



Erasmus+



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# **ComProCom Erasmus+ Project Communicating Professional Competence**

## **Preliminary National Report: Ireland Preliminary Draft V1.0**

### **Introduction**

The first step in the Common Work under the ComProCom (Communicating Professional Competence) Erasmus+ Project is to undertake a review of the current situation regarding competence frameworks and their use in each respective partner country. This work is to be undertaken principally by means of *desk research* and *remote discussions*, in the following timeframe:

- Development of first versions of national reports to 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015
- Finalisation of work on national reports to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015
- Development of overall report to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015

This preliminary first draft report, prepared by the Irish partner, is presented and should be read in the following context:

- This report provides a short overview of the current situation in Ireland generally and includes specific reference to the industry chosen by the Irish partner (training and development)
- This report was prepared by means of desk research only; discussions with relevant stakeholders will take place on foot of the November 2015 ComProCom Erasmus+ project partner meeting; *this report therefore provides a short preliminary introduction to the main features of the system in Ireland, and will be expanded upon further in the coming weeks*
- It is important to note that the ComProCom Project Application refers to the situation regarding standards and frameworks in Austria, Poland, and Greece, and it notes that it would be good to review these 'in light of international developments (UK, Germany)' (e.g., see page 27) - there is, however, no reference made to the situation in Ireland which, as is outlined below, is a comprehensive outcomes-based good-practice system that is developed and operated in consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders at all levels, and is linked closely to many developments and systems at European level
- The November Vienna meeting will provide all partners with the opportunity to clarify a number of issues relating to the Project, including, for example, the assumptions the Project is based on and the associated Project goals, particularly in light of the fact that this may have been arrived at without reference to the situation in Ireland
- This discussion will, in turn, help to inform the completion of this and other National reports, by the agreed date of end November; the completion of the Irish Report will also be informed by remote discussions with selected stakeholders, which, as mentioned above, will be undertaken on foot of the November Project meeting

## **Structure of the Report**

This report was prepared broadly in accordance with the headings outlined in the e mail from our Polish partner on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015, and it includes the following:

- Section 1    **The Irish National Qualifications Framework** including
    - 1.1 Milestones in the Development of the Framework
    - 1.2 Links to Qualifications Frameworks in Europe
    - 1.3 Other International Work
    - 1.4 Stakeholders and Consultation
    - 1.5 Summary and Diagram of Framework
  
  - Section 2    **Recent and Prospective Changes in the Provision of FET**
    - 2.1 Establishment of SOLAS, Further Education and Training Authority
    - 2.2 Publication of Further Education and Training Strategy
    - 2.3 Review of Apprenticeship System
    - 2.4 Action Plan for Jobs 2015 and Regional Skills Fora
  
  - Section 3    **A Note on Training and Development**
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## **1. The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)**

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) provides a way to compare qualifications, and to ensure that they are quality assured and recognised at home and abroad. Established in 2003, it is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. It describes what learners should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification, and it also shows how learners can move from one qualification, or qualification level, to another within the system.

Each of the ten levels in the NFQ grades learning from beginner to advanced, based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQ are, therefore, organised in this way, and the system, as well as the qualifications within it, are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes. They are also linked to credit systems and arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning (i.e., validation of non-formal and informal learning).

The NFQ therefore incorporates awards for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained: School qualifications (awards) awarded by the State Examinations Commission, and further and higher education and training qualifications formerly awarded by FETAC and HETAC, and those awarded by the Institutes of Technology and the Universities, are all included in the Framework.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has responsibility to develop, promote and maintain the Irish NFQ, and QQI also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications.

QQI is a state agency established by the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012, with a board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. QQI's functions include those previously carried out by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

See <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html>, and page 9, below, for summary image of the NFQ.

### **1.1 Milestones in the Development of the NFQ**

The concept of the NFQ was first proposed in legislation in 1999 and was officially launched as an active framework in 2003. Since then, there have been many national and international developments which have helped establish the NFQ in Ireland and its recognition in other countries developing their qualifications frameworks.

Since its launch, all of the qualifications made by the national awarding bodies in Ireland have been recognised within the NFQ.

