



Implementation and Impact of the National Framework of Qualifications in the Further Education and Training Sector

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Table of Contents		Page
Acknowledgements		3
Executive Summary		4
Section 1	Introduction	6
Section 2	Awards Data	18
Section 3	Methodological Approach	24
Section 4	Findings	25
	Introduction	
	Knowledge and understanding of the Framework	
	Impact of the Framework	
	Implementation and operation of the Framework	
	NFQ Influencing Factors	
	Knowledge and understanding of the policies on access, transfer and progression	
	Implementation of the NQAI's policies on access, transfer and progression	
	Recognition of International Awards	
	Impact of the Framework and the policies on access, transfer and progression	
	Conclusion	
Section 5	Future Plans	45
Appendices		
Appendix 1	Knowledge and understanding of the Framework	51
Appendix 2	Impact of the Framework	54
Appendix 3	Implementation and operation of the Framework	58
Appendix 4	Knowledge and understanding of the policies on access, transfer and progression	61
Appendix 5	Implementation of the NQAI's policies on access, transfer and progression	63
Appendix 6	Recognition of International Awards	70
Appendix 7	Impact of the Framework and the policies on access, transfer and progression	71
Appendix 8	Conclusions	79
Appendix 9	Survey Instrument	81

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Executive Summary

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and accompanying policies on access, transfer and progression were launched in 2003.

At the time, it was acknowledged that it would take some years for the Framework, and its related policies, to be fully implemented across all levels and by all stakeholders.

The Framework has now been in operation for 5 years. In 2007, the NQAI, in consultation with its stakeholders, including FETAC, agreed that a study to ascertain the extent of the implementation and impact of the Framework was timely.

The NQAI devised a terms of reference, which set out a number of stages to the study. A study team¹ was commissioned to co-ordinate the study and consider various inputs. Key inputs to the study include sectoral reports for each of the four main education and training sectors. The bodies with main responsibility/oversight for implementation in each of the four sectors were requested to prepare these reports, following consultation within their respective sectors².

FETAC were invited to prepare a report for the Further Education and Training sector.

The resulting report is contained herein and considers the impact and implementation of the NFQ in the Further Education and Training Sector. It builds on information returned following the Review of FETAC in 2007 and FETAC's latest Strategic Plan 2008-2010. FETAC also conducted focus meetings with representative stakeholders and an online survey during May/June 2008 to inform this report.

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the policies on access, transfer and progression have been warmly welcomed and are seen as a hugely important and beneficial development in the FET sector.

The Framework has enabled greater understanding of and navigation through the diverse layers of awards and qualifications systems that existed within the State prior to 2003. It has also facilitated greater comparability between national awards and awards from other jurisdictions.

The positive impacts of the Framework in the FET sector are evident through the critically important key features: clarity, coherence, connectivity and continuous improvement, which have been repeatedly identified by stakeholders.

The findings highlight that the Framework has had significant impact for learners and the opportunities offered in the FET sector, both in terms of quality of service and access, transfer and progression. It has also benefited providers and employers by bringing greater clarity and coherence to the awards and programmes in the FET sector.

Stakeholders in FET identified the following as the main achievements/key areas of the NFQ to date:

- **Placement and Classification of Existing Awards**
- **Introduction of a Common Awards System**
- **Improved Quality Assurance**

¹ The Study Team includes Prof. Tom Collins (Chair), Ms. Frances Kelly, Mr. Henry Murdoch, Prof. David Raffe, Dr. Anna Murphy (Secretary).

² The four sectors include Universities and associated colleges; HETAC; FETAC; the National Council for Curriculum Assessment and the State Examinations Commission (schooling sector).

- **Improved Access, Transfer and Progression Opportunities**

The stakeholders also identified that in order to ensure full implementation and greater integration across the different sectors, there is a need for further work to be undertaken by the relevant bodies including the NQAI, FETAC, HETAC, the SEC, the universities and programme providers in these four key areas.

The report also notes that adequate resources and supports are required to ensure greater understanding and application of the Framework in order to meet stakeholders needs and national priorities such as the objectives identified in the National Skills Strategy.

The findings are consistent with the outcomes of the FETAC Review in 2007 and latest Strategic Plan. FETAC's Strategic Plan 2008-10 provides a solid basis to ensure that the Framework and related policies are further implemented in the FET sector over the next few years.

Section 1 Introduction

The NQAI is undertaking a study, in 2008/09, to measure the impact and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) across the education and training sectors, which span the ten levels of the NFQ.

The study will assess the initial impact of the framework and the extent of its implementation over the five years of its existence. The study aims to identify progress to date, limitations affecting implementation, and the associated influencing factors, promoting or adversely affecting implementation of the NFQ.

The NQAI have commissioned a Study Team³ to consider and assimilate the various inputs to this study. The inputs are:

- (i) The NQAI have published a context paper *“Background paper on the development, implementation and impact of the National Framework of Qualifications and related policies on access, transfer and progression”* (2008).
- (ii) Four reports on the impact and implementation of the Framework across the national education and training spectrum – the schooling sector (NCCA), further education and training (FETAC), higher education/IOTs (HETAC/IOT) and the universities (IUA) will be published in September 2008.
- (iii) Cross-sectoral case studies in the areas of Nursing and Guidance will be conducted.
- (iv) A consultative forum on the outcomes of the various reports will take place in November 2008.

The Study Team will produce a Synthesis Report and outline their recommendations, in order to achieve optimal impact and implementation of the Framework in April 2009. This report will provide a basis for the NQAI to consider follow-up actions to the study.

FETAC were invited to co-ordinate the report from the further education and training (FET) sector. The resulting report, herein, considers the implementation and impact of the framework in the FET sector.

The report is divided into five sections; Section 1 introduces and outlines the developments within the FET sector since the establishment of FETAC in 2001 and the introduction of the Framework in 2003. Section 2 presents headline FETAC awards data for the period 2001 to 2007. Section 3 describes the methodological approach used by FETAC to assess the impact and implementation of the Framework in the FET sector, Section 4 reviews findings emerging from an online survey and focus meetings which FETAC conducted during the second quarter of 2008, to collect stakeholders' views regarding the impact and implementation of the Framework. Section 5 of the report outlines FETAC's future plans to ensure successful implementation of the Framework in the FET sector.

³ The Study Team includes Prof. Tom Collins (Chair), Ms. Frances Kelly, Mr. Henry Murdoch, Prof. David Raffe, Dr. Anna Murphy (Secretary).

Background to the Further education and training Sector

Further education and training (FET) in Ireland is provided by a wide range of organisations through a variety of courses and programmes.

Further education centres encompass a broad span of course providers, including Vocational Education Committees (VECs), secondary schools, comprehensive schools, community schools and colleges, as well as a variety of adult learning and community education centres. Programmes offered by further education centres cover all fields of learning. There are currently 1,400 centres registered with FETAC.

FÁS offers training programmes nationwide, including apprenticeships, training for the unemployed and training in the workplace. FÁS has 20 training centres. They also operate temporary centres and procure programmes from a wide variety of training providers. Apprenticeship training is delivered in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Teagasc provides education and training through 33 centres. The programmes cover all aspects of agriculture, including horticulture and food science, and are targeted to meet the specific needs of farmers and the food industry in addition to broader vocational certificate programmes. Teagasc also operates temporary centres and delivers programmes in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Fáilte Ireland has four training centres. Programmes are provided in the fields of hotel and catering and tourism. The programmes are a mix of theoretical and work-based learning. They include Craft training (e.g. professional chef), adult training and training targeted at enterprises (e.g. safety programmes). Fáilte Ireland also operates temporary centres. The Craft programmes are delivered in partnership with the Institutes of Technology.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara operates three permanent centres, in addition to two mobile coastal training units. Programmes are provided in fisheries and encompass commercial fishing, aquaculture, communications and health and safety.

Learning and training in the workplace takes place in many companies and businesses throughout Ireland. It is coordinated through a range of schemes developed by various agencies, including Fáilte Ireland, FÁS, Skillnets and by individual firms.

FET programmes are also available through the institutes of technology, the National College of Ireland, Tipperary Institute, professional bodies and a range of private colleges.

Background to FETAC

FETAC was established on 11 June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. Its specific remit was to become the single national awarding body for the further education and training sector in Ireland. In addition to unifying the awarding function of the sector (previously awards now under FETACs remit, were made by NCVA, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc and NCEA), this role involves the determination of standards, promotion of awards and monitoring the quality of programmes and assessment.

FETAC is committed to promoting enhanced access to learning to increase the opportunities for progression while ensuring that all modes of learning are valued and recognised. FETAC is making the ideal of lifelong learning a reality for learners.

Over the last seven years, FETAC has moved from its establishment phase on to development, and now it is firmly in the implementation phase.

FETAC's main functions under the Act can be summarised as follows:

- making awards;
- determining standards;
- promoting awards;
- assuring and monitoring the quality of programmes leading to a FETAC award;
- validating programmes;
- ensuring fair and consistent assessment of learners;
- recognising other awards;
- facilitating access, transfer and progression.

In June 2001, FETAC adopted the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies for the duration of the transition phase (2001-2006). Given the diversity and complexity of the sector and the challenges involved in introducing a single awarding system the NQAI agreed that these arrangements be extended until such time as FETAC developed its own processes and procedures. Initially those associated with quality assurance, programme validation, setting standards, assessment and monitoring were adopted. New policies and procedures are being introduced on a phased basis to ensure continuity for learners and programme providers on the one hand, while ensuring its functions under the Act were being implemented on the other, for example provider quality assurance commenced in 2005, the Common Awards System became operational from January 2008, new assessment arrangements began in July 2008 and FETAC monitoring will begin in Autumn 2008.

Making Awards

FETAC has made over 650,000 awards through the processes of the former awarding bodies over the period 2001-2007.

The National Framework of Qualifications was launched by the NQAI Authority in 2003.

The introduction of the framework had a significant impact on awards and standards within the further education and training sector. FETAC's placement and classification of awards on the framework brought coherence and structure to the awards within what is a very diverse sector. It has brought together, successfully, the awards of the five former awarding bodies.

Placement and Classification of Legacy Awards

The FETAC Council established a process for placing legacy awards⁴, which was carried out in collaboration with the former awarding bodies. The process culminated in over 300 major/special purpose and supplemental awards being placed on the framework at levels 3, 4, 5, and 6. The placement and classification of legacy awards was agreed with the NQAI Authority in early 2005.

Classification of Awards

FETAC classified all placed awards as major, minor, special purpose or supplemental awards. In April 2006, FETAC published a listing of the newly classified awards in the form of a directory. From July 2006, all new awards were issued according to the new classification. In March 2007, the directory contained 2,222 named awards including over 200 major awards and over 1,800 minor awards. All FETAC awards are now part of the

⁴ Legacy awards are defined by the Authority as "awards that were made either before the determination of the framework, or after its determination, but prior to implementation of the new framework".

framework and are coherent in their structure and in their relationship to each other. The directory is updated at regular intervals, as new awards are developed.

All FETAC awards are currently issued with a designated level (number) and title: Certificate (major); Component (minor); Specific Purpose (special purpose) and Supplemental.

FETAC has recently commenced implementation of the Common Awards System (see below). It will be implemented for all new awards developed from 2008.

Towards a Common Awards System

In December 2005, following extensive consultation and research, FETAC published its new Common Awards System setting out the structure and features for the new awards. The Common Awards System is the single way of developing and describing FETAC awards. Over time this system will be implemented for all awards' development. All existing awards will, over time, be harmonized through the Common Awards System, removing duplications and making them available to all providers.

Determining Standards and the Common Awards System

Since 2001, FETAC determined standards through the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies. FETAC has recently commenced the determination of standards under the common award system.

The Standards Advisory Board was established in March 2007. This board is representative of key national stakeholders and serves to quality assure the process of developing national standards. A number of Standards Development Groups will develop and review standards for awards at levels 1 to 6. New Standards Development Groups will be established in line with the FETAC awards plan as part of the common awards system.

In 2006 FETAC launched the first new awards developed through the Common Awards System at levels 1 and 2. Awards at these levels aim to meet the needs of learners, young and old, adults who may be returning to education and training, or who may be engaging with learning for the first time and learners with few or no previous qualifications.

These new awards were developed through extensive consultation and with the assistance of an Expert Working Group. The features, characteristics and standards for each of the awards are published in the form of an Awards Specification. A key feature of each certificate is that it comprises a number of components (minor awards) which learners can achieve at their own pace and accumulate over time towards one of the named certificates (major awards). This provides significant access opportunities for learners to achieve a major award. There are 2 major awards at level 1 (Level 1 Certificate in General Learning, Level 1 Certificate in Communications) and 1 major award at level 2 (Level 2 Certificate in General Learning) currently available. There are over 50 minor awards available at levels 1 and 2 in fields such as Communications, Mathematics / numeracy, Learning to Learn, Information and Communications Technology, Visual and Performing Arts, Sciences, Health and Safety.

FETAC will identify new award areas for development at all six levels of the framework in their Awards Plan. An Awards Plan is a three year plan for the review of existing standards and development of new standards. The first Awards Plan, developed in consultation with the former awarding bodies and other key stakeholders, was devised in 2008. The plan will be updated and reviewed on an annual basis. New awards will be developed within the Common Awards System and will be based on standards determined through a single and transparent standards development process.

Promoting Awards

Since its establishment in 2001 significant work has been undertaken initially on establishing and promoting the FETAC name and brand and subsequently on promoting FETAC awards.

FETAC has successfully promoted its awards, as evidenced from marketing research conducted on behalf of FETAC. The FETAC brand is firmly established. Stakeholders including learners, have a high degree of awareness of FETAC and FETAC awards. FETAC acknowledges that it must continue to promote its awards to ensure their status and value and to strengthen the association with the levels of the framework. FETAC is committed to addressing the issue of international recognition through its continuing work in Europe.

FETAC's communications and promotional strategy will continue to evolve as the organisation develops and stakeholder needs change.

Quality Assurance

Any providers offering FETAC awards must agree their quality assurance procedures with FETAC. FETAC's policy is set out in *Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training: Policy and Guidelines for Provider*.

The main points of the policy are:

- FETAC recognises the primary role of providers in the establishment and operation of quality assurance;
- all providers must demonstrate the capacity to quality assure their further education and training programmes.
- agreement between FETAC and the provider on the provider's quality assurance procedures is required for provider registration with FETAC;
- registered providers can submit programmes for validation against new awards;
- FETAC will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a provider's quality assurance procedures and will review the agreement within a maximum period of five years.

Since the process of provider registration began in January 2005, approximately 700 providers, including c. 170 new providers, have agreed their quality assurance procedures and are now registered providers. These providers represent approximately 1,400 education and training centres.

Programme Registration and Validation

Validation is the process through which FETAC evaluates a programme of education and training. It ensures that learners on the programme will have the opportunity to reach the standards for the award to which the programme is designed to lead. Since 2001, programmes leading to awards at levels 3 to 6 were validated through the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies.

Following the classification of awards in 2005, the FETAC Council commenced registration of all programmes leading to its awards, through gathering and capturing specific programme details e.g. awards, programme title, duration and delivery mode. This represents the Council's first step towards a national validation process for the sector. The Registration of Programmes applies to all new and existing providers offering programmes leading to FETAC awards at levels 3 to 6 on the framework.

In 2006, over 700 centres from the further education sector registered almost 5,000 programmes with FETAC, 2,000 of which lead to a major award and 2,800 to one or more minor awards.

The registration of programmes will continue until new programmes are developed for the new awards under the Common Awards System (CAS). As new awards are developed as part of the CAS, they will be validated as outlined in FETAC's validation policy agreed by FETAC Council in 2006. The policy will ensure that all programmes offered by registered providers leading to FETAC awards will provide learners with appropriate opportunities to reach the standards for the award. FETAC will require providers to submit programmes for validation before commencement of programme delivery.

Providers who offer awards at levels 1 and 2 must first have their programme validated by FETAC. To date 49 programmes have been submitted by 33 providers, reflecting 19 VECs, 5 Special National Schools, 8 HSE funded providers and 1 agency, NALA. Typically programmes focus on literacy; some reflect essentially an 'intervention' that is being made as part of a larger programme of learning, while others meet the needs of learners who for diverse reasons find their most appropriate entry point for qualifications at Level 2. HSE funded providers tend to devise programmes around the broadest range of awards at both level 1 and 2, catering for very diverse abilities of learners within a care setting. The Further Education Support Service is providing support for providers engaging with awards at level 1 and 2⁵.

FETAC recognises the capacity and expertise of a range of organisations including higher education institutes, VECs, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc and BIM in relation to programme design, development, evaluation and approval. The policy on programme validation provides for the establishment of Programme Approval Agreements with such organisations. FETAC will ensure through Programme Approval Agreements that these organisations have structures, processes and procedures in place for the evaluation and approval of programmes in accordance with FETAC guidelines and criteria. It is intended to have a number of these agreements in place by the end of 2008.

FETAC will enable providers to develop programmes for use across a range of registered centres in order to facilitate the sharing of validated programmes. Programme Approval Agreements and shared programmes recognise both the significant expertise within the sector and ensure efficient use of resources while avoiding duplication of effort.

Standards for named awards at levels 1 and 2 have been available since 2006. The validation policy is being implemented for programmes leading to these new awards. The first programme submissions at levels 1 and 2 were received in April 2007 from a small number of providers.

In the coming years, as new awards are introduced and as existing awards are replaced across levels 1 to 6, providers will be required to have their programmes leading to these new awards validated, for example as new regulations are developed for quarrying, new awards and standards, new programme providers and new programmes will emerge. FETAC will manage this process, having due regard to the impact on all stakeholders and with the fundamental objective of improving the quality of programmes for learners.

⁵ The first levels 1 and 2 awards were presented by Minister Mary Hanafin in May 2008. It is intended to formally review the levels 1 and 2 awards and standards and the introduction of associated processes on conclusion of the pilot phase, planned for December 2008.

Assessment

In June 2001 FETAC adopted all of the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies in relation to assessment. These process and systems will continue until full implementation of FETAC assessment policy in 2008.

FETAC is assured of the quality of assessment processes of the former awarding bodies. The characteristics of best practice identified across these bodies significantly informed the development of FETAC policy on assessment. These characteristics have been identified as being in line with international practice. They include:

- internal assessment procedures;
- standards based and criterion referenced assessment;
- guidelines for assessors and verifiers;
- internal monitoring/verification procedures;
- independent external verification/examining procedures.

The policy on quality assuring assessment was agreed by FETAC Council in March 2006. This policy identifies a framework for the quality assurance of assessment. This framework includes the publication of Award Specifications, the Quality Assuring Assessment Policy, Guidelines for Providers, and Guidelines for Internal Verifiers and External Authenticators. Since the publication of the policy, FETAC developed guidelines to assist providers in the development and implementation of procedures for fair and consistent assessment.

The guidelines set out the role and responsibility of the provider with regard to quality assuring all aspects of their assessment practice, including:

- assessment of learners;
- verification and authentication of assessment;
- approval of results;
- processing appeals;
- requesting FETAC to make awards to learners.

All registered providers are required to have in place quality assured assessment procedures to oversee, verify and authenticate their assessment procedures.

As outlined in the monitoring policy FETAC will monitor providers' activities on an ongoing basis, including those relating to assessment, to ensure consistent application of the requirements and to safeguard the integrity of FETAC awards.

Implementation of new assessment arrangements commenced in July 2008 and the first assessment period occurred in August 2008.

Monitoring

The national monitoring processes and systems of the former awarding bodies were adopted by FETAC on establishment and will continue in operation until full implementation of FETAC policies and procedures. These processes are generally centred on a two stage-approach of centre approval/registration and external examining/monitoring of assessment.

Following a consultation process FETAC published a policy on monitoring in March 2006. In developing its policy on monitoring, FETAC had regard to the existing systems of the former awarding bodies. Implementation of the new monitoring policy commenced in Autumn 2007. The policy applies to all registered providers and programmes leading to awards at levels 1 to 6.

As part of the new monitoring policy, FETAC will monitor providers and their programmes and services in a systematic and planned way. FETAC have developed a monitoring plan and will produce annual monitoring plans, identifying priorities in terms of provider types, programmes and awards. The initial stage of monitoring will focus on providers' quality assurance and the attainment of national standards. When new programmes have been validated by FETAC, monitoring will include specific reference to programmes.

A critical part of monitoring is self-evaluation. Providers self-evaluate the programmes and services they offer to learners with a view to identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Action plans must then be put in place and progress against plans continuously monitored.

An important aspect of FETAC monitoring is to ensure that provider self-evaluation is taking place and that the improvement plans developed by the providers are substantive and, crucially, implemented.

The implementation of provider quality assurance presented a genuine challenge for the further education and training sector. FETAC acknowledges that the new processes present significant demands and challenges to providers. However, provider quality assurance marked a significant watershed in the sector, recognising the primacy of providers' own quality assurance systems as the mechanism to maintain and improve the quality of programmes. It places, for the first time, nationally, the primary responsibility for quality assurance on providers. This fact, allied with the requirement for all current providers to formally register with FETAC before the end of 2006 has generated a new and concentrated focus on quality assurance across the FET sector.

The full impact of the implementation of provider quality assurance will take time to assess and evaluate. The outcome of this process will enable a more measured assessment of the impact of provider quality assurance on individual providers and on the sector overall.

Through the implementation of these functions FETAC has provided a benchmark for quality assurance in the sector. Previously undocumented and informal quality arrangements have been solidified and a large number of providers are now recognised as operating under a national quality assurance framework. Learners are now participating in programmes offered by a quality assured provider.

The implementation of provider quality assurance, self-evaluation and monitoring will contribute to building capacity and expertise within the further education and training sector. Experience suggests that providers are collaborating, sharing best practice and building networks within their own specific sectors. It is envisaged that as the sector grows in expertise and confidence, such collaboration and networks will extend across all providers for the benefit of learners nationwide.

Recognition of Other Awards

In the area of vocational education and training, the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) called for increased co-operation between member states in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and the recognition of competence and qualifications. Recognition of qualifications is a concrete objective set by the European Commission in order to facilitate worker and learner mobility.

It was within this context that FETAC developed a policy and process for the Recognition of Other Awards in order to promote greater employability, social inclusion and lifelong learning as noted in the objects of the Qualifications Act. The FETAC Council, following a period of consultation, published its policy in November 2003. This policy led to the development of

two distinct processes for award recognition, each depending on the purpose for which recognition is sought. The processes identified were to enable:

- access to employment or learning opportunities;
- transfer of previously certified learning to gain credit towards a FETAC award.

FETAC established the process relating to access in 2004 and the process relating to transfer in 2005.

Recognition Processes

The implementation of the two processes enables award holders to apply for formal recognition from FETAC of their award. The efficiency of the processes has been substantially enhanced by the completion of the placement and classification of legacy awards on the framework, the agreement on the alignment of Irish and UK awards, the Authority's policy on award inclusion and alignment and the emerging European Qualifications Framework.

Regarding enabling access, FETAC provides advice to the Authority relating to international further education and training awards. Advice provided leads to an Award Comparability Statement being issued by the Authority.

