

Údarás Náisiúnta
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann
National Qualifications
Authority of Ireland



Qualifications Recognition

at

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Annual Report of the recognition service 2010

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Introduction & Principles and Objectives of the Recognition Service

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland assumed the role of the Irish ENIC-NARIC in 2003. Since that time, it has established a qualifications recognition service which is aimed at individuals, employers, education providers and other stakeholders who may have enquiries concerning education and training awards made outside of Ireland. As the Irish ENIC-NARIC, the Authority also has a role in promoting and providing information on Irish awards abroad. In addition, due to the positioning of the recognition service at the Authority, a substantial number of Irish award-holders seek advice from the service in terms of the placement of their awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This paper reports on the activities of the recognition service in 2010.

The principles and objectives of the recognition service are outlined below

Principles of the Recognition Service

1. To be the definitive source of information and reference on Irish and foreign education and training qualifications and to:
 - provide up-to-date and comprehensive information on the Irish education system and on the countries for which it provides advice;
 - develop unilateral understandings of foreign education systems;
 - seek to develop recognition agreements / framework alignments with other countries where appropriate and be cognisant of sectoral agreements and framework developments in other countries as they relate to qualifications;
 - make advice/information regarding the comparability of Irish and foreign qualifications publicly available and ensure that it is current, accurate and consistent; and
 - seek to continue to increase the visibility and awareness of the qualifications recognition service.

2. To fulfil its responsibilities with regard to the recognition of Irish and foreign qualifications in line with relevant legislation and agreements, which includes *inter alia*:
 - compliance with the requirements and spirit of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region and the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (Riga Recommendations); and
 - compliance with the Freedom of Information Acts (1997 & 2003) and the Data Protection Acts (1988 & 2003);
3. To endeavour to provide advice and / or information on all qualifications, including those not currently recognised through the NFQ, by
 - promoting the full recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland by institutions, employers and society in general;
 - promoting the full recognition of Irish qualifications abroad by institutions, employers and society in general; and
 - providing advice regarding completed Irish and foreign qualifications upon submission of required documentation
4. To use the NFQ as the basis for all qualifications recognition advice provided
5. To adopt a proactive approach to the recognition of qualifications which is responsive to national trends and requirements
6. To operate a service that is non-discriminatory and customer-focused by:
 - providing fit-for-purpose, consistent advice and / or information to clients in a timely and efficient manner based on extensive research and a robust process;

- issuing advice to clients in not longer than 3 months; and
- referring clients to appropriate external sources of information / contact points when unable to assist directly.

7. To be transparent, consistent and coherent in all of its activities and:

- undertake to explain, as fully as possible, the basis for the advice it provides to the applicant.

8. To collaborate with stakeholders in carrying out its qualifications recognition responsibilities [and cultivate a positive working environment with those stakeholders] and to:

- seek to ensure processes employed by partner organisations are transparent, consistent and coherent; and
- seek an explanation of the rationale used by partner organisations in the formulation of advice.

9. To seek to identify and anticipate the resources required to operate the service optimally.

Objectives of the Recognition Service

- To embrace knowledge management to facilitate expansion of expertise to build up an information centre that provides reliable, comprehensive and consistent information to all stakeholders
- To provide an efficient service to stakeholders ensuring that queries and recognition requests are responded to in a timely manner
- To maintain links with the ENIC/NARIC network and ensure that Ireland is adequately represented and in turn to ensure that the agenda of the ENIC-NARIC network is fed back within a national context

Part A: An Overview of the Recognition Service in 2010

1. Overview & Highlights for 2010

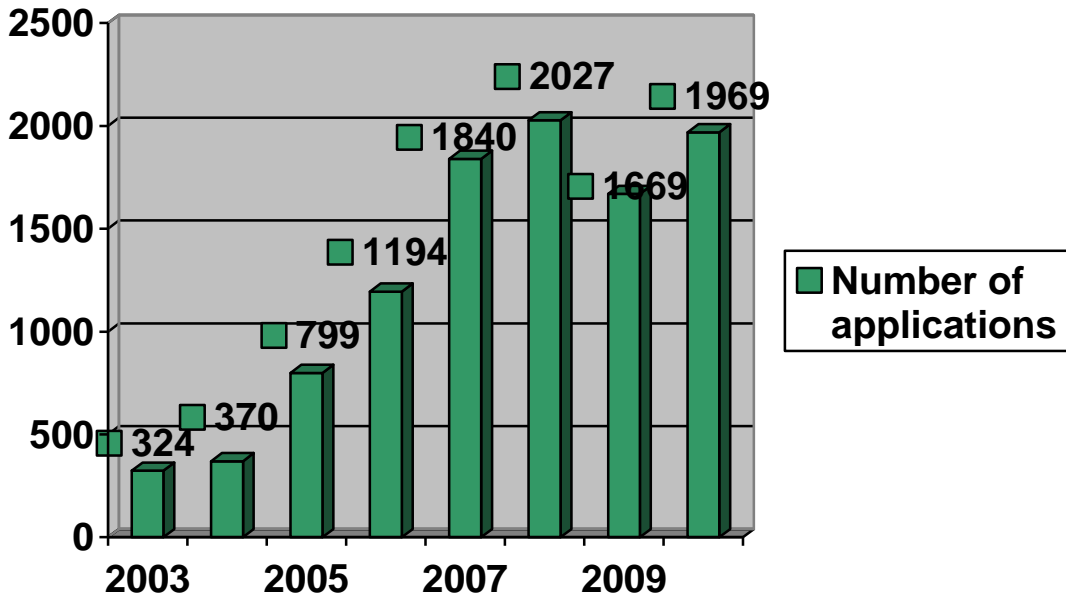
Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the key highlights and developments within the recognition service during 2010. The areas identified in this section are further elaborated upon within the report.

