

POLICY AND CRITERIA FOR MAKING AWARDS



CONTENTS

1. LEGAL BASIS AND INTRODUCTION	2
2. POLICY SCOPE	3
3. POLICY PURPOSE	3
4. INTERPRETATIONS	3
5. MAKING AWARDS AND AWARDS STANDARDS	5
6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARD NAMES	5
6.1 FET Awards	5
6.2 HET Awards	6
7. CREDIT	6
8. MAKING A JOINT AWARD	9
9. RECORDS	9
10. INTEGRITY OF AWARDS MADE BY QQI	10
11. WITHDRAWING AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARD	11
12. LEARNER ASSESSMENT, AWARDS CLASSIFICATIONS AND GRADES	11
13. AWARD CERTIFICATES	14
14. EUROPASS DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE SUPPLEMENTS	14
15. FEES	14
16. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY	14

1. LEGAL BASIS AND INTRODUCTION

QQI's general functions are set out in section 9(1) of the 2012 Act. Sub-sections a, e, f, g and j are particularly relevant here as is section 9(2) which concerns actions to be undertaken by QQI in the performance of its functions. Section 50 and 51 of the 2012 Act concern the making of awards by QQI or by providers to which authority to make an award has been delegated under Section 53 of the Act (providers with DA).

This document sets out the QQI Policy and Criteria for the making of an award by QQI or by a provider with DA granted under Section 53 of the 2012 Act.

It explains the basis for the making of an award by QQI and outlines how that statutory process is administered by QQI. In addition to this policy, detailed procedures and guidelines for the certification of learners are made available to providers offering programmes leading to QQI awards.

QQI policy is adopted by the Board and implemented by the executive accordingly.

Figure 1 QQI Awards Cycle



2. POLICY SCOPE

This policy applies to the making of an award by:

- A. QQI
- B. A provider with DA
- C. Awarding Bodies Entering into Joint Awarding Arrangements with QQI

3. POLICY PURPOSE

The main purpose of this policy is to:

- establish the overarching framework for QQI certification of learner achievements
- set out the respective roles and responsibilities involved in the QQI certification process
- guide QQI in making decisions relating to the administration of its certification function
- function as a reference point for providers seeking certification services from QQI, and for providers with DA
- ensure that all learners entitled to a QQI award are treated fairly and equitably
- promote public confidence in the integrity of QQI's approach to certifying learners
- establish a basis for holding QQI accountable for the performance of its statutory function to make awards that safeguard the integrity of the NFQ
- issue certificates and other learner records to learners that provide a transparent and trusted basis for national and international recognition of their achievements.

4. INTERPRETATIONS

The making of an award by QQI means is the process whereby QQI issues a certificate confirming that the learner has acquired and, where appropriate, demonstrated the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill or competence.

For the purpose of this policy, the following interpretations also apply:

Award means an award (qualification) which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.

Awarding body means a body issuing awards that formally recognises the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.

Award standard means the knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired, and where

appropriate, demonstrated, by a learner before a specified QQI award may be made.

Credit means an acknowledgement of an enrolled learner's completion of a programme or part of a programme of education and training to a particular standard. Usually expressed as a quantitative value, credits indicating the estimated workload typically required for a learner to achieve required learning outcomes. Credit may be accumulated towards a QQI award.

Delegated authority means a process whereby a provider is granted the legal right to make awards in their own name.

Determine means to decide and establish the appropriate standards of knowledge, skill or competence that apply to QQI awards.

Joint award means a single award made to a learner by two or more awarding bodies with awarding powers.

Qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when QQI determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

Learning outcome means statements of expected knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners to justify the making of a QQI award. Awards standards, as determined by QQI, are always expressed in terms of learning outcomes.

NFQ Award-type Descriptor means the description of the breadth and kind of knowledge, the range and selectivity of skills, the role and context competence, learning competence and insight, appropriate to a specific award type.

NFQ Award Class means a category of awards. There are currently five classes of awards in the NFQ (Major, Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental and Professional).

NFQ Level means statements about the indicative breadth and kind of knowledge, the range and selectivity of skills, the role and context competence, learning competence and insight, appropriate to a specific NFQ level.

Programme of education and training (programme) means a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship.

Validation of a programme of education and training designed to lead to a QQI award means a regulatory process that determines whether (or not) a particular QQI award can be offered in respect of a provider's programme of education and training.

5. MAKING AWARDS AND AWARDS STANDARDS

QQI, or a provider with DA, will only make an award to a learner once satisfied that the learner has acquired, and where appropriate demonstrated, the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill and/or competence as determined by QQI.

