment of terms of reference by the Authority
- Self evaluation by the Council
- Evaluation by a panel of experts
- Consideration of the report of the panel by the Council and the development of a plan by the Council to implement the recommendations in the report
- Consideration of the review report and the Council's plans by the Authority

In concluding the review process in summer 2006, the Authority considered it helpful to note the purpose of the review established in the terms of reference – that it was to be developmental in intent, and aimed to assist the Council in achieving its own quality enhancement goals and to further develop its own internal quality culture. The Authority considered that it is clear from the self-evaluation report, the review panel's report and HETAC's response that the review process had succeeded in meeting its primary purpose.

The Authority concurred with the findings and supporting rationale in the report of the review panel and supported the plans set out in the response of HETAC.

In fulfilment of its statutory review function, the Authority was satisfied that the Higher Education and Training Awards Council had performed effectively its principal statutory functions since its establishment and had developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and are being operated as appropriate.

As the agency reviewing the Council for the purpose of testing the compliance of the Council with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, the Authority was satisfied that in the performance of its functions, the Council complies with these.

The Authority noted HETAC's follow-up report of autumn 2007 on the implementation of the actions in its response to the review panel's report.

The FETAC review commenced in spring 2007. The review comprises:

- The establishment of terms of reference by the Authority
- Self-evaluation by the Council
- Evaluation by a panel of experts
- Consideration of the report of the panel by the Council and the development of a plan by the Council to implement the recommendations in the report
- Consideration of the review report and the Council's plans by the Authority

It is anticipated that the review process will be completed in spring 2008.

Building on the outcome of the review processes, it is anticipated that the next HETAC corporate plan will be in place by autumn 2008 and that the next FETAC plan will be in place by spring 2008.

Increased joint planning and corporate work between the Authority and the Councils, in the context of regular joint work-planning tripartite meetings between the executives of the three bodies, was recommenced in summer 2007.

Theme 3 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 3 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – all principal actions have been carried out
- The extent to which stakeholders have positive views on the effectiveness of the Authority's appeals roles – while appeals procedures are in place, these have yet to be tested.
- The extent to which the awards Councils and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has assisted the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence – there is general support for the manner with which the Authority has assisted the Councils in undertaking their work while not interfering in the performance by them of their functions. This was underpinned in the findings of the Authority's quality review process.(SER, pgs 30-32). The important matter of clarity in the roles of the three organisations in the implementation of the Framework was also examined through the online questionnaire, where stakeholders were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement that these were generally understood. 81% of respondents agreed strongly or slightly that this was the case whilst 13% disagreed slightly or strongly with the statement (SER pg, 31).

7 THEME 4 – SUPPORTING THE DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that the Authority will continue to support the Dublin Institute of Technology in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

The Authority is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 to review the effectiveness of the Institute's quality assurance procedures on a periodic basis and to publish the results of these reviews. The European University Association was commissioned to carry out the first such review on behalf of the Authority which was completed in June 2006. The review comprised:

- The establishment of terms of reference
- Self-evaluation by the Institute
- Evaluation by a panel of experts appointed by the European University Association
- Consideration of the report of the panel by the Institute and the development of a plan by the Institute to implement the recommendations in the report
- Consideration of the review report and the Institute's plans by the Authority

The Authority supported the recommendations that related specifically to quality assurance in the review team report, and the measures that the Institute was putting in place to respond to them. The Authority drew particular attention to the following issues:

- the need to implement more proactively and to review the annual programme reporting processes in order to encourage full participation by both students and staff, and in order to ensure greater transparency in the student feedback process
- the need to accelerate the development of the emerging systems for school, faculty and research review

An update on the implementation by the Institute of the findings of the review process was noted by the Authority in spring 2007.

In spring 2007 the Authority also noted the findings arising out of the application of the Institute's quality assurance procedures in the previous academic year and the plans of the Institute for implementing these findings.

The Institute adopted a revised Quality Enhancement Handbook in summer 2006 which, *inter alia*, extends its quality assurance policies and procedures to non-academic departments. These revised procedures were agreed with the Authority in spring 2007.

In winter 2007 the Institute and the Authority agreed a revised approach to the manner in which the Institute would inform the Authority of the findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures and the plans of the Institute for implementing these findings. Thus on an annual basis the Institute now provides the Authority with the school/faculty review reports that took place during the previous academic year, as well as an update on the Institute's progress with regard to the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of effectiveness.

The Authority exercises all of the above functions within the context of a general policy approach which recognises that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in the Institute rests with the Institute

itself. Thus, the Authority endeavours to be supportive of the Institute's efforts to further develop its own internal quality culture, and to add value at an appropriate overarching level.

