

2009 Annual report on Authority Business Plan (2009-10)

Introduction

The Authority adopted a five year Strategic Plan (2008-2012) and a two year Business Plan (2008-2009) in February 2008. These set out the direction and goals of its work, and the key actions to be taken in the initial two year timeframe. In March 2009, the Authority adopted an updated Business Plan to cover the next two-year cycle within the Strategic Planning period, i.e. 2009-2010.

The Authority executive continues to monitor and report on progress in achieving the Authority's strategic goals and the implementation of the related Business Plans, in line with the overall arrangements agreed in 2008. As part of this process, an annual report on the Business Plan is presented to the Authority at its first meeting of each year. This report is the second annual report on the Business plan within the current strategic planning cycle, and details measures taken in respect of each of the action lines in the Plan and available results concerning performance indicators.

The following sections of this report set out the key achievements of the Business Plan, and factors critical to them, for the period January-December 2009. Section I highlights the major areas of work in 2009 which are expected to have the greatest impact on the achievement of the Authority's goals. This section also reports on performance indicators for each goal in line with those identified on the Authority's Strategic Plan. Although the indicators refer to performance over the five-year period, achievements in relation to 2009 are reported where possible. Changes in the operational environment of the Authority in 2009 which have impacted on its work are also noted.

Section II reports on the action lines set out for 2009 under each of the Authority's six strategic goals. This section includes new actions taken in response to new developments.

Strategic Goals

The Authority's six strategic goals are that:

1. *The National Framework of Qualifications is widely known, understood, used and valued in society*
2. *The National Framework of Qualifications is more deeply implemented in a way that is open and responsive to the needs of the learner, society and the economy*
3. *Effective and integrated pathways between qualifications operate throughout the National Framework of Qualifications*
4. *All Framework qualifications are quality assured to the highest international standards*
5. *Framework qualifications are fully recognised abroad and qualifications gained outside Ireland are appropriately recognised in Ireland*
6. *The Authority, in tandem with FETAC and HETAC, are high quality, effective and efficient state agencies.*

Section I Highlights

Summary

2009 was a difficult year for many organisations, both in the public and private sectors, as a result of the economic downturn and consequent financial pressures. The Authority successfully implemented all emergency measures required by Government in 2009 including the moratorium on recruitment. Notwithstanding the constraints on funding and the moratorium, the Authority maintained operations within these constraints and delivered on the organisation's objectives for the period. The majority of the action lines for 2009, as set out in the Authority's Business Plan (2009-10), were achieved.

The Authority also responded to other key challenges, including making a full contribution to the initial work undertaken on the implementation of the Government's decision to establish a new, amalgamated qualifications and quality assurance body. The new body will assume the existing functions of the Authority and the awards Councils, and the external quality review role of the universities. The Authority participated in, and contributed to the outputs of the Implementation Advisory Group, which was established by the Department of Education and Science to advise it on high level matters pertaining to the functions, board composition, strategic planning, reporting arrangements and the name of the new body. In this context, too, the Authority has also been given a new role in relation to the regulation of international education programmes, as part of a broader policy initiative to establish a Quality Mark for English language schools and further and higher education colleges. The Quality Mark will be overseen in due course by the new qualifications and quality assurance body but, in the interim, the Authority will take on the responsibility of administering the existing Internationalisation Register, and for overseeing the Advisory Council for English Language Schools, beginning in 2010. Significant preparatory work to facilitate the transfer of these functions to the Authority was undertaken in 2009.

The extent of achievement of the work plan in 2009, and the positive response to the changing operational environment was due, in large measure, to the continued positive engagement of staff across the organisation, and the continued positive engagement of the Authority's stakeholders.

Looking ahead to 2010, it is expected that the financial pressures on the Authority will remain extremely challenging, and that the planning and preparation for the amalgamation of the Authority and the awards

Councils will intensify. In light of this and the outturn for 2009, the executive is reviewing its business plan for 2010.

Strategic Goal 1

The National Framework of Qualifications is widely known, understood, used and valued in society

The main achievements in 2009 were in relation to communications, and in referencing the NFQ in national statistics and in key information sources of education and training providers.

Communications

With regard to communications, the Authority concentrated its efforts in 2009 on exploiting existing communication channels in more innovative, efficient and cost effective ways. The use of the NFQ levels to classify course choices in the Central Applications Office Handbook has been of significant benefit in promoting public awareness of the NFQ. In 2009, a revised description of the NFQ was agreed with the CAO and included in the 2010 CAO Handbook. Another key action was the inclusion of a Framework insert in a mail-shot to all CAO applicants in July 2009.

Following the successful integration of QualifaX into the Qualifications Authority in 2008 – which was confirmed in the outcome of an independent audit by Price Waterhouse Cooper undertaken in 2009 at the request of the Authority's Internal Audit Committee – further work was undertaken to utilise QualifaX, the National Learners' Database, as a tool for providing accurate information on the NFQ to the wider public. Specifically, in the updating of course information in the database, provision is made for the correct referencing of programmes, and the awards to which they lead, with the NFQ. An increased understanding has taken place amongst all staff of the benefit of QualifaX in this regard. In the case of the ongoing inclusion of university awards over the last year, staff involved in the implementation of the Framework and the maintenance of QualifaX kept in close contact to ensure that information on award levels was communicated to the public as soon as it became available.

Significant work was also undertaken in 2009 on the redesign of the QualifaX and NFQ websites to make all information contained therein more accessible to the end user. Increasingly, too, other public sector organisations have been taking data feeds from QualifaX, which will enhance its utility as a communication tool for the NFQ (see below SG 6).