Application for an award based on a validated programme

A relevant provider may apply to QQI on behalf of an enrolled learner, requesting an award be made in respect of a QQI-validated programme of education and training. Such an application should only be made if the provider is satisfied that the enrolled learner has acquired, and where appropriate demonstrated, the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill or competence as determined by QQI.

Application for an award based on approved procedures for the recognition of prior learning

A relevant provider, having regard to their established procedures for access transfer and progression, including procedures for credit transfer and accumulation and the recognition of prior learning, may apply to QQI to make an award to a learner where the learner has, in the opinion of the provider, acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill and/or competence as determined by QQI. Before forming such an opinion, a relevant provider must ensure, and where appropriate demonstrate, that it has the capacity and capability to implement quality assured procedures for the identification, assessment and recognition of prior learning acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings. Typically, such capacity requirements will include current experience in delivering a relevant QQI validated programme.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARD NAMES

Award titles promote public understanding of the expected demands and outcomes of a named award type. QQI will use award titles that are clear, concise and reflect the content of the learning achievements that they signify. Precise titles are important, are easier to search and increase transparency for learners and other users of qualifications. QQI will avoid the use of award titles that could be misleading, misrepresented or misunderstood. QQI will determine titles for awards that it makes and will promote consistent titling practices compliant with public information requirements of the Irish Register of Qualifications.

6.1 FET AWARDS

QQI may make named awards in accord with any of the FET award-types established within the NFQ.

FET major, special purpose and supplemental award names shall have the following form (stated in Irish and English):

[Named award stem] in [Specialisation] Names award stems are:

- i. Major: Level N Certificate or (at Level 6) Advanced Certificate (N is the NFQ level)
- ii. Special Purpose: Level N Special Purpose Certificate
- iii. Supplemental: Level N Supplemental Certificate.
- iv. Minor: Level N Minor Certificate

On request, QQI may issue a **'Record of Minor Awards'** to recognise Minor award(s) achieved where a Major, Special Purpose or Supplemental award is not certified. A 'Record of Minor Awards' is not a type or a class of award, it is an official record of awards achieved and it will replace the Component Certificate.

6.2 HET AWARDS

HET major named awards shall have the following form: [Named Award Stem] in [Specialisation].

Normally only the award stem names are 'standardised' unless otherwise determined by the relevant award standard, the remainder of the named award is agreed at validation. QQI maintains and publishes a list of permitted named award stems, see Table 1.

The overall length of specialisation element of an award title is limited to 50 characters to ensure that it can be printed clearly on awards parchments.

The names of minor, special purpose and supplemental class awards shall comply with the following rules:

- i. Award names for all higher education and training minor, special purpose and supplemental awards at Framework Level 6 must commence with "CERTIFICATE IN".
- ii. Award names for all higher education and training minor, special purpose and supplemental awards at Framework Levels 7-9 must commence with
- iii. "CERTIFICATE IN" where the corresponding programme or modules amount to less than 60 HET credits. Otherwise they must commence with "DIPLOMA IN".
- iv. A minor award must be linked to a major award and the name (award title) of the major award must appear on the certificate/diploma.

Award names for the professional award class shall be agreed in writing with QQI on a case-by-case basis.

7. CREDIT

Credit means a quantitative value (credits) indicating the estimated workload typically required for a learner to achieve required learning outcomes. Credit may be accumulated towards a QQI award.

Credit is a measure of expected learner effort. In the context of this policy, it concerns the expected learning time required to achieve the requirements for an award. QQI awards require a substantial learner effort to complete all the required learning activities. Trivial volumes of learning, say less than 50 notional learning hours, do not meet the volume threshold for a QQI award to be included within the NFQ.

The credit system applied by QQI for higher education awards is compatible with the European credit transfer system which expects 25-30 hours of learner effort per credit and a full-time workload of an academic year accounts for 60 HE credits. This corresponds to an annual workload range of 1,500 – 1,800 hours.

The QQI credit system for QQI further education and training awards expects 10 hours of learner effort per credit and the full-time workload of an academic year accounts for 120 FET credits. This corresponds to a typical annual workload of 1,200 hours.

Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as classes, workshops, seminars, projects, examinations, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Table 1 shows the award titles and associated credit ranges to be used by QQI

NFQ Level	Major Awards		Minor Awards		Special Purpose Awards		Supplemental Awards	
	Titles of Award Types	Credit	Title	Credit	Title	Credit	Title	Credit
1	Level 1 Certificate	20	Level 1 Minor Certificate	5, 10	Level 1 Special Purpose Certificate	5-20	n/a	
2	Level 2 Certificate	30	Level 2 Minor Certificate	5,10	Level 2 Special Purpose Certificate	5-20	n/a	
3	Level 3 Certificate	60	Level 3 Minor Certificate	5,10,20	Level 3 Special Purpose Certificate	5-60	Level 3 Supplemental Certificate	5-60
4	Level 4 Certificate	90	Level 4 Minor Certificate	5,10,15,20	Level 4 Special Purpose Certificate	5-90	Level 4 Supplemental Certificate	5-90
5	Level 5 Certificate	120	Level 5 Minor Certificate	5,10,15,30	Level 5 Special Purpose Certificate	5-120	Level 5 Supplemental Certificate	5-120
6¹	Advanced Certificate	120	Level 6 Minor Certificate	5,10,15,30	Level 6 Special Purpose Certificate	5-120	Level 6 Supplemental Certificate	5-120
6	Higher Certificate	120	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	180	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
			Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
8	Honours Bachelor Degree	180-240	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
	Higher Diploma	60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
9	Masters Degree	60-120	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60	Certificate	<60
	Postgraduate Diploma	60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60	Diploma	≥60
10	Doctoral Degree	n/a						

¹ Levels 1-5 and the Advanced Certificate at Level 6 operate under the FET credit system

8. MAKING A JOINT AWARD

QQI may, for the purposes of making a joint award to an enrolled learner in respect of a programme of education and training, enter into a joint awarding arrangement (referred to as a “joint awarding arrangement”) with—

- A. an awarding body, and
- B. the provider of the programme of education and training where the programme of education and training leading to the joint award is not provided by the awarding body.

A joint awarding arrangement may be made only in respect of a programme of education and training which has been validated by QQI.

Where QQI enters into a joint awarding arrangement, the provider of the programme of education and training leading to the joint award may apply in respect of an enrolled learner of that programme to QQI to make a joint award to the learner where the provider is satisfied that the learner has—

- A. completed the programme of education and training concerned, and
- B. acquired and, where appropriate, demonstrated the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill or competence as determined by QQI.

Where QQI receives an application from the provider of the programme of education and training leading to the joint award, QQI shall make a joint award with the awarding body with which it has entered into a joint awarding arrangement in respect of the programme concerned to the enrolled learner where QQI is satisfied that the enrolled learner has—

- A. completed the programme of education and training concerned, and
- B. acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill or competence as determined by QQI

An application for making a joint award shall be accompanied by such fee (if any) as may be determined by the QQI.

9. RECORDS

QQI collects and requires providers with DA to collect specified data about each named award made and the learner to whom the award is made. Providers with DA are expected to inform themselves of the current QQI specifications for awards records to be maintained, collect the required data and make these data available to QQI upon request.

QQI will retain and analyse data concerning awards and awardees (learners) to inform its work, including reliably indicating the value of a QQI award. QQI will routinely publish data on the awards that it makes, such data are produced in line with national and international official data classifications and comply with government policy on open data.

QQI will maintain accurate documents and records to demonstrate that certification processes have been effectively conducted and to verify the status of holders of QQI awards. QQI will maintain a system for managing, maintaining, versioning, storing and disposing of records relevant to the certification of learners. All such records are managed in such a way as to ensure the security, integrity and confidentiality of the data. Data collection arrangements, including data sharing arrangements with other parties, will be fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation.

10. INTEGRITY OF AWARDS MADE BY QQI

QQI will make awards based on objective evidence obtained through a fair, valid and reliable assessment. Providers requesting awards from QQI and providers with DA shall operate valid, fair and reliable assessment methods that systematically and objectively confirm that learners have acquired appropriate standards of knowledge skill or competence. A provider shall ensure the integrity of all assessment leading to the certification of learners, this includes assessment tasks conducted by providers or third parties. Provider procedures for quality assuring assessment practices will be subject to QQI guidelines on assessment and such procedures should at all times promote public confidence in the integrity of assessment processes and certification decisions relating to QQI awards.

Providers subject to this policy should document structures, policies and procedures to identify and manage conflicts of interest so that their role in QQI certification activities are undertaken impartially. Certification decisions, by providers or by QQI, should never be unduly influenced by other interests or parties. Conflicts of interest can occur in certification processes where a provider or QQI acts in their own interest to benefit themselves; personal bias overrules objective evidence; certification decisions are influenced by fear of a candidate or other interested party; reliance on revenue from certification prevents objective decision making.

