



QQI POLICY.

**Core Policies and Criteria for the Establishment
of Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs)**



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Dearbhú Cáilíochta
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Qualifications Ireland

FOREWORD

QQI is a statutory body with express functions including the approval of the establishment of listed awarding bodies (LABs) and has established these Policies and Criteria under Section 55E(1)(a) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the “2012 Act”) as amended¹.

The approval of the establishment of LABs is a regulatory process that determines if an organisation is an appropriate body, with reference to particular awards, to make such awards. LABs will be listed on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)².

Approved LABs can apply to QQI to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

QQI accepts applications for the establishment of a LAB from:

- Organisations delivering their own programmes leading to awards that are proposed to be included within the Framework, called **provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)**
- Organisations that engage other providers, called associated providers, to deliver the programmes leading to awards that are proposed to be included within the Framework, called **non-provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)**
- Organisations may operate a combination model whereby they deliver some of their own programmes leading to awards that are proposed to be included within the Framework and engage associated providers to deliver other programmes leading to awards that are proposed to be included within the Framework and these are called **combination listed awarding bodies (LABs)**
- QQI will provide guidance to prospective LABs regarding the most suitable LAB type for their individual organisation.

1 [Revised Acts \(lawreform.ie\)](https://www.irishstatelaw.ie/RevisedActs/)

2 www.irq.ie

PART 1: CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

These are the core policies and criteria for the establishment of a LAB. This is a regulatory process that determines if an organisation, with reference to particular awards, is a suitable body to make such awards.

The inclusion of awards within the Framework is with reference to awards generally, in terms of the award type and class, rather than the individual instances of the award being made to a person. A LAB will bear full responsibility for the oversight of the making of individual awards to learners. Individual instances of awards can be made with an NFQ level based on the inclusion of the award within the Framework and listed on the IRQ.

2. THE BASIS FOR ESTABLISHING LABS AND APPROVING AWARDS FOR INCLUSION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK

The establishment of LABs is a statutory function of QQI outlined in Section 55 of the 2012 Act (as amended).

2.1 WHAT IS AN AWARD?

An award is a qualification granted to a learner who has successfully completed an education or training programme by demonstrating the necessary standards of knowledge, skill, or competence.

The terms awards and qualifications are used interchangeably by QQI in the Irish context. Any award included within the Framework is considered a qualification. It is possible to include micro-credentials as qualifications in the NFQ. Though it is worth noting that a micro-credential does not have to be included in the NFQ.

2.2 WHAT IS AN AWARD WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK?

All awards included within the Framework are based on recognised standards specified in terms of knowledge, skill, or competence³ and expressed as learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements of what an enrolled learner is expected to know, understand, and where appropriate, demonstrate, on completion of a programme of education and training, which leads to an award included within the Framework.

All awards included within the Framework are associated with a level, award type, class of award,

³ The Framework is a system of levels and types of awards based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by a learner to entitle the learner to an award. See S43 of the 2012 Act (as amended).

and award standard. There are general award standards associated with a level within the Framework or an award type. **The development of specific award standards for named awards is the responsibility of the awarding body.**

2.3 WHAT IS AN AWARDING BODY?

A body issuing awards formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences) of an individual, following an assessment procedure.

2.4 WHAT IS A LAB?

A LAB is an awarding body that does not have statutory awarding powers of NFQ awards in the State and voluntarily seeks to have their awards included in the National Framework of Qualifications.

A LAB may not delegate or transfer its power to make awards that are included in the NFQ.

2.5 THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LABS

Section 55 of the 2019 (Amended) Act facilitates the establishment of a new category of awarding body to be known as a 'listed awarding body (LAB)' as a mechanism for regulating the voluntary inclusion of a wider range of qualifications in the NFQ.

QQI's functions include approving the establishment of LABs and approving the inclusion of awards within the Framework (Section 55 of the 2012 Act (as amended)).

These policy and criteria are established under Section 55E(1)(a) of the 2012 Act (as amended).

An awarding body who falsely claims or represents that QQI has approved them as a LAB or that QQI has approved their awards for inclusion within the Framework commits an offence under the 2012 Act (as amended).

2.6 THE VALUE OF ESTABLISHING LABS

The **value proposition** of the LABs scheme, and inclusion of awards within the Framework is as follows:

- To continue to deliver on the original **vision** and intention of the NFQ as a mechanism for the development of qualifications and the recognition of learning achievements.
- To enable learners and graduates of professional, sectoral, and international awarding bodies in Ireland to more easily participate in and benefit from **access, transfer and progression** policies and procedures already in place across the sector.
- To ensure awards of these bodies can be **articulated** as part of the wider education and training system and make visible the possibilities and opportunities for access, transfer and progression and recognition of prior learning.
- To provide learners with a greater **choice** of quality assured awards.

- To provide assurance and **confidence** to learners about awards being undertaken and the awarding bodies delivering them.
- To **recognise** the learning already being undertaken by learners by providing a mechanism to include such awards within the Framework.
- To ensure the National Framework of Qualifications remains **relevant and responsive** to a changing education and training landscape.
- To **preserve** alignment with international qualifications frameworks, namely the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the QF EHEA ('Bologna')

2.7 BODIES WHO MUST SUBMIT FOR ESTABLISHMENT AS A LAB

The legislation does not require any specific bodies to seek establishment as a LAB. However, by virtue of being required to have their awards included within the Framework, awarding bodies will be required to be established as a LAB to continue awarding relationships with certain relevant providers mentioned in Section 48 of the 2012 Act (as amended), namely:

- An Foras,
- The National Tourism Development Authority
- Teagasc
- An Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- An educational or training institution established and maintained by an education and training board
- A recognised school in so far as the school providers adult, continuing or vocational education or training which leads to an award
- An education and training board

Section 55B(2) of the 2012 Act (as amended) outlines those awarding bodies and providers that are not required to be established as a LAB. This includes QQI, DABs, providers operating under delegated authority of QQI and bodies making awards under the Education Act 1998.

2.8 FEES

The schedule of fees is published separately.

2.9 RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL

Establishment as a LAB is with reference to the date of approval and awards approved for inclusion within the Framework will only be considered included from that date onwards. QQI will provide a general statement of comparability for those awards issued prior to inclusion within the Framework. This will be published on the IRQ.

Awards included in the NFAQ prior to the introduction of this policy are not affected by this policy. Awards that previously benefitted from alignment to the NFAQ can continue to reference alignment for the relevant period.

PART 2: PROCEDURES FOR THE DETERMINATION OF AN APPLICATION TO BE ESTABLISHED AS A LAB

3. PREREQUISITES BEFORE APPLICATION FOR ESTABLISHMENT AS A LAB

3.1 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Before a decision can be made to approve the establishment of a LAB, the applicant must demonstrate evidence of meeting the minimum requirements. An awarding body must meet all the specified minimum requirement in one of the two categories outlined below.

- The term ‘established awarding bodies’ refers to awarding bodies, both international and domestic, already offering awards in the State,
- The term ‘emergent awarding bodies’ refers to awarding bodies, both international and domestic, seeking to enter the Irish market for the first time.

Please note; An awarding body that does not meet the requirements for an established awarding body does not automatically qualify as an emergent awarding body.

