

**National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Corporate Plan, 2003 – 2006
(including a Report on 2001 – 2003)**

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Chairperson's Foreword

This document is being published at a very exciting time for the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and provides a timely report on the work of the Authority over the last two and a half years. This follows closely on the recent public launch of the National Framework of Qualifications. While the report relates to the work of the Authority itself, it reflects also the detailed work in which the Authority has been engaged in partnership with national stakeholders.

Building on this, the document sets out the plans of the Authority for the next three years. The implementation of the Framework is a most important national endeavour. The plans of the Authority have particular regard to the collaborative nature of this implementation. Over the next three years all of those involved in education and training will need to work together to make the National Framework of Qualifications a reality for learners, providers and awards bodies and for society as a whole.

The changes that are to be brought about over the next three years are not changes that the Authority, together with the awards bodies, can bring about without having also the active co-operation of other stakeholders. In particular, the providers of learning opportunities will face the challenge, arising from the development and implementation of the Framework, of putting in place suitable opportunities for learners which will lead to recognition in an appropriate way in the Framework and to progression to further learning or to the labour force.

While this is a three year plan, it is recognised by the Authority that it will need to revisit its plan during that time. This will help to ensure that the work of the Authority continues to be appropriately focussed and to have regard to developments as they arise during the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Dick Langford

Chairperson

Part I - Introduction

1 Introduction

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established on 26 February 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The arrangements for membership of the Authority are set out in the Act and provide for a broad basis of background and expertise in the membership of the Authority. The current members of the Authority are listed in appendix 1. The Authority currently has 13 members of staff. These are listed in appendix 2.

The Authority has a range of functions to perform in leading a cultural change in learning. The two principal tasks of the Authority are as follows:

- To establish and maintain a National Framework of Qualifications
- To promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression.

Through the performance of these two principal tasks, the key cultural change sought is to refocus the arrangements for learners accessing learning opportunities and attaining awards on the needs of learners themselves. The outcome will be a more diverse learner community throughout further and higher education and training; it will include a higher proportion of adults, more learners engaged in part-time programmes, workers seeking to update or extend their awards, and many learners with a variety of special needs. These new participants will require new entry arrangements to ensure accurate matching of learner and programme, the recognition of prior learning, new kinds of provision and new arrangements for progression as they seek to meet their personal learning and award objectives. Whatever specific strategies are adopted, it is certain that it will be necessary for many groups and individuals at all levels in our education and training systems to participate in, contribute to and be subject to processes of change.

The Authority is now at a key time in its work. Over the past two and a half years it has been consulting with stakeholders and developing its policy approach. The approach of the Authority to this consultation process is to use it as a way to help stakeholders to take ownership of the overall changes in culture that the Authority is driving and to listen to the suggestions of stakeholders in this context. This form of consultation is key to preparing the ground for the changes to be implemented. The Authority is now at the point where it has finalised the outline National Framework of Qualifications and its policies on access, transfer and progression for learners.

This publication incorporates in Part II, a report by the Authority on its work since its establishment and in Part III, the planning by the Authority for its work over the next three years.

2 Overall Approach

This chapter sets out the mission statement of the Authority and the overall policy approach adopted by the Authority.

Mission Statement

The mission statement of the Authority is as follows:

The Authority will lead a cultural change, in partnership with stakeholders, with the aim of achieving

- wide recognition of outcomes of learning, and
- improved access for learners to quality learning opportunities.

Policy Approach

The Authority has already established its overall policy approach in relation to the development of the National Framework of Qualifications and access, transfer and progression for learners. The remainder of this chapter summarises this policy approach.

Framework Definition

The Authority has defined the National Framework of Qualifications 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.”

Vision for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression

The Authority has also developed a composite vision for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression:

“The learner should be able to enter and successfully participate in a programme, or series of programmes leading to an award, or series of awards, in pursuit of their learning objectives. The National Framework of Qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry, and to promote transfer and progression, so that learners are encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities.”

Vision for the Recognition of Learning

The establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications, and the work of the Authority generally, presents a vision for the future, with the needs of the learner taking priority. This represents a new departure in Irish

education and training, and there is a unique opportunity to develop the awards system for education and training in an innovative and creative way, ensuring that Ireland is at the leading edge of international developments in this area.

The importance of knowledge to present day society and economies has never been greater. We are entering an age of knowledge in which the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity has become knowledge itself. In order to be a knowledge society we must also become a lifelong learning society. The development of a lifelong learning society is a stated national and European policy.

The Framework, and the work of the Authority as a whole, must facilitate the cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community by measuring, as appropriate, relevant learning achievements in this regard and relating them to each other. Such participation by citizens in society has become known as “active citizenship”. The concept incorporates the mutually supporting objectives of personal fulfillment, democratic participation, social inclusion, adaptability and employability.

To ensure compatibility with this vision, the Authority has also set out that the development of the Framework will be undertaken in accordance with an integrated set of basic values and principles: equality and accessibility, comprehensiveness and coherence, transparency and simplicity, quality, and relevance.

This vision for the recognition of learning and these values and principles will continue to be implemented by the Authority and will inform the performance by the Authority of all of its functions.

Approach by Authority to its Work

Arising from the vision, values and principles set out above, the Authority has also decided that its work should be undertaken in accordance with a set of process guidelines. These guidelines can be summarised under six headings: consultation and inclusiveness, research and evaluation, best management practices, facilitating change, the international dimension, subsidiarity and autonomy.

Part II – Report

3 Introduction to Report

The Authority is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 to prepare a report on its activities every two years. The Authority was established on 26 February 2001. The Authority also wishes to formally recognise and endorse the strategic approaches, taken in the first two and a half years of its work, through a report on the work of the Authority during that time.

4 Sections in Report

This report is grouped into the following sections below:

- 4.1 Transitional arrangements
- 4.2 Development of the National Framework of Qualifications and related Policy Tasks
- 4.3 International Policy Engagement
- 4.4 International Recognition of Awards
- 4.5 Corporate Arrangements

In each of these sections there is a summary of the actions undertaken by the Authority from its establishment until now.

4.1 Transitional arrangements

An important area of work for the Authority has been to support the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council by putting in place transitional arrangements. The overall approach undertaken by the Councils and the Authority has facilitated the smooth transfer of responsibilities to the awards Councils and the implementation by the Councils of transitional arrangements, initially pending the setting out of the National Framework of Qualifications and now pending its full implementation. This has involved:

- Initial consultation, prior to the establishment of the Councils in June 2001, on the nature of the transitional arrangements that needed to be put in place for the performance by the Councils of their functions to ensure a smooth carrying on of existing business
- The determination of such initial procedures in June and July 2001 following formal consultation with the Councils immediately following their establishment

- The updating of these procedures in December 2001 and in April 2003, following consultation with the Councils
- The development of initial procedures for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, in September 2001, following consultation with the Council, in relation to the Council delegating authority to certain recognised institutions to make awards
- The putting in place, in June and July 2001, of an interim appeals process where the validation of a programme is refused or withdrawn by one of the awards Councils
- The agreement of the Authority to the initial delegation of authority by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in autumn 2001 to four institutes of technology to make awards
- The agreement with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in April and June 2003, to procedures and criteria in relation to reviews leading to the delegation of authority to make awards by the Council
- The agreement of the Authority to the strategic plan of the Further Education and Training Awards Council which was published in summer 2003.

