

## National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Response to the Framework Implementation and Impact Study April 2010

The NCCA Council discussed the Study at its meeting in December 2009. Council appreciated the general issues raised in the Study concerning the Framework and school awards and is committed to advancing work on the key recommendations made in the Study.

### **Key issues identified in the Study in relation to the schools sector**

The Study identifies a number of issues in relation to the Leaving Certificate (p.12) and recommends that its inclusion across two Levels be revisited. The issues identified are:

- its inclusion across two Framework levels
- its treatment as a single award even though it has a number of variants
- differentiation in the level of achievement of learners
- limited progression for holders of the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme into higher education and training.

Each of these issues was raised and discussed by a working group including representatives of the NCCA, DES, FETAC and NQAI and referred to in an issues paper agreed by the group in 2007. Regarding the inclusion at two Levels, the group agreed that interpretation of school awards in the labour market and uncertainty surrounding the comparative value of schools and FETAC awards were important issues arising from the original inclusion that merited further investigation. At the time, it was decided to progress the issue by undertaking a comparative study of the value of school and FETAC awards. Draft terms of reference for the work were generated and

some initial drafting took place but this work has been superseded by the parallel developments of the Study itself and of the recent referencing of the NFQ to the EQF. As a result, a fresh approach to the issues involved is viewed as the most appropriate response at this stage, with the focus placed firmly on the relationship between the Leaving Certificate and the Framework. That relationship, of course, will continue be influenced and affected by ongoing developments in senior cycle education more generally.

The following matters need to be taken into account in considering the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate across two Levels:

- the implications of any change in the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate in the Framework for holders of the award, existing students and prospective students and for future participation in its different programmes. The implications are particularly complex given the level of public awareness of and interest in the Leaving Certificate.
- the further development and introduction of components relating to the Framework in the senior cycle (flexible learning pathways, learning outcomes, a greater variety of curriculum components etc. ) will, of its nature, contribute to advancing movement to a more refined degree of inclusion in the Framework.
- the political implications of advancing the issue and the elaboration of any potential solutions need to be addressed in tandem with any technical work.
- the use by the CAO system of the Leaving Certificate examination results to determine entry to higher education significantly influences the particular forms of assessment used in the qualification.

The NCCA/NQAI could initially work together on a process and a set of ideas for advancing the re-examination of the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate on the Framework. It might be useful to approach this from the perspective of Leaving Certificates to be awarded in the future (and so distinguish between current, legacy and future awards). This may be the best way to proceed because, as Leaving Certificate subjects continue to be reviewed, developed and introduced, they are increasingly articulated in terms (learning outcomes, units etc.) that are consistent with those of the Framework itself.

On the question of progression to higher education and training, the issue concerns the LCA only and the NCCA's view is that the development of increased progression pathways and opportunities is best addressed at ground level between the relevant players. A review of the LCA is currently underway and the question of progression is under consideration in that context along with broader issues related to the ring-fenced nature and the standards associated with the programme. Again, the outcomes of this review will influence ongoing discussion of the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate on the Framework.

### **On-going work in the Schools sector and the Framework**

There are a number of areas of on-going work in the schools sector which relate to the Framework. These include the strong focus on the embedding of key skills in all senior cycle subjects currently under review. All curriculum components under development within the NCCA, whether they are subjects, proposed short courses or transition units (for use in Transition Year programmes) are outcomes-based components. In addition, the recently launched consultation on the review of Junior Cycle education is fully aligned and cognisant of the principles of the Framework and developments in relation to it. This demonstrates how the Framework is being mediated in the schools context with consideration of

- more flexible and locally developed programmes of study and curriculum components
- the use of examinations alongside other ways of gathering evidence of learning
- the clear articulation of diverse and rich learning outcomes as the basis of curriculum components
- increasing access to awards other than school awards in school settings and beyond
- the development of new qualifications at Levels 1 and 2.

These considerations and areas of development can usefully inform any approaches to addressing the issues raised in the FIIS study and are being taken into account in the broader consideration of the inclusion of schools awards in the Framework.

### **Other recommendations and issues raised in the Study and noted by Council**

Council also made the following observations on other recommendations in the Study:

- There is a continuing need for greater efforts to make the framework more relevant to schools – to develop their ownership of it. This would contribute to addressing the risk, identified in the FIIS, of its being associated with non-mainstream provision.
- The NCCA is very interested in contributing to the work set out in recommendation five, of establishing a set of principles of quality assurance for Framework qualifications. This is seen as consistent with the ideas under discussion in both junior and senior cycle review of schools having greater choice and autonomy in the development and implementation of educational programmes.
- The importance of achieving alignment between learning outcomes and approaches to assessment should be continually pursued and the NCCA looks forward to continuing involvement in NQAI discussions on this.
- Research into the experience of learners as they engage with education and training and the qualifications associated with the Framework should be supported and encouraged, the recent ESRI study on early school leavers and their ongoing longitudinal study being prime examples of this.
- The schools sector now has a growing body of practice and experience in working with learning outcomes. It would welcome more discussion across stakeholders on learning outcomes, sharing practice and experience in working with them and in work on aligning assessment and learning outcomes.