Finally, a substantial communications campaign was initiated in 2009 to fulfil the Authority's responsibilities as the National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (see also SG 5 below). In this capacity, the Authority is responsible for providing information and guidance on the EQF generally, the referencing of the NFQ to the EQF and the comparison and use of qualifications at European level.

Referencing the Framework in national statistics

Following engagement between the Authority, the Statistics Unit in the Department of Education and Science and the Central Statistics Office, the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) now carries a revised education question that allows responses to be mapped to the NFQ. The first responses to the new question were collected from April 2009 (Quarter 2). The availability of national data on education and training attainment by NFQ levels will assist the Authority, its successor body, and other stakeholders, in undertaking future evaluations of these awards and award holders from a number of different perspectives, including social and economic.

Another key action in this area was the proposal by the Authority and the Department of Education and Science of a new education and training question for use in Census 2011. The question was piloted by the Central Statistics Office in 2009 and, following an analysis of data comparability with the education results of the 2006 Census, the proposal was adopted.

Finally, in response to a specific recommendation arising from the Framework Implementation and Impact Study (see SG 2 below) in relation to existing data gaps, both qualitative and quantitative, on the availability and use of pathways and their outcomes for learners, the Authority is supporting the Leaving School in Ireland programme of research which is being led by the Economic and Social Research Institute. The first study to be conducted under this programme of research will involve a major project on the post-school experiences of the cohort of young people who took part in the Post-Primary Longitudinal Study. The NFQ is being used as the classification system to capture education and training pathways for this study. The work will be guided by a Steering Group, made up of representatives of a number of education policy organisations including the Authority, HETAC and FETAC.

Referencing the Framework in key information sources of education and training providers

In response to inconsistent practice of NFQ referencing by providers of education and training, the Authority executive commenced the development of support guides to assist providers in referencing the NFQ appropriately. The first of these guides was published in March 2009 and provides advice and examples to Higher Education and Training providers on how to reference NFQ detail including award-type, awarding body, NFQ level, credit and ATP opportunities.

The Authority also provided support to FETAC in the publication of guidelines for registered providers on provision of information for learners. These guidelines include key NFQ referencing requirements that will promote consistency in the provision of Framework detail for learners.

SG 1 Performance Indicators

- *Agreement of CAO to include revised NFQ description in 2010 CAO Handbook*
- *Distribution of NFQ information 'postcards' to 73,000 CAO applicants (2009 cohort)*
- *25.6% increase in 2009 in number of unique visitors to redesigned QualifaX website compared to previous year (unique visitors in 2008 amounted to 344,584 and increased to 432,969 in 2009)*
- *Visitors to redesigned QualifaX website spending an average of 6 minutes on site (40% reduction on previous year)*
- *67% increase in 2009 in number of unique visitors to redesigned NFQ website compared to previous year (unique visitors in 2008 amounted to 35,318 and increased to 58,951 in 2009)*
- *Two EQF bulletins were distributed to all contacts, in March and June : positive feedback was received from the European Commission, who asked to circulate it more widely; from the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, who contacted the Authority to use as it as a model for similar activity;*

and from Athlone Institute of Technology who committed to distribute it further

- *EQF seminar was held on 20 April 2009 for national stakeholders – 63 participants attended*
- *A second seminar was organised jointly with the European Commission on 17 September 2009. Almost 100 participants attended, including 18 members of the EQF Advisory Group*
- *A new EQF webpage was published and regularly updated; and an EQF presentation was produced for use in briefing sessions – both have received positive feedback from stakeholders*
- *Agreement of CSO to include NFQ referenced education and training questions in QNHS and Census 2011*

Strategic Goal 2

The National Framework of Qualifications is more deeply implemented in a way that is open and responsive to the needs of the learner, society and the economy

The main achievements in 2009 were the publication of the Framework Implementation and Impact Study, the completion of the first cycle of work by the university sector Framework Implementation Network, the inclusion of NUI awards in the NFQ, and alignment of more awards made by recognised UK awarding bodies in Ireland.

Framework Implementation and Impact Study

A major area of work that was completed in 2009 was the Framework Implementation and Impact Study. The final report, which was prepared by an external Study Team of national and international experts, under the chairmanship of Professor Tom Collins, was published by the Authority in September 2009. The Study covers the first five years (2003-08) of the operation of the NFQ and its purpose was to: assess the extent to which the NFQ is being implemented; support deeper implementation of the NFQ and policies on access, transfer and progression; identify progress in implementation; identify gaps and drivers/obstacles in respect of implementation; and assess the initial impact of the NFQ. The Study Report contains a total of 19 recommendations. These are addressed to the Qualifications Authority, and other stakeholders as appropriate, and will provide a basis for the continued development and implementation of the NFQ. In considering the Report, the Authority has been mindful of the Government's decision to amalgamate the Authority and the awards Councils. In this context, the report will be a key document in informing the work of the new qualifications and quality assurance body.

University sector Framework Implementation Network

The university sector Framework Implementation Network was jointly established by the Authority and the Irish Universities Association at the end of 2007. The purpose of the network is to deepen the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) within the university sector, primarily through the exchange of experience and practice between members. The eight Irish universities, and twelve affiliated colleges, are members of the Network. In 2009, the Network completed its initial work programme, with the finalisation of guidelines on key issues relating to NFQ implementation in the sector: designing programmes for inclusion in the NFQ, developing discipline specific learning outcomes and designing appropriate assessment methods. Following online publication of the guidelines in December 2009, a hard copy publication will be disseminated in early 2010. It was

also agreed in early 2009 to continue the Network over the academic year 2009-10. A new work programme, centred around the theme of Lifelong Learning, will commence in 2010.

