Programme for Review of National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Policies

Future Proofing the NFQ

December 2024

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

A priority of the QQI Statement of Strategy 2025-2027 is to future-proof the National Framework of Qualifications as the authoritative information source for quality assured tertiary qualifications. Actions identified to deliver this priority include the further development of QQI's platforms to promote the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as the authoritative source of information on quality-assured qualifications including micro-credentials and the review and modification of the current system of award types in the NFQ to better serve learners in a more integrated tertiary education system, including general education qualifications delivered via the school system.

This programme aims to deliver on this priority by conducting a policy review of the National Framework of Qualifications. This will include the review of existing policy and the development of new policy to formally articulate the mechanism for maintaining and implementing the NFQ, as well as promotions and communications.
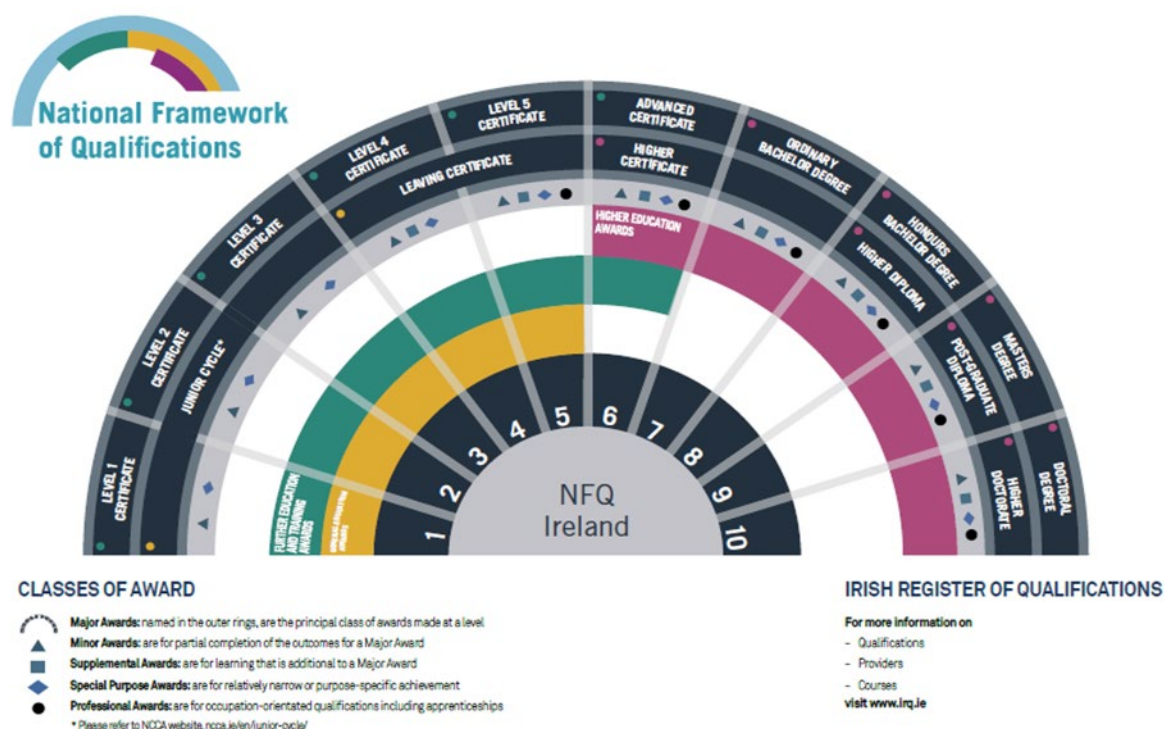
2. Background

2.1.   NFQ Policies

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in 2003 and implemented in collaboration with the two awards councils; Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

The foundational documents of the NFQ were introduced at this time. This included:

- Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications[1]
- Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications[2]
- NFQ Grid Level Indicators[3]
- Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-Types[4]
- Policies, actions and procedures for the promotion of access, transfer and progression
- Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training[5]

In 2012, the Irish government established Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI), amalgamating several existing agencies, including the NQAI, HETAC and FETAC which then ceased to exist. This consolidation aimed to streamline the qualifications process and ensure a coherent approach to quality assurance. QQI subsequently took over the responsibility of maintaining and further developing the NFQ.

Following the initial establishment of the NFQ in 2003, both NQAI and QQI established some additional NFQ policies including:

- Professional Award Type Descriptors and
- Higher Doctorate Award Descriptors.

The Policies, actions and procedures for the promotion of access, transfer and progression were restated in 2015 and the Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training continues to be in place.

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[1] pol_&_crit.qxd (qqi.ie)

[2] determinations.qxd (qqi.ie)

[3] NFQ Grid Level Indicators.pdf (qqi.ie)

[4] descriptors-minor-spa-supplemental-awards.pdf (qqi.ie)

[5] principlesandoperguidelinesgreen.pdf (qqi.ie)

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019[6] introduced new requirements regarding the inclusion of awards in the Framework for all awarding bodies including Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) and for the establishment of new types of awarding bodies, Listed Awarding Bodies. The relevant sections of the legislation enabling the new requirements for the inclusion of awards within the Framework was commenced on the 1st of September 2024. The following documents have been established to support these activities, related to the NFQ.

- Joint Sectoral Protocol between QQI and Designated Awarding Bodies[7]
- Policies and Criteria for Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies[8]
- Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework[9]

QQI's policy in relation to the validation of programme leading to its awards can be considered the policy related to the inclusion of QQIs awards in the Framework. The Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework currently exempt bodies that make awards under the Education Act 1998 from a formal process to include awards in the NFQ, but the inclusion of the junior cycle, senior cycle and associated awards needs to be considered as part of this review.

To summarise, the following NFQ policies continue to be in place today.

- Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (2003)
- Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications (2003)
- NFQ Grid Level Indicators (2003)
- Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-Types (2003)
- Professional Award Type Descriptors[10] (2014)
- Higher Doctorate Award Descriptors[11] (2006)

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[6] Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 (irishstatutebook.ie)

[7] Joint-sectoral protocol DABs.pdf (qqi.ie)

[8] qp-23-core-policies-and-criteria-for-the-establishment-of-listed-awarding-bodies-labs.pdf (qqi.ie)

[9] qp-23-core-policies-and-criteria-for-the-establishment-of-listed-awarding-bodies-labs.pdf (qqi.ie)

[10] Professional Award Type Descriptors.pdf (qqi.ie)

[11] Professional Award Type Descriptors.pdf (qqi.ie)

OVERVIEW OF QUALIFICATIONS BY NFQ LEVELS

NFQ Level 1 0.28%
NFQ Level 2 0.28%
NFQ Level 3 1.23%
NFQ Level 4 1.33%
NFQ Level 5 6.36%
NFQ Level 6 14.43%
NFQ Level 7 12.02%
NFQ Level 8 24.34%
NFQ Level 9 36.08%
NFQ Level 10 3.64%
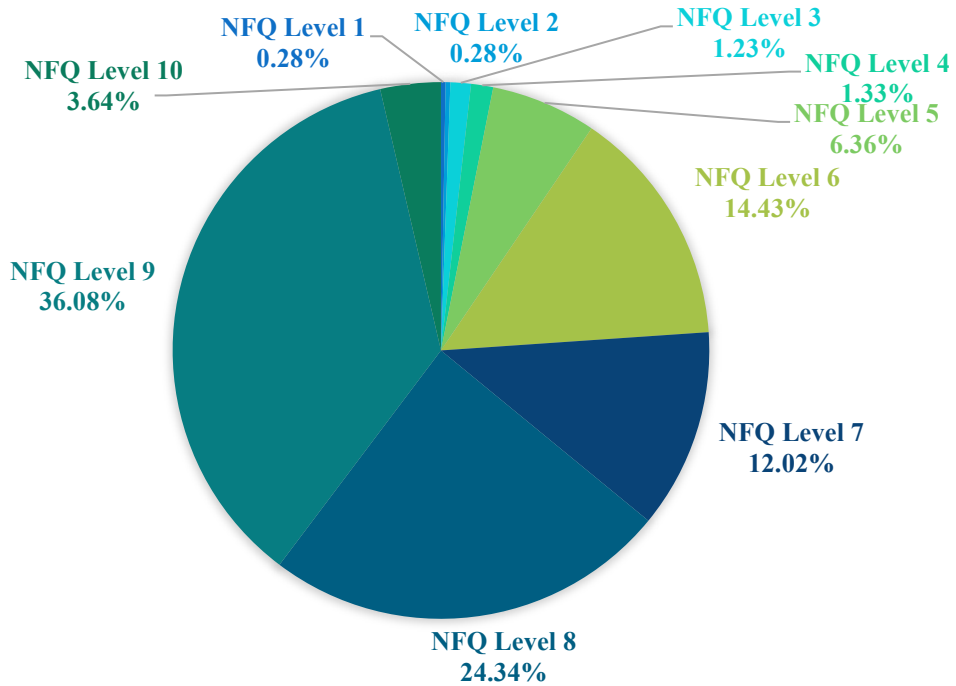
Summary of Qualifications published in IRQ by NFQ Level as of October 2024

AWARD CLASS

Supplemental 0.22%
Special Purpose 13.43%
Minor 22.63%
Major 63.71%
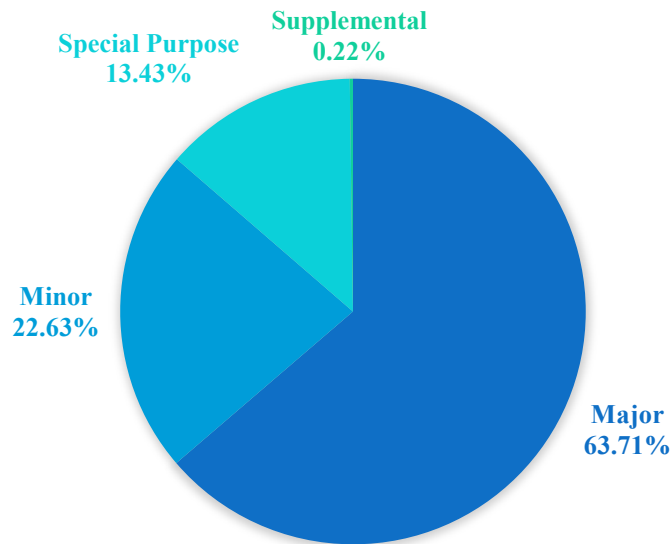
Summary of Qualifications published in IRQ by award class as of October 2024

2.2.   Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum

A country's qualification system comprises diverse actors and processes that help ensure the supply of trusted qualifications that meet society's needs and there are certain challenges that require collaborative approaches to find solutions. For this reason, in 2022 QQI decided to establish a new standing group, the Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF).

The purposes of the IQQF are:

1) To provide a **national platform for collaboration** on systemically important quality and qualifications challenges.

2) To help **identify, prioritise and monitor the progress of specific initiatives** to be pursued by collaborative working groups.

3) To **advise QQI** when requested.

4) To provide a **forum** for participants to exchange ideas and insights into the workings of the qualifications system.

When fully established, the group will comprise representatives from all types of qualifications users: learners, employers, parents, practitioners, occupational associations and professions, providers and their staff, regulators, trade unions, the international community, and others, either directly or through representative bodies.

As of 2024 only a subgroup of the IQQF has met which is the Statutory Awarding Bodies Group (IQQF-SABG).

2.3.   European Frameworks

The NFQ is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and self-certified as compatible with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) with the most recent referencing report[12] published in 2020.

