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The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe

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CEDEFOP

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Foreword

This Cedefop report covers the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in the 27 members of the European Union, in two candidate countries to the EU (Croatia and Turkey) and in Iceland and Norway.

It confirms ([1]) the importance and priority attributed to NQFs across Europe. While this can be explained partly by the EQF and set deadlines ([2]), countries increasingly tend to see NQFs as key instruments influencing national policies and reforms in education, training and employment.

All the 31 countries ([3]) covered by the report aim to develop and introduce a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning responding to the EQF. The majority of these countries aim for comprehensive frameworks covering all levels and types of qualifications and seeking a stronger integration between them. This is a significant result as it shows an increased attention to the overall coherence and permeability of education and training systems and their ability to promote lifelong and lifewide learning.

The emerging NQFs reflect the national systems they are supposed operate within. While we can observe differences in specific objectives and in design features, it is generally accepted that frameworks should introduce an explicit set of qualifications levels and level descriptors, that they must reflect the learning outcomes approach and that a broad range of stakeholders – from education, training and employment – must be involved.

The analysis shows that countries have reached different stages of development and implementation. More countries are now moving from early conceptualisation and design to stakeholder consultations and advanced testing of their frameworks. In some cases (for example Belgium Flanders, Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal) formal adoption has been achieved. Those countries with already established frameworks (UK, Ireland, France) have carried out or are in the process

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[1]   Cedefop (2009). *Development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe (September 2009)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available from Internet:
http://cedefop.europa.eu/en/files/6104_en.pdf [cited 25.05.2010].

[2]   Countries are invited to refer their national qualifications levels to the EQF by 2010 and to introduce an explicit reference to EQF levels in their certificates and diploma by 2012.

[3]   Of the 32 countries having signed up to the EQF, Lichtenstein is the only one not developing a NQF for LLL. Lichtenstein is, however, developing a framework for HE in line with the Bologna process. A total of 34 NQFs are covered by the analysis, reflecting that the UK has separate NQFs for England/Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland and that Belgium is developing separate frameworks for Flanders and the French speaking community respectively.

of carrying out reviews. The recent external evaluation of the Irish Framework ([4]) draws attention to the long-term challenges of the practical implementation of frameworks.

This report pays particular attention to the relationships between the NQFs for lifelong learning (developed in response to the EQF) and the qualifications frameworks for higher education (developed in response the qualifications framework for European higher education area in the Bologna process). This relationship is at the core of the development of comprehensive frameworks and requires clarification and sometimes redefinition of the borderlines between existing education and training sub-systems (and stakeholders).

The sometimes tense discussions on the relationship between VET and HE remind us that the success of NQFs depends on their ability to involve stakeholders and to address conflicts of interest openly. The analysis shows that the involvement of stakeholders varies significantly between countries. If a significant number of countries establish 'pro forma' frameworks only loosely connected to the existing systems and practices this could undermine the overall positive developments which currently can be observed.

Overall there is strong national momentum in developing NQFs. Whether this momentum can be sustained and strengthened depends on the involvement of stakeholders and the extent to which they see the added value of the NQFs.

It is our hope that this second report will contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of NQFs, actively support the rich and intense dialogue currently taking place at national level in this field as well as inform national policy developments and reforms.

The conclusions drawn in this report are based on analysis and interpretation by Cedefop and do not reflect the points of view of those who have generously shared their knowledge and expertise with us ([5]).

As developments in this field are constant and rapid, Cedefop will continue to publish regular overviews of NQF developments in the coming period.

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([4]) Collins, Tom et al. (2009). *Framework implementation and impact study 2009. National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.* Available from Internet:
http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html [cited 24.06.2010].
([5]) See Annex 2.

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Introduction

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have, over a short period of time, developed into key instruments influencing national education, training and qualifications systems. While this phenomenon can be observed world-wide ([6]), European developments ([7]) are now particularly consistent and strong. The main reason for this is the development (since 2004) of the European qualifications framework (EQF). Formally adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2008, the EQF Recommendation introduced a strict timeframe ([8]) for countries to link their national qualifications systems to the European meta-framework. As this report shows, the majority of countries ([9]) consider the setting up of an NQF as the best way to address the agreed EQF objectives and target dates.

It would be wrong, however, to see European NQF developments as exclusively about aiding recognition of foreign qualifications and promoting cross-border mobility. European NQFs are increasingly taking on a national reform function aiming at making national qualifications systems more transparent, coherent and permeable. In some cases they try to redefine the way the different sub-systems of education and training and their qualifications are related to each other. Designing and implementing an NQF implies something more than agreeing on a set of technical features, for example a hierarchy of levels of learning or a register of certificates and diploma. Setting up an NQF is about creating a platform for dialogue involving as broad a group of stakeholders as possible. The breadth and depth of these (new) dialogues is an important first indicator of the importance attributed to the NQF in different countries. High level of involvement (including disagreement and controversy) signals that the framework is taken seriously and will probably influence existing structures, practices and interests; a lack of dialogue, involvement and ownership may indicate a potentially limited future impact of the framework.

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[6] The European Training Foundation (ETF) lists 120 countries with current NQF developments.

[7] Distinct from developments in other parts of the world, NQF developments in Europe focus on comprehensive NQFs, including qualifications awarded in general education, VET, HE and adult learning.

[8] Countries are invited to refer their national qualifications levels to the EQF by 2010 and to introduce a reference to the EQF levels in certificates and diploma by 2012.

[9] Of the 32 countries having signed up to the EQF, Lichtenstein is the only not developing an NQF for lifelong learning. Lichtenstein is, however, developing a framework for higher education in line with the Bologna process.

Covering developments in 31 countries (and 34 NQFs) (^{10}) this report shows that most European countries are at an early stage of NQF development. Only developments in the next few years will fully demonstrate the reform potential of the national frameworks and the extent to which they can improve existing education, training and qualifications structures and practices. This introductory chapter aims to draw together the main findings and observations from the national chapters and thereby identify some of the main challenges and opportunities.

The objectives of NQFs

NQFs play a key role in linking national qualifications systems to the EQF (and the qualifications frameworks for the European higher education area) reference levels and descriptors. International comparability and the need for a common qualifications language is of key importance to the countries covered by this report but the potential role of NQFs in improving national education, training and qualifications systems is increasingly acknowledged. The following objectives are presented by almost all countries, irrespective of the stage of NQF development. NQFs aim to:

(a) make national qualifications systems easier to understand and overview, both nationally and internationally;
(b) strengthen coherence of qualifications systems by connecting different parts of education and training and making it easier to understand;
(c) improving permeability of education and training by clarifying and strengthening the horizontal and vertical links within existing systems;
(d) support lifelong learning by making learning pathways visible and by aiding access, participation and progression;
(e) aid recognition of a broader range of learning outcomes (including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning);
(f) strengthen the link and improve the communication between education and training and the labour market;
(g) open up national qualification systems to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training (for example awarded by sectors);
(h) create a platform for cooperation and dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders;
(i) provide a reference point for quality assurance.

