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# The Irish National Framework of Qualifications

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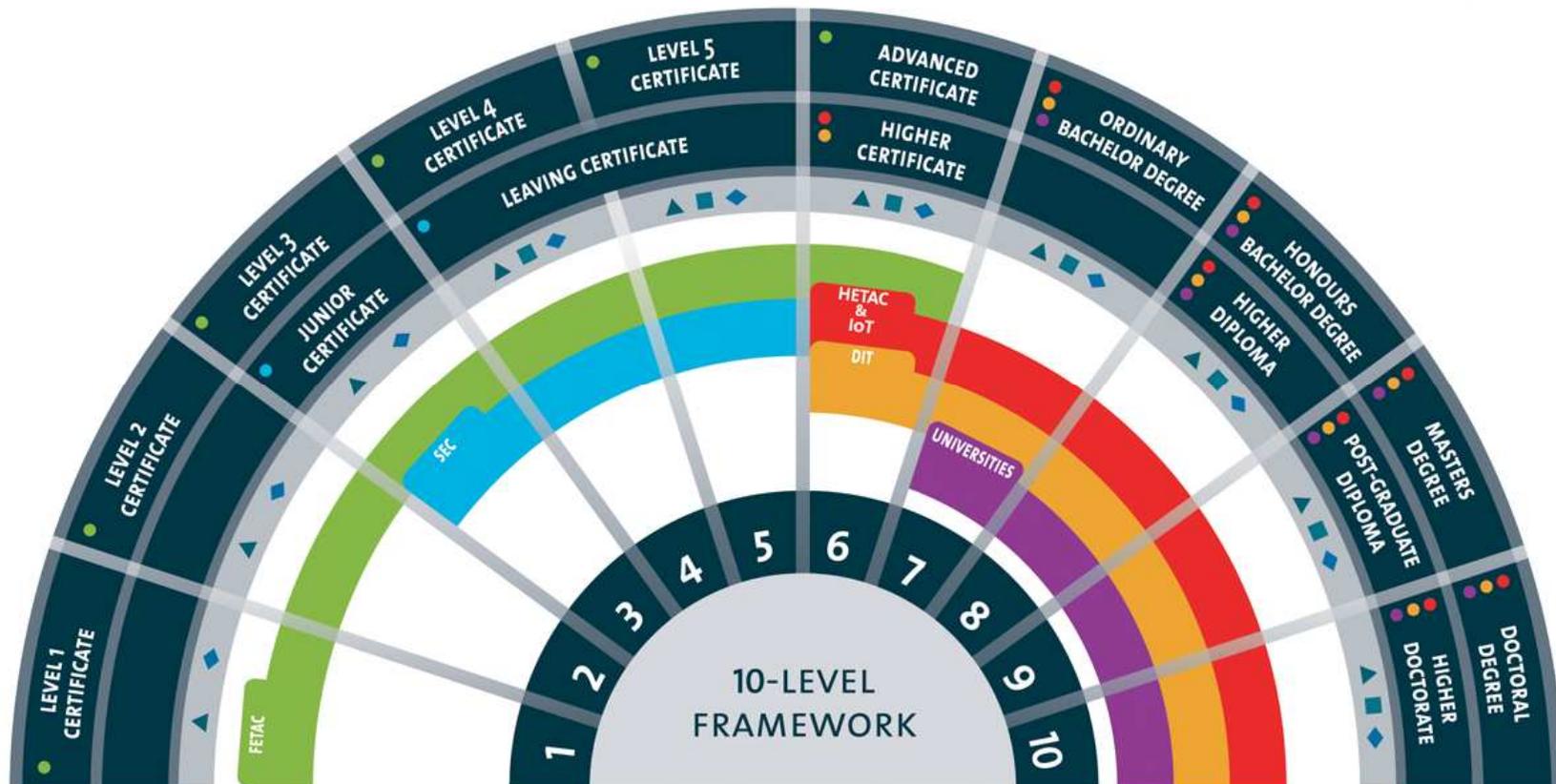
# National Framework of Qualifications

What was required?

