

Circular No. 1 2014

Circular concerning recognition within the National Framework of Qualifications (Framework) for the purposes of Section 48 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 to all providers listed in Section 44(9) of this Act other than Institutes of Technology (IOTs); and to all providers of QQI validated Further Education and Training (FET) programmes who may wish to avail of arrangements for Common Awards System exemptions in this context

Introduction

QQI and its predecessor bodies have defined standards for a large number of awards of different types. These awards, which cover a wide variety of fields of learning, are included in the Framework and further education and training programmes of education and training designed to lead to these awards are offered by numerous providers. Nevertheless, QQI acknowledges that there are circumstances in which the awards of other awarding bodies may better meet the needs of learners, providers or employers, and it is neither the wish nor intention of QQI to monopolise the awards offered by public providers in Ireland.

The purpose of this circular is to provide interim arrangements for recognition within the Framework of awards of certain other awarding bodies for the purposes of Section 48 of the 2012 Act. Awards recognised under these arrangements may under certain conditions be used for exemptions in QQI validated programmes leading to awards in the Common Awards System whether or not they are provided by Section 44(9) providers.

Legal Basis

Section 48 of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* sets out the requirements for providers listed in Section 44(9) to enter into an arrangement with an awarding body other than QQI:

- 48.**—(1) A provider referred to in *section 44(9)* may enter into an arrangement with an awarding body other than the Authority to provide, organise or procure a programme of education and training where—
- (a) completion of the programme by an enrolled learner and the attainment by the learner of a specified standard of knowledge, skill or competence upon such completion entitles the learner to an award of the body, and
 - (b) the award of the body is recognised within the Framework.
- (2) A provider shall notify the Authority of an arrangement referred to in *subsection (1)* prior to entering into the arrangement.

Context

Many Section 44(9) providers have already entered into arrangements with awarding bodies other than QQI without fulfilling all of the requirements prescribed by Section 44(8) of the 2012 Act. For

example, tuition leading to certain industry (e.g. vendor) Information Technology awards that are not yet recognised within the framework is widely available in Section 44(9) providers.

There are various ways for awards to be recognised within the Framework. For example, awards made by QQI, awarding bodies with delegated authority from QQI and DIT are recognised within the framework. Otherwise, four groups of awarding bodies can be identified in addition:

- 1) (Group A Awarding Bodies) Each body authorised by law to make awards in the State is required to ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that each award that it makes is recognised within the Framework; this applies to the universities and the State Examinations Commission *inter alia*.
- 2) (Group B, C and D Awarding Bodies) Awards that are contingently recognised within the framework include professional awards aligned by HETAC and UK awards aligned by NQAI.

QQI recently published a white paper on alignment of professional awards. This deals with awarding bodies in Groups A and B. It is anticipated that the white paper will progress to policy shortly.

QQI is also developing more general policy on the recognition within the Framework for awards of bodies in Groups C and D. These include (but are not limited to) international industry (vendor) awards and UK awards that were previously aligned by NQAI (or by QQI in continuance of NQAI's approach following amalgamation). This more general policy will enable Section 44(9) providers to enter into an arrangement with an awarding body other than QQI to provide, organise or procure a programme of education and training under Section 48 of the 2012 Act.

The Need for an Interim Arrangement

As QQI's policy development in this area continues and in order to facilitate continuing provision of programmes leading to awards of awarding bodies in Groups C and D, QQI is making the following interim arrangements for recognition within the framework.

The interim arrangements are considered warranted because, on balance, QQI is of the opinion that the Section 44(9) providers should be facilitated in providing programmes leading to awards of other awarding bodies (including industry awards) where they are properly quality assured and serve a useful purpose for learners and society.

The interim arrangements apply to recognition within the Framework of the awards of Group C and D awarding bodies with retrospective effect from 6/11/2012, the date of commencement of the 2012 Act and until 31/12/2015, or a date to be published for the implementation of new QQI policy for recognition in the Framework for the purposes of Section 48 of the Act of 2012, whichever is later.

This interim arrangement will minimise disruption while Section 44(9) providers regularise arrangements under Section 44(8). Allowing until the end of the 2014/15 academic year gives providers some security in planning while QQI develops and implements new policy. There is provision for automatic extension if there are any delays in establishing the required new policy.

