

National Policy Approach to the Recognition of International Awards in Ireland

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Summary

Part I is an introduction to the paper. It commences by setting out the aim which is that the paper will form the basis of the initial outline of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards. It further sets out that the paper has been considered by the recognition advisory group which has been established by the Authority and that, following this, the Authority will consider subsequent steps in the development of the national policy approach. This Part then sets out why there is a need for a national approach to the recognition of international awards. It refers to the role of the Authority under the Qualifications Act and to European developments. It also notes the increase in the number of individuals seeking to find employment or undertake further study in Ireland who hold foreign qualifications. The paper then sets out the role of the recognition advisory group established by the Authority and the organisations, which are represented on the group. The introduction concludes with a summary of the national legislative background to the recognition of international awards.

Part II of the paper sets out the current procedures in relation to the recognition of international awards. It highlights the arrangements put in place by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland as both the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) - National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) and the National Reference Point (NRP). It refers to the study visits already undertaken by the Authority to the Netherlands and to Denmark.

Part III of the paper sets out relevant issues which need to be considered in the context of the development of a national approach and summarises a number of important developments. In the first instance, this part looks at what is meant by recognition. It notes that the Lisbon Convention indicates that recognition is a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.

Effectively, this is taken to mean advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the foreign qualification in the context of access to learning or employment. If a formal award recognition agreement is in place it is a direct statement of comparability. The paper then sets out a number of processes which are similar to the recognition of an international award but which are not actually the recognition of an international award.

The paper then summarises the international dimension to recognition, detailing the relevant European Union directives. Following this, the issue of common international platforms, which exist in many sectors and professions, is summarised. These are where sector, industry or regulatory associations and professional bodies come together to agree and establish international standards and regulations whether on a formal or informal basis.

The document then summarises the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, the Lisbon Convention, 1997. In so doing, it highlights that the inter-governmental committee of the Lisbon convention has developed two legal tools for recognition; criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications and a code of good practice for the provision of national education. There is then a brief summary of relevant elements in the general agreement on trade in services.

The paper continues by setting out relevant elements in relation to cooperation in vocational education and training, and in particular the Copenhagen process, as well as relevant developments in cooperation in higher education and in particular the Bologna process. The paper then continues by setting out how it appears that there is an increased coherence in international developments and notes the proposal of the European Commission that an overarching European Framework of Qualifications be established. Developments in relation to the Europass are also noted.

Various types of recognition arrangements are then set out. The first of these is award recognition agreements. The paper notes that the extent to which existing arrangements are in place has been looked at and an appendix is attached setting out such arrangements where they have been brought to the Authority's attention. The paper then refers to the role of the National Framework of Qualifications. The paper then looks at the developing linkages between the Irish Framework and UK Frameworks.

The paper then continues to look at the roles of various stakeholders in the recognition of international awards. It is particularly noted that it is awarding bodies which have the power to recognise awards as being comparable to the awards that they set standards for and make. Furthermore, it is also noted that it is a matter for providers of education and training to decide what awards to accept for the purposes of entry to programmes of education and training and that it is the responsibility of employers to decide what awards they accept for entrance to employment. It is of note that employers can only do so within any statutory requirements relating to that employment and in the context of national and local agreements involving trade unions and other stakeholders, as well as relevant international directives or agreements.

The issue of the permanence of awards and recognition is also detailed in the paper. Plans for the inclusion of international awards made in Ireland in the National Framework of Qualifications are also set out. While the paper mainly concerns the recognition within the state of awards made outside it, the paper notes that many of the policy approaches in this regard are relevant to the recognition outside Ireland of Irish awards.

The paper then raises issues about resourcing. It highlights that it will be necessary to ensure that the necessary human, bibliographical and equipment resources are made available to implement any national approach to the recognition of international awards.

Part IV of the paper looks at the way forward in the development of a national policy approach to the recognition of international awards. The policy and process issues which have been determined to date are stated in this section.

These issues are as follows:

- Recognition of an international award is a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of an international award with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities. Effectively, this is taken to mean advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the international award in the context of access to learning or employment. If a formal award recognition agreement is in place it is a direct statement of comparability.
- The Authority, in partnership with stakeholders, will put in place a coordinated approach to the recognition of international awards and, in so doing, will bring about a consistent and coherent national approach.
- The process will be that queries are received by the Authority concerning information about awards made in Ireland and their value abroad and awards made abroad and their value here for various purposes, including both academic recognition and entrance to employment. At this stage, the Authority responds by providing information about existing agreements and arrangements. Where this is not sufficient, applicants complete an application form and submit a required set of documents describing their qualification. The Authority then consults with a relevant awarding body which conducts the assessment of the international award.
- The recognition service will be marketed as a single entity i.e. there would be a one-stop-shop for recognition queries and information. The title for this service will be Qualifications Recognition – Ireland. A distinct area within the Authority’s website will be developed.

- The policy approach will be consistent with the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.
- Recognition agreements will be sought on a proactive basis.
- A Recognition Implementation Group has been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Department of Education and Science. This group will be responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

Part I – Introduction

Aim of Paper

This paper has been prepared by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in consultation with national stakeholders to bring together as many as possible of the issues around the recognition in Ireland of awards made outside of Ireland. The paper also refers to and is linked to the recognition outside of Ireland of awards made in Ireland.

This paper sets out the basis of the development of a national policy approach to the recognition of international awards. Much of the material contained in the report is based on information acquired by the Authority in implementing its role in the recognition of international awards. In addition, the input from the Recognition Advisory Group and awarding and professional bodies regarding their current procedures and arrangements in the area of recognition of international awards is acknowledged.

Need for a National Approach to International Award Recognition

There are a number of reasons why there is a need for a national approach to the recognition of international awards to be developed in Ireland:

- Under the Qualifications Act, 1999, the Authority has the role of facilitating recognition in the State of education and training awards made outside the State and facilitating recognition outside the State of education and training awards made in the State.
- At European level, there are a number of initiatives which aim to increase transparency of education and training awards and so facilitate recognition of international awards. These initiatives include the Lisbon Convention, European Network of Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centres, National Reference Points, Europass, EU Directives on Recognition of Professional Qualifications etc. Ireland participates in these agreements and initiatives.
- Over recent years, there has been a large increase in the number of individuals who hold international awards who wish to find employment or undertake further study in Ireland. These individuals can include students from many different countries seeking to access further learning opportunities in Ireland. They would also include refugees and migrant workers.
- There are a large number of Irish people going abroad to work and study. One of the major obstacles these people face is that their Irish awards may not be accepted or recognised.
- There are currently a large number of organisations involved in the recognition of international awards. Many of these organisations have

developed their own recognition procedures and in some cases recognition agreements. It is considered beneficial to synthesise procedures so that there is one national approach to international award recognition.

Recognition Advisory Group

The Authority established a consultative group to advise it on its approach to performing its recognition co-ordination function and to working with stakeholders, in general, and awarding bodies, in particular, in this regard.

The following organisations are represented on the group:

- The Further Education and Training Awards Council
- The Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities
- The Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology
- The Dublin Institute of Technology
- The Higher Education Authority
- The Irish Vocational Education Association
- FÁS
- The National Tourism Development Authority
- Teagasc
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- The Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- The Union of Students in Ireland

Each of the members of the group was requested to provide some information in relation to processes for recognising awards in the State which are made outside the State:

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Also under the Act the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council are given the function of making or recognising “awards given or to be given to persons who apply for those awards and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the standard determined by the Council” (section 14(1)(c) and section 23(1)(c)). It is of note that while both Councils may, in certain circumstances, delegate authority to make awards, delegation does not extend to setting standards for awards or to recognition. Thus, the Councils also have a statutory role in international liaison and the facilitation of recognition.

It is also of note that one of the objects of the Act is “to promote recognition outside the State of awards made by bodies in the State and recognition in the State of awards made by bodies outside the State” (section 4(1)(i)).

Under the Universities Act, 1997, and the Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology have the authority to make awards.

Under the terms of the State Examinations Commission (Establishment) Order 2003, the State Examinations Commission has the power of making arrangements for the marking of work presented for relevant examination and issuing the results of examinations.

Part II – Current Procedures

Process of Recognition of an International Award

There are different processes in place in Ireland in relation to the recognition of international awards. Presently, applicants may choose from a number of alternative routes, the principle ones being as follows:

- contacting the Department of Education and Science directly if they require professional recognition within a regulated profession
- approaching the competent authority directly, e.g., a doctor holding a foreign medical qualification approaching the Medical Council directly
- contacting a college in order to attain credit for previous study undertaken abroad
- contacting a trade union in order to attain membership of that union
- contacting an Irish awarding body directly
- contacting the European Network of Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centre and National Reference Point in Ireland

Interim Arrangements on the part of the European Network of Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centre and the National Reference Point

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is now acting as both the National Reference Point for vocational education and training and the National Academic Recognition Information Centre for higher education.

The process in place is that queries are received by the Authority concerning information about awards made in Ireland and their value or comparability

abroad and awards made abroad and their value or comparability here for various purposes, including both professional and academic recognition.

If the candidate is seeking professional recognition within a regulated profession, they are referred to the Department of Education and Science. The Department of Education and Science is the designated contact point in Ireland for the professional recognition system. The Department then directs the applicant to the relevant designated authority of the profession in question. Appendix 2 provides further information regarding the professional recognition system in Ireland and the bodies involved therein.

If the applicant is seeking academic recognition or professional recognition for a non-regulated profession, the procedure is as described below.

Applicants complete an application form and submit a required set of documents describing their qualification. The Authority then consults with a relevant awarding body which conducts the assessment of the international award.

Following this consultation with the relevant awarding body the outcome of the assessment and the extent and level of the recognition to be accorded is communicated in writing by the Authority to the applicant.

A variety of approaches to the assessment of an award by awarding bodies for the purposes of defining comparability is used. Generally where there is a set of outcomes associated with an award, the awarding body will examine these and compare these to an Irish award. The programmes undertaken leading to awards are often examined. In addition, databases of awards and their comparability, such as of the UK NARIC and UK NRP are also used as well as international publications regarding education systems and qualification

structures e.g. Handbook of Universities etc. Similar procedures operate in other countries.

A summary report on the co-ordination by the Authority of the recognition of international awards in 2003 is attached at appendix 3.

Best Practice in Award Recognition - Study Visits

In the context of the development of a policy approach to the recognition of international awards, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland decided to conduct study visits to established European ENIC - NARIC and NRP centres. The objectives of the visits were as follows:

- to familiarise ENIC - NARIC/NRP Ireland and related personnel with work practices in an established ENIC - NARIC/NRP
- to learn and benefit from their experience in international award recognition
- to assist in deciding how best to further develop the operations of ENIC - NARIC/NRP Ireland
- to support the establishment of policies and procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland.

Research was conducted into a number of European ENIC - NARIC and NRP centres. It was agreed that the Netherlands and Denmark were the most suitable countries to visit as they both have well established centres which operate in a similar manner to the ENIC - NARIC and NRP in Ireland. Representatives from the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council were also invited to participate on the visits and agreed to do so. The visits took place in November 2003 and March 2004.

A report on both visits is attached at appendix 4.

Part III – Issues and Developments

What is an International Award?

An international award is deemed to be an award which has been made by a non-Irish awarding body outside of Ireland. The term foreign qualification is synonymous with international award.

What is Recognition?