Minimum requirements for established awarding bodies

- Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body and its awards. The relevant public authority must have an informed position about the organisation in its capacity as an awarding body. Such relevant public authorities are the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or a DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis⁴.
- A history of at least 20 years of making awards in Ireland⁵.
- Evidence of meeting an identified market/learning/skills/employment/societal need.
- Evidence of good standing as an awarding body, and specifically with reference to the proposed awards and subject areas.
- Where an awarding body is primarily established outside the State, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification and/or quality assurance authority in that jurisdiction(s) and must provide written testimony from the relevant authority or authorities confirming that the applicant is in good standing, has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns.⁶

⁴ Guidance will be provided by QQI to individual LABs regarding the suitability of proposed public authorities.

⁵ This reflects the approximate length of the time that the NFQ has been in place at the time of approval of these policies.

⁶ QQI intends to establish agreements with relevant regulators for the provision of this information.

F. Confirmation and evidence of proposed LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.

Or

Minimum requirements for emergent awarding bodies

- A. Sufficient evidence of an emerging learning/market/societal need.
- B. Sufficient evidence that the emergent awarding body has the requisite knowledge and experience to meet the emerging, unmet learning/market/societal need.
- C. Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body and its awards. The relevant public authority must have an informed position about the organisation in its capacity as an awarding body. Such relevant public authorities are the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or a DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis⁷.
- D. Additional support and endorsement needed from at least one further relevant public authority which must either be a funding body, or a government department/public sector agency with specific expertise and/or responsibility related to the proposed awards/subject area.
- E. There must be evidence of sufficient public funding for the qualifications of such an awarding body.
- F. Where an awarding body is primarily established outside the State, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification authority in that jurisdiction and must provide written testimony from that authority confirming that the applicant is in good standing has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns⁸.
- G. Confirmation and evidence of LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.

3.2 ENGAGEMENT WITH QQI

Prospective LABs are encouraged to contact QQI early and confirm achievement of these minimum requirements before progressing to preparing an application.

⁷ Guidance will be provided by QQI to individual LABs regarding the suitability of proposed public authorities.

⁸ QQI intends to establish agreements with relevant regulators for the provision of this information.

4. LAB STATUS

4.1 AWARDING RESPONSIBILITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

An awarding body is responsible for making awards that are approved for inclusion within the Framework and may engage associated providers to deliver programmes leading to the awards. However, only **approved** associated providers⁹ can be engaged to provide programmes leading to awards included within the Framework and must be managed within the parameters of the awarding body's QA procedures. Where an associated provider is a relevant provider under the Act, and QQI has approved their quality assurance procedures, a LAB can accept this approval in lieu of conducting their own QA approval. LABs are fully responsible for the QA of providers not under the remit of QQI.

As outlined in Section 55(F) of the 2012 Act, an associated provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all the prerequisites for an award of the LAB that is included within the Framework.

The initial phase of this scheme is focused on those awarding bodies operating within the boundaries of quality assuring provision of education and training which is in keeping with QQIs existing regulatory approach. As such, examination and certification bodies are not eligible to apply to be a LAB at this time, but this position will be reviewed following the first phase of implementation, which will be no longer than five years.

An examination or certification body is a body that does not quality assure provision of education and training but only organises and conducts examination/assessment of learning for the purposes of certification. LABs that offer examination or certification without quality assuring provision leading to the exam or certificate will not be permitted to include such an award within the Framework in the initial phase.

4.2 SCOPE OF LISTING

Establishment as a LAB is with reference to the awards proposed to be made by it. As such, a LAB's approved scope of provision is initially limited to:

- the level and type of awards, including micro-credentials, proposed to be made by it at approval stage.
- the subject/content area of awards proposed to be made by it at approval stage.
- the type of LAB – provider, non-provider or combination, and approved associated providers.

Any additional awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework after initial establishment will still need to be approved by QQI in line with relevant policy and criteria. However, new awards that are within the scope of listing will not require wider consideration of QA procedures.

⁹ The LAB is responsible for approving associated providers. QQI reserves the right to conduct its own assessment of due diligence prior to enrolling an associated provider in the Learner Protection Fund.

4.3 EXTENDING/MODIFYING THE SCOPE OF LISTING

After a LAB has been established and its initial awards included within the Framework, it may seek to extend the approved scope of listing by applying to have additional awards included within the Framework. An evaluation process that looks at both the suitability of the LAB to make the proposed awards, as well as the suitability of the inclusion of these awards within the Framework will be required. The LAB may be required to modify its quality assurance procedures to the satisfaction of QCI to extend the approved scope of listing.

Approval of the inclusion of awards within the Framework alone may extend the scope to a limited extent (e.g., within the provider's existing submitted QA procedures).

4.4 LABS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

The quality assurance procedures developed by the LAB (Section 55F (2) of the Act) must address the awards and classes of awards in respect of which the LAB is approved. The procedures must also address related services, for example, the quality assurance of programme approval and assessment procedures, and its procedures for making awards.

Awarding Bodies should consult the suite of QCI's statutory QA guidelines, noting the sector-specific and topic-specific guidelines that may apply.

QCI approval of QA procedures developed under Section 28 of the Act is only required in the case of provider and combination LABs and this approval will be sought as part of the application to be established as a LAB.

However, in the case of non-provider awarding bodies, QCI needs to be satisfied with the scope and efficacy of the QA procedures developed under S55F of the Act to be satisfied with the ability of the awarding body to make awards which protect the integrity and reputation of the NFO. As such, the relevant QA procedures will be submitted to QCI as part of the application to be established as a LAB but are not subject to formal, statutory QCI approval.

4.5 ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION (ATP)

Provider and combination LABs must prepare ATP procedures under Section 56 of the Act, and these are subject to QCI approval.

4.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) & ASSOCIATED PROVIDERS

Non-provider and combination LABs must outline in their quality assurance procedures developed under Section 55 F, their process for ensuring associated providers have QA and ATP procedures in place.

The QA procedures of the LAB must also describe the process for approving, monitoring, and reviewing associated providers and their programmes, with a clearly outlined procedure for ending the relationship with an associated provider, where indicated. The process for approving associated providers must refer to the due diligence requirements set out by QCI¹⁰.

Formal approval of associated providers in line with QQI policy and criteria is required even where the LAB has a long-standing relationship with such a provider. Where an Associated Provider is also a relevant provider of QQI, a LAB may take this as evidence of the suitability of an associated provider but only where the QQI approved QA procedures are consistent with the proposed associated provision (ie) in terms of level, award type, subject area. For example, if an associated provider is seeking to deliver a programme leading to a major award at Level 8 but is only approved to deliver minor awards at Level 6 by QQI; this would not fall within the scope of QQI approved QA procedures and the LAB would be fully responsible for the quality assurance of the associated provider and their provision.

4.7 FLEXIBLE, DISTRIBUTED AND ONLINE LEARNING

LABs and their associated providers may make arrangements that involve flexible, distributed, blended or online learning but such arrangements must have regard to relevant QQI guidelines¹¹. This needs to be clearly outlined in the QA procedures submitted as part of the application to be established as a LAB, and in the procedures dealing with approval and review of associated providers. Associated providers should clearly outline arrangements for such learning in their own QA procedures.

4.8 TRANSNATIONAL

Under Section 60(1)(b) of the Act LABs are excluded from the code of practice for learners outside the State enrolled on programmes leading to award that are awards included within the Framework. As such, LABs are restricted to making NFQ awards within the State. The awarding body can, of course, make awards outside Ireland in line with awarding powers in other jurisdictions, but must not provide a certificate indicating achievement of an Irish NFQ award. As such, a LAB may not use NFQ logos or NFQ levels on certificates issued to learners outside Ireland.

