

Access, Transfer & Progression: Policy

1 Preface

The Authority launched the National Framework of Qualifications and associated policies, including Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners, on 17 October 2003.

On 19 June 2003, FETAC launched its Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets out in the context of the National Framework, a clear vision for the work of the Council for the period 2003-2006. It also provides a plan of action with specific milestones.

The measurement of the achievement of the Strategic Plan is signalled by the performance indicators, which, in meeting the needs of learners, will include the range of opportunities for access, transfer and progression, offered by 2006. Enhancing the status and recognition of FETAC awards will be measured in part through the extent of recognition of awards.

This paper outlines an overview of FETAC's policies for Access, Transfer and Progression. Definitions of access transfer and progression are referred to below. The primary focus is on access transfer and progression among and between awards in the Framework, rather than to employment, although it is fully acknowledged that access and progression to and within employment is a central goal for the majority of learners, and indeed of many awards.

2 Background

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 links the facilitation of lifelong learning with the promotion of access, transfer and progression opportunities. Access, transfer and progression are defined and are conditional on learners receiving recognition for skills, knowledge or competence.

The promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression for learners are driving themes for complete realisation not only of the letter but also of the spirit of the Act.

The Authority published "Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners" in October 2003, to make the National Framework of Qualifications meaningful.

This document responds to four themes of the Authority which require specific policies, actions and procedures in relation to access, transfer and progression:

credit, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements, and information provision.

Specific roles for the Authority, the awards Councils and providers are set out in relation to credit, transfer and progression routes, entry arrangements and information protocols.

Essentially the Authority determines policy and procedures for access, transfer and progression. Providers must implement them. FETAC must monitor the implementation of these procedures by providers, and must co-ordinate some elements to be implemented by providers. Monitoring of provider compliance will happen in part through programme validation.

With regard to information provision the Authority requires the immediate compliance of providers, with co-ordination by FETAC of key elements.

These include, with regard to transfer and progression routes, the co-ordination of the identification of programme adaptations required to support achievement of all awards by learners. FETAC is to co-ordinate and map transfer and progression routes between awards, thus facilitating providers in compliance with the determinations of the Authority regarding transfer and progression. FETAC is to co-ordinate the development of comparable statements to be used by providers indicating the basis for successful participation leading to achievement of an award, and which may also inform providers making similar statements for each programme. FETAC is currently developing Guidelines for Providers arising from this policy document. A range of solutions are being considered by the Executive, based on a pragmatic approach to legacy awards and to the promotion of the Framework.

A national approach to credit is being lead by the Authority. FETAC is represented in this work. Credit is also linked to the recognition of prior learning, and of other certificated learning. FETAC is preparing policies and procedures for providers in both these areas.

The FETAC Strategic Plan 2003-2006 sets out the key elements of a vision for access, transfer and progression and points to the embedding of linked features into different functions. It also highlights some concrete outcomes for the Council, in that by 2006, there will be increased opportunities for FETAC graduates for access, transfer and progression.

Existing arrangements for access, transfer and progression for FETAC graduates vary according to the prior arrangements of the former awarding bodies. The strongest model for access to higher education for FETAC graduates is the Higher Education Links Scheme.

The Authority has noted that transfer and progression opportunities are weakest traditionally within the training sector, particularly from training into higher education.

The broader international and European context sets access, transfer and progression issues within the concept of mobility for citizens, facilitated by the genuine portability and recognition of qualifications achieved within member states. FETAC policy on Other Awards outlines the current approach to promoting mobility.

This Access, Transfer and Progression Policy has emerged through a range of initiatives of the Council. It is driven by legislation and by the role of the Council in ensuring that providers implement the determinations of the Authority published in

October 2003. As already noted, the FETAC Strategic Plan 2003-2006 makes reference to increased range of access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners in 2006.

A draft discussion paper was presented to the Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee of the Council in March 2004.

Primary consultation on this policy and on how the requirements for Providers may be met, has been with the Quality Assurance Consultation Group, in line with the recommendations of the Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee of the Council in March 2004.

The development of this policy has been informed also by development of specific policies in relation to the Recognition of Prior Learning, Recognition of Other Awards, and arising from analysis of determinations, policies and procedures of the Authority, by elements of almost all other areas of the Council activities- the development of awards, promotion of awards, development of standards, validation procedures and policy, and by the implementation of transition arrangements and placement of legacy awards process.