In 1997 the Council of Europe and UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (The Lisbon Convention, 1997). Ireland signed without reservation as to the ratification of the Lisbon Convention on 8 March 2004 and it came into force in Ireland on 1 May 2004. According to the Lisbon Convention, recognition is defined as

“A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.”

Depending on the purpose – further studies or work – there are two main types of recognition: academic and professional.

Academic Recognition is the recognition of an international award for the purpose of further studies. The main task in this case is to assess whether the applicant is capable of continuing studies in the chosen direction and at the chosen level.

In relation to access to academic recognition, recognition may be sought for the following purposes:

- access to a programme of education and training

- exemption from some elements of a programme or from some elements of the assessment of outcomes associated with an award
- credit towards an award.

Professional Recognition is the recognition of an international award for the purpose of employment in a certain profession. In this case it has to be ascertained whether the applicant has sufficient knowledge and professional skills to pursue a particular profession in the receiving country.

In relation to professional recognition, recognition may be sought for:

- access to employment generally
- access to particular kinds of employment or for access to regulated employment or to membership of a professional body
- access certain additional levels of pay which may require the attainment of particular awards
- in the case of self-employed people, professional recognition may include the entitlement to provide a service

The distinction between these two different recognition purposes is an important issue and must be considered in formulating the national policy approach to international award recognition. Also the meaning of the “acknowledgement of the value of a foreign qualification” is important. Effectively, this is taken to mean advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the international award in the context of access to learning or employment. If a formal award recognition agreement is in place it is a direct statement of comparability.

What is an International Awarding Body?

There are many different types of international awarding bodies. Many tend to be bodies based primarily in one country, perhaps operating in a single country

or operating in a number of other countries. Generally there are different ways in which such international awarding bodies operate. In some instances, they provide their own programmes and make the awards themselves, such as the Open University. In other instances they operate as external certifiers for programmes provided by other providers of education and training. In some of these cases, they may set the assessment arrangements. In some cases the awards of these international bodies are included in the framework of qualifications in their country of origin, where such a framework exists.

There are also international awarding bodies in specific sectoral areas, often in information technology. These tend to be bodies which would not primarily be based in any single country and would operate in a number of countries. Often they would be linked to global corporations. Examples of these would include Microsoft, Intel, Cisco, Lotus, Novell and Sun. These global awarding bodies have been described as existing in a “parallel universe” to traditional awarding bodies.

There are not generally agreed international processes in place for the recognition of global awards. However, some of these bodies have their programmes incorporated into programmes that already lead to awards in the State, such as those of the Awards Councils.

The policy approaches in this paper aim to cover awards made outside of Ireland by any international awarding body.

Processes Similar to Recognition of an International Award

In some instances it may not be possible to have an international award recognised. In such cases the purpose of recognition may be attained in other ways.

For example, where the purpose is for entry to employment, a trade or professional body such as a trade union may have a process in place to assess the knowledge, skill and competence of an individual and if the body is satisfied, it may admit that person to membership even though that person does not have a qualification. In such cases, membership of the body effectively can provide for possible entry to employment.

Another possibility is that the person may seek to have an award made by an awarding body in respect of the knowledge, skill and competence that the person has attained. It is of note that the two awards Councils have a function of making awards where persons apply for awards directly and in this regard a Council may request a provider of education and training to assist the Council in forming an opinion about whether the Council should make an award. The implementation of this process is being considered by the Councils at present. There are many issues in considering the implementation of this including whether the process would apply where someone is seeking an award for outcomes of learning in relation to which an award may already have been made. It is important that this process does not lead to the applicant getting either a double award or double credit.

Until recently, FÁS had arrangements in place whereby its Asylum Seekers Unit operated a system for assessing skills. The system was computer based and involved the learner completing the assessment on computer. It had assessments for a number of occupations. The assessment was separate from that which FÁS operated for the purposes of certification. No FÁS/City & Guilds awards were issued based on the assessment. The outcome of the assessment was used both to place people on appropriate training courses and to place people in employment. In the employment context it was seen as an indicator only and this point was highlighted to employers. Asylum seekers are now mainstreamed within FÁS client services.

Fáilte Ireland operates an Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) system for applicants with incomplete awards or applicants seeking recognition for work experience. Non-EU applicants can go through a process similar to APL if the qualification is not known to Fáilte Ireland. There are also procedures in place for practical and oral assessment.

International Dimension

EU Directives

There are a range of EU Directives in place concerning the recognition of qualifications. These are known as Sectoral Directives and General Directives.

The Sectoral Directives are based on a minimum harmonisation of each countries' education and practical training system that has been negotiated by advisory bodies with professional representatives for the EU countries. Most of the Sectoral Directives were agreed in the 1970s and early 1980s and mainly concern medical professions. They lead to automatic mutual recognition.

The General Directives do not provide for automatic mutual recognition. Requirements of national legislation regulating the particular profession must be fulfilled before an applicant can be approved on the basis of foreign qualifications. In some cases, where an applicant does not have a qualification but is practicing in a profession, or is practicing in a profession but holds a qualification which is not deemed to be comparable, the General Directives set out that the applicant has to complete an aptitude test or an adaptation period may be applied before they may be accepted into employment in that profession.

The Department of Education and Science is the contact point in relation to all EU Directives on the recognition of professional qualifications and planning is underway for the Authority to assist the Department. The General Directives are:

- Council Directive 89/48/EEC of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher-education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration
- Council Directive 92/51/EEC of 18 June 1992 on a second general system for the recognition of professional education and training - diplomas, certificates and titles other than those obtained by higher education of at least three years' duration.
- Council Directive 99/42/EC of 7 June 1999 which replaced previous directives on liberalisation and transitional measure and supplements the first and second General Directives.
- Council Directive 2001/19/EC of 14 May 2001. Also known as the SLIM Directive, it amends the Sectoral Directives, except for the lawyer directive and to some extent the General Directives.

At present work is underway to simplify the EU professional recognition directives into a single Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications. It is expected that the requirements, which currently apply where someone does not have a qualification but is practicing in a profession, or is practicing in a profession but holds a qualification which is not deemed to be comparable, will be reduced in the proposed Directive.

Common International Platforms

Common international platforms exist in many sectors and professions where sector, industry and regulatory associations and professional bodies come together to agree and establish international standards and regulations. They can operate at a number of levels. For example, at a regulatory level they can establish standards and requirements to practice, such as in the aviation sector where these requirements are transposed into legislation in the participating countries. At this level national awarding bodies agree and accept the standards set out and there is automatic recognition of awards from participating countries.

At a sectoral level common platforms establish standards that are not of a regulatory nature and it is up to national awarding bodies to decide on how they will integrate these standards and awards into national systems and how the awards will be recognised. The information and communication technology sector is an area where this approach has evolved and has resulted in both specific standards and awards (Microsoft) and sector standards and awards (Computing Technology Industry Association, CompTIA). Many national awarding bodies are seeking to establish processes whereby these awards can be recognised.

In the proposed EU directive on the recognition of qualifications it is envisaged that there will be common platforms where EU wide associations and/or professional bodies establish criteria suitable for compensating for substantial differences which may exist between the training in the various member states for a particular profession. This is to facilitate the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. To be considered to be established at European level, a common platform must cover at least two thirds of the member states and in any case all of the member states which regulate that profession.

Many professional bodies have also established international platforms that operate in a number of areas. These include the development and agreement of common programmes, standards and awards. These developments can be part of licence to practice requirements in some countries where the profession is regulated and may also facilitate the recognition of qualifications. This recognition may include formal agreements between professional bodies in different countries.

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (The Lisbon Convention, 1997)

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives meeting in Lisbon on 8 - 11 April 1997. This Council of Europe/ UNESCO Convention – usually referred to as the Lisbon Convention – has since been signed and ratified by most European countries including Ireland.

Among the main points of the Convention are the following:

- Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country. No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.
- The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.
- Each country shall recognise qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees –

as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.

- Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another country shall have one or both of the following consequences:
 - access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations and preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as candidates from the country in which recognition is sought;
 - the use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought.

- In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labour market.

- All countries shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

- All countries shall provide information on the institutions and programmes they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.

- All countries shall appoint a national information centre, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of international awards to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons.

- All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate

recognition. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO that aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relating it to the higher education system within which it was issued.

Two international legal tools for recognition have been adopted by the intergovernmental committee of the Lisbon Convention:

Recommendations on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications - This recommendation sets out general principles and assessment procedures including addressing issues relating to information to applicants, information on the qualification for which recognition is sought, fees, translation and verification of the authenticity of documents. The recommendation also looks at the assessment criteria and these include the status of the institution making the award or providing the programme of learning and the assessment of individual qualifications.

Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Transnational Education – The Code is designed to promote good practice in the area of transnational education with particular reference to the quality of the provision of study programmes and the standards of qualifications issued by the Parties to the Lisbon Convention. For implementing the provisions of the Code with regard to the recognition of qualifications, the Recommendations on procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications must be applied.

Both the tools are international legal texts that supplement the Lisbon Convention.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) was established under the World Trade Organisation and came into effect in 1995. It establishes rules for international trade in services and commitments to further trade liberalisation including education. The general thrust of these rules is to encourage the recognition of qualifications in order to allow persons supply education services across borders. It targets discrimination, particularly on the grounds of nationality. The agreement also provides a mechanism for the exchange of information on recognition arrangements. It is possible that, in the future individual states could seek to expand the GATS role in recognition or seek to have the benefits of, for example, bilateral agreements negotiated between specific countries, extended to others. However, it would appear that the preferred approach is for states to work within existing international structures for this purpose and few commitments to additional trade liberalisation have been made by countries. While the GATS has a limited role with respect to recognition, this could evolve especially if major barriers to recognition emerge, cannot be resolved by other means and are given priority in any new set of negotiations on the GATS.

Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training

The European Forum on the Transparency of Vocational Qualifications proposed in 2001 that each Member State would designate one National Reference Point responsible for providing information on national vocational qualifications. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, with appropriate support from the Further Education and Training Awards Council, is acting as the National Reference Point. The key functions of a National Reference Point are to:

- act as first point of contact when questions relating to vocational education and training qualifications, certificates and Certificate Supplements arise
- have direct access to relevant information or be in contact with the relevant national bodies which have the information
- either be able to answer questions themselves or transfer them to the competent agency
- be a national partner in a European network of reference centres with similar responsibilities.

The Forum also recommended that each Member State would establish a system to issue, together with each official national vocational education and training certificate, a certificate supplement in the official national language, which could be translated on a voluntary basis in one or more other EU languages; the Certificate Supplement will be based on a common European format.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, with appropriate support from the Further Education and Training Awards Council, set up an advisory group to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of the European

Forum on the Transparency of Vocational Qualifications. This group has now been merged into the Recognition Advisory Group referred to in Part I above.

On 30 November 2002, in Copenhagen, Ministers for Vocational Education and Training from 30 European countries adopted a Declaration aiming to increase voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training, in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, and thereby establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning. The target is for the cooperation initiatives set out in the declaration to be implemented by 2010.

The following priorities were among the priorities that are being pursued through enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training

- Increasing transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments such as the European CV, Certificate and Diploma Supplements, the European Language Portfolio and the Europass Training into one single framework.
- Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.