Where a programme has any on-site component, including assessment, which requires attendance in person in Ireland, the NFQ award can be made to any learner. In the case of online provision only, NFQ awards can only be made to learners based in the State.

¹¹ www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2023-12/statutory-quality-assurance-guidelines-for-providers-of-blended-and-fully-online-programmes-2023_1.pdf

5. PREPARING AND SEEKING ESTABLISHMENT AS A LAB

This section outlines the steps required to apply to be a LAB, with reference to proposed awards. The specific awards will be considered for inclusion within the Framework following formal establishment as a LAB, although, in practicality, the decisions will be made as part of the same process.

5.1 BEFORE SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

A prospective awarding body must ensure that the minimum requirements set out in Sections 3 of this document have been met before making a request to be approved as a LAB. A request to be established as a LAB must comply with all the requirements of QQI's policy and criteria, though it is appropriate for a prospective LAB to detail any specific criterion which are not relevant to them.

Submission of a request by a provider to QQI shall not imply that any of the requirements have been met.

5.2 SELF-EVALUATION BY THE AWARDING BODY

Prior to making a request for establishment as a LAB, with reference to proposed awards, an awarding body is required to conduct, and prepare a report on, a critical and candid evaluation, against QQI's criteria of

- i. the overall operation and management of the awarding body and
- ii. the awards proposed to be included within the Framework.

A separate policy and criteria document has been developed to describe the process for the inclusion of awards within the Framework, which should be reviewed and referenced by the awarding body as part of its application to be established as a LAB and have awards included within the Framework.

The evaluation must indicate whether (i) and (ii) (above) meet the applicable criteria and include analysis and commentary clearly citing evidence and referencing this in the supporting documentation.. The evaluation should describe the means and methodologies used by the awarding body for the evaluation and include a critical analysis of, and commentary on, their effectiveness.

Unsupported assertions that the criteria are met will not be accepted.

5.3 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

The documentation must include sufficient information to address QQI's criteria. It must address:

- (i) the overall operation and management of the awarding body and
- (ii) the awards which are proposed to be included within the Framework.

The supporting documentation should include the provider's quality assurance procedures established under Section 55F of the Act and informed by the guidelines issued by QQI under Section 271A of the Act. The quality assurance procedures of Provider and Combination LABs are also established under Section 28 of the Act, and these are subject to approval by QQI. A Combination LAB may develop one set of QA procedures to meet the requirements of both S55F and S28.

In the case of non-provider and combination awarding bodies, the supporting documentation should include the procedures for approving, monitoring, reviewing, and discontinuing associated providers, with reference to any QQI guidance issued.

5.4 ASSEMBLING AND MAKING THE APPLICATION

All requests for establishment as a LAB must include:

- A. Confirmation that the minimum requirements have been met;
- B. The awarding body's self-evaluation report against the policy and criteria (5.2);
- C. The supporting documentation (5.3);

The documentation including the awarding body's evaluation report must address the criteria. QQI may refuse a request to establish the LAB on the grounds that the application does not address the criteria fully. The onus is on the applicant to present a complete case. QQI will develop guidance and templates to support prospective LABs in compiling the application.

The request for establishment as a LAB and to make awards that are included within the Framework must be signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.

5.5 DUE DILIGENCE

As part of the application to be established as a LAB, applicants will be required to evidence compliance with the due diligence regulations established under Section 29B of the Act.¹² Any exemptions from this requirement must be applied for at the point of confirming achievement of the minimum requirements specified in 3.1.

Non-provider LABs will also be required to confirm compliance by its associated providers with these due diligence regulations. QQI reserves the right to conduct its own due diligence assessment of associated providers prior to allowing payments to the Learner Protection Fund. Some associated providers that are also relevant providers may be PEL exempt.

5.6 WITHDRAWAL OF A REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT AS A LAB

Requests for establishment as a LAB may be withdrawn prior to the start of the independent evaluation stage. After the independent evaluation stage has started, QQI will normally progress to a determination and publish the approved evaluation report. This is in line with our commitments as part of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.¹³

¹² Some exemptions to this requirement are provided for in Section 29A (f) of the Act and further detailed in Section 65 (6).
¹³ [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\) - EQAR](#)

Eligibility for refunds will be specified in a separate Fees and Charges policy.

5.7 CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

The documentation (including that covered by unit (5.4)) relating to a request for establishment as a LAB will be made available confidentially to QQI staff and persons and organisations involved in their evaluation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that QQI is subject to the Freedom of Information legislation and QQI records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

5.8 SCREENING BY QQI

QQI will screen the documentation supporting the request and if satisfied that it addresses the criteria will proceed to arrange for the evaluation of the request. If QQI is not satisfied that the documentation addresses the criteria it will inform the awarding body who may choose to make a revised submission. Passing this screening check is no guarantee that the documentation will be found to have addressed the criteria when independently evaluated.

5.9 EXEMPTIONS

5.9.1 INTERNATIONAL LABS

Section 55E(9) permits consultation with public bodies outside the State in the effective implementation of policies and criteria under S55E(1). As such, QQI may accept endorsement and confirmation from comparable regulatory authorities in other jurisdictions in lieu or as part of the application process outlined in 5.4. Such endorsement from a relevant public authority must assure QQI that the prospective LAB is subject to rigorous oversight like that outlined in this policy and criteria. Exemptions from the full process will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

5.9.2 DOMESTIC LABS

Where a public authority, inside or outside the State, has an informed perspective about the applicant awarding body, this will be considered in lieu of or as part of the evaluation conducted under 5.4. Exemptions from the full process will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

6. EVALUATION AND DETERMINATION OF A REQUEST TO BE ESTABLISHED AS A LAB

6.1 INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

- All applications for approval as a Listing Awarded Body (LAB) will be independently evaluated against the criteria outlined in Part 3, though QQI may appoint an executive member to the panel. This approach is outlined below.
- At a minimum, each application will be considered by an independent review panel. It will be determined if the application demonstrates compliance with the criteria outlined in Part 3.
- As considered necessary by QQI and by arrangement with QQI, evaluators may undertake physical or virtual site visits as part of the evaluation. They may interview the awarding body's leadership, the programme and awards personnel and other relevant stakeholders.
- The evaluation report, which may be drafted by an independent evaluator or the Executive, must address whether the applicant meets the criteria to be established as a LAB in general and in detail. It must include one of the following overall recommendations, considering the applicable policies and criteria:
 - **Satisfactory** – meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied that the applicant is suitable for inclusion in the List of Awarding Bodies.
 - **Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions** – specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed conditions that need to be satisfied before establishment as LAB i.e., outline minor changes necessary before a final decision is made by QQI.
 - **Not satisfactory.**
- Normally an application that fails to meet the criteria in any of its aspects will be considered not satisfactory. Nevertheless, to ensure that the process will not be implemented unreasonably, if an independent evaluation finds that an applicant mostly meets the criteria but needs some minor modifications, the independent evaluation could conclude "Satisfactory subject to recommended special conditions" where the special conditions prescribe the changes that need to be made.
- Further, in exceptional cases the 'special conditions' may be used to identify parts of the application that are considered satisfactory on a stand-alone basis. All independent evaluation reports are required to provide a rationale for any proposed special conditions and recommendations to the provider as well as the overall conclusion.
- In the case of a not satisfactory recommendation, a LAB can submit a new application for establishment as a LAB after 6 months.

6.2 DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The decision to establish an awarding body as a LAB and/or include awards within the Framework is the responsibility of QQI. Independent review panels make recommendations to QQI, but the final decision is made by QQI.