Over 2,000 learners, who hold awards through other awarding systems, have their learning recognised by FETAC every year. FETAC enables learners to transfer from one provider to another usually by granting exemptions from the assessment process. This process initially operated for FETAC awards arising from the NCVA processes.

In 2006 the recognition process was extended to include applicants holding awards issued by the former awarding bodies, Irish higher education awards and international awards.

FETAC has a role in promoting the recognition of its own awards internationally. One of the means of achieving this is through the issue of EUROPASS certificate supplements for FETAC major awards. High take up awards were initially targeted at certificate supplement development, with 20 certificate supplements developed for level 6 Craft awards. In 2007 further certificate supplements were developed for the new level 1 and 2 awards. Some certificate supplements have been developed for level 3 awards, and there are plans to further extend this for awards at levels 3 to 6. As they are developed, certificate supplements are available for download from the FETAC website.

FETAC continues to assist the NQAI in aligning non FETAC awards to the NFQ, for example such as those originating from quality assured bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. FETAC continues to work with NQAI, HETAC and other national awarding bodies in progressing this.

Access, Transfer and Progression

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 set out for the first time in legislation a central role for learners within a national context of lifelong learning. The Authority has a specific role to determine the procedures to be implemented by providers for access, transfer and progression. The Act requires FETAC to assist the Authority in facilitating access, transfer and progression by ensuring that providers have adequate procedures in place.

FETAC's role is to ensure that procedures for access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers of validated programmes.

The FETAC Council agreed a policy on access, transfer and progression in June 2004. This policy considered both the consolidation of existing pathways, appropriate to the purpose of the existing legacy awards and the development of an infrastructure that would support access, transfer and progression arrangements. Facilitating access, transfer and progression has underpinned and has been embedded into all of the agreed policies of the FETAC Council.

The publication of the Directory of FETAC Awards in 2006 supports the transparent articulation of transfer and progression routes at local level for existing awards.

The introduction of new awards at levels 1 and 2 in 2006 provides access to the national qualifications framework for learners who formerly were excluded from having their learning recognised. These awards have been designed with transfer and progressions opportunities in mind.

The agreement of provider's quality assurance systems is a key mechanism whereby FETAC ensures access, transfer and progression arrangements for learners at local level. Providers are required to agree their systems for information provision to learners, entry arrangements, arrangements to facilitate diversity, and for the recognition of prior learning. Access, transfer and progression requirements are reinforced within providers' policies for programme development, delivery and review and for the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

In the context of recognition, implementation of FETAC's recognition process provides a mechanism through which exemptions may be granted towards the requirements of an award on the basis of other certified learning.

The Higher Education Links Scheme facilitates progression to third level programmes of education and training for holders of particular FETAC awards at levels 5 and 6. This scheme has continued to expand since its inception over a decade ago, and most recently, there has been a significant increase in the number of universities participating. The current number of participating institutions including the universities is 40. This has grown from 21 in 2002.

During 2005 FETAC and the Institutes of Technology initiated what is called the Pilot Scheme. This scheme built on the previously operated HELS and facilitates progression to courses leading to Higher Certificate (level 6), Ordinary Degree (level 7) and Honours Degree (level 8) for holder of any FETAC (NCVA) level 5 or 6 awards. Both of these schemes are operated through the Central Applications Office (CAO).

The Higher Education Links Scheme and the associated pilot scheme are viewed extremely favourably by the stakeholders. There is a call for this scheme to be extended to all FETAC awards.

The NFQ has led to progression options for Major Award holders in Crafts. Currently, there are 15 progression pathways elaborated by Institutes of Technologies for Major Award holders in Crafts.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) refers to the process of recognition of the knowledge, skills and competence an individual learner already has, however acquired.

FETAC is required by the NQAI Authority to ensure that providers implement the procedures for access, transfer and progression. The recognition of prior learning is a significant mechanism to help improve access, transfer and progression for learners and is essential for the promotion of lifelong learning.

The Authority determined that the recognition of prior learning will be applicable to learners gaining:

- entry to programmes;
- credit towards an award or exemptions from some programme requirements;
- eligibility for a full award.

In late 2004, the Authority convened an advisory group to devise a set of national principles for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training in order to underpin the introduction of policy and procedures for the recognition of prior learning in Ireland. FETAC, HETAC and other stakeholders in further and higher education were represented on this advisory group. In June 2005, on the basis of its advice, the Authority agreed principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training. Following consultation a policy on recognition of prior learning was agreed by the Council in 2005. The policy requires providers who register with FETAC to facilitate learners through the recognition of prior learning for access to programmes, credit or exemptions from requirements of a programme and access to full awards in so far as they can subject to the availability of guidelines on recognition of prior learning. Following approval of FETAC's Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning in 2005 a pilot implementation project commenced in 2006.

The purpose of the pilot project was to assess and identify implementation issues relating to providers and FETAC regarding the recognition of prior learning. This pilot project was evaluated in 2007.

Based on the findings of the evaluation a number of recommendations are proposed with regard to the further implementation and development of RPL in the further education and training sector. The key recommendations include:

- As part of their quality assurance (QA) requirements all providers should commence the development and implementation of policies and procedures for the facilitation of learners with prior learning for the purposes of **access** to programmes and **gaining exemptions** or credit from programme requirements.
- Providers are required to set out in their QA policies and procedures their methodologies for ensuring the fair and consistent assessment of prior learning, as appropriate to their quality assurance agreement.
- All providers should develop procedures to monitor and review their RPL policies and procedures on an ongoing basis to ensure overall credibility of processes implemented.
- Providers who wish to offer RPL for the purpose of enabling learners **to achieve an award** must be specifically quality assured by FETAC to do so. These providers should develop RPL as a new strand of their QA policies and procedures. As part of their quality assurance policy and provider will state the specific resources and expertise they have in place to enable them to carry out this activity effectively and credibly.
- Funding agencies should address the issue of appropriate funding for the providers within their remit to enable them to offer RPL for the purpose of access to and/or exemption from programmes. They should also address the issue of funding for providers who have the competences to enable learners to achieve an award. This

should include the following cost; mentoring staff, staff development, development of materials and implementation costs.

Summary

Through the implementation of its functions FETAC has brought structure and coherence to the awards within the further education and training sector. It has contributed significantly to the recognition of the emerging sector and has provided learners with clarity and understanding of what their award stands for. FETAC has enabled access for learners at levels 1 and 2, levels which were previously outside the framework and has promoted the status and value of all FET awards.

FETAC has met the needs of learners in further education and training through the provision of awards by:

- increasing the number of awards made to learners;
- introducing new awards and standards at levels 1 and 2;
- establishing a fully transparent national awards system through the classification of all awards and the publication of the updated Directory of FETAC Awards;
- ensuring increased opportunities for learners to transfer and progress using FETAC awards;
- registering all new providers accessing FETAC awards through the quality assurance process;
- enabling learners to accumulate minor awards over time;
- registering programmes leading to FETAC awards, and establishing a register of these programmes;
- ensuring providers offering programmes on a commercial and profit making basis have arrangements in place for the protection of learners;
- completing a pilot project with a small number of providers which enabled learners' prior experience and learning to be recognised and making recommendations for the future;
- recognising other, non-FETAC, awards.

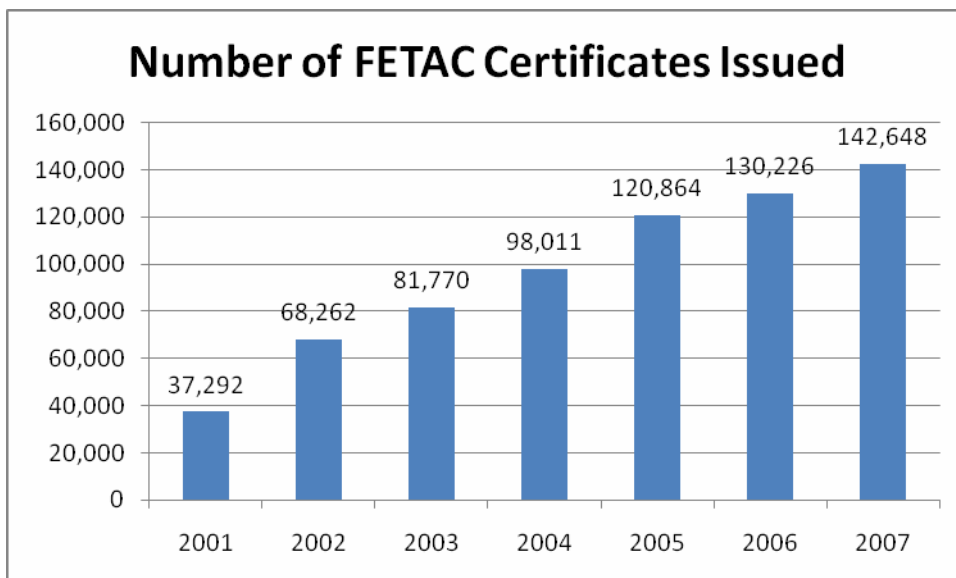
Section 2 Awards Data

It is currently estimated that there are approximately 300,000 learners per annum in the further education and training sector; on average, approximately 130,000 of these are receiving FETAC awards annually. Whilst this figure illustrates the substantial impact FETAC has made at national level, the FETAC Council recognises that there is significant opportunity for FETAC to develop and grow the number and range of awards it makes in the future. The FETAC Council is also keenly aware of the challenges presented in meeting the requirements of the National Skills Strategy.

The graph (i) illustrates the numbers of FETAC certificates issued annually since 2001. For various classification reasons the data across years are not wholly comparable, but they provide a rough guide as to the volume of certificates despatched. The figure for 2005 is overstated, due to a change in data reporting practice. The numbers of FETAC certificates issued have doubled when 2002 is compared with 2007 data. Over 680,000 FETAC certificates have been issued during the period 2001-2007.

The graphs and tables set out below identify:

- Graph (i) Number of FETAC Certificates issued 2001-2007
- Graph (ii) Number of FETAC Certificates, by Former Awarding Body, issued 2001-2005
- Table (i) Number of FETAC Certificates, by Award Type, Issued 2006
- Table (ii) Number of disaggregated FETAC Awards, by Award Type, and by NFQ level, Issued 2006.
- Graph (iii) FETAC Certificates Issued in 2007, by Award Type.
- Graph (iv) FETAC Award Recipients in 2007 by Award type.
- Graph (v) FETAC Awards Achieved in 2007, by Level and Award Type.
- Table (iii) Number of FETAC Certificates Award Type, Issued May/June 2008 for Levels 1 and 2.

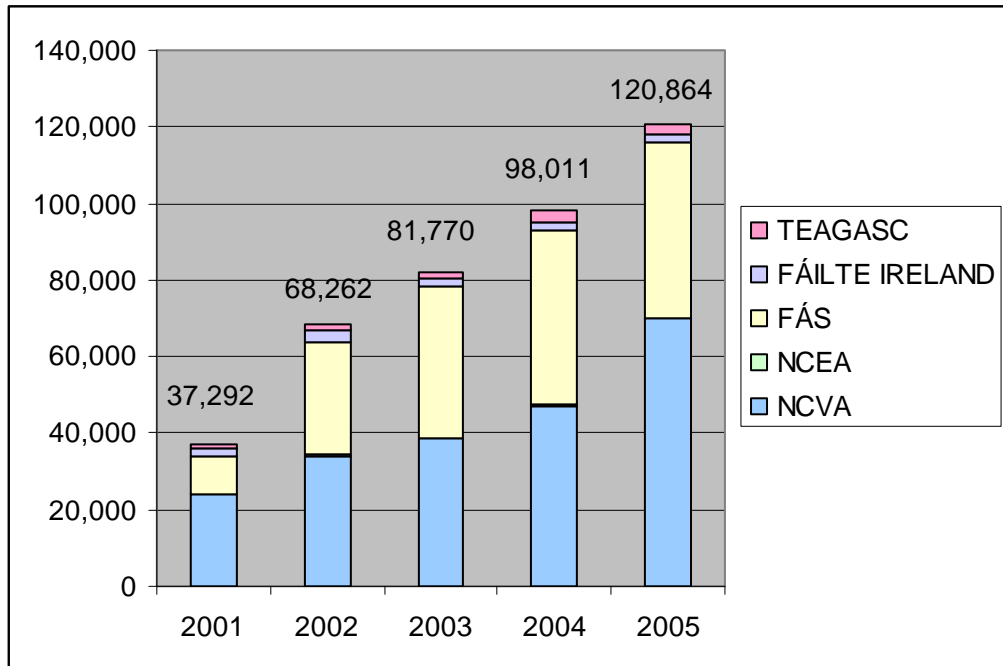


2001 includes awards from June to December 2001.

Graph (i) Number of FETAC Certificates Issued 2001 – 2007.

The graph (ii) illustrates the numbers of FETAC certificates issued annually since 2001, according to their former awarding body. Again, the data across years are not wholly comparable and the figure for 2005 is overstated. This graph illustrates that there is a

general upward trend in the numbers of paper certificates issued, categorised by former awarding bodies, when 2001 is compared to 2005.



2001 includes awards from June to December 2001.

Graph (ii) Number of FETAC Certificates, by Former Awarding Body, Issued 2001 - 2005.

Table (i) illustrates awards for 2006 by NFQ Award type. 2006 marked the first year all awards could be presented by NFQ level and award type, rather than by categorising by former awarding body. The data show 130,226 paper certificates were awarded to 111,099 learners in 2006. The 75,703 Component Certificates are disaggregated into 135,170 minor awards bringing the total awards achieved in 2006 to 189,693. Table (ii) indicates the disaggregated awards by their respective NFQ levels. Over 70% of the total number was for minor awards, and over 50% of the total number was at level 5.

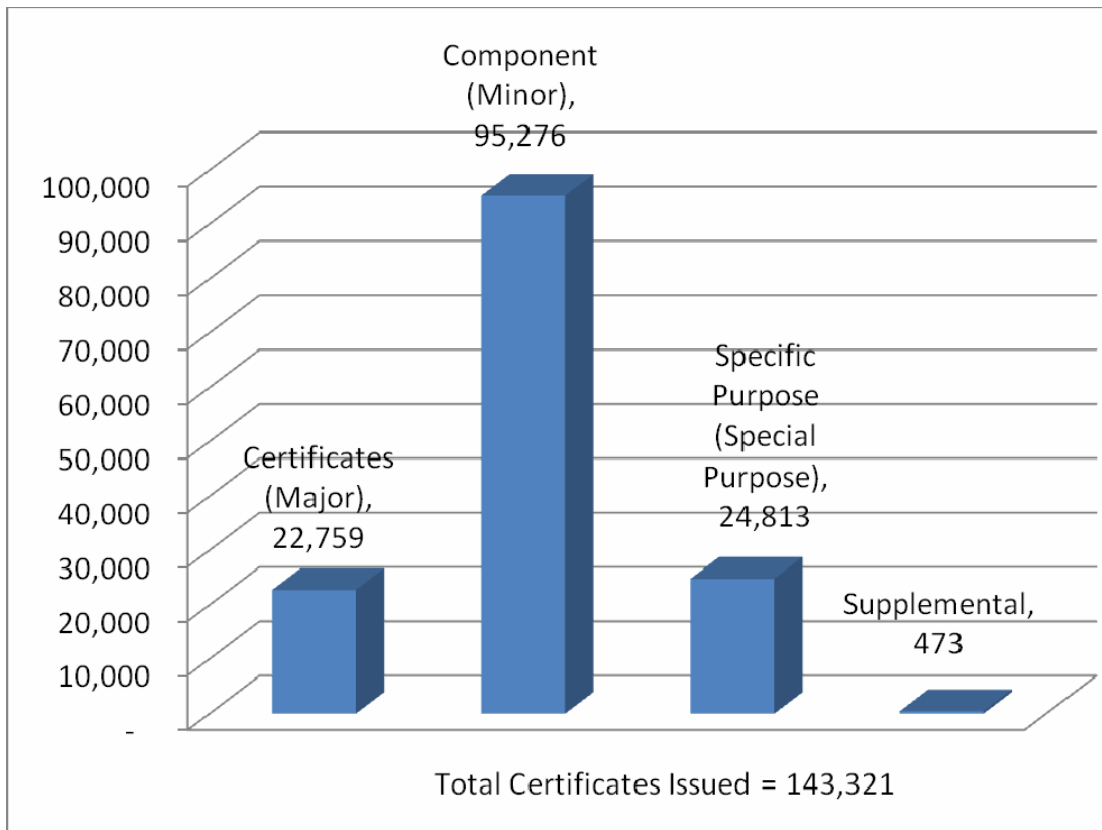
Table (i) Number of FETAC Certificates, by Award Type, Issued 2006.

2006	Paper Certificates Issued
Certificates (Major)	26,299
Component (Minor)	75,703
Specific Purpose (Special Purpose)	28,028
Supplemental	196
Total number of Certificates	130,226
	Award holders
Certificates (Major)	24,515
Component (Minor)	65,521
Specific Purpose (Special Purpose)	24,777
Supplemental	191
Total number of Award holders	111,099

Table (ii) Number of disaggregated FETAC Awards, by Award Type, and by NFQ level, Issued 2006.

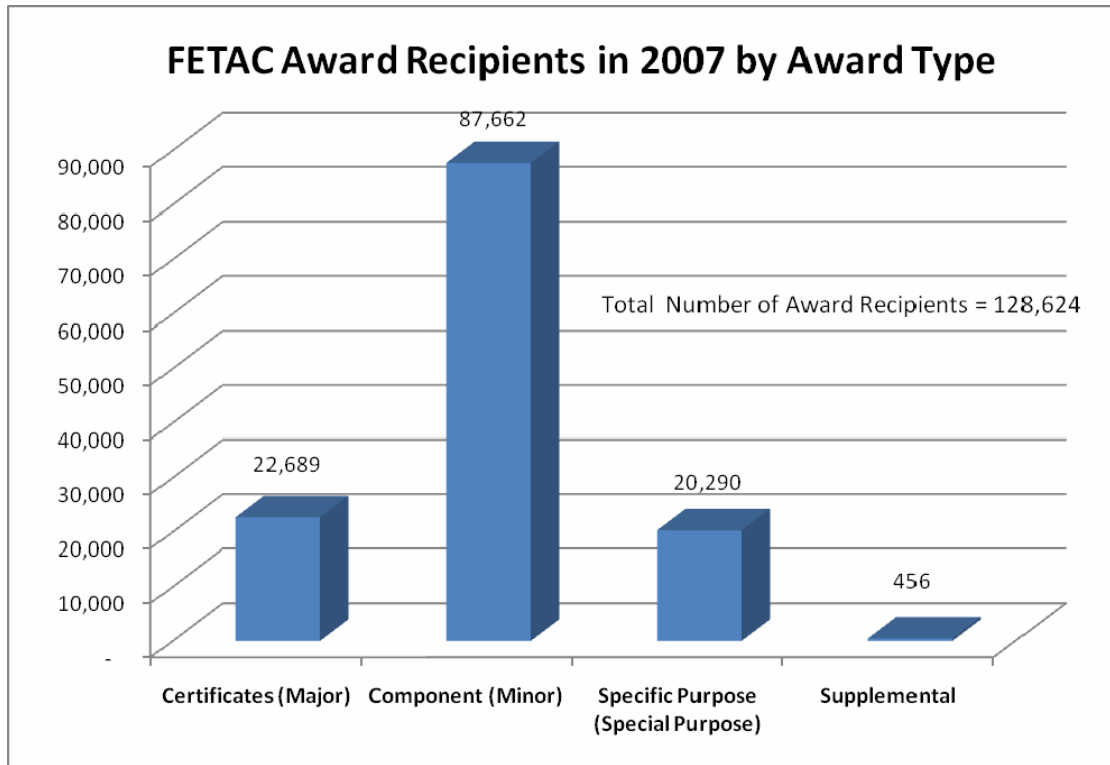
Award Type	Level	Numbers of Disaggregated Awards
Major	Level 3	3,488
	Level 4	1,739
	Level 5	14,071
	Level 6	7,001
Major Award Total		26,299
Minor	Level 3	34,064
	Level 4	24,062
	Level 5	72,003
	Level 6	5,041
Minor Award Total		135,170
Special Purpose	Level 3	39
	Level 4	1,342
	Level 5	23,887
	Level 6	2,760
Special Purpose Award Total		28,028
Supplemental Award Total (Level 6)		196
All Awards Total		189,693

Graph (iii) indicates the different award types issued as paper certificates in 2007. Just over 143,000 paper certificates were issued to 128,624 learners and of these circa 88,000 learners received Component Certificates comprised of minor awards; almost 23,000 received Certificates, i.e., major awards, over 20,000 received Specific Purpose Certificates issued for special purpose awards; and almost 500 learners received Supplemental Certificates for supplemental awards.



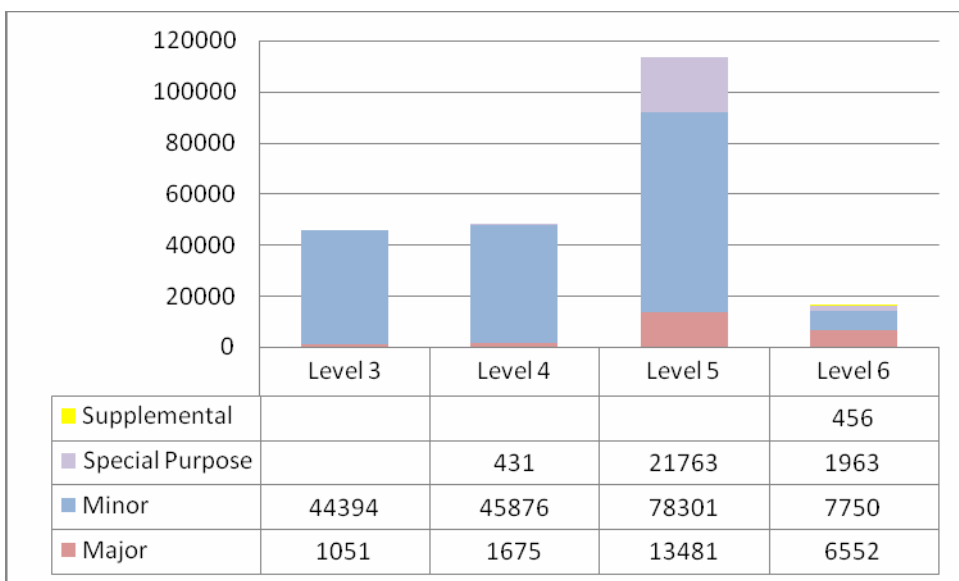
Graph (iii) FETAC Certificates Issued in 2007, by Award Type.

Graph (iv) counts the numbers of learners receiving the different award types issued in 2007. Almost 90,000 learners achieved Component Certificates; almost 23,000 learners achieved Certificates issued for major awards. Just over 20,000 learners received Specific Purpose Certificates and almost 500 learners received Supplemental Certificates.



Graph (iv) FETAC Awards Recipients in 2007 by Award Type

When the component certificates are disaggregated into their individual minor awards, there was a total of 223,693 FETAC awards attained in 2007. Graph (v) shows the NFQ level and corresponding award type for the disaggregated awards data. Over three quarters of the total number was for minor awards, and over 50% of the total number was at level 5.



