

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)

Supplementary information for awarding organisations

Which criteria need to be met in order to be eligible to apply for the alignment of awards with the NFQ?

To apply for the alignment of awards with the NFQ under this revised agreement, the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- The awarding organisation must be recognised by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual¹) (see <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/>)
- The awards made by the awarding organisation for which alignment is sought with the NFQ must be included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What is the 'pilot project' referred to in the revised agreement?

The regulating organisation prior to Ofqual, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)² put in place pilot arrangements for the alignment and quality assurance of awards of awarding organisations, recognised by QCA, with the Irish NFQ. The pilot arrangements ensured that the external layer of quality assurance provided by the regulator was extended to the activities of recognised awarding organisations in the Republic of Ireland. The pilot took place over a period of 18 months from May 2008.

During this time, a number of awarding organisations sought to align their awards with the NFQ. Reports regarding those awards aligned with the NFQ during the pilot project are available on the website of the NQAI: <http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentofUKawards.html>

¹ Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, and of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Ofqual co-operates with the regulators in Wales (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA for qualifications other than VQs) for the purposes of regulating awarding organisations which operate in the three countries.

² The NQAI is responsible for developing and maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications in the Republic of Ireland and related policies on access, transfer and progression.

We aligned our awards during the 'pilot project'. Do we have to resubmit an application as part of the revised agreement between NQAI and Ofqual?

If the awards aligned with the NFQ during the pilot project have not changed, no additional application needs to be made to the NQAI, although the awarding organisation will need to confirm its accordance with the new agreement and meet any additional requirements therein.

If the status of awards aligned with the NFQ as part of the pilot project has changed, a new application for alignment will need to be made to the NQAI. Please note: if qualifications have been moved to the QCF since they were aligned to the NFQ during the pilot project, this is considered to be a change of status and a new application will need to be made to the NQAI in respect of those awards.

We aligned our awards during the pilot project. Do we have to meet with the NQAI to formally agree to the revised agreement in respect of those awards in respect of our existing aligned awards?

All awarding organisations that have aligned, or are seeking to align, qualifications with the NFQ, must meet with the NQAI to discuss the revised agreement and to confirm that they are in a position to fulfil the requirements set out within. In this regard, two situations are envisioned:

- (i) Where the awarding organisation submits a complete application for qualifications to be aligned with the NFQ by 13 May 2011 (see When Is the Process Open for Applications? below), it will be invited to meet with the NQAI to review this application, and to confirm its accordance with the agreement;
- (ii) Where an awarding organisation does not submit an application for qualifications to be aligned with the NFQ by 13 May 2011, the NQAI will contact the awarding organisation soon after to arrange a meeting to confirm its accordance with the agreement and additional requirements therein.

We aligned our awards during the pilot project. We now wish to align additional awards. What is the process?

An awarding organisation that has aligned awards during the pilot project and now wishes to apply to align additional qualifications to the NFQ should complete the application form titled 'Group C Ofqual NFQ Alignment Application Form'.

This will be our first application for alignment of awards with the NFQ. What is the process?

An awarding organisation that is making an application for the alignment of qualifications with the NFQ for the first time should complete the application form titled 'Group C Ofqual NFQ Alignment Application Form'

How is the level at which our awards are aligned to the Irish NFQ determined?

When determining the comparable level of a given qualification on the NFQ, the NQAI will have regard to the referencing of the UK qualifications frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and to the document *Qualifications can cross boundaries – a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland* (March 2009).

When is the process open for applications?

In 2011, the NQAI will accept applications for the alignment of qualifications with the NFQ (assuming that the criteria referenced above are fulfilled) at two stages in the year.

Application Period 1: Applications can be submitted to the NQAI from 28 March to 13 May 2011. If applications are accurately and fully completed at the time of submission, and the awarding organisation makes itself available to meet with the NQAI when requested, it is expected that awards submitted during Application Period 1 will be aligned **on** 29 July 2011.

Application Period 2: Applications can be submitted to the NQAI from 19 September to 28 October 2011. If applications are accurately and fully completed at the time of submission, and the awarding organisation makes itself available to meet with the NQAI when requested, it is expected that awards submitted during Application Period 2 will be aligned **on** 27 January 2012.

The NQAI will inform the awarding organisation if there is an issue with its application and will contact the awarding organisation to arrange a time to agree the revised agreement. In order to meet the timeframes indicated, the NQAI asks that awarding organisations refrain from contacting it to request updates at other times, and would appreciate the cooperation and understanding of awarding organisations in this regard. If this cooperation is not secured, the NQAI cannot guarantee that it will be in a position to meet the timeframes indicated above.

Is there a deadline for submission of applications?

Yes. The deadlines for submission of applications in 2011 are indicated above.

How long does the process of aligning our qualifications take, from the time of application?

The timeframe for the processing of applications is indicated above.

For what period will qualifications aligned with the NFQ remain aligned?

Qualifications remain aligned to the NFQ as long as they remain recognised by Ofqual, and alignment has not been ceased by the NQAI.

Can the NQAI cease the alignment of awards?

The revised agreement makes provision for the NQAI, in consultation with Ofqual, to cease the alignment of qualifications. Please see section 9 of the revised agreement.

In this case, a learner holding the qualification at the time of its alignment can continue to refer to the level at which it was aligned with the NFQ, but it could no longer be offered to learners as an aligned qualification.

What administrative fees are associated with aligning our awards with the NFQ?

The NQAI and Ofqual wish to recover staff and administrative costs associated with the process of aligning qualifications with the Irish NFQ. A fee will be charged for each application for alignment of qualifications with the NFQ. This fee should be paid, by electronic transfer to the NQAI, at the time of application.

- The following fee schedule applies to an awarding organisation, recognised by Ofqual, which wishes to make an application to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to have its awards aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications. As expressed in the table below, the fee schedule is graduated in accordance with the number of qualifications submitted for alignment.

<i>Number of qualifications submitted</i>	<i>Associated fee</i>
1-50	€2,000
51-100	€2,500
101-300	€3,300
300+	€4,300

Where can we access the appropriate application form?

The application form for alignment of qualifications under this agreement is available at the following link on the website of the NQAI: www.nqai.ie/AlignmentofUKAwards2011.html