<b>Milestones in the Development of the NFQ</b>	
<b>1999</b>	The NFQ was proposed by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999
<b>2003</b>	After an extensive period of public engagement and consultation, <b>the NFQ was established as the single national entity through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other</b>
<b>2003</b>	Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications are published
<b>2004</b>	Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose, and Supplemental Award Types are published
<b>2006</b>	<b>The NFQ was self-certified as compatible with the Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA), the first national Qualification Framework to complete this exercise</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>The NFQ was referenced to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, the first national Qualification Framework to complete this exercise</b>
<b>2012</b>	The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 reaffirms the statutory basis of the NFQ  Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is established and one of its statutory functions is 'to promote, maintain, further develop and implement the Framework'
<b>2014</b>	Descriptors for the class of professional award-types determined at levels 7-9 in 2011 and extended to Levels 5 and 6 in 2014

## **1.2 Links to Qualifications Frameworks in Europe**

As noted above, Ireland completed referencing of the Irish NFQ to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2009<sup>1</sup>. The referencing process undertaken in Ireland established a clear and demonstrable link between the Levels in the NFQ and the level descriptors of EQF in the following manner:

<b>Irish NFQ Level</b>	<b>EQF Level</b>
10	8
9	7
8	6
7	6
6	5
5	4
4	3
3	2
2	1
1	1

*The referencing process also demonstrated that the NFQ, and the qualifications within it, are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes, and they are*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.qqi.ie/Documents/Referencing%20Irish%20NFQ%20to%20the%20European%20QF%20for%20Lifelong%20Learning.pdf>

linked to credit systems and arrangements for the Recognition of Prior Learning (i.e., validation of non-formal and informal learning).

Ireland's NFQ has also been verified as compatible with that of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)<sup>2</sup>. This means that higher education and training qualifications from Ireland are consistent with EHEA bachelor, master and doctorate cycles.

### **1.3 Other International Work**

Since its establishment in 2003, there have been many national and international developments which have helped establish the NFQ in Ireland and its recognition in other countries developing their qualifications frameworks. For example, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is involved in a wide variety of national and international projects, initiatives, agreements and networks with the aim of improving the quality of education and training across Europe and the world.

#### ***Formal Agreements***

QQI and the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) in the UK have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding and an Information Sharing Agreement. This means they work together to share information and promote understanding of the quality and reputation of Higher Education in Ireland and the UK.

QQI has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications). Under this agreement the agencies agree to cooperate by exchanging information, recognising each other's decisions and cooperating with each other in quality assurance activities where feasible.

#### ***European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education***

QQI is an active member of Enga (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), the umbrella organisation representing quality assurance organisations from the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). QQI's membership was reconfirmed in September 2014 for a five-year period following an expert review.

Enga promotes European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in Higher Education and shares information and expertise among its members and stakeholders. Dr Pdraig Walsh, Chief Executive of QQI and board member of Enga since 2011 was elected President of the association at the 4th General Assembly in Vilnius on 29-30 October 2013.

#### ***European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training***

As the new legal entity following the amalgamation of several agencies, QQI has taken over the contract with the European Commission to host and support the Egavet (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) project. Egavet is a community of practice which promotes European collaboration in quality assurance for VET (Vocational Education and Training).

#### ***Enic-Naric***

The Enic (European Network of Information Centres) and Naric (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) were established to improve recognition of

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Verification%20of%20Compatibility%20of%20NFQ%20with%20QF%20EH%20EA%20220609.pdf>

qualifications and periods of study in European countries and beyond. QQI hosts the Irish Enic-Naric centre, and in this capacity it provides:

- Advice on the general academic recognition of qualifications gained outside Ireland
- Contact information for professional recognition bodies where professional recognition of a foreign qualification is required
- Information on the Irish education and training system and promote the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad

### ***European Qualifications Framework***

As noted above, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is used to compare awards from qualifications systems throughout Europe, and Ireland verified the compatibility of the NFQ with the EQF in 2009.

QQI is also heavily involved in the development of the EQF, and was one of the first two countries to reference its qualifications framework to the EQF. QQI is the contact point for the EQF in Ireland and is on the international advisory group developing the framework.