It is clear that there are general overarching policy directions that will endure into the future beyond the transition phase, but that are consistent with current needs.

There are also specific needs and opportunities that pertain to the transition phase, pre 2006, referring to Legacy Awards. Legacy awards will be replaced by "new" FETAC awards from 2005, which will have implicit greater opportunities for access, transfer and progression for learners. The opportunities that currently apply to legacy awards should not be lost in the future. This means that there is a very specific and tight time frame to enhance and consolidate opportunities for access, transfer and progression for legacy awards holders, some of whom will still be pursuing lifelong learning opportunities, perhaps on the basis of current legacy awards, into 2040.

This suggests two specific strands of activity for FETAC. One relates to the immediate legacy awards and the second, to future awards. The outcomes of both strands are compatible.

3 Aim of Access, Transfer and Progression Policy

The aim of FETAC's policy on access, transfer and progression is to ensure that all FETAC awards create multiple, transparent and equitable access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners, to other awards throughout the Framework.

This requires the enhancement and consolidation of existing opportunities for Legacy awards pre 2006 and the inherent construction of such opportunities within awards after the transition phase.

FETAC policy objectives are:

- to ensure coherence with regard to access, transfer and progression across all the Councils functions
- to comply with the legislation and the determinations of the Authority
- to develop national, transparent, equitable and inclusive opportunities for award holders, which reflect the parity of esteem with which each award is viewed, and also respect the different purposes of awards.

Arising from that

- to ensure that all FETAC awards lead to other progression opportunities within the FETAC range of awards
- to consolidate and enhance existing opportunities for all legacy awards.

The policy for access, transfer and progression is closely tied to the development of three other policy areas: Recognition of Other Awards, Recognition of Prior Learning, and the accumulation of credits. FETAC is working with the Authority on the development of a national credits system. FETAC policy on Recognition of Prior learning is under development. This suite of Council policies reflects a firm commitment to enabling full recognition of learners' skill, knowledge and competence.

Access, transfer and progression is also a thematic strand running across almost all other activities of the Council. Therefore, the principles that govern it must be compatible with those determined for other areas.

Equality, inclusion and progression are key considerations in relation to Council policy regarding access, transfer and progression. This means the inclusion of *all* awards, the consideration of *all* learners' access, transfer and progression requirements, *all* programmes carrying with them some transfer and progression opportunities and *all* awards being valued equally, and the outcomes of this consideration being made transparent to all learners.

This is in line with international and national research which indicates that generally actions around access, transfer and progression are driven by commitment to equality.

The Authority have adopted the same fundamental vision, values, principles and process guidelines for the development of access, transfer and progression as they did for the Framework. In short, the principles of inclusion- all learners, all awards, all programmes- and equality dominate. The Authority also emphasise transparency in terms of access to accurate information, for learners.

4 FETACs Access, Transfer and Progression Policy Statements

Five broad policy statements arise for FETAC, based on an analysis of elements of all Council functions relevant to access, transfer and progression, and from the requirements of the Act and of the Authority.

- i. All FETAC awards will create opportunities for access, transfer and progression for learners, appropriate to the purpose of the award.
- ii. The Council holds all its awards in equal esteem. A range in the purposes of awards and opportunities created by them reflects learner needs and goals.
- iii. Specific attention will be given to ensuring that opportunities currently existing for legacy awards will be documented, consolidated and enhanced during 2004-2006. This is in keeping with the spirit of the Legacy Awards Placement Process which aimed to ensure that learners' achievement continues to be valued. FETAC will work to ensure that access, transfer and progression opportunities apply to all FETAC graduates seeking opportunities in other programmes leading to FETAC awards.

- iv. Attention will also be given to the development of implicit opportunities pertaining to new awards in the post transition phase.

Particular attention will be given to the development of access, transfer and progression opportunities at entry, transition and exit points of the FETAC levels of the Framework.

Significant differences, if any, between the legacy and emerging new awards will be documented in the interests of transparency for learners. These differences will vary and may require bridging or other appropriate enabling means for learners holding Legacy awards to avail of the range of access, transfer and progression options implicit in the new award. This recording of significant difference and consideration of bridging arrangements will underpin and support recognition of prior learning, recognition of other certification and the development and application of a credit system.