Overview

The graph presented below is representative of the number of applications that have been received and logged in each year of the service. In 2010, there was an 18% increase in applications received over the previous year. The figures do not reflect the number of telephone and email queries received each year, nor are they reflective of the number of individuals who call to the office during office hours. For additional information on the number of queries dealt with by the executive in 2010, please see the ‘Breakdown of numbers – 2010’ section below.

Development of the recognition service from 2003 – 2010



In order to further illustrate the number of applications received and logged in 2010, the following tables set out the number of applications received quarterly and the percentage closed with a 1 – 2 week timeframe. The tables relate to higher and further education awards. Similar tables relating to the remaining categories of applications, excluding Garda, are listed in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Higher Education Applications – Total: 1300

Quarter	No. Applications	% closed (in 1-2 wks)	No. Open
January - March	342	65	3
April – June	325	70	4
July - August	368	92	5
Sept - Dec	265	92	6

Table 2. Further Education Applications – Total: 429

Quarter	No. Applications	% closed (in 1-2 wks)	No. Open
January - March	112	67	4
April – June	100	61	1
July - August	119	79	7
Sept - Dec	98	83	15

Highlights

2010 has seen a number of significant changes come into effect within the recognition service. Firstly, organisational changes and government policy impacted staffing of the recognition service. Secondly, the recognition service has become more integrated into ongoing policy work of the Authority, most notably in relation to the alignment of UK qualifications to the NQF and the placement of legacy awards of the universities. During the year, the role of the recognition service evolved in line with increased implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications in a number of different contexts. The service was **involved in many stakeholder activities** in which the recognition of qualifications played a central role, such as the issuing of study visas by the Garda National Immigration Bureau; the issuing of grants for further education by the VECs and County Councils; access to the Advanced Certificate in Agriculture for young farmers; initial discussions on the introduction of revised qualification requirements for Garda recruitment and the recognition of qualifications for entry to primary school teacher training.

The Authority assumed responsibility for the management and maintenance of the **Internationalisation Register** from the DES on 1 March 2010. The Register consists of a list of education programmes which meet certain criteria and allow students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) access casual employment in Ireland. The application process and administration involved in maintenance of the Register is managed by the recognition team in conjunction with a wider management team within the organisation. The introduction of this additional function to the activities of the recognition service placed considerable pressure on resources as staff needed to become accustomed to the work involved. In addition, Sharepoint (data management system for Qualifications Recognition and the Authority in general) was customised to cater for Register applications and reports that are required to be generated on a monthly basis for the Department of Justice.

The recognition service has continued to be heavily involved in the European ENIC-NARIC network through regular participation in meetings and contributions to the electronic listserv facility. In addition, the Irish NARIC is involved in two projects, the first concerning the use of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) led by the French NARIC and the second being the Working Group on Recognition set up by the Bologna Follow-Up Group. This work **promotes the links between the recognition of qualifications and developments in qualification frameworks (QFs)**.

Internally, an important aspect of the work of the recognition team has been the **continued integration of Sharepoint** into the operation of the service following its successful introduction in April 2009. In addition to the streamlining of application processing, the software has allowed the team to store and share information efficiently. The development and use of project centres on the NQAI intranet site has greatly facilitated internal communication, essential for linking the work of the recognition team with other policy developments. Following the transfer of responsibility for the Internationalisation Register to the NQAI on 1 March 2010, Sharepoint was modified for processing of Register applications which reflects the system in place for recognition applications. This software has been invaluable in administering the Register as

efficiently as possible in addition to integrating the work into the recognition team. A significant advantage is the ability to more easily produce updates to the Department of Justice on a monthly basis.

