



A **Common Awards System** for **Further Education** and **Training**

Find out more at www.fetac.ie

New Awards for Further Education and Training

A new national awards system is being introduced for all further education and training. This new system provides awards at level 1-6 of the National Framework of Qualifications. Known as the Common Awards System (CAS) it is informed by best practice and traditions nationally and internationally. It is replacing all FETAC awards over time; existing awards become part of the FETAC legacy, and are referenced against the new Common Awards.

The Common Awards System is a cornerstone in FETAC's overall commitment to improving the quality of further education and training experiences for learners. Registered providers who have agreed quality assurance systems with FETAC will design and offer programmes leading to these new awards. All programmes must be validated by FETAC prior to delivery. Awards will be systematically evaluated and reviewed. Providers also will evaluate and review programmes. FETAC will monitor programmes to assure continuous improvement across the system. This quality cycle enhances learners' experiences and strengthens further education and training nationally.

What is the Common Awards System?

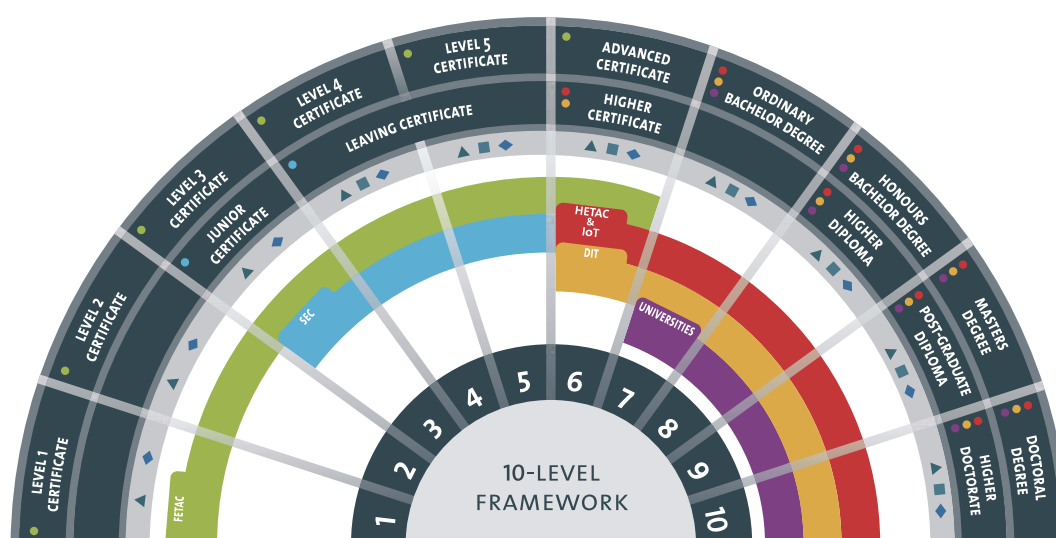
The Common Awards System is a national outcomes-based awards system for all further education and training.

The Common Awards System provides a coherent architecture for all awards, including:

- A credit system, reflecting the typical amount of learner effort, including directed and self directed effort. The credit system enables learners to accumulate recognition over time and to navigate a range of programmes leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications
- Breadth and balance within the structure so that learners achieve specific vocational expertise alongside general knowledge, skill and competence, in line with the National Skills Strategy
- A clear relationship with other FETAC awards to help plan pathways in learning - known as access, transfer and progression arrangements.

Common Awards share characteristics including:

- A common format. Awards Specifications set out the structure, requirements and standards of the award
- Explicit reference to the award types and levels indicators of the National Framework of Qualifications
- A focus on outcomes of learning - what learners will be able to do on achievement of the award. Standards of knowledge, skill and competence are expressed as learning outcomes
- Accessibility for all providers who have agreed quality assurance arrangements with FETAC.



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



Award Types

There are four types of Common Award - *Major, Special Purpose, Supplemental* and *Minor*.

Award types are an important feature of the National Framework of Qualifications:

- A major award reflects a significant volume of learning. It is the principal class of award within the Framework
- Special purpose awards recognise specific relatively narrow ranges of learning, typically required for particular occupations
- Supplemental awards recognise learning which up-skills or updates previous achievement, for example to meet regulatory requirements in the context of employment

All these awards are made up of one or more minor awards.