Theme 4 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 4 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – all principal actions have been carried out
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the quality assurance review of the DIT undertaken by the Authority – the Authority's review process confirmed a positive view. The review process was described by the Institute as a positive and timely experience, particularly in relation to the detailed self-evaluation that it undertook. Feedback from the European University Association was also positive. It indicated that the role played by the Authority was appropriate and that it "showed consideration for the need to preserve the independence of the review" (SER, pg 37).
- The extent to which the Institute and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has supported the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence – the Authority's review process confirmed a positive view. The Institute indicated that the engagement between the Institute and the Authority both with regard to the Authority's annual consideration of the findings arising from its agreed quality assurance procedures, and to the review of effectiveness of the Institute's quality assurance procedures, had been helpful to the Institute in further developing its own internal quality culture. Specifically, the Institute felt that discussions with the Authority had influenced thinking with regard to the publication of quality assurance outcomes and had encouraged the recently adopted decision to implement a new system of school and faculty reviews (SER, pg 37).



THEME 5 – INTERNATIONAL POLICY ENGAGEMENT

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that the Authority will make a proactive and influential input on behalf of the State into the development of international policy approaches on qualifications related matters, and will collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing.

The Authority has endeavoured to consult and collaborate extensively with national stakeholders when engaging internationally in this manner. The interdependency of the Authority, the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council is particularly reflected in an international setting where the level of involvement of the three organisations requires careful planning and implementation in order to maximise resources. The Authority and the two Councils all have legal requirements to inform themselves of relevant international practice and an agreement is in place within which the three bodies discuss their respective individual and collaborative international engagements.

In autumn 2005 the Commission established a technical group to develop the European Qualifications Framework and invited the Authority to become a member of the group. In autumn 2006, the Commission adopted a proposal for the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), which was launched by the Commission in winter 2007. The Authority has also engaged with the Commission on the initial implementation of the European Qualifications Framework through a new working group established in spring 2007 to work towards this. The Authority has also represented Ireland on the European Commission's cluster group on learning outcomes.

The Authority has provided support for the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment throughout the process of planning the implementation of the cooperative initiatives outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration. A number of technical working groups were established for the implementation of the Declaration. The Authority was involved with the group on credit transfer until winter 2006 and the Further Education and Training Awards Council is now involved with this group, which has led the development work behind the proposal for a system of credit accumulation and transfer in vocational education and training (ECVET).

In relation to the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, the Authority has been an active supporter regarding the development of an outcomes-based approach to describing and comparing qualifications. Following the adoption of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, the Authority has participated in the Bologna working groups to encourage its initial implementation. Ireland responded to an invitation to undertake the self-certification of the compatibility of the National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework. A Steering Committee, which was chaired by the Authority and comprised of representatives of the Authority, the Irish higher education and training awarding bodies and two co-opted international experts, prepared the Irish response in relation to the criteria and procedures for aligning national frameworks to the Bologna Framework. On completion of this work in winter 2006, Ireland became the first European country to verify the compatibility of its National Framework of Qualifications with the Bologna Framework.

As well as the above work on the Bologna Framework, the Authority also participates in the Department of Education and Science's Bologna Steering Group, and is responsible for the implementation and promotion of the Diploma Supplement in its capacity as the National Europass Centre.

In winter 2006, the Authority hosted a conference on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on the Lisbon process change agenda and looking beyond 2010 towards new approaches in teaching and learning that will be required to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The Authority also regularly responds to requests to provide relevant Irish experts or speakers for international events.

The Authority is an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and has sought full membership following the completion of its quality review process.

Theme 5 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 5 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – all actions have been carried out
- The inclusion of policy approaches promoted or proposed by the Authority in international policies – the Authority's quality review confirms this, including the assessment by 70% of respondents to the online questionnaire who agreed strongly or slightly that the Authority had made an effective and proactive input into developing international policy approaches on qualifications related matters, with 28% registering that they neither agreed nor disagreed or didn't know. This reflects perhaps the wide range of stakeholders that responded to the online questionnaire and their varying levels of familiarity and direct involvement with international policy on qualifications related matters (SER, pg 41).
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are informed of and can participate, as appropriate, in international developments with which the Authority has an engagement – the Authority's quality review confirms the extent of this. 52% agreed strongly or slightly that the Authority had ensured that Irish stakeholders were informed of and could participate, as appropriate, in the international developments in which it had engaged. At the same time, 82% of respondents indicated that they agreed strongly or slightly that the Authority had contributed to the internationalisation of Irish education and training (SER, pg 41).

9 THEME 6 – INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF AWARDS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is to have a fully functioning and well-known international recognition service established by winter 2008

In 2004, the Authority, in consultation with stakeholders, established an integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications which is operated through its international recognition service. As established formally in this paper, and in line with its responsibility for co-ordinating international recognition activities, the Authority is the first port of call for recognition queries. A Recognition Advisory Group was formed which comprised representatives of the Authority, the Department of Education and Science, HETAC, FETAC and the universities. This group meets periodically and assists as necessary in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

In line with the national policy and with a view to efficiently and speedily addressing the recognition of UK qualifications in Ireland, and vice versa, the Authority hosted a meeting of the various qualifications and regulatory bodies in Ireland and the United Kingdom. This led to the Authority, with the cooperation of Irish awarding bodies, agreeing with UK regulatory authorities in 2005, the cross-referencing of the Irish Framework to Frameworks in place in the United Kingdom. Work has continued among the qualifications and regulatory bodies in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Agreement in principle was reached in summer 2007 that the UK quality assurance arrangements would apply for the making of UK vocational education and training awards in Ireland and it is planned that this will be implemented in 2008.

