



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

**QQI AWARDS STANDARDS
FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION
AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

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1 INTRODUCTION

These standards describe minimum expected learning outcomes for educational awards to be made following successful completion of an International Foundation Programme. There are two standards: one for prospective undergraduates and the other for prospective postgraduates.

Pre-higher Education Foundation Programmes for International Students (*International Foundation Programmes*) will be their first experience of education in Ireland for many people.

An International Foundation Programme can provide the formation necessary to enable an international student to meet the minimum academic requirements (all other things being equal) for participation in a higher education programme in an Irish higher education institution and to cope with living and studying in Ireland.

The minimum expected learning outcomes embedded in the standards are aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. International foundation programmes offering more than the minimum requirements might aim at qualifications at higher NFQ levels e.g. at level 6 (in which case the NFQ level 6 special purpose award-type descriptor should be satisfied simultaneously with these standards).

The minimum expected learning outcomes are organised under a number of themes (colour coded in the table in section 2) which include:

- The minimum overall standards of general education required to access higher education. The standards are at NFQ Level 5 and Level 8 respectively for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. These standards reflect the general educational requirements of typical programmes. The relevant NFQ level descriptors are set out in the yellow cells in the table in section 2.
- The minimum standard of English language proficiency required for successful participation in a wide range of higher education programmes. The standard is expressed (in the blue cells in the table in section 2) using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- The field-of-study or discipline-specific learning required for access to higher education programmes. These are set out in the green cells in the table in section 2.
- The knowledge, skill and competence required to prepare an international student to live and successfully participate in higher education study in Ireland.

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The minimum level of language competence that is generally considered adequate for successful participation in a wide range of higher education programmes is B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This level of English language proficiency should enable international students to progress to the institution of their choice and have a reasonable chance of successfully completing their higher education programme (including ongoing English language improvement) all other things being equal.

Please note that B2+ is the minimum expected level of English language competence **for** learners completing an International Foundation Programme, not the required level of English for entry to such programmes.

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

2 MINIMUM EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES: FOUNDATION QUALIFICATIONS

	Preparation for Undergraduate Programmes	Preparation for Postgraduate Programmes
NFQ Level and Award-type	NFQ Level 5 ¹ Special Purpose Award	NFQ Level 8 Special Purpose Award
Volume	Typically one academic year of student effort (meaning a comparable volume of learning to one year in a full-time typical higher education bachelor degree programme)	Variable
	Overall, the minimum expected learning outcomes as expressed in this column are at NFQ Level 5	Overall, the minimum expected learning outcomes as expressed in this column are at NFQ Level 8
Named Award	Level 5 Specific Purpose Certificate in International Foundation Studies	Level 8 Special Purpose Certificate in International Foundation Studies
Language Standard	<p>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages² (CEFRL) with B2+ performance level (Strong Vantage Performance) (see CEFRL Chapters 3, 4 and 5) in the context of the educational domain (CEFRL pp. 48-49).</p> <p>This is the level of language competence that is generally considered to be the minimum requirement for success (all other things being equal) in a higher education programme. Certain disciplines will require a higher level of competence for access to higher education programmes.</p>	<p>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) with B2+ performance level (Strong Vantage Performance) (see CEFRL Chapters 3, 4 and 5) in the context of the educational domain (CEFRL pp. 48-49).</p> <p>This is the level of language competence that is generally considered to be the minimum requirement for success (all other things being equal) in a higher education programme. Certain disciplines will require a higher level of competence for access to higher education programmes.</p>
Learning required to access a particular higher education programme	<p>Demonstrate knowledge, skill and competence required to access a particular higher education and training programme leading to a qualification at the specified NFQ Level (6, 7 or 8).</p> <p>This learning outcome may be achieved partially through prior learning but all International Foundation Programmes must specify progression arrangements for all who successfully complete.</p>	<p>Demonstrate knowledge, skill and competence required to access a particular higher education and training programme leading to a qualification at NFQ Level 9 or 10.</p> <p>This learning outcome may be achieved partially through prior learning but all International Foundation Programmes must specify progression arrangements for all who successfully complete.</p>
Carried forward learning outcomes	Not applicable.	The Knowledge, Skill and Competence required for Level 5 is also required for the Level 8 Qualification (in addition to the expected learning outcomes expressed in this column) and will not necessarily be repeated in the columns below.