Graph (v) FETAC Awards Achieved in 2007, by Level and Award Type.

The first levels 1 and 2 awards were awarded in May and June 2008. 133 paper certificates were awarded. Table (iii) shows the level 1 and 2 awards data.

Table (iii) Number of FETAC Certificates Award Type, Issued May and June 2008 for Levels 1 and 2.

Awards Achieved -Summary	May and June 2008	
Communications	Level 1	2
General Learning	Level 2	39
Certificates (Major Awards)		41
Component Certificates (Minor Awards)		92
All Awards		133

In terms of access, transfer and progression it is noteworthy that almost 19,000 learners⁶ who received a FETAC award in 2006 also went on to achieve a FETAC award in 2007.

⁶ The figure for learners is based on disaggregated awards data, i.e. the figure is headcount data and not adjusted.

Section 3 Methodological Approach

The participants in this study are FETAC stakeholders, within the Further Education and Training sector.

The approach to the study was as follows:

- (i) The information collected during the Review of FETAC in 2007, for FETAC's latest Strategic Plan 2008-2010 and from communications surveys conducted for FETAC, was reviewed to inform this study and resulting report.
- (ii) A Gap Analysis was conducted, to determine what further research/consultation was required. Based on this, FETAC conducted focus meetings with representative stakeholders.
- (iii) FETAC also carried out an online survey⁷ (see Appendix 9) during May/June 2008. All representative stakeholders were invited to disseminate the survey to as wide a population as possible, to consult further within their relevant sectors, and to submit responses and/or engage in further discussion with FETAC.

On-line Survey details

Approximately 160 valid surveys were received to the online survey from a representative cross-section of stakeholders. The survey was particularly targeted at groups which were at risk of being under-represented, such as employers and learners. The survey was available from the FETAC website during May/June 2008 and was also e-mailed to key stakeholders, with a request to forward the survey.

Of 161 valid responses to the survey, 92 respondents completed the question 'Which of the following best describes you as a respondent to this questionnaire?'

Of the 92 respondents to the question: 30 of respondents to the question selected 'Skillnets'; followed by 25 respondents indicating that 'Provider/Procurer of Programmes' best described them, followed by 22 selecting 'Teacher/Trainer'. 12 selected the category 'Other'. 10 selected 'Government Department', followed by 7 indicating that they are 'Learners', 6 are 'Employers'. Of those who responded over 5 selected that they hold FETAC awards, 3 selected FETAC evaluators/verifiers; 2 indicated that the category 'Members of the public' best described them and 2 also selected 'Social Partners' as the most appropriate category. Some respondents selected more than one category.

⁷ Surveymonkey.com was used to devise and collect the survey data.

Section 4 Findings

Introduction

The main finding of this study, into the implementation and impact of the Framework in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, is that the Framework and the related policies on access, transfer and progression are seen as a hugely important and beneficial development to the FET sector and the stakeholders within the sector.

The Framework has enabled greater understanding of and navigation through the diverse layers of awards and qualifications systems that existed within the State prior to 2003. It has also facilitated greater comparability between national awards and awards from other jurisdictions.

The positive impacts of the Framework in the FET sector are evident through the following critically important key features, which have been repeatedly identified by stakeholders:

- **Clarity** – the Framework, through its sheer simplicity of 10 levels (Levels 1 to 10), has enabled greater knowledge and understanding of awards and of their relationship to each other. This clarity has facilitated the user, e.g. employers and education and training institutions, to make informed decisions regarding award holders, based on their enhanced knowledge and understanding.
- **Coherence** – the Framework has enabled the development of a more coherent and robust system of awards in the FET sector, through the development of the Common Awards System. The Common Awards System builds on the Framework constructs of ‘major’ and ‘minor’, thereby enabling learners to accumulate minor awards, over time, towards major awards. This is a critical requirement and demand in the FET sector.
- **Connectivity** – the Framework connects awards and communicates with stakeholders. It enables new and more transparent pathways to be built for learners across the system, including between FET and HET. At an international level it enables further and more ambitious connections, through the future alignment of the NFQ with the EQF.
- **Continuous improvement** – the Framework has brought about a greater emphasis on continuous improvement and enhancement of programmes and the learning experience. This focus on continuous improvement has been realised through providers formalising and further developing their quality assurance systems.

This section outlines in detail the findings of the study based on stakeholder feedback. It identifies the key technical achievements and elaborates on stakeholder understanding and expectations. It does so in the context of the above identified, critically important features.

1. Knowledge and understanding of the Framework

The Framework is welcomed and viewed as a hugely positive development by stakeholders within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector.

There is a high level of awareness of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) within the sector. Over half of respondents to the online survey recorded that there is a ‘good’ to ‘very good’ awareness of the NFQ within the FET sector. A further one third of respondents believed the level of knowledge to be ‘ok’ within the sector.

The evidence collected in the online survey and the focus meetings reflects the rich diversity which exists within the FET sector. Some respondents reported that there is a low awareness of the NFQ among learners, albeit a high awareness of the FETAC 'brand'. The FETAC brand is seen as a stamp of quality for many learners, however the connect with FETAC and the NFQ is not always made by the general public, employers and learners. This contrasts with other evidence, which reported that there is a high level of awareness of the NFQ throughout the Department of Education and Science (DES) funded FET sector. In particular the 'fan' graphic is widely recognised.

The knowledge of practitioners was reported as being at a high level. One of the reasons behind the high level of knowledge and understanding by programme providers was attributed to their operational need to understand the Framework, for example in order to reach 'Quality Assurance Agreements' with FETAC. The understanding of the NFQ varies considerably depending on the level of involvement of the practitioner.

Two-thirds of respondents to the online survey rated the understanding of the NFQ within the FET sector as 'okay' to 'good', although almost one fifth of respondents rated the understanding as 'poor' to very poor'. 13% of respondents believed the level of understanding to be 'very good' within the FET sector.

Feedback received indicated that the level and nature of language used in NQAI documentation is sometimes found to be overly complex by those who are not specialised in the area of formal qualifications. There is also a low level of real understanding of the meanings of Knowledge, Skill and Competence and sub- strands. This is not surprising, as whilst programme providers need to be very well versed in these details a full understanding is not required by end-users such as learners.

It is clear, that there is a lack of depth of understanding in certain areas of the sector. There was a view that employers, the general public and learners do not have a high awareness, and/or understanding, of the Framework.

"Extent of knowledge and understanding is poor in the private commercial sector"

"The NFQ is well understood amongst the training providers in the FET sector however, there needs to be greater understanding and awareness of it by individuals and employers."

"It can be very difficult for learners to grasp what it (the National Framework of Qualifications) means."

In summary, there is generally a strong awareness and a good understanding of the NFQ in the FET sector. Employers, the general public have a relatively low awareness and understanding of the NFQ and its inherent benefits. Learners have a fairly good knowledge but would benefit from a deeper understanding of the NFQ. Programme providers have a high knowledge and understanding of the NFQ.

2. Impact of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) brings a coherence and general understanding of the value of qualifications in Ireland. It serves as a motivational tool, and has provided an impetus for change in the education and training sectors. It serves as a 'signpost' for learners, providers and employers and aids a clear and transparent understanding of qualifications.

The NFQ has been well received by FET stakeholders. The online survey results found that almost three-quarters of respondents had a 'good' or 'excellent' impression of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The feedback clearly identified the following key achievements to date. These four key achievements/areas and associated key benefits, as highlighted by stakeholders, are outlined below. Further background information is already given in the 'Introduction' section.

Achievements of the NFQ

Summarising, the main achievements as viewed by stakeholders are:

- **Placement and Classification of Existing Awards**
- **Introduction of a Common Awards System**
- **Improved Quality Assurance**
- **Improved Access, Transfer and Progression Opportunities**

Placement and classification of existing awards

The placement and classification of existing and former awards, at Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6, including the availability of the '*Directory of FETAC awards 2006*', is viewed positively by stakeholders. The placement has improved the associated status of Level 1 to 6 Awards in the FET Sector. It has resulted in clarity and coherence which enables a comparison of awards. The placement has permitted an alignment of awards from several programme providers within one Framework. This has enabled a consistent and clear recognition of qualifications, regardless of the mode of learning involved to reach an award. It has also provided a clear route for learners through the system to higher education. In terms of mobility on an international stage, the NFQ and placement has enabled comparison with UK and other European qualifications.

"The Framework has brought better recognition and greater credibility to FET awards and courses for learners, education practitioners and employers."

"All awards are now under one umbrella of FETAC, and there is a better understanding of the value of awards"

Introduction of a Common Awards System

The (i) partnership approach, to developing national standards and the common awards system, and stakeholder involvement, and the (ii) appropriate setting of national standards for the knowledge, skill and competence to be acquired by learners were both highlighted by stakeholders as key elements in successfully developing the new awards at Level 1 and 2, as part of the Common Awards System by stakeholders.

"The establishment of two new levels, while still far from complete, is remarkable, and places Ireland at the leading edge of world practice in terms of accreditation of basic skills."

(A key benefit of the NFQ is the) *"Determination of standards at Levels 1 and 2, where no standards previously existed, thus ensuring access to the 'Framework' for a greater number of learners."*

"Provided a mechanism whereby all learning can, if so wished, be mapped to a standard."

(The NFQ has enabled) *"Comparison with UK and other European qualifications."*

Improved Quality Assurance (QA)

FETAC's reference to international good practice in the development of providers QA systems, and associated resources (e.g., QA Guidelines for Providers and Monitoring Guidelines), and the subsequent wide-ranging consultation with relevant stakeholders is seen as a core strength by stakeholders.

The development of QA policies and procedures by all programme providers registered with FETAC, is generally viewed by stakeholders as a positive development. The QA agreement is led by the provider, generates mutual understanding and awareness within providers, about their roles, and has created an emphasis on continuous improvement. This bottom-up approach has already impacted and formalised quality within the FET sector, affording greater credibility and status to national awards. It has also increased parity of esteem for FET awards relative to Higher Education and Training awards. The QA agreements have also resulted in programme providers explicitly taking access, transfer and progression into account when designing programmes for validation.

Programme providers have devoted considerable time and effort into developing their quality assurance systems. The associated documentation which programme providers must complete for their QA agreements was reported by some stakeholders as being onerous and resource intensive.

Improved Access, Transfer and Progression Opportunities

The NFQ in conjunction with the placement of awards has resulted in a coherent unified system for Further Education and Training. This lends a credibility and status to the awards within the sector, and provides more opportunities for learners to access education and training at a pace which suits them, and offers more flexibility around delivery of programmes leading to awards.

The Framework was cited as *“Providing a ladder of opportunity.”*, *“Enabling recognition of Prior Learning.”* and *“Allowing people to progress in education at a pace and level they are capable of.”*

The introduction of the Framework has resulted in more opportunities for progression to Higher Education from the FET sector. Progression pathways have been established with many Universities through the Higher Education Links Scheme. It is increasingly common for FETAC learners to move onto undergraduate courses. An overall c. 10% of Central Applications Office (CAO) offers are made to FETAC qualified applicants. As another example, there are now 15 progression links for FÁS apprenticeships into the Institutes of Technology.

Teagasc have been particularly successful in developing the appropriate networks and linkages with the third level institutions, and recommend a step-by step approach in establishing the appropriate networks.

“It is a great achievement that young people can now see where on the ladder of qualifications they are, and where they can go in the future.”

“From the disability service perspective it puts people on the learning path with recognition for, in many instances, great levels of effort.”

At an international level, access, transfer and progression opportunities have also improved due to the introduction of the Framework. The Framework has facilitated recognition at an international level through the EQF, and international agreements. The NFQ enables transferability and recognition of qualifications outside Ireland.

Stakeholders' Expectations of the NFQ

It is encouraging that stakeholders' expectations of the NFQ, and what it should enable, tally well with the main achievements of the NFQ to date, and future plans for further implementing the NFQ.

Stakeholders expect that the NFQ should provide *"A transparency in relation to qualifications and a greater common standard."* They contend that *"The Framework should provide a visible scale of competency which allows one to benchmark a persons achievements, example during an interview"* and *"Should provide the levels to which all awards are benchmarked."* Furthermore, the NFQ should *"Create a common understanding/qualification."* and provide *"Greater clarity around the value and quality of qualifications."*

The development of a Common Awards System, national standards and award specifications, in conjunction with programme providers' quality assurance systems, will fully realise these expectations.

There is an expectation that there is consistency and quality across the FET sector and that a high standard of learner assessment occurs across the various centres. The implementation of programme providers QA systems, self-evaluation and FETAC's monitoring role, coupled with a Common Awards System will ensure consistency and quality across the sector.

The provision of opportunities for learners to access, transfer and progress to and from programmes and awards across NFQ levels was of paramount importance to stakeholders. It was viewed as an important factor in realising the ambitions of instating a knowledge based economy. As an aid to access, transfer and progression the NFQ should be *"Simple to use and reference."* and *"Clearly explain the various levels of education awards in Ireland"*. Furthermore, the NFQ should *"Value all learning, full time or part time, irrespective of learning site, from basic literacy to post doctoral level."*

In order to promote and enable further access, transfer and progression stakeholders referred to the need to

- Develop and provide a streamlined credit system across the NFQ, from levels 1 to 10.
- Provide more and streamlined progression pathways particularly at the FET/Higher Education and Training interface,
- Provide mechanisms for systematic accreditation of prior and work based learning.

Progression opportunities to employment should be further developed, stakeholders aspirations included that the NFQ *"would be widely used in recruitment"* and would be *"widely used in public and private sectors alike."* There was an expectation that the NFQ provides a career progression plan. To this end, *"Enterprise led organisations should be encouraged to have options on the framework for workplace learning."* There was also a desire to see an increase in the acceptance of FETAC qualifications by employers instead of junior/leaving certificates.

Stakeholders see the Framework as a mechanism to further improve international mobility, both for learners moving out of Ireland and international learners coming into Ireland. To this end, there is a need to ensure that the Framework continues to link to the European system and offers clear advice on the recognition of international awards. The role of the NFQ in facilitating mobility to and from the UK market is particularly important, and involves further alignment of the UK qualifications to the NFQ. Alignment of non FETAC awards on the Framework would greatly enhance mobility within Ireland and further afield.

“For other countries to be able to clearly see what level an award is at, and also for employers in Ireland to be able to see your achievements based on other achievements that they would be more familiar with.”

“As a priority, I think we should be further advanced in allowing International workers have their qualifications formally mapped onto our NFQ in a simple and quick application process.”

(That the NFQ) *“Provides an open and transparent system of recognising prior learning and qualifications on a pan European level.”*

Stakeholders also see the Framework as a key means of measuring Ireland’s knowledge base, and ensuring advances are made to meet the up-skilling requirements of our knowledge economy.

“The Framework should be used as a measure as to how Ireland is making progress in moving its labour force up the levels within the framework. Census and labour force surveys etc. should use the Framework levels as a basis for collecting the qualification base of the Nation.”

Stakeholders indicated the need to further promote the significance and benefits of the NFQ in the FET sector, particularly to employers and learners.

Realising Stakeholders Expectations

Over 80% of respondents to the online survey agreed that their expectations were being delivered to some extent. It is clear from the cross analysis of the main achievements (indicated earlier) with stakeholders expectations that the ground work is in place. The main achievements now need to be built on.

In order to fully realise stakeholders’ expectations, the following is required:

- Further alignment of Awards
- Further development of the Common Awards System
- Increased Opportunities for Access, Transfer and Progression
- Maintaining and further developing Quality Assured Systems

In parallel with the above listed requirements, there is a need to ensure an adequately resourced and well informed FET sector.

Specific issues raised around resources included the time, financial and human resources required by programme providers to develop appropriate quality assurance systems, and to embrace the need for a flexible learning environment. Another example cited include the provision of ‘recognition of prior learning’, viewed by stakeholders as a hugely positive development, which must be properly resourced. The migration of existing awards, review and development of new awards as part of the Common Awards System are tasks requiring appropriate resources and collaboration.

The Framework is a new concept to the FET sector and there is a need for further information campaigns, advisory services and marketing initiatives. There is definitely a strong brand awareness around FETAC, but less so around the Framework, and indeed around the connection between HETAC, the NQAI and FETAC. Publicising the NFQ and rolling it out to stakeholders - informing and communicating the concept and features and benefits at a local level is an area requiring further development. The stakeholders viewed FETAC’s advertisement campaign to promote its awards as hugely successful. There is a

section of the population - including particularly, some employers and learners - who have still to receive the message, or to fully understand where FETAC and its awards fit in the wider scheme of education and training provision. Ongoing promotion will be necessary for some time to come, therefore, and could perhaps be focused more specifically at learners and employers and on the connection between the NFQ and FETAC Awards.

There is also a general need for further collaboration within the FET sector, for example between FETAC and the funding organisations, and between the FET and Higher Education and Training Systems, including the Universities.

3. Implementation and operation of the Framework

Almost half of respondents to the online survey results believed that the National Framework of Qualifications is working 'well' or 'excellently'. A further 40% believed the National Framework of Qualifications is working 'ok' and circa 8% believe it to be working 'poorly'. The focus meetings echo the belief that the NFQ is working well.

A collaborative approach has been taken to implement the Framework, particularly between FETAC and the former awarding bodies, HETAC and the NQAI, but also between FETAC and all its stakeholders. A partnership approach, coordinated by FETAC which involves extensive consultation and collaboration amongst the representative stakeholders informs all aspects of policy, procedures and system development to implement the Framework. The approaches adopted at a provider level vary, but have the same common elements and are identified in each providers Quality Assurance agreement. Since 2005, providers have put in place and commenced implementation of their Quality Assured procedures, including self evaluation of their programmes.

FETAC coordinates a wider monitoring and evaluative function to ensure consistency of national standards across the FET sector. Additionally, to ensure continuity and appropriate time for providers to put in place their newly structured QA systems, the policies and procedures of the former awarding bodies were initially adopted by FETAC, and are now largely replaced.

The full introduction of the Common Awards System, over the next few years, will replace all existing awards.

Providers have also developed networks and linkages with each other to enable further access, transfer and progression opportunities for their respective learners.

The previous section 'Impact of the Framework' has outlined the major achievements resulting from the introduction of the Framework. These key achievements also represent the key actions taken to date to implement the Framework and are:

- The placement and classification of awards on the NFQ;
- The development of a Common Awards System;
- The development of an overarching Quality Assurance System within which all registered programme providers have their individual QA systems (as outlined in their QA agreements) and
- The development of access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Through discussion with stakeholders, and an analysis of the expectations held by stakeholders, it is evident that those identified each represent priority areas requiring further development, in order to fully implement the Framework.

Issues also arose in relation to the need for an adequately resourced and well informed FET sector.

With regard to these key areas, the priorities and any associated concerns are described below:

Placement and Classification of Awards/Alignment

- Stakeholders require non-FETAC awards, within the FET sector, to be aligned to the Framework.
- There is a need for the levels to be clear and unambiguous. There is a lack of clarity with regard to levels on the NFQ for the leaving certificate.
- The existence of two Level 6 Major Awards side by side on the NFQ with minimal difference was recorded as unsatisfactory by some key stakeholders, however this was seen as advantageous by other stakeholders.
- In relation to Levels 1 and 2 awards, there is a particular need to ensure these awards are an integral part of Framework, and capture the requirements of those operating at these levels, and seeking further progression. This presents a unique opportunity for Ireland to continue to lead, as internationally there is little experience at these levels.

Development of a Common Awards System

- Standards Development and the Common Awards System are in the early stages of development. The current lack of national standards for new awards, other than at levels 1 and 2, is the single greatest limiting factor in the implementation of the Framework. New awards are needed, presenting the greatest opportunity and the greatest challenge for FETAC, to implement and catalyse the impact of the Framework.

In devising new awards:

- FETAC needs to be fully informed of the education, training, skills and qualifications requirements of all sectors pertaining to further education and training.
- FETAC must address the needs of the sector, for example, training people at work or for work.
- There needs to be an incorporation of creative, affective domains, and a parity of esteem for same.
- There is a divide between the 'Education' and 'Training' cultures which need merging, there are different understandings between the people involved in both, an issue, for example, competency based assessment and its importance for awards which are effectively 'licences to practice' and/or require safe practice. Careful consideration is required when devising assessment criteria for National Standards, particularly thresholds for minimum 'pass' and what the learner must know/demonstrate. Careful consideration is required to ensure true 'competency based assessment' applies to standards, as necessary.

Development of an overarching Quality Assurance System

- There is a need to fully implement FETAC policies and programme provider's own policies and procedures in terms of validating programmes, monitoring and evaluation and ensuring fair and consistent assessment.
- There is a need to fully implement FETAC's monitoring.
- Self evaluation by providers also needs to be fully implemented.

Development of access, transfer and progression (ATP) opportunities

- There is still a long way to go in terms of providing progression opportunities for learners that are meaningful and transparent. Until access (including the availability of appropriate awards), transfer and progression routes are further developed, it will be difficult to achieve the goals attached to the National Skills Strategy.
- There is a need for more networks and linkages to be established between programme providers to ensure appropriate opportunities are put in place for access, transfer and progression. Teagasc have been particularly active in this regard and have built up a strong progression network for their learners who wish to continue with their studies.

- Higher education is still relying too heavily on the points system as entry, however, the NFQ FETAC awards at equivalent levels are coming more to the fore in terms of access to Higher Education. There are now more opportunities for progression to Higher Education, with an overall c. 10% of CAO offers made to FETAC qualified applicants.
- A streamlined credit system is required to fully enable access, transfer and progression.
- The Recognition of International Awards is not happening in sufficient volume. A unified national approach for recognition is required, with particular priority to be given to UK awards. The creation of bilateral agreements with other EU Member States is suggested as a possible route.

As mentioned earlier, in order to support the priorities in implementing the Framework, it is essential to have an adequately resourced and well informed FET sector. To this end:

Information provision to all stakeholders is a key enabler in implementing the NFQ. The NQAI, HETAC and FETAC need to intensify their campaign to ensure the NFQ permeates to the learner, and to the people imparting guidance. There is a general need for knowledge promotion and information dissemination. Efforts must persist for some time to come to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the Framework and that the benefits are communicated to all, particularly surrounding access, transfer and progression. This study has identified a knowledge gap for employers, learners and the general public about the Framework and a general lack of understanding across the sector regarding access, transfer and progression. There is a particular need for guidance for learners to be introduced, or strengthened where it exists.

There is a call for an integrated promotion of the Framework between NQAI, HETAC and FETAC, and to build awareness and the perceived value of NFQ Awards both nationally and on an international stage.

The importance of having a Framework isn't sufficiently emphasised in plain terms eg. for employers, learners - the 'what does it mean for me?' factor. The language and concepts of the NFQ are complex; level indicators and award types are not easily understood, in contrast to the NFQ itself which is seen as simple in structure and readily identified through the 'fan diagram'. The Level Descriptors are confusing to some stakeholders, particularly at levels 6 and 7. Simplified statements of the levels could be related more closely to actual awards to show what the difference in levels and awards mean.

