

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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1. The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and its relationship with the European Frameworks

1.1 The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the 'Bologna Framework')

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the 'Bologna Framework', is an overarching framework which provides a mechanism for relating national frameworks of *higher education qualifications* to each other. Ireland was invited to undertake a pilot project of the self-certification of the compatibility of the Irish NFQ with the Bologna Framework in 2005. The Irish NFQ was formally aligned with the Bologna Framework in November 2006. The document below sets out the verification of the compatibility of the NFQ with the cycles of the Bologna Framework: http://www.nqai.ie/publication_nov2006.html

1.2 The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an overarching *lifelong learning framework* through which different countries' national qualifications systems can be compared. The EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, and higher education. It applies to all types of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. The core of the EQF consists of 8 levels, which are described through learning outcomes. The principal aims of EQF are to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

The EQF was formally adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The relationship between the Irish Framework and the European Frameworks is illustrated below:

The process of referencing the Irish NFQ to the EQF was completed in 2009. Further information on the referencing process, including its terms of reference, is available here: http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html.

<i>EQF levels</i>	<i>EHEA Framework (Bologna)</i>	<i>NFQ Levels</i>	<i>NFQ Major Award-types</i>
1		1	Level 1 Certificate
		2	Level 2 Certificate
		3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
		4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
		5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award)* Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	First Cycle	7	Ordinary Bachelors Degree
		8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	Second Cycle	9	Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	Third cycle	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate

*The Advanced Certificate is a further education and training award at Level 6 on the NFQ and is not aligned with the Bologna Framework.

2. Recognition Agreements

Ireland has actively sought to establish links with other countries and education and training authorities to encourage an understanding of the Irish education system and to facilitate improved mobility and recognition for learners.

2.1 A Comparison of qualifications in the UK and Ireland

The Irish awarding bodies and NQAI and the UK awarding and qualifications regulatory bodies have undertaken an exercise to compare the qualifications frameworks in the UK and Ireland. The exercise was completed in June 2005 and the document, *Qualifications can cross boundaries - a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland* was published. The leaflet is a 'ready reckoner' for employers, learners and other interested parties, designed to enable broad comparisons to be drawn between qualifications and their levels in Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

An updated version of the leaflet was published in April 2009 and can be accessed online here:

http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/int_qual_database/uk/uk_list_of_qualifications.html

2.2 Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications between the Government of Ireland and the Government of The People's Republic of China

In 2001 an international agreement was signed by the Irish and Chinese governments for the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications. The agreement provides for the mutual recognition of higher education awards from sub-degree (higher certificate) to doctorate levels. The agreement seeks to ensure that students and graduates travelling between both countries for the pursuit of further study or employment will have their existing qualifications understood and recognised.

3. The Diploma Supplement

As part of the full implementation of the Bologna Process reforms (www.bologna.ie) in higher education the issuing to graduates of Europass Diploma Supplements has been required since 2005 for all higher education institutions in Ireland. These documents are issued automatically, free of charge and in English in the majority of institutions. Diploma Supplements follow the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO / CEPES. Implementation of the Diploma Supplement in Ireland is coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (www.ngai.ie).

4. Certificate Supplement

The Europass Certificate Supplement is provided to learners who hold a vocational education and training award. The Certificate Supplement provides additional information regarding the award which is not available on the official certificate, such as the skills and competences acquired, the level of the certificate, and entry requirements and access opportunities to the next level of education etc. The information contained on the Certificate Supplement is provided in a standardised format and is supplied by the relevant awarding body which makes the award. In Ireland, the Certificate Supplement is issued by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).