The Authority has also put in place a number of transitional arrangements in relation to quality assurance and awards with institutes of technology, as follows:

- In June 2002, the Authority agreed interim procedures for quality assurance under the Qualifications Act with the Dublin Institute of Technology
- In April and June 2003, the Authority approved, on a transitional basis, arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology with awarding bodies other than the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

4.2 Development of the National Framework of Qualifications and related Policy Tasks

The two principal tasks of the Authority are:

- To establish and maintain a National Framework of Qualifications
- To promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression.

These have been the main focus of the work of the Authority to date and the Authority has engaged in a range of activities relating to these functions since its establishment. These are set out below.

Consultation and Research

The Authority engaged in a formal consultation process to discuss the strategic approach of the Authority with all stakeholders. In November 2001 the Authority published “Towards a National Framework of Qualifications: A Discussion Document”. The publication of the document was an important step by the Authority; it set a context for the development of the work of the Authority and, in particular, for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications. The purpose of the document was to explore how the Authority might approach the performance of its functions. The Discussion Document formed the basis of a broad consultative process. The Authority received over 80 written submissions. These have all been published by the Authority on its website (www.nqai.ie). On February 14th, 2002 the Authority hosted a National Forum at Dublin Castle. The Forum was attended by over 300 delegates. It provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to consider the issues raised in the Discussion Document and in the subsequent consultation process.

The Authority considered that a formal process of engagement with stakeholders was necessary to advance to the next stage of Framework development. Accordingly, in March 2002, the Authority established a Consultative Group whose role is to assist the Authority initially in the

preparation of the National Framework of Qualifications and of the policy approach to access, transfer and progression for learners. The consultative group has a broad membership representing the main stakeholders of the Authority – awarding bodies, providers of further and higher education and training, social partners including, learner representatives and statutory agencies. The group meets on a regular basis and has been of great assistance to the Authority. The Authority has also engaged in a wide range of bi-lateral and multi-lateral meetings with stakeholders. An example is the three consultative meetings to date convened by the Authority and the awards Councils with representatives of the community and voluntary sector.

In addition, the Authority has established an expert advisory group in relation to credit. The task of the group is to assist the Authority in the consideration of the possibilities for the development of a system or systems for credit accumulation and transfer to complement the National Framework of Qualifications, and the appropriate roles of stakeholders in such developments.

In May 2002 the Authority also published a further discussion paper – “Towards a National Framework of Qualifications – Inclusion of Professional and International Awards – A Discussion Paper”. The paper was prepared with a view to discussing how to include in the National Framework of Qualifications awards from private bodies in the State, such as professional bodies, and from international bodies of various kinds making awards to learners in the State. Following the receipt of submissions, in February and May 2003 the Authority hosted workshops on the inclusion of professional and international awards in the Framework. Reports on these workshops are available on the website of the Authority.

The Authority also undertook some international research in relation to national Frameworks of qualifications. A summary of this work was published by the Authority on its website in June 2002.

In addition, the Authority also looked at the development of the Framework from an employment perspective. It established a consultative group, representative of agencies and employer and employee representative bodies. A report on focus groups organised by the Authority was published in January 2003.

In September/October 2002, on behalf of the Authority, Lansdowne Market Research undertook two surveys of learners and employers on their awareness of and attitudes to existing qualifications and awarding bodies. These surveys were published by the Authority on its website in January 2003. The purpose of the surveys was twofold: to benchmark awareness and attitudes; and to inform the introduction and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Policies and Criteria for the Framework

Under section 8 (2)(a) of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 the Authority is to determine policies and criteria for the Framework. In April 2002 the Authority published a document, “Towards a National Framework of Qualifications – Establishment of Policies and Criteria”. This document contains:

- Vision and principles
- Process guidelines
- A definition of knowledge, skill and competence
- The basic architecture of the Framework.

Over the period October 2002 – March 2003, the Authority determined further policies and criteria for the Framework as follows:

- Division of knowledge, skill and competence into sub-strands for the specification of level indicators
- Further policies and criteria for award-types
- Policies and criteria for the placement of existing and former awards in the Framework.

Framework Determinations

Between October 2002 and April 2003, the Authority made a number of determinations relating to the National Framework of Qualifications:

- The Authority determined that the Framework will consist of 10 levels
- It also determined a 10-Level grid of level indicators. The grid shows how the outcomes in each of the eight sub-strands progress across the ten levels. The level indicators set out in this grid are intended to enable the Authority to place award-types at appropriate levels in the Framework based on the mix of learning outcomes they contain
- The Authority determined the initial major award-types for each of the ten levels in the Framework. The outline Framework contains fifteen such award-types. The Authority also determined titles and descriptors for these award-types
- The Authority determined the differentiation between further and higher education and training under section 10 of the Act
- The Authority also determined that it is through the descriptors for the award-types that the Authority will set the overall standards of the awards of the two awards Councils and the Dublin Institute of Technology and that by determining award-type descriptors the overall standards are, accordingly, now set.

Access, Transfer & Progression for Learners

In March 2003, the Authority established policies, actions and procedures in relation to the key object of promoting and facilitating access, transfer and progression for learners, which included a composite vision for the promotion

and facilitation of access, transfer and progression. The policies also incorporated objectives for a national approach to credit.

Communicating the Framework

The Authority has developed a communications strategy for the Framework with the following four objectives: generating awareness of the Framework; delivering accurate and comprehensive information; creating confidence in the Framework and; preparing the ground for successful implementation.

Different audiences have been identified for particular messages. The aim is that awarding bodies and major national stakeholders are directly involved in the communication strategy and the coordination of onward communications.

A cascading approach is being implemented and this involves the sequential targeting of audiences over 3 phases. This includes multi-layered information delivery utilising indirect channels. The phases set out cover the period March 2003 to the end of 2004. The first phase from March to September 2003 has addressed the awarding bodies and major national stakeholders. The public launch of the Framework took place at a national conference on 17 October, 2003. The next phases will address a wider audience of providers, social partners, representative bodies, teachers, trainers and the media.

4.3 International Policy Engagement

The overall approach of the Authority has been to aim to make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches rather than merely being reactive to such change. In making such inputs the Authority has endeavoured to undertake collaborative approaches with the active involvement of stakeholders and, in particular, both the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. There is interdependency in the work of the three bodies and this is particularly reflected in the work of these organisations outside the State where the particular division of work between the three bodies needs to be carefully planned and implemented.

