

## Section 8:

### DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM IN IRELAND

As at February 2009

The Irish higher education and training system comprises of a range of higher education institutions – Universities, Institutes of Technology, other nationally recognised institutions and independent higher education colleges. The Department of Education and Science maintains a [list of Higher Education institutions](#) in Ireland, which provide higher education and training programmes leading to awards included in the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). These institutions offer a wide range of different types and levels of awards. Entry to higher education and training is on a controlled basis with the most common entry point being completion of the Leaving Certificate, a State examination taken at the end of second level education. In recent years, there has been an increase in the availability of alternative access routes into higher education and training.

#### Government Agencies

The Higher Education Authority ([www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie)) is responsible for furthering the development and assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education and training, including research. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA) ([www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie)) is responsible for establishing and maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) ([www.hetac.ie](http://www.hetac.ie)) is the awarding body and quality assurance agency for the Institutes of Technology, (*other than the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)*) and other higher education and training providers outside the university sector.

#### Higher Education Institutions

There are seven Universities recognised under State legislation. The Universities make their own awards and validate programmes in institutions recognised by them. They provide programmes of study leading to awards included at NFQ Levels 7-10 and engage in basic and applied research. The Universities have primary responsibility for their own quality assurance systems. They established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) ([www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)) which has delegated authority as an independent body, to organise the periodic review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in place in the Universities as required by State legislation. The [HEA](#) also has a review role in relation to quality assurance procedures in Universities.

There are thirteen Institutes of Technology (IoT) which are designated under State legislation. They provide programmes leading to awards at NFQ Levels 6 - 10. The Institutes of Technology make their own awards at specified levels under delegated authority from HETAC.

The Dublin Institute of Technology ([DIT](#)) has the authority to make its own awards at NFQ Levels 6 - 10. While DIT has primary responsibility for the implementation of quality assurance procedures, the NQAI has a statutory quality review role in relation to these procedures.

Other providers of higher education and training may apply to HETAC for approval of their quality assurance procedures and subsequent validation of their programmes. While such providers have primary responsibility for quality assurance, HETAC has a statutory role in quality assurance monitoring and review. Furthermore, any person may apply to HETAC for an award based on their lifelong learning achievement without reference to a programme of higher education and training.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been incorporated into the awards systems of HETAC, the Institutes of Technology, DIT and the Universities and most programmes are ECTS compatible. ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility.

### **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**

In terms of higher education and training, the NFQ sets the overall standards for all higher education and training awards. It is the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured. It also defines the relationship between all education and training awards. It is a 10-level framework based on learning outcomes that are determined by standards of knowledge, skill and competence. Higher education and training awards are at NFQ Levels 6 to 10 and may be made by HETAC, DIT, the Universities and Institutes of Technology with delegated authority. The framework consists of 16 major award types with minor and special purpose awards available at each level and supplemental awards available at NFQ Levels 4 to 10. All awards included in the Framework are underpinned by legislative quality assurance arrangements. The major awards of the NFQ are set out below together with the alignment to the 'Bologna' Framework and the draft alignment to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF):

EQF Level**	EHEA Framework (Bologna)*	National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level	NFQ Major Award-Types
EQF Level 1		NFQ Level 1	Level 1 Certificate
		NFQ Level 2	Level 2 Certificate
EQF Level 2		NFQ Level 3	Level 3 Certificate; Junior Certificate
EQF Level 3		NFQ Level 4	Level 4 Certificate; Leaving Certificate
EQF Level 4		NFQ Level 5	Level 5 Certificate; Leaving Certificate
EQF Level 5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	NFQ Level 6	Advanced Certificate (VET award); Higher Certificate (HET award)
EQF Level 6	First Cycle	NFQ Level 7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
		NFQ Level 8	Honours Bachelor Degree; Higher Diploma
EQF Level 7	Second Cycle	NFQ Level 9	Masters Degree; Post-Graduate Diploma
EQF Level 8	Third Cycle	NFQ Level 10	Doctoral Degree; Higher Doctorate

#### **'Bologna' Framework of Qualifications/European Qualifications Framework**

\*The Bologna Process, which commenced in 1999, is designed to lead to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. A central initiative in the process is the adoption of a system based on three cycles – undergraduate, graduate and doctorate. The NFQ was formally aligned with the 'Bologna' Framework in 2006.

\*\*Running parallel to the Bologna Process is the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. Ireland completed the process of referencing the National Framework of Qualifications to the EQF in May 2009 (see referencing outcome above). Alignment facilitates the recognition of learning and supports access, transfer and progression for learners.

Please note: Information on the Irish National Higher Education and Training System is provided by the Irish National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), located at the offices of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, and can be contacted via e-mail, [info@qualrec.ie](mailto:info@qualrec.ie).