



Developing and Validating a National Framework of Qualifications – Issues and Pitfalls

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Outline of Presentation

- Pre-development Phase
- Development Phase
- Post-development Phase



Part I

Pre-Development Phase



Building a Consensus that a National Framework of Qualifications should be developed

- This phase took 7 years in Ireland from 1992 to 1999
- Allowed for general vision for a Framework to be set out
 - **Need for a coherent national policy approach to qualifications**
 - **Need for qualifications to support a lifelong learning society**
- Such a long initial phase probably not needed now in many European countries



Deciding on the extent of the coverage of the Framework – what areas of learning should be included? – I

- Some countries have a single framework for all qualifications – higher education, vocational education and training, schooling
- Others have separate frameworks for one or two of these
- The most effective way to proceed depends on the nature of a country's systems
- Is a Framework really a National Framework if it does not include qualifications in higher education, vocational education and training, schooling?



Deciding on the extent of the coverage of the Framework – what areas of learning should be included? – II

- In Ireland in the early 1990s there was some consideration to a “National Framework” with qualifications from vocational education and training, schooling and higher education outside the universities
- It became clear later in the decade that this could not achieve the policy aspirations for a National Framework
- It was decided that the Framework should aim to include all qualifications
- Thus basis for “education and training” as a single construct



Linking Framework development with existing initiatives

- Many qualification-related reforms already underway within sectors of education and training already
- Framework development concept build on these and provided opportunities for coherence
- Framework concept allowed for evolutionary change – in a managed way
- In other countries, Framework concept was has been and may be more of a revolution



How should Framework development be led and undertaken? – I

- This depends on national arrangements
- In Ireland a new body was established to do this
- The need for a new body to do this was quite contested, at first
- Balance between lead body and awarding bodies – issues of autonomy, responsibility and subsidiarity



How should Framework development be led and undertaken? – II

- Clarity on who is in charge is vital
- Agreement on this among key Government Departments (across Education and Training) is also vital
- If this is fudged the chances of establishing an effective Framework to meet all of its goals can be reduced



Part II

Development Phase



Stages of the Development Process

- Five major stages in Irish Framework development
 - Principles, Aims and Vision
 - Type of structure – learning outcomes, levels, types of awards
 - Number of levels and the learning outcomes for these
 - Types of qualifications and the learning outcomes for these
 - Titles of awards
- Helpful for any country to have a number of different stages, whatever they are



Research-Based Approach

- Research basis for Framework is vital
- Nature of various different national qualifications and national sub-systems of qualifications
- Frameworks in place in different countries and international meta-Frameworks
- Different types of approach to learning outcomes
- Research on the qualifications needs of different types of users of qualifications – learners, employers etc.
- Need to avoid paralysis by research
- This research base is much more developed now than it was when Irish Framework was being developed, but is still relatively under-developed



Consultative Mechanisms – I

- Need for a mix of formal and informal
- Openness of approach is very important
- Formal engagement with national stakeholders involving Government Departments & agencies, awarding bodies, providers/institutions, learners, quality assurance bodies, social partners is necessary
- Mix of bi-lateral and multi-lateral fora – some stakeholders exposed to each other for the first time
- Different stages to the consultative process are also helpful
- E.g., initial work with stakeholders was on the detailed aims and goals for the Framework



Consultative Mechanisms – II

- Then a draft Framework was developed and tested against such aims and goals
- This helped to move consultation away from institutional aspirations
- Approach to consultation reflects the political culture of Ireland – some stakeholders have different impacts within different sectors of education and training
- Competing stakeholder demands may make a single Framework unattainable in some countries?