A change in the approach by which applications for recognition were processed was introduced during 2010. In the past, applications received were logged and assigned immediately but not closed unless the award was from a country for which we have a Country Education Profile (CEP), thus, considered an 'immediate response'. Others were placed in a 'queue' and closed based on date received. During 2010, an attempt was made to close off all applications as they were logged or if not possible, some initial research conducted. This **change in processing** reflects greater expertise of staff in addition to an accumulation of information on education systems and has resulted in significant reductions in the time taken to close applications.

During 2010, further effort was made internally to **facilitate enhanced communication** with admissions officers, a priority identified following the 'Different Roles, Different Responsibilities' conference in November 2008. Although not yet launched due to shifting priorities during the year, much work has been conducted on designing a new Qualrec website due to go live in early 2011.

Besides processing recognition applications from individuals, another area of work in relation to qualifications recognition is the **referencing of other national Frameworks with the NFQ**. This year, the Authority Executive also worked in collaboration with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) to publish a report entitled 'The compatibility of degree qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand'. The report was welcomed by the recognition team in terms of adding further clarity to the recognition of qualifications from Ireland and New Zealand in the respective countries. Information on such agreements are published on the Recognition website.

The programme of developing **Country Education Profiles (CEPs)** was paused in mid 2010 due to workload. One particular difficulty in the recognition service is the demand element of the work and priorities were required to be realigned during the year particularly due to the work involved with the Internationalisation Register. However, country profiles for Italy and Romania were brought close to completion and it is hoped that these will be published in 2011. As one of the Authority's responsibilities, facilitating the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad will be aided by the country profile on Ireland, distributed to all ENIC-NARIC colleagues in 2009 and upon request to others; a growing consideration due to increasing emigration. In the year to April 2010, the total number of emigrants is estimated to have increased by 1% (estimated at over 40% in year to April 2009) to a figure of 65,300, of which Irish nationals make up the largest group (27,700) followed EU12 nationals¹ at 19,100². The continuing merging of recognition work with that of the organisation is important. An important aspect of this fusion is the updating of CEPs already published, where applicable, in conjunction with availability of Bologna verification and EQF referencing reports by participating countries.

The **recognition website** (www.qualrec.ie) is an increasingly important resource, particularly with less staff and during 2010, the website was visited 61,297 times, an increase of 10% on the previous year. On average, over 11,500 unique visitors³ visited the website each quarter in 2010. The majority of traffic was concerned with seeking information on how to avail of the service. The international qualifications database has seen an increase in traffic to its pages since last year and it is hoped that the launch of the new recognition website in 2011 in conjunction with publication of the CEPs currently in development along with other award comparabilities, this trend will continue as more people seek relevant information on the website.

¹ EU12: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania

² Central Statistics Office: Population and Migration Estimates. Published 21 September 2010

³ Unique Visitors: Number of visitors from different IP addresses. However, depending on how computers are networked, certain organisations may operate all computers from one IP address.

The **ENIC-NARIC network** is an important forum for the Authority to link policy initiatives with the recognition of qualifications and mobility of citizens. A particularly important development in terms of influencing activities of this network was the election of the NQAI to the NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) for a third term. The NAB, made up of representatives of 3 member countries, is responsible for helping to manage the ENIC-NARIC Network and offers advice to the Secretariat (consisting of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UNESCO-CEPES) on the design, implementation and monitoring of the annual work programme. In addition, members of the NAB may suggest agenda items for the annual meetings of the network. Membership of the Board allows the Authority raise issues of concern in the area of qualifications recognition in a European context. Workshops on the link between recognition of qualifications and the development of QFs were held at the ENIC-NARIC Annual Meeting in June 2010 as a result of the previous NAB meeting. The need for credential evaluators to gain an adequate understanding of QFs for their daily work was noted at this meeting and presentations were provided on QF developments nationally and internationally by a representative of the Council of Europe. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding the role of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in recognition. There appeared to be a general consensus surrounding the need to foster links between recognition and quality assurance through the use of QFs and many NARICs again called for a stronger mandate from the EU Commission around their involvement in the development of QFs in their home countries.

On an ongoing basis, the recognition team has been engaged **in maintaining an efficient service for customers** who wish to obtain recognition of their qualifications. There has continued to be an evident increase in Irish citizens seeking recognition of legacy awards for the purpose of gaining employment or continuing education in Ireland. The executive is constantly seeking ways to improve the recognition service. To this end, Recognition Service Enhancement Meetings (RSEM), introduced initially in 2008, are continuing on an ad-hoc basis.

