

# PART 7

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary is based on the (most) common usage of terms in in policies, procedures and practice concerning RPL and the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

## Access

Access concerns entry to and participation in education and training institutions or programmes. In certain circumstances before admittance is granted certain criteria may need to be fulfilled. Some examples include a requirement for a particular qualification (award), attainment of a particular level of education, skills or work experience. There may be a distinction between eligibility criteria (e.g. prior learning achievement) and selection criteria (e.g. to allocate limited places, equality criteria).

## Alignment

Qualifications (awards) of professional bodies and awarding bodies that are based in other countries may be “aligned” with the NFQ (a similar, but less specific, term is “recognised through the Framework”) and in accordance with quality assurance criteria. For example, some awards made in Ireland by awarding bodies from the UK are aligned with the NFQ. Such qualifications can then be better understood in an Irish context and compared to other qualifications in the Framework. For further information please see the following link: [www.nqai.ie/AlignmentReports.html](http://www.nqai.ie/AlignmentReports.html)

## Assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate learning attainments (knowledge, skill and competences) of an individual against the standards of the unit of assessment (e.g. module, unit, programme, qualification). *Formative* assessment is used to support the learner. *Summative* assessment is used to certify whether learning outcomes have been achieved and whether the learner is therefore entitled to gain entry, credit etc. for his/her learning.

## Award

An award or qualification is conferred by the awarding body and indicates that an individual has acquired certain standards of learning, usually through having successfully completed a programme of study and attained the relevant standards. An example of an award is an Honours Bachelor Degree.

## Award- type

An award-type is a category of named awards which have common features and the same level in the Irish NFQ. Examples of award-types include: Junior Certificate (NFQ level 3), Advanced Certificate (NFQ Level 6), and Honours Bachelor Degree (NFQ Level 8). There are 16 major award-types in the NFQ. Award-types can reflect a mix of standards of knowledge, skill and competence which is independent of any specific field of learning.

## Bologna Process

The Bologna process, inaugurated in 1999, is a voluntary process currently involving 47 countries (both EU and non-EU). Within the EU, the Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. To achieve this, the Framework for the European Higher Education Area or the ‘Bologna Framework’ (2005) was developed to build on the three cycle system for higher education. It introduced qualifications descriptors and associated credit range guidelines (bachelor/master/doctorate). This Framework aims to make the recognition of qualifications (awards) easier, thus allowing citizens to travel more easily between countries for employment purposes or to pursue additional studies. The compatibility of National Qualifications Frameworks or systems to the Bologna Framework will eventually be verified by each participating state. Ireland completed this verification process in 2006.

## Credit

A credit system is a systematic way of measuring notional student workload associated with an educational programme, qualification, module or unit. Credit systems are based on a common currency which can be used to support accumulation and transfer of credit within and between programmes and institutions. The definition of credit in higher education systems varies, depending on the parameters used. A specific volume or range of credit is assigned to a qualification or programme. A student must accumulate a certain volume of credit in order to achieve a qualification. Credit is achieved following a verification or assessment that the relevant learning outcomes or standards have been achieved.

### European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool which enables students to transfer and accumulate credits for learning achieved through higher education and is the basis for credit systems in Irish higher education. In ECTS *60 ECTS credits* are attached to the workload of a typical full-time academic year.

### European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, 2008, is an overarching 8 level qualifications framework linking countries' qualifications systems, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across 33 countries and systems in Europe. The Irish NFQ, formally referenced to the EQF in 2006, remains the most significant reference for individuals gaining qualifications in Ireland.

### Formal learning

Formal learning takes place through programmes of education or training that are delivered by education and training providers. It is assessed and can lead to awards.

### Informal Learning

Learning that takes place through life and work experience, which may also be referred to as experiential learning. Often it is learning that is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competence.

### Institutes of Technology (IOTs)

The institutes of technology (IoTs) are designated under State legislation. They provide programmes leading to HETAC awards at NFQ Levels 6-10. The institutes of technology may also make their own awards at specified NFQ levels under delegated authority from HETAC.

### Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, to understand and / or be able to do following successful completion of a period of learning. Awards in the NFQ are based on learning outcomes. These are set out in level indicators and in award-type descriptors

### Level

There are 10 levels in the NFQ. Each level sets out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. For example, FETAC awards at NFQ Levels 1 and 2 recognise basic learning; the Leaving Certificate is placed at NFQ levels 4 and 5; an Honours Bachelor Degree is placed at NFQ Level 8; a Master Degree at NFQ Level 9.

## **Lifelong Learning**

Lifelong learning includes all learning activities undertaken throughout life. The term recognises that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a range of situations. As such it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability.

## **National Awarding Bodies**

For the purposes of the Framework, an awarding body is a national body that has the power to give an individual a qualification (award) for his/her learning. The national awarding bodies which have their awards included in the Framework are: the State Examinations Commission, FETAC, HETAC, the universities, DIT and institutes of technology with delegated authority to make awards. However many other awarding bodies such as professional bodies or UK awarding bodies may also have their awards included in or aligned with the NFQ.

## **Non-formal Learning**

Learning that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning

## **Programme of Education and Training**

Programme (of education and training) means any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence and includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.

## **Progression**

The process by which learners may move from one programme of education and training to another where each programme is of a higher level than the preceding programme.

## **Qualification**

No distinction is made between an award and a qualification.

## **Recognition**

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved or of qualifications can be done through a variety of processes:

- the award of qualifications, credit or exemptions
- comparison with existing qualifications or with a level on the NQF
- acknowledgment of the value of learning achieved or of qualifications by stakeholders in society e.g. employers

Awarding bodies, the NQAI (with respect to individual applications for recognition of foreign qualifications or for Irish qualifications abroad) and providers can be involved in recognition.

## Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as 'a process by which prior learning is given a value'. It concerns learning that has taken place, but has not necessarily been assessed or measured. Such prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal routes.

### Transfer

Transfer refers to the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.

### Validation

In the European context, the term 'validation' is used to refer to 'confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.