Links with Interdependent policy areas

- Coherence of national policy approach between Framework development and linked policy areas, e.g.:
 - **Quality assurance**
 - **Credit accumulation and transfer**
 - **Recognition of prior learning**
 - **Progression opportunities for learners across education and training**
- Could be part of a single overall policy approach or overlapping but separate ones



International or ‘meta’ frameworks

- Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (adopted by European Ministers, Bergen 2005) - the ‘Bologna Framework’
 - verification of compatibility with the Irish national framework –completed November 2006
 - one of first two countries doing this
- European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, (‘EQF’ - under development)
 - proposal about to be adopted
 - 8 levels, based on learning outcomes



Links with International Frameworks

- Meta-Frameworks not in place when Irish Framework was developed
- Potential for competing demands
 - **domestically constructed and owned Framework**
 - **Coherence with 2 meta-Frameworks, with required elements?**
- Danger in National Frameworks merely being a translation of meta-Frameworks



Issues that arose in development – I

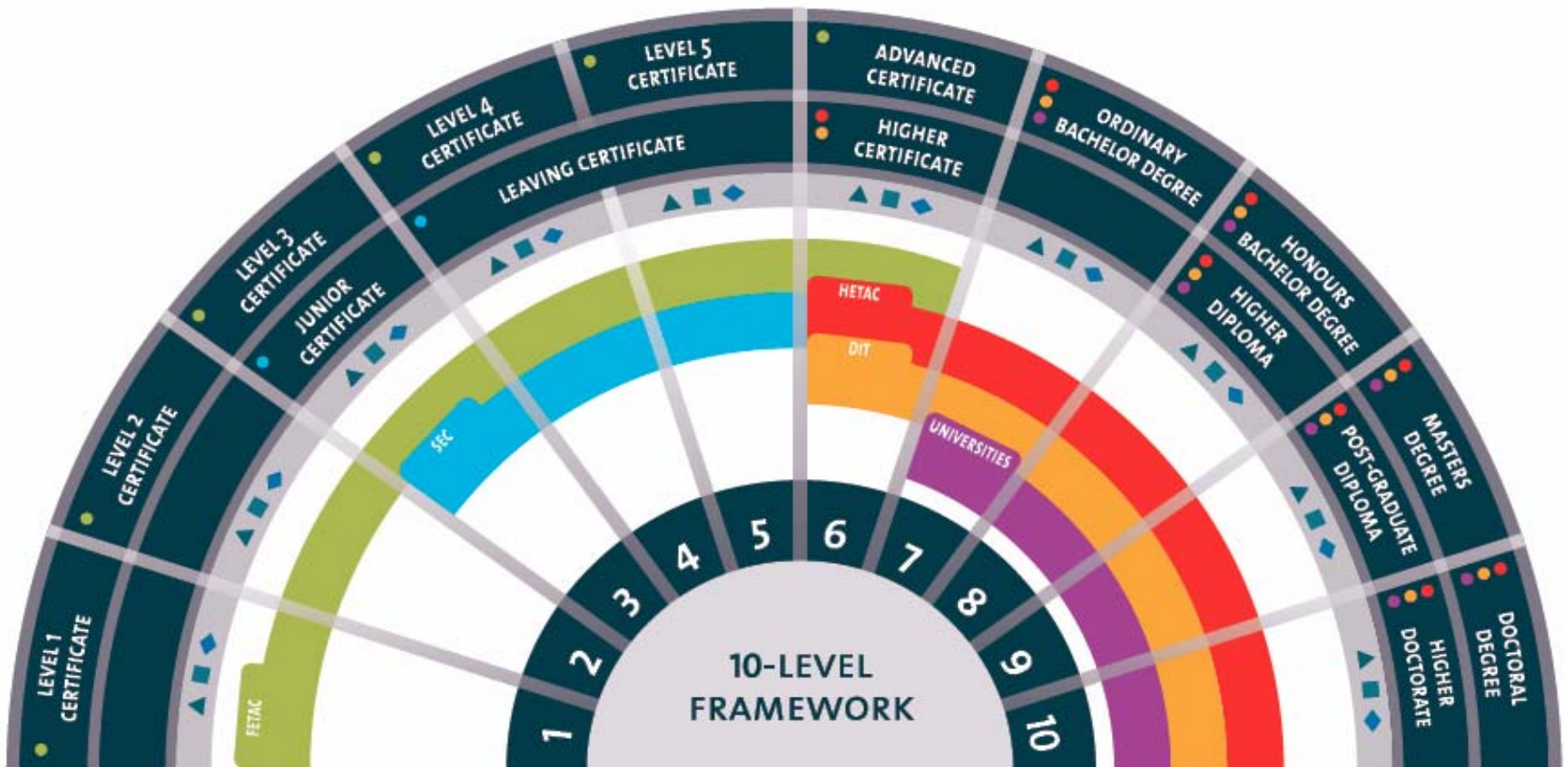
- Speed of development of Framework
 - **Stakeholder representative groups worked together but not much time for detailed consultation and awareness within stakeholder groups during development phase**
 - **At the same time, the ideas had been discussed in Ireland for over 10 years**
- Consideration of the number of levels for the new Framework
 - **Lowest level**
 - **Number of post-graduate levels**
- A range of inconsistent practices in the use and titles of awards were identified