Inclusion of awards in the NFQ/Alignment of international awards with the NFQ

Another key area of work that was advanced in 2009 relates to the inclusion in the NFQ of outstanding awards made within the university sector. Specifically, agreement was reached with the National University of Ireland for the inclusion of major diploma awards (Higher Diploma and Postgraduate Diplomas at Levels 8 and 9), and certain non-major awards (minor and special purpose) made by the NUI in the five colleges it recognises: the Institute of Public Administration (IPA); the National College of Art and Design (NCAD); the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI); Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy and Shannon College of Management.

In 2009, and building on work completed in 2008, further sets of awards made by recognised UK awarding bodies operating in Ireland were also aligned with the NFQ. Awards aligned in 2009 are made by the British Computer Society, City and Guilds, ITEC, the Qualifications Network, the Wine and Spirit Education Trust and University College Birmingham.

SG 2 Performance Indicators

- *Completion of Framework Implementation and Impact Study within projected timelines*
- *Continued participation in university sector Framework Implementation Network of all 8 Irish universities and 12 affiliated colleges – agreement to continue network in 2009-10 academic year*
- *Completion by FIN of first work programme and publication of outcomes*
- *Inclusion of 77 National University of Ireland major diploma and minor/special purpose awards in the NFQ*
- *Alignment of 119 UK awards with the NFQ*

Strategic Goal 3

Effective and integrated pathways between qualifications operate throughout the National Framework of Qualifications

The main achievements in this area in 2009 were in relation to increased Tripartite engagement on developing system wide approaches to qualifications matters, the Authority's participation in a POBAL/ EU Lifelong Learning Project and the outcomes of the Framework Implementation and Impact Study (FIIS).

Tripartite engagement

In 2009, the major effort with regard to developing integrated and effective pathways throughout the NFQ took place within the context of the preparations for amalgamation between the Authority and the awards Councils. One of the avowed aims of the amalgamation of the qualifications and quality assurance bodies is to achieve greater coherence within the education and training system, including in relation to the promotion of access, transfer and progression opportunities.

To this end, a Framework Executives Group (FEG) was established by the Authority and the awards Councils to examine the policy and technical aspects of award making and quality assurance, with a view to increasing knowledge and understanding across the three agencies of the different systems operating in further and higher education and training, and identifying the barriers to permeability between them. As part of this broader learning process in the lead up to amalgamation, the Authority is now working more closely with FETAC in relation to the development of standards and the migration of awards into its Common Awards System. Specifically, the Authority executive is participating in a standards migration project in the childcare sector to support FETAC, and collaboration on other similar, sectoral standards projects is also envisaged. The development of standards, and increasing the availability of Framework compliant awards within the further education and training sector, are necessary prerequisites of developing more integrated and effective pathways through the NFQ.

POBAL/ EU Lifelong Learning Project

During 2009 the Authority executive was invited by POBAL to join a national steering group to agree the themes and outputs for the series of events in connection with an EU funded project 'Delivering Lifelong Learning for Disadvantaged Communities'. The overall strategic goal of the project is to support and value the implementation of the Irish Lifelong Learning Strategy within the context of the EU Education and Training work Programme.

Two thematic seminars were held in the autumn of 2009 on 'Community- based Access as a route to further and higher education and training' and 'Early Childhood Care and Education and Family living'. The final event took place during January 2010 at which the Authority executive hosted a round table discussion on 'The Role of the Qualifications System and Lifelong Learning'. The development and implementation of the NFQ has always been intended to support key social inclusion priorities as part of a national lifelong learning strategy. Involvement in this project has provided opportunities to reach a key audience and to examine the role of the NFQ and linked policies on access, transfer and progression in delivering quality lifelong learning opportunities for disadvantaged learners.

FIIS Outcomes

The other key development in 2009 was the publication of the Framework Implementation and Impact Study, which contains recommendations that relate directly to access, transfer and progression (Recommendations 3, 7, 9, 10,11). These recommendations are currently being considered by the Authority and other relevant stakeholders, and will inform current and future work in relation to the achievement of Strategic goal 3, both by the Authority and its successor organisation.

SG 3 Performance Indicators

- *New and deeper engagement with awards Councils on policies that support development of integrated and effective learning pathways – 9 full FEG meetings held in 2009; 4 additional sub-group meetings held on Standards and Registration*
- *New collaboration with FETAC on standards development/CAS migration – participation in Childcare Standards Group*
- *Identification by FIIS of 5 Recommendations to enhance access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners through the NFQ*
- *Active participation in 3 thematic seminars within Pobal/EU Lifelong Learning project*

Strategic Goal 4

All Framework qualifications are quality assured to the highest international standards

The main achievements in this area relate to the Authority's quality assurance role with the DIT and the awards Councils, and its continued role in promoting collaboration amongst quality practitioners through the IHEQN.

DIT Quality Assurance

Under the Qualifications Act, the Authority is responsible for periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Dublin Institute of Technology (under section 39(3) and (4) of the Act), and for considering the findings arising from the application of the quality assurance procedures agreed with the Dublin Institute of Technology (under section 39(2) of the Act). As part of this ongoing engagement, the Institute and the Authority have agreed that the Institute should endeavour to accelerate the development of the systems for school, faculty and research review. Considerable progress was achieved in this area in 2009. In the academic year 2008-9, the Institute conducted 10 school reviews and 1 non-academic unit review. In addition, the Institute has put in place a schedule to conduct 10 school reviews and 1 non-academic unit review in 2010-11.

Quality Assurance and the Councils

The Authority has continued to discharge its quality-related responsibilities with regard to the two Councils. In relation to HETAC, the Authority agreed to recommendations from the Council for the granting of delegation of authority to make awards to two recognised institutions; approved a new business plan for the Council, and commenced the hearing of a validation appeal from a provider. In relation to FETAC, the Authority has been working closely with the Council with regard to the follow-up on the recommendations that arose from the 2007-8 review of the Council, with particular emphasis on a recommendation in relation to standard setting. As part of the process, the Authority and Council agreed a new six-monthly reporting mechanism to monitor progress on standard setting, and are also collaborating on particular standard setting projects (see under SG 3 above).