QQI is the EQF National Coordination Point (NCP) which involves providing support for referencing the Irish NFQ to the EQF and for promoting and communicating the EQF to individuals and organisations. QQI is also the National Correspondent for the QF-EHEA which involves ensuring the self-certification of the Irish NFQ with QF-EHEA and to further coherence between the QF-EHEA and EQF.
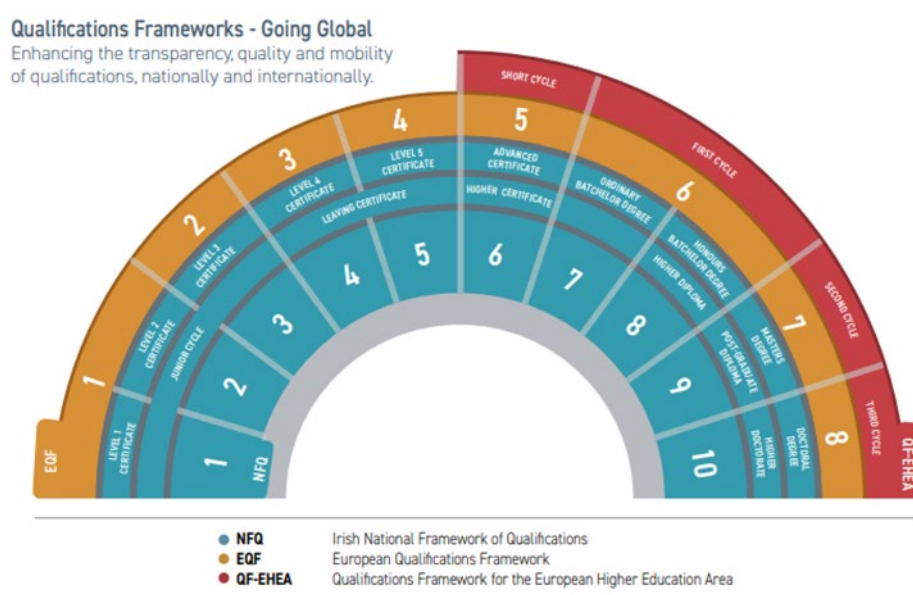
The relationship between the NFQ and EQF and QF-EHEA is important and requires some level of monitoring and reporting. QQI completes a bi-annual (every 2 years) survey about developments and progress related to the NFQ for the NFQ Inventory maintained by Cedefop.

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[12] NFQ Referencing Report 12-2020.pdf (qqi.ie)

The latest inventory was published for 2022[13] with data for the next inventory collected in 2024. This information also enables the maintenance and publication of the online EU Comparison Tool which supports the comparison of national qualifications frameworks across Europe.[14]

QQI also routinely provides information related to the Bologna Process Implementation in Ireland which was last published in 2024.[15]

The relationship between the NFQ and European frameworks is essential to the recognition of qualifications held by learners to support access to education, employment and mobility. It is important to facilitate the mobility of Irish learners but also of international learners into Ireland.

Global Fan Diagram outlining relationship between NFQ levels and levels of EQF and QF-EHEA

2.4.   Bilateral Agreements

QQI, in its role as the authority with responsibility for the promotion and maintenance of the NFQ, has also conducted bilateral comparisons of the Irish NFQ with other national frameworks including New Zealand[16] and Hong Kong[17].

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[13] European inventory of NQFs | CEDEFOP (europa.eu)

[14] Compare Qualifications | Europass

[15] The European Higher Education Area in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report (europa.eu)

[16] comparing-qualifications-in-ireland-and-new-zealand.pdf (qqi.ie)

[17] comparing-qualifications-in-ireland-and-hong-kong.pdf (qqi.ie)

The Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries Guide[18] which is maintained by the UK and Ireland Qualifications Framework and Policy Group is a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.

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[18] Qualifications can Cross Boundaries (qqi.ie)

3. Context

Section 43 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended)[19] specifies that QQI is the authority responsible for the promotion, maintenance, further development and implementation of the NFQ and is responsible for reviewing the operation of the Framework and amending the Framework from time to time as it considers necessary.

This responsibility should be considered in tandem with our role as EQF NCP and National Correspondent for the QF-EHEA. The maintenance, further development and implementation of the Framework; and reviewing and amending the Framework must be cognisant of knock-on impacts to referencing of the Irish NFQ to the EQF and compatibility with the QF-EHEA.

Finally, learners should be considered central to implementation of the NFQ as it essential that the qualifications they earn are valued nationally and internationally and are easily explained and understood in Ireland and beyond.

3.1.   20 Years of the NFQ

The NFQ celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023 which was marked with an anniversary conference and a report that charted the history and development of the NFQ over the 20 years. Both the conference[20] and the report[21] highlighted some challenges associated with the Framework that need consideration and action. These can be summarised as follows:

- The infrastructure of the NFQ needs to be reviewed with specific focus on the two major awards at NFQ Level 6 and the approach for micro-credentials.
- Some policy ambitions expressed in 2003, such as recognition of prior learning (RPL) and access, transfer and progression (ATP) have not yet been fully realised.
- Clearer, streamlined communication about the NFQ
- Capacity building across the sector to build deep, technical knowledge of the Framework in our institutions.

It is worth noting the centrality and commonality of learners in all these challenges. The infrastructure of the NFQ, specifically the two major awards at NFQ Level 6 and the inconsistent implementation and use of micro-credentials have the potential to disadvantage learners and present barriers to progression. Both RPL and ATP are designed to support learners in their education journey and the policy ambitions of both are learner centred. All end users benefit from

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[19] Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (irishstatutebook.ie)

[20] 20 Years of the NFQ | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)