Under the Qualifications Act, the Authority was required to co-opt two expert members, at least one of whom should have international experience. The approach decided by the Authority has been to co-opt two people with particular experience of developments outside the State – the current co-optees are Professor Anne Moran of the University of Ulster and Dr. Abrar Hasan of the OECD.

Copenhagen and Bologna processes

On 30 November 2002, Ministers for Vocational Education and Training from 30 European countries adopted a Declaration in Copenhagen 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.

Throughout the process of the preparation of the Copenhagen Declaration, the Authority has supported the two key Departments involved – the Department of

Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Departments agreed that the Authority would represent the State on the coordination group set up to oversee the initial plans for the Declaration and now for its implementation. The Authority hosted a national briefing and consultative seminar on the process on behalf of the two Departments in September 2002 which was viewed as having a key input into the Irish policy approach to the Declaration. The Authority, together with the Further Education and Training Awards Council, hosted a further such seminar on implementing the Declaration in October 2003. A number of technical working groups have been established for the implementation of the Declaration. The Authority is involved with the group on credit transfer and the Further Education and Training Awards Council is involved with the quality assurance group.

The Authority is also assisting the Department of Education and Science in an initiative linked with the Copenhagen Declaration. The European Commission has established ten expert working groups in relation to the implementation of the objectives, established by the European Council, relating to education and training systems in Europe. These are part of the Commission's work programme on education. Each expert group is to have at least one workshop which will be hosted by a member state. Group H concerns making learning more attractive and linking learning with the world of work and the Authority represents Ireland on the group. The Authority hosted an international seminar on the work of the group in May 2003. The general purpose of the seminar was to exchange approaches to good practice in adult education, in-formal and non-formal learning and in partnerships in education and training with a view to increasing the attractiveness of learning and strengthening links between learning and society in general.

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 relation to the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, the Authority has supported the development of an outcomes-based approach to describing and comparing qualifications. The Authority, together with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, engaged in a collaborative exercise, involving Dutch, German, Flemish, UK, Irish, Spanish, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian agencies, which was entitled the Joint Quality Initiative and led to outcome descriptors for the first cycle of Bologna (Bachelors Degree) and the second cycle of Bologna (Masters). These descriptors are referred to as the Dublin Descriptors as they were finalised at a meeting hosted by the Council and the Authority in Dublin Castle in February 2002. The Dublin Descriptors represent an informal agreement and there are further European developments anticipated. The Authority has adopted the policy of seeking to have further work undertaken on defining the outcomes associated with the cycles through an overarching European Framework of qualifications. The Authority has also played a key role in discussions within Ireland in relation to the Bologna Declaration through its involvement with the Department of Education and Science’s steering group.

The Authority is an associate member of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies – the Higher Education Authority and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council are full members. This Network is playing a key role in bringing about the European dimension to quality assurance which is part of the process of the implementation of the Bologna Declaration. It provides an opportunity for the development of best practice models. The Authority is also a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – the main purpose of the Network is to collect and disseminate information on current and developing

theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education.

OECD

The Authority has engaged with the OECD in work on the role of national qualification Frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The key initial element in this activity is the preparation of a Country Background Report; these reports from participating countries will form the basis of a composite report by the OECD. The Authority has now submitted this report to the OECD. An advisory group of national stakeholders assisted the Authority in this task.

The Authority has also coordinated one of three thematic groups set up to explore particular aspects of the overall subject of the activity. The group is addressing the issue of “The development and use of qualifications Frameworks as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems”. An international workshop for participants was hosted by the Authority in May 2003.

4.4 International Recognition of Awards

Ireland and the United Kingdom

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 linking or cross-referencing of the various emerging frameworks of qualifications on these islands within the broader European context. The organisations are to meet again in 2004.

Coordination of Recognition of International Awards

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is in the process of becoming the national coordinating point in relation to the recognition of international awards. This is in line with the statutory role of the Authority in relation to the facilitation of the recognition of awards. The Authority is aiming to put in place as simple and understandable a system for the recognition of awards as possible, while ensuring that the autonomy of awarding bodies, including the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the awards Councils is protected.

Some initial steps have been taken to develop this role for the Authority. Planning is underway for the implementation of the recommendations of the European Forum on the Transparency of Vocational Qualifications. The European Forum proposed that each Member State would designate one National Reference Point responsible for providing information on national vocational qualifications and 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 Higher Education Authority has taken 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 Network is now being subsumed into the European Network of Information Centres, 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 become the national centre for both networks. The transfer took place with effect from the start of February 2003.

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

In the interim, the Authority has coordinated responses to recognition queries. In this regard, the two awards Councils have processed many of the recognition queries.

4.5 Corporate Arrangements

On an immediate basis after its establishment the Authority had to commence operating as a corporate body funded by the Department of Education and Science. The appropriate financial arrangements and procedures were put in place in 2001 to ensure that the administration of the Authority was effective and efficient. These have since been further developed. The Authority has been informed by the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Finance in October 2001 and has agreed appropriate processes and procedures in line with this, such as developing a policy approach to internal financial control which includes the engagement of a firm of accountants on the Authority's behalf. The Authority has also established an Internal Audit Committee which has commenced its work. In addition, the Authority has formally listed the functions that it reserves to itself.

The Authority also had to allocate grants to the awards Councils. A grant was allocated to the Further Education and Training Awards Council in 2001 and both Councils have received grants since then. The detailed information is as follow:

- A total grant of €1,569,349 (£1,236,000) was paid to the Further Education and Training Awards Council in 2001
- A total grant of €6,477,250 was paid to the Further Education and Training Awards Council in 2002
- A total grant of €1,909,000 was paid to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in 2002.

In 2003, the following initial grant allocations for the Councils have been determined and funding is being transferred on a regular basis:

- A total grant of €5,238,739 for the Further Education and Training Awards Council

- A total grant of €2,768,100 for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

Financial reporting arrangements have also been agreed with the Councils.

The Authority's grant allocation for itself in 2001 was €672,941 (£530,000) and it spent €614,941 (£484,000). The Authority's grant allocation for itself in 2002 was €2,198,000 and it spent €2,022,372. The initial grant allocation for 2003 is €1,493,161.

In April 2003, following a request from the Department of Education and Science to review the fees charged by the awards Councils, the Authority published a discussion paper reviewing the fees paid by education and training providers to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. Submissions were invited on this paper and a number have been received and made publicly available.

The Authority also moved to adopt a logo and establish a website in 2001.

The Authority was initially located in serviced offices and moved to long-term office accommodation in Jervis House, Jervis Street, Dublin 1, in February 2003.