Quality Assurance and Amalgamation

A key consideration underpinning the Government's decision to establish an amalgamated qualifications and quality assurance agency is to promote greater coherence in quality assurance both within the

higher education sector and across further education and higher education and training. The Authority has continued, in its role as secretary to the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, to promote collaboration and understanding amongst quality practitioners with a view to achieving this coherence. In 2009, and in the context of the upcoming amalgamation, FETAC was invited to participate in IHEQN meetings as an observer.

An important output from the IHEQN in 2009 was a publication entitled 'Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions'. The code of practice and guidelines were developed to enable higher education institutions to set their own education provision arrangements for international students against agreed sector wide benchmarks. It is intended that all higher education institutions will make a conscious commitment to adopt and maintain these standards in relation to the recruitment, reception, education, pastoral care and welfare of their international students, ensuring the continuing high standing of Irish higher education institutions as education and training providers worldwide. This initiative is significant in the context of the upcoming amalgamation, as the new body will be responsible for regulating certain aspects of international education in Ireland.

The IHEQN also concluded working groups and published documentation regarding student involvement in quality assurance and the development of common principles for follow-through on quality reviews.

SG 4 Performance Indicators

- *10 School reviews and 1 non-academic unit review undertaken by DIT in 2008-9*
- *New collaboration with FETAC on standards development/CAS migration, including direct participation in Childcare Standards Group*
- *2 delegation of authority recommendations agreed with HETAC*
- *New HETAC Business plan approved by the Authority*
- *Secretary to 3 IHEQN meetings*
- *Publication by IHEQN of code of practice for higher education institutions on provision of education to international students, and two other collaborative documents.*

Strategic Goal 5

Framework qualifications are fully recognised abroad and qualifications gained outside Ireland are appropriately recognised in Ireland

The main achievements in this area were the completion of the referencing of the NFQ to the European Qualifications Framework, the completion of a joint-project to enhance recognition with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and the introduction of an automated system within the Recognition service.

European Qualifications Framework

A major highlight for the Authority in 2009 was the completion of the referencing of the NFQ to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (see also SG1 above). The principal aims of EQF are to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. From the Authority's perspective, it will also be an increasingly important tool to assist in the recognition of Irish qualifications in Europe and European qualifications in Ireland.

Ireland was the first member state to complete the referencing process, well in advance of the 2010 deadline set out in the Recommendation establishing EQF. The achievement was marked at a seminar held in Dublin on 17 September 2009, which was organised jointly by the Irish authorities and the European Commission, and which was opened by the Minister for Education and Science, Mr Batt O'Keeffe, TD, and the Director General for Education and Culture within the European Commission, Ms Odile Quintin. The Authority is the National Coordination Point for EQF in Ireland and was assisted in the referencing process by a steering committee, which included representatives from FETAC, HETAC, the Irish Universities Association and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and three international experts.

Joint-project with New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Another key development in relation to Strategic Goal 5 was the completion of work on a joint-project between the Authority and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, which aims to improve the basis on which Ireland and New Zealand recognise each other's qualifications. The final report – *The compatibility of degree qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand* – which establishes compatibility between the higher education degree qualifications at Levels 7-10 of the NFQ and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, will be published early in 2010.

Recognition Service

An internal review and reorganisation of the Authority's recognition service was undertaken in 2008. This responded to the findings of the 2007 Quality review of the Authority and subsequent internal reorganisation. It aimed to fully integrate (and support) the service with that of developing the Framework and promoting the recognition of qualifications at home and abroad. The review covered all aspects of the service – including the nature, extent and value of the advice provided, detailed operational procedures, the effectiveness of interactions with stakeholders, building and managing knowledge and practical ways to improve efficiency. Work has continued throughout 2009 on the developmental processes inaugurated in 2008. The main development has been the introduction of a fully automated system for processing recognition applications, using the Microsoft Sharepoint application. The new system is also being used to enhance knowledge management processes and to store and retrieve all documentation associated with the service. A separate report on the recognition service activities in 2009 has also been prepared and published to accompany this report.

SG 5 Performance Indicators

- *Completion and publication of EQF Referencing report ahead of 2010 deadline*
- *Completion of report on the compatibility of Irish and New Zealand qualifications*
- *Introduction of automated system for handling recognition applications*

Strategic Goal 6

The Authority, in tandem with FETAC and HETAC, are high-quality, effective and efficient state agencies

The major achievements in 2009 were in the area of Transforming Public Services (TPS), in the tripartite work undertaken with FETAC and HETAC, in the development of a new Human Resources strategy, and the introduction of new HR and financial procedures, and a new knowledge management system.

Transforming Public Services

The Transforming Public Services (TPS) programme is the new phase of public sector reform. This reform requires that the public service delivers value-for-money and maximises resources to meet the needs of the public. Sharing services is an aspect of reform that brings public sector reform to life. QualifaX has developed a shared data service which delivers on these performance objectives by:

- increasing access to high quality information on education and training across the public sector
- expanding the access points for education and training information for website users
- promoting accurate referencing of the National Framework of Qualifications to inform learners' choices
- addressing the national priorities of up-skilling and re-skilling
- supporting Lifelong Learning by enabling all learners to explore what opportunities are available both locally and nationally.

QualifaX has information on almost all education and training courses that are available in Ireland. There is now a facility to provide this data to other users, thus avoiding duplication in the area of data collection while enhancing public sector information provision. Provider organisations can benefit from QualifaX by ensuring their courses are on the QualifaX system and available to a wide audience. Public information providers can enhance their offering by availing of the high quality data available from QualifaX. A number of public sector organisations are now maximising access to QualifaX information through a variety of data feed options. QualifaX provides data feeds for partner organisations to create a more cost efficient and streamlined service for the public.