## **1.4 Stakeholders and Consultation**

Consultation is crucial to fulfilling QQI's function as part of a system that is developing and implementing policies with social, commercial and educational goals. QQI currently observes a consultation framework and is developing policy to underpin this cooperation.

### ***Learners***

QQI engages with learners in governance structures through consultation with representative groups and the involvement of learners in its review and accreditation processes. This feedback is an explicit requirement of QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines. In addition to the presence of two representatives on the QQI board, learners are involved in QQI's evaluative processes. All Institutional Review teams include a student or a student representative, and during reviews, the team meets with students and representatives.

### ***Providers***

QQI engages with further and higher education and training providers and institutions in the public and private sectors. It consults with providers on strategic and policy developments; in some cases it also engages as the awarding body and the external quality assurance body, while in other cases, it acts solely as the external quality assurance body. In all cases it promotes quality improvement and enhancement.

QQI routinely engages with providers and institutions through its Quality Assurance and Qualifications sections, particularly in the course of:

- Awards standards development
- Programme validation and review
- Monitoring
- Certification
- Annual dialogue meetings
- Institutional review

### ***Employers***

Part of QQI's job is to help to meet the needs of the labour market. This means understanding the skills required by employers in an ever-evolving environment, and

facilitating their input into programmes developed by education and training providers. To this end, QQI engages with employers and employer representatives on a range of activities including standards development, policy consultation and recognising/aligning foreign qualifications. QQI also facilitates employer participation in providers' work, for instance in their quality assurance systems and programme review panels.

### ***Professional / Regulatory Bodies***

Professional / regulatory bodies play a key role in QQI's work, and, because the professions involve communities of practice, they are critical to the functioning of the qualifications system. Their input is also essential in areas such as educational quality assurance and the determination and formulation of standards for qualifications. It is important therefore that QQI engages in knowledge sharing with a range of organisations as part of its policy-development process. These organisations are often connected and typically interact with:

- The international scientific and technical community in the discipline concerned
- Providers of programmes of education and training (some professional bodies are providers in their own right)
- Professional practitioners
- Professional regulators
- Employers

### ***State Bodies***

With so many stakeholders involved in education and training, joined-up thinking and coordinated action is essential; QQI therefore has regular interactions with relevant State bodies and is developing protocols to deepen these links. Some of the state bodies that QQI works with on an ongoing basis include the following:

#### *Department of Education and Skills*

QQI is answerable to the Department of Education and Skills which funds some of its running costs. QQI has input into policy development and provides the Department with feedback. QQI works with the Department in areas such as:

- Qualifications
- Further Education and Training
- Higher Education
- Schools Inspection
- Guidance
- Statistics
- International Relations
- Teacher Education
- Schools Curriculum and Examinations

#### *Solas – Further Education and Training Authority*

Solas is the national agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating Training and Further Education programmes in Ireland. Solas and QQI are currently developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to set out how they will cooperate in the future.

#### *Higher Education Authority (HEA)*

The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and policy development body for higher education and research in Ireland. It is also the funding body for higher education. The HEA publishes extensive statistics on Higher Education and is the national contact point for Erasmus+ and other European funding programmes for Higher Education.

On 1 January 2015, a Memorandum of Understanding between the HEA and QQI came into operation. The Memorandum provides an agreed framework for cooperation and communication between the two organisations in the interests of the higher education sector as a whole. The MoU, which will be implemented over the period 2015 – 2017, sets out a range of actions which support the four key commitments presented in the document: coherence of approach, alignment of activities, Ireland in an international context, and partnerships for enhancement.

*National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)*

NCCA's role is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment from early childhood through to second-level education. The Council also provides support to learners, teachers and other stakeholder - including the conduct of related research. We work with NCCA particularly on the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications in the school system.

## **PROCESS**

### **Sector Needs Analysis**

The desk research confirmed that recent and current standards development activity in Ireland is largely interrelated with the process set out for the development of award standards on the National Framework of Qualifications.

References in many professional bodies to competency development is in fact concerned with ongoing Continuous Professional Development and Post Graduate Education, while most entry level or progression route structured guidelines on competency and standards development is directly linked to the award standards.

