



Brief note of national developments on curriculum policies and practices

Country: IRELAND

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The concept of “Outcomes” is not new to education and training; what is now undoubtedly evident is the massively increased salience and prominence of this concept over the past few years in national and European policies and in any discussion about curriculum reform. In common with “learning outcomes”, “outputs”, “attainments”, “products” “aims”, “objectives”, “capacities”, “assessment standards” or “(key) competences”, outcomes of learning feature in many official curricula and other documents. However, there are important conceptual differences between these terms and not yet a clearly marked delimitation. Taking into consideration these different understanding, we would like you to provide some brief information on the following issues:

1. Up to what extent curriculum policies in your country consider/introduce outcome-oriented approaches? Please indicate which levels/types of education and training such reforms address.

FESS support Providers at Levels 1 – 6 of the NFQ. At these levels the National Awarding Body is FETAC. FETAC’s Strategic Plan commits the organisation to putting in place a comprehensive suite of awards at levels 1 to 6 of the [National Framework of Qualifications](#) (NFQ). It is planned to achieve this is by:

- the migration of existing awards into the [Common Awards System \(CAS\)](#).
- the development of new awards in new areas.

2. What is the rationale behind these reforms? What do they aim to achieve?

The Common Awards System is the new way of developing FETAC awards. It is a coherent and structured way of developing awards, which is consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications. It is outcomes based. By 2014, every FETAC award will be part of this system. This means that all awards will share common characteristics including:

- a common format. Awards Specifications make it easy to see the requirements and the standards for each award;
- explicit reference to the award types and level indicators of the National Framework of Qualifications;

- breadth and balance within the structure so that learners achieve specific expertise alongside general knowledge, skill and competence in line with the National Skills Strategy;
- a focus on outcomes of learning - what learners will be able to do on achievement of the award. Standards of knowledge, skill and competence are expressed as learning outcomes, facilitating flexibility for providers and programmes;
- a credit system, reflecting the typical amount of learning required, which enables learners to accumulate recognition over time;
- a clear relationship with other FETAC awards to help plan access, transfer and progression;
- a unique six digit code, signaling the level and award type;
- accessibility for all registered providers.

3. What are the new features/characteristics/principles that these new outcome-oriented curricula introduce?

Award Types

There are four types of Common Award - **major, minor, special purpose** and **supplemental**. Award types are an important feature of the National Framework of Qualifications. A major award reflects a significant volume of learning. It is the principal class of award within the Framework. Special purpose awards recognise specific relatively narrow ranges of learning, typically required for particular jobs. Supplemental awards recognise learning which up-skills or updates previous achievement, again typically in an employment context. All these awards are made up of one or more minor awards.

Minor awards recognise small volumes of learning that are coherent and relevant in their own right, but also link to one of these award types. Minor awards are the building blocks for FETAC awards. Minor awards are also known as components.

Award Specifications

The requirements of common awards are outlined in award specifications. Specifications outline:

- how an award is structured
- the purpose of an award
- the learning outcomes for the award and
- the appropriate assessment techniques

Award specifications will be available for all major, minor, supplemental and special purpose common awards:

- certificate specifications, special purpose specifications and supplemental specifications set out the requirements for awards, including the named minor awards;
- component specifications set out the requirements for a minor award.

Programme Validation

Any programme leading to a common award must be validated by FETAC, prior to commencement of the programme. Only registered providers, who have agreed quality assurance systems with FETAC may submit programmes for validation. Consult [Awards for Validation at Level 1 and Level 2](#) and [Awards for Validation at Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6](#).

4. What is the current stage of implementation of these reforms?

The timetable for the CAS has been as follows

Development – 2004 -2006

Implementation (New Awards Level 1 and 2) – 2008

Migration of Existing Awards – 2008 – 2011

Publication – 2010 onwards

Review of Standards – 2012

By October 2011 All Level 4 and some Level 5 and 6 awards will be ready

By February 2012 all awards will be in accordance with the CAS

Please see FETAC publication and deactivation dates below;

Publication and Deactivation

Level	Type	Publication dates	Deactivation date (last date for certification)
3	Major (4) and associated minors	October 2010 (all)	5 December 2011
4	Majors (9+) and associated minors	February 2011 – set 1 October 2011 – set 2	5 December 2012
5	Majors (100+)	February 2011 – set 1 October 2011 – set 2 February 2012 – set 3 October 2012 – set 4	5 December 2012 5 December 2013
6	Majors (100+)	February 2011 – set 1 October 2011 – set 2 February 2012 – set 3 October 2012 – set 4	5 December 2012 5 December 2013
5	Minors	February 2011 – October 2012	Date of the major award of which they are a part or December 2012 or 2013. Check website*
6	Minors	February 2011 – October 2012	Date of the major award of which they are a part or December 2012 or 2013. Check website*

*Vocationally specific minor awards will be deactivated at the same time as the major award of which they are part. The final major award to be deactivated will determine the deactivation date of any recurring vocational minors.

5. What are the main challenges faced?

The main challenges will be to meet the specified targets, with regards to the Common Awards System.

Providers must be upskilled in the area of Programme Development. For Providers this will involve the design of the Programme and Assessment (including modes of delivery and assessment, duration, learner profile, context, added value). The Programme will then be validated by FETAC and delivered and assessed by the Provider, in accordance with the Provider's Quality Assurance.

This process will require much support from FETAC and from FESS.