



FETAC

*Further Education and
Training Awards Council
Comhairle na nDámhachtainí
Breisoideachais agus Oiliúna*

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

13 November 2009

1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper was prepared in response to the recent publication by the National Qualifications Authority of the Ireland (NQAI) of the Report on the Implementation and Impact of the Framework.
- 1.2 While it is acknowledged that the above Report was not due to be a review of the framework since its implementation, FETAC considers that additional quantitative and qualitative information may assist interested parties when studying the Report. Also, as significant time has passed since the Report was originally commissioned, FETAC takes the opportunity, when appropriate, to include information relating to 2008-9.
- 1.3 This paper therefore outlines the extent of change that has taken place in the further education and training sector between 2003-2009 following the launch of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003 and the subsequent development, publication and implementation of FETAC policies in a range of areas. It also attempts to capture the impacts of the changes.

2. **Context**

- 2.1 The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was established in June 2001.
- 2.2 The National Framework of Qualifications was launched by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in October 2003.
- 2.3 FETAC commenced consultation in 2003 on the development of policies for the further education and training sector related to its functions and in the context of the framework.
- 2.4 FETAC agreed and published a range of policies between 2004 and 2006. Implementation commenced in 2005. Since then and as a consequence of the framework and the impact of the implementation of FETACs policies the further education and training landscape has changed significantly. See highlights below.

3. **Quality Assurance**

- 3.1 A new quality assurance system including provider registration (2005), programme registration (2006), programme validation (2007), self evaluation (2006) and external monitoring (2008) is now (2009) fully operational in the further education and training sector.
- 3.2 At the end of 2005, FETAC agreed quality assurance procedures with 22 providers. By November 2009, FETAC has agreements in place with 832 providers. These include large state providers (FÁS and the VECs, Fáiite Ireland and Teagasc), private providers, public service agencies (eg RSA), work based learning organisations, community based providers, secondary schools, special schools and specialist training providers.
- 3.3 FETAC is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the above provider's programmes. Providers are required to implement the recommendations resulting from the monitoring process. Since 2008, FETAC has monitored 169 providers (49 in

2008 and 120 in 2009). The first FETAC Annual Monitoring Report was published for the year 2008.

- 3.4 New guidelines for providers on quality assuring assessment were introduced into the sector in July 2008. These require providers to put in place the following: internal verification, external authentication, a results approval process and an appeals process. The new arrangements have facilitated the expansion of the number of certification opportunities for learners from two (May and November) in 2003 to four (January, May, August and November) from 2009.

4. **Awards**

- 4.1 All existing FETAC awards were placed on the framework in 2005 across levels 3-6.
- 4.2 FETAC awards were re-configured during 2005/6 to meet the requirements of the National Framework of Qualifications, specifically the award types and the knowledge, skill and competence outcomes.
- 4.3 The re-configuration included (a) the establishment of new set minimum volumes for major awards, (b) the classification of all existing awards as major, minor, special purpose, and supplemental based on volume and mix of knowledge, skill and competence, (c) new naming conventions, and the application of the new award titles and (d) new parchments were designed to reflect the impact of the implementation of the changes (a) - (c) above.
- 4.4 A new Directory of FETAC Awards was published in March 2006 listing the new classified awards. Since then all further education and training awards are developed and classified according to award types (major, minor, special purpose and supplemental).
- 4.5 The number of awards included in the Directory increased from 219 major awards, 134 special purpose awards, 3 supplemental awards, and 1931 minor awards in early 2006 to 309 major awards, 151 special purpose awards, 5 supplemental awards and 3154 minor awards in 2008.
- 4.6 The number of awards made by FETAC to learners increased from 87,866 in 2003 (developed and classified by former awarding body) to 219,550 in 2008 (developed and classified according to framework award types). The total number of awards made since 2001 will reach 900,000 by the end of 2009.
- 4.7 A consultation process commenced in 2004 on the development of a new, unified system of awards for the further education and training sector.
- 4.8 The outcome of the consultation process was a new Common Award System which was published in 2006.
- 4.9 New mechanisms were established in 2007 (including a Standards Advisory Board, Standard Development Groups, Consultation Groups) and tools developed in 2008 (Guidelines for developing awards and standards and a Credit, Accumulation and Transfer System) to assist the development of new awards.
- 4.10 The Common Awards System and the associated Credit, Accumulation and Transfer System became operational across the further education and training sector from 2008. It is now the single way of developing FETAC awards.

