

Quality and Qualifications Ireland: new standards for core competencies NQF levels 1-4 (EQF 1-3) and new vocational standards NQF Levels 3-4 (EQF 2-3)

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 IRELAND

Timeline



ID number 28682

Background

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for developing, promoting and maintaining the Irish NFQ. QQI also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications. In addition to maintaining and reviewing the current standards, QQI's mandate also entails development of new awards standards.

Description

Established in 2003, the Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQ) is a 10-level, single national entity through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other. Underpinned by quality assurance principles, the Irish NFQ describes qualifications in the Irish education and training system and sets out what each qualification says about what learners know, understand and are able to do. It also sets out qualifications pathways from one NFQ level to the next.

In 2016, the review of the Irish NFQ was initiated by QQI.

2019 Approved/Agreed

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 amends and extends the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 and makes updated provisions concerning the means by which an award's status may be established and referenced to the NFQ. It also provides for the establishment of listed awarding bodies as a category of awarding bodies.

2020 Implementation

In June 2020, QQI published a green paper on the qualifications system and a technical paper on qualifications. They set out a wide range of qualifications and quality assurance related issues for discussion and are especially important for further

education and training (FET). They address the mechanisms for the alignment of programmes of education and training with society's need for qualified people. They are relevant to the design of qualifications and the courses to which they lead.

2021 Implementation

Planning of the public consultation started in 2021 but was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2022 Design

In November 2022, QQI launched a public consultation on new broad award standards at NFQ Levels 1-4 (until February 2023).

Based on the Levels 1-3 Award Standards Review published by QQI in 2018 and considering opinions, ideas and suggestions received in relation to the existing Common Award System (CAS), QQI with experts from the FET sector developed broad standards at Levels 1-4. This first suite consists of:

- (a) 10 core broad standards at NFQ Levels 1-4, aligned with EU key competences for lifelong learning, e.g. in digital competence, entrepreneurship or citizenship;
- (b) 11 broad vocationally-oriented standards at NFQ Levels 3-4, e.g. in ICT, Construction and engineering, Hospitality and personal services.

The draft broad standards should allow more flexibility and innovation in the design of programmes and in teaching, learning and assessment. By outlining a broader set of competences relevant to life and society at large, they should also allow providers to respond more readily to meet the personal, social and economic needs of learners.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, QQI published its full report on the consultation on Draft Broad Award Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4, taking account of national and EU policy developments on lifelong learning, social inclusion and skill formation. The report notes that with partners across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in Ireland, a suite of twenty new draft award standards at levels 1-4 of the NFQ were created. A fundamental alteration in the proposed broad award standards format is the removal of highly prescriptive learning outcomes moving towards approaches where expected learning outcomes are expressed in more open terms. The suite of new award standards comprises ten core competence award standards specified at NFQ levels 1 to 4, and ten vocational award standards specified at NFQ levels 3 and 4. The award standards for core competences are aligned with the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning 2018. The suite of broad award standards at NFQ levels 1-4 will become available from 2024.

2024 Implementation

In 2024, QQI published the new Further Education and Training (FET) Awards Standards of Core Competencies for NFQ Levels 1-4 (EQF 1-3), aligned with the EU Key Competencies for Lifelong learning in:

- Citizenship
- Cultural Awareness and Expression
- Digital
- Entrepreneurship
- Learning for Sustainability
- Literacy
- Mathematical and Numerical
- Multilingual
- Personal, Social and Learning to Learn
- Science and Technology

QQI also published the new FET vocational award standards for NQF 3-4 (EQ2-3) for:

- Administration and Office Work
- Agriculture
- Aquaculture
- Community Support Services
- Construction and Engineering
- Fine Arts, Crafts and Design
- Horticulture
- ICT
- Tourism and Hospitality Services
- Retail

Implementation guidelines for using board award standards at NQF levels 1-4 (EQF 1-3) were also published outlining the guidelines as the basis for the phasing of the implementation of the new awards, and the basis of consultation in the piloting of the board award standards when undertaking new programme development or in a scheduled review of existing validated programmes.

Detailed planning and guidelines to support the implementation of broad award standards at NFQ levels 1-4 will be developed in collaboration with the stakeholders.

2025 Completed

The implementation of the new awards standards was completed with stakeholders.

Bodies responsible

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Target group

Other

All learners enrolled in courses awarded by QQI and on the NFQ

Thematic categories

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Comprehensive national qualification frameworks

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[QQI Key milestones](#)

[Green paper on the qualifications system](#)

[Policy impact assessment of the Irish national framework of qualifications](#)

[Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#)

[Levels 1-3 Award Standards Review](#)

[QQI Consultation on Draft Broad Award Standards at NQF Levels 1-4 \(EQF 1-3\): Full Report](#)

[Background to the Development of Broad Award Standards at NFQ levels 1-4](#)

[Update on Broad Award Standards at NFQ Levels 1-4](#)

[At a glance: QQI's Public Consultation on a Suite of Draft Broad Award Standards at NQF levels 1-4 \(EQF 1-3\)](#)

[FET Awards Standards \(Core Competencies\) Core competences are broad award standards \(NFQ Levels 1-4\) aligned with the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#)

[FET Awards Standards Award standards for Vocational Broad Award Standards NFQ Levels 3-4 \(EQF 2-3\)](#)

[Implementation Guidelines for using broad award standards at NFQ levels 1-4 \(EQF 1-3\)](#)

“ … ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Quality and Qualifications Ireland: new standards for core competencies NQF levels 1-4 (EQF 1-3) and new vocational standards NQF Levels 3-4 (EQF 2-3): Ireland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28682>