- Prior to the submission of an application for establishment as a LAB, the QQI Executive will first ensure that the prospective applicant has met the minimum requirements outlined in 3.1. If the Executive is unable to determine if the minimum criteria has been met, an independent evaluator will be appointed to confirm the achievement of these minimum requirements.
 - Failure to meet the minimum requirements will prevent a prospective LAB from submitting a full application for establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards within the Framework.
- Applicants that have passed the assessment of minimum requirements will proceed to submitting a full application. A detailed assessment against the criteria outlined in Part 3 of this document, and against the criteria outlined in the regulations established under Section 29B will be undertaken by a review team. An assessment of the suitability of quality assurance procedures and access, transfer, and progression procedures will also be undertaken at this time.
 - A negative determination at this stage of the process may be appealed. Applicants will not be able to progress to the assessment of its awards for inclusion within the Framework unless the appeal is upheld. Submission of a new application after 6 months will be permitted.
- Applicants that have been deemed to (i) meet the criteria in Part 3 of this document, and (ii) meet the due diligence regulations, are considered a suitable and competent body to be established as a LAB. Where relevant, applicants will also have received QQI approval of QA and ATP procedures.
- Applicants meeting all the above requirements may proceed to a detailed assessment of their proposed awards with reference to the **Policy and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework**.
- LABs and the approved awards will be included on the IRQ¹⁴.

6.3 INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS

Evaluators will be objective and independent of the awarding body, and its associated providers, making the request e.g., free of conflicting interests, and will comply with the *Roles, Responsibilities and Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Evaluators*.¹⁵ Any related interests must be declared in the independent evaluation report and will be published.

Independent evaluators must be competent to make a recommendation on whether the body should be established as a LAB. Competence means having the capacity to make and defend judgements against the applicable QQI criteria. Specifically, an evaluator or an evaluation group will be selected on the basis of having the competence to justify their recommendation whatever it may be.

For the independent evaluation of requests for establishment as a LAB the groups of evaluators will include student member(s) and will be composed in compliance with ESG standard 2.4. Independent evaluators with expertise in qualifications and/or qualification frameworks will also be integral members of the team. Typically, evaluation groups will have expertise in

¹⁴ www.irq.ie

¹⁵ [qqi-roles-responsibilities-and-code-of-conduct_0.pdf](#)

- A. the operation and management of bodies with awarding authority comparable to that requested;
- B. the main discipline-areas of the relevant proposed awards and
- C. generic areas including pedagogy, assessment, quality assurance, qualifications and all the other areas indicated by QQI's criteria.

QQI will exercise its judgment as to the number of evaluators that may be required in respect of the request in question and the competences required having regard to the particular awarding body and awards and the nature of the relevant proposed awards. Training will be provided to independent evaluators where QQI considers this necessary.

An evaluator who feels that they do not have the competence to evaluate an application should not accept an invitation to do so or if this realisation, or a conflict of interest, occurs following acceptance, should notify QQI without delay.

6.4 ENDORSEMENT FROM A RELEVANT REGULATOR

In the case of international LABs subject to comparable regulatory schemes in other jurisdictions, endorsement from a relevant regulator may be used, at QQI's sole discretion, as evidence of part of the application to be established as a LAB. Applicants will need to communicate with QQI regarding such an approach.

A relevant regulator is considered to be a regulator in that jurisdiction with responsibility for approval, review and/or monitoring of qualifications and/or awarding bodies.

- A. **Level 1 Endorsement – Applicant submits a full application.**
Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing but either the regulatory scheme is significantly different or insufficient information is available – applicant submits a full application.
- B. **Level 2 Endorsement – Applicant submits a partial application covering any outstanding criteria.**
Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing and confirms that substantial components of the regulatory scheme are comparable and that an appropriate Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) [or other more relevant agreement] is in place with QQI – applicant submits a partial application to cover the outstanding criteria.
- C. **Level 3 Endorsement – Applicant submits minimal application.**
Regulator confirms the applicant LAB is regulated and in good standing and an MOU [or other more relevant agreement] is in place with QQI – applicant submits a short application with relevant data required.

7. DECLARATION OF THE OUTCOME

7.1 CERTIFICATE OF LAB STATUS

Establishment as a LAB and authority to make awards which have been included within the Framework is communicated to the provider by the issue of a certificate of LAB status. The certificate will include details of the scope and boundaries of the approval such as (but not limited to):

- A. Awarding body name
- B. Names of approved associated providers
- C. Awards which have been included within the Framework
- D. The conditions of establishment as a LAB and of inclusion within the Framework
- E. Special conditions of establishment as a LAB and of inclusion within the Framework.
- F. Review date
- G. Specific cooperative arrangements for review with international regulatory bodies

7.2 PUBLICATION OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

The approved evaluation report alongside the determination of the request for establishment as a LAB and the certificate of LAB status, is a substantive product of the process. It will be published after closure of the appeal period unless the determination to refuse the request for establishment as a LAB is appealed, in which case the report will be published if the appeal is unsuccessful. Reports will be published on the IRQ and/or the QQI website.

In some cases, the awarding body's self-evaluation report may be published subject to the awarding body granting permission especially if it demonstrates exemplary practice.

7.3 PUBLICATION OF DESCRIPTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LAB

Certain administrative information will also be published including information about the determination of the request for establishment as a LAB, the awards and classes of awards involved, the certificate of LAB status and the applicable protection of enrolled learners (PEL) arrangements.

7.4 MAKING OF AWARDS

A LAB must apply to QQI to have its awards included within the Framework before making such an award. A LAB's power to make NFQ awards is limited to those awards approved by QQI for inclusion within the Framework.

A LAB may continue to make non-NFQ awards but cannot infer a connection to the NFQ, or QQI approval of QA procedures for these awards.

7.5 IRISH REGISTER OF QUALIFICATIONS

Listed awarding bodies, and their NFQ awards, will be published on the Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ).

8. DUTIES, CONDITIONS AND OBLIGATIONS

Sections 55F and 55G are particularly relevant in this context and will be implemented by QQI.

8.1 DUTIES OF LABS AS OUTLINED IN SECTION 55

Duties of listed awarding bodies

55F. (1) In this section ‘associated provider’ means a provider, having a place of business in the State, that enters an arrangement with a listed awarding body under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all of the prerequisites for an award of the listed awarding body that is included within the Framework.

(2) A listed awarding body shall establish procedures for the quality assurance of its awards and for the external quality assurance of providers who, in relation to it, are associated providers.

(3) The Authority may give one, or more than one, direction to a listed awarding body requiring the body to impose on a provider, who, in relation to the listed awarding body, is an associated provider, obligations to which subsection (4) applies, and obligations, so imposed, shall be complied with by the provider accordingly.

(4) This subsection applies to obligations (which shall be specified in the direction concerned under subsection **(3)**)—

(a) the imposition of which, in the opinion of the Authority, is necessary or expedient, and

(b) that are to apply to, or in respect of, the provider’s activities as an associated provider in relation to the awarding body.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (4), the obligations to which that subsection applies include obligations with respect to the employment of—

(a) procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners,

(b) procedures for quality assurance, and

(c) procedures, which are fair and consistent, for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by the awarding body concerned (before awards that are included within the Framework are made by that body) are acquired and, where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners.

(6) For the purposes of the compliance by an associated provider with the obligation referred to in paragraph (a) of subsection (5) to employ the procedures referred to in that paragraph, the associated provider shall have regard to the policies and criteria established by the Authority under subsection (1) of section 56 if that subsection would otherwise not apply.