Tripartite work

Cooperation between the Authority, FETAC and HETAC is formalised through regular meetings at senior executive level. This work is in

addition to the regular collaboration between the agencies on qualifications and quality assurance issues, which is now pursued through the Framework Executives Group (see SG 3 above). Tripartite meetings in 2009 resulted in the commencement of collaboration on the integration of the new FETAC Business System across the agencies, and in identifying other policy and organisational issues associated with the amalgamation. The Tripartite engagement also contributes to the achievement of shared services and public sector reform. In relation to the former, cooperative arrangements were advanced in 2009 with the wider set of education agencies on shared contracts for services.

Human Resources

Important work was also completed in 2009 in the area of Human Resources. A new Human Resources strategy was developed and introduced to all the Authority's staff. In addition, the Training and Development strategy has been broadened to encompass not only the training needs of individuals, but also organisational education and training needs that have been identified through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS), such as report writing and research skills.

Knowledge Management and Compliance Procedures

A new intranet system was also introduced in 2009 to improve knowledge management processes and knowledge resources within the Authority. This is an important development in the context of preparations for amalgamation. Revised financial and Human Resource procedures were also introduced in 2009 in line with best practice, legislative requirements and Department of Finance Guidelines.

SG 6 Performance Indicators

- *Qualifax data feeds provided to Education Ireland, Failte Ireland, Palliative Care (Irish Hospice Foundation) and Grad Ireland*
- *5 Tripartite meetings of Senior Executives held*
- *Effective financial management systems confirmed by 2009 internal audits and audit of the Comptroller and Auditor General*
- *Introduction and dissemination of new HR strategy and financial procedures*
- *Introduction of new intranet (Sharepoint) system to improve knowledge management*

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

BUSINESS PLAN

Key Deliverables 2009/10

Items in *bold italics* are priority actions

	Key Deliverables 2009/10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this
SG1	NFQ is widely known, understood, used and valued in society					
SG1/02	Joint communications plan	Communication Strategy developed	2009	Partial Completion	Subject to funding levels	Model approach developed Sept 09. For implementation by NQAI – joint strategic approach on hold pending amalgamation
		Implementation of communication strategy	2009/10	N	Agreed approach in place	On hold pending amalgamation
SG1/04	Develop and implement approach to ensure all E&T information sources correctly reference the NFQ	See SG2/12				
SG1/05	Promote awareness and use of NFQ in	See SG2/12				

	awarding bodies/providers					
SG1/07	Develop approach to promote awareness and use of the NFQ and Recognition amongst learners/employer bodies/recruiters/Foreign nationals/E&T Providers (incl. Community & Voluntary sector) and User Guides	See SG2/12				
SG1/11	Implement agreed approach to promote awareness and use of the NFQ within the public service through PAS	Guidelines for mainstreaming public sector recruitment agreed by Finance	Concluding 2009	Partial completion	Effective engagement by PAS and Dept of Finance.	Guidelines with DoF for approval. Recruitment moratorium in Public Sector has negatively impacted on engagement by key partners
		PAS referencing and using NFQ in campaigns.	Concluding 2009	Y		
SG1/12	Assess the existing data/stats sets and work with Gov Depts to ensure data can effectively provide info on NFQ utility	Support CSO QNHS survey using revised education and training question in Q2 2009	2009	Y		
		Support CSO Census 2011 question on Education and Training to be piloted in 2009		Y		

SG1/16	<i>Analysis of NFQ implementation and implications for policy</i>	SG2/1 - Participate in Steering Group for funders of the ESRI post school longitudinal study (new action Aug 09).	2009/10	On-going	
		Participate in SLMRU data sub group	2009/10	On-going	
	<i>Analysis of NFQ implementation for funding mechanisms including outcomes of Framework Implementation and Impact Study</i>	Phase 1 Funding mechanisms identified	2009	Y	
		Phase 2 Develop approach (objectives/actions) to integrate NFQ into policy and funding mechanisms	2010	On target	Funding policy for education and training will be subject to significant change during 2009/2010
		Advise DES and other agencies of appropriate use of NFQ in funding policy	2009/10	On-going	

	Key Deliverables 2009/10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this
SG2	NFQ is more deeply implemented in a way that is open and responsive to the needs of the learner, society and the economy					
SG2/1	<i>Commence and complete Framework Implementation and Impact Study and develop strategic response</i>	Synthesis report, recommendations completed and consideration of follow up actions by Authority	June 2009	Y published Sept 09		
		Implement recommendations	2009/10	Ongoing	Impact of amalgamation and engagement of stakeholders	
SG2/2		<i>Include remainder of universities' awards including affiliated and NUI colleges.</i>	Inclusion re: 7 Universities Affiliated colleges NUI <i>Follow-up action to be taken, SG 2/15</i> <i>Work on H Dip in Education</i> Working group convened and	2009/10 2009/10 2009/10	On target	Effective engagement and cooperation from universities, recognised colleges, and NUI
			2009/10	On target	Effective engagement and cooperation from universities and teaching colleges.	

		terms of reference agreed.			
SG2/3	Support and coordinate the development of FIN	Continuing to act as joint secretary with IUA Coordination of activities, where possible, with those of IHEQN.	2009/10 & ongoing	Y	Continued engagement of FIN members to carry out projects identified and impact of amalgamation
SG2/4	Support and contribute to projects from FIN	Development of three projects around: ○ Learning Outcomes ○ Assessment ○ Technical aspects of design of programmes for inclusion in the NFQ FIN guidelines on above topics published	2009/10	Y	Continued engagement of FIN members to carry out projects identified
SG2/4a	Organise joint FIN/Bologna experts conference with HEA	Conference completed	Feb. 2009	Y	

SG2/4b	Organise joint Bologna experts conference with HEA on employability, mobility and the Bologna Framework	Conference completed	2009	Y	
SG2/6	Agree general approach for a process and schedule for inclusion of legacy awards with each university	Agreement with universities on implementation of supplementary policy approach	2009	Y	Effective engagement and cooperation with universities and NUI
		Implement agreed approach with each university	2009/10	Ongoing	
		Internal project group established and working with individual universities and NUI centrally to progress this project.			