The Quality Assurance process brings with it a need for considerable resources and this should be addressed. The existence of two distinct Quality Assurance systems by HETAC and FETAC carries a further resource burden and different subsidiarity issues. A balance is required between centralised management (by funders, FETAC etc.) and programme provider ownership.

4. NFQ Influencing Factors

As detailed previously, the main achievements in terms of implementing the NFQ to date, include (i) Placement and Classification of Awards; (ii) Development of a Common Awards System; (iii) Development of Programme Provider Quality Assurance and (iv) Development of Access, Transfer and Progression opportunities. It follows, therefore, that any factors which have influenced and continue to influence the implementation of the Framework impact, in some way, on these areas.

The **NQAI vision and level indicators, and the communications tools** around the Framework, in particular the fan diagram, have been key enabling factors in implementing the NFQ. The logic and coherence which the Framework brings have positively influenced

the placement and classification of awards on the NFQ, which has had a positive knock on effect on providing learners with more opportunities for access, transfer and progression.

The **Partnership and Consultative Approach** is recognised as having a positive influence on implementing the NFQ, again with the **time and resources** required serving as a limiting factor. It was cited by stakeholders that the NFQ is co-ordinated by three organisations, and provision of programmes primarily funded by two Government Departments. **Relevant and appropriate co-ordination** across these stakeholders will continue to influence the implementation of the Framework.

Legislation, which has brought about a common understanding and language and which has set out the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders has also been a key influencing factor. Furthermore, funding for programmes has been connected with legislation, providing positive support in implementing the framework.

Conversely, the language and jargon associated with the Framework has proved a limiting factor and brings with it a need to ensure **information** reaches the various stakeholders in a clear and interpretable manner. The benefits of the NFQ need to be communicated fully to all stakeholders to ensure a well informed sector.

A critical influencing factor is the need for the **Common Awards System (CAS)**. The need for National Standards and availability of national awards appropriate to the National societal and market needs is key. The CAS is in place for some awards at levels 1 and 2, which is having a positive impact on the FET sector. The availability of a CAS across levels 1 to 6, and across all fields of learning, is required by the FET sector, and its absence continues to be a limiting factor in implementing the Framework.

The FETAC accreditation process is perceived by stakeholders as being comprehensive and elaborate with a heavy resources burden. There is recognition that the quality assurance is paramount to ensuring the credibility of awards in the sector, and that a culture of continuous improvement is bedding down in the FET sector. The **Quality Assurance Agreements** were cited as an important assisting factor, whilst the associated **time and resources** required to develop these agreements was cited as a constraint. One example given was that those programme providers offering relatively short programmes require disproportionate effort in terms of meeting their Quality Assurance and programme validation requirements.

There is a need to build capacity, with appropriate support, among programme providers across the sector. Desk and onsite monitoring will require significant resources for their effective implementation. There is a need for allocation of sufficient resources to all relevant parties for this purpose. There is a fear among some of the smaller providers about their capacity to comply with FETAC regulations.

Networks and Linkages are an important enabler for progression and are positively influencing implementation where they exist. More networks and linkages are required, particularly as a bridge between the Further Education and Training, and Higher Education Sectors. There is also a need for an appropriate credit system to enhance access, transfer and progression. Currently, the shorter programmes which lead to awards, and the assigning of credits to those awards to enable accumulation and access, transfer and progression is cited as an area which requires action. One approach for consideration could be that relevant on-the-job work-based learning would be combined with a short course and lead to an award of higher volume/more credit. The area of assessing and recognising work-based learning is an area which requires further consideration, and is adversely affecting access, transfer and progression. There is also a need for providing strong guidance to learners with regards to Access, Transfer and Progression.

5. Knowledge and understanding of Authority's policies on access, transfer and progression

Whilst there is a high level of awareness of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) within the sector (Refer to section 'Knowledge and Understanding of the Framework'), there is considerably less awareness around the policies on access, transfer and progression (ATP). The online survey results found that almost half of respondents are aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression. Just over one-third are 'vaguely aware' and 15% of respondents to the question are not aware of the policies on ATP.

When those surveyed were asked to rate their understanding of the Authority's (NQAI) policies on access, transfer and progression (ATP), one-third recorded a 'good' or 'very good' understanding. One-third of respondents rated their understanding of the ATP policies as 'okay' and the final one-third rated their understanding as 'poor' to 'no understanding'.

Generally, there is awareness and understanding of the policies on access, transfer and progression amongst the programme providers at a corporate level, and this filters through to the operational levels to varying degrees, albeit often on an ad-hoc basis. At an operational level, it is reported that knowledge varies according to the role of the person involved. Some, though a small minority, have extensive knowledge of the policies while others, possibly some front line teachers/instructors, generally have a lower level of awareness.

Evidence suggests that there is very limited knowledge in the industry sector, and amongst the general public. This is not surprising, given that the cohort of employers, the general public and to a lesser extent learners, was identified earlier (Refer to section 'Knowledge and Understanding of the Framework') as not having a high awareness, or understanding, of the Framework. The communication of these policies to all stakeholders is important.

The promotion of the policies on ATP was reported as varying hugely across the FET sector. This was reflected both in the responses to the survey and in the focus meetings. Where respondents believed that the level of promotion of ATP is poor, this was linked to insufficient resources, guidance and to competition between programme providers.

"There are insufficient resources being devoted to guidance in particular. Also, notwithstanding commitments in Quality Assurance documents, providers measure productivity in terms of inputs rather than outputs."

(ATP is) "Poorly promoted - I've been studying for 7 years as a mature student now, and no information relating to this was ever provided by the colleges I attended. It does not seem to be freely available."

"ATP is promoted well at policy and official level, less so at Programme provider level - this is understandable as it is a competitive environment."

Respondents, who believed that the level of promotion of ATP is adequate and improving, commented that there was good promotion by FETAC and the Further Education Support Service, but that a need exists for more information to filter down to enable appropriate promotion of ATP by programme providers. The area is viewed as a 'work in progress', and a particular need exists to systemise and improve Recognition of Prior Learning.

"Recognition of Prior Learning to date has not been widely included by Programme providers."

Respondents who believed that the level of promotion of ATP is good reflected:

“ATP is promoted by all agencies, due to the fact that these agencies must have all their Quality Assurance policies in order.”

Some programme providers referred to their efforts to promote ATP by offering information and guidance to their learners:

“We give our students seminars and information about it, and also give them time with career guidance counsellors to discuss their options.”;

Some respondents commented that whilst ATP within the FET sector is good, this is not the case in relation to progressing from FET to HE sector:

“The FET sector is generally very flexible -- few academic entry criteria, full-time and part time learning, strong targeting of at risk groups, and flexibility in teaching, learning and assessment approaches. The barriers relate to progression from FE to HET.”

Other respondents believe that ATP is well promoted at a local level but that progression to other programme providers is not promoted, perhaps in part due to competition, and limited guidance expertise:

“Very well promoted at the local level where programmes were being advertised - a lot of this was aimed at retaining learners within an organisation - mostly for the benefit of the learner, though sometimes it can be to ensure student number and revenue.”

It is clear from the survey findings, dealt with in this section and earlier sections, that there is a need for considerable action in order to ensure access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners, both in terms of the availability of opportunities, and the communication of these opportunities to learners. The policies are a feature of all programme providers QA agreements. Programme providers are hopeful that these policies, when fully implemented, will make a significant difference to their learners, whilst indicating that putting the theoretical into practice is not an easy task.

6. Implementation of NQAI’s policies on access, transfer and progression

37% of respondents to the online survey believed the access, transfer and progression (ATP) to be working ‘ok’. An equal number of respondents (16% in both cases) believed that ATP is working ‘poorly’ or conversely ‘well’. A significant number of respondents (over a quarter) recorded that they did not know how well the ATP policies are working.

One of the key areas of success in the FET sector, in relation to the implementation of the Framework, includes improvements in the provision of opportunities for access, transfer and progression (ATP). In fact, all other identified areas of success in implementing the Framework to date, positively influence the availability of ATP; (i) placement and classification of awards, through providing a clear and transparent reference point for those awards; (ii) the availability of a Common Awards System reinforces clarity and transparency, through providing a coherent and coordinated suite of awards; (iii) Quality Assurance agreements set out at a programme provider level the relevant policies and procedures for ATP.

The importance of ATP as a driver, in the context of realising the ambitious targets set within the National Skills Strategy, particularly for employees, cannot be overstated.

Further details around the implementation of ATP are provided in this section.

Placement and Classification of Awards

The NFQ, in conjunction with the placement and classification of awards has resulted in a coherent unified system for Further Education and Training.

Common Awards System

With the Common Awards System, awards will be developed as a suite of awards, with common elements as outlined in award specifications, across levels and access, transfer and progression features will be duly incorporated.

New Awards, have been introduced, as part of the Common Awards System, at Levels 1 and 2 of the Framework.

Programme Providers' Quality Assurance (QA) Systems

Programme providers have individual policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression in place, as part of their QA agreements with FETAC.

The NFQ has impacted on the holistic development of programmes, ensuring awards and programmes do not exist in isolation, but rather as a suite of programmes leading to awards. The ability to accumulate minor/special purpose awards towards a major award is a key requirement in developing national standards and awards.

Programme providers' Quality Assurance policies on ATP were recognised as a useful resource.

Progression Routes

There are many opportunities within the FET sector for access, transfer and progression. The FET sector is seen by stakeholders as generally being very flexible, with few academic entry criteria, offering full-time and part time learning, strong targeting of at risk groups, and flexibility in teaching, learning and assessment approaches.

The key areas requiring focus and development are where FET learners wish to engage in Higher education and also for access to employment. There are now more opportunities for progression to Higher Education, facilitated as a result of the NFQ. For example, an overall c. 10% of CAO offers are made to FETAC qualified applicants.

Teagasc have successfully established networks and linkages enabling progression routes to Higher Education for their learners.

The NFQ and the progression group established by the NQAI, has lead to strong progression options for Major Award holders in Crafts. Currently, there are 15 progression pathways elaborated by Institutes of Technologies for Major Award holders in Crafts.

Through the Institute of Technology sector, access, transfer and progression routes have been agreed for the Fáilte Ireland programmes.

Current Limitations

The current limitations, and hence the major priorities, in relation to access, transfer and progression (ATP) include the need to:

- Further develop a Common Awards System. There is a need to develop awards which are informed by, and which meet the needs of society and the economy.
- Develop a streamlined Credit System. There is a need for a clear, transparent and unified credit system to be implemented in order to capitalise on ATP.
- Improve the systems for Recognition of International Awards. A unified national approach for recognition is required, with particular priority to be given to UK awards.
- Improve the systems for Prior Learning.
- Put in place more networks and linkages between programme providers, particularly as a bridge from FET to Higher Education.
- Ensure appropriate guidance is available to learners.
- Ensure a well informed, adequately resourced FET sector.

Regarding access/progression to employment, there is a desire amongst stakeholders to see more employers accept equivalent awards other than the traditional requirement for Leaving Certificate awards. This could be progressed by targeting employers through awareness campaigns.

There was a call to further develop networks and linkages across the education and training sectors. Stakeholders asked that programme providers work on developing linkages and networks; that awarding bodies would work in concert to ensure progression options particularly at level 6; and for a fully integrated system between schools, colleges and universities in conjunction with, and working closely with employers. There needs to be a consistency in approach by different programme providers and greater coordination at local and national levels. Some stakeholders made the case for provision of national programmes, in addition to national awards, in some instances.

Alignment of the NFQ to other Frameworks, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will also aid ATP.

The Framework must function within a well-informed and adequately resourced FET sector.

The results from the online survey found that 25% of respondents believed that there is adequate information on access, transfer and progression (ATP) available to Programme Providers, just over 10% believed that there is adequate available to Learners, whilst only 5% agreed that there is adequate information for Employers. Approximately half of respondents believe that there is 'some' information available to Learners and to Employers, whereas 42% agree that some information is available for Programme Providers. Strikingly, 40% agreed that there is not enough information on access, transfer and progression (ATP) available to Employers; compared to 25% agreeing that there is insufficient information available to Learners, and 13% agreeing same for Programme Providers.

There is a clear need to target learners and employers who are not sufficiently aware of ATP opportunities.

Information provision to all stakeholders is a key enabler in implementing the NFQ. Efforts must persist for some time to come to ensure that the benefits surrounding access, transfer and progression are communicated to all. This study has identified a knowledge gap for employers, learners and the general public about the Framework and a general lack of understanding across the sector regarding access, transfer and progression.

There was consensus that ATP needs to be clear, transparent and easy to understand. Despite the availability of general information, there is also a need to disseminate this information to the relevant stakeholders.

Generally, there was recognition that there is a lot of general information available, through sources such as the FETAC directory and website, but more information on specific progression options from programmes should be made available to learners.

There is also a need to ensure the available information is easily understood and appropriately connected/streamlined i.e. available from levels 1 to 6 through to 10.

“Information is available if you go looking for it, but it is not easily accessed and when you do get it, very often it is written in a large difficult to interpret documents.”

Learners particularly need to understand how ATP applies to them, and how to go through the system, which must be learner friendly. It is critical that the implementation of ATP is not overly bureaucratic.”

“Learners must be made aware of programme specific ATP opportunities at local level by programme providers.”

There is a need for comprehensive and clear information, particularly in relation to progression routes. The information available for programmes should provide entry arrangements, and the transfer and progression arrangements from that course, so that learners can plan their learning on an informed basis. Some stakeholders cautioned that progression should be considered in its broadest context and not merely onwards and upwards. Comments were raised relating to taking the capacity of a learner to succeed into consideration. It is necessary to consider a learner’s ‘capacity to succeed’, in conjunction with any prior essential knowledge required for a particular programme:

“Achievement at one level in the Framework should demonstrate a learner’s general capacity to achieve at the next level. However, the other concern for Programme Providers is whether the learner has sufficient prior knowledge to be able to successfully follow the chosen discipline at the next level. There needs to be greater public clarity as to what this prior essential knowledge is.”

In terms of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) there is a need to develop and to ensure more comprehensive, and less confusing information, on the validity of prior learning. There is also a role within the work-place to provide RPL. Resources were specifically highlighted in relation to RPL and are seen as a limiting factor in terms of offering learners ATP.

“Everyone should have the opportunity to access, transfer and progress, however this may be difficult where Programme providers don’t have the resources to recognise prior non formal and formal learning.”

“Learners, especially within the work place, should be widely informed of opportunities for transfer and progression, with a large emphasis placed on Accreditation of Prior Learning.”

The Framework is only one tool or support to facilitate ATP. There is a general need for more guidance and career counselling in education and training, and increased accompanying resources. In terms of access, there is a need for increased participation and progression by disadvantaged / marginalised learners. It would be useful to conduct more research which identifies ‘barriers’ to access. The HEA have conducted relevant research in this regard. Additionally, there is a need for more people at work to have access to the Framework and access to learning. There is a general need to enable learners navigate the Framework within and across levels. There are calls from some stakeholders for employers to introduce more paid education leave.

7. Recognition of International Awards

Recognition of International Awards is viewed by stakeholders as an area, which has benefited from the National Framework of Qualifications, and requiring further development. Recognition of International Awards has been discussed in earlier sections, as it is an important component of access, transfer and progression.

The online survey results found that 5% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the recognition of International awards; over one-third of respondents believed it has 'improved' the recognition of International Awards. A further 22% believed that there has been 'no change' as a result of the NFQ and 2% believed it has actually 'dis-improved' the recognition of International awards. Significantly, over one-third of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response, suggesting the need for more information dissemination to stakeholders.

There was a clear indication that recognition of international awards has improved, but this is an area where further development is required. The NQAIs advisory service is resulting in improvements in the area, as are co-ordinated and consistent approaches by FE colleges.

The service needs to be better publicised and expanded. Given that few countries have national frameworks, the level of progress to date is considered reasonable by stakeholders.

(The NFQ) "Has lead to a greatly increased awareness of recognition opportunities for international certification, and facilitated Access, Transfer and Progression for those learners who hold those awards."

(There is) "Still a need for further work to ensure that employers are more aware. Also a need for co-operation and understanding at Department level in relevant jurisdictions."

Europass is also improving the recognition of international awards by communicating learners' qualifications in a way that is understandable to programme providers and employers.

There is a need for more systematic recognition of international awards in Ireland, particularly from the UK, and of Irish awards abroad. It is an area which will realise its true potential, as a result of emerging knowledge gained through award inclusion and alignment processes, the emerging European Qualifications Framework, Certificate and Diploma Supplements, VET National Reference Points and VET Quality Reference Points.

The pending future alignment of the NFQ to the EQF will further improve recognition of international awards and as a consequence mobility for learners and workers.

As with all components of access, transfer and progression, there is a need to publicise the area of recognition of international awards to learners, employers and all stakeholders.

8. Impact of the Framework and related policies on access, transfer and progression

Please refer to the earlier sections 'Impact of the Framework' and 'Implementation of the Framework', which relate to this section. The findings contained in these earlier sections are not repeated here, rather the broad summary findings from the online survey are detailed.

The online survey results found that 8% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the quality of programmes; a further 53% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the quality of programmes. Just over one fifth believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ, whereas 1% believed it has actually 'dis-improved' the quality of programmes. Almost one fifth of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

A similar pattern emerged in terms of 'quality of awards' and for 'learning outcomes and standards'. This means that stakeholders generally believed that quality of programmes, awards and standards have improved with the implementation of the NFQ.

Approximately half of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' (7%) or 'improved' (42%) assessment. Over a quarter believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 6% believed learning assessment has 'dis-improved'. 18% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

Almost half of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' (8%) or 'improved' (39%) the 'Learning Experience'. One third believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ, and 1% believed the 'Learning Experience' has 'dis-improved'. 19% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

Again, stakeholders generally believed that assessment and the learning experience have improved with the implementation of the NFQ, however stakeholders are less emphatic in this regard, compared to the improved quality of programmes awards and standards. Strikingly, a significant percentage of stakeholders believed that assessment has deteriorated with the implementation of the NFQ and this finding merits further inquiry.

15% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the International Standing of Ireland's FET'. A further 39% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the 'International Standing'. 18% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ. 28% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

The programme providers' Quality assurance (QA) agreements have raised the profile of QA across the whole sector. QA is now embedded and the emphasis is on continuous improvement. There is consensus that learners are now more involved, and that stakeholders are more engaged within a collaborative framework. It is early days to adjudicate the impact on the quality measures, as much will depend on the roll out of National Standards and the Common Awards System. This is reflected in the high proportion of survey respondents indicating 'don't know' in relation to the impact on quality. The initial impact is generally seen as positive, and Ireland's international profile for FET has certainly benefited. Our EU partners have watched the development and roll out of the Framework with great interest. Stakeholders recognised that FETAC/HETAC and the NQAI have also had a high level of involvement in EU developments in VET. Ireland and the NFQ have influenced at a European level.

"Ireland has been influential in informing and shaping developments at a European level, and has encouraged unified approaches to FET and HET."

The Framework has also been very beneficial in providing opportunities for the involvement of all stakeholders in policy development and in raising awareness. The online survey results found that almost two thirds of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications has had a 'very positive' (16%) or 'positive' (48%) impact on the partners in education and training, including employers, trade unions, community/voluntary, representative bodies and professional bodies.

Resources and funding has improved but also features as a concern in the context of new responsibilities for programme providers (QA agreements; assessment policies etc). Resources also presents as an issue in relation to building capacity of programme providers and in relation to implementing access, transfer and progression. 40% of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications has had a 'very positive' (9%) or 'positive' (31%) impact on resources and funding in the FET sector. 30% believed that there has been 'no impact' as a result of the NFQ and 7% believed the impact has been 'negative'. 22% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

The impact of the NFQ on staff has generally proved positive. From the online survey it is evident that almost one half of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'had a 'very positive' (6%) or 'positive' (43%) impact on staff. 25% believed that there has been 'no impact' as a result of the NFQ, and a significant 7% believed the impact on staff to be 'negative'. 20% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

9. Conclusion

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the policies on access, transfer and progression have been warmly welcomed and are seen as a hugely important and beneficial development in the FET sector.

The online survey results found over half of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications and the policies on access, transfer and progression are 'very important' to the FET sector with a further 38% citing it as 'important'. Less than 5% believed the Framework is 'not important' to the sector, a further 5% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response. Stakeholders attending focus group meetings believed the NFQ is very important to the FET sector.

In terms of technical findings, the four key achievements/areas of success include:

- **Placement and Classification of Existing Awards**
- **Introduction of a Common Awards System**
- **Improved Quality Assurance**
- **Improved Access, Transfer and Progression Opportunities**

Placement and Classification of Existing Awards

The Framework has enabled placement and classification and classification of awards, thus enabling for the first time a comprehensive comparison of awards. This has brought clarity and coherence to stakeholders in relation to awards within the FET sector. The Framework has also brought about a common language, emanating from the Act, and common definitions (for example learner, programmes, validation etc.).

The process of placement and classification of awards has improved access, transfer and progression for learners.

Introduction of a Common Awards System

The Common Awards System sets out the structure and features for all new awards. The Common Awards System is the single way of developing and describing FETAC awards. Over time this system will be implemented for all awards' development. The features, characteristics and standards for each of the awards are published in the form of an Awards Specification.

In 2006 FETAC launched the first new awards developed through the Common Awards System at levels 1 and 2. A key feature of each certificate is that it comprises a number of components (minor awards) which learners can achieve at their own pace and accumulate over time towards one of the named certificates (major awards). This provides significant access opportunities for learners to achieve a major award.

Improved Quality Assurance

The registration of programme providers with FETAC involves the programme provider setting out their intended policies and procedures, in their respective Quality Assurance (QA) Agreements with FETAC. FETAC agree a programme provider's procedures for quality assurance, where those procedures demonstrate the programme provider's commitment and capacity to maintain and improve the quality of its programmes and services. Evidence suggests that the QA process is cultivating a culture of continuous quality improvement within the sector.

Improved Access, Transfer and Progression Opportunities

The Framework has brought more focused attention on the concept of levels and progression, and offers opportunities for learners to gain nationally recognised awards to assist them in gaining employment or to pursue further education/training. The Framework has also assisted programme providers in developing the many links established by Further Education colleges with Universities such as DCU, DIT and Institutes of Technology etc. The Framework has also further enabled accumulation and has resulted in programme providers explicitly taking access, transfer and progression into account when designing programmes for validation.

Further development of these four key areas of success would realise full implementation of the Framework and the inherent benefits. The success of the Framework is dependent on, and must be supported by continued efforts, ensuring a well informed and appropriately resourced FET sector.

The knowledge and understanding of the NFQ varies considerably amongst stakeholders. There is a lack of depth of understanding in certain areas of the sector. Feedback indicates that the level and nature of language used in NQAI documentation is sometimes found to be overly complex by those who are not specialised in the area of formal qualifications.

There is a need for clear information on awards for learners, particularly the award type and level, and access, transfer and progression opportunities including employment opportunities.