1 Irish students normally access higher education on the basis of the Leaving Certificate which is placed at Level 4-5 on the NFQ.

2 http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (04/09/2014)

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Knowledge³		
Breadth	<i>Broad range of knowledge</i>	<i>An understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning</i>
Kind	<i>Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant depth in some areas</i>	<i>Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)</i>
Language and educational culture	<p>Demonstrate a level of proficiency in English language (CERFL B2+) that will enable them to learn from introductory subject matter in the relevant fields of study delivered through the medium of English.</p> <p>Demonstrate a knowledge of Irish/European educational culture that will enable them to cope with a typical Irish programme of higher education.</p>	<p>Demonstrate a level of proficiency in English language (CERFL B2+) that will enable them to learn from advanced subject matter in the relevant disciplines delivered through the medium of English.</p> <p>Demonstrate a knowledge of Irish/European educational culture that will enable them to cope with a typical Irish/European postgraduate programme of higher education.</p>
Intercultural awareness	Recognise and understand relevant differences in educational culture between their previous educational experience and higher education in Ireland and the implications for them as a student and demonstrate knowledge of effective coping methods and strategies for success.	
Understanding the learning process	Demonstrate an understanding of the academic and personal competencies required for a student to persist when facing the joint uncertainties of trying to learn a subject through a foreign language and study in an unfamiliar educational culture in a foreign country.	
Disciplinary awareness	Demonstrate awareness of the nature of study in their prospective broad discipline area.	

3 The yellow panels here and elsewhere in this document describe the general level of post foundation learning expected for access to higher education. The descriptors are part of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Know-how and skill		
Range	<i>Demonstrate a broad range of specialised skills and tools</i>	<i>Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of skills and tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity</i>
Selectivity	<i>Evaluate and use information to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to varied unfamiliar problems</i>	<i>Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing</i>
	Demonstrate ability in the context of their prospective field of study to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make independent use of a broad range of specialised academic skills and tools • Identify, interpret, and evaluate information in order to make reasoned judgements • Select, adapt, develop and employ a range of strategies to respond to problems not previously encountered. 	Demonstrate ability in the context of their prospective broad discipline area to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct guided academic research • Synthesize and apply a range of strategies to respond to complex scenarios.

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Competence		
Competence Context	<i>Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts</i>	<i>Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts</i>
	<p>Demonstrate in an Irish or European higher education context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Engage with the culture of learning that applies in higher education generally and in their field of study specifically » Transact effectively with the wider education system » Use their knowledge of the social and cultural landscape to identify opportunities to engage and cope effectively with living and studying in Ireland • an awareness of the academic and professional or scientific communities of relevant disciplines. 	
Competence Role	<i>Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities; join and function within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups</i>	<i>Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups</i>
	<p>Demonstrate, in an Irish or European higher education context an ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in an academic programme • Work individually • Work and communicate (through a variety of communications media) in cross-cultural groups • Successfully complete academic tasks using a range of skills and strategies • Take initiative and responsibility for their own learning. 	Demonstrate an ability to participate actively as a member of a research community in a relevant discipline.

QQI STANDARDS FOR PRE-HIGHER EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Competence		
Competence Learning to Learn	<i>Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment</i>	<i>Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically</i>
	Demonstrate, in an Irish or European higher education context, an ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on and develop their learning skills and competence • Develop diverse skills and strategies to cope with participation in a programme of higher education • Make judgements on how to complete academic tasks effectively • Make effective use of guidance. 	
Competence Insight	<i>Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour</i>	<i>Express a comprehensive, internalised, personal world view manifesting solidarity with others</i>
	Demonstrate, in an Irish or European higher education context an ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on educational ethics and related implications for participation in a programme of higher education • Reflect upon and express their individual educational beliefs, values, cognitive style and personality and be aware of the effect of these on their own and classmates' academic performance. • Evaluate feedback and formulate responses following appropriate reflection. 	