Issues that arose in development – II

- The types of major awards
 - The number at each level
 - Cross-over between higher education and vocational education and training
- The titles of types of awards
 - Use of word “Bachelors”
 - “Certificate”
 - “Diploma”

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications – award-types and awarding bodies





The Framework in outline

- architecture: Levels, Award-types, Named Awards
- a structure of 10 levels
- classes of Award-type: major, minor, supplemental, special-purpose
- 16 major award-types defined for the Framework (e.g. Advanced Certificate, Honours Bachelor Degree)
- a 'named award' is what a learner actually receives (e.g. Advanced Certificate in Craft – Electrical)
- Awards of professional and international bodies in Ireland being aligned with the Framework



Part III

Post-Development Phase



Implementation

- Continuous engagement with different groups of stakeholders involved in implementation
 - Awarding bodies
 - Different types of providers/institution
 - others
- Different sectors at different paces
- Unique but co-ordinated implementation strategies with different sectors of education and training
- Danger if there is a perception that work is completed



Inclusion of Qualifications in the Framework

- Framework sets out types of qualifications to be used by Irish awarding bodies for now and into the future
- Process in place for inclusion of discontinued Irish awards in Framework – some of these are quite contested
- Process in place for inclusion of Irish professional awards in Framework – a small number of awards that operate independently of Irish awarding bodies
- Many international awarding bodies operating in Ireland, particularly from the UK, and it is important that these awards are aligned with the Framework – quality assurance vital.



Long Term Cultural Change

- Learning outcomes based approach is not an overnight change
- Encourage academics etc. to re-think approaches
- Impact on assessment policies need to be thought through
- Impact on the work of professional regulatory bodies
- Standard setting approaches, particularly for further education and training
- Linked credit and modularisation developments



Shared Ownership of Framework and its Implementation

- Framework implementation can only be effective where those implementing have ownership of Framework
- Not just a communications exercise
- Need to continuously seek to deepen ownership in academic community and among all involved in implementation
- Framework will not be implemented if it is perceived as being externally imposed



Communications

- Within those providers/institutions responsible for implementation
- With learners about the changes taking place and their role
- With the general public including employers
- Raises questions about how the Framework should be used in society
- Use of Framework in Certificate and Diploma Supplements



Framework and Quality Assurance

- **An important dimension of Framework implementation: credibility of Framework dependent upon it**
- **Statutory quality assurance arrangements in place for the following Irish awarding bodies:**
 - State Examinations Commission
 - FETAC
 - HETAC
 - Dublin Institute of Technology
 - Universities
- **Authority works closely with stakeholders in developing and enhancing quality cultures across education and training system**
- **Professional and international awards – quality assurance an important issue in Ireland**



Recognition of qualifications: international comparabilities

- Framework has great potential to enable international qualifications in Ireland to be recognised
- 11% of Irish labour force from outside Ireland and rising
- many specific comparabilities established already through the work of Qualifications Authority in processing queries
- *Qualifications can cross boundaries*, a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland
- Impact of meta-Frameworks aim to facilitate comparison of the Irish NFQ with qualifications systems in other European countries – this will need to be tested over time

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

Main stages of education / employment

Qualifications can be taken at any age in order to continue or return to education or training