As part of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration a Technical Working Group on credit has recommended the development, by 2010, of a coherent European credit and qualifications meta-framework, specified according to a 'typology' of knowledge, skills/tasks and competences, in order

to facilitate the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes across national and sectoral borders, and contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon goals. The Group has set out that the development of such a framework at European level would be the cornerstone of a European area of lifelong learning and a true European labour market. This has been endorsed by the Copenhagen co-ordination group.

Co-operation in Higher Education

The Higher Education Authority took part in the network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres for many years as Ireland's national centre. The network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union, the European Economic Area countries and the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. In effect the NARIC is now being subsumed into the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC), set up following the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

The Department of Education and Science considered that the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland should now become the national centre for both NARIC and ENIC and the transfer to

The Bologna Process

In 1999, Ministers for Education from 29 European countries came together in Bologna to search for a common European answer to the problems and the challenges facing higher education systems. A document officially headed “The European Higher Education Area” and better known as the Bologna Declaration, was signed by 29 European Ministers for Education in June 1999. In agreeing the Declaration the Ministers undertook to co-ordinate their Higher Education policies in order to establish the European Higher Education Area and to promote the European system of Higher Education worldwide. To this end they set out to attain a number of objectives by 2010.

Among the objectives of the Ministers were:

- Easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the European Diploma Supplement;
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate level in all countries; access to the second cycle requires successful completion of the first cycle. The second cycle should lead to a master and/or doctorate.
- Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility;
- A European dimension in quality assurance (by developing comparable criteria and methodologies); and
- Improvement in the free movement of students and teachers through structural reforms.

At a subsequent meeting in Berlin in September 2003, ministers urged Member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile.

Ministers also have undertaken to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

Much work has been undertaken in advancing with the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, in general, and the development of qualifications, in particular. A number of important cross-European developments feeding into the debate on qualifications structures in higher education in Europe as follows:

- The work of the Joint Quality Initiative
- Bachelor-Master Generic Qualification Initiatives, including
 - Helsinki Bologna seminar on Bachelor-Level Degrees, 2001
 - EUA Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe, 2002
 - A conference and publication on recognition issues in the Bologna process
- Credits and International Benchmarking
 - EUA/Swiss Confederation Conference on Credit Transfer and Accumulation, 2002
 - Tuning Educational Structures in Europe
 - Transnational European Evaluation Project, 2002-2003

There have also been a number of national developments in terms of the development of national frameworks of qualifications in Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The Bologna Follow-Up Group has established a working group to lead the initial work towards the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. There has been some initial thinking undertaken on the nature and purpose of the overarching framework. It is generally recognised that more work is needed on the

purposes of the framework and that more thinking is needed on the role of the overarching framework in facilitating the recognition of international awards.

As part of the Bologna process, the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education in Portugal, organised a seminar on recognition issues in the Bologna Process in Lisbon on 11 and 12 April 2002. Among the key recommendations was the encouragement of further work at national and European levels on the issue of learning outcomes and a recommendation that there should be discussions on learning outcomes and competences, in order to help move recognition procedures away from formal issues such as length of study and names of courses, and towards procedures based on the results of student learning.

Coherence of International Developments

The overall approach of European developments in qualifications is to increase comparability and compatibility of all awards made across Europe. The European Commission in its report of November 2003 on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, has called for the development of an overarching European Qualifications Framework and the Commission has set out that it is determined to make all necessary efforts to achieve this by 2005 and expects the Member States to do likewise.

The EU Commission is advancing a formal proposal for a decision, in 2004, of the Council of Ministers of Education and the European Parliament on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences which will be known as Europass. This proposal for a decision establishes the single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences and provides for the adequate implementation and support measures. Thus, the proposal

incorporates a number of tools which are already available to citizens for both education and training:

- the European CV
- the Diploma Supplement
- the Certificate Supplement
- the Europass Training
- the European Language Portfolio

Under the new Europass framework these tools will be known respectively as:

- Europass – Curriculum Vitae
- Europass – Diploma Supplement
- Europass – Certificate Supplement
- Europass – Mobility
- Europass – Language Portfolio

While, transparency of qualifications and competences is a different issue than the formal recognition of qualifications, increased transparency is pursued for the sake of recognition in a wider, social sense: to improve understanding and appreciation of both qualifications and competences on the labour market.

In addition, the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) was established recently, one of its aims is to achieve mutual recognition of accreditation decisions between its members. The consortium intends to collaborate actively with other organisations and initiatives in the area of the recognition of international awards e.g. the ENIC - NARIC network.

Recognition Arrangements

Award Recognition Agreements

It is noted above that recognition in one particular country by that host country is not necessarily through agreement with the awarding body in the country where an award was originally made. Thus, it may well be the case that the awarding body which made the award may not agree with the recognition of the award. Where there is agreement, this may be referred to as a recognition agreement.

In Spring 2002 the Authority sought information from a range of awarding bodies, former awarding bodies and professional bodies on any recognition agreement in place, including

- Process leading to agreement
- Nature and scope of agreement
- Unilateral or bilateral nature of agreement
- Duration of agreement
- Legal status of agreement

The aim was to map out the existing recognition arrangements, in which awarding bodies and professional bodies in this State are involved and to inform the development of future approaches.

The responses to the seeking of information have shown that there are not many direct international award recognition agreements in place. The full information is attached at appendix 5. In responding professional bodies referred to their implementation of EU Directives. In addition, professional bodies referred to bi-lateral agreements that they have entered into – e.g., the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland has bilateral agreements with Australia and the United Kingdom for Certified Public Accountants and

the Institute of Engineers of Ireland has a wide range of international bi-lateral and multilateral agreements. There are a number of bilateral agreements in relation to electricians and plumbers in place between the UK and Ireland – these were entered into by FÁS. Also in relation to Toolmakers and Fitters, some discussions have taken place although the agreements are unsigned.

A number of countries have international award recognition agreements in place – for example China has such agreements in relation to the recognition of awards with both Germany and the United Kingdom. There are a number of interesting dimensions to the agreement entered into by China and the United Kingdom as follows:

- It focuses on recognition of particular award-types referred to as Bachelor, Master and Doctorate degrees
- Organisations are to be designated to provide information on institutions and awards
- The recognition appears to only refer to recognition for the purposes of entry to higher education
- There is a particular acknowledgement of the autonomy of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom
- There is to be a standing expert committee established under the agreement to follow-up on discussions and facilitate implementation.

Any potential recognition agreements have implications for both the recognition of awards made internationally in Ireland, but also for the recognition of awards made in Ireland internationally.

National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications is defined as

“The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent

way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.” The Framework is further described in appendix 6.

The framework assists in the recognition process by acting as a reference point for assessing the broad comparability, on the basis of learning outcomes, of qualifications within the state. This level of comparability may be sufficient for purposes of for example entry into the labour market or entry into particular levels of education. In addition, the development of linkages to other national frameworks has the potential for establishing a basis for assessing the comparability of qualifications. The framework is also consistent with developments in the Bologna process to achieve greater comparability and compatibility of qualifications in higher education across Europe and is feeding into work to develop a European framework of qualifications in this regard.

Ireland and UK Framework Links

In June 2003, the Authority hosted an initial meeting of the various qualifications and regulatory bodies in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The organisations have established a technical group to look at the potential for linking the various emerging frameworks of qualifications on these islands as closely as possible within the broader European context, the issues arising and the potential meaning and consequences of any agreed levels comparability.

The work of these qualifications and regulatory bodies is particularly relevant to mutual recognition of awards on a north/south basis and a working group has been established to advance such developments. The qualifications and regulatory bodies are to meet again in June 2004.

Any potential agreement arising from this process has implications for both the recognition of awards made in the United Kingdom in Ireland, but also for the recognition of awards made in Ireland in the United Kingdom.

A parallel working group has also been established on a north/south basis.

Roles of Stakeholders in Recognition of International Awards

In general, it is awarding bodies which have the power to recognise awards as being comparable to named awards that they set the standards for and make. Where more than one awarding body in Ireland makes the same or a similar award, as may well be the case with the operation of common award-types in the national framework of qualifications, it is a matter for each awarding body to recognise an award as being comparable to a named award that it sets the standards for and make. Potentially, this could give rise to a situation where there is differing recognition within Ireland of a particular international award.

It is important to note that recognition in one particular country by that host country is not necessarily through agreement with the awarding body in the country where an award was originally made. Thus, it may well be the case that the awarding body which made the award may not agree with the recognition of the award. Where there is agreement, this may be referred to as a recognition agreement.

It is a matter for providers of education and training to decide what awards to accept for the purposes of entry to programmes of education and training. For example, many providers of higher education and training make decisions on the entry of students with international awards to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

In addition, it is the responsibility of employers to decide what awards they accept for entrance to employment and for accessing certain additional pay levels which may require the attainment of particular awards. It is of note that employers can only do so within any statutory requirements relating to that employment and in the context of national and local agreements involving trade unions and other stakeholders, as well as relevant international directives or agreements.

Furthermore, it a matter for Government and the Oireachtas, subject to international law, to make decisions about which professions should be regulated and where regulatory bodies, such as professional bodies exist, it is a matter for them to decide what awards to accept for entry to regulated o(qil8)3.1(71-0.08.8062)4.vps.0

Indeed, it is the case that while there may be increasing comparability and compatibility of international awarding systems, it will remain the case that recognition is sought for awards made in the past and which may pre-date any such increased comparability and compatibility.

A related issue is whether there should be a shelf-life associated with any recognition decision.

Inclusion of International Awards Made in Ireland in the National Framework of Qualifications

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is examining possible processes for the inclusion of the international awards which are made in Ireland in the National Framework of Qualifications. This concept is different from that of the recognition of international awards made outside of Ireland. Nevertheless, the issues are related and may involve the examination of the same award.

The policy approach of the Authority has yet to be determined on the inclusion of such awards in the framework and the Authority has already engaged in some consultation with stakeholders on these issues. A further consultative paper is to be published by the Authority in July 2004.

It is important to note that only awards which are made in Ireland may be included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

Recognition outside Ireland of Irish Awards

Once a national approach for international award recognition has been agreed, it will be necessary to ensure that the necessary human, bibliographical and equipment resources are made available to support the task.

There will be a need to ensure that there are sufficient staff resources to process recognition arrangements taking into account the number of applications for international award recognition and information flow intensity. The staff would need to include academic, administrative and secretarial staff.

There will be a need to ensure that appropriate bibliographical sources are in place. Appropriate reference material will need to be made available including reference works on foreign education systems, education legislation, lists of officially recognised and accredited institutes and programmes, legislation in the field of recognition, description of national criteria and procedures for recognition of international awards etc.

There will be a need to ensure that appropriate hardware and software should be available to work into interactive databases, publish information on the web, maintain a database on previous evaluations carried out nationally and publish this to the public.

While, many countries charge for the co-ordination and processing of recognition queries, the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications adopted by the Lisbon Convention Recognition Committee on 6 June, 2001 refers to consideration of whether it is possible to provide for the assessment of foreign qualifications as a public service free of charge. It further sets out that where this is not feasible, fees should be kept as low as possible and should not be so high as to constitute a barrier to the assessment of international awards.

Communication

Once a national approach to international award recognition is being implemented, it will be necessary to consider how the information regarding the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved will be disseminated.