From its establishment in February 2001, the Authority made arrangements for staff to be recruited and employed on a short-term basis, while the Authority arranged to appoint a chief executive. A chief executive was appointed in March 2002 and since that appointment, permanent recruitment has been completed. There are now 13 staff employed by the Authority. The approach to the staffing of the Authority is for a small team to be put in place with key policy development and change leading functions and for the continuing redeployment of staff based on development areas.

Part III - Plan

5 Emerging Themes

The Plan of the Authority for the performance of its functions over the next three years is set out in this Part. Seven emerging themes grouping the Authority's functions are introduced and a high level objective is associated with each of these themes.

In chapter 6, there is a breakdown of each of these themes in turn, a setting out of the various action lines emerging within each of these themes and the potential timetable for these action lines. A series of performance indicators is also developed in relation to each theme.

In planning for the future, it is helpful to group the functions of the Authority into a number of themes. The following grouping of functions of the Authority through themes is considered helpful by the Authority in planning for the performance of its functions:

- National Framework of Qualifications
- Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners
- Supporting the Awards Councils
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology
- International Policy Engagement
- International Recognition of Awards
- Organisation Culture of the Authority.

The Authority considers that while particular themes may encompass more of the functions of the Authority than others, the Authority is not setting out the themes in a hierarchy and all themes are considered vital to the Authority in performing its functions.

Objectives for Emerging Themes

The Authority has developed a high level objective associated with each of the themes as follows:

- National Framework of Qualifications – The objective will be that by autumn 2006 all of the policies and criteria of the Authority in relation to the Framework will have been determined, the initial major award-types in the Framework will be fully implemented and that planning will have been completed for the commencement of a review of the operation of the Framework
- Access, transfer and progression for learners - The objective will be that there will be increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners by autumn 2006 consistent with the new Framework
- Supporting the awards Councils - The objective will be that the Authority supports the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence
- Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology - The objective will be that the Authority supports the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence
- International Policy Engagement - The objective will be that the Authority will make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches and will collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing

- International recognition of awards - The objective will be that a national policy approach to the international recognition of awards will be put in place by early 2004 and that this will be implemented by autumn 2006
- Organisation culture of the Authority - The objective will be to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

6 Development of the Themes

The plan now continues to break down each of these themes in turn and looks at the various action lines emerging within each theme and the proposed timetable for the action lines.

There is also a range of performance indicators set out for each of the themes. It is recognised that the Authority's role and functions can be characterised by an interdependency with many stakeholders. The performance indicators have been developed having regard for this interdependency.

In the case of each theme, one of the important performance indicators is that the actions outlined in each theme are performed by the Authority within the timetable set out.

There is also a need for performance indicators which look at the effectiveness of the manner in which the Authority has performed its functions, as well as the efficiency with which the functions are performed. The approach taken has been to focus on the views of stakeholders on the effectiveness and efficiency of the performance by the Authority of its functions.

The policy approach also generally provides for reviews of the National Framework of Qualifications and related issues, planning for which is to be completed within the timescale for the plan. Such reviews are also an important measure of performance.

The Authority will need to work, in consultation with stakeholders, towards further definition of performance indicators and to consider how to measure these.

6.1 Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications

The objective will be that by autumn 2006 all of the policies and criteria of the Authority in relation to the Framework will have been determined, the initial major award-types in the Framework will be fully implemented and that planning will have been completed for the commencement of a review of the operation of the Framework.

This dimension of the Authority's work concerns the continuing development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. It is also concerned with the future review of the Framework. In addition, it concerns the advocacy role of the Authority in promoting cultural change in learning and in helping to shape national policy approaches.

The work undertaken to date by the Authority in the development, implementation and communication of the Framework is set out in Part II, chapter 4.

6.1.1 Further Framework development

Major Award-types for the Further Education and Training Awards Council

The Authority has already determined the initial major award-types of the Council. The Council is to review whether there are sufficient initial major award-types determined by the Authority for the Council and the descriptors for these by the end of spring 2004. The Council may advise the Authority in

relation to the possible development of these. The Authority is to consider any such advice with a view to any decisions by summer 2004.

The higher doctorate award-type

The Authority is to examine how a descriptor for such an award-type, typically achieved on the basis of a substantial body of scholarly work after the first doctorate, might be developed, in consultation with stakeholders. The aim will be that a descriptor will be adopted by the Authority by spring 2004.

University Awards

The universities are considering how awards which they make at up to and including level 6 might be incorporated within the Framework. The aim is that the policy approach to include these will be determined by the Authority in winter 2004.

Minor, special purpose and supplemental awards

The Authority aims to adopt descriptors for these award-types beginning in spring 2004.

Professional awards

The Authority aims to publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of professional awards in the National Framework of Qualifications by summer 2004. The aim is to consult on these with a view to the policy approach being determined by summer 2005.

International awards

The Authority aims to publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of international awards in the National Framework of Qualifications by summer 2004. The aim is to consult on these with a view to the policy approach being determined by summer 2005.

Awards other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate made by the Department of Education and Science

The Authority aims to consult further with the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission on the inclusion of awards made by the Department/Examinations Commission, other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework. It is hoped that the policy approach to include these will be determined by the Authority in summer 2004.

Institutes of technology – approval of awarding arrangements

In April and June 2003, the Authority approved, on a transitional basis, of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology with awarding bodies other than the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. The Authority aims to consult on further arrangements in the context of developments in relation to the inclusion of professional and international awards in the Framework. The aim is to determine a policy approach by summer 2005 on the approval of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology.

6.1.2 Implementation of Framework

Working with awarding bodies

The Authority will work with the principal awarding bodies in further and higher education and training – the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities – in facilitating the implementation of the Framework.

The Authority will also work closely with those organisations involved in schools awards – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the

State Examinations Commission and the Department of Education and Science
– in facilitating the implementation of the Framework.

This work will continue throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Fields of Learning

The Authority will facilitate linkages between the awarding bodies in the implementation of standard setting across fields of learning where more than one awarding body is involved. This work will continue throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Award Classifications

The Authority will examine the national approach to award classifications. Award classifications are the manner in which the outcomes of an award are described, for example, first, second or third class, or merit and distinction. It will aim to do so in consultation with stakeholders. The Authority will then consider the appropriateness of developing a national policy approach on the issue by winter 2005.

Titles

The Authority has already developed a policy approach to titles and determined the titles of the initial major award-types in the Framework. The Authority will discuss the appropriateness of consistency of titles of named awards with stakeholders. The Authority will then consider the appropriateness of developing a national policy approach on the issue by summer 2004.

6.1.3 Advocacy and Promotion

Advocacy

The Authority will take a lead role in advocating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the development of

the Framework generally and the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression. This role will involve

- contributing to policy-making at national level
- participation in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups
- the establishment, where appropriate, of consortia of relevant stakeholders to enable the development of consensus for change
- participation in debate and discourse on issues relevant to qualifications and to access, transfer and progression, including the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops as appropriate.