(7) A listed awarding body shall—

- (a)** co-operate with the Authority in the performance of the Authority's functions in so far as those functions relate to the inclusion of awards within the Framework,
- (b)** monitor compliance by an associated provider, on whom it has imposed obligations pursuant to a direction under subsection (3), with those obligations,
- (c)** review from time to time, and not less than once every 5 years, or at any time upon the request of the Authority, compliance by such an associated provider with the foregoing obligations,
- (d)** if such an associated provider has failed in a material respect to comply with any of the foregoing obligations, discontinue (after having afforded the provider a reasonable opportunity to make representations in writing that the grounds for such discontinuance do not exist in the particular case) any arrangement that exists between it and the associated provider under which arrangement the provider provides a programme referred to in subsection (1),
- (e)** provide to the Authority such information as the Authority may from time to time require for purposes of the performance of its functions in relation to awards included within the Framework, and
- (f)** comply with any condition that the Authority imposes, by notice in writing given to the body, on the awarding body concerned, being a condition the imposition of which the Authority considers to be necessary or expedient so as to maintain the integrity and standing of the Framework.

(8) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (e) of subsection (7), the information that the Authority may require to be provided under that paragraph includes—

- (a)** particulars of providers who, in relation to the listed awarding body concerned, are associated providers,
- (b)** particulars of programmes of education and training validated by the Authority or otherwise included within the Framework that lead to awards of the listed awarding body concerned that are included within the Framework,
- (c)** any report prepared by the listed awarding body concerned on foot of a review carried out by it with respect to the provision of programmes of education and training that lead to awards of the body that are included within the Framework, and
- (d)** numbers of awards made by the listed awarding body concerned that are included within the Framework.

(9) An awarding body that is not a listed awarding body, but which claims or represents that it is such an awarding body commits an offence.

8.2 CONDITIONS

As outlined, Section 55F (7) QQI may impose conditions on listed awarding bodies that it considers to be necessary and expedient to maintain the integrity and standing of the National Framework of Qualifications.

QQI retains the right to impose new and additional conditions on any or all established listed awarding bodies, with the agreement of the relevant listed awarding bodies. The following are the general conditions currently specified by QQI.

8.2.1 GENERAL CONDITIONS

- A. All listed awarding bodies are required to collaborate with other awarding bodies in the State to:
 - i advance the development of learner pathways;
 - ii advance the articulation of awards for the purposes of access, transfer, and progression;
 - iii support and advance the stackability of micro-credentials and other qualifications;
 - iv and any other such projects and approaches that seek to advance opportunities for learners and recognition of formal and non-formal learning.
- B. Initial establishment is with reference to the initial proposed awards. As such, scope of listing is limited to the levels, subject areas and associated providers proposed in the initial awards. Additional awards can be submitted for inclusion within the Framework within this scope. Awards outside the scope will require an application to extend the scope of listing.
- C. It is expected that once an award is included within the Framework, it will continue to be included and that the awarding body will take appropriate steps to ensure the award continues to be up to date and relevant to the need of learners and other stakeholders.
- D. Listed Awarding Bodies must provide clear and accurate information to learners about all awards it is offering to learners in Ireland, regardless of inclusion within the NFQ or not. Learners must be clear about the status of the qualification in which they are enrolling and the difference between those awards leading to NFQ awards, and those that do not.
- E. Ongoing inclusion of awards is dependent on sufficient evidence of ongoing need for the award, suitability of the award and evidence of ongoing review and update of the award to be evidenced at time of review.
- F. All offerings in Ireland or to students based in Ireland by the LAB and its associated provider(s) of a programme leading to the learning outcomes associated with an award included within the Framework must lead to that award. Programmes with the learning outcomes associated with the award can only be offered by approved associated providers, and not any other third parties.
- G. Listed awarding bodies are not permitted to make NFQ awards to learners outside Ireland.
- H. LABs must continue to implement, review and update procedures for quality assurances of its awards and for the external quality assurance of associated providers.
- I. LABs must cooperate with QQI, including the provision of information, in relation to its functions to include awards within the Framework. Required information includes but is not

limited to:

- i Number of awards made each year
 - ii Enrolment and completion rates
 - iii Access, transfer and progression information
 - iv Data about RPL applications and decisions
- J. LABs must provide information and data about awards included within the Framework in the requested format for timely publication on the IRQ.
- K. LABs must notify QQI immediately of any risks, issues, information, or concerns that affect/may affect learners and learner achievement, the integrity of the NFQ, the integrity of Framework awards or the reputation of a LAB, associated provider or Framework award.
- L. LABs must have appropriate and robust procedures in place for approving associated providers, and as part of these procedures, have due regard to the regulations and guidelines issued by QQI in relation to due diligence.
- M. LABs must have robust procedures in place for monitoring, review, and discontinuance of associated providers.
- N. LABs using associated providers must have systems in place to receive, store and manage learner information throughout their enrolment on a programme of study leading to an NFQ award.
- O. LABs must ensure that associated providers that are not exempt from protection of enrolled learners (PEL) must pay into the fund as required by QQI. In the case of a PEL event of an associated provider, the LAB must work closely with QQI to make appropriate arrangements for learners, including the provision of learner information to QQI.
- P. LABs must ensure that all associated providers have procedures in place for: access, transfer and progression; assessment; and quality assurance. Where an Associated Provider is a relevant provider of QQI, the LAB may accept QQI approval of ATP and QA procedures as sufficient evidence of same, so long as the scope of the QA procedures is consistent with the proposed associated provision.
- Q. LABs must monitor compliance by an associated provider with obligations.
- R. LABs must conduct a review of associated providers once every 5 years to ensure ongoing compliance with obligations. Where an associated provider is a relevant provider¹⁶, the LAB may use the evidence of reengagement, revalidation, annual monitoring, and periodic review to inform such review.
- S. LABs must discontinue arrangements with associated providers to deliver programmes leading to NFQ awards where an associated provider has not fulfilled their obligations.
- T. LABs must have appropriate contractual arrangements in place with associated providers that reflect their statutory responsibilities and role in discontinuance.
- U. LABs operating in other jurisdictions must notify QQI of any significant communications with other regulators.

8.3 OBLIGATIONS

In the case of non-provider or combination LABs, QQI may instruct the awarding body to impose obligations on its associated providers. QQI retains the right to issue new and additional instructions to LABs in relation to the obligations of associated providers. The following are the instructions currently specified by QQI:

- A. Associated providers must develop procedures for access, transfer and progression and must have regard to any guidelines issued by QQI in relation to access, transfer, and progression.
- B. Associated providers must develop procedures for quality assurance and must have regard to any relevant guidelines issued by QQI.
- C. Associated providers must develop procedures for assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the standards of knowledge, skill or competence determined by the LAB for NFQ awards are acquired and, where appropriate, demonstrated, by enrolled learners.
- D. Associated providers must develop policies and procedures related to academic integrity and academic misconduct; must put in place sufficient supports and training for students who are vulnerable to academic misconduct; and must provide training to staff and students regarding academic integrity.
- E. Associated providers must pay into the Learner Protection Fund as required by QQI.
- F. Associated providers must provide information about enrolled learners to the LAB.

9. PROCESS FOR INCLUDING NEW AWARDS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK

The *Policy and Criteria for Inclusion of Awards within the Framework* outlines the process for applying to QQI to have awards approved for inclusion within the Framework. In the first instance, LABs will apply to be established as LABs at the same time as applying for inclusion of awards. However, subsequent applications for inclusion will normally only require the process for including awards within the Framework.