(^{10}) This reflects that the UK has separate NQFs for England/Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland and that Belgium is developing separate frameworks for Flanders and the French speaking community respectively.

Almost all these objectives are closely connected with the shift to learning outcomes taking place in most European countries. Without this systematic shift in the way we define and describe qualifications it is difficult to see how the NQF will be able to meet the above objectives. Alternatively the NQFs can be seen as a main instrument for systematically promoting the learning outcomes perspective and approach. As this report shows, the majority of countries give high priority to the learning outcomes approach, confirming its central role in reforming education, training and learning.

While many of the referred objectives are shared between countries, certain specific national objectives can be identified. In Germany, the new national framework is seen by some stakeholders as an instrument able to reduce traditional barriers within education and training, for example by addressing the lack of equivalence between vocationally and academically oriented qualifications. In many of the newer Member States the perceived problem is that education and training do not meet labour market needs: the frameworks may provide a common language enabling a better dialogue. In Denmark, Austria, Finland and Sweden, frameworks are being designed to include qualifications acquired outside the traditional formal system and training (e.g. originating from professional training in occupations or awarded by sectors). An important objective in many countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia) is to use the framework developments to strengthen and better integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Roles and functions of NQFs

David Raffe (2009) ([11]) distinguishes between three types of frameworks. His main distinction is between communication and reforming frameworks. The main role of the communication frameworks is to improve the description of existing qualifications systems and thereby clarify available options for stakeholders, be these learners or policy makers. The communication framework is thus about making better use of what is already there. The reforming framework aims (explicitly) to improve the existing system by strengthening its coherence, relevance and quality. Part of this reform may imply the development of new pathways and programmes or to change the division of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. The third type of framework identified by Raffe is the transformational framework. The first generation South African framework (1994) is frequently used as an

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([11]) Raffe. D. (2009). National Qualifications Frameworks in Ireland and Scotland: A Comparative Analysis. Available from Internet: http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/NQF_ECER_2009.pdf [cited 25.05.2010].

example of this, radically breaking away from previously existing institutional arrangements and practices. While the last category is unlikely in the European situation, the main distinction between communication and reform frameworks can be further explained by the extent to which legal and administrative regulation is used and whether frameworks can be described as tight or loose.

Most NQFs in Europe have been presented as communication frameworks aiming to make education, training and qualification systems visible and more understandable to different stakeholders (students, employers, providers, and teachers) and to clarify the vertical and horizontal links between different types of qualifications. Increasing transparency of education, training and qualification systems and singular qualifications in terms of leaning outcomes is seen as a prerequisite for addressing the objectives listed previously.

Some countries explicitly point to the reforming role of the new frameworks (for example Croatia, Iceland and Poland). These countries see the NQFs as an opportunity to change the existing education and training, using the frameworks as reference point for reform. This can imply that the NQF is given a regulatory role where it will directly influence the design, provision and award of qualifications. The qualifications and credit framework (QCF) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is an example of such a regulatory framework which set very clear criteria for qualifications and thereby directly influences design of qualifications and recognition ([12]). The same can be said for the French framework, where the national certification committee operates as a gatekeeper and regulates not only which qualifications should form part of the framework, but also how they should be described and according to which criteria.

The rules on design, provision and award of qualifications are traditionally the responsibility of each education and training sub-system ([13]). NQFs can change this by serving as an external and shared reference point. Whether the emerging European NQFs should be understood as communication or reforming frameworks will depend on whether they actively inform and influence the definition and description of qualifications. It will also depend on whether they take on the role of national gatekeepers, thus defining the scope and character of the overall national qualification system.

([12]) See Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework, August 2008.
 Available from Internet:
 www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_regulations.asp
 [cited 25.05.2010].
([13]) Cedefop (2010). Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks. An international
 comparative analysis. Available from Internet:
 http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/15974.aspx [cited 10.06.2010].

NQFs may have different functions and goals for different education and training systems. In Ireland, the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) has a stronger reforming and regulatory role in some subsystems (vocational and further education and non-university higher education) than in others (notably general education and universities) ([14]). The coming years will show what roles and functions the emerging NQFs will have in relation to different education and training subsystems.

In general, and reflecting continuing national developments, the distinction between communication and reforming frameworks is becoming less clear-cut. In some cases we can observe that ambitions change as the process moves on. This is well illustrated in the recently completed evaluation of the Irish framework where the incremental character of the process is underlined, showing that targets and visions will change as stakeholders get involved in the continuous process of framework development and implementation.

Stages of NQF development

The development and implementation of NQFs in the 31 countries covered by this report can be broadly distinguished as follows:
(a) conceptualisation and design; during this stage countries analyse and define the rationale and main policy objectives of the future NQF, in many cases resulting in an outline providing the basis for wider dissemination and discussion;
(b) consultation and testing; during this stage the NQF proposal is presented to and discussed within a broader group of stakeholders, normally as part of a public consultation process. Many countries decide to test the proposed NQF level descriptors through projects in selected economic areas;
(c) official establishment/adoption; at this stage the NQF is adopted and established, normally taking the form of a decree/law or in a formal agreement between stakeholders;
(d) practical implementation; this stage moves the framework towards full scale applied practice and requires that institutions comply with the new structures and methods and that potential end-users are fully informed about the purposes and benefits of the framework. Eventually the NQFs must deliver benefits to end users, individuals and employers.

([14]) Allais, Stephanie.; Raffe, David; Young, Michael (2009). *Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues.* Geneva: ILO. Employment Working Paper No. 44. Available from Internet: http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_119307/index.htm [cited 25.05.2010].

In the Cedefop project Changing qualifications (to be published in 2010), the following policy development stages have been identified. Although developed for qualifications systems in general, this approach is also relevant to NQF developments and has informed the stages presented and applied above:

(a) policy discussions: no concrete implementation, for example discussions about the best approach to recognising the qualifications of immigrants;

(b) policy: the direction is set but there is no concrete implementation yet, for example a law is passed to develop an NQF;

(c) implementation: the infrastructure for change is put in place such as funding, management and a communications strategy, for example a body is set up to manage and coordinate the assessment and validation of experience in private companies;

(d) practice through pilot schemes: people use the new arrangements, for example a learner is taught and assessed according to a new modular programme and qualification;

(e) full scale applied practice: all old methods are adapted to the new methods;

(f) effect: the new system delivers benefits to individuals, organisations and society, for example more adult learners are engaged in lifelong learning and skills supply to the labour market is improved.