The Authority also provides advice to the Department of Education and Science in relation to the development of qualifications recognition agreements with other countries. Such an agreement was finalised with the Chinese authorities in spring 2006 and signed by the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin T.D. and her Chinese counterpart, Mr Zhou Ji. Detailed discussions were undertaken in 2006 and 2007 with the Malaysian authorities in relation to a system-wide recognition agreement for Irish qualifications in Malaysia and it is planned that these will be completed in 2008.

The Authority acts as the national centre for the Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) – the purpose of the Network is to improve academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union, the European Economic Area countries and the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. This Network has now been essentially subsumed into the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) which was set up following the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

The Authority has a qualifications recognition service which provides advice on the recognition of international qualifications. In 2006 approximately 1200 written applications were received by the Authority and in 2007 there were 1,823 written applications. Details on these written applications are included in appendix 5. In addition, the Authority also handles an extensive number of recognition queries by e-mail and telephone, and makes available a growing body of information on international qualifications on its website. The international database of qualifications on the website currently features 12 countries, listing the national qualifications available in a particular country and the comparable Irish qualification. More countries will be made available on the website as further research is carried out.

The Authority has put a communications strategy in place for its international recognition service which includes identifying groups of representative bodies for migrant workers and ensuring that they are aware of the service. Much work was undertaken on this initiative over 2006 and 2007. The

Authority also hosted a conference in spring 2006 to highlight the opportunities that have been developed for the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland and to seek to develop these opportunities further. It was attended by representatives of various national bodies and organisations.

The Authority is working with FÁS in terms of providing information for those intending to travel to Ireland on the employment services available and the importance of bringing suitable information regarding their qualifications if they wish to have them recognised on arrival.

A broader advertising campaign around the recognition service has been undertaken and has included an insert in national newspapers regarding the nature of the service. Reference was also made to the recognition of qualifications in the Authority's Framework advertising campaign that took place in autumn 2006.

Theme 6 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 6 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – these have all been implemented
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are satisfied with the recognition policies developed by the Authority and their satisfaction with the implementation of the policies is demonstrated in the outcomes of the Authority's quality review process. 61% of the online respondents agreed strongly or slightly that an integrated and effective policy approach had been established, 10% disagreed slightly, 1% disagreed strongly and 28% neither agreed nor disagreed or did not know. 54% agreed strongly or slightly that the Authority had implemented the policy approach effectively, 8% disagreed slightly, 1% disagreed strongly and 36% neither agreed nor disagreed or did not know. In terms of the Authority's success in implementing the national policy approach a wider range of views is discernible. The Department of Education and Science referred to what it terms "good progress" in the provision of recognition services, particularly through engagement with client groupings (SER, pg 48).
- The number of recognition agreements in place – an agreement is now in place with China and the Framework is aligned with the Bologna Framework. Increasingly, unilateral Irish understandings of qualifications systems and individual qualifications from other countries are set out on the Authority's website
- The growth in the number of requests for advice – there has been a significant increase. However, the Authority is seeking extensive further activity and is developing its information and knowledge capacity to meet increased demand and the need identified through the quality review to increase awareness of the service.
- The reduction in the time to process requests for advice – it has been a challenge to reduce the time for processing requests as the number of requests has increased. This challenge will be somewhat off-set by the increasing availability to the public of information on previous advice provided to applicants.

10

THEME 7 – EUROPASS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is that all elements of Europass will be available in Ireland by 2006 and that there will be widespread awareness of Europass among prospective users by 2008

Europass is a European Commission initiative that aims to assist individuals in having their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood throughout Europe, thereby increasing the mobility of learners and workers. The main concept behind Europass is to link separate initiatives, all aimed at increasing the transparency of qualifications and competences, into a structured portfolio of five documents. The Authority was designated the National Europass Centre for Ireland by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in 2005 and is thereby linked to a network of corresponding Centres across Europe whose role it is to promote and implement Europass. To assist it in this task, the Authority formed a Europass Advisory Group, comprising of representatives of the Authority, the Department of Education and Science, HETAC, FETAC and the universities. This group meets regularly.

The documents making up Europass are: the Diploma Supplement (an individualised document issued to graduates of higher education institutions); the Certificate Supplement (a generic document issued to those holding a vocational education and training award); Europass Curriculum Vitae; Europass Language Passport (which describes language skills and competences); and, Europass Mobility (an individualised document, which is used to record an organised period of time that a person spends in another European country for the purpose of learning or training).