10. EXIT AWARDS

If a LAB proposes to offer exit awards as part of an NFQ award, these must be approved for inclusion within the Framework by QQI before being awarded to students.

Exit awards proposed for inclusion within the Framework must be in keeping with award type descriptors and level indicators and represent a coherent achievement of learning relative to the proposed award. The LAB must develop individual award standards for each exit award.

11. APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL

Applicants to be established as a LAB may appeal refusal by lodging an appeal with the Appeals Panel.¹⁷

Applicants may submit a new application 6 months after a refusal.

12. OFFENCE

It is an offence for an awarding body to claim or represent that it is a LAB if it has not been so approved by QQI.

13. JOINT AWARDING

A LAB may only enter a joint awarding relationship with another awarding body that has authority to make awards included within the Framework and has the authority to make the relevant Framework award. A LAB must notify QQI of any such arrangement to make a joint award in advance. QQI will confirm if the joint awarding relationship is permissible.

¹⁷ [Appealing a decision made by QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)

PART 3: CRITERIA TO BE ESTABLISHED AS A LAB

14. INTRODUCTION

The criteria outline the requirements that must be satisfied to be established as a LAB. It is necessary to address the criteria and the evidence requirements when requesting establishment as a LAB. There is some overlap between the topics addressed by these criteria and those addressed by criteria for the inclusion of awards within the Framework, quality assurance guidelines and such like. However, these criteria go well beyond quality assurance and the purview of typical quality assurance units. For example, corporate and academic governance and management (and not just QA of same) feature strongly in the criteria. The criteria must be addressed when requesting establishment as a LAB.

Non-provider LABs may need to reference their associated providers to evidence achievement of all the criteria listed and this is appropriate. It is important that non-provider LABs ensure that all associated providers are fulfilling the standards expected in the provision of education and training programmes leading to awards within the Framework.

These criteria do not prescribe a certain governance and management structure but seeks to identify principles associated with such structures that will give necessary assurance to QQI of the capability and capacity of a prospective LAB to make NFQ awards.

Applicants are invited to describe their existing governance structures and explain how these meet their needs with reference to history, scale, size, and complexity. If a particular criterion is not relevant, an applicant is encouraged to explain the rationale for this. The same evidence may be used repeatedly to demonstrate compliance with different criterion, and this is expected and accepted.

15. CRITERIA RELATING TO OVERALL OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT

15.1 SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

- A. The scope of the awarding body's quality assurance procedures established under Section 28 and/or Section 55F of the 2012 Act (as amended), as implemented, encompasses the awards and classes of awards proposed to be made if approved as a LAB.
- B. The awarding body has clear, documented internal processes for the quality assurance of its associated providers.
- C. The awarding body has a clear and realistic strategy for the educational, training and research awards or classes of awards and related services that fall within the scope of the awards proposed to be made.
- D. The awarding body has effective structures & systems for governance, management & administration with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for awards and related services.

- E. The awarding body has necessary and sufficient infrastructure and systems in place for information and data management, including but not limited to, learner records. Systems must ensure that learner records for Framework awards are maintained even in the event the awarding body ceases to be a LAB.
- F. The overall operation and management related to awards are sound.

15.2 RESOURCES

- G. The awarding body's financial management is robust, and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of relevant awards and programmes leading to these awards.
- H. The awarding body, where relevant, has sufficient human resources who are available and competent to educate and train, to facilitate learning and to assess learners within the scope and scale of provision in respect of the proposed awards for inclusion within the Framework.
- I. The intellectual, physical, social, and cultural environments (including real and virtual learning environments) are supportive of, and conducive to, learning and the formation of learners and are safe and monitored.
- J. Library and other information services are sufficient, and appropriate to the student profile and the programmes associated with the proposed awards.
- K. The awarding body must ensure it has sufficient student support services in place, which are appropriate to the student profile and the programmes associated with the proposed awards.
- L. There must be evidence that general physical resources are operated and managed in a way that is consistent with the mission of the awarding body.

15.3 AWARDING FUNCTIONS

- M. An awarding body must have procedures in place for determining award standards that are consistent with the NFQ and for assigning the appropriate NFQ level and award type to their own awards.
- N. An awarding body must have rigorous systems in place for programme approval and review that ensure the specification of learning outcomes, NFQ level, applicable award type, award class, volume in terms of credits and appropriate and coherent titling.
- O. The awarding body is responsible for the development and maintenance of the award and the specific award standards and must have systems in place to ensure that award standards are upheld.
- P. Programme approval and review systems and procedures must account for alignment of the expected learning outcomes with the relevant NFQ descriptors.
- Q. Reviews of programmes, or equivalent institutional procedures, include an evaluation of intended and achieved programme learning outcomes as assessed against the specific award standard, award type and level on the NFQ.
- R. Reviews of programmes, or equivalent institutional procedures, include evaluation of data related to academic misconduct and academic integrity.
- S. There is commitment to the implementation of formal, structured feedback as part of its review

- and development of awards included within the Framework and associated programmes.
- T. Arrangements for accessing programmes leading to Framework awards (including arrangements for the recognition of prior learning where possible), transferring from it, exiting from it, and progressing to other programmes are documented at the outset in programme materials and clearly communicated to the learner.
 - U. Assessment policies and regulations are in place to ensure the validity, reliability and manageability of assessment and engagement with learners and to ensure award standards are maintained and that qualifications are only awarded to learners who have successfully achieved the learning outcomes.
 - V. Assessment methodologies are appropriate to the level and class of awards, learning outcomes and award standards.
 - W. Clear, objective assessment criteria are associated with professional components of programmes leading to Framework awards, including but not limited to placement, internship, professional training, or any similar activity and all of the associated learning outcomes are properly assessed.
 - X. Internal and external moderation is used to ensure reliability of assessment practices.
 - Y. Where available, there is evidence of consistency between the actual learning outcomes achieved by learners and stated learning objectives and the minimum (and other) intended programme learning outcomes.
 - Z. Quality assured arrangements for access, transfer and progression that facilitate accessible and inclusive pathways to qualifications are implemented. Pre- and post-programme entry activities are consistent with QQI policies and criteria on access, transfer and progression¹⁸ and with quality assurance guidelines on learner admission, progression and recognition.
 - AA. The awarding body has procedures in place for the recognition of qualifications already achieved and/or of learning acquired in non-formal or informal settings consistent with the Lisbon Recognition Convention¹⁹ and with relevant European Policy²⁰.
 - BB. The awarding body operates transparent systems for credit accumulation and credit transfer consistent with QQI policy for levels 1-6 and with the Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Credit in Irish Higher Education²¹ and with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (ECTS)^{22 23}. This extends to professional practice arrangements.
 - CC. The awarding body is committed to the publication of reports on (i) inclusion of new awards within the Framework, (ii) periodic reviews of the LAB and its awards and (iii) reviews of associated providers.

18 National Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression ATP Policy Restatement FINAL 2018.pdf (qqi.ie)

19 The Lisbon Recognition Convention is the main legal instrument on the academic recognition of qualifications in Europe <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

20 See EU Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

21 Principles and operational guidelines for credit in higher education have been adopted by QQI. [principlesandoperguidelinesgreen.pdf](#) (qqi.ie)

22 ECTS has been adopted by most of the countries in the European Higher Education Area and adopted as the national credit system https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

23 [ECTS users' guide 2015 - Publications Office of the EU](#) (europa.eu)

PART 4: REVIEW, WITHDRAWAL OR VARIATION OF LAB

16. PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW

Section 55G is particularly relevant to this section.