Threats to impartiality of certification decisions can either be actual or perceived. Decisions about ownership, governance, management, finance, contracts, marketing, incentives and commissions, can threaten impartiality. Relationships that involve such decisions should be monitored to ensure they do not present a threat to impartiality. QQI and providers subject to this policy must take all reasonable steps to identify and manage all threats on an ongoing basis. Providers should immediately report to QQI any actual or potential adverse effect on the integrity of QQI certification processes.

QQI will make awards on condition that it is satisfied that a learner has met the standards of the relevant award sought. Providers will cooperate with QQI to ensure that any application for a QQI award is warranted. QQI reserves the right to request or access relevant assessment records, reports or artefacts that support claims for QQI certification. QQI may engage directly with external examiners and external authenticators to monitor and maintain awards standards.

11. WITHDRAWING AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARD

An education award may be made where a learner has successfully completed a validated programme or where QQI is of the opinion that an award can be made.

Award documentation (e.g. parchments and certificates) issued by QQI or a provider with DA, whether printed, digital or otherwise shall remain the property of the awarding body permanently.

Once issued, QQI awards are permanent. Unless in very exceptional circumstances where the integrity of the qualification has been compromised, once awarded, qualifications are not withdrawn.

If, after the award has been made to a learner, it can be demonstrated that the learner did not deserve the award then the award may be withdrawn by QQI or the provider with DA.

All providers to whom this policy applies shall ensure that they implement procedures for the withdrawal of an award from a learner (or for the recommendation of withdrawal of an award by QQI) including learner appeals procedures. The procedures for the recommendation of withdrawal of an award shall be the responsibility of the provider concerned when the award was made by QQI unless the provider concerned has ceased being a relevant provider under the 2012 Act.

12. LEARNER ASSESSMENT, AWARDS CLASSIFICATIONS AND GRADES

Providers of programmes leading to QQI awards and providers to whom, under section 53, authority to make an award has been delegated are required to establish procedures which are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by QQI under section 49(1) are acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners. QQI will publish quality assurance guidelines to support assessment policy, procedures and practice of providers offering programmes leading to QQI awards.

Successful performance by enrolled learners on QQI validated programmes may be classified as a pass. More granular classifications recognising a broader range of learner achievements are set out in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the award classifications available for FET and HET

FET Award Classifications		
NFQ Level	Named Award Stem	Possible Classifications
1 to 3	All award classes and types	Successful, Unsuccessful
4 to 6		Distinction, Merit, Pass, Unsuccessful
HET Award Classifications		
6	Higher Certificate	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Certificate (SPA, Minor, Supplemental)	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Diploma (Minor, SPA, Supplemental 60+ ECTS)	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Certificate (Minor, SPA, Supplemental <60 ECTS)	Pass Not Awarded

8	Honours Bachelor's Degree	First-class honours Second-class honours Grade 1 Second-class honours Grade 2
	Higher Diploma	Pass Not Awarded
	Diploma (Minor, SPA, Supplemental 60+ ECTS)	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Certificate (Minor, SPA, Supplemental <60 ECTS)	Pass Not Awarded
9	Postgraduate Diploma	Distinction Merit Pass Not Awarded
	Masters	First-class honours Second-class honours Pass Not Awarded
	Professional Masters	First-class honours Second-class honours Grade 1 Second-class honours Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Diploma (Minor, SPA, Supplemental 60+ ECTS)	Distinction Merit Grade 1 Merit Grade 2 Pass Not Awarded
	Certificate (Minor, SPA, Supplemental <60 ECTS)	Pass Not Awarded
9 and 10	Masters (by research) Doctorate	Unclassified.

13. AWARD CERTIFICATES

QQI parchments and certificates are designed to be clear and verifiable. They contain security features that reduce the risk of fraud. QQI permanently retains information concerning each award that it makes. A person to whom a QQI award certificate or parchment has been presented as evidence of learning achievement may contact QQI to verify the award.

The design and information content of QQI award parchments and certificates is consistent with their purpose and significance.

The classification of awards shall appear on all parchments unless the awards are unclassified.

Providers to whom QQI has delegated authority to make an award may design their own certificates and parchments but must obtain QQI's agreement for the design (including text) before issue.

14. EUROPASS DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE SUPPLEMENTS²

Awards of QQI and those of providers with DA will be accompanied by a Europass Certificate or Diploma Supplement, whichever is applicable.

15. FEES

QQI publishes a schedule of fees for certification services. Providers are invoiced for certificates generated according to the schedule.

16. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This policy will be reviewed no later than five years after adoption by the QQI Board.

2 More information on Europass can be found at <http://www.europass.ie/europass/index.html>