There is a need for more information/marketing to ensure FETAC awards are recognised and appreciated in employers' environment and internationally. Industry awareness of awards and the Framework generally needs focus and is viewed as a current limitation.

The key priorities emerging from this study are to:

- Communicate the NFQ and its benefits to all stakeholders, particularly employers and learners. There is a call for an integrated promotion of the Framework between NQAI, HETAC and FETAC.
- Develop National Standards and the Common Award System, which is critically important to successfully implementing the NFQ, with an appropriate credit system, and to develop awards which are informed by and which meet the needs of society and the economy;
- Monitor and evaluate agreed quality assurance policies and procedures,
- Further develop access, transfer and progression opportunities, through establishing more networks and linkages between programme providers and through developing guidance available to learners across the FET sector,
- Improve Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of International Awards, and
- Reference the NFQ to European Frameworks.

The following Section (Section 5) considers the key priorities for implementing the Framework and sets out FETAC's future plans in this regard.

Section 5 Future Plans

Introduction

FETAC has developed their second Strategic Plan which outlines FETAC's mission, vision and goals and objectives for the period 2008-2010. It also provides a clear roadmap of how FETAC can achieve these objectives.

FETAC is building on the successful completion of the first Strategic Plan, to address the needs of the rapidly evolving further education and training sector in Ireland. In particular, FETAC is meeting the needs of the sector's increasing number of learners of all ages and stages, in partnership with the emerging local, regional and national networks of Programme providers.

The Strategic plan has also been shaped by the added insights gained from the first external quality review of FETAC, carried out in 2007 by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

As part of this Quality Review, five key issues were identified by FETAC in its Self-Evaluation Report 2007, and the external panel's draft report concurred with these. Each of these issues presents a particular challenge to FETAC which it endeavours to meet through the implementation of FETAC's second Strategic Plan.

- the need for a comprehensive suite of awards to meet the needs of the learner, providers and social and economic needs;
- FETAC's capacity to meet the demand for new awards;
- the recognition of FETAC awards as awards with status and value, in particular with employers, unions and industry groups;
- the full implementation of all FETAC functions and the challenge of achieving this through partnership with others;
- the need for a system of assessment and certification which supports diverse modes of learning.

It is noteworthy that of the five key issues, the first two pertain to developing a Common Awards System and National Standards, which were identified in this report as critical to have in place, in order to realise the full potential of the NFQ.

FETAC's Mission and Goals

The mission of FETAC remains unchanged, and is **to make quality assured awards** to learners which are relevant to individual, economic and social needs and that:

- are in accordance with national **standards** within the national framework of qualifications;
- create opportunities for learners in further education and training to have their achievements **recognised**;
- provide systematic **progression** pathways.

The goals are:

Goals

1. A comprehensive suite of awards will be in place
2. FETAC awards will be recognised nationally and internationally
3. Learners will be able to navigate the national framework of qualifications
4. All FETAC registered providers will be continually improving the quality of their programmes and services
5. Effective partnerships will underpin FETAC's relationships with all key stakeholders
6. FETAC will deliver a quality service
7. Learners' needs will be central to the work of FETAC.

FETAC's Strategic Objectives

FETAC's goals when delivered, will address the issues identified within this report. In response to the main issues raised from stakeholders responding to the online survey and in focus meetings on the 'Impact and implementation of the NFQ', some of the relevant strategic objectives from FETAC's Strategic Plan 2008-2010 are outlined, to indicate how these issues will be addressed by FETAC.

Issue Raised:

The Need for a Common Awards System/National Standards

FETAC are committed to developing National Standards and a Common Awards System. FETAC will:

- Further develop a comprehensive and relevant suite of FETAC awards which meet the needs of learners, the economy and society, awards using the Common Awards System (CAS):
 - Review all existing awards
 - Develop new awards through the establishment of standards development groups in a range of fields.
- Develop standards based on appropriate research and input from relevant statutory, professional and/or lead bodies, further and higher education providers and agencies, employers, unions and industry groups
- Use appropriate research to identify best practice in relation to standards development
- Involve HETAC and the Higher Education Institutions in standards development to ensure a coherent approach to development which avoids duplication and provides the basis for progression.
- Develop working relationships with a range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to ensure the status of FETAC awards.
- Establish an industry forum to ensure the currency of FETAC awards and increase recognition amongst the social partners. Through the forum FETAC will aim to increase industry involvement in the development of standards for awards and ensure awards are relevant to the workplace, increase awareness and recognition of awards, identify the needs of employers as providers of education and training and explore how closer relationships between providers and industry can be created and encouraged.

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To establish an appropriate range of quality assured awards at levels 1 to 6 of the national framework of qualifications' and 'To ensure that FETAC awards have status and currency)

**Issue Raised:
The Need for Information Provision**

FETAC will:

- Devise a communications strategy which builds on the established FETAC brand and engenders greater understanding and recognition of FETAC awards within the context of the National Framework of Qualifications
- Provide up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information that is easily understood and available in different languages
- Carry out a range of promotional activities designed to increase awareness and recognition of awards by employers, trade unions and industry groups
- Carry out joint promotional activity with other bodies including the NQAI and HETAC.
- Investigate and identify the needs of stakeholder through surveys, focus groups, website etc.
- Increase accessibility of information and services
- Implement an eServices strategy to provide self-service options for key stakeholders including providers and learners

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To promote wider recognition of FETAC awards by employers and the public and To offer a high quality customer service)

**Issue Raised:
The Need to Meet the Needs of Learners in terms of Access, Transfer and Progression**

FETAC will:

- Build and implement a system which increases access, transfer and progression within the FETAC suite of awards
 - Embed access, transfer and progression in the standards development, provider registration and programme validation processes
 - Develop a network of linked programmes which learners can use to transfer and progress
 - Certify informal learning (prior and work based)
 - Quality assure providers who wish to offer recognition of prior learning for awards
 - Enable learners to accumulate awards over time.
- Design awards that can be achieved in diverse education and training settings including the workplace.
- Implement the Authority's policies for the alignment and inclusion of awards from other bodies.
- Inform learners and other stakeholders of the access, transfer and progression opportunities relating to awards and programmes for levels 1 to 6 of the national framework of qualifications.
- Publish a comprehensive guide to FETAC awards (including access, transfer and progression information)
- Publish a register of validated programmes
- Publish the FETAC Learner Charter
- Publicise the recognition of other awards by FETAC, simplify the process and improve access and transfer opportunities for holders of such awards
- Publish a comprehensive directory of other awards recognised by FETAC.
- Provide learner specific information that is clear and unambiguous and available in a variety of modes and languages
- Publish a guide to progression opportunities for award holders

- Issue certificate supplements in different languages and promote their use to award holders and employers.
- Monitor providers approach to informing learners in relation to awards and programmes and involving learners in self evaluation activity.
- Continue to monitor the protection for learners enrolled with providers offering programmes on a commercial and profit making basis.
- Increase opportunities for progression for learners to higher education and training
 - Liaise with the NQAI and HETAC to clarify further the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
 - Remove barriers to progression for learners by influencing the higher education provider institutions and the Higher Education Authority (HEA).
- Promote the recognition of FETAC awards for access to employment and/or promotion within work
 - Establish an industry forum
 - Initiate and promote partnerships between industry, unions, employers and providers of further education and training.
- Track learner progress and publish statistics and reports.

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To create transparent and systematic pathways for learners through levels 1 to 6 of the national framework of qualifications; To foster a learner centred culture across all FETAC activities; and To consolidate and improve progression opportunities for award holders).

Issue Raised:

The Need for Improving Recognition of Prior Learning

FETAC will:

- Develop a comprehensive and relevant suite of awards that facilitates the recognition of learning and enables access, transfer and progression for levels 1 to 6 of the national framework of qualifications
- Develop and implement a planned and structured approach to the recognition of work place learning
- Design awards that can be achieved in diverse education and training settings
- Refine and improve mechanisms for assessment in the workplace
- Initiate and encourage partnerships between industry and providers of further education and training.
- Review FETAC processes and systems to facilitate flexible provision
- Enable learners to accumulate awards over time
- Include generic and transferable skills within awards
- Increase the opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and work place learning

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To contribute to the achievement of the national skills strategy, and To foster a learner centred culture across all FETAC activities)

Issues Raised:

The Need for Improving Recognition of International Awards and The Need for Aligning NFQ with European Qualifications Framework

FETAC will:

- Strengthen FETAC's international dimension

- Instigate strategic alliances with education and training organisations, government departments and awarding bodies from abroad to facilitate the recognition of awards internationally
- Improve and promote FETAC's process for the recognition of other awards
- Explore the possibility of assuring providers to offer FETAC awards abroad.
- Publish a range of materials and publications in different languages.
- Build on the agreed approach to international engagement with NQAI and HETAC with a focus on promoting frameworks in Europe and ensuring recognition of FETAC awards.
- Support the work of the Authority in aligning the Irish Framework with the European Qualifications Framework
- Implement the Authority's policies on alignment and inclusion of awards from other bodies
- Continue to assist the Authority in processing individual recognition applications
- Issue certificate supplements in different languages for all major awards and promote the use of certificate supplements to award holders and employers.
- Develop closer North-South linkages in Further Education and Training.
- Improve the accessibility of relevant services
- Publicise and simplify the process for the recognition of other awards

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To build recognition of FETAC awards Internationally, To offer a high quality customer service; and To contribute to the achievement of the national skills strategy.)

**Issue Raised:
The Need for Adequate Resources**

FETAC will:

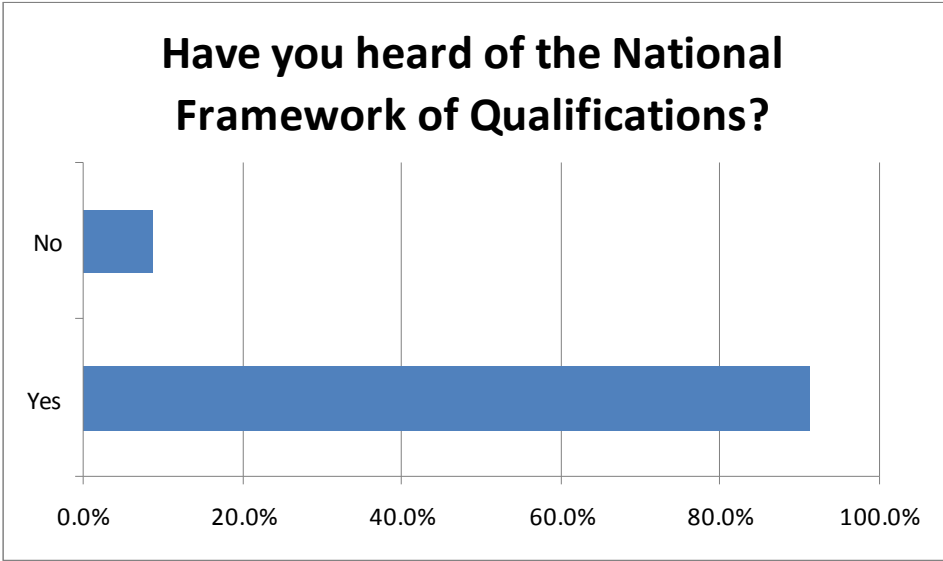
- Build stronger relationships with funding agencies to aid in planning effective and timely interventions for providers as they implement FETAC policies
- Engage in dialogue with funding agencies on the resource implications for providers relating to the implementation of policies and the various funding options available.

(Extracted from Strategic Objectives: To build on the partnerships which have been established with key stakeholders; and To continue influencing national, education and training, policy development and implementation).

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Knowledge and understanding of the Framework
- Appendix 2 Impact of the Framework
- Appendix 3 Implementation and operation of the Framework
- Appendix 4 Knowledge and understanding of the policies on access, transfer and progression
- Appendix 5 Implementation of the NQAI's policies on access, transfer and progression
- Appendix 6 Recognition of International Awards
- Appendix 7 Impact of the Framework and the policies on access, transfer and progression
- Appendix 8 Conclusions
- Appendix 9 Survey Instrument

Appendix 1 Knowledge and Understanding of NFQ



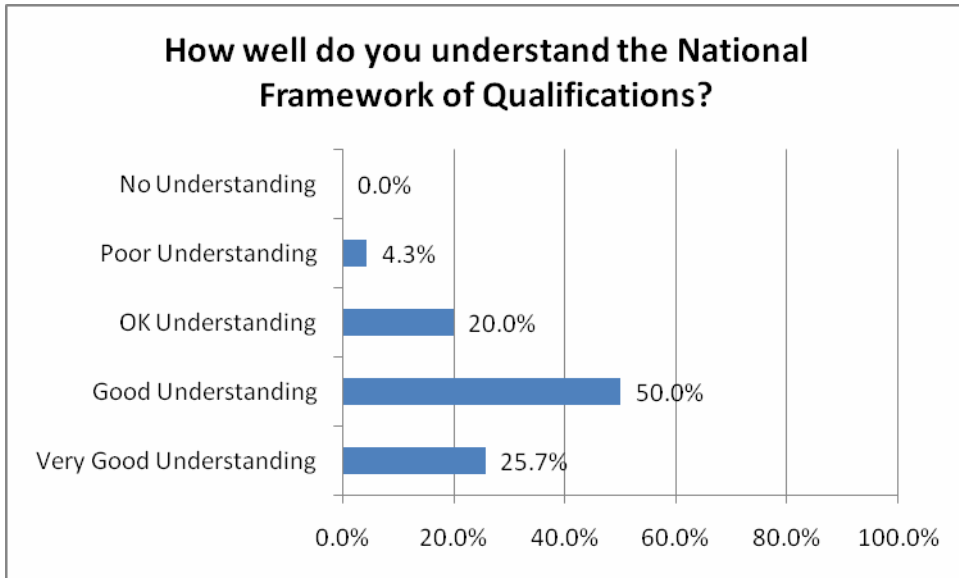
Graph 1 Online Survey Results – Have you heard of the National Framework of Qualifications?

As indicated in Graph 1, the online survey results found that 91% of respondents had heard of the National Framework of Qualifications, whilst 9% had not heard of the NFQ. Table 1 shows the numbers of respondents to the question.

Table 1 Online Survey Results – Have you heard of the National Framework of Qualifications?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	91.3%	146
No	8.8%	14
	<i>answered question</i>	160
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

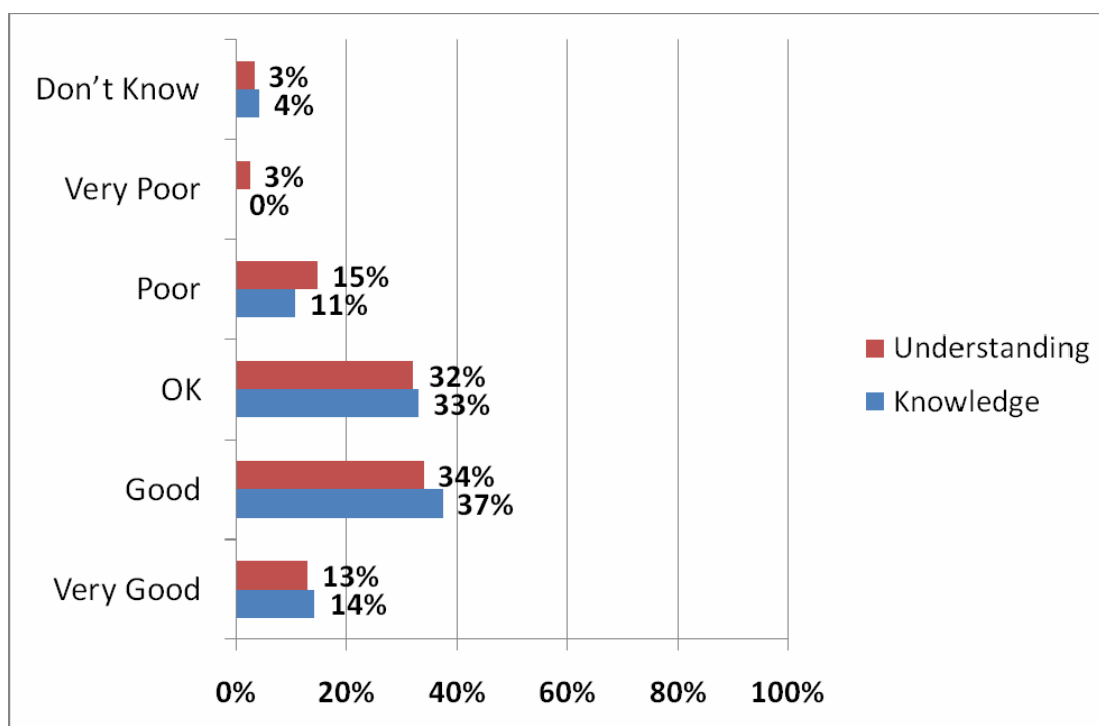
The online survey results found that the knowledge and understanding was recorded as 'good' or very good' by 75% of respondents to the question (140 respondents, Graph 2, and Table 2).



Graph 2 Online Survey Results – How well do you understand the National Framework of Qualifications?

Table 2 Online Survey Results – How well do you understand the National Framework of Qualifications?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Good Understanding	25.7%	36
Good Understanding	50.0%	70
OK Understanding	20.0%	28
Poor Understanding	4.3%	6
No Understanding	0.0%	0
	<i>answered question</i>	140
	<i>skipped question</i>	21



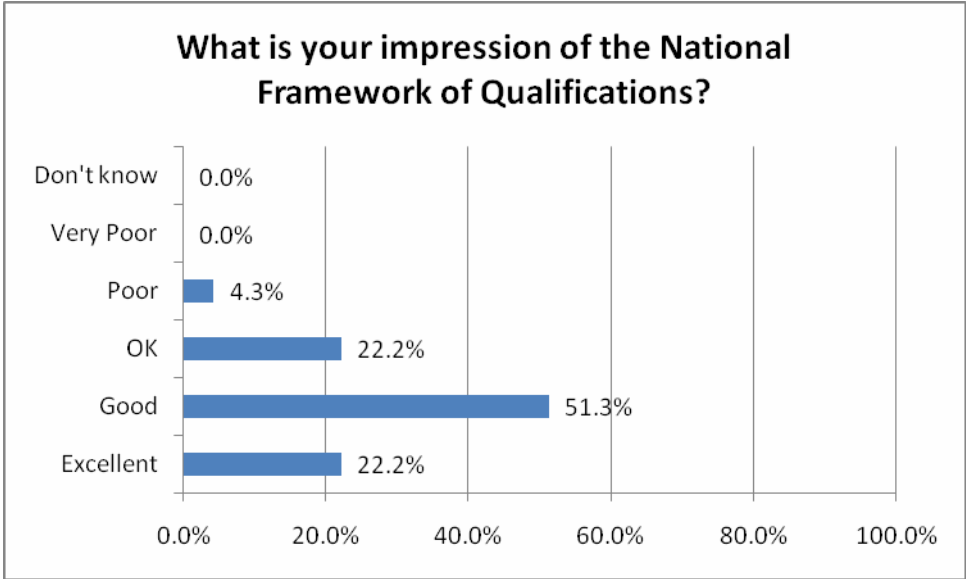
Graph 3 Online Survey Results – **In your view, what is the extent of knowledge and understanding of the National Framework of Qualifications in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector?**

When those surveyed were asked for their opinion on the level of knowledge and understanding of the National Framework of Qualifications within the FET sector as a whole, over two-thirds recorded an 'okay' to 'good' awareness of the NFQ within the FET sector. Two-thirds of respondents also rated the understanding of the NFQ within the FET sector as 'okay' to good', although almost a fifth of respondents rated the understanding as 'poor' to very poor'. 14% of respondents believed the level of knowledge to be 'very good' and a similar share believed the understanding to be 'very good' within the FET sector (Graph 3, Table 3).

Table 3 Online Survey Results – **In your view, what is the extent of knowledge and understanding of the National Framework of Qualifications in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector?**

Answer Options	Very Good	Good	OK	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	Response Count
Knowledge	20 (14%)	52 (37%)	46 (33%)	15 (11%)	0 (0%)	6 (4%)	139
Understanding	15 (13%)	39 (34%)	37 (32%)	17 (15%)	3 (3%)	4 (3%)	115
Comment							39
<i>answered question</i>							145
<i>skipped question</i>							16

Appendix 2: Impact of NFQ



Graph 4 Online Survey Results – What is your impression of the National Framework of Qualifications?

As indicated in Graph 4, the online survey results found that almost three-quarters of respondents had a ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ impression of the National Framework of Qualifications. Nearly, 5% of respondents selected ‘poor’. Table 4 shows the numbers of respondents to the question.

Table 4 Online Survey Results – What is your impression of the National Framework of Qualifications?

What is your impression of the National Framework of Qualifications?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	22.2%	26
Good	51.3%	60
OK	22.2%	26
Poor	4.3%	5
Very Poor	0.0%	0
Don't know	0.0%	0
	<i>answered question</i>	117
	<i>skipped question</i>	44

The following representative statements were given in the online survey in response to the Question: **What expectations do persons working in the sector have of the Framework?**

Selected Quotes:

(That the NFQ) *“Allows me to progress at a level I’m capable of.”*

“That it will offer learners multiple pathways to have their skills, knowledge, understanding and achievements recognised in a way that all parts of the system can recognise, and that will therefore support learners in broadening and/or raising skills etc as well as qualifications levels. It may also help to raise expectations and ambitions amongst learners and providers. By doing these various things it will increase the knowledge base of the economy and Irish society.”

(The NFQ will provide) *“Streamlined progression pathways to further and higher learning; accumulation of credits towards awards; mechanisms for accreditation of prior and work based learning systemised”*

“That there is less reliance on Leaving Certificate as sole gateway to progression”

(That the NFQ provides) *“Increased access, transfer and progression options and allows for meaningful accumulation of smaller pieces of learning throughout a learners' lifetime.”*

“That a fair and equal system for accreditation of all learning is established, regardless of level. That the establishment of the NFQ will contribute to a culture of lifelong learning. That national qualifications are increasingly valued in Irish society by learners, employers, providers and other stakeholders”

(That the NFQ provides:)

“A transparency in relation to qualifications and a greater common standard.”; “consistency and quality control” and ensures “That there is a high standard of assessment right across the various centres.”

“That the significance of NFQ is promoted in the FET sector, the FET route to HE is simplified, and publicised and that an individual's NFQ 'standing' is made available to them.”

(That the NFQ will) *“Fully communicate goals, make clear the structures, and make relevant to individuals and enterprise.”*

“That the Framework will provide a qualifications ladder - once the awards are all migrated and the gaps in the award schedule have been filled. Once this is done all providers will have access to all awards - subject to quality assurance and programme validation.”

“I would hope that FETAC qualifications would be accepted instead of junior/leaving cert for some posts”

“For other countries to be able to clearly see what level an award is at, and also for employers in Ireland to be able to see your achievements based on other achievements that they would be more familiar with.”

(The NFQ should) *“Value all learning, full time or part time, irrespective of learning site, from basic literacy to post doctoral level.”*

Current Delivery of Expectations

As indicated in Table 5, the online survey results found that over three-quarters of respondents believed that their expectations of the National Framework of Qualifications were being delivered to some extent. 17% of respondents believe that their expectations of the Framework are not being delivered.