Compared to the first full review of NQF developments published by Cedefop in September 2009 ([15]), countries are making progress. A significant number of countries have moved on, in most cases moving from the early conceptualisation and design stage into consultation/testing (Finland) and official adoption (Lithuania). Norway, the most recent participant, has now decided to develop a comprehensive NQF, reflecting a lengthy national discussion on the strategy in this area.

Conceptualisation and design

Belgium (Wallonia), Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia and Sweden have still to decide on the precise scope and structure of their frameworks. In some cases this reflects that work started recently (Netherlands), in other cases debates on how to move forward are continuing: in Italy lack of agreement regarding the relationship between the regions and the federal level has delayed clarification. Working groups of stakeholders from education, training and the labour market have been assembled in all these countries, in the majority of cases working towards clear deadlines for when to come up with a proposal (October-December 2010). –

([15]) Cedefop (2009). *Development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe (September 2009).* Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available from Internet:
http://cedefop.europa.eu/en/files/6104_en.pdf [cited 25.05.2010].

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Iceland, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey have largely decided on the overall scope and structure of their frameworks and are now focusing on completing (definition and agreement) level descriptors, the division of roles of different stakeholders, the responsibilities of institutions and the relationship between different subsystems (VET and HE in particular). In most of these countries the work on a qualifications framework for higher education has been going on for some time and their links to the remaining parts of the education and training system (general compulsory education and VET) is a common discussion topic. In some countries, notably Belgium (Wallonia), Spain and Romania, HE frameworks are weakly linked to the overall structure, illustrated by the use of separate level descriptors for these qualifications.

We can identify a clear dividing line between countries in the use of learning outcomes or competence based approaches. Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden have already carried out major national reforms based on learning outcomes and are using this for the new NQFs. Belgium, Italy and Romania have carried out some learning outcomes based reforms, but these are in many cases restricted to sub-systems and of limited scope and influence. Other countries, for example Cyprus, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland and Turkey, are relatively new to the learning outcomes approach. These different starting positions may influence the way NQFs move from conceptualisation to full practical implementation. It is interesting to note that the attention given to learning outcomes approaches is becoming stronger; Poland, for example, has initiated a broad programme to promote the use of learning outcomes in higher education, systematically working with institutions and practitioners.

Some countries have registers of qualifications in place (e.g. Hungary, the Netherlands and Romania) and are strengthening the involvement of employers and employees in qualifications developments, for example through sector councils and committees (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Slovenia).

Consultation and testing stage

Several countries, such as Germany, Austria and Finland, have carried out extensive consultation and/or testing. In Austria, extensive consultation was completed at the end of 2008; in Finland this was carried out during the autumn of 2009. Greece is currently carrying out a national consultation and Cyprus has signalled the same intention. By broadening the group of potential stakeholders involved in the discussion, the consultation stage plays a key role in clarifying the purpose and legitimacy of the framework (in both in the Austrian and Finnish cases broad support for the NQF was expressed). The extent to which legitimacy is strengthened depends on the thoroughness of preparatory work carried out in the

first (design and conceptualisation) stage. The degree of debate and involvement observed in Austria and Germany in the early stages of developments contrasts with the relatively limited involvement and engagement observed in some other countries. It is also worth noting that countries differ in terms of the use of research to prepare discussions and developments: the German and Austrian efforts have played an important role in clarifying options.

The German testing of its framework in four selected sectors (IT, metal, health and trade) can both be seen as a way to strengthen the technical design-features of the framework and as a way to strengthen its overall legitimacy among key stakeholders. Now reaching its final stages, this testing has pointed to the challenges involved in strengthening the permeability of education and training systems, notably on how better to link VET and HE. A number of other countries have also entered into extensive testing, for example Italy where learning outcomes based methodology has been applied in tourism and the mechanical sector and is now being further tested in the chemical, food and agriculture sectors.

Official establishment and adoption

Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal have formally adopted their frameworks (through decrees or a laws). A number of other countries (Croatia and Finland) expect such a decree or law to be adopted during 2010. It is important to notice that the choice of legal instruments reflects national traditions. While most countries originally started their work by adopting a decree or law (for example the Czech Republic in 2006), others use a more incremental strategy, moving forward on the basis of existing legal arrangements and/or administrative decisions. The Danish and Icelandic frameworks both refer to recent education and training reform but do not propose any independent NQF legislation. The evidence provided by this report, however, shows that NQFs in the next few years are likely to influence the legal basis of national education and training systems. This will normally not take place through the adoption of one single legal act, but by the revision of a broad range of decrees and laws. The Polish case illustrates this; an analysis is currently being carried out to identify how the new NQF will influence the numerous laws and decrees currently in place.

Practical implementation and revision

Ireland, France, and the UK have been working on NQFs for the last decade (or more) and reached an advanced stage of implementation. All these first generation frameworks are currently undergoing (or have recently completed) reform and revision. The existing five-level structure of the French framework is currently being revised, possibly giving way to an eight-level structure. The role of the national

committee administering the framework (CNCP) (^{16}) has also been strengthened in the last year. The adoption of the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) for England and Northern-Ireland (in 2008) exemplifies how frameworks evolve, in this case by firmly integrating credit transfer into the structure and accompanying practices. The recent external evaluation of the Irish Framework (NQAI September 2009) (^{17}) draws attention to a number of factors important for practical implementation. The evaluation emphasises the need for time in which to develop familiarity with the framework, the need for an iterative process of development and support from different stakeholders, the need for the framework to be 'loose' enough to accommodate different types of learning and, not least, the need to balance implementation within sub-systems with the need to introduce system-wide approaches. The report also emphasises the importance of further strengthening the visibility of the framework in relation to the labour market (assisting the development of career pathways, certifying learning achievements acquired at work, for guidance purposes). However, the study emphasised the emerging impact of the NQF on learners in terms of new opportunities for progression and impact on teaching and learning processes (^{18}) (^{19}).

Overlapping stages

The four main stages described above are partly overlapping. There is, for example, not always a clear-cut distinction between conceptualisation/design and consultation/testing. The German developments illustrate this: the extensive testing plays an important part for technical development and refinement as well as for strengthening the credibility of the new framework among key-stakeholders. This is also the case in Belgium (Wallonia). Based on developments so far it seems clear that the level of 'NQF-preparedness' differs. The following factors seem to be of particular importance:

(^{16}) Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle (CNCP, National committee on vocational qualifications).