- a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland
- one framework to encompass all awards for all aspects of education and training
- a simple, transparent frame of reference

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS

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## AWARDING BODIES

- FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education & Science)
- HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- IoT - Institutes of Technology (make their own awards at specified levels under Delegated Authority from HETAC)
- DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities

## AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four types of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- **Major Awards:** are the principal class of awards made at a level
- ▲ **Minor Awards:** are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- **Supplemental Awards:** are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- ◆ **Special Purpose Awards:** are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement



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## New legislation, new structures

- Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999
- Three new organisations, 2001
  - **National Qualifications Authority of Ireland**
  - **Further Education and Training Awards Council**
  - **Higher Education and Training Awards Council**
- Awards Councils bring coherence to the system
  - replace seven previous systems of awards
  - one awarding body for all further education and training (VET)



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## Role of new organisations - I

**National Qualifications Authority of Ireland** is responsible for:

- the establishment and maintenance of a framework of qualifications for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners
- the establishment and promotion of the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the existing universities.
- the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision.



## Role of new organisations - II

**Awards Councils** are responsible for:

- Making and promoting awards on the NFQ
- Setting standards and award requirements
- Validating further / higher education and training programmes
- Monitoring and evaluating quality of programmes
- Ensuring that student assessment procedures are fair and consistent
- Ensuring that arrangements are in place in private education and training institutions to protect learners where validated programmes cease to be provided



## Approach taken

- strong legislative base – legitimisation
- stakeholder approach: consensus-building and consultation
- dual approach enabled
  - comparatively rapid development
  - implementation across all elements of the education and training system
- Note: progress is made on the basis of agreement to go forward – full consensus is not always possible



# Communications strategy

- **Identification of key messages**
  - ✓ Purpose of NFQ
  - ✓ How NFQ works, and how it applies to stakeholders
  - ✓ The benefits of NFQ to specific audience
- **Identification of key audiences**
  - ✓ Awarding bodies, major national stakeholders
  - ✓ Providers, representative bodies, social partners
  - ✓ Learners, employers, general public



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## Timeline

- 1999 - Qualifications (Education and Training) Act
- 2001 - National Qualifications Authority established
- 2003 - National Framework of Qualifications launched
- 2006 - Verification of Compatibility with Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area ('Bologna')
- 2009 - Referencing to European Qualifications Framework (June)
- 2009 - Framework Implementation and Impact Study published (September)
- 2011 - Legislation being drafted to create single Qualifications and Quality Assurance body



## Framework Study – main findings

- Takes time to foster debate, understanding and engagement
- Importance of stakeholder involvement and partnership
- Iterative development
- Balance between implementation within sectors and coherence system-wide
- Specific issues to be revisited. The NFQ is dynamic
- Communication through brokers e.g. guidance community
- Engagement with enterprise / employers



## Learning outcomes

- Intention that learning outcomes should become the common language of qualifications
- Significant progress to date in introducing learning outcomes (standard setting, policies on assessment, quality assurance, programme validation)
- Different rates/depth of progress across the sectors
- Approaches to bridge the gap between NFQ level descriptors and descriptors at programme level?
- Extent of the cultural shift: compliance-driven or a deeper cultural embrace?