Communications strategy

The Authority has developed a communications strategy to establish the identity of the National Framework of Qualifications and to ensure confidence in its implementation. This will involve a three-phased process of communication on the Framework and its implementation.

A cascading approach is being implemented and this involves the sequential targeting of audiences over 3 phases. This includes multi-layered information delivery utilising indirect channels. The phases set out cover the period spring 2003 to the end of 2004. The next phases will address a wider audience of providers, social partners, representative bodies, teachers, trainers and the media.

Register

The Authority will consult with stakeholders on how the inclusion of a particular named award in the Framework should be communicated and the possible extent to which all named awards in the Framework, and programmes leading to these, might be included in an overall Framework Register. The Authority will develop a policy approach on this issue by summer 2004.

Website

The Authority will review and develop its website by spring 2004 and will ensure that all appropriate information on this is included in a user-friendly way.

Annual Framework conference

The Authority will host an annual Framework conference to facilitate national stakeholders being updated on the development and implementation of the Framework and to facilitate those developing and implementing the Framework to consult further with stakeholders.

6.1.4 Placement of existing and previous awards

To date there has not been any placement of existing and previous awards in the Framework. The policy approach has been defined by the Authority. The aim is that as much placing as possible will take place by winter 2003. It is recognised that all placement may not be possible by that time, particularly in the case of existing and previous further education and training awards and the aim is that such placements will all have been made by winter 2004.

6.1.5 Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance

Organisation of a forum

The Authority will facilitate the exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance in education and training. This will involve hosting a conference by winter 2004 which will involve providers of education and training and all of the bodies in the State with a responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of operation of quality assurance arrangements, including the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Irish Universities Quality Board, the Higher

Education Authority, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science and the Authority itself.

Consultation with HEA on its university quality assurance review role

The Higher Education Authority has the role of reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the universities. The Higher Education Authority must consult with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in performing this function. The Authority will continue to advise the Higher Education Authority on the review which is already underway and on any subsequent reviews.

6.1.6 Framework review

Level 6 review

The differentiation between further and higher education and training at level 6 relates to standards of knowledge, skill and competence. These standards have been set through the descriptors for the award-types. The key differentiating factor between the two is the emphasis that each places on particular learning outcomes in the descriptors. In making the determination, the Authority indicated that it will review its decision in spring 2006.

Overall review of Framework

The Authority is planning that an initial review of the Framework and its implementation will take place in 2006/2007. The Authority aims to have the policy approach in relation to this review determined by autumn 2006.

6.1.7 Performance Indicators

The Authority has set out in 6.1.6 above that it is to commence a Framework review process. In this context, the following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which the architecture of the Framework, including the sub-strands of learning outcomes, the classes of award-types and the standards for award-types, is implemented
- The awareness and attitudes of stakeholders, including learners and employers, to the National Framework of Qualifications and its implementation and relevance to them
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view of the effectiveness of the Framework in meeting its objectives
- The inclusion of policy approaches proposed or promoted by the Authority in national policies.

6.2 Theme 2 – Access, Transfer & Progression for Learners

The objective will be that there will be increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners by autumn 2006 consistent with the new Framework

The above objective summarises the following four objectives that are already part of the policies of the Authority:

- **Objective 1** – To develop an integrated National Framework of Qualifications.
- **Objective 2** – To identify and realise a network of clearly signposted transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of Qualifications, and to ensure that learners are facilitated to avail of these routes.
- **Objective 3** – To ensure that learners can avail of entry arrangements to all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications that are fair, transparent, and compliant with equality legislation.
- **Objective 4** – To ensure that accurate and reliable information is available to all learners, through a range of approaches and formats that is accessible to a diversity of learners, to enable them to plan their learning on the basis of a clear understanding of the awards available and the associated entry arrangements and transfer and progression routes.

6.2.1 Facilitating implementation of policies for access, transfer & progression

Facilitation of change

The Authority will take a lead role in coordinating the cultural changes needed at structural, organisational and individual levels to support the achievement of the objectives for access, transfer and progression. This role will involve

- contributing to policy-making at national level
- participation in national and sectoral coordinating and development groups
- the establishment, where appropriate, of consortia of relevant stakeholders to enable the development of consensus for change
- participation in debate and discourse on issues relevant to qualifications and to access, transfer and progression, including the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops as appropriate.

In the facilitation of change, the Authority will collaborate actively with the two awards Councils, whose function it is to ensure that the procedures set down for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers under their auspices. The policy of the Authority is that the awards Councils will facilitate the relevant providers in making changes in systems, structures and programmes that will be necessary in the context of the emerging new learner groups and new kinds of learning, and particularly in the context of the policies of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression.

Credit

The Authority has set out principles, guidelines and objectives for a national approach to credit. The next stage in the development process will involve consideration of how to implement the national approach to credit. Of particular relevance will be further consideration of whether the national approach to credit will lead to the creation of a single national credit system or

a national system of credit arrangements. The Authority aims to have plans for the implementation of a national approach to credit established by summer 2004.

The Authority also has an important role to play in international liaison, in partnership with other key stakeholders, and in the coordination of developments in Ireland with international initiatives in the area of credit. In particular, in further developing a national approach to credit, it is necessary to take into account the recent and ongoing European initiatives.

Transfer and Progression Routes

The Authority has determined procedures to be implemented by providers to promote the extension of transfer and progression routes at all levels of the system, and to clarify for learners the arrangements for use of transfer and progression routes. However, these measures alone will not fully meet the objective of achieving a network of clearly delineated, accessible transfer and progression routes through the National Framework of Qualifications: this will also require active intervention at various levels to encourage and facilitate the process of extending the network of routes. The awards Councils have a primary role to play in this facilitation. However, there are elements of the system where the remit of the awards Councils does not apply.

Accordingly, the Authority will adopt a coordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level. This may involve intervention to initiate processes of transfer and progression route development across the divide of responsibilities of the various awarding bodies – e.g. between awards of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and a university. As the body with the widest overview of the situation, the Authority will identify gaps and blockages in transfer and progression routes, indicate the arrangements

required to bridge gaps or remove obstacles, and identify the appropriate bodies to take the necessary actions.

Entry Arrangements

In addition to the setting of procedures to be implemented by providers and the awards Councils, the improvement of entry arrangements will require action to bring about changes – for example, to remove barriers or to develop consistency in factors identified as necessary for successful participation – in areas of education and training that are not within the remit of the Councils, such as the universities, and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Accordingly, the Authority will adopt a proactive facilitating role with providers and awarding bodies outside the remit of the Councils, and a coordinating role in ensuring that the objective of transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements, in compliance with equality legislation, is achieved for all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications.

The Authority, working with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, which has been established within the Higher Education Authority, will seek to ensure the development and implementation of appropriate entry arrangements to higher education and training for adult learners.