These QQI awards standards have benefited from the advice provided by the following group made up of a selection of individuals who have expertise relating to the provision of International Foundation Programmes.

- Declan Doyle Head of Development, Institute of Technology, Carlow
- Fiona Farr (Chair) Dean of Teaching and Learning, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Limerick
- Fiona Gallagher School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University
- Victoria Lindsay Director of Quality Development, QAA
- Richard McHugh Head of Business and Programme Development, Griffith Institute of Language, Griffith College Dublin
- Diane Schmitt Chair of BALEAP, Senior Lecturer, Nottingham Language Centre, Nottingham Trent University Engineering Centre,
- Gary Tennant Academic Manager, Atlas Language School, Dublin

3 ADDENDUM: QQI VALIDATION OF INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMMES

This addendum applies exclusively to the validation of international foundation programmes by QQI.

The overall purpose of a Pre-higher Education Foundation Programme for International Students (International Foundation Programme) is to support students from outside Ireland in making the transition required to successfully participate in higher education programmes offered in Ireland. They provide students from outside Ireland with opportunities to identify and address gaps in their learning so that following completion of the programme they are prepared to access and successfully participate in their chosen higher education programme.

At the end of an International Foundation Programme a student is expected to have acquired:

- a. English language skills for successful academic participation
- b. Learning skills
- c. Self-efficacy skills
- d. Discipline-area specific knowledge, skills and culture
- e. Cultural understanding

The standard's two sets of expected learning outcomes prescribe (minimum) end-point achievements (at NFQ Levels 5 and 8). A programme of education and training may be designed to enable a defined group of students to reach this standard. The required volume of learning will depend on the level of learning of the students at start of the programme. Considering the list of topics above, A and D are likely to account for most of the variation between different International Foundation Programmes.

3.1 Special Validation Conditions

The minimum intended programme learning outcomes must be consistent with the QQI Standards for Pre-Higher Education Foundation Awards for International Students.

Concerning topic 'D', International Foundation Programmes may be designed to enable learning to bridge between an Irish higher education institution's access requirements and a student's current educational qualifications. International Foundation Programmes offering such tuition and assessment must include arrangements for progression for all learners who successfully complete the programme to specific higher education programmes in identified higher education institutions.

This will require cooperation and formal agreement at a central senior level between the receiving higher education institution(s) and the provider(s) of the International Foundation Programme. In other words:

- a. There must be guaranteed progression pathways into specified HE programmes for all students who successfully complete the international foundation programme;
- b. Such progression pathways must be agreed centrally with the receiving HEI and student numbers on the IFY capped to reflect the capacity of the receiving HEI(s) to accept graduates;
- c. Evidence of such arrangements must be submitted with the application for validation to QQI.

Alternatives to International Foundation Programmes may be attractive to some students e.g. student participation in the Leaving Certificate Established programme and access to higher education through the CAO—this standard does not address such arrangements.

3.2 VALIDATION GUIDELINE

This standard is compatible with International Foundation Programmes of diverse pedagogical approaches and durations. The following validation guidance is expressed in the context of a one-year fulltime programme. It has proportionate implications for longer and shorter programmes.

There is a limited amount of learning that can be achieved in a one-year International Foundation Programme. For example, an English language standard of CEFRL B2+ at the end of a one academic year International Foundation Programme will not generally be achievable unless the level at entry is CEFRL B1+ assuming that half an academic year of learner effort is devoted to language learning.

3.3 INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMME DESIGN

As observed in section 3.1, a one year International Foundation Programme taking students at B1+ will require half of a year for English language learning to bring them to B2+. A significant proportion of the remainder will be required to address the other general outcomes identified in this guideline. The remaining time is available for subject-specific learning. This apportioning of time is an accounting mechanism and does not imply that the corresponding learning outcomes must or should be achieved independently.



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