The following **significant changes to the technical processing of recognition applications** have been introduced by the recognition service, and supported by the whole organisation, over the past 12 months:

- Since early 2010, all staff in the recognition section have been actively involved in logging and closing applications within a 1 – 2 week timeframe where possible. It is agreed that the recognition team will attempt to handle applications only once in an effort to increase efficiency of the service. The quick turnaround will help raise the profile of the service. Please see Tables 1 and 2 on page 7 for a breakdown of figures.
- The issue of the recognition of international school awards with a significant number of technical subjects was discussed. Currently, the recognition team issue a response comparing such awards to the Leaving Certificate, stating that they also provide access to the workplace at technician level in the home country. However, it has become apparent that this advice is not always a ‘best fit’ for applicants, particularly if they wish to seek employment in Ireland. As these awards are so different to awards in Ireland, it is difficult to compare it directly to an award on the NFQ. It was noted that previous comparisons to the Leaving Certificate were done on the basis of the foreign award being the terminal qualification at school level, rather than the award being broadly similar to the Leaving Certificate. It was agreed that recognition should be done in the spirit of the Lisbon Convention, which includes it being fit for purpose, so depending on the purpose for which recognition is required, a best fit response will be issued. Thus, such awards may be compared to the Leaving Certificate or Level 5 Certificate where appropriate.
- Teagasc applications were reviewed to ensure that consistent and accurate responses are issued. Holders of non- agricultural awards must have attained a Level 6 major award in order to gain access to the Advanced Certificate in Agriculture (required for Stamp Duty Relief on land transfer). The Level 6 requirement can refer to a Further or Higher education award. This is important to note due to the credit range associated with the Advanced Certificate. Awards submitted for the Teagasc scheme are assessed on a case by case basis in

consultation with other members of the recognition team as the NQAI has a certain level of decision making power with assessments made within defined criteria rather a direct award comparison.

- A small number of queries on foreign awards originate from Garda Headquarters for the purpose of granting Garda increments. Previously, the arrangement with Garda Headquarters was that a parchment would suffice for applications of this nature. However, in case of a reassessment being required, the recognition team has agreed that all applications of this nature in future must include a copy of both the parchment and transcripts so that all required documentation is present.
- A benchmark statement was developed for use in recognising UK legacy awards in 2009. The UK awarding body in question was contacted in the first instance for information on how the qualification is benchmarked to the UK Framework. The recognition team has introduced a policy of using Guided Learning Hours (GLH) to compare UK awards with FETAC credits and therefore to a major or minor award. As there are currently no provisions in place for the placement of UK legacy awards on the UK Framework, the benchmarked response is now used with advice in the letter taking the form of 'comparable to an award at level X' rather than a direct award comparison.
- In terms of queries regarding UK aligned awards, responses are issued advising that an award is aligned at a particular level with information also provided on how the GLH compare to FETAC credits. This will provide an understanding of the volume of the award.

2. The Recognition Service & Contribution to External Policy Initiatives

Although an increase in recognition applications occurred in 2010, there were considerable demands placed on the recognition service due to growth in the level of interest from various stakeholders in its work and due to the increasing implementation of the Framework. A brief description of a sample of these activities is listed below:

Local Authorities / VECs

The executive received a large volume of queries throughout the year but concentrated in the month of August concerning grant applications for returning to education. These queries originated from both the public and the organisations administering the grants. There are 4 schemes in operation, namely, grants for PLC courses – NFQ Levels 5 and 6; third level maintenance grants for trainees (TLT) – NFQ Levels 6 and 7 in IoTs and the VEC Scholarship Scheme for those progressing from further into higher education (administered by the VECs). The remaining scheme is the Higher Education Grants Scheme – NFQ Levels 8, 9 and 10 in IoTs and Universities administered by Local Authorities. Many queries resulted in the submission of formal recognition applications; the majority requiring urgent feedback due to timeframes involved in the grants process. The executive is to seek consultation with these bodies in 2011 to agree a more coordinated approach to resolving such queries in a reasonable timeframe.

Public Appointments Service (PAS)

The executive has worked closely with the PAS throughout 2010 to agree an appropriate level of engagement for future Garda competitions. For Garda recruitment, the recognition service assesses foreign qualifications to ascertain if they meet the education requirements as outlined by the PAS. In the past, this input resulted in the executive assuming a role of information provider for competitions and has placed heavy demands in terms of workload on the recognition service at certain times. A new procedure has now been agreed with the PAS and involves the Authority having direct contact with the PAS and no involvement with applicants. In light of this, contact details for the recognition service are to be removed from the Garda recruitment booklet and all

queries to the service will originate from PAS directly for future campaigns. The Authority is to refer any queries relating to the Garda Reserve competition to PAS directly.

Legacy Awards & Access to Teacher Training Programmes

Throughout 2010, many queries were received by the Authority regarding access to the Higher Diploma in Education from various colleges. A Level 8 Honours Bachelor Degree or equivalent is required for entry but particular difficulties exist when an individual presents an Irish legacy award which has not yet been placed on the NFQ. The executive has been working with the institutions involved to place legacy awards on the NFQ to facilitate access to these programmes. Information on levels agreed for the various awards presented is being maintained for the purpose of publication on the website.

Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE)

The ECCE scheme, introduced by the Government in 2009 and in place from January 2010 involves the provision of free childcare places. In addition to meeting the requirements regarding staff ratios as provided for under the Child Care Regulations, the pre-school year staff leader in crèches must have a major award in childcare/early childhood education of at least a Level 5 on the NFQ, or equivalent. This will be raised to a minimum qualification requirement of a major award at Level 6 on the NFQ by September 2012. The Authority executive attended a number of meetings in 2009 and a further one in 2010 with the early childhood section of the DES to provide advice on qualifications and their placement on the NFQ. The recognition team have continued to receive a significant volume of queries from the public and County Childcare Committees relating to this scheme. Individuals may be referred, as appropriate, to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMYCA) charged with overall management of the scheme.

Study Visits

Delegations visiting the Authority were provided with information on the recognition service in order to foster relations with relevant organisations which may be presented with Irish awards. In addition, these sessions acted as a means to promote the recognition service and build contacts with individuals abroad which may be contacted to facilitate work of the service.

3. The Recognition Service – Applications and queries

Growth of service from 2003 - 2010

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland assumed the role of the Irish ENIC-NARIC in 2003. Since then, the executive has recorded the number of applications received on an annual basis. The service has grown steadily since 2003 with the number of applications increasing each year until 2009. In 2010, there was an 18% increase in applications received over the previous year. The reason for this increase in formal applications experienced may be attributed to the economic recession. With increasing redundancy, it appears that individuals with foreign awards trying to either re-enter the labour market or access further education are being asked to have their awards recognised. Likewise, for those with Irish legacy awards in particular, an indication of how their award is recognised through the NFQ is important. A particularly high level of demand in 2010 was in relation to accessing grants for returning to education where progression in terms of Framework levels must be shown. It is evident from the current numbers that the service is still very much in demand. The increase in numbers is attributable to some extent, to the service's active engagement with stakeholders; deeper implementation of the NFQ and the fact that the executive has taken all available opportunities to promote the service. The result of this work is an increase in the profile of the recognition service.

Breakdown of numbers - 2010

A total of 1,969 applications were received over the year, an increase of 18% from the figure recorded in 2009. This figure is somewhat surprising given that immigration of non-Irish nationals to Ireland has dropped from 67,600 in 2008 to 38,900 in 2009 and 17,500 in 2010⁴. In addition, Qualifications Recognition deals with a large volume of queries via email, phone and visitors to the office. Approximately 2,511 email queries were received, an average of 628 per quarter. Administrative difficulties resulted in phone queries and visitor numbers not being recorded although it is acknowledged that such information is important and efforts will be made to possibly record phone calls

⁴ Central Statistics Office: Population and Migration Estimates. Published 21 September 2010.

automatically through the phone system so that accurate statistics can be produced on a regular basis.

Summary

The following pages provide information on the categories of applications received and information on the volume as well as the main countries from which applications are received.

It is of note that the majority of applications received were assessed and closed within the 12 week time-frame that is stipulated to applicants. More importantly, there is a high percentage of applications being closed within a 1-2 week timeframe.

It is also important to note that the executive processes applications from EU and Non-EU countries alike. This means that the recognition service may be conducting research into any number of education systems. For example, in higher education in 2010, 1300 applications were received and these concerned awards from 85 countries. This again reinforces the value of CEPs and the use of Sharepoint to efficiently capture and retrieve information on education systems and awards from around the world.

Applicants who are dissatisfied with the advice issued by the recognition service can avail of the reassessment process that is in place. This year, 5 applications for reassessment were received, a reduction of 3 from 2009 and all have been resolved and closed. A more detailed examination of the reassessment applications can be viewed in Appendix 2.

When applications are received, they are divided among four staff members (three since November 2010) based on workload and are logged and assigned as appropriate on the Sharepoint system. Within the current system, applications can be logged under 1 of 7 headings:

- **Higher Education** – all applications that concern awards that form part of the higher education system in another country are logged under this heading.
- **Further Education** – all applications concerning awards that are of a vocational nature and form part of the vocational education and training system in another country are logged under this heading.
- **Garda Applications** - In 2006, the NQAI was approached by the Public Appointments Service to assist with determining the comparability of foreign qualifications for the purposes of meeting the minimum entry requirements for An Garda Síochána. Any applications received that stipulate the applicant is seeking recognition for this purpose are logged under this heading.

Note: There was no Garda recruitment campaign during 2010.