Part IV – Way Forward

Overall Approach

In the context of the consideration of the issues arising set out above, the following has been determined:

- Recognition of an international award is a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of an international award with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities. Effectively, this is taken to mean advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the international award in the context of access to learning or employment. If a formal award recognition agreement is in place it is a direct statement of comparability.
- The Authority, in partnership with stakeholders, will put in place a co-ordinated approach to the recognition of international awards and, in so doing, will bring about a consistent and coherent national approach.
- The process will be that queries are received by the Authority concerning information about awards made in Ireland and their value abroad and awards made abroad and their value here for various purposes, including both academic recognition and entrance to employment. At this stage, the Authority responds by providing information about existing agreements and arrangements. Where this is not sufficient, applicants complete an application form and submit a required set of documents describing their award. The Authority then consults with a relevant awarding body which conducts the assessment of the international award.
- The recognition service will be marketed as a single entity i.e. there would be a one-stop-shop for recognition queries and information. The title for this service will be Qualifications Recognition – Ireland. A distinct area within the Authority’s website will be developed.

- The policy approach will be consistent with the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.
- Recognition agreements will be sought on a proactive basis.
- A Recognition Implementation Group has been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Department of Education and Science. This group will be responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

This approach is set out in further detail below.

Policy Issues

Definition of recognition of international awards

In summary, it is set out above that recognition is generally understood to be advice by a competent authority on the comparability of the international award in the context of access to learning or employment.

Role of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

The various roles of the Authority and stakeholders are identified in the section titled Roles of Stakeholders in Recognition of International Awards above.

Given that the role of co-ordinating the international recognition activities rests with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, there is a need for the Authority to take a lead role. The Authority is then to be the first point of call for recognition queries and will facilitate the response to these by consulting with national and international awarding bodies, agencies and networks.

Recognition queries could be received from a number of sources e.g. directly from applicants, employers, government organisations, admission departments of institutions etc. Stakeholders will support the Authority's co-ordinating role by providing advice regarding the recognition application to the Authority.

Development of International Recognition Agreements

To date, much of the recognition of international awards has concerned the recognition of one (named) award as being comparable to a national award for a particular purpose. This has involved the detailed examination and comparison of particular awards. Indeed this examination also often involves an examination of the programme leading to an award. This recognition process is considered further below in the section on Process of Recognition of an Award.

While the continuation of the existing approach to the recognition of international awards will be necessary for particular purposes, it may not be necessary for all purposes and this is where frameworks can be helpful. For example, it is possible to develop comparability between levels in frameworks and thus to have confidence that awards at levels in different national frameworks which are recognised as being comparable have a common level of outcomes associated with them. This can be taken a stage further by the potential recognition of award-types in different jurisdictions as being comparable. There may still be a need for specific comparability arrangements between particular named awards for particular purposes.

There are two potentially similar areas where proactive developments will take place to ensure that recognition of international awards is not merely a reactive process.

These will be to either put in place a process whereby

- agreements are entered into with awarding or qualification framework bodies in other countries, or
- unilateral decisions are made within Ireland on the comparability of particular groups of international awards or frameworks of qualifications but with which the awarding or qualification framework bodies in other countries do not necessarily agree.

Agreements with awarding or qualification framework bodies internationally

In relation to agreements entered into with awarding or qualification framework bodies in other countries, there has been some movement towards agreements which are relevant to international agreement. Some examples are set out below:

- Movement towards an overarching European framework of higher education qualifications in the next stage of the Bologna process
- The investigation in the Copenhagen process of how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training
- The examination of the potential for aligning the various emerging frameworks of qualifications in Ireland and the United Kingdom as closely as possible within the broader European context, the issues arising and the potential meaning and consequences of any agreed levels comparability is discussed above
- The bilateral recognition agreements entered into in a limited number of areas in relation to Irish awards

It is considered appropriate that recognition agreements along the lines set out above are pursued proactively. The policy thrust in relation to the recognition of international awards should be towards Framework referencing or linking and establishing the levels of awards as opposed to having detailed recognition processes for all individual awards. Both the policy approach to recognition agreements and the process of considering recognition arrangements would need to be established initially. The Authority needs to work with the awarding bodies in order to determine how to proceed with setting up such agreements and agree the processes to be followed.

Any such agreements could assist in ensuring that there is an agreed approach internationally to the international recognition of awards and could result in reduced requirements for recognition of individual awards.

There is a need to consider with which countries it would be helpful to explore opportunities for recognition agreements.

Any such agreements which are put in place should be subject to review within an agreed timeframe. Such agreements would not compromise admission requirements and, in the case of further study, the final decision regarding admission lies with the learning institution.

Unilateral decisions are made within Ireland on the comparability of particular groups of international awards or frameworks of qualifications

In relation to unilateral decisions within Ireland on the comparability of particular international awards or frameworks of qualifications but with which the awarding or qualification framework bodies in other countries do not necessarily agree, there have not been many developments to date. The mechanisms to do this have not really been in place until now.

There are now movements in many countries toward national frameworks of qualifications and this can allow countries to determine the relative comparability of other international awards to their own. One example of this is the operation of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre in the United Kingdom. Comparabilities are set out by ECCTIS, which operates the Centre, between awards made in the United Kingdom and awards in other countries, including Ireland. There is some disquiet among Irish stakeholders about some of the comparabilities that have been determined.

There is a need to consider the potential development of unilateral decisions within Ireland on the comparability of particular international awards or frameworks of qualifications (with which the awarding or qualification framework bodies in other countries do not necessarily agree). It is important

to consider for which countries it might be beneficial to develop such unilateral decisions.

Process Issues

Notwithstanding the major policy issues that need further decisions and are referred to above, there is also a need to consider the nature of the processes that are to be put in place.

Information to applicants for recognition

It will be important that there is as much information as possible publicly available about the process of application for the recognition of awards and about any recognition decisions or agreements already made.

Formal application

There will be a need to develop a recognition application form that captures all of the necessary information in as accessible a way as possible. An initial version of such a form is already in use.

There can potentially be different applicants for the recognition service. It could be the holder of an award, a provider of education and training seeking to assess the award for the purpose of entry to a programme, or an employer seeking to assess the award for the purpose of entry to employment.

Translation

The recognition service will need to be made available for people from many different countries with awards made in many such countries. This will mean that consideration will need to be given to providing the service in languages

other than Irish and English and/or translating from and into languages other than Irish and English. In addition, there may be a need for confidence in the accuracy of translated text.

Referral

Where an application relates specifically to recognition for entry to regulated employment, there would be a referral to the Department of Education and Science which subsequently liaises with the relevant competent authority.

In many cases when a query is received by the Authority and it cannot be responded to on the basis of available information, the next step will be to refer it to an awarding body for consideration. It is considered that the referral would be to the awarding body which it would appear makes the most similar awards.

Assessment of award

Awarding bodies would then be responsible for determining the value of an award compared with their own awards. Such recognition advice by the awarding body would refer to the purpose of the recognition, but this would not necessarily mean that the purpose would be fulfilled as the responsibility here could rest with an employer or provider.

The advice given to the applicant is advisory in nature. The recognition advice given may determine the level of an award, its comparability to an Irish award, but not necessarily its full value.

The policy approach to assessing the comparability of an international award is also important. The policy approach will need to focus as far as possible on the outcomes associated with the award. However, further information may also

be necessary and it may be difficult to get information from countries that are not operating on an outcomes basis. In addition, there will be a need to ensure consistency in the assessment of awards among various awarding bodies.

Verification of authenticity

This is an important issue. There are a number of dimensions to this. There may be a need to authenticate that a particular provider of education and training and/or awarding body exists. There will be a need to authenticate that a particular award exists – this would need to be part of the recognition process.

There may also be a need to authenticate that a particular person actually has a particular award and is that person. Checking on the authenticity of an individual award holder should not be a matter for the recognition service. The advice issued to the applicant should include a general disclaimer which indicates that it is the responsibility of the employer and/or the learning institution to determine the authenticity of the award holder.

Verification arises, in particular, where it is not the holder of the award who is seeking recognition of an award.

Outcome of assessment

The manner in which the decision in relation to the recognition of an international award is set out is also relevant. There may be a need to detail where such rationale is sought.

Response to applicant

It is considered appropriate that responses would be channelled through the Authority. Thus the awarding body would inform the Authority of the outcome of the assessment and the Authority, in turn, would inform the applicant.

Speed of Response

Many applicants will be seeking immediate responses to queries and it may be possible to respond relatively quickly on queries where further referral by the Authority is not necessary. However, it is clear that there is a tension between the rigour of the recognition processes of awarding bodies and the speed at which responses can be made.

Appeals/Review Process

It is standard practice to have appeals/review processes in place for decisions such as recognition decisions.

It is difficult to have an appeals or review process for decisions which are made using existing recognition agreements.

Where advice has been made by the service, it may be possible to have an appeals/review process and further consideration of this will be undertaken. The outcome of such a process would either be to confirm the advice or to undertake the process again.

Applications from Refugees

Procedures will need to be put in place to accommodate applications for award recognition from refugees who may not have the necessary documentation to support their application. If satisfactory evidence exists to support their application, it should be possible to attain recognition and it should be possible

for applicants to take practical and/or written tests in order to prove their knowledge, skills and competences. Further consideration of this issue is needed.

Marketing of Recognition Services

As the implementation of the national policy approach in relation to the recognition of international awards takes place there is a need to consider how the recognition service can be marketed and advertised.

At one end of the spectrum there could be a very proactive approach with all potential entrants to the state being informed about the recognition service and with particular information being aimed at particular immigrant populations within the State. At the other end of the spectrum, a service could be built up from the existing service and knowledge of it could be spread as more and more applications are received.

It is envisaged that the recognition services of the ENIC - NARIC and NRP be marketed as a single entity i.e. there would be a one-stop-shop for recognition queries and information. The title for this service will be Qualifications Recognition – Ireland.

Any marketing of the service will need to have regard to the plans for the development of the service and the resources available to the service.

Marketing of the service should only be adopted when the recognition system is able to deliver results to the applicants. There is likely to be a dramatic increase in the number of recognition applications received once the service is advertised and so it is important that the necessary resources are put in place prior to marketing the services.

The recognition service is also linked to a number of other European and international developments in relation to transparency of awards and mobility and consideration will need to be given to ensuring that appropriate linkages are availed of.

The Authority is to set up an overall website, linked to the framework of qualifications and covering all awards and setting out as much information regarding the recognition of international awards as possible. A database of recognition applications is to be maintained by the Authority which stores all relevant information regarding applications received requesting recognition of international awards.

Recognition Fee

Currently there is no fee charged to the applicant for recognition services. This is a public policy matter which is open to review at a later stage. It is appropriate that for the cost of translation of documents be borne by the applicant.

Recognition Implementation Group

A Recognition Implementation Group has been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, HETAC, FETAC, the universities and the Department of Education and Science. This group will be responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

Among the areas of work for this group will be:

- Consideration of a review/appeals mechanism for advice provided by the service

- Identification of areas where recognition agreements or unilateral recognition decisions on groups of awards should be made
- Development of a coherent and consistent policy approach to the assessment of international awards
- Development of such recognition agreements of unilateral recognition decisions on groups of awards.