(^{17}) Collins, Tom et al. (2009). *Framework Implementation and Impact Study, 2009.* National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The study concluded with nineteen recommendations concerning the further implementation of the Framework and access, transfer and progression. The study is available on http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html [cited 24. 06. 2010].

(^{18}) Even though this impact has been slower than expected.

(^{19}) Collins, Tom et al. (2009). *Framework implementation and impact study 2009.* National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, p. 29. Available from Internet: http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html [cited 24.06.2010].

(a) the extent to which learning outcomes is accepted and used for defining and describing qualifications (in the national system as a whole and in its different subsystems) [20];

(b) the extent to which countries already have developed national standards (occupational, educational) [21];

(c) the extent to which qualifications registers have been established and clarify the scope of the national qualifications system and the relationship between single qualifications;

(d) the extent to which cooperation with labour market actors have been formalised (e.g. through sector councils);

(e) the extent to which validation of non-formal and informal learning is integrated into the national qualifications systems;

(f) the extent to which pathways have been established between institutions in different subsystems and thus influence access, progression and transfer.

Some countries will be able to 'tick off' almost all the issues listed above. While these countries will be able quickly to put in place a functional NQF, the mid- and long-term impact of an NQF may very well be as big in countries able to use the NQF as an active and consistent instrument to pursue these issues.

Main characteristics of NQF design

Most countries aim at a comprehensive NQF [22] covering all levels and types of qualifications and based on a single national structure of qualifications levels and descriptors. In a number of cases framework developments have already been initiated in sub-systems and have occasionally developed into sub-frameworks [23], notably for higher education (as part of the Bologna process) and for VET (frequently accompanied by a strategy for developing standards and setting up registers of VET qualifications).

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[20] Cedefop (2009). *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Cedefop reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3054_en.pdf [cited 24.06.2010].

[21] Cedefop (2009). *The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Cedefop panorama series). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5195_en.pdf [cited 24.06.2010].

[22] They are comprehensive in the sense that they cover qualifications awarded at all levels and in all subsystems of education and training (including general, VET and higher education, adult learning).

[23] A sub-framework is a framework which covers only one sub-system (e.g. VET, HE) and is part of a overarching comprehensive framework.

NQFs and integration

The explicit aim of these comprehensive frameworks is to strengthen the coherence of the overall national qualification system and to improve the interaction between sub-systems of education and training. Bjørnåvold and Coles ([24]) touch this issue by focusing on the degree of integration aimed at and achieved by the NQF. The main distinction introduced is between sector, bridging and integrating frameworks. While the first category contains no explicit links between independent sector frameworks (for example VET and HE frameworks), the bridging framework introduces common levels offering minimum formal links but retaining the independence of the sector frameworks. The integrating model will operate with a single set of levels and descriptors and use this for all sub-systems. In this last case separate sector frameworks will not be operational. The challenge of integration can be addressed by the following questions:

- what is gained and what is lost by seeking closer integration of education and training sub-systems and institutions; how should cohesion and specialisation be balanced?

- what is gained and what is lost by developing a common set of levels and descriptors covering all types and levels of qualifications; is there a danger that the particular objectives of sub-systems (VET, HE) is being compromised by a quest for lifelong and lifewide learning?

- which learning outcomes are most critical; what balance should be struck between knowledge, skills, autonomy, responsibility, attitudes etc.?

While concrete solutions reflect highly diverse national structures, cultures and traditions, continuing developments are largely circling around the above questions and we can observe three main tendencies in the design of NQFs for strengthening the integration of education and training sub-systems and institutions.

A first group of NQFs can be identified which are characterised by a coherent set of level descriptors, spanning all levels of education and training and where increased coherence is an explicit vision. These frameworks come close to the integrating (also unitary) national qualifications framework identified above. These frameworks try to clarify the relationship between qualifications and show how they can be accumulated and combined according to the needs of the individual in question (and not only according to the more limited logic of the education and training provider). Based on learning outcomes, this approach can make it possible to judge whether, for example, a VET qualification can form a basis for a HE

([24]) Bjørnåvold, Jens; Coles, Mike. *Added value of national qualifications frameworks in implementing the EQF*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. (European Qualifications Framework Series: Note 2). Available from Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note2_en.pdf [cited 10.06.2010].

qualification. These countries emphasise the need for systems to be permeable and for better horizontal and vertical progression (Ireland, France, Malta and UK-Scotland). The draft Croatian, German, Icelandic and Polish frameworks are all building on broad and comprehensive level descriptors and indicate that higher levels may be open to qualifications awarded outside HE institutions.

A second group of countries has introduced a distinction between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8, the latter being restricted to qualifications awarded by traditional higher education institutions (in compliance with the three Bologna cycles). This seems to be the case in Belgian (Wallonia), Danish and Romanian frameworks, where the integrating function of the frameworks is relatively modest, limiting accumulation and progression to existing sub-systems of education and training. The approach also implies that higher level qualifications are defined according to institution, not learning outcomes. While there is still a comprehensive framework covering all levels and types of qualifications, the links between the education and training sub-systems is weaker and only partly challenges existing institutional borderlines and divisions of roles and responsibilities.

A third group of countries, including Belgium (Flanders) and Austria has reached a compromise where levels 6-8 have been divided into parallel strands. One covers academic qualifications (Bologna process), the other is for vocationally or professionally higher level qualifications awarded outside the higher education institutions. In some cases the same level descriptors are used for the two strands (Belgium, Flanders), in other cases two strands are using different descriptors. Coming close to what elsewhere has been termed a bridging framework, this approach tries to balance the emphasis on coherence with a clear acknowledgement of the need for and relevance of a sub-framework (e.g. for HE, VET) and the development of more detailed level descriptors for these.

Diverse developments in Member States so far indicate that the following dimensions will influence the degree of coherence between and integration of education and training sub-systems and the implementation of truly comprehensive frameworks:

(a) existence of an explicit and coherent set of levels spanning all qualifications;

(b) whether a coherent set of level descriptors has been developed spanning all levels of qualifications;

(c) the extent to which qualifications are defined in terms of learning outcomes (or compatible conceptual terms);

(d) the extent to which credit arrangements are used (and whether compatible criteria for awarding credits are used across sub-systems);

(e) whether common criteria regarding the design and award of qualifications are used;

(f) the extent to which qualifications will be referenced to the national levels according to the same criteria;

(g) whether a coherent set of quality assurance procedures will be applied across levels and types of qualifications;

(h) whether a common register of qualifications is being developed or not;

(i) the balance between centralised, national coordination and autonomy of sub-systems and their institutions.