As the nature of some of the Europass documents involves self-assessment (the Language Passport) and personal choice (the Curriculum Vitae) the focus is primarily on promotion to potential users in these cases rather than on implementation. The Authority has actively canvassed the opinions of stakeholders on the potential breadth of application of the Curriculum Vitae, in order to establish the users to whom the tool would be of most benefit and to encourage its use.

To date, 353 Europass Mobility documents have been issued to learners and the Authority continues to work with providers and awarding bodies to broaden its application to the full range of exchange programmes in operation in further and higher education settings.

As the Certificate Supplement is to be issued by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Diploma Supplement is issued to learners by higher education providers, the Authority has worked closely with the Awards Councils and the other awarding bodies on the implementation of these elements of Europass. HETAC ensured that providers delivering programmes leading to its awards (and with delegated authority to make awards) were issuing Diploma Supplements to graduates from 2005. An increasing number of universities are now also issuing the Diploma Supplement. A Diploma Supplement implementation group is now working to deepen implementation across higher education.

As the Further Education and Training Awards Council has now established its awards system it is turning its attention to the corresponding development and implementation of the Certificate Supplement. It has formed a Certificate Supplement Advisory Group to assist it in this task and has commenced making some Certificate Supplements available.

With regard to the promotion of Europass, the Authority has undertaken a number of initiatives. In February 2006 the initiative was introduced to the public, in conjunction with the annual FÁS Opportunities event and to coincide with the European Year of Workers' Mobility. The event received media coverage at that time.

The Authority has developed a series of publications and promotional items to communicate Europass, including a folder containing samples of the five Europass documents and a CD that was tailored for Guidance Counsellors. Further promotional activities have been designed in collaboration with the Union of Students in Ireland and include a poster campaign for higher education campuses which commenced in spring 2007. Europass has also been represented by the Authority at a range of further and higher education exhibitions.

Theme 7 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 7 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions set out above – these have all been implemented
- The extent to which the elements of the Europass are used within Ireland – the initial implementation of these is confirmed in the Authority's quality review process (SER pgs 52-53). The Authority concluded in its SER that whilst it has made advances in the implementation of Europass, further progress in this area is required, particularly with regard to the implementation of each of its component elements. In particular, the Authority concluded that it should give particular focus to ensuring widespread implementation of the Certificate Supplement and the Diploma Supplement (SER, pg 54).

11 THEME 8 – CORPORATE AFFAIRS

The following objective was set by the Authority in December 2005.

The objective is to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

This concerns the organisation of the Authority itself. The Authority has worked over 2006 and 2007 to meet the objective that it set for itself. The Authority's quality review process was of particular relevance in this regard as it was an organisation wide endeavour.

Corporate Governance

Since 1 January 2005 the Authority has been a prescribed public body under the Ethics in Public Office Acts and is operating in a manner consistent with these. The Authority has continued to implement the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The Authority has endeavoured to provide value for money by ensuring that its services are provided in an economic, efficient and effective way.

The Authority has met all of the planning and reporting requirements under the public sector modernisation programme. This has been a most helpful way to ensure that a range of corporate policy issues across the work of the Authority are addressed in a coherent and structured way.

Managing Financial Resources

The Authority also had allocated grants to the awards Councils. The detailed information is as follows:

- A total grant of €6.5m was paid to the Further Education and Training Awards Council in 2006 and €7.8m in 2007
- A total grant of €2.4m was paid to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in 2006 and €2.5m in 2007.

The Authority was paid a total grant in 2006 of €2m. and of €2.2m in 2007.

The Authority has allocated grants to each of the Councils within a timescale to meet the Councils' needs in terms of planning for a full-year's expenditure. The Authority and the Councils have put in place a system of information flows on expenditure and estimated future expenditure which meets the needs of all concerned. The Authority reports on these matters regularly to the Department of Education and Science

Since winter 2004, the Authority put in place and implemented a framework for accountability on the expenditure of the grant to the Councils and to the Authority.

The Internal Audit Committee completed internal audit reviews in 2006 and 2007.

2006 Annual Accounts have been cleared by the Comptroller and Auditor General and have been published by the Authority. A summary of this is attached at appendix 6.

Human Resources Management

In summer 2007 the Authority completed an internal re-organisation as part of the work on the quality review process and in line with its updated development plans.

The Authority continues to implement human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements. These were initially established in winter 2003. In winter 2007 the Authority attained the FÁS Excellence Through People standard award.

The Performance Management Development System is being implemented on a continuing basis and is linked to the organisation's ongoing analysis of training needs.

Knowledge/Communications Management

The Authority's Framework website was updated in winter 2006. The Authority's corporate website is currently under revision in order to ensure that information regarding the Authority's activities can be easily located by stakeholders.

Quality Management Systems

The Authority's Customer Service Charter continues to be implemented. Its internal and external Quality Assurance and Accountability Policies were updated in spring 2007.

The Freedom of Information Act, 1997 has applied to the Authority since 31 May, 2006.

Decentralisation

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, planning is underway for the relocation of the Authority to Edenderry, Co. Offaly. The Authority is working with the OPW and the Department of Education and Science in this regard.