[21] 20-years-of-the-irish-national-framework-of-qualifications-a-story-of-collaboration-and-co-operation-2003-2023.pdf (qqi.ie)

clear communication about the NFQ and ensuring that all those involved in developing qualifications and programmes have a technical understanding to ensure its correct implementation.
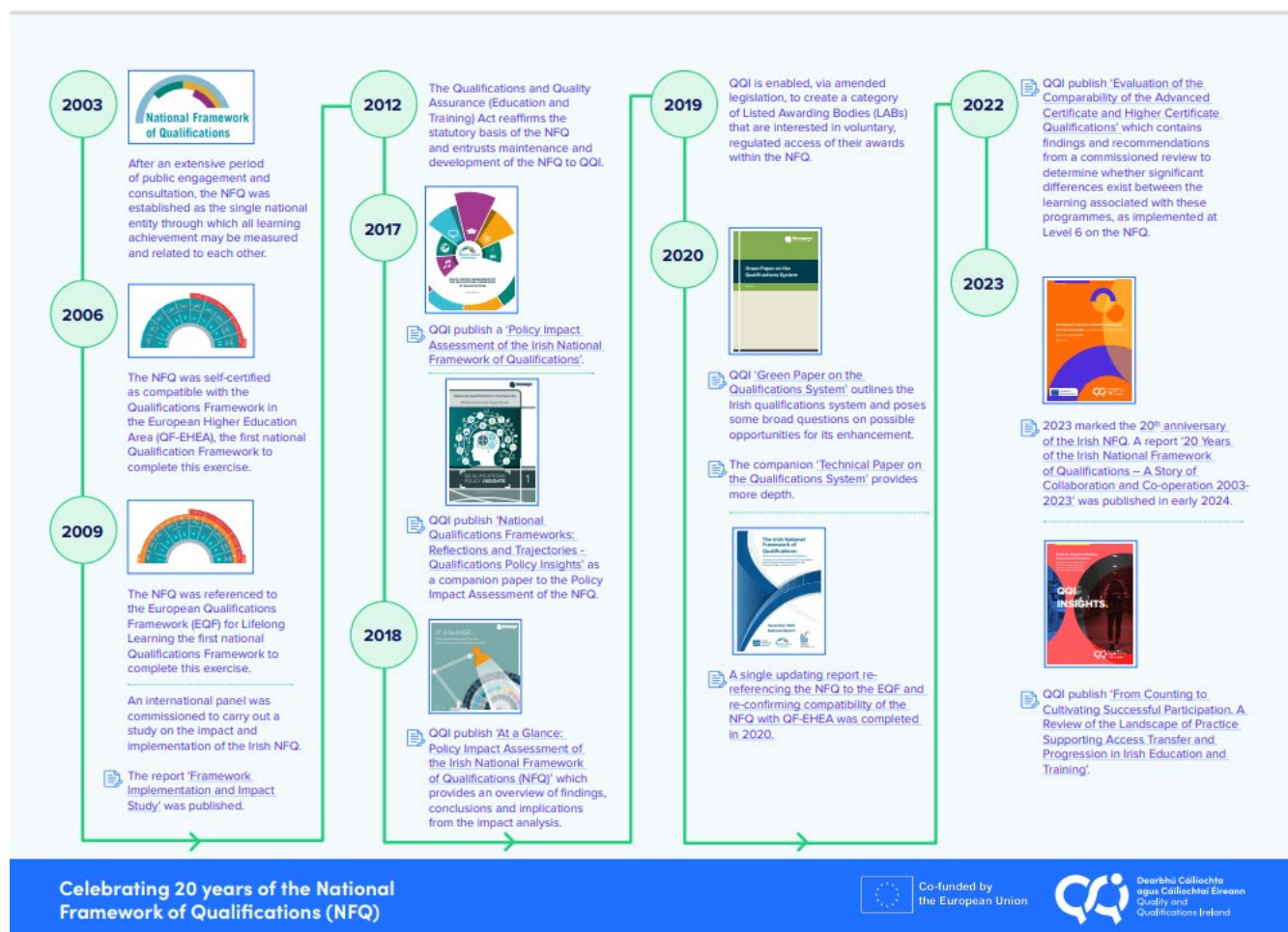
Overview of the 20 years of the Irish NFQ[22]

3.2.   Changing Landscape

The education landscape has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Although the NFQ has always included small qualifications, the development of these increase at pace. There are just over 7,000 major awards listed on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) and over 4,000 non-major awards. In 2023, QQI published data about small qualifications and micro-credentials between 2014 and 2023[23]. This data indicated that there were 1542 qualifications of less than 30 ECTS published on the IRQ in October 2023. There was a relatively even distribution across each level from NFQ Level 6 to 9 with the highest number of small qualifications (423) at NFQ Level 9. The increasing number of micro-credentials has the potential for learners to navigate the

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[22] 20-years-of-the-irish-nfq-timeline-2003-2023.pdf (qqi.ie)

[23] Data on HE micro-credentials in Ireland 2014-2023 | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)

education system in different ways. This is even more likely as people now have portfolio careers changing roles, organisations and industries regularly. The link between labour markets and qualifications framework may become more important. It is also important that learners continue to be provided with clear, accurate information about programmes and awards that supports them to make informed decisions about the programmes they enrol in.
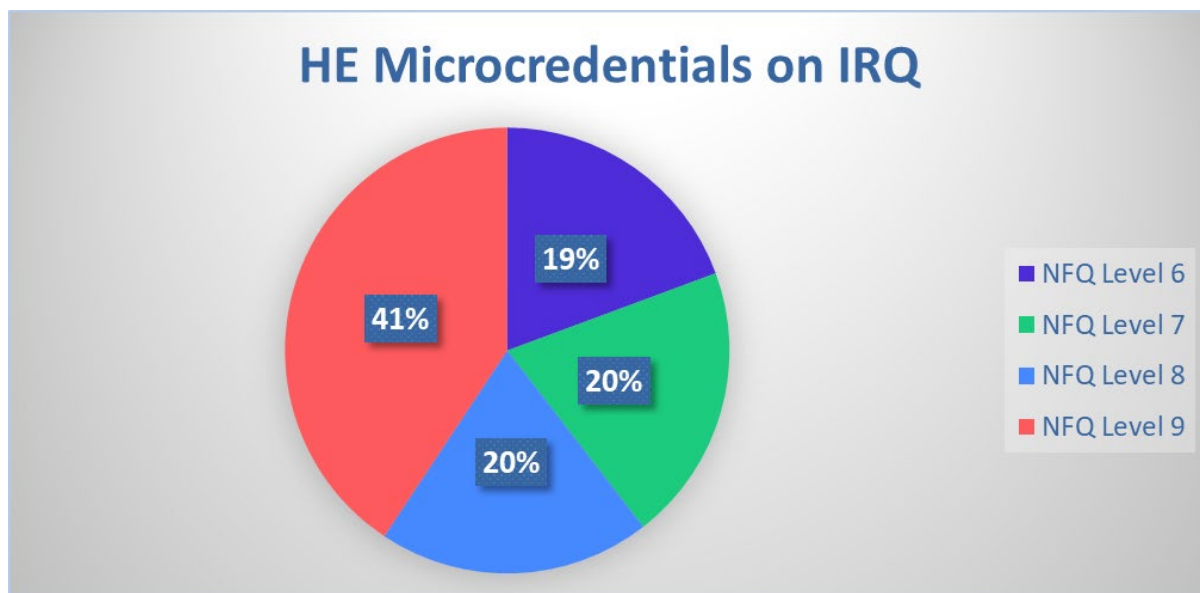
Overview of Higher Education Qualifications of less than 30 ECTS published on the IRQ as of October 2024