- 4.11 In April 2008 a project to migrate all existing awards to the Common Awards System commenced. Due to the number and range of existing awards and the number of stakeholders involved the project is scheduled to take three years.
- 4.12 The first new awards at levels 1 and 2 were launched in 2006. These awards are the first awards developed according to the Common Awards System.
- 4.13 The first awards at level 1 and 2 were made to learners in May 2008.
- 4.14 In 2008 FETAC made a total of 99 awards at level 1 (12 major awards and 87 minor awards) and 502 at level 2 (53 major awards 449 minor awards).
- 4.15 In 2009 (to October) FETAC made a total of 107 awards at level 1 (including 57 major awards) and 275 at level 2 (including 175 major awards).
- 4.16 There are currently 11 Standard Development Groups in existence developing a range of awards including Micro-generation, Tachograph, Emergency Lighting, Water Safety.

5. Programmes

- 5.1 The first phase of programme validation ie the registration of programmes commenced in March 2006. Since then all providers offering FETAC awards are required to register their programmes with FETAC.
- 5.2 By 2009 **over 8300** programmes have been registered.
- 5.3 The first programmes leading to awards at levels 1 and 2 were validated in 2007.
- 5.4 In 2008 34 programmes from 25 providers were validated at levels 1 and 2.
- 5.5 In 2009 (to October) 49 programmes from 26 providers were validated at levels 1 and 2.
- 5.6 During 2009, 8 Programme Approval Agreements were signed. A Programme Approval Agreement is a quality assurance agreement with a provider which sets out how the provider develops, evaluates and approves programmes. The programmes are then forwarded to FETAC for validation.

6. Recognition of Prior Learning

- 6.1 An extensive RPL pilot project was undertaken in 2006/7 with 9 providers. The project's Evaluation Report made a number of key recommendations, which were subsequently reflected in FETAC establishing guidelines and criteria for providers who wish to offer awards through RPL. At the end of the project 50 learners received certificates through RPL. All 50 came through the workplace.
- 6.2 One of the key recommendations of the Evaluation Report was that while all providers are required as part of their quality assurance agreement to facilitate learners to access programmes and gain exemptions, providers who wish to offer RPL for awards must submit their policies and procedures to FETAC for agreement.

6.3 By 2009 (to November) 10 providers are now quality assured to offer named awards through RPL.

7. Recognition of Other Awards

7.1 FETACs Recognition of Other Awards Policy 2006 sets out how FETAC recognises other awards. This policy was supplemented in 2008 with a policy on alignment, following the launch of the NQAI's policy on alignment and inclusion.

7.2 FETAC recognises other awards that are included in or aligned to the framework by granting credit to the award holder (of the other award) towards a FETAC award.

7.3 In addition, FETAC recognises vendor type certification eg ECDL and MOS.

7.4 Since 2004 FETAC has processed over 7200 recognition applications. This includes 254 learners in 2004 who received recognition for achieving an ECDL award. This increased to 1307 in 2009 (to date).

8. Access, transfer and progression

8.1 In 2001, 599 learners applied for entry to higher education institutions through the CAO on the basis of a FETAC award. In 2008 the number increased to 7, 244.

8.2 In 2008, 11% of total applicants to higher education institutions applied on the basis of achieving a FETAC award.

8.3 In 2001, 22 higher education institutions offered progression on the basis of a FETAC level 5 award. Now 41 higher education institutions accept learners on the basis of FETAC awards, including universities, DIT, Institutes of Technology and private higher education providers.