Table 5 Online Survey Results – **Based on your response to Question (What expectations do you have of the National Framework of Qualifications?): Are these expectations being delivered?**

Based on your response to Q4 (What expectations do you have of the National Framework of Qualifications?):		
Are these expectations being delivered?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	18.9%	20
Some	64.2%	68
No	17.0%	18
<i>answered question</i>		106
<i>skipped question</i>		55

The following representative statements were given in the online survey in response to the Question: **Based on your response to Question ‘Are these expectations being delivered?’ What is influencing the delivery/non-delivery of your expectations?.** Selected Quotes:

“The level of information available on the FETAC website, and the number of briefing sessions provided to all stakeholders.” has aided the delivery of expectations.

(The networking provided by Skillnets was cited as a positive factor): *“Through Skillnets we have learned how to identify which employees are at what level, we can then evaluate if they can move to a higher level. “*

“Skillnets networks - industry and enterprise are driving changes and needs in education and learning.”

“The availability of new awards at Levels 1 and 2.” has positively impacted on meeting stakeholder’s needs

“The basic policies and system architecture under the framework are in place, and FETAC, HETAC and NQAI have been innovative in promoting flexibility and change.”

“Learners have the ability to accumulate small pieces of learning at a time, pace and place that suits them. Providers can offer modular programmes learning to national awards - this can suit both learners and employers.”

“Expectations are being realised slowly. The 'Framework' is a new concept to Irish education. It takes time for all aims to be delivered & understood by the potential learner base.”

“A comprehensive media campaign has been lacking. Also collaboration within and outside the EU has been of poor quality.”

“Lack of Marketing to employers, who don't understand the NFQ. There is no link up with HETAC's marketing.”

(There is a) “Decided lack of marketing to private employers: most of the workforce is employed in SMEs and I don't see any evidence that those employers are supported in understanding the NFQ.”

(Actions are required to remove) “Existing difficulties in transfer and progression into higher education.” and to address “Intransigence in University sector.”

(There is a need to facilitate:) “More part time learning, accumulation of credits, and more widespread use of Accreditation of Prior Learning, which needs to be promoted and supported.”

“Resources within the FET sector are inadequate.”

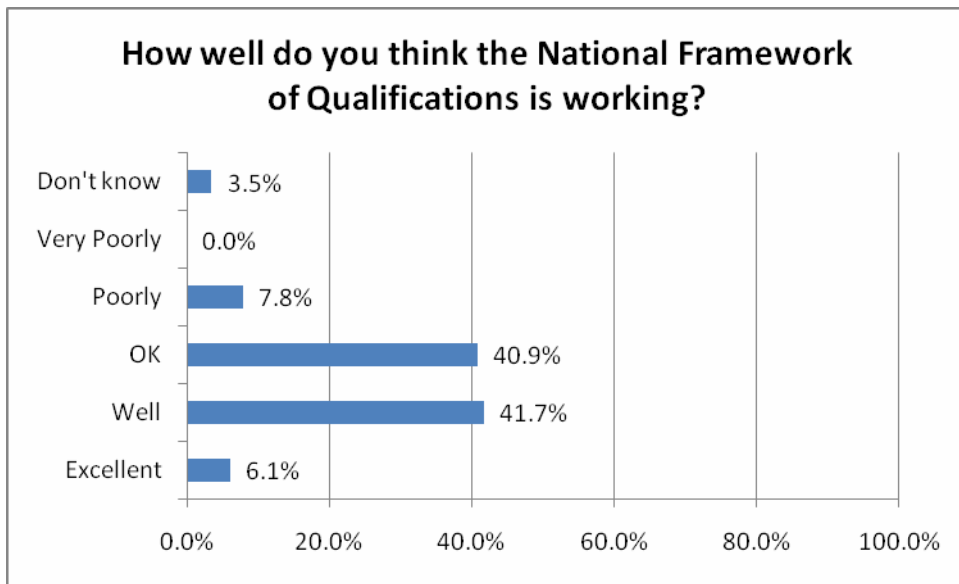
“The migration, review and development of new awards is a huge task that must be appropriately resourced. The whole issue of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) also needs resourcing. If a coherent system for RPL of learners were established, it would greatly increase the numbers attracted to return to education and training. RPL has the potential to change the face of further education very much for the better but only if a system is put in place to facilitate it for all.”

“Providers have to change to take this opportunity on board, and access and funding mechanisms which deter flexibility have to change as well.”

(It is) “Time consuming and resource intensive to get new awards approved. “ and to agree “Quality Assurance” with FETAC.

“Time and willingness of industry to invest in training.” (can deter implementation of the NFQ.)

Appendix 3: Implementation and operation of the Framework



Graph 5 Online Survey Results – **How well do you think the National Framework of Qualifications is working?**

As indicated in Graph 5, the online survey results found that almost half of respondents believed that the National Framework of Qualifications is working ‘well’ or ‘excellently’. Just over 40% believed the National Framework of Qualifications is working ‘ok’ and circa 8% believe it to be working ‘poorly’. Table 6 provides further details on the numbers of respondents to this question.

Table 6 Online Survey Results – **How well do you think the National Framework of Qualifications is working?**

How well do you think the National Framework of Qualifications is working?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	6.1%	7
Well	41.7%	48
OK	40.9%	47
Poorly	7.8%	9
Very Poorly	0.0%	0
Don't know	3.5%	4
<i>answered question</i>		115
<i>skipped question</i>		46

The following representative statements were given in the online survey in response to the Question: **What, in your opinion, are the benefits of the National Framework of Qualifications?**

Selected Quotes:

Provides a Common Awards System

(It is a) *“Simple, clear framework. A person can identify where they are, employers can easily identify level of attainment.”*

(It is fact-based:) *“Provides fact rather than opinion about the hierarchy of qualifications.”; and clear “It gives a clear indication as to what level of knowledge a graduate has.”*
The NFQ “Provides conceptual elegance, clarity, consistency, simplicity, transferability of qualifications.”; (And offers a) “Standardised, transparent, harmonised system of awards.”

(The NFQ) *“Provides an opportunity for learners to have their achievements mapped against a recognised level or standard.”*

“Learners can dip in and out of the qualifications framework and now courses can be equated with others on the framework.”

(The Framework) *“Has enabled the introduction of the recognition of learning achievements at Level 1 and Level 2.”* (And is all-inclusive ensuring) *“All learners, regardless of ability, now have the opportunity to receive certification and credit for their learning.”*

(The NFQ) *“Allows for recognition of qualifications, both at home and abroad.”*, (and allows for) *“Ease of comparison within other EU member states regarding the validity of your qualification abroad.”*

(The Framework) *“Provides a career pathway”*; (and) *“Provides a clear path up the educational ladder.”*; (whilst also) *“Promoting life long learning.”*

(The NFQ) *“Enables greater transparency and flexibility for learners and for employers in regard to learning outcomes and skills levels. Includes non-academic soft skills in assessing learning outcomes; important within 21st century workplace.”*

Improves Quality Assurance

(Quality is a key feature and the NFQ provides a basis for) *“ensuring 'quality' assured awards from Quality assured Programme Providers.”*

(It has introduced common levels and standards and) *“Provides an opportunity for learners to have their achievements mapped against a recognised level or standard.”*

Promotes Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP)

(The NFQ) *“Is designed to promote quality, mobility, progression and flexibility, and Ireland is well placed for inclusion in the European Qualifications Framework. The Framework provides certification opportunities for public, private, workplace, community and independent learners, and for full time and part time programmes. It has been successful in seeking to unify and make coherent a diverse system.”*

(It supports) *“The availability of recognition for international certification”*; (and) *“Has increased the credibility of FET certification by learners, education practitioners and employers.”*

(It offers a) *“Standardisation, common language/currency which can be used by all”*; (and is) *“Clear and measurable against all qualifications and international systems.”*

The following representative statements were given in the online survey in response to the Question: **What, in your opinion, are the drawbacks of the National Framework of Qualifications?**

Selected Quotes:

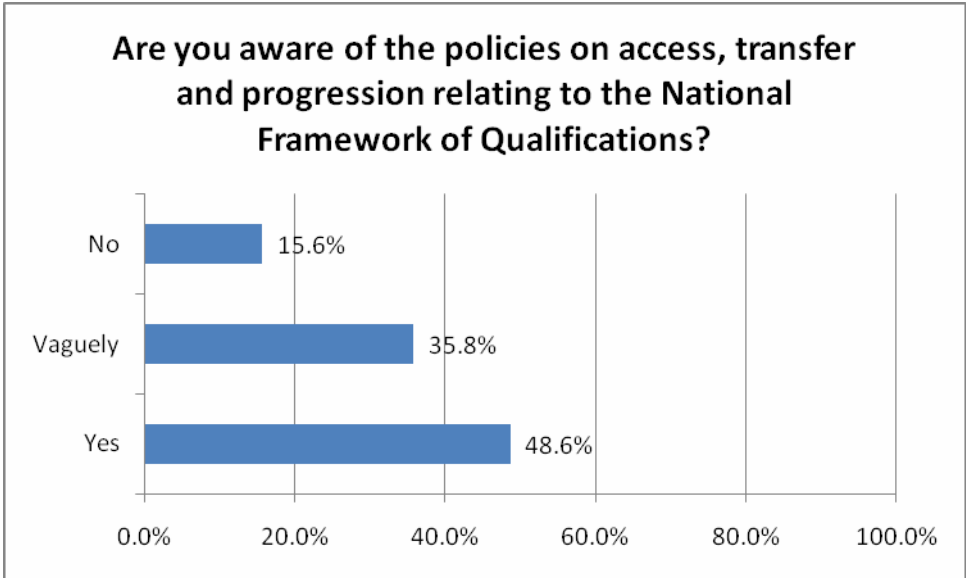
(There is a) *“Lack of awareness and understanding amongst learners and employers.”*. (The NFQ remains) *“largely a tool that is 'understood' and used by providers and advisors.”*

“At FETAC level, the documentation requirements are daunting for a small provider, although they are in keeping with the processes and principles now emerging at European level. The concepts and language of the framework are difficult to understand.”

(The NFQ can appear complicated) *“It appears complicated - tends to put trainers and training organisations "off" getting involved.”*; (and the) *“Competence strands cause problems in interpreting.”*. (It was also remarked that) *“Some sub-strands are superfluous.”*

(There is a need to align the NFQ with the European Framework): *“In the European / International context a uniformity in the number of levels in each qualifications framework would facilitate comparison, transparency and transferability more readily. The eight level structure of the EQF may lead to some confusion for those used to the ten level structure.”*

Appendix 4: Knowledge and understanding of Authority’s policies on access, transfer and progression

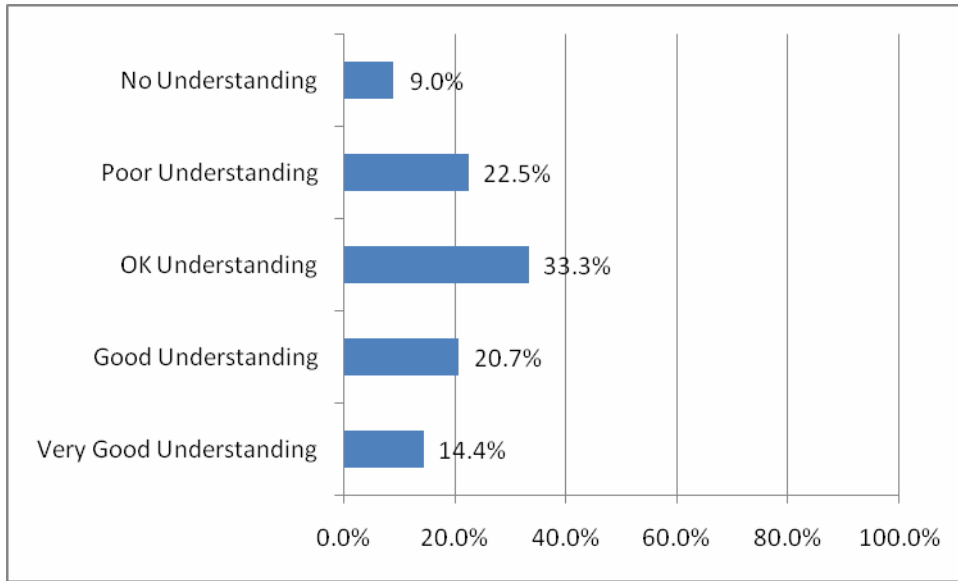


Graph 6 Online Survey Results – Are you aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression relating to the National Framework of Qualifications?

As indicated in Graph 6, the online survey results found that almost half of respondents are aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression. Just over one-third are ‘vaguely aware’ and 15% of respondents to the question are not aware of the policies. Table 7 provides further details on the numbers of respondents to this question.

Table 7 Online Survey Results – Are you aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression relating to the National Framework of Qualifications?

Are you aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression relating to the National Framework of Qualifications?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	48.6%	53
Vaguely	35.8%	39
No	15.6%	17
	<i>answered question</i>	109
	<i>skipped question</i>	52



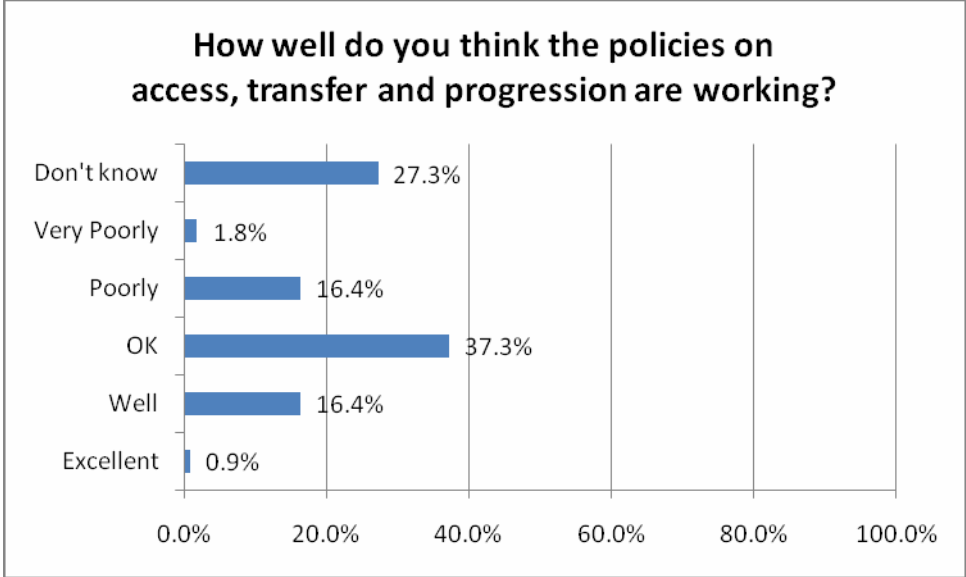
Graph 7 Online Survey Results – How well do you understand the policies on access, transfer and progression concerning the National Framework of Qualifications?

When those surveyed were asked to rate their understanding of the Authority’s (NQAI) policies on access, transfer and progression (ATP), one-third recorded a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ understanding. One-third of respondents rated their understanding of the ATP policies as ‘okay’ and the final one-third rated their understanding as ‘poor’ to ‘no understanding’ (Graph 7). Table 8 provides further details on the numbers of respondents to this question.

Table 8 Online Survey Results - How well do you understand the policies on access, transfer and progression concerning the National Framework of Qualifications?

How well do you understand the policies on access, transfer and progression concerning the National Framework of Qualifications?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Good Understanding	14.4%	16
Good Understanding	20.7%	23
OK Understanding	33.3%	37
Poor Understanding	22.5%	25
No Understanding	9.0%	10
	<i>answered question</i>	111
	<i>skipped question</i>	50

Appendix 5: Implementation of NQAI’s policies on access, transfer and progression

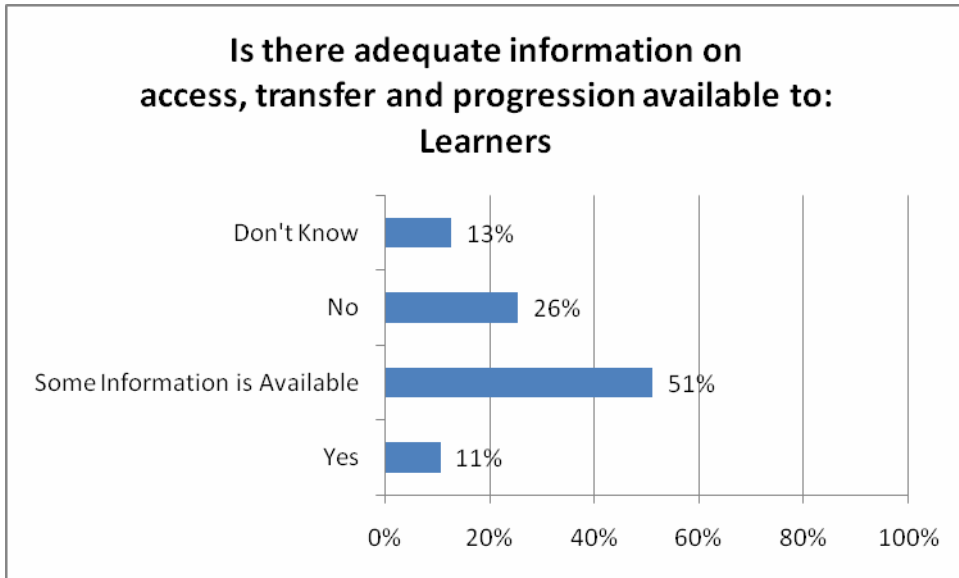


Graph 8 Online Survey Results - How well do you think the policies on access, transfer and progression are working?

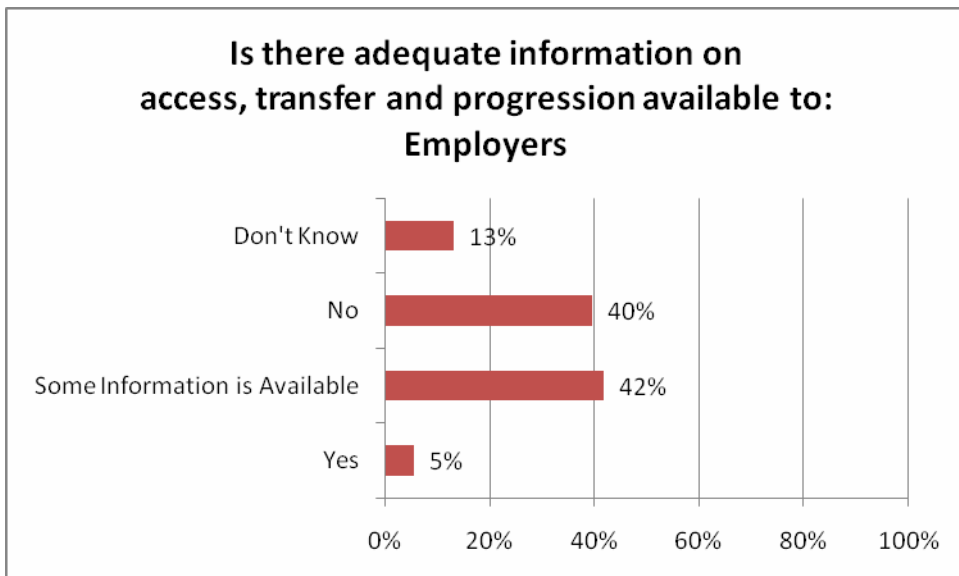
As indicated in Graph 8, the online survey results found that 37% of respondents believed the access, transfer and progression (ATP) to be working ‘ok’. An equal number of respondents (16% in both cases) believed that ATP is working ‘poorly’ or conversely ‘well’. Almost 2% of respondents believe that the ATP policies are working ‘very poorly’ and just under 1% recorded that the ATP policies are working to an ‘excellent’ standard. A significant number of respondents (over a quarter) recorded that they did not know how well the ATP policies are working. Table 9 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 9 Online Survey Results - How well do you think the policies on access, transfer and progression are working?

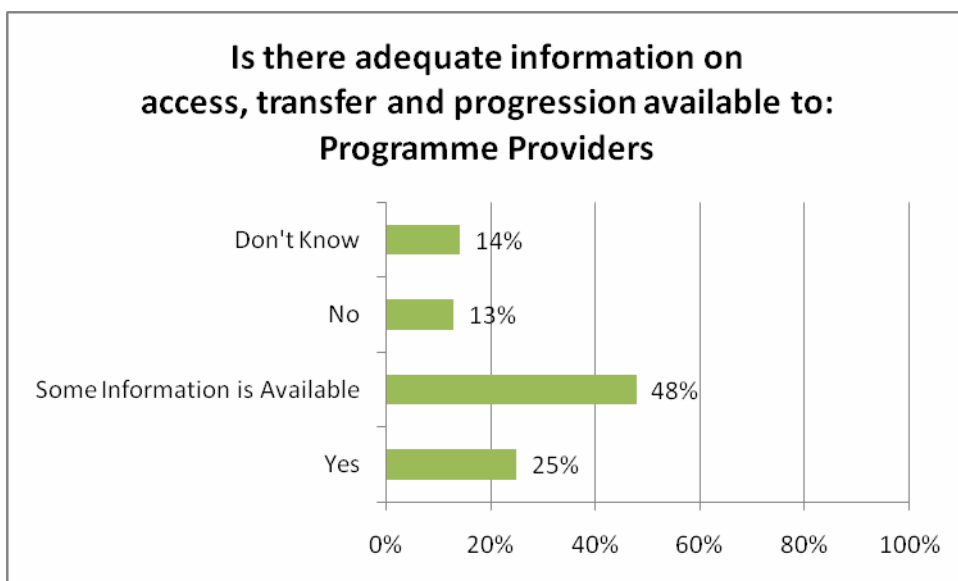
How well do you think the policies on access, transfer and progression are working?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	0.9%	1
Well	16.4%	18
OK	37.3%	41
Poorly	16.4%	18
Very Poorly	1.8%	2
Don't know	27.3%	30
	<i>answered question</i>	110
	<i>skipped question</i>	51



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

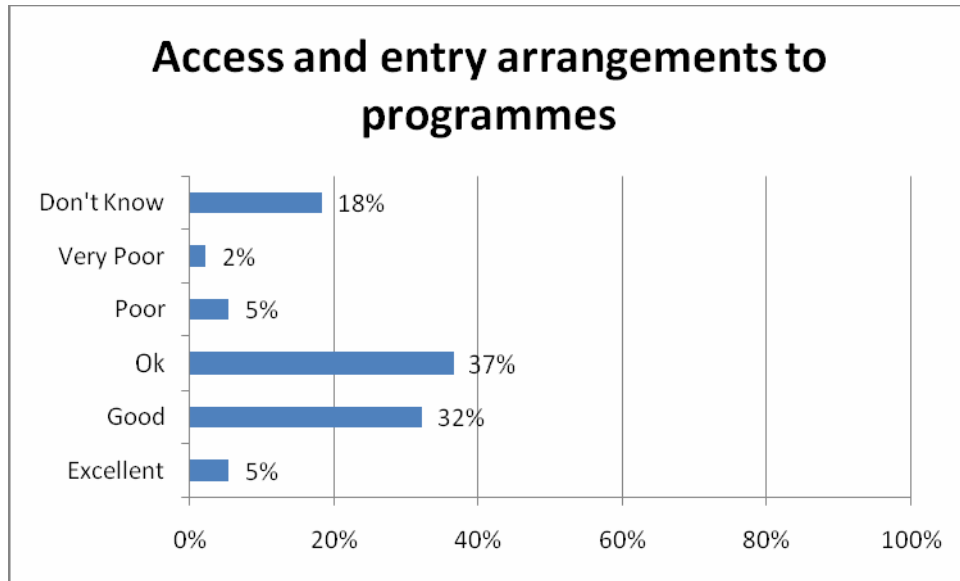
Graph 9 (i), (ii), (iii) Online Survey Results - **Is there adequate information on access, transfer and progression available to: Learners (i); Employers (ii), Programme Providers (iii)**

As indicated in Graph 9, the online survey results found that just over 10% believed that there is adequate information on access, transfer and progression (ATP) available to Learners, 5% agreed that there is adequate information for Employers and 25% believed that there is adequate information available to Programme Providers. Approximately half of respondents believe that there is some information available to Learners and to Employers, whereas 42% agree that some information is available for Programme Providers. Strikingly, 40% agree that there is not enough information on access, transfer and progression (ATP) available to Employers; compared to 25% agreeing that there is insufficient information available to Learners, and 13% agreeing same for Programme Providers. Table 10 provides further details on the number of respondents.