Review of listed awarding bodies

55G. (1) The Authority shall—

- (a) at least once every 7 years, and
- (b) from time to time as the Authority thinks appropriate,

review the operation and management of each listed awarding body in so far as that operation and management relates to—

- (i) awards of the listed awarding body that are included within the Framework,
- (ii) the listed awarding body's implementation of the procedures established by it under section 55F(2), and
- (iii) the fulfilment by the listed awarding body of its duties under section 55F(7)(b) and (c).

Reviews will broadly be based on the procedures and assessment outlined as part of the application process. More detailed guidelines on preparing for a review may be published separately.

16.1 PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED UNDER SECTION 55G OF THE 2012 ACT

The standard procedure for review will be the same as the procedure for the evaluation of a request for establishment as a LAB, and the inclusion of awards within the Framework, but with certain differences.

The review will involve a self-evaluation by the LAB against the policy and criteria for establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards within the Framework, and an evaluation by QQI of that self-evaluation. The LAB will be required to evaluate its overall operation and management, the implementation of quality assurance procedures established under S55F and compliance with any duties and conditions. The LAB's evaluation for the purpose of review should make extensive use of its experience of operating and managing as a LAB, the making of awards within the Framework and oversight of associated providers (if relevant). The supporting documentation will include suitable evidence of this experience.

In the case of non-provider LABs, review will specifically address the quality assurance of associated providers.

16.2 RELEVANT PROVIDERS

Provider LABs are considered relevant providers for the purposes of the Act, and as such, are subject to the effectiveness reviews outlined in Section 27 of the Act.

A review of a provider LAB might usefully be combined with a review of the effectiveness of QA.

Quality assurance.

27.— (1) The Authority shall, as soon as practicable after the establishment day—

- (a) issue guidelines (in this section referred to as “quality assurance guidelines”) for the establishment of procedures for quality assurance under section 28, and
- (b) establish procedures (in this section referred to as “effectiveness review procedures”) for review by the Authority of the effectiveness of—
 - (i) the procedures for quality assurance established by relevant providers, and
 - (ii) the implementation of those procedures by relevant providers,

16.3 INTERNATIONAL LABS

International LABs that are subject to reviews of quality assurance in their home jurisdiction may be able to use evidence of this review to satisfy part or all the review requirements of being established as a LAB in Ireland. This will be arranged with QQI on a case-by-case basis and may include a requirement for QQI to appoint one or more reviewers to the review being undertaken by another regulator.

16.4 OTHER ARRANGEMENTS

Where a domestic provider LAB is subject to review by another professional or statutory regulatory agency, it may be possible for QQI to conduct a combined review with this regulator. This will be arranged with QQI on a case-by-case basis.

16.5 REVIEWS OF ASSOCIATED PROVIDERS

LABs are required to review associated providers once every 5 years. These reviews will inform the overall review of a LAB conducted by QQI.

Where an associated provider is a relevant provider, and subject to periodic review by QQI, a LAB can rely on this review.

16.6 ANNUAL MONITORING

LABs will be required to comply with the monitoring policy implemented by QQI which may require an annual statement of compliance. In the case of international awarding bodies, it may be possible to collaborate with regulatory bodies in other jurisdictions regarding annual submissions.

17. WITHDRAWAL OR VARIATION OF LISTING OF AWARDING BODIES

17.1 WITHDRAWAL OR VARIATION BY QQI OF LABS INCLUDING INCLUSION OF AWARDS

Section 55H of the 2012 Act deals with the withdrawal or variation of listing of an awarding body.

55H. (1) Where, following a review under section 55G in respect of a listed awarding body, the Authority is of the opinion that, on any of the grounds specified in subsection (3), either—

(a) it is no longer appropriate that the awarding body's name stand included in the list of awarding bodies with reference (as the Authority considers appropriate) either—

(i) to each of the one or more awards as respects which the body's name had been included in that list (a 'whole deletion'), or

(ii) to such one or more (as the Authority specifies), but not all, of those awards (a 'partial deletion'),

or

(b) the conditions for the time being imposed on the awarding body under section 55F(7)(f) ought to be varied, then, subject to the provisions of this section, the powers specified in subsection (2) may be exercised by the Authority. (2) The powers referred to in subsection (1) are—

(a) to delete from the list of awarding bodies the name, whether by way of a whole deletion or, as the Authority considers appropriate, by way of a partial deletion, of the awarding body concerned, or

(b) to vary the conditions for the time being imposed on the awarding body concerned under section 55F(7)(f).

(3) The grounds referred to in subsection (1) are—

(a) having regard to the policies and criteria established under section 55E(1)(a), it is appropriate that the name of the awarding body concerned no longer stand included, whether by way of a whole deletion or by way of a partial deletion, in the list of awarding bodies or that, as respects the conditions for the time being imposed on the awarding body concerned under section 55F(7)(f), those conditions ought to be varied,

(b) the awarding body concerned has failed to comply with one or more of the conditions imposed on it under section 55F(7)(f), or

(c) other circumstances exist in respect of the awarding body concerned that the Authority considers provide a reasonable justification for the exercise by it of either of the powers specified in subsection (2) in relation to that body,

and this section shall be construed so that the existence of the ground specified in paragraph (b), as with that specified in paragraph (a) or (c), enables the exercise by the Authority of either of the powers specified in subsection (2) in relation to the body concerned.

(4) If the Authority proposes to exercise either of the powers specified in subsection (2) in relation to a listed awarding body, the Authority shall, by notice in writing, inform the awarding body that the Authority proposes to delete from the list of awarding bodies its name, whether by way of a whole deletion or by way of a partial deletion and, in the case of the latter, specifying the awards to which it is proposed the deletion will apply, or, as the case may be, to vary, in specified respects, the conditions that stand imposed on it under section 55F(7)(f), and the notice shall state the reasons for the proposed course of action and be accompanied by a copy of the report prepared under section

55G(5). 85

(5) A notice under subsection (4) shall state that the awarding body may submit observations in writing to the Authority in relation to the proposed course of action specified in the notice or in relation to the report that accompanies the notice, not later than one month from the service of the notice on the awarding body, and the awarding body may submit such observations accordingly.

(6) Where after consideration of any observations submitted to it in accordance with subsection (5) —

(a) the Authority is still of the opinion referred to in subsection (1)(a) or (b), it may, by notice in writing addressed to the awarding body—

(i) delete from the list of awarding bodies the awarding body's name, whether by way of a whole deletion or, as the case may be, by way of a partial deletion (being the partial deletion as notified to that body under subsection (4)), or

(ii) vary, in particular respects, the conditions that stand imposed on the awarding body under section 55F(7)(f),

or

(b) in a case in which the original opinion was that referred to in subsection (1)(a) and the Authority is now of the opinion that the awarding body's name should be deleted from the list of awarding bodies by way of—

(i) a partial deletion (rather than by way of a whole deletion), or

(ii) a partial deletion as respects a lesser number of awards than had been notified to that body under subsection (4),

it may, by notice in writing addressed to the awarding body, delete from that list the body's name by way of a partial deletion consonant with what is described in subparagraph (i) or, as the case may be, subparagraph (ii), and that deletion (of whatever kind) or variation shall be expressed to take effect from such date (not being earlier than the date of service of the notice) as the Authority considers appropriate and specifies in the notice.