Information Provision

The Authority will actively represent the need to have a wider information-base for learners in relation to qualifications, and will participate with other key stakeholders in the development of policies in this regard. If necessary, the policies, actions and procedures established by the Authority in relation to information provision will be adjusted to ensure that they are in concert with

the provisions of any new systems or structures emerging in the areas of information and guidance for learners.

6.2.2 Further policy development & implementation

Consortium on access of higher education

The Authority is in discussions with the Higher Education Authority, in the context of the establishment of the National Office, with a view to drawing together a Consortium of relevant partner organisations to address the issue of entry to higher education and training by adult learners. A Consortium could identify appropriate entry arrangements and seek agreement on their implementation. Appropriate entry arrangements could be additional or alternative to existing arrangements and/or could involve the adaptation of existing arrangements, as required to facilitate participation by adult learners. The aim is to complete these discussions and determine a way forward by summer 2004.

Procedures for providers

The Authority will develop the existing procedures in consultation with stakeholders.

The procedures will be reviewed in the context of the Framework review set out above.

Assistance to Providers in Implementing Procedures

The Authority will consider further possible ways to assist providers in the implementation of the procedures that the Authority has determined by summer 2004, having regard to the role of the awards Councils in ensuring that certain providers implement the procedures.

Universities access, transfer & progression review

The Authority will determine the policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the universities by autumn 2006. It will do so in consultation with stakeholders generally and, in particular with the universities and the Higher Education Authority.

6.2.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which stakeholders in learning have a positive view on the effectiveness of the policies of the Authority on access, transfer and progression for learners
- Increased diversity in arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners
- Increased information available about such diverse arrangements.

6.3 Theme 3 – Supporting the awards Councils.

The objective will be that the Authority supports the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

There is a close link between the work of the Authority and of the awards Councils. This is particularly the case in relation to the first two themes in this plan. This section of the plan concerns the planning, funding and review role of the Authority in relation to the Councils.

6.3.1 Funding Role

Funding awards Councils

The Authority will aim to ensure that the Councils are fully and appropriately funded to enable them to perform their functions.

The Authority aims to allocate grants to the Councils by the end of April in each year. The Authority aims to further develop the information flows from the Councils in relation to their annual and estimated expenditure for each year.

The Authority will explore with the Department of Education and Science and with the two Councils its responsibilities in relation to the work of the Councils under the Framework for accountability proposed in the Report of the Working Group on the Accountability of Secretaries General and Accounting Officers. The aim will be to complete this exploration by Summer 2004. The Authority will implement its appropriate role.

Advice on fees to be charged by Councils

The Authority aims to advise the Department of Education and Science in relation to the level and nature of fees to be charged by the Councils by winter 2003. Any subsequent advice would be made to the Department at the Department's request.

6.3.2 Planning and Review Role

Procedures for Councils

The Authority aims to consult with the Councils in relation to the existing procedures established by the Authority for the performance by the Councils of their functions. The procedures will be further developed by spring 2005.

Councils' strategic planning

The Authority aims to work closely with the Councils on their strategic planning. The plan of the Further Education and Training Awards Council was approved by the Authority and published in June 2003. The Council is to review the plan by summer 2004.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council is preparing a plan. The Authority aims to discuss the draft plan with the Council with a view to a plan, approved of by the Authority, being in place by spring 2004.

Review of Councils

The Authority is planning that an initial review of the Councils' work will take place in 2006/2007. The Authority aims to have the policy approach in relation to this review determined by autumn 2006.

Validation appeals role

The Authority will review its interim validation appeals procedures in the context of the policies on the validation of programmes being developed by the Councils. The aim is to do so by winter 2004.

Delegated authority role

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council has agreed with the Authority the criteria and procedures for reviews leading to delegation of authority to make awards and for reviews where such delegation has already taken place. The Authority will implement its role under these procedures in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

The Authority aims to develop the policy approach to its role in relation to appeals against the withdrawal of delegated authority by spring 2004.

In relation to the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Authority will aim to agree procedures with the Council should the Council wish to have procedures agreed.

6.3.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which the advice of the Authority on fees is implemented
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the Authority's appeals roles
- The extent to which the awards Councils and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has assisted the Councils in responding to the needs of learners and society as a whole and in developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

6.4 Theme 4 – Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology

<p>The objective will be that the Authority supports the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.</p>

6.4.1 Quality Assurance

Agreed quality assurance procedures

In June 2002, the Institute and the Authority agreed interim quality assurance procedures for the Institute. These are currently being reviewed by the Institute with a view to the Institute and the Authority agreeing revised procedures in spring 2004.

Findings following implementation of quality assurance procedures

The Institute is to inform the Authority of the findings arising out of the application of procedures and the plans of the Institute for implementing these findings. The aim is that the approach to this will be agreed in spring 2004. The aim is that these will then be implemented on an immediate basis.

Authority review of quality assurance procedures

The objective will be that the Authority will initiate a review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Institute in 2004. The first step will be to determine the policy approach to this review and the aim is that this will be completed by spring 2004.

6.4.2 Access, Transfer and Progression

The Authority is to ensure that its procedures for access, transfer and progression are implemented by the Dublin Institute of Technology. Discussions have been initiated with the Institute. The aim is that the approach

to the reporting arrangements of the Institute on this issue will be determined by spring 2004.

6.4.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which stakeholders have a positive view on the effectiveness of the quality assurance review to be undertaken by the Authority
- The extent to which the Institute and other stakeholders have a positive view on how the Authority has supported the Institute in further developing and enhancing a culture of excellence.

6.5 Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement

The objective will be that the Authority will make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches and will collaborate with national stakeholders in so doing.

6.5.1 Europe

Copenhagen and Bologna processes

The overall approach of the Authority will continue to be to make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches rather than merely being reactive to such change. In making such inputs the Authority will endeavour to undertake collaborative approaches with the active involvement of stakeholders and, in particular, both the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

The Authority will remain actively engaged with implementation of the Declarations in Ireland. This involves an active role in the Bologna Steering Group of the Department of Education and Science. It will also involve parallel engagement with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, together with other national stakeholders in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration.

The issues facing Europe in the initial consideration, and now the implementation, of the Copenhagen Declaration parallel the issues facing Ireland in relation to the development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. Key inputs that the Authority will continue to make are:

- The need to contribute to the development of these processes from the learner's point of view

- The need to contribute to the development of common approaches to issues and themes that arise across Europe in both higher education and vocational education and training
- The need to develop an approach, based on levels and outcomes, to the development of qualifications across Europe and to comparisons between them.

In relation to the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, the Authority will continue to support the development of an outcomes - based approach and will seek to engage in collaborative development work.

The Authority is hosting a conference as part of the Irish Presidency of the European Union on 8th March 2004 common themes in European policy development in higher education and in vocational education and training. The conference is being hosted with the support of other national agencies and on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The common themes to be addressed include

- the greater compatibility and comparability of awards systems
- credit accumulation and transfer
- quality assurance
- increasing transparency
- facilitating mobility of learners and workers.