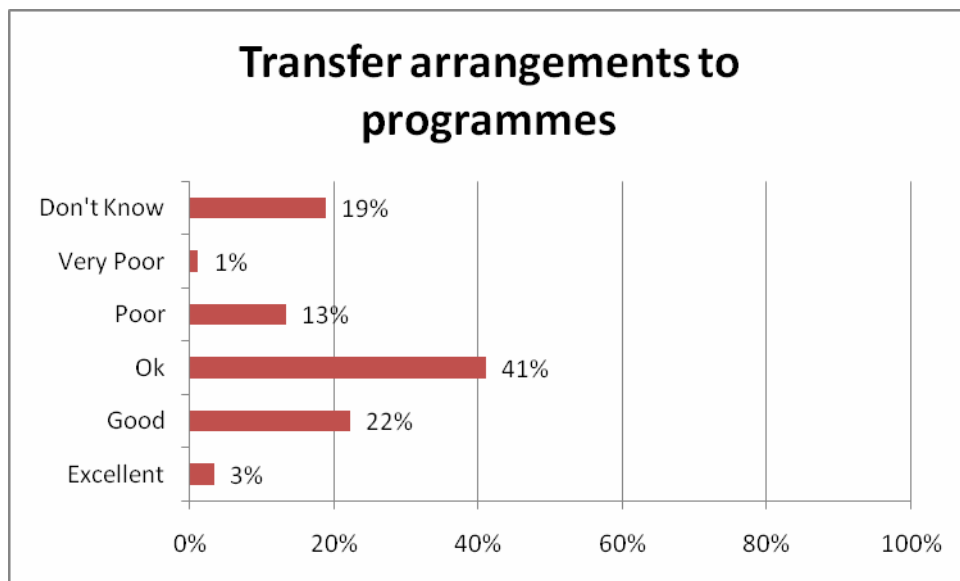
Table 10 Online Survey Results - **Is there adequate information on access, transfer and progression available to: Learners ; Employers , Programme Providers?**

Is there adequate information on access, transfer and progression available to:					
Answer Options	Yes	Some Information is Available	No	Don't Know	Response Count
Learners	10 (11%)	48 (51%)	24 (26%)	12 (13%)	94
Employers	5 (5%)	38 (42%)	36 (40%)	12 (13%)	91
Programme Providers	23 (25%)	44 (48%)	12 (13%)	13 (14%)	92
Comments					19
<i>answered question</i>					95
<i>skipped question</i>					66

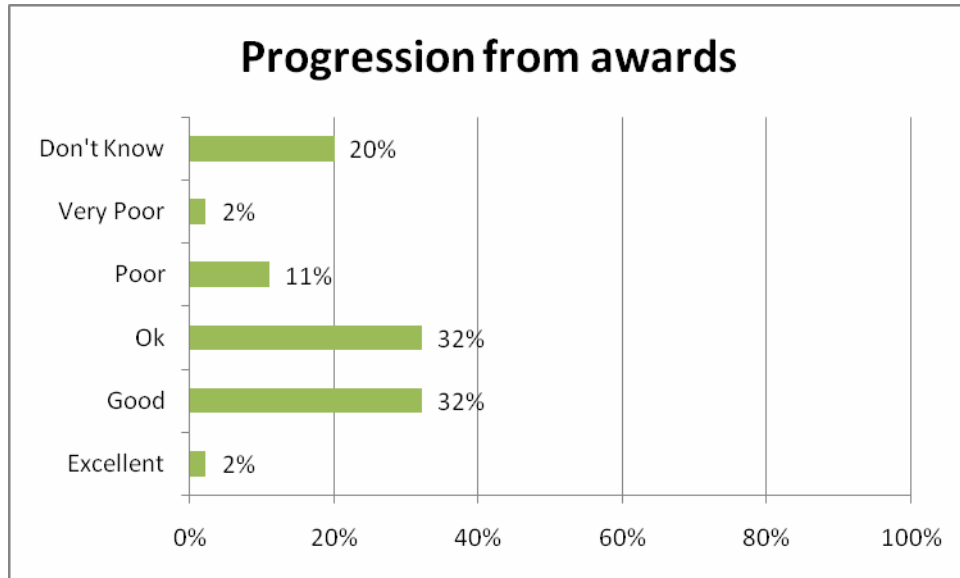
Extent of implementation



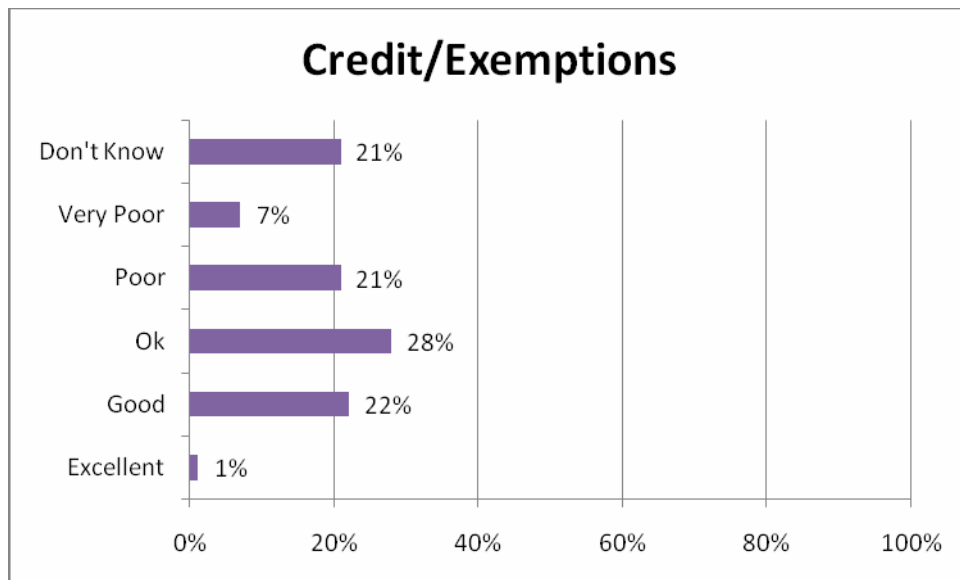
(i)



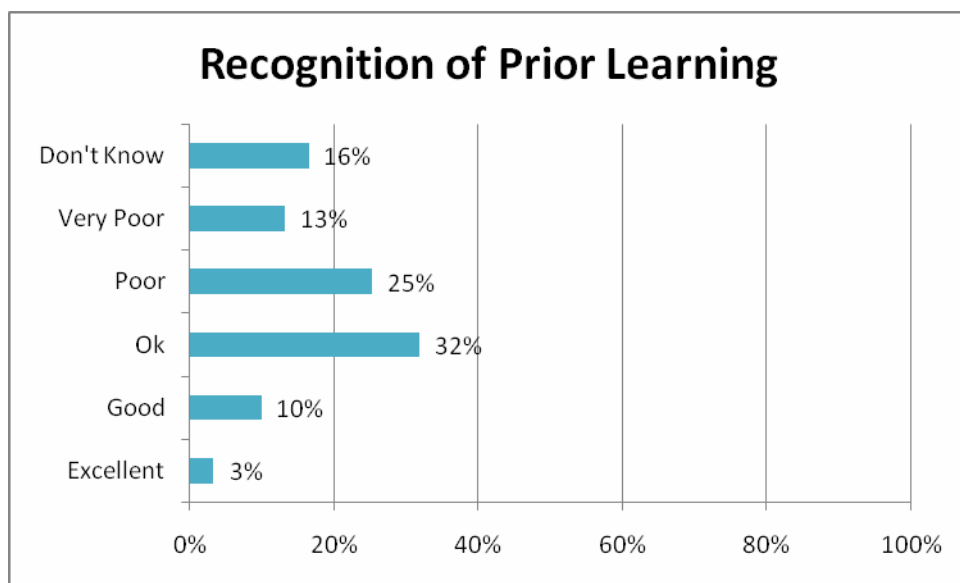
(ii)



(iii)



(iv)



(v)

Graph 10 (i), to (v) **Online Survey Results - What is the extent of implementation of ATP in the FET sector in respect of: Access and entry arrangements to programmes (i); Transfer arrangements to programmes (ii), Progression from awards (iii), Credit/Exemptions (iv), Recognition of Prior Learning (v).**

As indicated in Graph 10, the online survey results found that almost 40% of respondents believed that access and entry arrangements to programmes are 'good' to 'excellent'; almost 40% believe the arrangements to be 'ok' and 7% believe them to be 'poor' or 'very poor'. Just under 20% of respondents recorded 'Don't know' (Graph 10 (i)).

In terms of transfer arrangements from programmes 25% of respondents believed transfer arrangements to programmes to be 'good' to 'excellent'; just over 40% believe the arrangements to be 'ok' and 14% believe them to be 'poor' or 'very poor'. Just under 20% of respondents recorded 'Don't know' Graph 10 (ii).

In terms of progression from awards one-third of respondents believed progression opportunities to be 'good' to 'excellent'; almost a third of respondents believe progression to be 'ok' and 13% believe them to be 'poor' or 'very poor'. 20% of respondents recorded 'Don't know'. (Graph 10 (iii)).

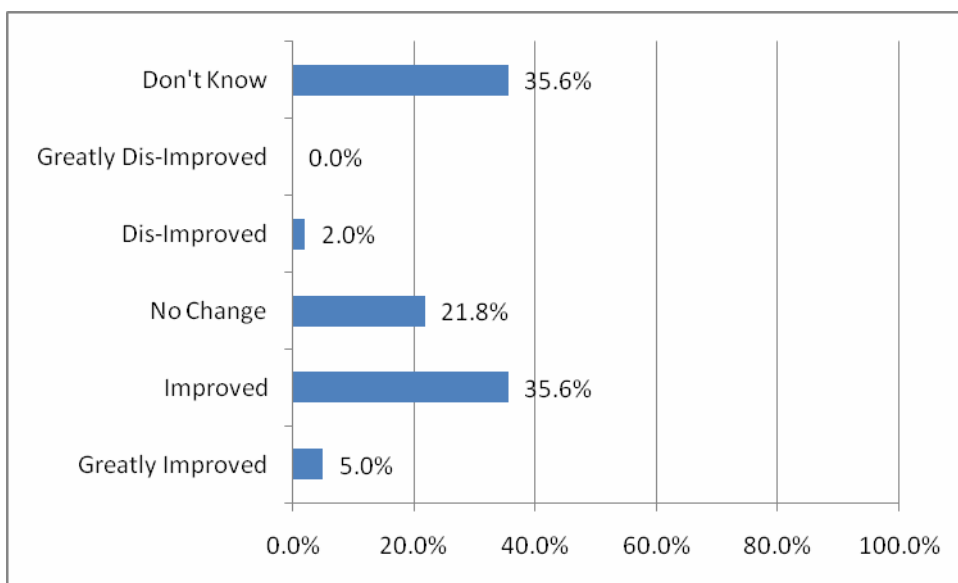
The online survey results indicate that almost approximately one quarter of respondents believed that credit and exemptions are operating at a 'good' to 'excellent' level; over one quarter believe the credit/exemptions arrangements in place to be 'ok' and almost 30% believe them to be 'poor' or 'very poor'. Just over 20% of respondents recorded 'Don't know' (Graph 10 (v)).

Table 11 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 11 Online Survey Results - **What is the extent of implementation of ATP in the FET sector in respect of:: Access and entry arrangements to programmes (i); Transfer arrangements to programmes (ii), Progression from awards (iii), Credit/Exemptions (iv), Recognition of Prior Learning (v).**

What is the extent of implementation of ATP in the FET sector in respect of:							
Answer Options	Excellent	Good	Ok	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know	Response Count
Access and entry arrangements to programmes	5 (5%)	30 (32%)	34 (37%)	5 (5%)	2 (2%)	17 (18%)	93
Transfer arrangements to programmes	3 (3%)	20 (22%)	37 (41%)	12 (13%)	1 (1%)	17 (19%)	90
Progression from awards	2 (2%)	29 (32%)	29 (32%)	10 (11%)	2 (2%)	18 (20%)	90
Credit/Exemptions	1 (1%)	19 (22%)	24 (28%)	18 (21%)	6 (7%)	18 (21%)	86
Recognition of Prior Learning	3 (3%)	9 (10%)	29 (32%)	23 (25%)	12 (13%)	15 (16%)	91
						<i>answered question</i>	93
						<i>skipped question</i>	68

Appendix 6: Recognition of International Awards



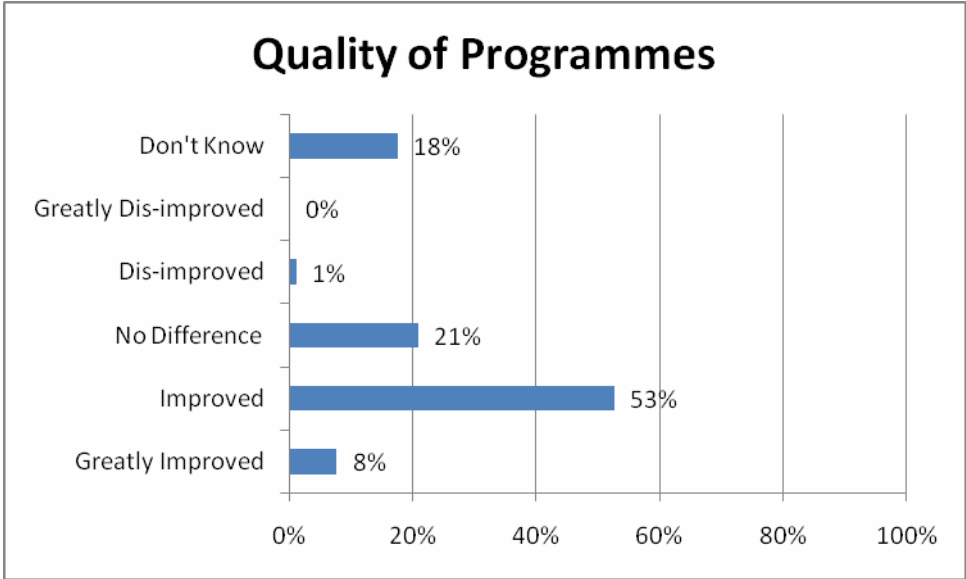
Graph 11 Online Survey Results - **Has the recognition of international awards for the purpose of entry to programmes, or for exemptions from parts of programmes, been improved by the Framework?**

As indicated in Graph 11, the online survey results found that 5% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the recognition of International awards; over one-third of respondents believed it has 'improved' the recognition of International Awards. A further 22% believed that there has been 'no change' as a result of the NFAQ and 2% believed it has actually 'dis-improved' the recognition of International awards. Significantly, over one-third of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response. Table 12 provides further details on the number of respondents.

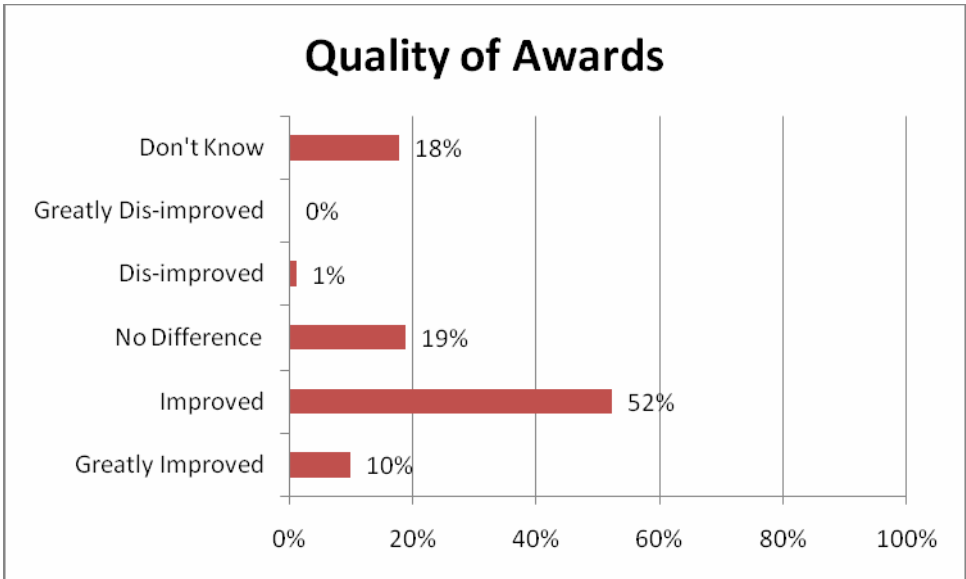
Table 12 Online Survey Results - **Has the recognition of international awards for the purpose of entry to programmes, or for exemptions from parts of programmes, been improved by the Framework?**

Has the recognition of international awards for the purpose of entry to programmes, or for exemptions from parts of programmes, been improved by the Framework?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Greatly Improved	5.0%	5
Improved	35.6%	36
No Change	21.8%	22
Dis-Improved	2.0%	2
Greatly Dis-Improved	0.0%	0
Don't Know	35.6%	36
Comments:		17
<i>answered question</i>		101
<i>skipped question</i>		60

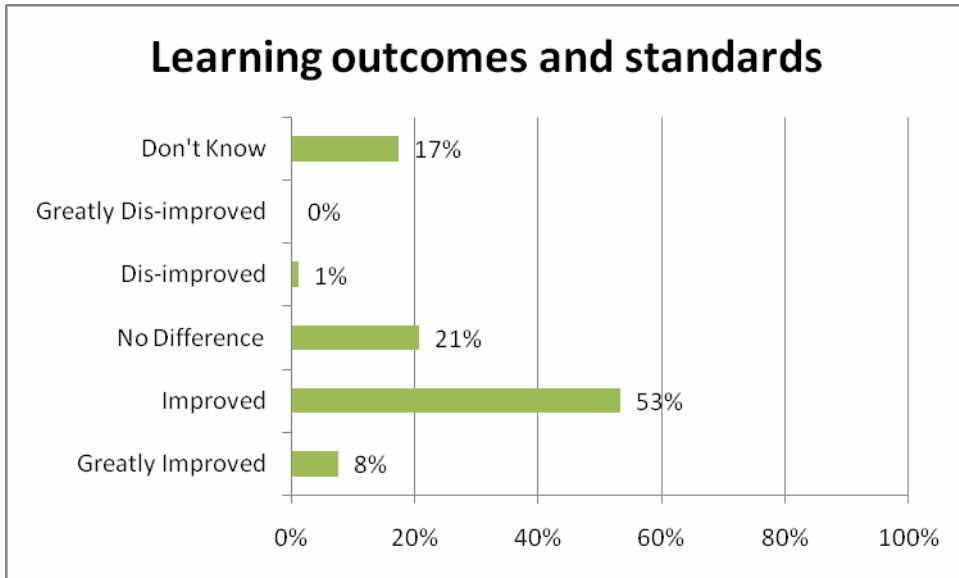
Appendix 7: Impact of the Framework and related policies on access, transfer and progression



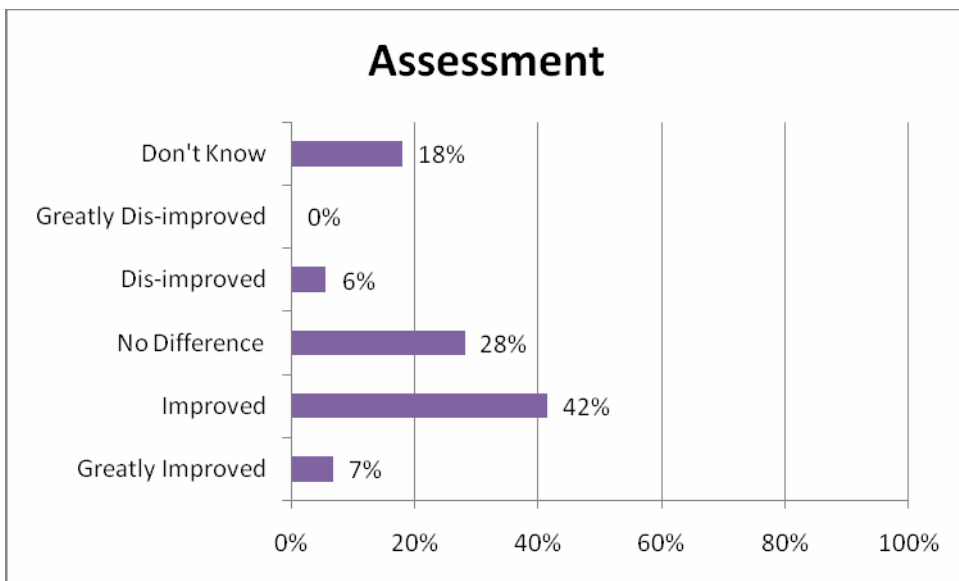
(i)



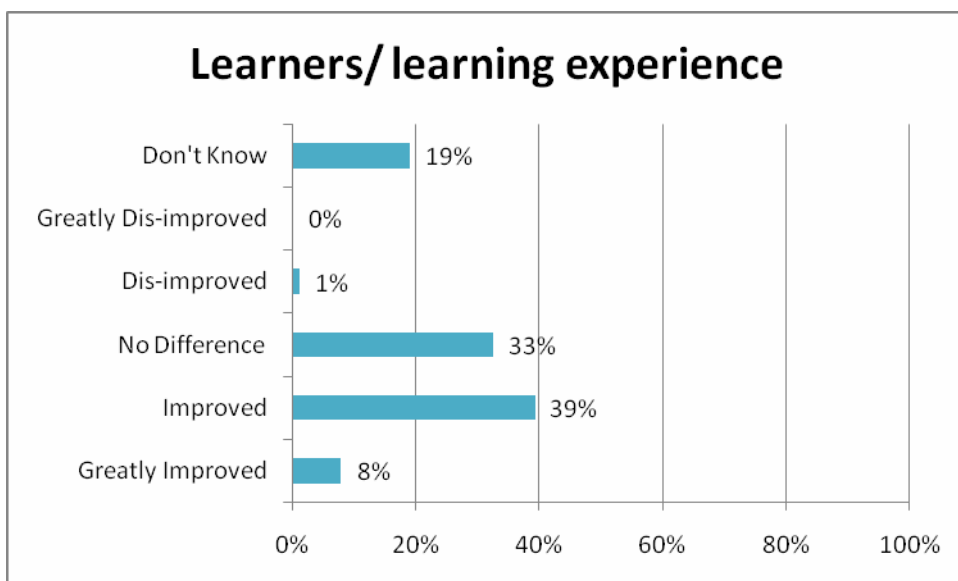
(ii)



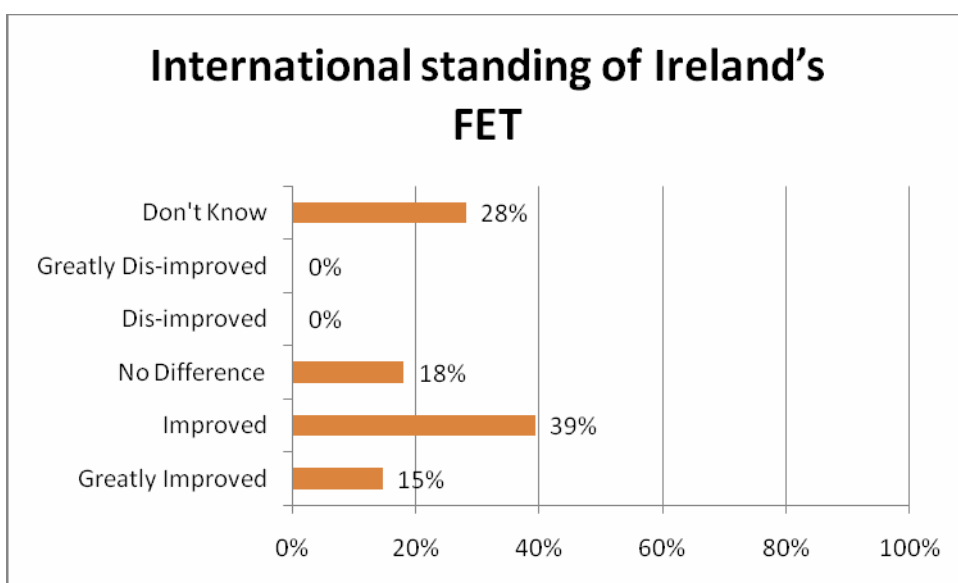
(iii)



(iv)



(v)



(vi)

Graph 12 (i) to (vi) **Online Survey Results - What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of: Quality of Programmes (i), Quality of Awards (ii), Learning outcomes and standards (iii), Assessment (iv), Learners/ learning experience (v) and International standing of Ireland's FET (vi).**

As indicated in Graph 12, the online survey results found that 8% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the quality of programmes; a further 33% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the quality of programmes. A further 21% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 1% believed it has actually 'dis-improved' the quality of programmes. 18% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (i)).