- **School awards** – All non-Garda applications concerning awards that form part of the school system, be it primary or post-primary are logged under this heading.
- **Teagasc** – the executive has a role in assessing qualifications for the purposes of meeting the stipulations for tax exemptions regarding the transfer of land as per the Finance Act. Any applications that indicate this as the purpose for the recognition request are logged under this heading.
- **Miscellaneous** – the executive receives number of applications that do not match the criteria of the above mentioned categories. These could concern applications regarding awards made by professional bodies, Irish awards that are not placed on the Framework and grant applications to name a few.

- **Reassessments** – the executive makes provision for applicants who are dissatisfied with the comparability statement received in relation to their recognition requests. Reassessment applications are logged under this heading. The process requires a review of the documentation submitted with the original application.

The figures from 2010 are analysed further below, within the context of each category, to illustrate the main countries from which applications were received. To compare and contrast, the figures from 2009 are also represented below while anticipated trends and developments for 2011 are detailed further on page 26.

Higher Ed: *1300 applications received in total from 85 countries*

2010	Total 1300	2009 Total 1132
Poland	24% (314 applications)	Poland (279 applications)
Nigeria	4% (50 applications)	Nigeria (84 applications)
Lithuania	6% (82 applications)	Lithuania (75 applications)
Romania	5% (62 applications)	India (53 applications)
US	4% (52 applications)	Russia (40 applications)
India	4% (47 applications)	Romania (39 applications)
Latvia	4% (47 applications)	
Russia	3% (42 applications)	
	- <i>Remaining applications fragmented</i>	

Further Ed: *429 applications received in total from 37 countries*

2010	Total 429	2009 Total 315
UK	41% (174 applications)	UK (94 applications)
Poland	11% (49 applications)	Poland (56 applications)
Latvia	7% (31 applications)	Ireland (23 applications)
Lithuania	7% (30 applications)	Australia (13 applications)
	- <i>Remaining applications fragmented</i>	

Misc: *112 applications received in total from 25 countries.*

2010	Total 112	2009 Total 123
Ireland	43% (48 applications)	Ireland (57 applications)
UK	12.5% (14 applications)	Poland (16 applications)
Poland	8% (9 applications)	UK (12 applications)
	- <i>Remaining applications fragmented.</i>	

School:	<i>124 applications received in total from 38 countries</i>	
2010	Total 124	2009 Total 89
Poland	23% (29 applications)	Lithuania (11 applications)
Lithuania	10% (12 applications)	Poland (10 applications)
Romania	8% (10 applications)	Latvia (9 applications)
<i>- Remaining applications fragmented.</i>		

Teagasc:	<i>4 applications received in total from 2 countries</i>	
2010	Total 4	2009 Total 8
Ireland	25% (1 application)	UK (5 applications)
UK	75% (3 applications)	Ireland (3 applications)

Staffing within the service

Organisationally, the executive operated within two teams in 2010: the Corporate and Communications (C & C) team and the Framework Implementation and Qualifications Recognition (FIQR) teams. In respect of recognition, the FIQR team was primarily responsible for the management and efficient running of the recognition service. As in 2009, the service operated with four full time staff members for most of the year and three from November. However, the loss of a receptionist who was actively involved in answering queries on recognition resulted in much pressure on the service during 2010. Along with an increase in formal applications from 2009, increased demand and pressure on resources occurred as a result of additional work acquired following the introduction of the Register on 1 March, leaving little time to pursue developmental work for the service. However, this development has led to increased opportunities to further integrate the recognition service into other work of the Authority. Management of the National Europass Centre in addition to responding to or fielding the majority of calls to the organisation from the public also increased workload. The loss of the reception function led to some internal changes in order to minimise the impact on the recognition service. A message was added to the phone system in late 2010 with a menu where individuals can choose which section of the Authority for whom they have a query. This has reduced the number of calls for the recognition team to some extent. In December, a decision was taken to reduce public opening hours for recognition applicants in light of reduced staffing resources. The opening hours are 09.30 – 14.00 each day to help maintain efficiency of the service.

Part B: A Look Ahead to the Recognition Service in 2011

1. Issues Arising

Resources

Maintaining sufficient staffing resources is an important consideration in delivering an efficient, flexible and professional recognition service. The number of staff directly working in the section remained at four for most of the year with one member lost in November due to expiration of her contract. Staffing resources are expected to be stretched in 2011. Alongside an increase in formal applications to the service in 2010, a trend which is expected to continue, applications and associated work for the Register and Europass are now additional functions of the recognition team. It is fully recognised that in the current economic climate, staffing levels will not increase but a decrease would curtail the service's capacity for further growth and diversification. The executive is committed, however, to exploring new ways to maximise output with existing resources. The Authority is currently investigating the possibility of providing experience to individuals involved in the Work Placement Programme through FÁS.