Secondary education
Initial entry into employment or further education

Continuation of secondary education

Progression to skilled employment

Completion of secondary education

Entry to higher education

Qualified/Skilled worker

Specialised education and training

Entry to professional graduate employment

Intermediate / higher education
Advanced skills training

Professional or postgraduate education or employment

National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland

www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/TheFramework

Level 1
Level 1 Certificate
Level 2
Level 2 Certificate

Level 3
Level 3 Certificate,
Junior Certificate

Level 4
Level 4 Certificate,
Leaving Certificate

Level 5
Level 5 Certificate,
Leaving Certificate

Level 6
Advanced Certificate, Higher Certificate

Level 7
Ordinary Bachelor Degree

Level 8
Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma

Level 9
Masters Degree, Post-graduate Diploma

Level 10
Doctoral Degree

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

www.scqf.org.uk

Access level 1
Access level 2

Access level 3
Foundation Standard Grade

Level 4
Intermediate 1, General Standard Grade, SVQ 1

Level 5
Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ 2

Level 6
Higher, SVQ 3

Level 7
Advanced Higher, Higher National Certificate, Certificate of Higher Education

Level 8
Higher National Diploma, Diploma in Higher Education, SVQ 4

Levels 9
Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma/Certificate

Level 10
Honours degree, Graduate Diploma/Certificate

Level 11
Masters, SVQ 5

Level 12
Doctorates

England, Wales & Northern Ireland National Qualifications Framework

www.qca.org.uk/qualifications
www.accac.org.uk
www.qca.org.uk/openquals
www.ccea.org.uk

Entry level
Entry Level Certificate(NQF)

Level 1
NVQ Level 1, Level 1 Certificate, GCSEs at grade D-G

Level 2
NVQ Level 2, Level 2 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma, GCSEs at grade A*- C

Level 3
NVQ Level 3, A' Levels, Level 3 Certificate, Level 3 Diploma

Level 4
NVQs, Level 4 Certificate, Level 4 Diploma

Level 5
NVQs, Level 5 Certificate, Level 5 Diploma, Higher National Diploma

Level 6
NVQs, Level 6 Certificate, Level 6 Diploma

Level 7
NVQs, Level 7 Diploma, Level 7 Fellowship, Level 7 Advanced Professional Certificate

Level 8
Highly specialist Diploma from a professional body



Qualifications can cross boundaries - a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

March 2005

England, Wales and Northern Ireland framework for higher education qualifications: FHEQ

www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/fheq

Level C
Certificates of Higher Education

Level I
Ordinary bachelor's degree, Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of higher education and other higher diplomas

Level H
Bachelor's degrees with honours, Graduate certificates and diplomas

Level M
Master's degree, postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate certificates

Level D
Doctoral degree



Many challenges still arising in Ireland – I

- Some areas of initial Framework implementation still need to be undertaken
- Deeper implementation needed across all sectors of education and training
- Framework not yet fully understood / used by funders and employers
- need to continue to develop public awareness of the Framework



Many challenges still arising in Ireland – II

- Status issues for providers/professions etc and status attribution by learners/parents/employers can impact on understandings of the Framework
- flexibility of the systems of the awarding bodies
- how to 'incentivise' the concept that CPD learning should lead to an award
 - issues for learners, employers, funders
- Progression route blockages
 - New types of learning programmes needed



Review of Implementation of the Framework

- A study on the implementation and impact of the Framework is to commence in 2008
- Key aim of this is to deepen implementation and widen use
- Will help to identify areas where more policy work or implementation is necessary



Conclusion

- Ireland has gone through what are lengthy pre-development, and development phases and is now in a post-development phase
- 3 Phases in Ireland were necessarily long as the concepts were new – the longest phase is now underway
- For other countries the initial phases may now be different, more linked and shorter
- However, full implementation is a long term change process
- Many elements of the phases may have relevance for other countries; may arise in a different order or in a different way



Further Information

- Framework website: www.nfq.ie
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland: www.nqai.ie
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council: www.hetac.ie
- Further Education and Training Awards Council: www.fetac.ie