The Interim Arrangement

For Section 44(9) Providers

Pending full recognition under the more general and yet to be developed QQI policy, QQI proposes for the purposes of Section 48-1(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, that '*recognised within the framework*' would mean that the award is included in, or 'aligned' with, the NFQ or where not included or aligned that:

1. The award is an international award (and/or industry award);
2. Recognition of the award within the Framework is formally requested by a Section 44(9) institution;
3. When made in respect of programmes of education and training provided under individual ETBs, the award is considered to be a further education and training award (no higher than NFQ Level 6);
4. The award has widespread recognition by employers nationally and internationally;
5. There is a high level of demand for the award;
6. The award is issued following successful completion of a programme provided by a Section 44(9) institution and is validly and reliably assessed against standards based on learning outcomes (e.g. it cannot easily be fraudulently obtained);
7. The programmes leading to the award are provided wholly by Section 44(9) providers and are subject to their quality assurance procedures; and
8. The programmes leading to the award have been offered by the Section 44(9) provider in 2013.

The conditions applying to recognition within the Framework under this interim arrangement shall include the following requirements for providers:

- A. not to publicly assign NFQ levels to awards, unless previously aligned by NQAI or the awards Councils (this does not preclude embedding such awards in programmes leading to QQI awards or awards made by IOTs)
- B. to notify QQI of the awards to which policy is applied, including the number of programmes leading to such awards and planned enrolment and the number of awards made by June 30th 2014, with updates every six months
- C. to apply agreed QA procedures to these programmes as far as possible
- D. to notify the awarding bodies concerned of the providers statutory obligations covered by these arrangements, which only relate to Section 48 and may not be used by the awarding body or other providers to claim general recognition in the NFQ under pain of non-compliance with section 67
- E. to provide statistical returns to QQI for its Programmes and Awards Database.

Recognition within the framework thus obtained may be withdrawn at any time by QQI, is without prejudice to the NFQ Level (if any) that may in the future be associated with the award by QQI, and may be subject to additional conditions.

Providers Not Listed in Section 44(9)

An award that is recognised within the Framework for the purposes of Section 48, following an application by a Section 44(9) provider may also be used for exemption purposes upon application by providers who are not listed in section 44(9) but who are providing QQI validated further education and training programmes and wish to avail of the exemption arrangements provided for in this circular. Requirements 1-8 and Conditions A-E above also apply changing what needs to be changed.

Exemptions and the Common Awards System

As stated above, awards that have been recognised under this interim arrangement may be used to gain exemptions for certification requirements for major awards. The practice of dual certification is not supported by QQI.

Exemption arrangements will be agreed on a national basis after all applications for recognition have been received under this arrangement.

It is important to note that an exemption granted under this interim arrangement will be without prejudice to future alignment decisions made under QQI policy. Specifically, an award that may be presented in lieu of a minor award at Level N may not be presented as an award that is recognised within the Framework at Level N. Instead, it may be presented as an award that is recognised within the Framework for the purpose of Section 48 of the Act of 2012.

Information Provision/ Communication of Arrangements

QQI will maintain a list of exemptions on its website. QQI will also maintain a list of Section 44(9) providers and the awards of other awarding bodies that they may offer under Section 48.

Further information protocols supporting these interim arrangements may be issued by QQI to providers.

Application Process

Recognition within the Framework under this arrangement is only available on a provider by provider basis. In other words recognition of an award must be connected with a particular quality assured programme of education and training that leads to the award and is not automatically attached to the award independently of how it has been achieved.

Section 44(9) Provider

Write to QQI, at framework.standards@qqi.ie, before 30th September 2014 as follows.

In the case of ETB institutions the application process should be coordinated and the letter should come from the Education and Training Board and cover all institutions and awards to be recognised under the arrangement. If feasible it would be preferable for a single coordinated response collating the information for all of the ETBs.

Requirements 1-8 must be satisfied for award to be recognised under this arrangement and the letter to QQI must declare that this is the case.

For each provider and for each award to be recognised in respect of that provider's programmes the following information must be provided

- Main Provider Name (e.g. an ETB)
- Provider Institutions Involved (if distinct e.g. a specific FE College)
- Centres Involved
- Award Title
- Awarding Body
- Assessment Body
- Duration of Programme in Weeks
- Estimated FET Credit Value (1 credit is 10 hours effort where effort is estimated average over all taking the programme)
- Number of Awards Made in the 2013 calendar year in this Centre
- CAS Exemptions sought in respect of this award (Give Minor Award Codes and make it clear whether the mapping is one-to-one or one-to-many or otherwise)

An Excel template will be provided to facilitate the presentation of the information.

[Providers Not Listed in Section 44\(9\)](#)

Following publication by QQI of the list of exemptions agreed on a national basis under the arrangements here, providers of programmes of further education and training leading to QQI awards may apply to QQI for permission to avail of the exemption arrangements provided for in this circular. Requirements 1-9 must be satisfied (changing what needs to be changed) and the letter to QQI must declare that this is the case. Applications should be made to framework.standards@qqi.ie.