Irish Language

The Authority is complying with its requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Theme 8 Performance Indicators

The Authority established performance indicators under Theme 8 in 2005. It is helpful to report on their implementation as follows:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out– these have all been implemented
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders have a positive view of the organisation culture of the Authority and how it conducts its business generally – the Authority regularly gets positive feedback from stakeholder organisations about the manner in which it works. This was also confirmed in the Authority's quality review. 86% of respondents agreed strongly or slightly that the process guideline of 'transparency' underpins the work of the Authority, 83% agreed strongly or slightly that 'equality' underpinned its work and 70% agreed strongly or slightly that 'flexibility' was one of the Authority's underpinning principles (SER, pg 57). In a further question regarding the Authority's corporate governance, 75% of respondents agreed strongly or slightly that they and / or their organisation has a positive view of the organisational culture of the Authority and how it conducts its business generally with only 6% disagreeing slightly (SER, pg 58).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Members of the Authority

Mr Paul Haran (Chairperson)

Dr Caroline Hussey (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Inez Bailey

Mr Eamon Devoy

Mr Tony Donohoe

Mr Hamidreza Khodabakhshi

Dr Seán Conlan

Mr Pat O'Callaghan

Mr Martin Shanahan

Prof W.J. Smyth

Mr. Donal O'Rourke

Mr Mogens Berg

Prof Anne Moran

Mr Seán Ó Foghlú (Chief Executive)

Appendix 2 Staff of Authority

Ms Siobhan Brennan, Staff Officer, QualifaX

Ms Claire Byrne, Director of Corporate Affairs

Ms Breda Cahill, Clerical Officer, QualifaX

Ms Laura Carrigan, Manager of Operations - Qualifications Recognition

Mr Eamonn Collins, Administration Executive

Ms Lorna Conway, Assistant Staff Officer, Qualifications Recognition

Mr John O'Connor, Development Officer

Mr Tom Farrell, Head of Operations, QualifaX

Ms Carmel Kelly, Project Officer

Ms Celine Kelly, Human Resources Officer

Ms Niamh Lenehan, Information Officer/Manager of Operations – Europass

Ms Mairéad McMahon – Finance Control

Dr Anna Murphy, Director of Research and Strategic Development

Dr Jim Murray, Director of Framework Implementation and Qualifications Recognition

Ms Trish O'Brien, Development Officer

Mr Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive

Mr William O'Keeffe, Assistant Staff Officer, International Recognition

Mr Sean O'Reilly, Project Officer

Ms Annette Reddy, Clerical Officer, QualifaX

Ms Patricia Reddy, Staff Officer, QualifaX

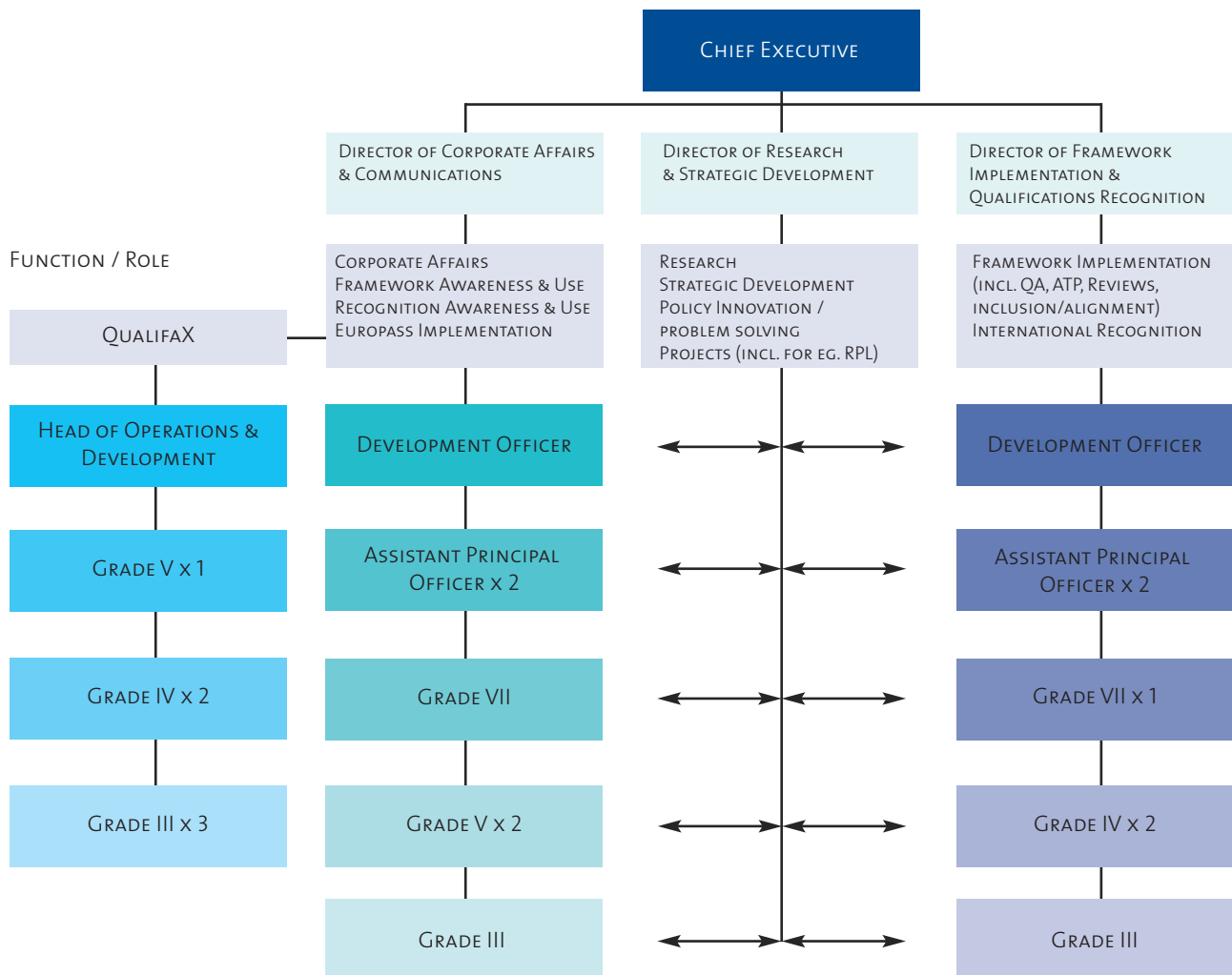
Mr Brendan Slattery, Clerical Officer, QualifaX