The integral involvement of all sectoral stakeholders in the standards development process ensured the award standards were determined by the needs of the industry and has resulted in broad engagement with these standards by those involved.

The process could only commence when an organisation or group of organisations approached FETAC to establish a Standards Development Group.

Depending on their expertise and organisational capacity any one organisation could be requested to lead and others could contribute as appropriate to the work of the group in order to ensure awards and standards met the needs of the entire sector.

Standards Development Groups were required to include, where possible, involvement of industry/sectoral lead bodies with a remit for developing standards in specific fields. Moreover, if there was a known Competent Body in a particular field area or subject domain, then that body was expected to play a significant role within the standards development process.

To ensure maximum economic and social relevance all development work must be underpinned by research on sectoral requirements. This was the starting point for the development phase.

The sector needs analysis or scoping study must focus on the needs of the sector in terms of identifying the knowledge, skill and competence requirements for specific areas and/or occupations within the sector.

The sector needs analysis was informed by the research activities and other outputs of national bodies eg the Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and by specific

legislative requirements eg Safety, Health legislation. It was also informed by government policies, collective social agreements and European directives and national or European regulations or standards.

It could be further informed by standards and occupational analyses and studies in comparable European member states.

The Group was required to produce a sector needs analysis report incorporating a rationale for award development and the identification of specific named awards at stated levels. All awards would be developed in the context of the knowledge, skill and competence requirements at the level of the award and the knowledge, skill and competence at the levels at least one level below and one level above the proposed award.

When the sector needs analysis was completed, the Executive and the Standards Development Group established the number of specific named awards, their types and levels to be developed by the Standards Development Group.

It was also explicitly noted that there were a range of competent bodies/authorities and professional / lead bodies who had a direct interest in and knowledge of awards and standards. These bodies were, within their respective competences, welcome to participate and contribute to the standards development Process.

### **Standard Advisory Board**

The Standards Advisory Board acted in an advisory capacity to the Council in relation to the development of standards. The Board included high level expert membership from key stakeholders including industry, employers, trade unions, learners, sectors including the community sector, former awarding bodies, statutory bodies, education and training (including further and higher education and training) and international expertise.

### **Standards Development Groups**

A Standards Development Group was the entity through which standards were developed prior to recommendation to the Council via the Standards Advisory Board. FETAC will invited organisations/bodies/individuals to establish a Group to develop these awards. FETAC welcomed expressions of interest from organisations/bodies that were in a position to establish such a Group. This broad scope ensured that those with a keen interest and the core skills required to engaged in the process of standards and competency development were leading the work.

The specific role of the Standards Development Group was to undertake the development and review of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. The Standards Development Groups developed an Award Specification including the award requirements (structure) and standards (learning outcomes) for each award, appropriate to the specific level, type and purpose of the award.

Standards Development Groups were expected to consult widely and to include appropriate stakeholders and expertise.

## **1.5 Summary**

The ten-level framework that is the NFQ in Ireland, and the qualifications within it, are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes. Each of the ten levels grades learning from beginner to advanced, based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. It describes what learners should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification, it shows how learners can move from one qualification, or qualification level, to another within the system, and it incorporates awards for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained.

The Framework of Qualifications in Ireland is a robust system that spans right across the provision of education and training in Ireland. Its ongoing operation and further development is based on significant and ongoing consultation with and input from relevant stakeholders, and it is referenced to, linked with and connected in many ways to developments in Europe and beyond (see [page 9](#), below, for a diagrammatic summary of the Framework, and see [Section 3, page 13](#), below, for a summary of where qualifications relating to Training and Development provided by the Irish Institute of Training and Development fit on this Framework).

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## National Framework of Qualifications



### AWARDING BODIES

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) makes awards in further and higher education and training
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education and Skills)
- Institutes of Technology
- Universities

### AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

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

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



For further information consult: [www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie) [www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie)

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## **2. Recent and Prospective Changes in the Provision of FET**

Many changes are currently underway that are completely re-shaping further education and training (FET) provision in Ireland. In the last few years alone, 33 Vocational Education Committees have been re-structured into 16 Education and Training boards, and FÁS, the national training authority, has been replaced with SOLAS, the new national Further Education and Training Authority. More recent and associated developments include publication of the Further Education and Training Strategy, the Apprenticeship Review and Implementation Plan, and the Apprenticeship Council.