- Minor awards recognise small volumes of learning that are coherent and relevant in their own right, but which also link to one of these award types. Minor awards are the building blocks for FETAC awards. Minor awards are also known as components, because they are a part of a broader set of requirements for a major or other award.

Awards Directory and Award Specifications

The Awards Directory is a full listing with details of the awards which FETAC makes available. The Directory can be browsed by field, sub-field and domain of learning, in line with ISCED categories for education and training, and by any of the six FETAC levels of the Framework. Alternatively, awards can be found using the individual award code. The Directory is structured so that the major, special purpose or supplemental award provides the context and link for individual minor awards. Minor

awards are also categorised by their own domain of learning.

The Awards Directory is available on the FETAC website at <http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/awardsinfo/directory/directory.htm>

Award Specifications are a holistic statement of the standards and specific requirements for an award. They outline:

- the **level**
- the **purpose**
- the **learning outcomes** that must be achieved

Minor Awards Specifications also state the appropriate **assessment techniques**. Award specifications are available for major, minor, supplemental and special purpose common awards:

- Certificate specifications, special purpose specifications and supplemental specifications set out the requirements for awards, including named minor awards
- Component specifications set out the requirements for a minor award. Component specifications also outline both the assessment techniques that will enable learners to evidence their achievement of the standard and the specific validation requirements.

Award specifications are published in the **Awards Directory**.

Each common award has a unique identification code. Each award code starts with the level of the award and then signals the award type - **M** for major, **N** for minor, **S** for special purpose, **U** for supplemental. After that each award has its own specific reference code, for example:

- **3M0829** signals a level 3 major award
- **6S2033** a level 6 specific purpose award

Standards

Standards are expressed holistically in the Common Awards System; in other words the award specification is the complete statement of standards including specific referencing to the Framework. The standard is not located in any single part of the specification, it is the sum of the parts.

Each specification states the learning outcomes which must be achieved to obtain the award. These are most detailed in minor awards. Minor awards relate directly to named major, supplemental or special purpose awards, all of which have general outcomes describing the overarching requirements for that named award.

Learning outcomes describe the specific requirements of knowledge, skill or competence in ways that provide for a range of learning contexts. The learning environment for a particular set of knowledge, skill or competence may vary, but the outcome achieved will be the same.

For example:

Learners will be able to:

Knowledge: *Analyse a range of current issues in communications and information technology*

or

Skill: *Demonstrate key commercial cheese making processes including post whey separation, salting and pressing*

or

Competence: *Reflect on the period of work experience and the progress made on the learning goals and action points that were set*

These outcomes are selected from awards at different levels, but could each be achieved in a factory, small business, classroom or farm.

Grading

Awards at level 1, 2, and 3 are graded Successful.

Awards at level 4, 5 and 6 are graded at Pass, Merit or Distinction.

Major, Special Purpose and Supplemental awards are graded, based on a weighted average across the grade achieved in the required minors. FETAC computes this based on the learners best achievements. This means that the overall performance of learners in specific fields of learning can easily be understood. Transcripts record the minors that have been achieved, including the grade and year of certification.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)

Common awards each have a credit value. Credit is accumulated through the achievement of minor awards. Major, special purpose and supplemental awards set out the total amount of credits required.

Credits reflect the amount of learning that is required, based on typical learner effort appropriate to each level of the Framework. The credit value provides for directed, self directed learning, effort and assessment. One credit reflects up to 10 hours of typical learner effort.

The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System:

- Provides for parity among awards across further education and training because the credit values are consistent at each level and for all awards
- Makes transfer easy for learners across a wide range of awards at the same level
- Enhances the flexibility and responsiveness of programmes, because they can accommodate diverse access and exit arrangements for learners
- Informs the practical planning and management of programmes. Providers can compare the volumes of awards and timetable accordingly.

Credits can be accumulated over time, through the achievement of minor awards. The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) makes it easy to identify commonalities between programmes. Providers will be able to improve access arrangements to programmes because for the first time, all further education and training providers in Ireland will use a common credit and awards system to describe and understand learners' achievement.

Credit values for awards are set out for each major, special purpose and supplemental award. Each minor award at a given level typically has the same credit value, known as the default value. Other values are permitted, but are atypical.