Dr Deirdre Stritch, Project Officer

Ms Yvonne Rudden – Clerical Officer

Ms Anne Walsh, Clerical Officer, QualifaX

Appendix 3 The Authority Executive – Organisation Chart



Appendix 4 Principal actions undertaken 2006-7

	Continuing	2006	2007
<p>THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS - FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i></p> <p>Determine policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of statutory professional awards in the National Framework of Qualifications</p>		Summer	
<p>THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS – IMPLEMENTATION OF FRAMEWORK <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i></p> <p>Continuation of collaboration with the principal awarding bodies in further and higher education and training – the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities – in facilitating the further implementation of the Framework.</p>	Continuing		
<p>Make provision for the inclusion of statutory professional awards</p>	Continuing		
<p>Facilitate the development of common approaches by awarding bodies to the recognition by them of the outcomes associated with awards made by professional bodies on a non-statutory basis</p>	Continuing		
<p>Completion of discussions on the possible elaboration on the inclusion of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework</p>	Continuing		
<p>Inclusion of awards made by the Department of Education and Science other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate</p>	Continuing		
<p>Promotion of discussion and the development of common approaches to the use of learning outcomes, the use and recognition of diverse approaches to assessing learning outcomes, and the use of award classifications</p>	Continuing		
<p>Supporting and advising awarding bodies in implementing a policy approach to titles of awards in a manner consistent with the Framework</p>	Continuing		
<p>THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS – ADVOCACY, PROMOTION AND USE OF THE FRAMEWORK <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i></p> <p>Contribution to policy-making at the national level</p>	Continuing		
<p>Participating in, establishing and supporting national and sectoral co-ordinating and development groups</p>	Continuing		
<p>Supporting use of the Framework as part of the Education Ireland Quality Mark</p>	Continuing		
<p>Implementation of Framework Directory</p>			Winter (work with Qualifax)
<p>Framework Conference</p>			Spring
<p>Determine a revised policy approach on the approval of awarding arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology</p>	Continuing		

	Continuing	2006	2007
Introduce a national debate among providers of further and higher education and training, awarding bodies and professional bodies in respect of their interdependent responsibilities with regard to accreditation and quality assurance	Continuing		
THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS – PLACEMENT OF EXISTING AND PREVIOUS AWARDS <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Completion of placing of existing and former awards	Continuing		
THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS – FACILITATING EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICE NATIONALLY IN RELATION TO QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance in education and training generally, including schooling and further education and training	Continuing		
THEME 1 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS – FRAMEWORK REVIEWS <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Commencement of Level 6 review			Deferred until after Framework study
Determination of policy approach to overall review of the National Framework of Qualifications			Winter
THEME 2 – ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION FOR LEARNERS - FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES FOR ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Support FETAC in the development and implementation of approaches to credit accumulation and transfer in further education and training	Continuing		
Support awarding bodies and providers in the implementation of principles and operational guidelines for a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training	Continuing		
Support awarding bodies and providers in enabling the implementation of principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning	Continuing		
Establish recognition of prior learning website	Continuing		
Map Framework progression routes			Spring
THEME 2 – ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION FOR LEARNERS - FURTHER POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Assist National Office for Equity of Access in the implementation of the National Action Plan	Continuing		
Determine policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the Universities			Winter
THEME 3 – SUPPORTING THE AWARDS COUNCILS – FUNDING ROLE <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Aim to allocate grants to Councils by end of April each year		Spring	Spring