Appendix 1

Existing Recognition Activities

Organisation	Nature of recognition requests received	Volume of queries per annum	Query sub-groups	Procedures adopted	Average processing time	Feedback from applicants
Teagasc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young trained farmers seeking comparability for education and training attainments, in order to qualify for EU and Government farming schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to quantify. Letters are issued from local county offices. There was one case of a recognition request received from a non-national. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To date, queries received are almost exclusively from UK applicants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of awards are listed officially in the Finance Act 1994. Letter of comparability is issued to successful applicants if their award is listed in the Act. If the award is not officially listed in the Act and/or the course is not delivered by Teagasc, course details are checked (duration, content etc.) with the providers and relevant letters are issued. 		No
FÁS	<p>Applicants wish to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access employment Pursue further education Gain exemptions from examinations and/or training programmes. Establish comparability with Irish award. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figures not stated. Queries have increased dramatically over recent years. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case by case approach. Letter outlines procedures to be adopted by FÁS, FETAC and the Authority as interim arrangement regarding recognition of foreign awards. 	Number of weeks – 3 months.	

Organisation	Nature of recognition requests received	Volume of queries per annum	Query sub-groups	Procedures adopted	Average processing time	Feedback from applicants
Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants seek recognition for NVQ and other awards in order to complete their qualification in the Republic of Ireland, or seek information about the comparability of their award here • Applicants seek recognition for work based experience and prior learning. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK and Northern Ireland applicants. • Irish and EU applicants. • Non EU applicants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NVQ Level III = Cert/FI 2 Year Culinary programme. • Other programmes recognised i.e. Strongbow Trainer in Industry Award (UK) for progression. • Additional certificate not given, letter stating comparability provided. • NVQ Level 2 allows student to go to final year in an IT subject to space being available. • Applicants who have completed Part 1 of old City and Guilds programme may also be accommodated. • APL system operated for applicants with incomplete awards or applicants seeking recognition for work experience. • Close links with Culinary Training establishments in the EU mean that applications can be checked out easily. • Non EU applicants can go through a process similar to APL, if qualification unknown to FI • Procedures in place for practical and oral assessment • Consult FETAC/HETAC/NQAI 		
BIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants seeking comparability for Certificates awarded in Commercial Fishing, Aquaculture etc. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defer to FETAC and the Authority in order to find comparability for FETAC Certificate awards. • DCMNR sets the standards and awards Deck and Engineer Officer (Fishing) Certificates of Competency in Ireland. • UK fishing Certificates of Competency are recognised in Ireland by DCMNR and a procedure is currently in place for holders of Irish fishing Certificates of Competency to be issued with UK Certificates of Equivalent Competency. • With expansion of the EU, reciprocal recognition arrangements and harmonisation of training standards for fishing Certificates of Competency across the EU is required. 		

Organisation	Nature of recognition requests received	Volume of queries per annum	Query sub – groups	Procedures adopted	Average processing time	Feedback from applicants
CHIU – Under Graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants seeking admission to undergraduate programs of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies depending on university. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main resources used to determine comparability: UK NARIC database and cumulative experience at faculty level <p>A-Level and EU applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparability of A-Level and other EU matriculation and award standards are available to AO. Determination made by AO. <p>Non – EU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications are not assessed by AO but the office may participate therein. 		
CHIU – Post Graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants seeking admission to postgraduate programs of study. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparability of awards is determined by individual departments. Levels of some primary degrees are stated in faculty booklets. 		
DIT- Under Graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants seeking admission to undergraduate programs of study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 800 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU applications - handled by CAO. Non-EU applications - handled by AO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A speedy decision is required. 	
DIT – Post Graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants seeking admission to postgraduate programs of study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1400 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Applicants – 200 Non-EU applicants – 1200 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Graduates handled by Graduate Studies Office. Non – EU applications handled by Graduate Office and Admissions Office who are used to dealing with requests. UK NARIC database also used when determining comparability of non – EU qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A speedy decision is required. 	
Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants seeking admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programs of study. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IT sector has compiled a common procedure for dealing with applicants holding awards from foreign countries who wish to gain entry to the institutes. A scoring system has been developed for CAO purposes. This is available online at www.cao.ie/app_scoring/app_scoring.htm 		

Organisation	Nature of recognition requests received	Volume of queries per annum	Query sub – groups	Procedures adopted	Average processing time	Feedback from applicants
HETAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education providers wishing to register foreign students on undergraduate courses. • Education providers wishing to register foreign students on postgraduate courses. • Employment agency queries e.g. civil service commission and health boards. • Applications for recognition forwarded by the Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (UG) Received June – Sept not quantified. • (PG) 25 • (EA) 3 • (DA) 120 since July 2002 referred by the Authority. • 520 additional web-based queries received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate placements. (UG) • Post graduate placements. (PG) • Employment agency queries e.g. health boards. (EA) • Foreign graduates applying directly. (DA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following resources are often consulted: UK NARIC Directories of institutions Qualifications directories • Internet resources e.g. College websites UK NARIC database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on complexity of the query. • 1 day – 4 weeks. 	
FETAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment 72% • Further Learning 6% • Employment and Further Learning 11% • Not Stated 6% • Other 4% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48 since January 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to areas of specialisation • Majority of applications were in the Craft sector, other popular sectors are: Construction Hospitality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition requests accepted from Authority only • Applications checked for completeness • Requests logged in database • Comparable FETAC awards identified (where possible) • Competent technical experts identified and sought • Comparability exercise undertaken • Advice provided to Authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeks to Months. • Dependent upon factors stated in Note 1 below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None to date

Note 1

- Level of clarity of detail provided by applicant.
- Number of qualifications put forward for evaluation.
- Familiarity with foreign awarding body
- Response time from foreign awarding body
- Availability of technical expertise to compare qualifications.

List of Acronyms

- AO – Admissions Office
- APL – Accredited Prior Learning
- CAO – Central Applications Office
- DA – Direct Applications
- EA – Employment Agency
- NVQ – National Vocational Qualification
- PG – Postgraduate
- UG – Undergraduate

Appendix 2

Regulation and recognition of Professions

The regulation of professions in Ireland is governed by national legislation and European Union (EU) directives. The EU directives apply in the countries of the European Union and the three countries of the European Economic Area. The EU directives are either directly transposed into Irish Law or referenced in the national legislation for specific professions or professional activity.

There are presently two types of EU recognition directives, sectoral and general. The sectoral directives refer to 7 professions. These are: doctor, nurses responsible for general care, dentist, midwife, pharmacist, veterinary surgeon and architect. The sectoral directives make it possible for persons trained in one member state to practice their profession in another member state after their name has been included in the appropriate professional register in their own member state on the basis that their qualification meets the minimum conditions set out for the profession in the relevant directive. That is, if they possess the qualification listed in the sectoral directive they are automatically recognised for that profession across the EU. These professions in turn are covered by national legislation in Ireland which sets out the specific requirements relating to the regulation of these professions and refer to the appropriate directive.

The general systems directives have been transposed into national legislation. Statutory Instruments (SI) 1 of 1991 and 135 of 1996 list the professions and professional activities that are regulated by law in Ireland, other than those set out above. SI 36 of 2004 makes some amendments to the two previous regulations. The other, SI 372 of 2002, relates to other occupations and activities that are regulated in some other Member States but not in Ireland, for example, craft, trade and industrial activities.

For the purposes of the directives a regulated profession is a professional activity or group of professional activities, access to which and/or the practice of which, is subject, directly or indirectly, to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions. These provisions can be concerning possession of specific professional qualifications. The extent of the regulation of these professions/professional activities varies both in extent and in detail across the EU Member States.

The use of a professional title limited by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to holders of a given professional qualification also comes under the general heading of regulated professions. In this context the regulation of some of the professions in Ireland is solely concerned with regulating the use of title. The professions of engineer or surveyor, for example, are not regulated, only the use of the title *chartered engineer* or *chartered surveyor*.

For each of these professions and professional activities a designated authority/competent authority are listed in either EU and/or national legislation. These authorities can either be the relevant Minister, professional body or national authority. These designated/competent authorities are the authority (in the host member state) that can recognise/refuse to recognise awards/qualifications/attestation of competence from outside the state for taking up or pursuing a regulated profession. They can also require an adaptation period or the passing of an aptitude test if they determine that a substantial difference exists in the education and training received

by the applicant vis-a-vis that required in the host Member State, or if the application does not hold the required evidence of education and training.

The attestations of competence can be issued for an un-regulated profession or activity for the purposes of recognition in another member state where such a profession or activity is regulated.

In March 2001, the EU Commission made a proposal for a single consolidated Directive to replace 15 existing general and sectoral system directives in the field of the recognition of professional qualifications. This proposed Directive has received its first reading at the European Parliament and under the Irish Presidency, it is hoped that this dossier will be progressed to political agreement for the Competitiveness Council in May 2004.

The following list names the professions and professional activities identified in national legislation in Ireland and the associated designated authority. Those professions that are marked by * are only regulated in relation to the use of title.

PROFESSION/ PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY	DESIGNATED AUTHORITY ACCORDING TO SI/ACT
--	---

Health-related Professions

DOCTOR	Medical Council
GENERAL CARE NURSE	Bord Altranais
DENTAL PRACTITIONER	Dental Council
VETERINARY SURGEON	Veterinary Council
MIDWIFE	Bord Altranais
PHARMACIST	Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
DENTAL CRAFTSPERSON/TECHNICIAN	Minister for Health and Children
REGISTERED DISPENSING OPTICIAN	Bord na Radharcmhastóirí
REGISTERED OPHTHALMIC OPTICIAN	Bord na Radharcmhastóirí
ORTHOPTIST	Minister for Health and Children
AUDIOMETRIC TECHNICIAN	Minister for Health and Children
SPEECH THERAPIST	Minister for Health and Children
CHIROPODIST	Minister for Health and Children
REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSE	An Bord Altranais
REGISTERED NURSE IN LEARNING DIFFICULTIES/MENTALLY HANDICAPPED	An Bord Altranais
PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE	An Bord Altranais
REGISTERED SICK CHILDREN'S NURSE	An Bord Altranais
NURSE TUTOR	An Bord Altranais
CHARTERED PHYSIOTHERAPIST *	Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists acting with the approval of the Minister for Health and Children
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST	Minister for Health and Children
DIETICIAN	Minister for Health and Children

MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNICIAN	Academy of Medical Laboratory Sciences acting with the approval of the Minister for Health and Children
DIAGNOSTIC AND THERAPEUTIC RADIOGRAPHER / RADIOTHERAPIST	Minister for Health and Children
PHYSICIST	Minister for Health and Children
PSYCHOLOGIST	Minister for Health and Children
Law and Accountancy Professions	
SOLICITOR	Incorporated Law Society of Ireland
BARRISTER	Council of the Honourable Society of King's Inns
CHARTERED/CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANT	Chartered Association of Certified Accountants
TAX CONSULTANT *	Institute of Taxation in Ireland
ACCOUNTANTS REGISTERED AS AUDITORS	Chartered Association of Certified Accountants Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT	Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland
ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN *	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland

TECHNICIAN ACCOUNTANT * Institute of Certified
Public Accountants in
Ireland

PATENT AGENT Controller of Patents,
Designs and Trademarks

TRADE MARK AGENT Controller of Patents,
Designs and Trademarks

Teaching Professions

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER Minister for Education
and Science

REGISTERED SECONDARY
SCHOOL TEACHER Secondary Teachers
Registration Council
acting with the approval
of the Minister

COMMUNITY AND
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
TEACHER Minister for Education
and Science

VOCATIONAL SCHOOL
TEACHER Minister for Education
and Science

TEACHER OR LECTURER IN
REGIONAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL COLLEGES Minister for Education
and Science

Social Work-related and Tourism Professions

SOCIAL WORKER National Social Work
Qualifications Board
acting with the approval
of the Minister for Health
and Children.