QQI launched TrustEd Ireland[24], or the International Education Mark, in September 2024 which brings regulation and quality assurance to the English language sector for the first time. These providers and their programmes will be listed in the IRQ but separate to the NFQ. As this sector progresses, there is opportunity to consider if there is a place for English language qualifications in the NFQ.

Although the NFQ has always been a flexible framework, it does not yet recognise all learning, an initial ambition of the Framework. The Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) scheme which provides voluntary, regulated access to the NFQ to professional, sectoral, technical and international awarding bodies for the first time, begins the work of including a wider range of qualifications, but will continue to exclude some types of learning.

In advance of reviewing the policies of the NFQ, the vision and ambition of the Framework needs to be reviewed and restated and updated as needed. The review needs to then focus on achieving this vision and ambition.

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[24] What is TrustEd Ireland? | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)

4. Approach to Review

This NFQ review will not be an impact, evaluation or effectiveness review of the NFQ and its implementation. Several of these have been undertaken in the last 20 years with good evidence of the impact of the NFQ on the education and training system. Instead, this programme will review the fundamental policy and infrastructure of the NFQ in relation to the promotion, maintenance, further development and implementation of the NFQ. The review will be action oriented with expected outcomes of:

- a revised and updated policy framework for the NFQ and
- clear, documented strategies for the maintenance and implementation and,
- promotion and communication of the NFQ going forward.

The strategies and approaches will emphasise the role of collaboration and cooperation across the sector in the implementation of the NFQ and will encompass the entirety of the NFQ, including the qualifications associated with post-primary school sector.

Such an approach will allow for QQI to review its own effectiveness in terms of promoting, maintaining, further developing and implementing the Framework and for working in collaboration and cooperation with the sector in the future.

QQI's role in relation to the NFQ extends beyond policy development and review. As such the review will have three stands:

a) **Policy Review and Update**
   - This will be a consultative process with a wide range of stakeholders. There will be a need to retire and rescind historical policies and issue new, updated policies with a focus on simplifying and streamlining the NFQ policy framework. This NFQ policy framework will cover all qualifications, awards and awarding bodies in Ireland.

b) **Maintenance and Implementation of the NFQ**
   - Maintenance and implementation of the NFQ is not only the role of QQI. There is shared responsibility across the sector, including those who make awards included in the NFQ and those who deliver programmes leading to NFQ awards, to protect the integrity and reputation of Irelands qualifications system.
   - The IRQ is a key tool in the implementation of the NFQ and a project to re-develop the IRQ is already underway.

- Collaboration and cooperation underpin implementation of the Framework and will need to be widened to include new Listed Awarding Bodies and bodies that make awards under the Education Act 1998.
- The relationship of the NFQ to other countries' frameworks and the EQF and QF-EHEA meta-frameworks needs to be considered.

c) **Promotion and Communication of NFQ**
- The focus of this will be understanding needs and priorities of end users, particularly learners, in terms of the NFQ, and by association EQF and QF-EHEA, with a particular emphasis on communicating the changes in NFQ policy. The development of tools, resources and supports will be explored as part of ongoing promotion and communication.
- This will also focus on capacity building within and beyond the education sector. The NFQ is widely used in public policy development and decision making and policy makers need to be supported to understand the NFQ and use it appropriately in policy making.

4.1. Policy Review and Update

A project for NFQ Policy Review will be presented to the Project Steering Group (PSG) for approval in late 2024/early 2025.

The policies established in relation to Section 55A-I of the legislation are the most recently established. However, even in this short time the Joint Sectoral Protocol has become somewhat outdated due to the increased offering of micro-credentials and the expansion into lower levels of the Framework by some universities under PATH 4 funding[25]. As such only the LABs policies are out of scope of this review as these need some time to be implemented and are scheduled for review in 2029. There may be a need to review these in 2027/2028 to facilitate their inclusion in an updated re-referencing to the EQF and QF-EHEA.

Two projects have already been commenced in relation to the known issues outlined earlier in the paper and related to NFQ policy. These will be accounted for in the programme for NFQ review.

Work is underway to develop a national RPL policy.