The Authority will actively engage as an associate member of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in the implementation of a European dimension to quality assurance and in the implementation of quality assurance dimensions of the Bologna Declaration generally.

6.5.2 Wider International Work

The Authority will continue to undertake international research in relation to national frameworks of qualifications and related issues with a view to informing Irish developments.

The Authority has engaged with the OECD which is planning for the preparation of a final synthesis report on the role of national qualification frameworks in the promotion of lifelong learning in 2004. This will be based on a series of national reports to be prepared by member countries willing to participate in the project. As part of this work, the Authority is also leading some work in co-operation with other countries in relation to the Thematic Group on Framework development processes.

The Authority, through its membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, will ensure that it inputs into and keeps up- to- date with international best practice in quality assurance.

6.5.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The inclusion of policy approaches promoted or proposed by the Authority in international policies
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are informed of and can participate, as appropriate, in international developments with which the Authority has an engagement.

6.6 Theme 6 – International recognition of awards

The objective will be that a national policy approach to the international recognition of awards will be put in place by early 2004 and that this will be implemented by autumn 2006.

6.6.1 Ireland and the United Kingdom

The Authority arranged an initial meeting of the various qualifications and regulatory bodies in the jurisdictions on these islands. A working group has now been established to look at the Frameworks in place on these islands and their possible linking or cross-referencing. The group will explore the aim, protocol and basis for the possible linking or cross-referencing. The qualifications and regulatory bodies are to meet again in 2004 to review the work of the group.

The Authority aims to reference the Irish Framework to Frameworks in place in the United Kingdom by winter 2004.

A key issue for the Authority will be the extent to which this work addresses issues relating to comparability of qualifications on a north/south basis.

6.6.2 Recognition Coordination

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is in the process of becoming the coordinating point in relation to the recognition of awards. This is in line with the statutory role of the Authority in relation to the facilitation of the recognition of awards. The Authority is aiming to put in place as simple and understandable a system for the recognition of awards as possible, while

ensuring that the autonomy of awarding bodies, including the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the awards Councils is fully protected.

The Authority now has responsibility as the Irish National Reference Point for vocational education and training qualifications and as the Irish National Academic Recognition Information Centre for higher education.

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

The Authority aims to develop a policy approach by summer 2004. The aim is that this will be fully implemented by autumn 2006.

The Authority will undertake its roles as the National Academic Information Centre and the National Reference Point in the context of this policy approach.

In the interim, the Authority aims to continue to coordinate responses to recognition queries.

6.6.3 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders are satisfied with the recognition policies developed by the Authority and their implementation.

6.7 Theme 7 – Organisation Culture

The objective will be to develop further the processes and systems used in the Authority to ensure that the organisation's operations are consistent with best management practice and in line with the approach of providing a quality, open and transparent service to its stakeholders and the wider community.

This section of the Plan concerns the organisation of the Authority itself. It is of relevance that much of the organisation of the Authority must operate within an overall vision for a public sector organisation and the public policy requirements set out for such organisations.

Furthermore, it is also of note that in Chapter 2 it was set out that the Authority is to work in accordance with a set of process guidelines. These guidelines can be summarised under six headings: consultation and inclusiveness, research and evaluation, best management practices, facilitating change, the international dimension, subsidiarity and autonomy. While these guidelines apply across all seven themes in this plan, they are particularly relevant to this section.

The Authority will strive to achieve this by focusing on five key areas:

- Corporate Governance
- Managing Financial Resources
- Human Resources Management
- Knowledge/Communication Management
- Quality Management System

6.7.1 Corporate Governance

The Authority has been informed by the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Finance in October 2001. The Code is being considered by the Department of Education and Science at present and arrangements for implementation are to issue from the Department.

The Authority has agreed appropriate processes and procedures to ensure compliance, in principle, with the Code as published. The Authority will

- Continue to review the implementation of the Code
- Ensure that, when it becomes subject to the provisions of the Ethics in Public Office Act, the Authority will operate in a manner consistent with that Act
- Provide value for money by ensuring that its services are provided in an economic, efficient and effective way. This objective underpins the approach taken to all aspects of this strategic plan.

6.7.2 Managing Financial Resources

In the context of the Authority appropriately managing its financial resources, the Authority will ensure that

- There is a consistency of reporting financial affairs as between the three organisations funded through the Authority. These reports will strive to be timely and accurate enabling the Authority to make the correct financial decisions consistent with its responsibility
- Financial policies and procedures are agreed, reviewed and updated as necessary in line with best practice and any changes in reporting requirements
- The internal audit function within the Authority is fully operational and provides timely reports.

6.7.3 Human Resources Management

The Authority is responsible for the effective management of the human resources employed by it. In this context the Authority continually works to recruit and deploy adequate levels of staffing resources and to enhance the capability of staff in line with changing demands. Specifically the Authority will

- Agree human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements, by winter 2003
- Develop and expand the provision of training and development options for all staff to meet identified needs at all levels on a continuing basis
- Set up a performance appraisal system consistent with best practice and the needs of a Performance Management Development System which addresses the management of work performance, career and development needs of staff by spring 2004
- Ensure that tasks are delegated consistent with the business plans drawn up to accomplish the strategic objectives of the Authority by summer 2004.

6.7.4 Knowledge/Communications Management

Like every organisation, the Authority produces a wide variety of documents covering all aspects of its remit. The management of information and communications is important. The following will be the focus of activity in this area:

- The further development of the website to incorporate the National Framework of Qualifications and expand linkages to ensure that it operates in a user-friendly way by spring 2004

- Develop the internal data sharing systems so that knowledge can be accessed and shared with all relevant individuals and organisations
- Further develop databases for the management of all communications both internally and externally
- Review, on a continuing basis, the communications tools used to ensure that there is consistency of approach in terms of accessibility, quality and content.

6.7.5 Quality Management Systems

The Authority strives to provide a quality service to its customers consistent with best practice and the underlying fundamentals of quality management. To this end the Authority

- Will continue to do its work in an open and transparent way continuing its practice of consultation with all interested and relevant parties
- Will set up the appropriate systems required for dealing with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, which it is likely to be subject to within the lifetime of this plan
- Will treat everyone inside and outside the Authority with respect and equity consistent with the best practice in this area
- Will develop a Customer Service Charter by spring 2004.

6.7.6 Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are considered appropriate by the Authority for this theme:

- The performance of the actions within the timetables set out above
- The extent to which Irish stakeholders have a positive view of the organisation culture of the Authority and how it conducts its business generally.

Part IV - Conclusion

7 Conclusion

This document reports in Part II on the work of the Authority over the past two and a half years. During this time the Authority has been consulting with stakeholders and developing its policy approach. The approach of the Authority to this consultation process is to use it as a way to help stakeholders to take ownership of the overall changes in culture that the Authority is driving and to listen to the suggestions of stakeholders in this context. This form of consultation is key to preparing the ground for the changes to be implemented.