These dimensions can be used to monitor and better understand the integrating function of frameworks. This approach will complement and improve existing efforts to categorise NQF developments.

Number of levels

Six countries (Italy, Hungary the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia and Sweden) have still to make a decision on the number of levels to be used in their frameworks. Most other countries have proposed or adopted eight levels. While this is partly inspired by the EQF, countries very much stress that the choice of eight levels has been based on a thorough analysis of existing national qualifications systems. It is interesting to note that France, currently basing its framework on a five-level structure introduced in 1969, is considering the shift to an eight-level structure. The broad consensus on an eight-level structure is contrasted with the frameworks of the UK and Ireland. Scotland now operates with 12 levels, Wales and England/Northern Ireland with nine (including entry level) and Ireland with 10. Iceland also decided to have a 10-level framework (additionally to seven-level structure, three entry levels have been introduced). The Polish draft framework suggests a seven-level structure as the most appropriate for national needs. Croatia and Slovenia have addressed the question of sublevels: Slovenia has introduced sublevels for levels six and eight, Croatia at levels four, five, seven and eight.

The decision of the UK, and also Iceland, to include entry-levels into their frameworks, addresses the challenge of how to include and reward learning elementary achievements, for example below EQF level 1. Entry (or access) levels were initially discussed in Belgium (Flanders) and Hungary, but eventually not included in these frameworks. The reason for this inBelgium was a fear that such a level could have a stigmatising effect. The Hungarian proposal for a 'level zero' would mainly concern the learning taking place before entering primary education, e.g. in kindergarten. Kindergarten (and the testing of school maturity) is seen as an integrated part of a lifelong learning approach and should be made explicit by a comprehensive framework. The entry levels of Iceland and the UK build on a different philosophy as they are supposed to assist a wide group of lifelong learners, such as individuals with learning difficulties, drop-outs from formal education and

adults lacking formal qualifications, to be able to link into the main qualifications ladder.

The profile of level descriptors

Though there is limited controversy regarding the number of levels in the different frameworks, the articulation of level descriptors is more challenging. While the national descriptors have to be sufficiently generic to be linked to the EQF, they also need to be sufficiently specific and precise to be able capture the diversity of national qualifications in existence. Defining the profile of level descriptors also raises a number of questions regarding the overall profile of education, training and qualifications. Should priority be given to theoretical knowledge and academic research, how should knowledge and skills be balanced in qualifications, and what should be expected as regards social competences and personal attitudes? The definition of level descriptors suggests key national debates on the main priorities and profile of national education, training and learning strategies. Based on national level descriptors ([25]) available May 2010, some main tendencies in the articulation of level descriptors can be identified (see also Annex 1):

Descriptors differ in terms of overarching concept. Most countries use variations of the EQF learning outcomes based approach, distinguished according to knowledge, skills and competence. A few, the Czech Republic, Germany and Lithuania, use competence as an overarching concept. This reflects existing national approaches and traditions and is likely to be used also by some other countries (for example the Netherlands). As illustrated by the examples in Annex 1, these conceptual differences do not significantly reduce the comparability of the different national descriptors (towards the EQF or towards other national descriptors).

Descriptors differ in terms of detail. Those developed for the first generation of Frameworks, for example Scotland and Ireland, are lengthier than those developed after the launching of the EQF. The influence of the EQF descriptors in terms of overall approach at national level, in particular as regards length of descriptions, is clearly seen. An exception is the descriptors of the Czech Republic which stands out from the remaining descriptors with a strong occupational and functional orientation.

([25]) At the time of writing, 15 complete national level descriptors were available. These included Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, UK (England-Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland). The sample thus covers descriptors from four already established NQFs (Ireland and the three UK frameworks); those remaining represent the new and emerging frameworks. A number of other national level descriptors are currently being prepared but have not been deemed ready for publication.

This reflects national reforms dating back to 2003-04, thus preceding the EQF developments.

Descriptors are largely consistent as regards the understanding of knowledge. Distinctions like factual/theoretical and concrete/abstract are used to orient the description of knowledge. The German approach also distinguishes between terms like professional knowledge, occupational knowledge and theoretical/professional knowledge.

Descriptors are largely consistent as regards the understanding of skills. A distinction like cognitive/motor skills, cognitive/practical skills, and theoretical/ practical skills dominates. We can also observe the use of specialised skills and tools, functional competences, routine skills and techniques etc.

Specifications of context is used (explicitly and implicitly) to distinguish between qualifications levels. Three countries, Belgium (Flanders), Ireland and Lithuania use context as an explicit criterion to be covered by the descriptors. While other countries fail to introduce context as an explicit criterion, it is of crucial importance and is addressed by indicating the complexity, the changeability and the unpredictability of situations where qualifications are to be applied.

The terms autonomy and responsibility, introduced by the EQF as a way to clarify and limit the term competence, are used by all countries to distinguish between levels of qualifications.

Countries have used a number of other additional concepts to be able to tailor the descriptors to their specific national needs. Finland introduces the terms management and entrepreneurship, evaluation and key skills for lifelong learning. The last category is interesting as it draws attention to learning to learn, communication and the command of languages. The German descriptors points in the same direction, not least through the distinction between social competences and self competences. Ireland distinguishes between aspects like learning to learn and insight, Malta between communication, judgement and learning skills and Scotland between generic cognitive skills, communication, ICT, accountability and teamwork.

The level descriptors prepared so far show that countries are not merely copying EQF descriptors. Instead we can see the development of descriptors specific to the national context and therefore varying considerably in terms of conceptual approach and detail. While this is a positive and necessary development, the available cases also include a strong common perspective. Concepts and words differ somewhat but the same basic approach is used when distinguishing between levels of qualifications. This is particularly noticeable in the way the third column of the EQF is interpreted nationally: terms like context, autonomy and responsibility play a key

role in distinguishing between levels and for establishing a common core language to be used at national and European level.