	Continuing	2006	2007
Develop further the information flows from the Council in relation to their annual and estimated expenditure	Continuing		
Implement responsibilities in relation to the work of the Councils under the Framework for accountability that has been put in place for the Councils	Continuing		
THEME 3 – SUPPORTING THE AWARDS COUNCILS – PLANNING AND REVIEW ROLE <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Consider new corporate plans of Councils when submitted Determine policy approach in relation to the review of effectiveness of FETAC's performance of its functions	Continuing		Spring
Implement review of effectiveness of HETAC		Winter	
Implement review of effectiveness of FETAC			Winter
Review existing procedures for the performance by the Councils of their functions (to be undertaken following the review of effectiveness)	Continuing		
Review Authority's validation appeals procedures in the context of the policies on the validation of programmes being developed by the Councils (to be undertaken following the review of effectiveness)	Continuing		
THEME 4 – SUPPORTING THE DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY – QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Complete review of effectiveness		Summer	
Consider findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures on an annual basis			Spring
Agree revised quality assurance procedures			Spring
THEME 5 – INTERNATIONAL POLICY ENGAGEMENT – EUROPE <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Verification of National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area		Autumn	
Engage with European Commission on the development of a European Qualifications Framework and, following its adoption, verify its compatibility with the National Framework of Qualifications	Continuing		
Undertake development task arising out of the alignment of European Qualifications Framework and the National Framework of Qualifications	Continuing		
Engage with European Commission on the development of a European Credit System for lifelong learning	Continuing		
THEME 5 – INTERNATIONAL POLICY ENGAGEMENT – WIDER INTERNATIONAL WORK <i>Actions undertaken 2006-7</i>			
Continued engagement with OECD on the next stage of the work on the role of national qualifications frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning	Continuing		

Seek to ensure that appropriate staffing resources are put in place to meet the performance of additional functions

**THEME 8 – CORPORATE AFFAIRS – KNOWLEDGE/
 COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT**

Actions undertaken 2006-7

Continuing development of internal data sharing systems and databases for the management of communications

Further development of databases for the management of all communications both internally and externally

THEME 8 – CORPORATE AFFAIRS – QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Actions undertaken 2006-7

Continue to work in an open and transparent way, continuing practice of consultation with all interested and relevant parties

Set up appropriate systems required for dealing with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act

Continue to implement Customer Service Charter and keep under review

Review policy approach to internal quality management system

THEME 8 – CORPORATE AFFAIRS – DECENTRALISATION

Actions undertaken 2006-7

Implementation of Government policy

THEME 8 – CORPORATE AFFAIRS – IRISH LANGUAGE

Actions undertaken 2006-7

Continue to implement policy on use of Irish language

	2006	2007
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		Spring
Continuing		
Continuing		
Continuing		

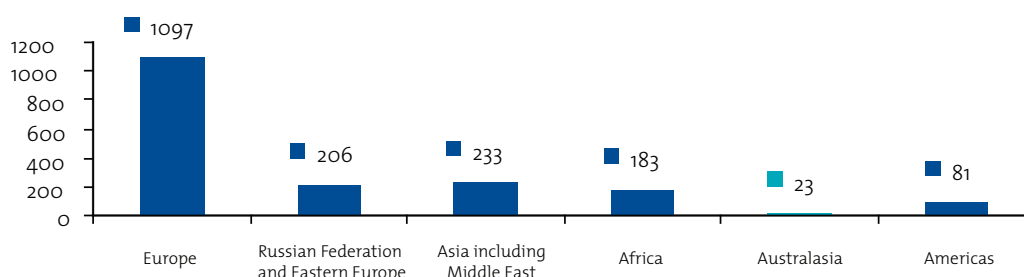
Appendix 5 Qualifications Recognition – Ireland, 2006 & 2007 Summary Report

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

2007

The figure relating to queries and applications received by the Authority rose to approximately 9,500 which is a 31.9% increase on the previous year.

1,823 recognition applications were processed in 2007, of this number 1,401 were closed by the end of 2007.



PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN OF FIGURES

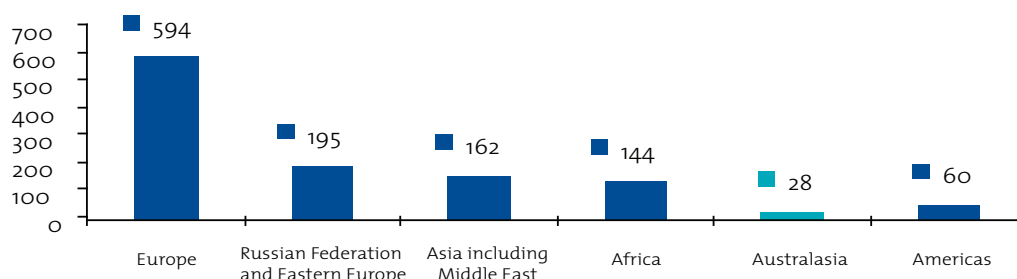
During 2007, 60% of applications originated from countries in the European Union, 11.3% came from the Russian Federation and Rest of Europe, 12.7% from Asia, while 10% came from Africa, 1.2% from Australasia and 4.4% from the America(s).