In Part III of this document, the Authority sets out the plans for its work over the next three years. It is envisaged that the plan would be reviewed and updated on an annual/bi-annual basis so that there will always be a rolling three year plan in place.

Appendix 1

Members of Authority

Mr. Dick Langford (Chairperson)

Ms. Inez Bailey

Mr. Jim Dorney

Fr. Nicholas Flavin

Dr. Abrar Hasan

Dr. Caroline Hussey

Mr. Donal Kerr

Prof. Anne Moran

Prof. Ciarán Murphy

Ms. Caroline Nash

Prof. Joyce O'Connor

Ms. Marie O'Mahony

Mr. Will Priestley

Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú (Chief Executive)

Appendix 2

Staff of Authority

Ms. Valerie Beatty, Director of Corporate Affairs

Ms. Claire Byrne, Administration Executive

Mr. Eamonn Carey, Development Officer

Ms. Leah Foley, Administrative Officer

Ms. Carmel Kelly, Award Recognition Coordinator

Ms. Celine Kelly, Assistant Staff Officer – Administration

Ms. Mairéad McMahon, Assistant Staff Officer - Finance

Mr. Edwin Mernagh, Development Officer

Dr. Anna Murphy, Director of Framework Development

Dr. Jim Murray, Development Officer

Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive

Ms. Yvonne Rudden, Administration-Receptionist

Appendix 3

Implementation Timetable

	Continuing	2003	2004	2005	2006
Theme 1 – National Framework of Qualifications					
<i>1.1 Further Framework development</i>					
Further decision on number of initial major award-types for FETAC			summer		
Descriptor for higher doctorate award-type			spring		
Policy approach for inclusion of university awards up to and including level 6			winter		
Descriptors for minor, special purpose and supplemental award-types			winter		
Publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of professional awards in the Framework			summer		
Policy approach for the inclusion of professional awards in the Framework				summer	
Publish draft policies, criteria and procedures for the inclusion of international awards in the Framework			summer		
Policy approach for the inclusion of international awards in the Framework				summer	
Policy approach on the inclusion of awards made by the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission, other than the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate in the Framework			summer		
Policy approach on the approval of arrangements entered into by the institutes of technology				summer	

1.2 Implementation of Framework					
Working with awarding bodies	continuing				
Facilitating linkages between the awarding bodies in the implementation of standard setting across fields of learning	continuing				
Consider the appropriateness of developing a national policy approach on award classifications				winter	
1.3 Advocacy and Promotion					
Advocating cultural change	continuing				
Communications approach	continuing				
Policy approach on overall Framework Register			summer		
Review and development of website			spring		
Annual Framework conference	annual				
1.4 Placement of existing and previous awards					
All existing and previous awards placed			winter		
1.5 Facilitating exchange of best practice nationally in relation to quality assurance					
National conference on quality assurance in education and training			winter		
Consultation with the Higher Education Authority on its university quality assurance review role	continuing				
1.6 Framework review					
Level 6 review					spring
Policy approach to initial review of the Framework and its implementation					autumn
Theme 2 – Access, Transfer & Progression for Learners					
2.1 Facilitating implementation of policies for access, transfer & progression					
Coordinating cultural change & active collaboration	continuing				

Plans for the implementation of a national approach to credit			summer		
Coordinating role in facilitating the web of transfer and progression arrangements and routes across and between the various elements of the system at a macro level	continuing				
Proactive facilitating role with providers and awarding bodies outside the remit of the Councils in relation to entry arrangements	continuing				
Coordinating role in ensuring that the objective of transparent, fair and consistent entry arrangements, in compliance with equality legislation, is achieved for all programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications	continuing				
Support for a wider information-base for learners in relation to qualifications	continuing				
2.2 Further policy development & implementation					
Complete discussions with the Higher Education Authority on possible consortium of relevant partner organisations to address the issue of entry to higher education and training by adult learners			summer		
Development of the existing procedures for providers	continuing				
Consider further ways to assist providers in the implementation of the procedures			summer		
Determine the policy approach for a review of the implementation of procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression by the universities					autumn
Theme 3 – Supporting the awards Councils					
3.1 Funding Role					
Aim to ensure that the Councils are fully and appropriately	continuing				

funded to enable them to perform their functions					
Explore with the Department of Education and Science and with the two Councils its responsibilities in relation to the work of the Councils under the Framework for accountability			summer		
Advise the Department of Education and Science in relation to the level and nature of fees to be charged by the Councils		winter			
3.2 Planning and Review Role					
Further develop procedures for Councils				spring	
Approve plan of HETAC for the performance of its functions			spring		
Policy approach determined in relation to an initial review of the Councils' work					autumn
Review of Authority's interim validation appeals procedures			winter		
Implement Authority's role in delegation process	continuing				
Determine policy approach to Authority's role in relation to appeals against the withdrawal of delegated authority			spring		
Theme 4 – Supporting the Dublin Institute of Technology					
4.1 Quality Assurance					
Agreement with the Institute to revise quality assurance procedures			spring		
Policy approach agreed to the way in which the Institute is to inform the Authority of findings			spring		
Policy approach to the review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Institute			spring		
4.2 Access, Transfer and Progression					

Determine reporting arrangements of the Institute on the implementation of access, transfer and progression procedures			spring		
Theme 5 – International Policy Engagement					
5.1 Europe					
Make an effective and proactive input on behalf of the State into developing international approaches	continuing				
Host a conference during the Irish presidency of the European Union on the common themes in European policy development in higher education and in vocational education and training			spring		
5.2 Wider International Work					
Undertake international research in relation to national frameworks of qualifications and related issues with a view to informing Irish developments	Continuing				
Theme 6 – International recognition of awards					
6.1 Ireland and the United Kingdom					
Referencing of the Irish Framework to Frameworks in place in the United Kingdom			winter		
6.2 Recognition Coordination					
Develop a policy approach to recognition coordination			summer		
Implementation of policy approach					autumn
Theme 7 – Organisation Culture					
7.1 Corporate Governance					
Continue to review its implementation of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	Continuing				
Provide value for money by ensuring that its services are provided in an economic, efficient and effective way	continuing				
7.2 Managing Financial Resources					

Appropriate management of its financial resources	continuing				
7.3 Human Resources Management					
Determination of human resource policies and procedures in line with best practice and consistent with the legislative requirements of all employers, including equality requirements		winter			
Develop and expand the provision of training and development options for all staff to meet identified needs	continuing				
Set up a performance appraisal system consistent with best practice and the needs of a Performance Management Development System			spring		
7.4 Knowledge/Communications Management					
Development of internal data sharing systems and databases for the management of communications	continuing				
7.5 Quality Management Systems					
Develop a Customer Service Charter			spring		