- v. Provider compliance with access, transfer and progression opportunities will be monitored through FETAC agreement of Providers' Quality Assurance Systems for Providers and through the validation, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes. FETAC will support provider compliance through the publication of Guidelines for providers in relation to access, transfer and progression. These will match the outline provided by the Authority and will also include reference to information and marketing strategies. Guideline capacity-to-succeed statements will be developed by FETAC for legacy awards, based on the Award -type Descriptors and/or Level indicators, and for new awards, following the same template. Providers will be able to use and adapt these as required, thus enabling full provider compliance with the requirements of the Authority, and FETAC compliance with the requirement by the Authority to ensure that such statements are nationally comparable and co-ordinated.

5 Strategy

The methodology for the achievement of policy statements is indicated in outline below. See Appendix 1.

The first and second policy statements arise in part through the Framework itself and the subsequent creation of different award types. These statements are not new, and reflect not only existing Authority policy, but are some of the key factors that the Council will apply to the development of new awards post 2005. They equally reflect the approach taken by the Council in the adoption of transition phase arrangements pertaining to Legacy awards. All learning, and all awards, are valued equally.

Realisation of the third policy statement essentially requires a range of actions by FETAC with regard to Legacy Awards before 2006. Any such actions will be carried out in full consultation with the former awarding bodies. The creation and consolidation of opportunities for access, transfer and progression appropriate to the purpose of the award, involves the documentation of existing opportunities attached to such awards, consideration of the outcomes of the placement process for Legacy awards and of appropriate enhanced access, transfer and progression routes with the former awarding bodies. Much of this information exists through the Legacy Awards Placement documentation.

There is a particular opportunity to develop wider links to higher education and training for FETAC graduates holding training based awards. A basis for

development exists in the Higher Education Links Scheme. Relationships with e.g. the HEA, the National Access Office, the Institutes of Technologies and Universities and the NCGE will be consolidated.

The fourth policy statement requires the development and application of processes that enable documentation of the differences between new awards and those of former Legacy awards. Effective implementation of the third policy statement will provide a firm basis for the negotiation of implicit transfer and progression opportunities for new awards, through the strengthening of the partnership between former awarding bodies, FETAC and diverse stakeholders considering FETAC awards for the purposes of access, transfer and progression.

The final policy statement infers the publication of Guidelines for providers with specific focus on access, transfer and progression. Arising from this policy, and from the consultation phase of the FETAC Quality Assurance initiative, Guidelines will be developed and issued to providers in autumn 2004. Providers will be required to implement these from January 2005. Following the dissemination of the outcomes of the placement process for Legacy awards by the Authority, FETAC will disseminate general guideline capacity to succeed statements for use by providers in relation to legacy awards, based on the Award types and/or Levels indicators and synopses of the Framework. As providers implement the Guidelines through 2005, this will afford an opportunity for the development of national route maps for access, transfer and progression relating to the Framework.

Appendix 1: Action line

Dissemination and Publication of policy and Guidelines for Access, Transfer and Progression.

Development of guideline capacity to succeed statements for Legacy awards.

Documentation of existing opportunities pertaining to Legacy awards and consideration of whether and how these might be enhanced, in collaboration with former awarding bodies.

Provider implementation of access, transfer and progression requirements.

FETAC and former awarding body promotion of Legacy awards with a view to enhancing attached access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Consolidation of relationships with appropriate other bodies, particularly within the upper levels of the Framework.

Development of processes to enable documentation of the significant differences, if any, between new awards and standards and those of former Legacy awards.

Refinement and application of processes to enable documentation of the significant differences, if any between new awards and standards and those of former Legacy awards.

FETAC and former awarding body promotion of Legacy awards with a view to enhancing attached access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Commencement of negotiation of access, transfer and progression opportunities appropriate to the purposes of new awards.

Analysis of existing access, transfer and progression opportunities for awards and programmes arising from Provider implementation of FETAC access, transfer and progression policy and guidelines.

FETAC and former awarding body promotion of Legacy awards with a view to enhancing attached access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Commencement of development of national route maps for access, transfer and progression pertaining to FETAC Legacy awards

FETAC and former awarding body promotion of Legacy awards with a view to enhancing attached access, transfer and progression opportunities.

Summary Report to Council on final access, transfer and progression opportunities pertaining to awards prior to new awards in 2006

Enhancement of national route maps for access, transfer and progression opportunities pertaining to all FETAC awards.

Development of summary statements pertaining to new awards highlighting the differences between former award(s) and new, and options for bridging to new awards, where appropriate.

Development of guideline capacity to succeed statements accompanying new awards, summarising appropriate requirements for successful participation in programmes leading to this award, according to a common template.