Communications

The recognition service availed of a number of opportunities throughout the year to communicate with our target audiences. This included the provision of publications to stakeholders upon request and presentations on the recognition service to all delegations from abroad who sought study visits to the Authority. The Authority reduced significantly the number of events attended during 2010, resulting in less opportunity to promote the service. However, Qualifax attended a number of events such as the National Ploughing Championships and distributed information on the recognition service where appropriate. Continued monitoring of the most common queries received via e-mail and telephone fed into the work on re-development of the recognition website aimed at improving usability and accessibility to the information published. It is hoped that general telephone and e-mail queries will be reduced by making the website more accessible.

2. What's in Store for 2011?

- **Internationalisation Register** – applications for the Register will continue to be streamlined into the work of the recognition service, mainly through Sharepoint. It is planned that one member of the recognition team will lead this work and provide updates to team members. This work will lead to increasing integration of the recognition service into other policy work of the Authority, predominantly through the alignment of UK awards to the NFQ.
- **Sharepoint** - the recognition service is looking forward to the continuing use and exploitation of Sharepoint to increase efficiency and to facilitate information gathering and sharing amongst staff. As staff of the NQAI have grown in confidence and expertise in relation to the system, the full potential of Sharepoint continues to be exploited. Of particular importance is the ability to use Sharepoint to access information so as to keep recognition staff informed of policy developments that may impact on recognition.
- **Partner in French NARIC project 'The use of the EQF in the recognition procedures of the NARIC centers'** - As a result of a call for projects to the Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) for the year 2010-2011, the French NARIC proposed a project with the aim of creating convergence in the utilisation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in daily comparison work. The Netherland, Belgium (French community) and Ireland are partners in the project. This work will outline the different recognition procedures employed by the NARICS participating in the project, the problems encountered by employing the EQF (Levels 4 – 8) and national frameworks, and their possible solutions. The group met twice during 2010 and aim to produce guidelines for NARIC centres to help increase understanding about how a national Qualifications Framework and its referencing to EQF may be used as a tool in the process of recognition of foreign qualifications. This is a two year project scheduled to conclude in December 2011 following meetings planned for Dublin in March and Warsaw in June (to coincide with annual ENIC-NARIC meeting).

- **Working Group (WG) on Recognition** – the Authority is represented in the WG on Recognition set up by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). The Authority executive is attending in order to reinforce the key role that both national and over-arching Frameworks have in terms of a ‘toolkit’ for credential evaluators. In addition, this WG is composed of many ENIC-NARIC representatives and should have a large influence on the work of these Networks. The project consists of six parts; 1. The respective roles of authorities, HEIs and ENIC-NARICs in recognition, 2. Considerations for reviewing legislation relating to the recognition of qualifications, 3. A review of differences in recognition criteria and procedures between countries, 4. A look at how recognition procedures in HEIs may be improved, 5. The role of QFs in recognition (working with the BFUG WG on QFs) and 6. Improving recognition through closer collaboration and clear communication with other parts of the world. In working towards the submission of recommendations to the BFUG in Autumn 2011, a conference is being planned for April 2011 in Riga to allow stakeholders an opportunity to have their contributions considered. It is intended that the next meeting of the Working Group will take place in Riga the day before the conference.
- **Award Comparabilities** – the benefits of developing country education profiles (CEPs) have been noted previously in terms of increased efficiency of the Qualifications Recognition service. It is envisaged that a number of CEPs already initiated and nearing completion will be concluded and published on the website in early 2011. A review of resources during 2011 will dictate the initiation of any new CEPs during the year. Meanwhile, during 2011, awards for which comparabilities have been well established and for which there is much information available will be published on the website. There are many benefits to this approach. In the first instance, complete CEPs do not necessarily need to be researched and published. Secondly, making this information available may reduce the number of formal applications made leaving more time available for developmental work. In addition, the published comparabilities will result in a more comprehensive International Qualifications Database on our website. Admissions officers will be invited to offer feedback on the comparabilities, thus, encouraging further collaboration.

- **National Stakeholders** – it is essential for the ongoing development of the service and planning in terms of workload that particular contacts with relevant national stakeholders are maintained and enhanced in 2011. Of particular importance are admissions officers in higher education institutions in moving towards the achievement of increased national communication and consistency within the field of recognition of qualifications. In addition, it is necessary to collaborate with the VECs and County Councils in relation to a coordinated approach to seeking information on progression and NFQ levels for those seeking grants for accessing further education.
- **European/International Dimension** – during 2011, a priority for the executive is to build further on the work conducted in linking the recognition of qualifications to developments in qualifications frameworks through the ENIC-NARIC network. Key events for driving this work include NAB and NARIC meetings during the year, the annual ENIC-NARIC meeting scheduled for June 2011 in Warsaw, Poland and the projects indicated above.
- **Recognition Website** – it is planned that the new-look recognition website will be launched in early 2011. It is hoped that the new layout will allow individuals navigate the website more easily and facilitate the access of information. A section for staff of higher education institutions will specifically target admissions officers and should allow the executive to liaise and collaborate on mutual issues and areas of interest more easily with this target group. The homepage of the recognition website will more closely mirror that of the NFQ and NQAI sites, with the intention of more clearly identifying the service as being an integral part of the Authority.
- **Recognition Newsletter** - A Qualifications Recognition **newsletter** template was developed in 2009 with the intention of updating relevant stakeholders on developments in the area of qualifications recognition. The first newsletter was issued electronically in September 2009 indicating that feedback was welcomed, thereby providing opportunities for sharing information. It is anticipated that another newsletter will be circulated in early 2011 via e-mail in addition to publication on the Qualifications Recognition website.