Challenges ahead

- European NQFs are being developed under considerable external pressure. The European initiatives have acted as catalysts and significantly speeded up developments. This is positive as it creates momentum and allows parallel processes to open up for extensive peer learning and cooperation. The speed may prove negative in the sense that countries may be tempted to create 'pro forma' qualifications framework not sufficiently embedded in national structures and practices.
- The success of the NQF depends on the shift to learning outcomes. While being accepted as relevant by most countries and in most sectors, practical implementation is uneven and sometimes slow. Without a consistent implementation of learning outcomes, NQFs will not succeed.
- The success of the NQFs in terms of being able to increase access and promote progression in education and training depends on their ability to aid support functions like validation of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer arrangements.
- The development of comprehensive frameworks runs the risk of becoming less 'fit for purpose' for sub-systems (general education, VET and higher education). A challenge in the coming period will be to balance the need for overall permeability and the need for sector-wise specialisation and specificity.
- NQF success is directly linked to the success in involving stakeholders and in being willing to discuss existing challenges openly.
- There will be a need to develop systematic monitoring, research and evaluation strategies. Indicators need to be developed to allow for better understanding of conditions for success (and for reaching end-users; individuals, employers).
- The success of the NQFs also requires that the following issues to be addressed:
  (a) how can frameworks be sustained financially? Many countries are basing their NQF developments on European Social Fund resources: can this be continued? Can cost-benefit analyses be developed?
  (b) how are NQFs developments embedded in the broader skills developments strategies linked to technological change, skills shortages in Member States?
  (c) how NQF can better link inputs and outcomes; how can NQFs be used to develop new curricula and assessment procedures?
  (d) how can NQFs be made visible to end users

AUSTRIA

Introduction

Introduction of the national qualifications framework (NQF) is broadly supported by all main political stakeholders in Austria. According to the government programme (2008-13) ([26]) it is expected that all Austrian national qualifications will be included in the eight-level national structure by 2013.

The NQF development process started after the EQF consultation process in January 2007. Most Austrian stakeholders involved in the consultation process agreed on the need for developing an NQF. The first 'fact-finding phase' (February to October 2007) aimed to gather and analyse information, to do research work ([27]) and to prepare a consultation paper.

The work formed the basis for a national consultation process taking place in the period January to June 2008. A total of 270 responses were received and the expert team presented its conclusions and recommendations in November 2008 to the National steering group. The resulting report *(Konsolidierung der Stellungnahme zum Konsultationspapier)* identified a number of open questions ([28]) and was used by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research to prepare a policy paper (October 2009 ([29])) outlining the strategy for the implementation of the Austrian NQF.

This strategy in particular clarifies the relationship between qualifications at levels 1-5 and 6-8. Qualifications at levels 1-5 from all sectors of education and training will be referenced according to the same set of level descriptors. At levels 6-8 two sets of level descriptors will be used, allowing academically and vocationally oriented qualifications to coexist ([30]). Dublin descriptors will be used for allocating qualifications related to Bologna cycles (BA, MA, Doctorate) and awarded by HE institutions (i.e. universities, universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and

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([26]) Regierungsprogramm der 24. Gesetzgebungsperiode (2008-2013), available from Internet www.austria.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=32965 [cited 16.3. 2010].

([27]) Markowitsch, Jörg (2009). Der Nationale Qualifikationsrahmen in Österreich: Beiträge zur Entwicklung. Vienna: Lit Verlag. (Studies in Lifelong Lerarning, 3).

([28]) All documents are available from the Internet of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/eubildung/nqr/nqr_sn.xml [cited, 16.3.2010] or on the website of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research http://www.bmwf.gv.at/wissenschaft/national/nqr/ [cited, 16.3.2010].

([29]) *Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich – Schlussfolgerungen, Grundsatzentscheidungen und Maßnahmen nach Abschluss des NQR-Konsultationsverfahrens,* prepared by the NQF project group of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. 2009. Unpublished.

([30]) *Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich,* p. 7.

university colleges for teacher education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). VET qualifications and qualifications from adult learning will be allocated to the NQF based on EQF descriptors and additional criteria.

The explanatory tables with criteria and procedures for referencing qualifications to the level of the NQF are currently being developed. The main principle is to use 'reference qualifications' as an orientation for placing qualifications to the NQF levels.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main objective of the Austrian NQF is to map all officially recognised national qualifications and present them in relation to each other and to make implicit levels of the Austrian qualification system explicit, nationally as well as internationally. The specific objectives are to:

(a) assist referencing of Austrian qualifications to the EQF and thus strengthen the understanding of Austrian qualifications internationally;

(b) make qualifications easier to understand and compare for Austrian citizens;

(c) improve permeability between VET and HE by developing new pathways and open new progression possibilities;

(d) reinforce the use of learning outcomes in standard-setting, curricula and assessment;

(e) support lifelong learning and enable stronger links between the adult learning sector and formal education and training;

(f) recognise a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning).

The NQF development process is organised into three strands (*Korridore*): formal qualifications, qualifications acquired in non-formal learning (for example in adult education institutions outside the formal education and training system) and informal learning. The policy paper ([31]) suggests some steps for including non-formal qualifications in the NQF. A conceptual paper will be prepared and pilot projects carried out on how to describe these qualifications in the terms of learning outcomes. Discussion will start with all relevant stakeholders on linking validation and allocation of non-formal qualifications to the NQF and on establishing validation and quality assurance procedures.

([31]) *Aufbau eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Österreich,* p. 11.

Involvement of stakeholders

The General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has initiated and is coordinating NQF development in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research which is in charge of higher education.

In 2006, an NQF project group was set up. It included representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. The group coordinated the NQF agendas within both ministries and is responsible for strategic planning, commissioning research studies and communication with stakeholders. Members of this group were the director general for VET (Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture) as chair, the director general for universities and universities of applied science (Federal Ministry for Science and Research) as joint chair and coordinators of several departments of these two ministries (VET; general education; adult education and lifelong learning; management of staff and school; research; universities and universities of applied sciences).

In February 2007, a national NQF steering group was set up. It is a decision-making body and includes 23 members covering all the main stakeholders (all relevant ministries, social partners and *Länder*). The main task of this group is to coordinate the implementation of the NQF and to make sure that the framework reflects the interests of stakeholders. Since qualifications and validation policies require cross-sector cooperation, ensuring coordination and ownership is of crucial importance for success.

A subgroup of the national steering group has been established. Its task is to prepare the meetings of the national steering group, discuss relevant issues and prepare working papers.

Separate working groups have been set up (2006) to pursue the development of a qualifications framework for higher education. Involved in this work are the different departments within Federal Ministry for Science and Research, the students' union, universities and universities of applied sciences. Self-certification to the QF-EHEA is expected by the end of 2010.

Levels and descriptors

Since 2007 Austrian stakeholders have been involved in intense discussions on the character of a future NQF. Central to this discussion has been the need to clarify the

main concepts and functions, in particular how the new learning outcomes-based level descriptors will influence the relations between qualifications.