Technical Professions

TECHNICIAN (ENGINEERING) * Institution of Engineers
of Ireland

ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN * Institution of Engineers
of Ireland

ARCHITECT * The Royal Institute of

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ASSOCIATE ENGINEER *	Institution of Engineers of Ireland
GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER *	Institution of Engineers of Ireland
CHARTERED SURVEYOR *	Society of Chartered Surveyors in the Republic of Ireland
CHARTERED TOWN PLANNER *	Royal Town Planning Institute Irish Branch, Southern Section
TOWN PLANNER *	Irish Planning Institute
CHEMIST *	Institute of Chemistry of Ireland
ANALYTICAL CHEMIST	Minister for Health and Children
BIOCHEMIST	Minister for Health and Children
MICROBIOLOGIST	Minister for Health and Children
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER	Minister for Health and Children
Transport Professions	
MARINE ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS 1	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
MARINE ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS II	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
MARINE ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS III	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
MARINE ENGINEERING OFFICER CLASS IV	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
SHIPS DECK OFFICER CLASS II	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources

	Resources
SHIPS DECK OFFICER CLASS III	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
SHIPS DECK OFFICER CLASS IV	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
SHIPS DECK OFFICER CLASS V	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER MERCHANT MARINE	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER CLASS I MASTER MARINER	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
SHIP RADIO OFFICER	Director of Telecommunications Regulations
ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS I (FU)	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS II (FU)- FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
ENGINEER OFFICER CLASS III (FU) FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER SKIPPER FULL FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER SKIPPER LIMITED FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER SECOND HAND FULL FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources

DECK OFFICER SECOND HAND LIMITED FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
DECK OFFICER SECOND HAND SPECIAL FISHING FLEET	Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE ENGINEER	Irish Aviation Authority
PILOT	Irish Aviation Authority
FLIGHT ENGINEER	Irish Aviation Authority

Appendix 3

2003 Summary Report on the Co-Ordination by the Authority of the Recognition of International Awards

Applications received

A total of 324 applications for recognition of foreign qualifications were received by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland during 2003.

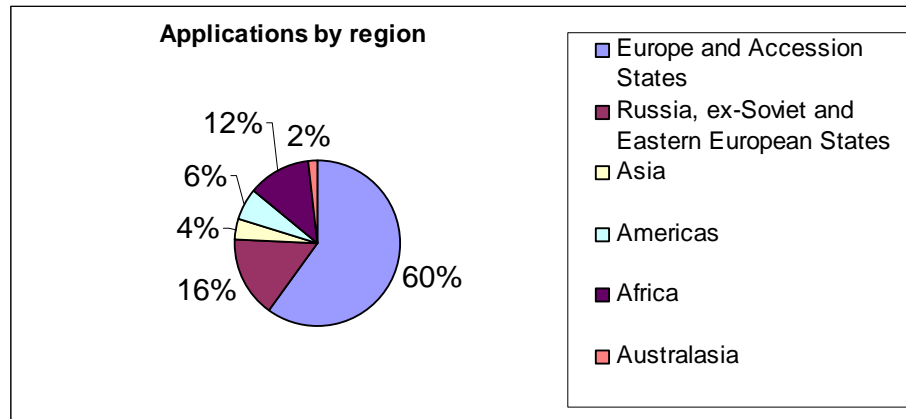
Origin of applications

Applications were received from applicants holding qualifications made by bodies in 50 countries in total. The following table shows each country, along with the total number of applications received from each.

Origin of award	Number of applications
UK	97
Ukraine	23
Spain	22
Nigeria	20
Romania	20
Germany	19
USA	13
Italy	11
Russia	11
Moldova	7
Zimbabwe	7
South Africa	5
Australia	5
Belarus	4
Canada	4
France	4
Lithuania	4
Philippines	4
Poland	3
Georgia	3
Greece	3
Bulgaria	2
Iran	2
Egypt	2
Estonia	2
Algeria	1

Origin of award	Number of applications
Afghanistan	1
Argentina	1
Austria	1
Belgium	1
Cameroon	1
Chile	1
China	1
Croatia	1
Cuba	1
Denmark	1
Holland	1
India	1
Iraq	1
Latvia	1
Malta	1
Morocco	1
New Zealand	1
Pakistan	1
Palestine	1
Portugal	1
Georgia	1
Sudan	1
Switzerland	1
Syria	1
Tunisia	1
Zaire	1
TOTAL	324

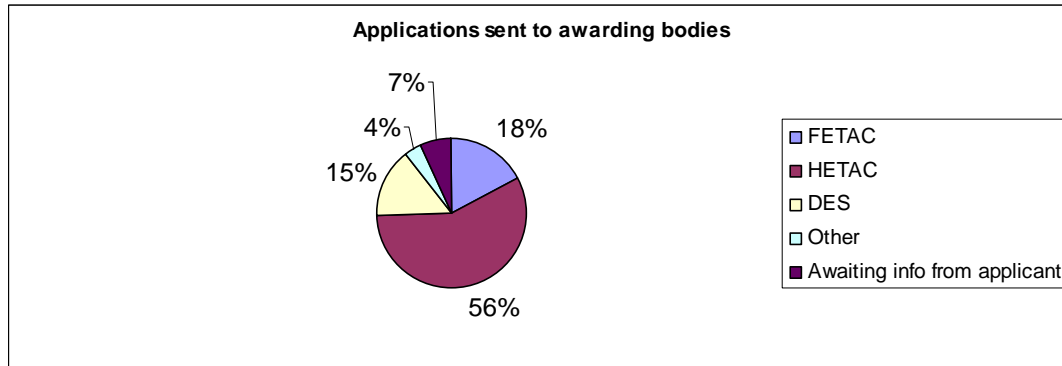
In order to get a picture of the areas of the world from where most applications originated, applications were grouped into the following regions; Europe and Accession States, Russia, ex-Soviet and Eastern European States, Asia, the Americas, Africa and Australasia. The following pie chart shows the percentage of applications received from each geographical region. The largest group of applications originated from Europe and the Accession States with the second largest group of applications originating from Russia, ex-Soviet and Eastern European States.



Awarding bodies consulted

In processing applications for recognition, the Authority consulted with FETAC, HETAC and the Department of Education and Science in order to make a determination regarding the comparability of the foreign qualification. In situations where the above three bodies were not in a position to advise the Authority, the advice of other bodies was sought. This group was generally the university sector; heads of departments within TCD, UCD, NUIG, NUI Maynooth, were consulted depending on the nature of the query. In addition, applications were sometimes forwarded to a regulating body for their advice e.g. the Academy of Medical Laboratory Science, the Law Society etc. A number of applications did not contain sufficient information in order to make a determination; this group of applications has been set aside as the Authority is awaiting the applicant to revert with additional information e.g. transcripts of results, translation of documents etc.

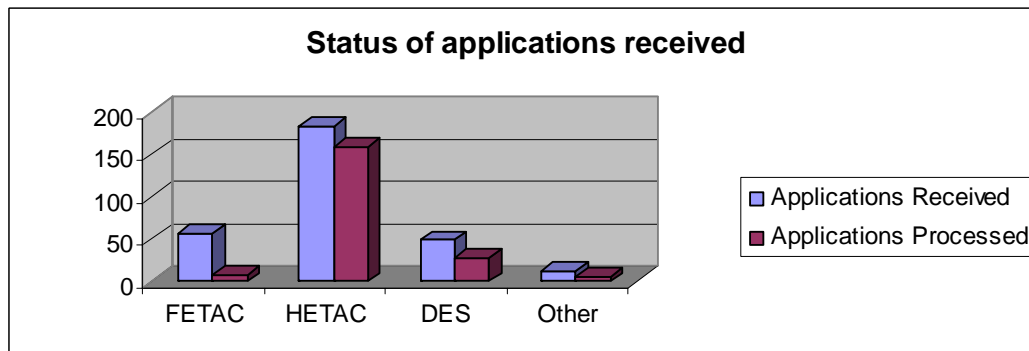
The following table shows the percentage of applications sent to each external body for advice on the comparability of the qualification:



Outcome of application for recognition

Once the applicant's file had been sent to the appropriate awarding body, the Authority awaits the advice of the awarding body. Applicants are kept updated regarding the status of the application. Once the awarding body or external body has advised the Authority, the information is communicated to the applicant within one week.

The following chart shows the number of applications sent to each of the external bodies and the number of applications which have since been processed and closed.



General queries

In addition to actual applications received, the Authority receives many queries by telephone, post, e-mail, fax and walk-in. The queries are generally from individuals. Queries can vary from people requesting information regarding EU directives, procedures to registering with regulated professions to procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications. In addition, government agencies and networks such as ENIC - NARIC and NRP on occasion contact the Authority seeking information and guidance. Records of such queries were not stored until November 2003. Since the beginning of November 2003, the Authority has dealt with 100 such queries.

Appendix 4

Report on Study Visit to ENIC - NARIC and NRP Offices in the Netherlands, November 2003

Background

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland intended to conduct a study visit to an established European ENIC - NARIC and NRP centre. The objectives of the visit were as follows:

- to familiarise ENIC - NARIC/NRP Ireland and related personnel with work practices in an established ENIC - NARIC/NRP
- to learn and benefit from their experience in award recognition
- to assist in deciding how best to further develop the operations of ENIC - NARIC/NRP Ireland
- to support the establishment of policies and procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland.

Research was conducted into a number of European ENIC - NARIC and NRP centres. The ENIC - NARIC in the Netherlands, known as NUFFIC, was chosen as the most suitable ENIC - NARIC to visit as it is well established, operates in a similar manner to ENIC - NARIC Ireland and has a history of hosting study visits by foreign visitors. The Dutch NRP office, known as COLO, was also approached and agreed to meet with the Irish delegation.

Representatives from the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council were also invited to participate on the visit. The following representatives attended:

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	Valerie Beatty, Carmel Kelly
The Further Education and Training Awards Council	Liam Carroll
The Higher Education and Training Awards Council	Renee Scully

During the two day visit, the group met with the following organisations:

NUFFIC (ENIC - NARIC the Netherlands)

COLO (NRP the Netherlands)

Haagse Hogeschool (University of Professional Education)

Meeting dates and itinerary were decided in conjunction with the colleagues at the three organisations in the Netherlands. A full programme for the study visit is attached in appendix 1.

Introduction to credential evaluation in the Netherlands

Both NUFFIC and COLO were founded in the early 1950s. At that time, the third level and further education/vocational education sectors operated completely independently. Credential evaluation was launched at NUFFIC in 1959; in 1984 the office assumed the role of NARIC. In the 1990s the ministry decided that credential evaluation for the further education/vocational sector, which was not the main work of NUFFIC, should be moved to COLO. Initially, this decision was viewed with hostility by NUFFIC who saw COLO as potential competitors. Nowadays, they are partner organisations working together very intensely; e.g. they are

currently joining forces to develop an information system relating to recognition which will support the work of both organisations.

NUFFIC

NUFFIC arranged a number of meetings with various members of staff in order to discuss various topics with the group.