8.4 In 2008 FETAC published the first national outline of progression links for qualified apprentices (Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft) to programmes. This was published to recognise existing arrangements and to promote further developments.

9. Impacts

9.1 Based on the above quantitative and qualitative information, the following significant impacts of framework implementation within the further education and training sector are noted:

9.1.1 The **growth in provision** including in areas which were previously considered disadvantaged. The impact is measured in terms of the growing number of registered providers and the number and range of registered/validated programmes. This is a result of the growing demand from learners for quality assured framework awards. It also reflects provision at levels 1 and 2 and in the work place, areas which were previously excluded from accessing certification.

9.1.2 The **increase in the number of awards made to learners**. This is a result of the increase in the number of awards developed including at levels 1 and 2, the increase in the number of learners participating including learners in the workplace and the increase in the number of certification opportunities per annum (from 2 to 4). The

increase in participation is further facilitated by the implementation of new quality assured processes relating to the Recognition of Prior Learning and the Recognition of Other Awards.

- 9.1.3 **The improvement in the quality of programmes.** This is the result of the implementation of provider registration, programme registration, programme validation, provider self evaluation of programmes, and external monitoring by FETAC. The validation process relating to programmes leading to awards at Level 1 and 2 in particular has added significant value to the quality of programmes. In addition, the new assessment arrangements (July 2008) have increased the quality, transparency and accuracy of providers assessment procedures. Therefore, it can be said with reasonable accuracy that providers are embracing a cultural shift towards embedding quality assurance, continually improving their programmes and earnestly striving to meet learner's diverse needs.
- 9.1.4 **The increase in the number of learners navigating the framework.** This is a result of the increase in the number and range of programmes leading to framework awards, the increase in the numbers entering programmes and successfully completing awards, and the increase in the number of FETAC award holders seeking to progress to further and higher education and training. Currently, 11% of CAO applicants are FETAC award holders.
- 9.1.5 **The increase in the number of learners entering employment** following the completion of a FETAC award. Providers have reported significant success in FETAC award holders entering employment between 2003 and 2008 on the basis of their award.

10. **Conclusions**

- 10.1 The above information outlines the extent to which the further education and training sector has changed since 2003.
- 10.2 FETAC acknowledges that further work needs to be done as a matter of urgency to meet the needs of learners and industry by
- increasing the pace of implementing the Common Award System and its associated Credit, Accumulation and Transfer System
 - completing the migration of existing awards to the Common Award System including the craft awards within the planned timeframe
 - developing relevant new awards
 - further enhancing access, transfer and progression arrangements for learners.
- 10.3 FETAC recommends that in the context of further deepening framework implementation the following should be considered:
- the role of minor awards at all levels should be further developed and promoted particularly in the context of facilitating learner accumulation of minor awards/credits over time and at their own pace
 - the range of major award types at level 7 should be reviewed. Currently there is only one major award type at level 7. Apart from levels 1 and 2 this is the only level where this occurs. This may negatively impact on the range of programmes available at level 7 and as a consequence may restrict progression from level 5 and 6.
 - the development of a national policy regarding access, transfer and progression to include government departments, awarding authorities (in terms of provider and programme approval processes), funding agencies (regarding their

arrangements) and providers (regarding how they facilitate access to and exemptions from programmes)

- the development of a national credit system to further assist learners to navigate the framework
- the identification of key performance indicators for measuring and tracking the implementation and impact of the framework into the future.

10.4 FETAC looks forward to working closely with the NQAI, HETAC, the Irish Universities Quality Board and other stakeholders over the next number of years to deepen implementation and ensure lasting impacts.

10.5 The development of relevant indicators for measuring and tracking progress will contribute significantly to our collective understanding of the extent of the implementation and impacts over time.