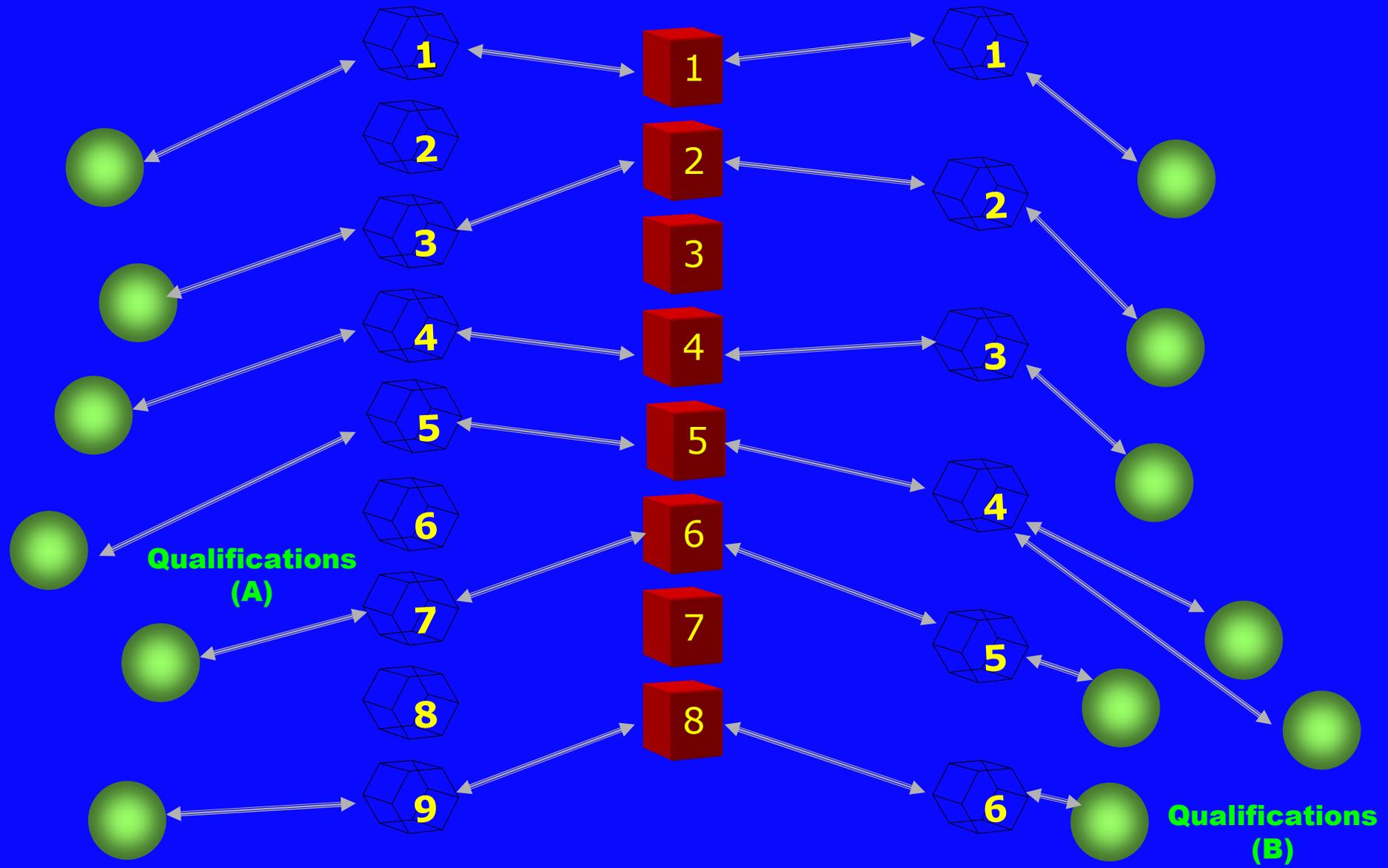


## Referencing NFQ to EQF

- Qualifications Authority designated as National Coordination Point
- The Authority convened a National Steering Committee
- Steering Committee included representatives from Further Education & Training, Higher Education & Training, Universities' sector, schools' sector and three international experts
- Committee used Referencing Criteria and Procedures agreed by the EQF Advisory Group
- Consultation with stakeholders an important part of the process
  - Consultative Group; national seminar; information bulletins; draft reports published on website for stakeholder comments

Country A

Country B





## The Irish Referencing Report concludes:

- There is a clear and demonstrable link between NFQ levels and EQF levels (*C and P: 2*)
- The NFQ, and qualifications within it, based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes, and are linked to credit systems and arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning (*C and P: 3*)
- There are transparent criteria and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the NFQ (*C and P: 4*)
- The quality assurance systems operating... underpin the NFQ and its implementation (*C and P: 5*) .



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## Cooperation with international experts

- Three international ‘critical friends’ – Belgium, Finland, UK
- Vital role in ensuring that national committee were challenged to explain what is implicitly understood at national level
- Supportive but objective role



## Quality Assurance

- Commitment to *Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA* and EQARF : external review of agencies undertaken – FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and IUQB
- Embedding of NFQ implementation in Quality systems: unfolding and variable story
- Referencing Report demonstrated that different sectors share common features of QA
- All QA authorities formally agreed (in writing) to Referencing Report



## Referencing findings: EQF and NFQ

<i>EQF levels</i>	<i>NFQ Levels</i>	<i>NFQ Major Award-types</i>
1	1	Level 1 Certificate
	2	Level 2 Certificate
2	3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
3	4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
4	5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
5	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award); Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	7	Ordinary Bachelors Degree
	8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	9	Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate



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## Further information

- NFQ website - [www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie)
  - National Qualifications Authority website - [www.nqai.ie](http://www.nqai.ie)
  - Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) - [www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie)
  - Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) - [www.hetac.ie](http://www.hetac.ie)
  - Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) – [www.iuqb.ie](http://www.iuqb.ie)
  - Framework Study - [www.nqai.ie/framework\\_study.html](http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html)
  - University Framework Implementation Network – [www.nfqnetwork.ie](http://www.nfqnetwork.ie)
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