1. Organisation and Functions

NUFFIC was founded in 1952 and now has 180 employees. It is an independent, not-for-profit organisation. It aims to foster international cooperation in higher education by:

- Programme management development cooperation
- Student and staff exchange
- Marketing
- Recognition and certification

2. Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

The Centre for International Recognition and Certification is responsible for the recognition function within the organisation. There are 23 staff members working in this section of NUFFIC. The main activities of the centre are:

- Credential evaluation
- Accreditation of prior learning

Credential Evaluation

The centre processes academic recognition and professional recognition requests. It offers advice to the applicant; this advice does not refer to legal regulations and has no legal status. The aim of the advice is to provide guidance for an employer or an educational institute in the Netherlands when considering applications from individuals who hold foreign qualifications. The employers and institutes are not bound to adhere to the advice provided by NUFFIC.

On average, NUFFIC receives 7,000 applications per annum. The largest number of applications relate to qualifications obtained in the Russian Federation (400) and the USA (400). Other countries with large numbers of applications are China (350), Morocco/Turkey (300). NUFFIC has processed in the region of 60,000 applications over the past 40 years.

Evaluations are conducted within NUFFIC. There are a number of credential evaluators within the organisation. These evaluators are generally assigned applications either by geographical area, language or similar education systems. Clients are varied and include the government, universities/hogescholen, employers, employment offices, refugee organizations, as well as individuals. The service costs €65 to individual applicants, however, to all other groups the service is offered free of charge. The majority of applicants come through other agencies rather than applying directly to NUFFIC.

The turnaround time between receipt of the recognition application and the forwarding of the recognition advice is 4 weeks.

It is interesting to note that the Dutch government insists that each migrant worker and refugee who enters the Netherlands and wishes to live and work there attend a compulsory integration programme. The programme includes instruction in the Dutch language and Dutch culture as well as classes on the country's government and public systems. Migrant workers and refugees are informed about the role of NUFFIC and COLO as part of the programme.

Credential evaluation criteria

In order to make a determination regarding comparability of a qualification, the following factors are taken into consideration:

- The purpose of the evaluation
- Prior evaluations of the same qualification, ensuring consistency in recognition practice
- Status of the institution where the applicant studied for the qualification
- Status of the awarding body

The material criteria which inform the recognition decision are as follows:

- Selectivity (what are the entry requirements to the programme in the home country)
- Learning outcomes and competencies
- Duration/study load
- Structure
- Content
- Differences in quality between programmes/institutions

Differences between qualifications under the above headings are viewed with flexibility, and only relevant substantial differences should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition.

Outcome of evaluation

The recognition advice given to the applicant generally takes the following format:

- Describes the qualification and how it fits into the system in the home country
- Compares it to the Dutch education system
- Concludes with a recommendation regarding how the qualification compares best to a Dutch qualification.

Themes within credential evaluation

a. Authenticity

In cases when there is doubt regarding the authenticity of qualifications, applicants are asked to present the original qualification to the NUFFIC office. On occasion, institutes are contacted in order to verify whether particular documents are genuine and whether they were rightfully issued to the applicant. Such evidence of authenticity is only requested on occasions where there is a serious doubt regarding authenticity. Verifying the authenticity of qualifications from Iraq and Afghanistan are currently posing particular difficulties for NUFFIC. NUFFIC is establishing a link with the police forensic unit to learn more about forgeries in this area.

b. Standardisation/Computerisation

NUFFIC is currently working on an integrated information system in conjunction with COLO. The system is called COMPARE and is designed to help manage the recognition function within NUFFIC and COLO. The COMPARE information system will be described further in point 3 below.

c. Internal Quality Assurance

Meetings are held within NUFFIC to ensure consistency regarding recognition methodology, wording of recommendation statements etc. It is hoped that the information system (COMPARE) will help to ensure consistency in recognition procedures.

3. Resources and Information Systems Library

NUFFIC has an extensive library which describes education systems worldwide. The library contains a large amount of books and publications published over the years. In addition to the resources in the library, credential evaluators, who are specialists in particular countries or regions of the world, keep relevant reference material in their offices. These resources are also categorised and recorded by the library.

COMPARE database

NUFFIC and COLO have developed an information system which is used to manage the recognition function within the organisations. The system has been in development for one year and will soon be ready for piloting. It is a web-enabled system which allows the organisations store and access recognition records in a consistent manner.

The screens are designed in chronological order which reflects the working process within the organisations. After logging on, there is a search screen which allows users to search through the database of applications by various search criteria such as surname, diploma, country etc. Users then can go through a number of screens which allow them to view documents relating to a particular case, add new applicants, view the status of recognition applications etc.

Currently, the system consists of a database which stores the data regarding applications (applicant contact details, description of qualification, date received etc.). Any documentation which has been issued to an applicant (acknowledgement of receipt of application, recognition statement etc.) are stored in Microsoft Word form in a directory linked to the database of applications. This system allows for ease of storage and retrieval of all material relating to recognition of qualifications within NUFFIC and COLO. The aim is that once the system is operational, all historical and current documentation and data relating to recognition within NUFFIC and COLO will be stored and available through the system.

Websites

NUFFIC has developed a number of websites which relate to its functions both in the area of recognition of foreign qualifications and additional projects. These sites are as follows:

www.idw.nl

Developed by NUFFIC and COLO, describes procedure for recognition of qualifications, how and where to apply etc.

www.professionalrecognition.nl

Describes recognition of professional qualifications, EU directives and where to send recognition applications.

www.leraarin.nl

Describes how people with foreign qualifications can become teachers in the Netherlands.

www.nccic.nl

Site which explains the certification of non-degree programmes in the Netherlands. Site is under construction.

www.ice-plar.nl

European project led by NUFFIC which aims to find ways of linking International Credential Evaluation and Prior Learning Assessment.

www.geesteswetenschappen.nl

Website offering information about programmes and research in the humanities in the Netherlands and Flanders. Currently under construction.

4. Additional projects

ACCEPT prior learning, lifelong learning

Identification, assessment and recognition of all forms of learning (especially non-formal and informal learning) is seen as an important prerequisite for the creation of a European area of lifelong learning. NUFFIC has been involved in a number of projects to explore the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands. A number of Accrediting Competencies acquired in Education, Professional Training and Employment (ACCEPT) projects have been initiated.

Example 1: Foreign medical doctors

At present, the Dutch ENIC - NARIC is developing a portfolio module for foreign medical doctors who wish to enrol in a Dutch medical study programme because their foreign qualification is not recognised in the Netherlands. The project is financially supported by the APL Knowledge Centre within NUFFIC and carried out in conjunction with the University of Utrecht. The main aim of the portfolio is to give the foreign qualified students the opportunity to describe in detail their previous learning experiences (within formal study, extra-curricular activities, employment, conferences, and so on) in such a manner that the staff at the University of Utrecht can better understand what they know and are able to do. Candidates are expected to provide evidence to support all declarations made within the portfolio with certificates, reference letters, transcripts etc. It is envisaged that clear, accurate and verifiable experience description might result in recognition of prior learning experience and thus result in a shorter study programme for the applicant.

As part of the project, the manner of displaying the information in the portfolio was studied so that it could be of maximum benefit to the academic staff, admission officers and examination committee.

Example 2: Immigrants and Refugees

A similar project is underway regarding immigrants and refugees. The aim of this project is to improve access to the Dutch labour market for such groups. The project attempts to identify a realistic and attainable professional target for the candidates and to determine a tailor-made programme that prepares the immigrant for this professional target.

COLO

COLO was established in the early 1950s. It now has 40 staff, 10 of whom are working in the recognition section.

The Dutch education system

The structure of the Dutch education system was explained. COLO has developed a standard explanatory letter and diagram of the system which it forwards to enquirers whenever it receives requests regarding the Dutch education system from bodies abroad. These documents are available in appendix 2.

Recognition process at COLO

COLO processes award recognition queries received concerning secondary vocational and further education. As is the case in NUFFIC, COLO offers advice to the applicant; this advice has no legal status.

Applications are received at COLO. COLO has contracted a number of credential evaluators distributed throughout various secondary vocational and further education institutes/bodies in the Netherlands. Generally, these evaluators are experts within a particular sector e.g. childcare, motor mechanics etc.

Once an application is received, some background research is conducted into the application at COLO regarding the status of the institute and the awarding body, duration of the studies etc. This information is noted on a standard form and the application is forwarded to the appropriate credential evaluator. Evaluators are paid on a per case basis (€60 per evaluation). Evaluators are expected to complete the form and make a recognition recommendation based on the information provided.

The service costs €105 to individual applicants, to all national bodies the service is offered free of charge. The majority of applications come through national bodies.

The turnaround time between receipt of the recognition application and the forwarding of the recognition advice is 8 weeks.

Resources

COLO has an extensive library containing information regarding education systems and qualifications worldwide. This library is consulted frequently and updated whenever additional information becomes available.

Haagse Hogeschool

Introduction

The group visited the Haagse Hogeschool (HH), which is a University of Professional Education in the Netherlands. There are 56 such schools in the Netherlands. The purpose of such higher professional education (hbo) is to offer theoretical instruction and to emphasise the development of the practical skills required for success in a particular profession. The other option for students is regular university education that emphasises more theoretical and research-oriented aspects of study.

The institute has a student population of approximately 15,000 and offers 50 programmes from its 15 Departments. Programmes are offered at undergraduate and postgraduate level, a number of which are delivered entirely in English. The majority of students enrolled on these courses are foreign.

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

In order to ascertain whether applicants have satisfied the entry requirements for its study programmes, HH has to deal with the recognition of foreign qualifications. If applications are submitted from countries or institutes which HH has not dealt with before, the application is forwarded to NUFFIC for credential evaluation. If similar applications have been dealt with previously, then HH checks the previous evaluation and gives a similar response to the applicant.

In addition to satisfying minimum entry requirements, applicants on occasion may have to complete tests which test their subject matter or language competences. It is interesting to note that an alternate entry route exists for applicants who are over the age of 21 who do not fulfill the minimum entry requirements. These applicants can take a generic test to confirm their competences. This test covers four areas: Dutch, English, History and Social Studies/General Knowledge.

European Credit Transfer System

Work on implementing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is ongoing in the institute. HH is the amalgamation of a number of faculties which previously worked independently of each other. Due to the diverse nature and historical context of the faculties that make up the institute, difficulties have arisen in the implementation of the ECTS.

Conclusion

It was agreed that the visit was most informative and worthwhile. It provided a very valuable networking opportunity with an ENIC - NARIC and NRP with many of the characteristics of the Irish situation but with many more years of experience to draw on.

Report on Study Visit to ENIC – NARIC and NRP Offices in Denmark, March 2004

Background

In follow up to the visit to the ENIC - NARIC and NRP in the Netherlands conducted in November 2003, it was decided to conduct a study visit to ENIC – NARIC and NRP Denmark. Denmark was chosen as the target country for the following reasons:

- The ENIC - NARIC and NRP functions are carried out in the same office, similar to Ireland
- The Danish office is well established and its functions are well defined.

The following representatives from the Authority, HETAC and FETAC participated in the visit:

The Authority	Valerie Beatty
	Carmel Kelly
FETAC	Liam Carroll
HETAC	Renee Scully

During the two day visit, the group visited the following organisations:

CVUU (Danish Centre for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications)

CIRIUS (Danish Centre for International Cooperation and Mobility in Education and Training)

Meeting dates and itinerary were decided in conjunction with the colleagues at CVUU and CIRIUS.

CVUU

CVUU arranged a number of meetings with various members of staff in order to discuss various topics with the group.