### **2.1 Establishment of SOLAS**

SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna), which operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, has been established to develop and give strategic direction to the Further Education and Training Sector in Ireland. It is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating a wide range of training and further education programmes and has a mandate to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality programmes to jobseekers and other learners. All SOLAS training centres have been transferred to the ETBs over time.

To achieve this, SOLAS will work closely with a wide range of stakeholders including learners, employers, Education & Training Boards, Government departments, state bodies, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and representative organisations. The aim is to build a clear, integrated pathway to work for learners through Further Education and Training.

Also of relevance is SOLAS's role, in conjunction with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, in providing the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) with research and secretariat support. The SOLAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit provides the Group with data, analysis and research and manages the National Skills Database.

The EGFSN advises the Irish Government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met. Established in 1997, the EGFSN reports to the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Education and Skills. The EGFSN provides advice to Government on skills issues impacting enterprise through:

- Skills foresight and benchmarking
- Strategic advice on building skills through education and training
- Data collection and analysis on demand and supply of skilled labour
- Influencing and monitoring implementation

The EGFSN's budget comes from the National Training Fund.

### **2.2 Publication of Further Education and Training Strategy**

In May 2014, the first ever national, five year, Further Education and Training Strategy was launched. Developed by SOLAS, it identified five high-level goals. These are:

1. **Skills for the Economy:** to address the current and future needs of learners, jobseekers, employers and employees and to contribute to national economic development
2. **Active Inclusion:** to support the active inclusion of people of all abilities in society with special reference to literacy and numeracy
3. **Quality Provision:** to provide high quality education and training programmes and to meet the appropriate national and international quality standards
4. **Integrated Planning and Funding:** FET provision will be planned and funded on the basis of objective analysis of needs and evidence of social and economic impact
5. **Standing of FET:** to ensure a valued learning path leading to agreed employment, career, developmental, personal and social options

The Strategy aims to provide a formal structure around the entire sector, to ensure that uniform standards and outcomes are delivered for all learners.

### **2.3 Review of Apprenticeship System**

Linked to the development of the national FET Strategy are the changes being made to the apprenticeship system, which began in 2013 and are ongoing. As part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs initiative (a process begun in 2012 and updated annually), the Department of Education and Skills undertook a review of the apprenticeship system to determine whether the current model should be retained, adapted or replaced. The Group made a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Department at the end of 2013, following consultations with interested parties. These included employers and employer representative bodies. In June last year, the Implementation Plan for the Review's recommendations was published.

One of the recommendations of the Review Group was the establishment of an Apprenticeship Council; this was launched in November 2014. It is enterprise-led and has representatives from business, trade unions, further and higher education bodies, as well as the Department of Education and Skills. In particular, the Council is tasked with the expansion of the apprenticeship model into new sectors of the economy. One of the first tasks of the Council was to issue a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers to develop new apprenticeships in areas outside of the current apprenticeship trades. This process is underway and the Council will make recommendations advising on the implementation of new apprenticeships following that process.

### **2.4 Action Plan for Jobs 2015 and Regional Skills Fora**

The 2015 Action Plan for Jobs includes a number of commitments to build on recent achievements to deliver relevant education and training to assist the unemployed in entering the workforce and up-skilling others to take up positions in a rapidly evolving jobs market, including a commitment to review the National Skills Strategy and publish a new Strategy in 2015, and to enhance engagement between the education and training system and employers to deliver high quality skills.

As part of this broad plan, a new national network of Regional Skills fora are being established to foster better links between education and enterprise in building the supply of skills to support job creation and development of each region. A total of €1m in direct funding is being provided in 2016 to support the new network across eight regions.

## **2.5 Summary**

The education and training landscape in Ireland is changing dramatically. The many developments can be viewed as an opportunity and a desire to foster closer links between providers and employers, and to increase the quality and responsiveness of training and education programmes to the needs of individuals, enterprises and the economy. The National Framework of Qualifications will continue to underpin the quality assurance of these developments, and to place them in the national and international context, through the ongoing liaison with and input from all relevant stakeholders.