SG2/7	<i>Encourage and support development of coordinated initiatives in the context of tripartite structures through the Framework Executive Group (FEG)</i>	Establish group Group established and met regularly over 2009. Two sub-groups developed on standards and registration.	2009	Y	Ongoing		
		Implement actions arising	2009/10		Ongoing		
SG2/11	Process applications from professional and international awarding bodies for inclusion and alignment	International and professional body applications dealt with on an ongoing basis. 6 applications for aligned of awards received and processed in 2009 (119 awards in total)	2009/10 & ongoing	Y		Effective cooperation between NQAI & Councils	
SG2/12	<i>Develop and publish user guides for specific audiences</i>	Publish HE - Marketing Officer user Guide	2009	Y			
		Develop ATP Guide	2009/10		On target		Deferred to 2010 in light of need to ascertain next steps for ATP and in the

						light of the amalgamation and recommendations in FIIS Report
		Develop FE Guide	2009/10	Y		
		Develop support (Guide) for employers	2009/10	On target	Engagement of key stakeholders	
SG2/13	Through Framework implementation projects promote use of learning outcomes throughout system	See SG2/4 See SG2/12				
SG2/14	Continue international engagement on learning outcomes, in particular through European Commission's Cluster Group on recognition of learning outcomes	Participation in cluster group meetings and contribute to outputs Cluster group is supporting implementation of EQF and Ireland has advised a significant number of member states on framework development processes (see SG 5/1)	2009/10 & ongoing	Y		
SG2/15	<i>In the context of deepening implementation of the Framework, promote cross- sectoral</i>	SG3/4 (FE) Linked to issues	2009 &	N	Cooperation from a range of	Work has not yet commenced on this

	<p><i>consistency in its use. Focus on titles, additional award types etc. Prepare paper for the establishment of a forum</i></p>	<p>emerging from SG 2/2 Consistency in higher education naming conventions</p>	<p>ongoing</p>		<p>stakeholders across further and higher education and training</p>	<p>project due to time constraints and the reduction in executive staff.</p> <p>In 2010 an issues paper in this area will be developed and the forum will be convened.</p>
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	Key Deliverables 2009-10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this
SG3	Effective and integrated pathways between qualifications operate throughout the NFQ					
SG3/1	<p><i>Explore ways to build on existing work on progression for holders of different forms of major awards at levels 4,5 and 6</i></p> <p><i>(re-cast existing objective in the light of work to date and FIIS)</i></p>	<p>Explore with FETAC, FAS and HETAC possibilities and issues arising from craft progression brochure (FETAC)</p> <p>NQAI leading a standards migration project in childcare sector on behalf of FETAC</p> <p>Implement study on comparison of FETAC and School awards at levels 4 & 5 in NFQ in accordance with agreed terms of reference</p>	<p>2010</p> <p>2009/10</p> <p>2009-10</p>	<p>N</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Partial completion</p>		<p>Focus has been redirected to collaborating with FETAC on its standards development process, in line with recommendations emerging from FIIS report. It is considered that this will have a larger overall impact on progression issues at Levels 1-6 and ATP in general.</p> <p>Initial research has taken place on the evolution of the Leaving Certificate Applied and draft report prepared.</p> <p>Focus redirected to collaboration with FETAC on the standards development process.</p>

SG3/3	Prepare strategic options paper on RPL for consideration by both Departments	Options paper submitted to Departments	2009	Partial Completion		Options paper on RPL devised and some initial discussions have taken place with the DES. Executive intends discussing this with the DETE in early 2010.
SG3/4	Promote use of credit as transfer and accumulation tool – national forum	See SG2/4 See SG2/12 See SG2/15	2009/10 & ongoing			
	Support development of credit in FETAC and its links to ECVET	Briefings for higher education institutions Convene technical advisory group on credit and naming conventions Adding a strand on FE credit to Forum (SG2/15)	2009/10	N	Full national engagement with main stakeholders	ECVET launched in latter half 2009. Implementation commencing early 2010. (See also SG2/15)
SG3/7	Participate in and contribute to HEA's advisory group on Access	Participation in and contributing to HEA access advisory group and national approach to access	2009/10 & ongoing	Y		
SG3/8	Develop and publish user guide for ATP	ATP User Guide completed	See SG2/12			

	Key Deliverables 2009-10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this
SG4	All Framework qualifications are quality assured to the highest standards					
SG4/2	<p>Monitor follow through on FETAC review outcomes</p> <p><i>Priority areas include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Internal review of organisational and staffing arrangements</i> ○ <i>Testing of a range of standard setting approaches – setting new standards and bringing together existing standards – implementing agreed approaches</i> ○ <i>Establishment of Industry Forum</i> 	<p>Initiate discussions with Council and report back to Authority as per agreed approach</p> <p>FETAC provided a report on progress in May 2009 and will provide 6 monthly updates to include progress in priority areas.</p> <p>Report from FETAC on progress</p>	<p>2009/10 & ongoing</p> <p>Jan 2010</p>	<p>Y</p> <p>On target</p>		