5. Organisation and Functions

CVUU was established in January 2000 as a part of the State Education Grants and Loan Scheme Authority. In summer 2002, the centre was transferred to the National Education Authority (higher education area) within the Danish Ministry of Education. The centre's main activities are as follows:

- Information and knowledge centre for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications
- Coordinating body in relation to Denmark's implementation of the European Union's general system for the recognition of professional qualifications.

6. Legislative Background

The basis for CVUU's work has been laid down in legislation governing the assessment of foreign qualifications. The Danish government was concerned about the number of people with foreign qualifications resident in Denmark who were unable to practice their particular profession because their qualifications were not recognised in Denmark. For that reason, the Danish Ministry of Education enacted legislation which governs the assessment of foreign qualifications in Denmark. The basis for CVUU's work has been provided for in this legislation. The pieces of legislation are as follows:

- Assessment of Foreign Qualifications etc. (Consolidation) Act 2003
- Assessment of Foreign Qualifications etc. Order 2003

The objective of the legislation was to provide a fast, transparent method for assessment of foreign awards and also to provide an opportunity to implement the Lisbon Convention in Denmark.

With regard to the above legislation, some important aspects are as follows:

- The legislation gives CVUU statutory authority in assessing foreign qualifications. The decision CVUU makes regarding the comparability of the foreign qualification is binding.
- Professional bodies which make decisions on access to regulated professions are obliged to obtain an assessment from CVUU when an applicant approaches them wishing to practice the profession. Certain designated authorities are exempt from this obligation if their current assessment standards are deemed to be high enough by CVUU. A number of authorities currently have this exemption e.g. National Health Board which oversees a number of medical professions.
- An appeals mechanism was established under the legislation. A Qualifications Board was set up. Holders of foreign qualifications who have applied for admission to a university and are not happy with the recognition decision attained therein may appeal the decision to the Qualifications Board. This board is comprised of representatives from a number of educational institutions.

- It is interesting to note that the CVUU has the right to set up Boards of Experts (Education Councils) to assist in setting and advising on general standards with regard to recognition. These boards meet four times a year. The following boards are in existence:
 - Science and Health
 - Technology and Craftsmanship
 - Social Sciences and Business
 - Humanities and Education
 - Arts

7. Assessment of qualifications

General

There are 6 full-time staff members working in credential evaluation. The centre processes about 1000 recognition applications per annum. Staff members are assigned a number of countries and they assess all applications (school, higher, vocational) which are received from those countries. In 2003, the top five countries from where awards were attained were: Iraq, UK, Former USSR, Sweden, Former Yugoslav Republic countries. The majority of awards presented to the CVUU relate to the teaching and engineering professions. The service is offered free of charge.

Assessment Process

The assessment process complies with national legislation, the Lisbon Convention and the associated recommendations and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications. The assessment is of level, not of comparability.

In general, the assessment process ascertains the following facts about the programme leading to the award:

- Whether the educational institution is officially recognised in the home country
- The admission level to the programme
- The duration of the programme
- The subjects studied/courses taken
- Details about the dissertation
- The balance between theory and practice

The process is as follows:

- Applicants complete an application form
- Attested documentation is included;
 - Photocopies of the Diploma and transcripts and translations of both
 - Photocopies of marriage certificate/name certificate if applicable

If there is doubt regarding the validity of the documentation, the applicant is asked to present the originals at the CVUU office. A checklist is completed for each application to ensure that all documentation has been included. The evaluator makes a decision on the application. This is read by a supervisor or discussed at a weekly meeting for credential evaluators.

Outcome of Evaluation

A written assessment is sent to the applicant which contains the following information:

- Information on the level of the award in the home country
- The name of the degree in the original language, educational institution, country, duration of the programme and year of completion
- The comparison with a Danish level
-

CIRIUS

1. Organisation and Functions

CIRIUS is an independent, governmental institution connected to the Danish Ministry of Education. It was established in July 2000 as a merger of activities previously carried out by several centres. CIRIUS is the Danish coordination agency for the three major educational programmes of the European Union, Socrates, Leonardo, Youth, and for a number of other programmes and schemes that contribute to international cooperation in education and training.

Its main focus is to work for internationalisation of education and training at all levels with a focus on

- Mobility of students and staff
- Transnational cooperation
- Intercultural understanding

CIRIUS informed the Irish group about the following initiatives which the institution is involved in:

Diploma Supplement

Institutions in Denmark have been obliged to issue the Diploma Supplement since September 2001. CIRIUS acted as an information point and a help line for the institutions implementing the Diploma Supplement. In addition, CIRIUS cooperates with the EU appointed ECTS and DS counsellors.

By 2004, most institutions issue the DS in English to all students.

Certificate Supplement

The Ministry of Education decided to develop the CS in 2000. The Danish model and the content of the CS was prepared in close cooperation with 6 trade unions. The model is a 2 page description available in Danish, English, French and German. By 2002, 187 CS were finalised. They have been distributed to schools and trade committees. The CSs are available on Cirius' website.

Institutions are not obliged to provide students with the CS. CIRIUS is responsible for any updates which need to be made to the CS going forward.

EuroPass

CIRIUS has coordinated the EuroPass initiative since 2001. To date, the office has distributed 3,600 EuroPass documents to educational institutions etc. In general, Danish users like the EuroPass concept but there are some technical obstacles to using it, e.g. it has to be completed by hand, an electronic version is not available etc.

The proposed new EUROPASS framework has been discussed in Denmark. In general the consensus is that conceptually EUROPASS is a good idea and that the combination of all the documents into one framework will have a stronger communicational impact than each of the documents has individually. However, some problematic areas have been identified:

- There may be a problem regarding the layout and logos used in the new EUROPASS framework. Institutions in Denmark have spent a lot of time developing the various documents e.g. the DS. The new framework may require current formats to be reworked which may be problematic.
- The Diploma Supplement and Mobilipass are personal documents which under the new framework will be available for download over the www. This may have implications for data protection and the potential for forgery. Also, ECTS transcripts of records will be available on the www.

Trends in Danish Higher Education – An Overview

With regard to the Bologna Process, there has been much development in Denmark and other Nordic countries over recent years.

The following points were noted:

- The Bachelors/Masters structure was introduced in the 1990s. The old third level education system is soon to be abolished.
- Denmark ratified the Lisbon Convention in 2003 and the legislation which deals with recognition issues was designed to fit the requirements as laid down by the Lisbon Convention.
- ECTS has been obligatory since 2002.
- Grading systems are in the process of being changed in Denmark in order to align the system with European standards.
- Denmark is currently involved in the development of a national framework of qualifications as well as being involved in the development of the European Framework of Qualifications.

Conclusion

There are plans to combine the offices of CVUU and CIRIUS later this year. Both offices work in a similar area and it is anticipated that combining the offices will lead to increased collaboration and the opportunity to centralise expertise within the new office.

The Irish group found the study visit to Denmark very interesting and worthwhile. It is beneficial to know how the Danish ENIC – NARIC and NRP office has organised its work and undertakes its functions. The potential for collaboration between the Irish and Danish ENIC - NARIC and NRP in the development of the work of the offices has been raised and will be considered further in the future.

Appendix 5

Analysis of Existing Recognition Agreements

Organisation	Reply Received	Agreements in Place Yes/No	Type of Agreement
Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland	Yes	Yes	Bilateral with Australia and United Kingdom for Certified Public Accountants, EU Directive
Irish Aviation Authority, Hawkins House, Dublin 2.	Yes	Yes	International- Joint Aviation Authorities of Europe, 23 countries. Agreements on Aircraft Engineers, Cabin Crew and Pilots
National Social Work Qualifications Board	Yes	Yes	EU Directive, Accreditation of non-EU qualifications for Professional Social Worker.
Department of Education and Science, Teachers Reg. Section	Yes	Yes	EU Directive, Accreditation of non-EU qualifications for Secondary teachers, Recognition of specified UK qualifications
Institute of Engineers of Ireland	Yes	Yes	Bilateral with Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Hong Kong on the recognition of registered professional titles CEng.; Bilateral with United Kingdom, South Africa, Canada for Engineering Technicians, Incorporated Engineers and Associate Engineers.; Mutual Recognition with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States, South Africa, Hong Kong on the recognition of accredited Engineering Degree, Diploma and Certificate programmes; International Register of Professional Engineers- Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States, South Africa, Hong Kong Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Ireland.
Council of the Honourable Society	Yes	Yes	Bilateral (N. Ireland), Directive
FÁS	Yes	Yes	Bilateral with UK National Training Organisation for crafts of Electrician and Plumber, agreement on Toolmaker and Fitter unsigned. Bilateral with UCLA Extension for Film and TV training awards (ends sept. 2002). Previous agreements with France, Germany and C&G now ceased.
CERT, Research and Certification	Yes	No	
Teagasc	Yes	No	
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Yes	No	International recognition the responsibility of the Dept. of the Marine and Natural Resources
Law Society of Ireland	Yes	Yes	EU Directive, Bilateral with New York and Pennsylvania Bar Society, New Zealand for Solicitor/Lawyer,
Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists	Yes	Yes	EU Directive, Accreditation of non-EU qualifications for Physiotherapists
Bórd na Radharcmhastóirí	Yes	Yes	EU Directive, Accreditation of non-EU qualifications for Ophthalmic Opticians (Optometrists) and Dispensing Opticians
Institute of Taxation in Ireland	Yes	Yes	Bilateral with United Kingdom for Associates/Fellows of the Institute of Taxation
Controllers of Patents	Yes	Yes	Directive/EC Council Regulation

Appendix 6

Summary of Nature of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications

The basic structure of the Irish national framework of qualifications is one based on levels. Each level has a specified level indicator. At each level in the framework there are one, or more, award-types. Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor. It has been the responsibility of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to develop these level indicators and award-type descriptors.

For each award-type a wide range of named awards are being developed. It is the responsibility of awarding bodies to develop named awards.

The framework is intended to enable the recognition of all learning achievements and the range of award-types provided will facilitate this inclusiveness. Not all combinations of achievement, at a given level, are the same or of equal importance. Some award-types fulfil a broader range of purposes and these are labelled major award-types. Other, more limited or specialised, recognition needs are met by minor, supplemental and special-purpose award-types. The following are the classes of award-types determined by the Authority:

- Major award-types are the principal class of awards made at each level. At most levels, such award-types capture a typical range of achievements at the level
- A minor award-type will provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, without achieving the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award
- Special-purpose award-types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes
- Supplemental award-types are for learning which is additional to a previous award.

International frameworks of qualifications are also generally based on similar concepts of levels, generic award-types and individual named awards.

Within a national framework, levels allow for award-types to be placed at a level on an overall, best-fit, basis rather than by conformity to a defined set of required outcomes. Thus the placing of two award-types at the same level indicates that in general that have a common level of outcomes associated with them, but this does not mean that they are equivalent.

Building on this, the development of two named awards of different major award-types at the same level signifies that the awards have a common level of outcomes associated with them.

Existing and previously made awards are those that were made either before the framework existed, or after it was put in place, but prior to implementation of the new framework standards for award-types. Such awards will retain their identities and their value and their standing /status as awards in their own right and for employment and progression. Such awards (sometimes referred to as legacy awards) will be accommodated in the framework and will be placed on the Framework levels, even though they may not fully conform to any new award-type (because they are designed differently). Many such award types will cease to be offered as the framework approach is implemented. The process of placing these awards in the framework has already begun. The Authority is working with the awarding bodies to agree the placement of existing awards at appropriate levels in the Framework.