There was a broad agreement on using an eight-level structure. The number of levels is sufficiently distinctive and corresponds well to the main characteristics of the Austrian qualifications system.

The EQF descriptors, based on knowledge, skills and competence, are used as national descriptors. 'Explanatory' table(s) including criteria and procedures are currently being developed to ease referencing of national qualifications to the NQF levels. The qualifications framework for higher education uses Dublin descriptors as a starting point for further development.

Use of learning outcomes

Austria is moving to strengthen the learning outcome approach across education and training as it will be central to the positioning of qualifications onto the NQF. Many qualifications are already learning outcome oriented, but the approach has not been applied consistently across all sectors and institutions.

In 2005, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture launched a project to develop educational standards for core subject areas in general education ([32]) and in VET ([33]). The educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in the particular subjects) and personal and social competences related to the respective field. Four competences are described:

(a) subject-matter competence;
(b) methodological competence;
(c) social competence (communication competence, competence to cooperate and interact);
(d) personal competence (being able to steer own actions by self-motivation and self-control).

In March 2009, the General Directorate for VET of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture started a project (Curriculum design – learning outcomes orientation) which aims to integrate educational standards in VET curricula.

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(32) For development of educational standards in Austria see the web site of the BIFIE
http://www.bifie.at/publikationen-0 or Huber et al. *Bildungsstandards in Deutschland, Österreich, England, Australien, Neuseeland und Südostasien.* 2006. Available from the Internet
http://www.edudoc.ch/static/web/arbeiten/harmos/lit_analyse_1.pdf [cited 10.5.2010].
([33]) See: http://www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/downloads.html [cited 10.5.2010].

In apprenticeship (dual system), the training regulation is issued for each profile by the Federal Ministry of Economics. It consists of the occupational competence profile (*Berufsprofil*) with related activities and work descriptions, and job profile (*Berufsbild*) with knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices.

The *Lehrabschlussprüfung* (final apprenticeship examination) is to assess whether the candidate has acquired the necessary skills and competences for entry to qualified work. It comprises a theoretical and a practical test. Master craftsperson examinations (for manual trade vocations) and examinations to prove the respective competence (for other regulated trades) are organised by the economic chambers in the *Länder*.

In higher education a qualification profile, describing the expected learning outcomes (and definitions of learning outcomes) for each module, was introduced by the University Act (*Universitätsgesetz*) in 2002, but implementation differs between HE institutions.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing process is expected to start in autumn 2010. The work has been supported by the EQF test and pilot projects, notably the Leonardo da Vinci 'EQF-Ref: Referencing process – Examples and proposals [34]. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by the end of 2011. OeAD (Österreichischer Austauschdienst, Austrian agency for international cooperation in education and research) was designated the national coordination point (NCP) in March 2010. It will be responsible for developing a home page on NQF and should become the main information desk for citizens and institutions.

Important lessons and the way forward

An important strength of the Austrian NQF development process lies in its involvement and engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, representing all subsystems of education and training as well as the social partners. This broad process has made it clear that stakeholders hold different and sometimes conflicting views on the role of the NQF.

The consultation paper emphasised that NQFs will have an orientation and communication function to make the existing qualification system visible and help

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[34] For more information see: http://www.eqf-ref.eu [cited 10.5.2010].

individuals to compare their qualifications and engage in further learning activities. While this was broadly supported in the consultation process, subsequent developments have raised the question of whether, and to what extent, the NQF should be used to support national reform. This is perhaps best illustrated by the question of how to use the three highest levels (6-8) of the framework. Should these be exclusively used for those qualifications forming a part of the Bologna framework or should they also be open to other, vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications. As the answer to this question is the latter, a number of questions regarding the equivalence of academically and vocationally oriented higher level qualifications arise.

Another issue being addressed is the allocation of national qualifications to the NQF level. There are still several open questions to be discussed (e.g. the issues of partial qualifications, how to apply the principle of best fit, procedures and operational structures).

Further development is needed to clarify questions relating to the learning outcomes approach in terms of concepts and sound assessment methodologies and tools. How to balance outcome orientation and input factors will be one of the central questions to be answered in the near future, as will be the question of whether learning outcomes are to be implemented in a coherent way across different education and training subsystems (general, VET and HE).

Another issue to be dealt with is the integration of non-formal qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the NQF developments and equivalences of qualifications.

Experience until now has shown that stakeholder involvement in all phases of the NQF development is both crucial and beneficial. In Austria, a good platform for cooperation between different stakeholders has been created. Further involvement of stakeholders to strengthen ownership and commitment will be needed. To ensure successful NQF implementation implies the need to engage and include education and training providers and universities.

Good cooperation in further development of the NQF for lifelong learning and the QF for HE will be needed to establish conditions for better progression possibilities between different subsystems.

Main sources of information

Information on the consultation paper, the process and the research work is available on the website of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/index.xml [cited 24.06.2010] and on the website of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/ eubildung/nqr/nationaler_qualifikationsrah.xml [cited 24.06.2010]

BELGIUM

Belgium is in the same situation as the UK in terms of developing and implementing more than one NQF. This reflects the federal structure of Belgium giving the three communities wide-ranging autonomy in the way they organise their education, training and qualifications systems. While the German speaking community has not taken any initiative to develop an NQF, both the Flemish and the French speaking communities have done so. Though they started basically at the same time (2005-06) different pathways have been followed, reflecting the differences in the two systems. A key question for the coming period is whether, and to what extent, the two emerging frameworks will be linked together: the fact that the Federal level decides on when compulsory education starts and ends, and the number of years required, provides a basic starting point for both frameworks. Such a link and coordination is foreseen by the EQF recommendation and could, arguably, provide added value to Belgian citizens for mobility within in the country. The solution chosen by the UK, to present a joint and coordinated referencing report covering all the different qualifications frameworks and their own referencing to EQF, could be considered by Belgium as well.

Belgium (Flanders)

Introduction

On 30 April 2009 the Flemish Parliament and Government in Belgium adopted an Act on the qualification structure ([35]) (*kwalificatiestructuur*) introducing a comprehensive qualification framework. This framework, based on an eight-level structure described by the two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, is now being implemented.