SG4/3	Monitor follow through on HETAC review outcomes	Initiate discussions with Council and report back to Authority as per agreed approach	2009/10 & ongoing			
	<p><i>Priority areas include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Development of a policy and approach to improved training for reviewers</i> ○ <i>Development of a strategic approach to selection and deployment of reviewers</i> ○ <i>Review of system of support for providers</i> ○ <i>Review of operational processes for programme accreditation and development of a policy on periodic review of programmes</i> ○ <i>Implementation of actions agreed with regard to the publication of reports</i> 	New HETAC Business plan setting out priority action lines in lead up to amalgamation approved by Authority				
SG4/4	Perform statutory functions in relation to the delegation by Councils to providers of authority to make awards	Performing these functions in a timely manner as and when required.	2009/10 & ongoing			
		Two requests for agreement with delegated authority received and processed in 2009.				
SG4/7	Monitor follow through on DIT review outcomes	Assessing and responding to DIT annual reporting mechanisms to Authority which	Ongoing			

		include monitoring of follow-through on review outcomes and consideration of findings arising from QA procedures				
		Annual report received from the DIT in November 2009 and put before Authority in January 2010.				
		Number of departmental reviews undertaken				
SG4/8	<i>Consider annually the findings arising from the application by DIT of its quality assurance procedures</i>	See SG4/7	Ongoing	Y		DIT resourcing this process
	<i>Review categorisation of DIT non-major awards</i>	Categorisation reviewed	2009	Y		
		179 DIT non-major awards have been referenced to the Framework in the last period.				

	<i>Review documentation on quality processes applied to overseas provision</i>	Information requested from DIT as part of annual review submission in November 2009.	2009	Y		
		Documentation reviewed.		Y		
		Recommendations will be made to the DIT re same.				
SG4/9	<i>Executive to inform itself and share information with HETAC and IUQB on international developments in QA (existing objective re-cast)</i>	Ongoing appropriate engagement	2009/10 & ongoing			
SG4/9a	Executive to inform itself of developments in EQARF and ECVET and share information with FETAC (re-cast existing objective)	Ongoing appropriate engagement	2009/10 & ongoing			
SG4/11	Monitor integration of Framework in QA arrangements of awarding bodies and providers	Promotion of integration of Framework in QA arrangements with QA agencies in context of IHEQN discussions on amalgamation & EQF implementation.	2009/10 & ongoing			New FIIS Report recommendation to develop principles on representation of NFQ in QA to be implemented in 2010

		The FIN report (see SG2/4) also incorporated a section on quality assurance and its link to the Framework.				
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	Key Deliverables 2009-10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this
SG5	Framework qualifications are fully recognised abroad and qualifications gained outside Ireland are appropriately recognised in Ireland					
SG5/1	<p><i>Participate on</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>EQF Advisory Group</i> ○ <i>Web platform Group</i> ○ <i>NCP (National Coordination Point) Group</i> 	<p>Participation in EQF Advisory Group and sub-group on criteria and procedures for referencing and on steering committee for EQF platform</p> <p>All of the above participated in over 2009. Executive has also provided expert advice re the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and Maltese framework's referencing to the EQF. Has also had involvement in the overarching UK frameworks group.</p>	2009/10 & ongoing	Y		

SG5/2	<i>National Consultation Seminar</i>	Seminar completed	2009	Y	
SG5/2a	<i>Complete referencing of the Irish NFQ to EQF</i>	Publication of National Referencing Report	2009	Y	Agreement with national stakeholders
SG5/2a	<i>Develop and implement EQF Communications campaign</i>	EQF communication plan developed	2009	Y	
		EQF communication plan implemented	2009/10 and ongoing	Y	
SG5/5	Engagement in ENIC-NARIC network	Engagement with Network on ongoing basis. Executive elected to the NARIC Advisory Board for a second year in 2009. Engaging actively with network on linking recognition with national and European frameworks.	2009/10 & ongoing	Y	

		Agreement to undertake a NARIC funded project in 2010-2011 re using frameworks as part of the recognition process.				
SG5/6	Proactively seek to agree qualification recognition agreements with other countries or unilateral understandings	Completion of work with NZQA on alignment of qualification frameworks in 2009 Report to be submitted to Authority January 2010.	2009	Y		
		Sign MoU with UAE Qualifications Framework Project	2009 Follow-up 2009/10 and ongoing.	Y Ongoing		
		Australian project – map qualifications systems	2009/10	On target	Engagement of AQFC	

		- seek to develop an appropriate methodology for referencing NFQ and AQF				
SG5/7	Engage with national stakeholders on policy developments relating to implementation of Bologna process including participation in National Steering Group	Effective participation in national steering group	Ongoing			
SG5/13	<i>Introduce new work practice to enhance in-house expertise on qualifications recognition matters and improve info to public</i>	Programme for Development of country profiles through 09/10	Ongoing	Partial completion	Staff time allocation being protected	The development of country profiles has been a difficult goal to achieve over the last period, largely due to the intensive research required and the time that must be allocated to developing them. A CEP on Ireland was finalised in 2009. It is expected that four other CEPs will be developed by March 2010. In the meantime the recognition service has continued to post any information on countries available through, for instance Bologna verification and EQF referencing reports, to its website.
SG5/14	Maintain NSEW engagement	Attend 5 countries meetings	2009/10 & ongoing	Y	Impact of EQF referencing on existing	

		Attended 5 countries meeting in Belfast in 2009.				understandings of qualifications on the two islands
		Agree new version of qualifications can cross boundaries	2009	Y		
		Participate on SCQF/ EQF referencing	2009	Y		
		Observer in UK EQF coordination group	2009/2010	Ongoing		
SG5/21	Monitoring demand through website analysis and management reports to establish current and future demand for recognition service	Regular reporting in place	2009/10 & ongoing	Ongoing		
SG5/22	Promote a consistent approach to recognition of qualifications in higher education providers	Action points arising out of seminar to be implemented in 2009	2009/10 & ongoing	Ongoing		Effective engagement with admissions/ International officers
		Forming stronger relations with admissions officers in he institutions				