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[25] gov.ie - PATH 4 project roll-out for universal design, autistic students and students with an intellectual disability announced by Minister Harris (www.gov.ie)

4.1.1. Projects Underway

Project	Completion Date	Final Output	Proposed Impacts
Review of ATP policy	Dec 2025	New ATP policy	- Rescind 2015 restatement on ATP - Rescind Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training - Inform the update of the ECTS user's guide ensuring the Irish perspective is clear. - Update transfer and progression options for learners from each major award type descriptor
Single Major Award at NFQ Level 6	Sept 2025	New award type descriptor for single award at NFQ Level 6	- Rescind award type descriptors for Advanced Cert & Higher Cert[26] in line with agreed transitional arrangements. - Retire original Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications with updates to Level 5 and 6 as needed, and cosmetic updates to remainder - Update determinations to reflect transition from distinction between FE and HE to tertiary

4.1.2. Plan for Remaining Policy Review

Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications
The Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications
continues to be an important foundational document of the Irish NFQ. However, much of the

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[26] These are contained in the Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications.

content relates to the initial establishment of the Framework, which is no longer relevant. The document will be retired rather than rescinded, noting that it is a useful historical document, and will be replaced by a new document.

The content will be reviewed, refined and updated to be relevant to 2024 and beyond. It will restate principles that are unchanged, remove reference to establishment and other outdated concepts and update content with reference to changes in the education landscape such as the proposed single award at NFQ Level 6, tertiary degrees and micro-credentials. The role of school's qualifications in NFQ policy will also be considered. International experience of the development and use of qualifications frameworks will also inform updates. The new document will reference the policies related to inclusion of awards in the Framework, rather than describing processes for placing existing and former awards in the Framework.

The updated document will have a placeholder title for the purpose of this paper which is the ***Policies and Criteria for the National Framework of Qualifications***.

Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications

Arising from the already commenced projects [Review of ATP and Intermediate Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6] there will be minor and cosmetic changes made to the Determinations document by September 2025.

However, a more comprehensive review of these determinations needs to be undertaken to ensure the following:

- The major awards available at each level of the NFQ continue to be suitable and sufficient for the needs of learners and other end users. Consideration needs to be given to removing, modifying and adding major awards.
- The Grid Level of Indicators continue to reflect the knowledge, skills and competence needed to be achieved by learners at each level and is sufficient to support the levelling of small qualifications and micro-credentials.
- The award-type descriptors for major awards at each level continue to be appropriate and reflective of the education and training system, with specific reference to Junior and Senior Cycle.
- The Higher Doctorate Award Type Descriptor will be included in this policy review.
- The fitness of the existing award-descriptors for awards resulting from long duration undergraduate programmes in some health professions.

It may be possible to include the content from the Determinations into the updated *Policies and Criteria for the National Framework of Qualifications.*

Grid Level Indicators

This will be reviewed as part of the review of the Determinations.

Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-Types and Professional Awards

The types of non-major awards available will be reviewed at this time. For example, the supplemental award type makes up less than 1% of all awards listed in the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ).

Consideration will be given to the development of a descriptor specifically for micro-credentials and the need to delineate between non-major awards and micro-credentials.

It may be possible to include the descriptors for non-major awards +/- micro-credentials in the updated *Policies and Criteria for the National Framework of Qualifications*

Joint Sectoral Protocol between QQI and DABs

The Joint Sectoral Protocol was established under Section 55 B (3) of the Act, as amended. The protocol was agreed in 2022 and formally implemented following commencement of the relevant section of the legislation on the 1st of September 2024. However, due to the changing landscape of education, the protocol needs to be updated to reflect changes to the awarding and provision of institutions.

4.1.3. Summary

Summary of NFQ Policy Review Approach					
Original NFQ Policy	**Proposed Status**	**Project**	**Action**	**Method**	**Timeline**
Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training	Rescind	Project 1 of NFQ Programme: ATP Review Approved by PSG in April 2024	Replace with updated ATP policy	Green Paper White Paper Final Policy	Nov 2024 June 2025 Dec 2025
Determinations – award type descriptors for Advanced and Higher Certificates	Review	Project 3[27] of NFQ Programme: NFQ Level 6 Approved by PSG in August 2024	Replace with award-type descriptor for single award at NFQ Level 6	Green Paper White Paper Final Policy	Nov 2024 March 2025 June – Sept 2025
Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications	Retire	Project 4 of NFQ Programme: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Develop Policies and Criteria for the NFQ	Green Paper White Paper	September 2025 March 2026

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[27] Project 2 of the NFQ programme has already been commenced and is detailed later in the paper.

		To be presented to PSG in Nov/Dec 2024		Final Policy	December 2026
Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications	Retire	Project 4 of NFQ Programme: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Interim update to Determinations arising from ATP & NFQ Level 6	Interim Policy	Sept 2025
			Develop new Determinations policy	Green Paper	May 2026
				White Paper	November 2026
				Final Determinations	May 2027
NFQ Grid Level Indicators	Review	Project 4: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Included in review of determinations		
Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, Supplemental Award-Types[28]	Review	Project 4: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Included in review of determinations		
Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach	Rescind	Project 1: ATP Review	Credit will be dealt with in Review of ATP		

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[28] descriptors-minor-spa-supplemental-awards.pdf (qqi.ie)

to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training					
Professional Award Type Descriptors	Review	Project 4: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Included in review of determinations		
Higher Doctorate Award Descriptors	Review	Project 4: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	Included in review of determinations		
Joint Sectoral Protocol between QQI and Designated Awarding Bodies	Review	Project 4: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	To be updated to more accurately reflect the scope of awarding and provision of DABs.		
Policies and Criteria for Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies	None - out of scope	Out of scope of review	Referenced in Policy and Criteria for Implementation of NFQ	Due for review 2029. May need to be reviewed earlier.	
Policies and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards in the Framework	None - out of scope	Out of scope of review	Referenced in Policy and Criteria for Implementation of NFQ		

4.2. Maintenance and Implementation of the NFQ

4.2.1. Shared Responsibility

QQI has statutory responsibility for maintaining and implementing the NFQ, but this responsibility for implementation is shared with all other awarding bodies and providers of programmes leading to awards in the NFQ. This includes:

- Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs)
- Delegated Authority Awarding Bodies (DAABs)
- Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs)
- Providers of programmes leading to QQI awards
- Linked Providers [of DABs]
- Associated Providers [of LABs]
- Those involved in General Education (School) Qualifications

For General Education (School) Qualifications there are several entities involved in the policy, design, development and awarding of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement and the Leaving Certificate and these include:

- Minister for Education
- Department of Education
- State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- Recognised schools

To date, there has been no formal agreement of the expectations associated with this shared responsibility for the implementation of the NFQ, nor has QQI articulated a strategy/plan for the implementation of the NFQ.