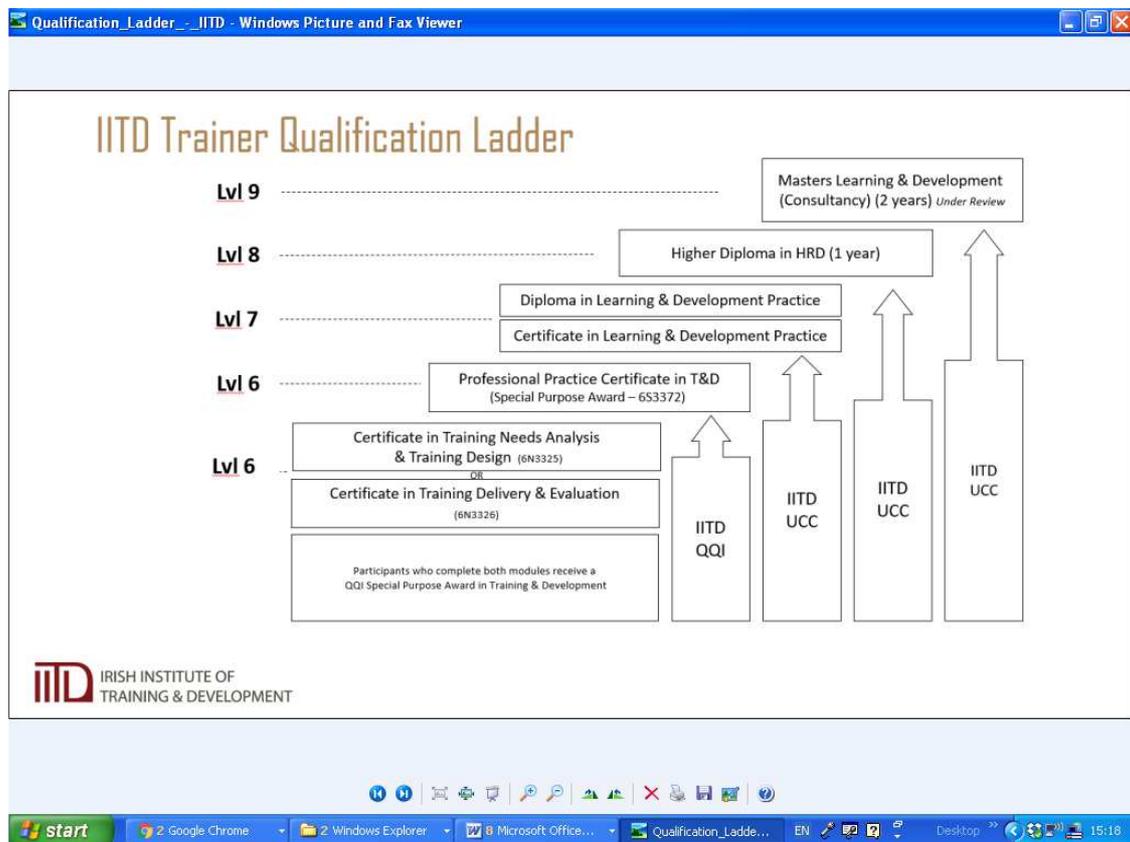
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### 3. A Note on Training and Development

The Irish Institute of Training and Development, founded in 1969, is the non-profit professional body representing members concerned with human resource training and development in Ireland. It has over 1,500 members who work in a variety of settings including business, industry, consultancy, voluntary, community, education and the public sector.

The Institute's education and continuing professional development offering consists of a range of programmes, from accredited courses in training and development, to 'Thought Leader' programmes, and the provision of bespoke training.

The Institute oversees the development and provision of a range of programmes, from foundation level to postgraduate, that lead to awards on the NFQ. The 'Qualification Ladder' diagram below summarises the positioning of these programmes on the NFQ.



Some programmes are delivered by, or on behalf of, the IITD itself, while others are delivered by a third-level institution, University College Cork.