		<p>Apart from ongoing communication with higher education providers in the normal course of events, the recognition team also produced an online newsletter updating this grouping on recognition and framework related matters.</p>				
SG5/24	Project management of ongoing facilitation of international visits	International visits accommodated and effectively managed	Continuing	Ongoing		
SG5/26	Coordinate diploma and certificate Supplements	Coordinate implementation of DS by providers.	Continuing	Ongoing		
		Coordinate implementation of CS by providers	Continuing	Ongoing		
		Revised National Guidelines for completion of	2009	Y		

		Diploma supplement in place				
		National approach developed to referencing EQF in DS and CS	2009/10	On target		
		See SG2/4b				
SG5/27	Gather statistical information on use of Europass, review awareness and development plan	Systems in place to record mobility documents and statistical information	Ongoing	Y		
SG 5/28	International Conference on Qualifications Frameworks	Organise conference Programme for event has been agreed and a cross-agency working group has been established to coordinate the event.	Spring 2010 (April 15, Dublin Castle)	On-target		

	Key Deliverables 2009-10	Key Performance Indicators and actions achieved	Target Date	Target met Y/N	Critical Success factors	If target is not met, actions taken to address this and/or issues affecting this	Comments
SG6	The Authority, in tandem with FETAC and HETAC, are high-quality, effective and efficient State agencies.						
SG6/1	<i>Through tripartite structures ensure effective use of grants and VFM</i>	Tripartite with Councils working effectively in achieving effective use of grants and VFM Budgets reductions have been implemented and expenditure has been achieved in line with agreed allocations. Budget/expenditure reporting is timely, transparent and consistent in content across the 3 bodies	Annual and ongoing 2009 2009	Y Y Y	Impact of amalgamation		
SG6/2	<i>Tripartite – continue to consider ongoing resourcing needs for 3 bodies</i>	Tripartite with Councils continuing to consider resourcing needs	Annual and ongoing	Tripartite have implemented Government moratorium	Budget constraints and amalgamation plans		

SG6/4	<i>Tripartite- common organisational objectives</i>	Tripartite with Councils effectively developed common organisational objectives through a joint strategic planning approach	2009	Y	Effectiveness of Joint communications group & FEG		
SG6/4a	<i>Tripartite approach to effective development and implementation of amalgamation of the 3 bodies and quality assurance functions</i>	Tripartite with Councils effectively implements organisational change in qualifications and quality assurance	2009/10	On-going			
		Participation in IAG	2009	Y			
		Tripartite responded to DES proposals	2009	Y			
		Collaboration with universities encouraged on amalgamation issues	2009/10	Y			
SG6/5	<i>Ensure internal audit function continues effectively</i>	Internal audit function managed effectively	Annual	Y			

		Internal audit performance and assessment of internal audit effectiveness undertaken	2009	Y			
		Annual regulatory compliance statement approved	2009	Y			
		Annual Financial Statements approved	2009	Y			
SG6/6	<i>Ensure compliance with data protection</i>	Full compliance with data protection legislation	2009/10 & ongoing	Y			
SG6/7	<i>Continue PMDS against strategic plans</i>	Effective implementation of PMDS	Annual	Y			
SG6/9	<i>Policy approach for QualifaX</i>	Consultation on policy approach for QualifaX completed	2009	Y			
		Develop policy with consultation group	2009	Y			
SG6/10a	<i>Enhance QualifaX user experience,</i>	New web	2009	Y			

	<i>encouraging them to investigate independently</i>	interface				
SG6/10b	<i>Promote accurate referencing of the NFQ on QualifaX to inform learner choice</i>	Data on QualifaX is accurate, NFQ compliant and complete	Concluding 2009 and continuing	Y		
SG6/10c	<i>QualifaX to support access, transfer and progression</i>	QualifaX makes specific contribution to ATP	Scope approach in 2009 take actions in 2010	On target		
SG6/10d	<i>Enhance information contained in Qualifax relating to employment, to inform individual choice</i>	Links established with career and labour market information sources	Concluding 2009/10	On target		
SG6/10e	<i>QualifaX to address national socio-economic priorities</i>	Links established and resources developed to raise awareness among users	Continuing 2009/10	On target		
SG6/10f	<i>QualifaX to provide increased learner access to high quality information</i>	Qualifax is positioned as a leading information source	Continuing	On-going		
SG6/10g	<i>QualifaX operations are efficiently maintained</i>	Management and operations of QualifaX	2009	Y		

		reviewed				
SG6/13	Continue to monitor internal structures to ensure knowledge exchange and communications	Internal structures in place to ensure knowledge exchange and communications	ongoing	Y and continuing		
SG6/15	Develop strategies for utilisation of IT to enhance performance	Systems are maintained and enhanced to support the organisations objectives Link to SG 1/1 communication strategy	Concluding 2009 and ongoing	On target		
		Introduction of Sharepoint in recognition service	See SG2/7			
SG6/15b	Tripartite Framework Executive Group	Terms of Reference agreed and work ongoing	Continuing	On-going		
SG6/15c	Engagement with HETAC Quality Assurance Project proposal	QA paper prepared by HETAC for consideration	2009	?		
SG6/15d	Establish project team to identify cross-business use of FETAC Business System	Collaboration established and underway	2009/10 & ongoing	On-going		

SG6/15e	Shared services in education	Lead developments with 9 education agencies and identify and exploit further opportunities	2009 on-going	On-going			
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