The online survey results found that 10% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the quality of awards; a further 52% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the quality of awards. Just under 20% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 1% believed it has actually 'dis-improved' the quality of programmes. 18% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (ii)).

In terms of learning outcomes and standards, 8% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' same. A further 53% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the learning outcomes and standards, 21% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 1% believed learning outcomes and standards have 'dis-improved'.. 17% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (iii)).

7% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' assessment. A further 42% of respondents believed it has 'improved' assessment, 28% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 6% believed learning assessment has 'dis-improved'.. 18% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (iv)).

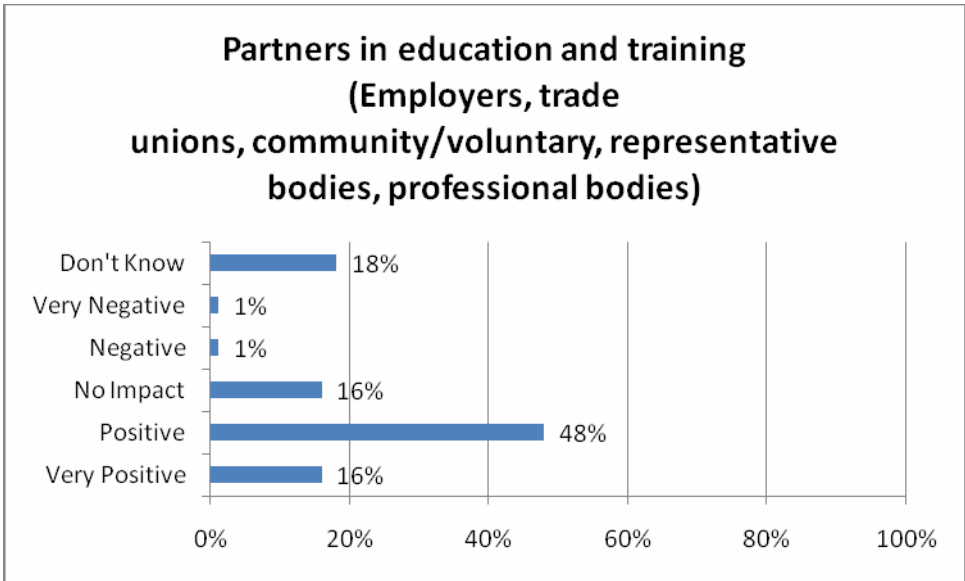
8% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the 'Learning Experience'. A further 39% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the 'Learning Experience', 33% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ and 1% believed the 'Learning Experience' has 'dis-improved'.. 19% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (v)).

15% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'greatly improved' the International Standing of Ireland's FET'. A further 39% of respondents believed it has 'improved' the 'International Standing. 18% believed that there has been 'no difference' as a result of the NFQ. 28% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 12 (v)).

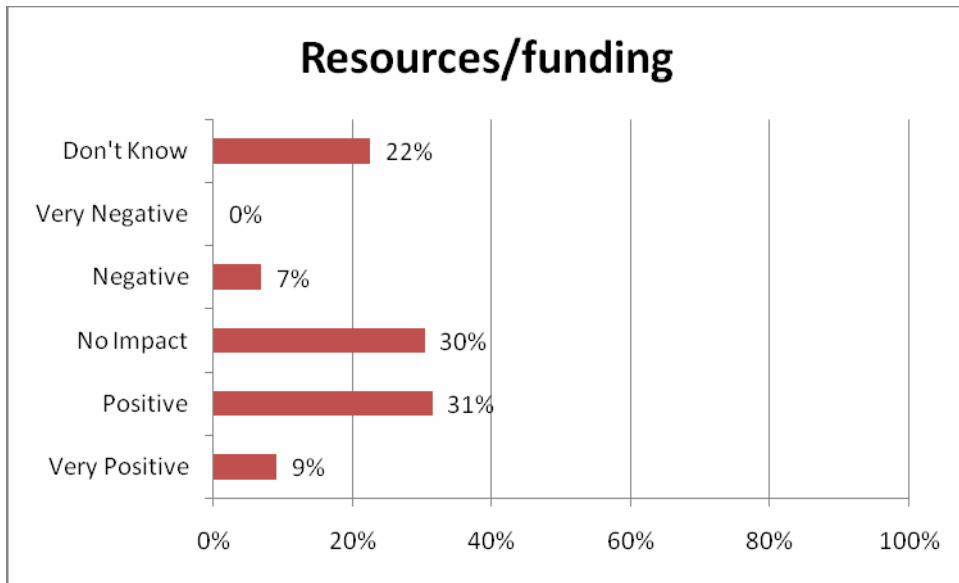
Table 13 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 13 Online Survey Results - **What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of: Quality of Programmes (i), Quality of Awards (ii), Learning outcomes and standards (iii), Assessment (iv), Learners/ learning experience (v) and International standing of Ireland’s FET (vi).**

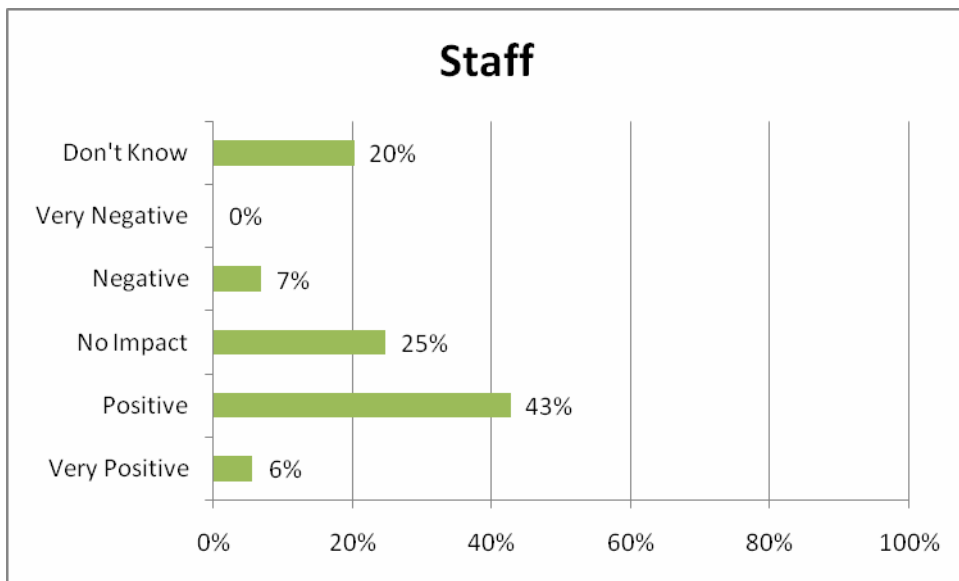
What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of:								
	Greatly Improved	Improved	No Difference	Dis-improved	Greatly Dis-improved	Don't Know	Response Count	
Quality of Programmes	8%	53%	21%	1%	0%	18%	91	
Quality of Awards	10%	52%	19%	1%	0%	18%	90	
Learning outcomes and standards	8%	53%	21%	1%	0%	17%	92	
Assessment	7%	42%	28%	6%	0%	18%	89	
Learners/ learning experience	8%	39%	33%	1%	0%	19%	89	
International standing of Ireland's FET	15%	39%	18%	0%	0%	28%	89	
Comments:							15	
							<i>answered question</i>	92
							<i>skipped question</i>	69



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

Graph 13 (i) to (iii) **Online Survey Results - What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of: Partners in education and training (i), Resources/funding (ii), Staff (iii),**

As indicated in Graph 13, the online survey results found that 16% of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications has had a 'very positive' impact on the partners in education and training, including employers, trade unions, community/voluntary, representative bodies and professional bodies; a further 48% of respondents believed the impact has been 'positive' 16% believed that there has been 'no impact' as a result of the

NFQ and 2% believed the impact has been 'negative' or 'very negative' 18% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 13 (i)).

The online survey results found that 9% of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications has had a 'very positive' impact on resources and funding in the FET sector, whereas a further 31% of respondents believed the impact has been 'positive' 30% believed that there has been 'no impact' as a result of the NFQ and 7% believed the impact has been 'negative'. 22% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 13 (ii)).

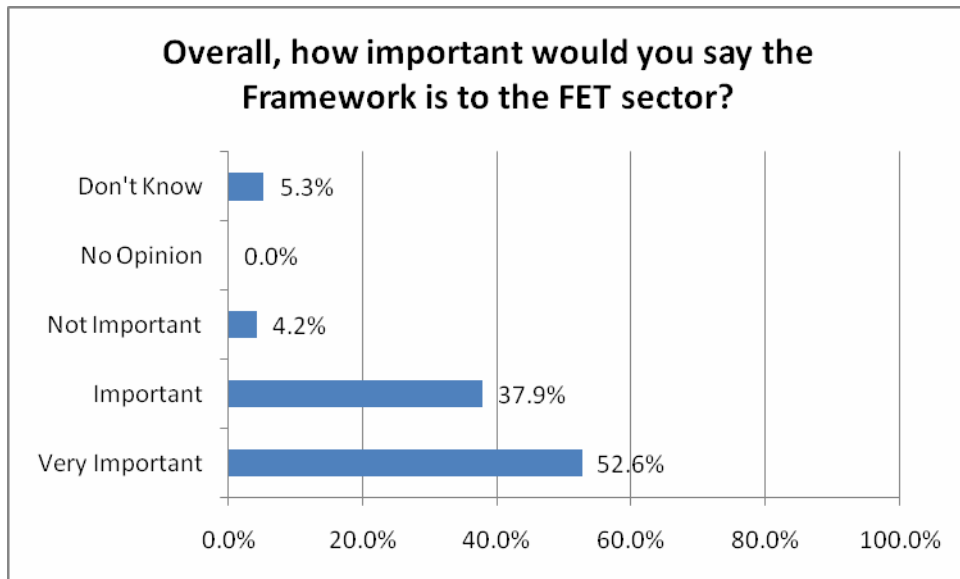
The online survey results found that 6% of respondents believed the National framework of Qualifications has 'had a 'very positive' impact on staff; a further 43% of respondents believed it has had a 'positive' impact on staff. 25% believed that there has been 'no impact' as a result of the NFQ and 7% believed the impact on staff to be 'negative'. 20% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response (Graph 13 (iii)).

Table 14 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 14 Online Survey Results - **What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of: Partners in education and training (i), Resources/funding (ii), Staff (iii),**

What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of:							
Answer Options	Very Positive	Positive	No Impact	Negative	Very Negative	Don't Know	Response Count
Partners in education and training (Employers, trade unions, community/voluntary, representative bodies, professional bodies)	16%	48%	16%	1%	1%	18%	94
Resources/funding	9%	31%	30%	7%	0%	22%	89
Staff	6%	43%	25%	7%	0%	20%	89
Comments:							11
<i>answered question</i>							94
<i>skipped question</i>							67

Appendix 8: Conclusion



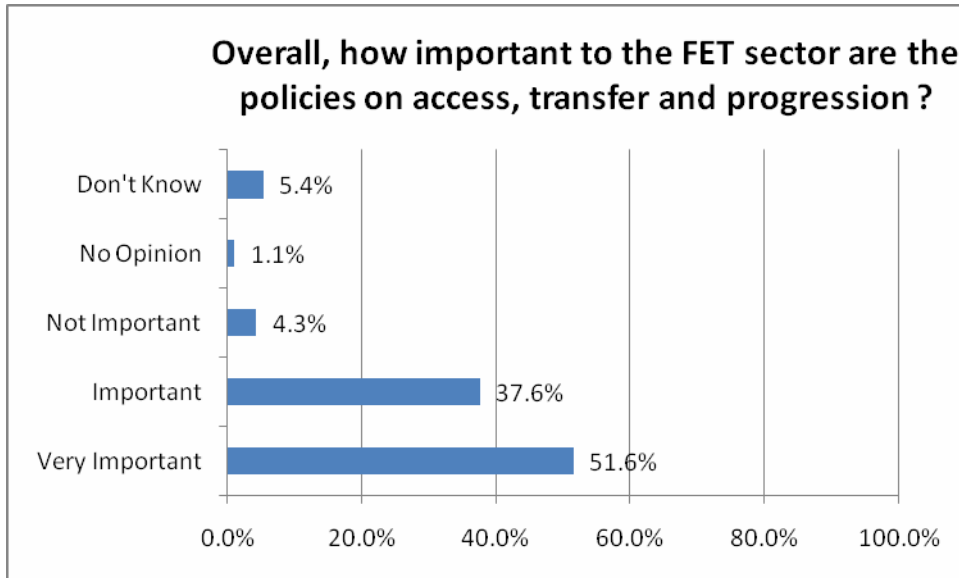
Graph 14 Online Survey Results - **Overall, how important would you say the Framework is to the FET sector?**

Graph 14, indicates that the online survey results found over half of respondents believed the National Framework of Qualifications is 'very important' to the FET sector with a further 38% citing it as 'important'. Less than 5% believed the Framework is 'not important' to the sector, 5% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

Table 15 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 15 Online Survey Results **Overall, how important would you say the Framework is to the FET sector?**

Overall, how important would you say the Framework is to the FET sector?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	52.6%	50
Important	37.9%	36
Not Important	4.2%	4
No Opinion	0.0%	0
Don't Know	5.3%	5
	<i>answered question</i>	95
	<i>skipped question</i>	66



Graph 15 Online Survey Results - Overall, how important to the FET sector are the policies on access, transfer and progression with regard to the National Framework of Qualifications?

Graph 15 indicates that the online survey results found over half of respondents believed the the policies on access, transfer and progression is are 'very important' to the FET sector, with a further 38% believing the policies to be 'important' to the FET sector. Less than 5% believed the policies are 'not important' to the sector, 5% of respondents recorded 'don't know' as their response.

Table 15 provides further details on the number of respondents.

Table 15 Online Survey Results Overall, how important would you say the Framework is to the FET sector?

Overall, how important to the FET sector are the policies on access, transfer and progression with regard to the National Framework of Qualifications?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	51.6%	48
Important	37.6%	35
Not Important	4.3%	4
No Opinion	1.1%	1
Don't Know	5.4%	5
	<i>answered question</i>	93
	<i>skipped question</i>	68

Appendix 9: Survey Instrument

(as developed using www.surveymonkey.com)

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) questionnaire.

The National Framework of Qualifications was established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in October 2003. Five years on, the NQAI are undertaking a cross sectional study into the impact and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications, and have requested each of the four main Education and Training sectors to produce reports informed by their stakeholders.

FETAC is undertaking the report into the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The report will feed into the NQAI's wider study and a 'Study team' will evaluate the cross sectoral information and produce a synthesis report with recommendations to improve the impact and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications across the Education and Training Spectrum. For more info refer to www.nqai.ie.

This questionnaire has seven sections:

- National Framework of Qualifications -- Knowledge and Understanding
- National Framework of Qualifications -- Implementation and Operation
- Access, transfer and progression -- Knowledge and understanding
- Access, transfer and progression -- Implementation
- Recognition of International Awards
- Conclusions
- Participant details

Some sections of the questionnaire may not be relevant to you. You are free not to answer particular questions if you wish.

Thank you for your time and feedback. Your feedback will enable us to provide a better service to you, our stakeholders.

* 1. Do you agree to your feedback being used to inform the FETAC Report into the Impact and Implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications?

- Yes - I agree that my responses may be used in FETAC's review
- No - I do not agree to have my responses used in FETAC's review

2. Have you heard of the National Framework of Qualifications?

- Yes No

2. National Framework of Qualifications -- Knowledge and Understanding

1. How well do you understand the National Framework of Qualifications?

- Very Good Understanding Good Understanding OK Understanding Poor Understanding No Understanding

2. In your view, what is the extent of knowledge and understanding of the National Framework of Qualifications in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector?

	Very Good	Good	OK	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comment

3. What have been the main achievements to date in the FET sector in respect of the National Framework of Qualifications?

4. What expectations do you have of the National Framework of Qualifications?

5. Based on your response to Q4 above: Are these expectations being delivered?

- Yes
 Some
 No

6. Based on your response to Q5 above: What is influencing the delivery/non-delivery of your expectations?

3. National Framework of Qualifications -- Implementation and Operation

1. What is your impression of the National Framework of Qualifications?

- Excellent Good OK Poor Very Poor Don't know

2. How well do you think the National Framework of Qualifications is working?

- Excellent Well OK Poorly Very Poorly Don't know

3. What, in your opinion, are the benefits of the National Framework of Qualifications?

4. What, in your opinion, are the drawbacks of the National Framework of Qualifications?

5. Do you know which organisations are responsible for implementing the National Framework of Qualifications in the FET sector?

- Yes
 Vaguely
 No

If Yes, please list the responsible organisation(s)?

4. Access, transfer and progression -- Knowledge and understanding

1. Are you aware of the policies on access, transfer and progression relating to the National Framework of Qualifications?

Yes

Vaguely

No

2. How well do you understand the policies on access, transfer and progression concerning the National Framework of Qualifications?

Very Good
Understanding

Good
Understanding

OK Understanding

Poor
Understanding

No Understanding

3. How well do you think the policies on access, transfer and progression are working?

Excellent

Well

OK

Poorly

Very Poorly

Don't know

4. What expectations do you have in relation to access, transfer and progression?

5. Based on your response to Q4 above:
Are these expectations being delivered?

Yes

Some

No

6. Based on your response to Q5 above:
What is influencing the delivery/non-delivery of your expectations?

5. Access, transfer and progression (ATP) -- Implementation

1. To what extent are the policies on access, transfer and progression promoted in the FET sector?

2. What is the extent of implementation of ATP in the FET sector in respect of:

	Excellent	Good	Ok	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Access and entry arrangements to programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transfer arrangements to programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Progression from awards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credit/Exemptions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognition of Prior Learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. How could access to awards be improved?

4. How could transfer and progression from one award to another (or from programmes leading to awards) be improved?

5. Is there adequate information on access, transfer and progression available to:

	Yes	Some Information is Available	No	Don't Know
Learners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programme Providers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

6. Please add any further comments on access, transfer and progression in relation to the Framework here?

6. Recognition of International Awards in the FET Sector

1. Has the recognition of international awards for the purpose of entry to programmes, or for exemptions from parts of programmes, been improved by the Framework?

Greatly Improved

Improved

No Change

Dis-Improved

Greatly Dis-Improved

Don't Know

Comments:

7. Conclusions

1. What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of:

	Greatly Improved	Improved	No Difference	Dis-improved	Greatly Dis-improved	Don't Know
Quality of Programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of Awards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning outcomes and standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learners/ learning experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International standing of Ireland's FET	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:

2. What in your view, has been the overall impact of the Framework on the FET sector in respect of:

	Very Positive	Positive	No Impact	Negative	Very Negative	Don't Know
Partners in education and training (Employers, trade unions, community/voluntary, representative bodies, professional bodies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resources/funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:

3. Overall, how important would you say the Framework is to the FET sector?

Very Important Important Not Important No Opinion Don't Know

4. Overall, how important to the FET sector are the policies on access, transfer and progression with regard to the National Framework of Qualifications?

Very Important Important Not Important No Opinion Don't Know

5. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

8. Participant details

Please complete your personal details below.

If you do not wish to give your personal details please still complete Q1.

1. Which of the following best describes you as a respondent to this questionnaire? (Please indicate one option)

- Learner
- Holder of FETAC award(s)
- Provider/procurer of programmes
- Teacher/Trainer
- Employer
- Skillnets
- Member of Public
- FETAC evaluator/verifier
- Social Partner
- Government Department
- Other (please specify)

2. Name:

3. Organisation (Full title):

Please tick

Not Applicable (Skip to Q4)

Organisation title

4. Role or position in organisation

5. Contact details

Telephone:

Email:

6. May we contact you to discuss your feedback in more detail if necessary?

- Yes
- No

9. End of Survey

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Your comments will contribute to FETAC's plans for the future.

FETAC will publish the outcomes in their report in Autumn 2008.