The following pillars can be explored as part of a green paper:

- Quantitative data model for reporting and monitoring related to the NFQ
- Qualitative data reporting on qualifications
- The role of the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) as the formal tool for the implementation of the NFQ
- Principles, policies and procedures articulating responsibility for implementing NFQ.
- Governance – role of QQI Board, Committees and Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF)

- Support – revitalise and widen the Framework Implementation Network (FIN)[29], tools and templates for use by institutions, providers and other end users, events and workshops

4.2.2. European Responsibilities

QQI's unique responsibility with reference to the EQF and QF-EHEA should be detailed in any approach for maintaining and implementing the NFQ. This relates to ensuring the implementation of the NFQ continues to be compliant with both the EQF and QF-EHEA but also ensuring that accurate reporting is enabled via the IRQ.

4.2.3. Relationship between Quality Assurance (QA) and NFQ

There is a clear relationship between QA and the NFQ which needs to be central to future and ongoing QA activities.

4.2.4. Projects Underway

Project	Completion Date	Final Output	Proposed Impacts
Redevelopment of IRQ	Dec 2027	Improved IRQ	- Publication of all qualifications included in the NFQ - Increased quality and quantity of data - Publication of IEM and associated ELE providers - Inclusion of learning opportunities offered by DABs - Better user interface - Link to Europass Qualifications Dataset Register (QDR)[30] maintained and expanded - Link to Database of European Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)[31] created

4.2.5. New Projects

NFQ Implementation Strategy/Approach

QQI needs to articulate its approach for implementing the NFQ setting out the expectations of all awarding bodies and providers in this shared responsibility. The approach needs to include

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[29] Welcome to the University Sector Framework Implementation Network (nfqnetwork.ie)

[30] What is the Qualifications Dataset Register (QDR)? | Europass

[31] Search - EQAR

principles, governance and support. The relationship between NFQ and EQF and QF-EHEA needs to be considered.

General Education (School) Qualifications
The formal levelling of updated general qualifications offered through post-primary schooling and their publication in the IRQ continue to be outstanding. QQI needs to work with NCCA in this regard.

Summary of NFQ Maintenance and Implementation Approach			
Project	**Action**	**Method**	**Timeline**
Project 2 of NFQ Programme: Redevelopment of IRQ Approved by PSG in May 2024	Improve quality and quantity of information on IRQ and improve end user experience.	Technical requirement gathering New structure/system for IRQ Build, test and launch new IRQ[32]	Jan 2025 March 2025 Dec 2027
Project 5 of NFQ Programme: NFQ Implementation Strategy To be presented to PSG in Sept 2025	Confirm approach for implementation including: • Roles and responsibilities • Data collection • Governance • Support • EQF & QF-EHEA alignment	Green Paper White Paper Final Approach	January 2026 September 2026 Jan 2027

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[32] Not in scope of current project approved by PSG but indicative timelines provided in the interest of transparency and clarity.

		Implementation of new structures etc	June 2027
Project 6 of NFQ Programme: Schools Qualifications To be presented to PSG in Q1 2025	Shared responsibility for implementing NFQ Publication of school qualifications in the IRQ	Agree approach with NCCA	June 2027

4.3.   Promotion and Communications of the NFQ

QQI has responsibility for promoting and communicating the NFQ. In our role as European Qualifications Framework (EQF) National Coordination Point (NCP), we also have responsibility for promoting and communicating the EQF. These two responsibilities can be considered together, as the communication of the EQF is intrinsically linked to the national framework.

For clarity, maintenance and implementation of the NFQ includes aspects of communicating the NFQ to the awarding bodies and providers with shared responsibility. However, promotion and communications will be considered related to end users of qualifications. This includes but is not limited to:

- Learners
- Job seekers
- Career Guidance Counsellors and Advisors
- Employers and recruiters
- Professional bodies and associations
- Industry and enterprise
- Public policy makers and regulators

This project will be multi-purpose:

a) Communicate changes to the NFQ arising from the preceding projects
b) Understand information needs of users and propose resources, tools, supports and events to meet these needs.
c) Build capacity within and beyond the education sector to understand the NFQ and its role in public policy and decision making.

Summary of NFQ Promotion and Communication			
Project	**Action**	**Method**	**Timeline**
Project 7 of NFQ Programme: NFQ Promotions and Communications To be presented to PSG in September 2025	Communicate changes to NFQ and Confirm approach for Promotion and Communications	Survey end user information needs	Sept – Dec 2025
		Identify & develop resources & supports in collaboration with end users	Jan – June 2026
		Confirm annual schedule of webinars/ events & other outreach activities	June – Dec 2026
		Commence annual outreach	Jan 2027
		Utilise new systems to communicate changes to NFQ	Throughout

5. Impact of review

The review of the NFQ will require an updated re-referencing to the EQF and self-certification of compatibility to the QF-EHEA.

This final project is the final step in the NFQ review and will be commenced on completion of Projects 1-7, with a start date in January 2028. It is expected that it will take approximately 2 years to complete the re-referencing including presentation to the EQF Advisory Group. The new governance structures arising from the new approach to maintenance and implementation will be utilised to oversee the re-referencing while the new systems for promotion and communication will be integral to the consultation and feedback processes.