2006

During 2006 Qualifications Recognition – Ireland dealt with approximately 7,200 queries and applications. This figure includes applications concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications as well as applications and enquiries from individuals concerning a variety of qualification-related matters.

1,194 applications requesting recognition of a foreign qualification were processed from 77 different countries of this number 1,000 were processed and closed by the end of the year.

During 2006, 51% of applications originated in Europe, 16% came from the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe, 14% from Asia, while 12% came from Africa, 2% from Australasia and 5% from the America(s).



Appendix 6 Extract from Annual Accounts 2006

REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL FOR PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

I have audited the financial statements of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland for the year ended 31 December 2006 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The financial statements, which have been prepared under the accounting policies set out therein, comprise the Statement of Accounting Policies, the Income and Expenditure Account, the Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses, the Balance Sheet and the related notes.

RESPECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE AUTHORITY AND THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

The Authority is responsible for preparing the financial statements in accordance with the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 and for ensuring the regularity of transactions. The Authority prepares the financial statements in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland. The accounting responsibilities of the Members of the Authority are set out in the Statement of Responsibilities of the Authority.

My responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland).

I report my opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with General Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland. I also report whether in my opinion proper books of account have been kept. In addition, I state whether the financial statements are in agreement with the books of account.

I report any material instance where moneys have not been applied for the purposes intended or where the transactions do not conform to the authorities governing them.

I also report if I have not obtained all the information and explanations necessary for the purposes of my audit.

I review whether the Statement on Internal Financial Control reflects the Authority's compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and report any material instance where it does not do so, or if the statement is misleading or inconsistent with other information of which I am aware from my audit of the financial statements. I am not required to consider whether the Statement on Internal Financial Control covers all financial risks and controls, or to form an opinion on the effectiveness of the risk and control procedures.

BASIS OF AUDIT OPINION

In the exercise of my function as Comptroller and Auditor General, I conducted my audit of the financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board and by reference to the special considerations which attach to State bodies in relation to their management and operation. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the amounts and disclosures and regularity of the financial transactions included in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgments made in the preparation of the financial statements, and of whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the Authority's circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

I planned and performed my audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations that I considered necessary in order to provide me with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatements, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error. In forming my opinion I also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.

OPINION

In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland, of the state of the Authority's affairs at 31 December 2006 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended.

In my opinion, proper books of account have been kept by the Authority. The financial statements are in agreement with the books of account.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gerard Smyth', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gerard Smyth

For and on behalf of the
Comptroller and Auditor General

6 September 2007

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2006

	Note	2006 €	2005 €
INCOME			
State Grant	1	10,972,405	10,411,000
Other income		59,864	-
Net deferred funding for pensions	16	260,000	164,000
Deposit Interest		483	1,110
		11,292,752	10,576,110
Transfer from/(to) Capital Account	9	92,882	74,177
		11,385,634	10,650,287
EXPENDITURE			
Grants to Awards Councils	2	8,925,000	8,375,000
Staff Costs	3	1,100,140	871,310
Premises	4	336,949	397,459
Central Administration and Services	5	1,190,712	761,202
Pension Costs	16	217,591	129,591
		11,770,392	10,534,562
		(384,758)	115,725
Accumulated surplus at 1 January		132,682	16,957
Accumulated (deficit)/surplus at 31 December		(252,076)	132,682

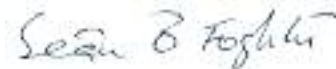
The Statement of Accounting Policies and notes 1 - 18 form part of these financial statements.

All income and expenditure for the year relates to continuing activities.



Paul Horan
CHAIRPERSON

27 August 2007



Seán Ó Foghlú
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

27 August 2007

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2006

	Note	2006 €	2005 €
Fixed Assets	6	565,436	658,318
Current Assets			
Debtors and prepayments	7	30,288	123,546
Cash on hand and at bank		91,890	78,197
		122,178	201,743
Current Liabilities			
Amounts falling due within 1 year			
Creditors and Accruals	8	374,254	69,061
Net Current Assests		(252,076)	132,682
Total assets less current liabilities before pensions		313,360	791,000
Deferred pension funding	16	1,800,000	1,500,000
Pension liabilities	16	(1,800,000)	(1,500,000)
Total assests less current liabilities		313,360	791,000
Represented by:			
Capital Account	9	565,436	658,318
Income and Expenditure Account		(252,076)	132,682
		313,360	791,000

The Statement of Accounting Policies and notes 1 - 18 form part of these financial statements.



Paul Haran
CHAIRPERSON

27 August 2007



Seán Ó Foghlú
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

27 August 2007

NOTES