Credit Values of Awards

Major awards allow for a specified volume of credit to be carried from the level above or below the level of the award. The credit value remains constant when used in this way. For example, a level 6 minor award of 15 credits used in the context of a level 5 major award contributes 15 credits to the total required.

A Credit System for Europe: ECVET

Across Europe a common credit system is evolving for further education and training, or initial vocational education and training (IVET) or continuing vocational education and training (CVET) as this sector is known in Europe. The European Credit System is known as ECVET. ECVET promotes mobility for learners, using credit as a common currency. It makes learning achieved abroad count in Ireland, and our achievements more easily understood in other countries.

FETAC's Credit and Accumulation System is consistent with the principles of ECVET.

Access, Transfer and Progression

Access, transfer and progression arrangements describe ways that ensure that learners can move freely across the Framework levels, getting recognition for learning they have already achieved.

Access arrangements provide for entry to programmes, with recognition of what a learner has achieved. Transfer occurs when a learner moves from one programme to

another, leading to awards at the same level. Progression refers to moving to programmes leading to awards at a higher level. Access, transfer and progression arrangements are devised on the basis both of awards and programmes. Currently progression typically depends on achievement of a major award.

Common Awards make access, transfer and progression arrangements easier because:

- The outcomes and requirements for awards are published
- The credit system is governed by rules ensuring a common approach across each level
- Common awards are built with minor awards, some of which re-occur among a wide range of major, special purpose or supplemental awards
- Learners' achievements are recorded both on certificates and in transcripts, which outline the grade at minor level
- Minor awards can be related to a wide range of certificate requirements providing new pathways for learners, building on what is already achieved.

CAS major awards at level 5 or 6 can be used for progression to higher education through the Central Admissions Office (CAO) on the basis of an agreed scoring system. Each major award is scored to a total maximum of 400 points.

FETAC will continue to supply certification data to the CAO, as appropriate.

Further details are available at:

<http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/casL56score2010.pdf>

Level	Credit Values for Major Awards	Default Minor Credit Values	Other Permitted Minor Credit Values	Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards
L1	20	5	10	Not Appropriate
L2	30	5	10	Not Appropriate
L3	60	10	5,20	≥5 and ≤60
L4	90	10	5,15,20	≥5 and ≤90
L5	120	15	5,10,30	≥5 and ≤120
L6	120	15	5,10,30	≥5 and ≤120

Managing the Transition for Legacy to **New Common Awards**

FETAC awards achieved prior to the introduction of Common Awards retain their value on the Framework. FETAC has referenced new awards to the legacy awards they replace. A reference list will be published on www.fetac.ie

Awards previously achieved can be used to gain exemptions within programmes leading, for example, to different awards at the same level (transfer). The reference list includes the methodology for this process.

Consolidating a Culture of **Quality Assurance**

The Common Awards System is the cornerstone of high quality further education and training in Ireland. Registered providers of programmes in further education and training have committed to continuously improve the quality of their provision and services, including

programme design, delivery and review. This focus on quality and continuous improvement is achieved through programme validation, provider self evaluation and review, and FETAC monitoring.

Programme Validation

Any programme leading to new Common awards must be validated by FETAC before programme delivery commences.

Validation is a process of evaluation which ensures that learners undertaking a programme are offered the opportunity to achieve the standard of the award. Validation is also a process of evaluating qualitative programme elements to ensure that a learner may attain the appropriate knowledge, skill or competence through a high quality learning experience. It will also ensure that the proposed assessment is appropriate to the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required to achieve the award, the programme and the learner.



ONE MILLION REASONS TO CHOOSE FETAC

Through validation, all programmes are evaluated for consistency, coherence, capacity and compliance.

Self Evaluation

Providers must also evaluate programmes, including accepting learner feedback. Certification processes through the integrated FETAC Business System (FBS) provides feedback on the range of learner achievements per provider. This will also support self evaluation.

Monitoring

Programmes are monitored by FETAC so as to assure continuous improvement, right across the system.

Because All Learning Matters...

This means that whenever a learner achieves a FETAC award on the Framework, that achievement is underpinned by a robust, integrated and accountable approach to quality and continuous improvement nationally.

Consolidating Quality



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