(7) A notice under subsection (6) shall state the reasons for the deletion or variation referred to in that subsection.

(8) After consideration of any observations submitted to it in accordance with subsection (5), the Authority may make any amendments to the report prepared under section 55G(5) that the Authority considers appropriate. If such amendments are made to it, a copy of the report, as so amended, shall be provided by the Authority to the awarding body concerned.

(9) The Authority shall publish the report prepared under section 55G(5), or, if it has been amended under subsection (8), the report as amended under that subsection, in such form and manner as the Authority thinks appropriate (including on the internet).

(10) The awarding body concerned may appeal to the Appeals Board against the deletion, under this section, of its name (whether by way of a whole deletion or by way of a partial deletion) from the list of awarding bodies or the variation, under this section, of the conditions that stand imposed on it under section 55F(7)(f).

Where QQI withdraws or varies the listing of an awarding body the provider may appeal against the withdrawal or variation to the Appeals Board (Section 55F(7)(f)).

17.2 WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

QQI may withdraw approval of a Provider or Combination LABs quality assurance procedures under Section 36(4) of the 2012 Act, which may influence the awarding body's ability to continue to make awards included within the NFQ.

17.3 WITHDRAWAL OF APPROVAL OF ATP PROCEDURES

QQI may withdraw approval of a Provider or Combination LABs ATP procedures under Section 36(4) of the 2012 Act, which may influence the awarding body's ability to continue to make awards included within the NFQ.

17.4 EFFECT OF FULL OR PARTIAL DELETION

As outlined in Section 55l (1) all awards cease to be considered as awards that are included within the Framework in the case of full deletion. Only the specified awards cease to be considered awards that are included within the Framework in the case of partial deletion.

As specified in Section 55l(3), awards made after full or partial deletion continue to be awards within the Framework in the case of students who were enrolled on programmes leading to those awards prior to deletion. In the event of such a 'teach out' period, the LAB will be required to work closely with QQI and keep them informed of the progress of the relevant students.

The IRQ will be updated to reflect full and partial deletions including arrangements for enrolled learners.

17.5 LAB-INITIATED WITHDRAWAL OR VARIATION

LABs may seek to voluntarily remove themselves from the List of Awarding Bodies or seek to voluntarily withdraw some awards from within the Framework. LABs seeking voluntary removal of any sort should engage with QQI to plan for withdrawal and/or variation. It may be necessary to continue making Framework awards to those learners already enrolled for an agreed period.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND TERMS

2012 Act ('the Act')	Qualifications And Quality Assurance (Education And Training) Act 2012 (as amended)
Access, transfer and progression (ATP)	Access, transfer and progression (ATP) describes the pathways available to learners to enter, transfer between and progress from programmes of education and training, which are the main route to achieving awards and qualifications.
Assessment	Learner assessment (specifically assessment of learning) means inference (e.g. judgement or estimation or evaluation) of a learner's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard based on appropriate evidence. Self-assessment is included in this.
Associated provider	Associated provider means a provider, having a place of business in the State, that enters into an arrangement with a LAB under which arrangement the provider provides a programme of education and training that satisfies all of the prerequisites for an award of the LAB that is included within the Framework.
Award	An award (qualification) which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.
Awarding body	A body issuing awards that formally recognise the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.

Award standard	Award standards identify the expected outcomes of learning, inclusive of all education and training for a particular award type. They concern the knowledge, know-how and skill, and competence that are expected from the learner who is to receive an award. They include both general standards for a particular award type and specific standards for named awards in particular subjects or fields of learning. Learners holding awards of the same award type should have comparable standards of knowledge, skill and competence.
Award type	The National Framework of Qualifications features four award classes – major, minor, special purpose and supplemental. Professional award types are also available and are mainly used in conjunction with another award type.
Bologna (Process)	The Bologna Process established the European Higher Education Area. It is an intergovernmental higher education reform process which seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. ²⁴
Combination listed awarding bodies (LABs)	Organisations operate a combination model whereby they deliver some of their own programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework and engage associated providers to deliver other programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.
Credit volume	The size of learning behind an award is called its volume. Volume is measured in credits e.g. 15 credits or 240 credits.
Designated awarding bodies (DABs)	Some providers have been granted authority to validate their own programmes and issue their own awards by legislation. These are called designated awarding bodies (DABs). The universities, the National University of Ireland, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), institutes of technology (IoTs) and technological universities are DABs.
EHEA	European Higher Education Area

24 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. *The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area*. [online]. Available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/bologna-process>.

ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred credit system designed to make it easier for students to move between different countries. ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. ECTS also helps with the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes, and makes them more transparent. ²⁵
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an 8-level (learning outcomes-based) meta framework for all types of qualifications. It serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks. ²⁶
Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)	The Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ) is Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI's) database of awards, providers and programmes.
Joint awarding	Two or more awarding bodies, with awarding powers, can make a single award to a learner.
Learning outcomes	A learner's knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. Learning outcomes outline what a learner is expected to know, be able to do and understand at the end of a learning process. ²⁷
Listed awarding bodies (LAB)	A listed awarding body is an awarding body that does not have statutory awarding powers of National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) awards in the State and voluntarily seeks to have their awards included within the National Framework of Qualifications.

25 European Commission. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). [online]. Available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system>.

26 Europass European Union. The European Qualifications Framework. [online] Available at: <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/european-qualifications-framework>.

27 Cedefop, 2017. Defining, writing and applying learning outcomes: a European handbook. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/566770>.

Micro-credentials	Microcredentials refers to a qualification (award) arising from a ‘small’ package of learning, where ‘small’ refers to the credit associated with the award. Minor, special purpose and supplemental award types can be used to develop microcredentials in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (‘the Framework’)	The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system. The NFQ shows how general education awards, further education and training and higher education awards are mapped against the 10 levels of the Framework.
NFQ award-type descriptors	An award type descriptor is a series of statements of general learning achievement which describes any award of a particular type.
NFQ grid of level indicators	A 10-Level Grid of Level Indicators which forms part of the determination of the National Framework of Qualifications. The grid shows how the outcomes in each of the eight sub-strands progress across the ten levels. The level indicators set out in this grid are intended to enable Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to place award types at appropriate levels within the Framework, based on the mix of learning outcomes they contain. ²⁸
Non-provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)	Organisations that engage other providers, called associated providers, to deliver the programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.
Programme	A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.

28 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), 2019. National Framework of Qualifications Grid of Level Indicators. [pdf] Dublin: QQI. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/NFQ%20Grid%20Level%20Indicators.pdf>.

Protection of enrolled learners (PEL)	Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) aims to safeguard a learner’s academic journey. It refers to arrangements made for specific programmes to ensure that a learner can complete the programme that they have begun if their programme is no longer offered by their provider for any reason.
Provider	A ‘provider of a programme of education and training’ is a person who, or body which, provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
Provider listed awarding bodies (LABs)	Organisations delivering their own programmes leading to awards that are included within the Framework.
QA	Quality assurance
QF - EHEA (‘Bologna’)	The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education in Ireland.
Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process to evaluate the skills and knowledge a person has gained through life outside formal education and training.
Relevant provider	A relevant provider is defined under section 1 of the 2012 Act (as amended). They include universities; technological universities; institutes of technology; the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI); providers whose programmes have been validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); providers with delegated authority from QQI to make awards; providers authorised by QQI to use the IEM; linked providers; and LABs providing one or more programmes leading to its own awards that are included within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

APPENDIX B: SOURCES AND RESOURCES

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