3. Anticipated Trends and Developments

Given the current economic climate, the recognition service acknowledges that the number of immigrants coming to Ireland has fallen significantly in the past year while the number of emigrants has also increased⁵. Combined, these figures show a net outward migration of 34,500 for the second year (7,800 to April 2009) since 1995 in Ireland. This change in climate will obviously impact on the recognition service although to what extent is difficult to predict. It is likely that the number of recognition applications in 2011 will be similar to those received in 2010, but other areas of work, such as queries relating to Irish qualifications, and the recognition service's role in the promotion of the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad, is likely to become increasingly important. In the last 12 months, there has been no reduction in the recognition applications received and there is no reason to expect that this situation will change in 2011. The executive will continue to monitor and examine the number of applications and queries received on an ongoing basis.

No Garda recruitment campaigns occurred in 2010 despite indications that one may be launched during the year. It is not envisaged that a campaign will be launched in 2011. The Garda Reserve recruitment campaign is ongoing which has little impact on the service.

The considerable rise in unemployment from 6.4% in 2008⁶ to 13.1% in 2009 (Q4) and an apparent levelling off to 13.6% in 2010⁷ (Q3) may lead to further changes within the service in 2011. It is difficult to anticipate whether this will impact upon the service in terms of increased or decreased demand. However, it is felt that as competition for jobs increases, migrants in Ireland who were previously in employment without ever availing of the service may now find it an appropriate time to seek recognition of their awards. Similarly, an increase in queries regarding legacy Irish awards is anticipated together with an increase in queries regarding the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad. Non-

⁵ Central Statistics Office: Population and Migration Estimates. Published 21 September 2010.

⁶ Central Statistics Office: Live Register. Published 8 January 2010.

⁷ Central Statistics Office: Live Register. Published 6 January 2011.

Irish nationals represented 17.5% of the Live Register in December 2010⁸. Of this number, the largest proportion of individuals are nationals of the EU15 to EU27 states⁹ while the smallest number are from the EU15 outside of Ireland and the UK. These statistics have an implication for the service in terms of the origin of foreign awards and the research and provision of information on certain awards on the website. The executive will continue to monitor statistics, trends and developments of this nature, and in national policy, as it seeks to further progress and enhance the recognition service's functions over the coming year.

⁸ Central Statistics Office: Live Register. Published 6 January 2011

⁹ EU15: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Portugal & UK.

EU27: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia & Slovenia.

Appendix 1 Snapshots of Recognition Applications: School, Miscellaneous and Teagasc categories

School Applications - Total: 124

Quarter	No. Applications	% closed (in 1-2 wks)	No. Open
January - March	23	52	
April – June	56	68	
July - August	28	79	1
Sept - Dec	17	94	

Miscellaneous Applications - Total: 112

Quarter	No. Applications	% closed (in 1-2 wks)	No. Open
January - March	24	67	
April – June	34	82	
July - August	40	78	5
Sept - Dec	14	86	1

Teagasc Applications – Total: 4

There were 4 formal recognition requests concerning Teagasc received during 2010. 3 applications were closed within 2 weeks while the remaining application was closed within 3 weeks.

Appendix 2

Reassessment Applications Received in 2010

The review process currently engaged by Qualifications Recognition consists of three stages:

1. Information Provision
2. Formal Reassessment
3. Formal Review

Information Provision

The aim of the advice provided by Qualifications Recognition Ireland is to clearly set out how the foreign qualification held by an individual compares to a qualification that is placed at a particular level on the National Framework of Qualifications. In the majority of cases applicants find the information to be clear in its content. In some more complex cases applicants are seeking clarification on points made in the advice issued and these can be addressed with an early response either via e-mail or telephone.

Formal Reassessment

In 2010, 5 applications were received requesting formal reassessment of their qualifications; 4 related to higher education qualifications and 1 related to further education qualifications.

All reassessment applications are closed. Of the applications, 2 were recognised at a higher level due to further information being made available while 3 remained unchanged. There has been no indication from the applicants involved that there is intention to proceed further and avail of the formal review process in place. No formal review applications were received in 2010.