



Údarás Náisiúnta  
Cáilíochtaí na hÉireann  
National Qualifications  
Authority of Ireland



# Ireland's experience of EQF and the EQF Referencing Process

**EQF Referencing Seminar  
Dublin  
17 September 2009**



## Ireland's vision of EQF I

- Irish Presidency Conference 2004 – exploring common themes in European policy development across higher education and vocational education and training
- At the time:
  - Convergence of approaches in some areas e.g. Quality, Credit
  - Growing political support for greater integration of two systems – for the benefit of individuals, the economy and society
  - Qualifications and, particularly, Qualifications Frameworks seen as a new and dynamic way of bridging the divide between the two systems
  - Need for an Overarching European Framework: to facilitate real comparisons of diverse national systems of qualifications and qualifications frameworks – to ‘think as Europeans’; to facilitate mobility of learners and workers

## ❖ Birth of EQF



## Ireland's vision of EQF II

- Same ideas and principles animated development of Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in the years before Presidency conference
  - Desire for transparency
  - Desire to bridge divide between different sectors of education and training – permeability, learning pathways, lifelong learning
    - NFQ neither a VET or Higher Education/Academic construct
    - At ease both with Bologna Framework and EQF
  - Desire to enhance understanding and portability of qualifications and to create more and better opportunities for learners and workers
  - NFQ launched in 2003 – EQF idea emerges in 2004-5
- ❖ Ireland quick to embrace idea of EQF and enthusiastic participant in its development and implementation



## Ireland and EQF Implementation

- Shared principles and ideas between NFQ and EQF have facilitated EQF implementation in Ireland
- NFQ Development (2001-3) and Implementation Process (2003 onwards) have provided a sound footing and real world experience to proceed with EQF implementation



## Irish Referencing Process

- General approach to referencing adopted by NQAI in September 2008
- Modelled on Bologna Framework Verification undertaken in September 2006
- National Steering Committee established to assist NQAI (FETAC, NCCA, IUA, HETAC; 3 international experts)
- Used the 10 criteria and procedures agreed by the EQF Advisory Group:
  - levels correspondence; principle of learning outcomes; transparency of Framework implementation; link to quality assurance structures
- Process also has an associated and ongoing consultation and communications plan



---

## Key features of the Irish approach to referencing

- **methodology: comparison in terms of**
  - framework architecture
  - conceptual base, esp. understanding of learning outcomes
  - how levels are defined
  - Comparative analysis of descriptors
- **comprehensive referencing of all levels in a single national framework**
  - all Irish awards, including those made for achievement in HE



## Challenges in the referencing process

- **'neat' results are not possible**
  - one-to-one alignment is not possible - ten levels cannot map precisely to eight
  - learning outcomes described in terms of eight factors in the Irish framework
- **task is not to prove that NFQ is the same as EQF - to clearly and accurately explain how they compare**



## Supports for the referencing process in Ireland

- **the experience of developing the NFAQ**
  - insight into what our qualifications actually mean
  - moved from implicit understanding to explicit meaning
- **resources already available**
  - expertise in framework development and implementation
  - structures and dedicated organisations
  - stakeholder familiarity with key concepts - framework, levels, learning outcomes



# Learning from the Irish experience

- **referencing is a challenging process**
  - any system of qualifications can be referenced to EQF - just do not expect 'neat' results!
- **all levels in a comprehensive framework can be referenced to the EQF levels**
- **referencing is a lot easier if the process of developing a national framework of qualifications has already been undertaken**



<b>EQF levels</b>	<b>NFQ Levels</b>	<b>NFQ Major Award-types</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Level 1 Certificate</b>
	<b>2</b>	<b>Level 2 Certificate</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Advanced Certificate (FET award); Higher Certificate (HET award)</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Ordinary Bachelors Degree</b>
	<b>8</b>	<b>Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate</b>



<b>EQF levels</b>	<b>EHEA Framework (Bologna)</b>	<b>NFQ Levels</b>	<b>NFQ Major Award-types</b>
<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>Level 1 Certificate</b>
		<b>2</b>	<b>Level 2 Certificate</b>
		<b>3</b>	<b>Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate</b>
		<b>4</b>	<b>Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate</b>
		<b>5</b>	<b>Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Short Cycle within First Cycle</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Advanced Certificate (FET award); Higher Certificate (HET award)</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>First Cycle</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Ordinary Bachelors Degree</b>
		<b>8</b>	<b>Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Second Cycle</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Third cycle</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate</b>



European  
Qualifications  
Framework

Country A

Country B