Project	Action	Method	Timeline
Project 8 of NFQ Programme: Updated re-referencing to EQF & QF-EHEA To be presented to PSG in Q4 2027	Updated re-referencing to EQF and self-certification of compatibility with QF-EHEA Updating of bilateral agreements with UK, New Zealand and Hong Kong.	To be designed utilising improved systems for maintenance and implementation of NFQ and promotion and communications of NFQ.	Present to EQF AG by mid 2030 Similar timeline for updating bilateral agreements

6. Working Methods

6.1. Management & Operations

It is likely that the individual projects will be managed mainly by staff from Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities Division (QILO), and overall programme management will be provided by the Head of QILO. It is proposed that project teams will be cross-functional drawing on expertise and experience from across QQI while seeking to exploit and build synergies and cooperation to mainstream some aspects of maintaining and implementing the NFQ.

The programme will be supported by an NFQ Review Programme Advisory Group. Membership will be confirmed in due course, but Directors should be core to the group. A meeting schedule will be confirmed but bi-monthly (every 2 months) meetings are likely to be sufficient. The Executive Policy Governance Group will be updated and consulted as needed, but at least twice a year.

6.2. Consultation

There will be significant external consultation associated with the programme commencing late 2024. We will strive to use existing fora, including the IQQF, as much as possible and to give advanced notice to key stakeholders. We will use a combination of surveys, focus groups and meetings to maximise feedback.

The Programme for NFQ Policy Review will be published and updated to promote the programme of work and to use it as an opportunity to build engagement and cooperation.

Internal consultation is also a key aspect of the programme. Updates will be provided via existing internal communications and webinars will be arranged to seek feedback and provide updates as needed.

6.3. Governance

The programme will be supported by an NFQ Programme Advisory Group

Projects will be approved and monitored by the Project Steering Group.

Policy coherence and strategic positioning will be provided by the Executive Policy Governance Group.

Policy approval will be overseen and approved by the Policy and Standards Committee.

Although many of the objectives of the review will be reflected in future corporate plans, given the strategic importance of the programme, it may be sensible to present regular updates to the Board regarding the status of the programme and associated sub-projects.

7. Conclusion

The Programme for the review of the NFQ is comprehensive and comprises eight projects. The timeline for this review is from 2024 – 2030. Some projects which have already commenced will be included in the programme. The details of each project are at a high level for the purposes of this paper but will be further detailed in each project charter to be presented to the PSG in due course.

The aim of this programme is to future proof the NFQ in line with QQI's strategic priorities. The review has several objectives:

- Review and update the policies associated with the NFQ
- Confirm approach to ongoing maintenance and implementation of the NFQ
- Confirm approach for ongoing promotion and communications of the NFQ
- Ensure systems in place to ensure ongoing referencing to EQF and QF-EHEA.

A summary of the NFQ programme and the projects is provided below.

Summary of NFQ Programme				
Project	**Status**	**Action**	**Method**	**Timeline**
Project 1 of NFQ Programme: ATP Review	**Commenced** Approved by PSG in April 2024	Replace with updated ATP policy	Green Paper White Paper Final Policy	Nov 2024 June 2025 Dec 2025
Project 2 of NFQ Programme: Redevelopment of IRQ	**Commenced** Approved by PSG in May 2024	Improve quality and quantity of information on IRQ and improve end user experience.	Technical requirement gathering New structure/ system for IRQ	Jan 2025 March 2025

			Build, test and launch new IRQ[33]	
				Dec 2027
Project 3 of NFQ Programme: NFQ Level 6	To be presented to PSG in August 2024	Replace with award-type descriptor for single award at NFQ Level 6	Green Paper	Nov 2024
			White Paper	March 2025
			Final Policy	June – Sept 2025
Project 4 of NFQ Programme: Policies & Criteria for NFQ	To be presented to PSG in Nov/Dec 2024	Develop Policies and Criteria for the NFQ	Green Paper	May 2025
			White Paper	November 2025
			Final Policy	May 2026
Project 5 of NFQ Programme: NFQ Implementation Strategy	To be presented to PSG in Sept 2025	Confirm approach for implementation including: • Roles and responsibilities • Data collection • Governance • Support	Green Paper	Jan 2026
			White Paper	Sept 2026
			Final Approach	Jan 2027

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[33] Not in scope of current project approved by PSG but indicative timelines provided in the interest of transparency and clarity.

			Implementation of new structures etc	June 2027
Project 6 of NFQ Programme: Schools Qualifications	To be presented to PSG in Q1 2025	Publication of school qualifications in the IRQ	Agree approach with NCCA	June 2027
Project 7 of NFQ Programme: NFQ Promotions and Communications	To be presented to PSG in September 2025	Communicate changes to NFQ and Confirm approach for Promotion and Communications	Survey end user information needs	Sept – Dec 2025
			Identify & develop resources & supports in collaboration with end users	Jan – June 2026
			Confirm annual schedule of webinars/ events & other outreach activities	June – Dec 2026
			Commence annual outreach	Jan 2027
			Utilise new systems to communicate changes to NFQ	Throughout

Project 8 of NFQ Programme: Updated re-referencing to EQF & QF-EHEA	To be presented to PSG in Q4 2027	Updated re-referencing to EQF and self-certification of compatibility with QF-EHEA	To be designed utilising improved systems for maintenance and implementation of NFQ and promotion and communications of NFQ.	Present to EQF AG by mid 2030

Timeline for Programme for NFQ Policy Review

	Q3 24	Q4 24	Q1 25	Q2 25	Q3 25	Q4 25	Q1 26	Q2 26	Q3 26	Q4 26	Q1 27	Q2 27	Q3 27	Q4 27	Q1 28	Q2 28	Q3 28	Q4 28	2029	Q1 30	Q2 30
Project 1: ATP		GP		WP		Policy															
Project 2: IRQ			IT	IT	IT	IT	IT	IT	IT	IT											
Project 3: NFQ Level 6		GP	WP		Policy																
Project 4: NFQ Policy					GP			WP		Policy				? r/v LAB policies							
Project 5: NFQ Implement							GP		WP		Strategy	Implement									
Project 6: General Ed (Schools)																					
Project 7: NFQ Promo & Comms					Survey			Tools & supports		Schedule of events	Implement										
Project 8: EQF Referencing																					