While the Flemish framework is seen as a precondition for referencing to the EQF, it is primarily an instrument for improving the national qualifications system. It

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([35]) The Flemish Government and Parliament Act on the qualification structure, 30 April 2009. The Flemish Community of Belgium is responsible for education and training policy and legislation in the Flemish Region and for Dutch-speaking education institutions within the Brussels-Capital region. The Flemish qualification structure is a classification of Flemish qualifications using an eight-level qualification framework.

is an integrated framework for professional qualifications and educational qualifications at all levels, including educational qualifications of higher education. The overall objective is to strengthen the transparency of qualifications and to clarify the mutual relations, vertically and horizontally, between these, to enhance communication on qualifications between education and the labour market and to strengthen the permeability between the different learning systems. A qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process has been developed and implemented (2003). The relationship between the two framework initiatives has been intensively discussed throughout the development process and the 2009 Act takes this into account in its terminology, framework descriptors and procedures.

Following the 2009 Act the work on implementing the framework has started. A national conference of all main stakeholders was held in November 2009 and discussions are currently being held with social and educational partners on how to implement the Act.

Rationale and main policy objectives

The 2009 Act defines the Flemish qualification structure (FQS) as 'a systematic classification of recognised qualifications based on a generally adopted qualifications framework (FQF)'. The qualification structure (including the qualification framework) aims at making qualifications and their mutual relations transparent, so that relevant stakeholders in education (students, pupils and providers) and in the labour market (social partners) 'can communicate unambiguously about qualifications and the associated competences' (2009 Act, Chapter I, Article 3).

The Act underlines that the qualification structure (including the qualification framework) should act as a reference for quality assurance, for the development and renewal of courses, for the development and alignment of procedures for the recognition of acquired competences, as well as for comparison (nationally and at European levels) of qualifications. The quality assurance of the pathways leading to recognised qualifications is being concretely followed up through the establishment of a new Flemish agency for quality assurance (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming, AKOV). This Agency will cover all types and levels of qualification, except the higher education qualifications at level five to level eight ([36]),

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([36]) The quality assurance of higher education qualifications from level five to level eight is followed up through the NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie). The NVAO is the accreditation organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders for higher education established by an international treaty.

and can thus be seen as key to the overall credibility and success of the overarching framework, domestically as well as at European level (in relation to the EQF).

The Act further emphasises the role of the qualification structure and framework as a reference for validation of non-formal and informal learning and as an orientation point for guidance and counselling.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Flemish NQF process is based on a broad involvement of stakeholders at all stages of the process, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training. Other relevant ministries (labour and social economy, and culture, youth, sports and media) have also been involved in the development. From the education and training side the involvement of all relevant sectors (general education, initial vocational education, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, including short cycle higher education) has been important. The link and overlap between professional and higher or general educational qualifications has been a challenge and the active involvement of stakeholders representing the different levels and types of qualifications has been important.

The adoption of the framework in 2009 has moved the work into a new stage. Stakeholders are seeing progress and paying more attention to the details of its implementation. Work in vocational education and training is defining and describing qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (occupational standards) defined with the involvement of social partners. In 2009 there was a series of information sessions on the topic for stakeholders. A communication campaign to a broader public will be set up later in collaboration with the stakeholders.

Levels and descriptors

The decision to base the framework on an eight-level structure described by two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, reflects a development process which started in 2005. A first proposal contained a 10-level structure but – influenced by the discussion on the EQF – was reduced to eight levels. The relationship between professional and higher education qualifications became a focus of discussions. It was acknowledged that while higher education institutes (universities and university colleges) have a 'monopoly' on the bachelor, master and doctorate titles, this does not rule out the parallel (at levels six to eight)

placing of vocationally oriented qualifications. Several stakeholders (for example representing the adult education institutions providing higher VET courses for adults) asked explicitly for the placing of particular VET qualifications at levels five or six. The identification of this 'grey zone' between academically and vocationally-oriented higher education qualifications resulted in the adoption of a set of descriptors using the same general logic at all levels.

Representatives from higher education argued that the EHEA (Dublin) descriptors would be the optimal way of describing levels sox to eight as it would allow for a direct integration of the HE framework into the new NQF. This was also linked to an argument that the learning outcomes at levels six to eight could best be focused on the category of 'knowledge'. This was not accepted by the majority of stakeholders recognising the need for broad descriptors covering more qualifications: academic, educational and professional.

Another important discussion in the development phase was the question of how to understand the lowest level of the framework. Should there, for example, be an access level leading into level one? Social partners particularly expressed the fear that introducing a 'lowest level' (level one or an access level below level it) could have a negative, stigmatising effect. In the adopted proposal, level one is defined as a starting, not access, level.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is not new to Flemish education and training: there is broad political support for the approach. Progress on practical implementation varies, in particular when looking at teaching methodologies and assessment practices. The continuing VET sector is probably the most experienced in this field. A competence-based approach is well integrated, referring to professional requirements in the labour market. The use of competences in the Flemish initial VET system has, in recent years, been inspired by Dutch developments (in particular the MBO reform). Learning outcomes are also present in general education, for example by the setting of learning objectives in national core curricula. The developments in higher education have been influenced by the Bologna process, but are mainly dependent on initiatives taken at the level of single institutions or associations of higher education institutes. While reflecting a diverse situation, a clear shift to learning outcomes can be observed in Flanders. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has partly influenced university practices. Work continues in vocational education and training to define and describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. These

descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners.

The learning outcomes approach is the key to the new Flemish framework. The 2009 Act underlines that the two main types of Flemish qualifications, professional and educational, are 'well defined sets of competences to which a level of the Flemish qualification framework is assigned' (2009 Act, section II, articles 8 and 9). In professional qualifications these sets of competences are to be exercised within a profession; in educational qualifications they indicate what is required to function and participate in society, to exercise professional activities, and to progress in education and training. The Act stresses that both professional and educational qualifications can be found at all eight levels of the framework. This signals an explicit move away from an input-based (provider-based) way of categorising and levelling qualifications.

The new qualification structure strengthens the position of qualifications standards in the Flemish qualification system. These standards are seen as essential for describing and defining the sets of competences referred to above and as necessary for increasing the coherence of the system. Without such coherence, introducing a certain common core of competences across institutions, transfer of qualifications will be difficult, creating dead-ends and slowing down progression.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is identified as one of the objectives to be aided and pursued by the NQF. Some progress has already been made, both in vocational and higher education. There are regulations, agreements and arrangements in place and there is clearly a system but these are currently piecemeal and somewhat fragmented. Therefore implementation remains not systematic and results remain limited in terms of mobilisation of institutions and impact on the population. An interministerial working group will outline an integrated validation approach addressing adults over 18 years of age based on the Flemish qualifications structure Compared to other countries, notably neighbouring countries like France and the Netherlands, the Flemish system has still some way to go for validation to become generally accessible and recognised as credible by the general public.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010-11. The EQF coordination point was designated in February 2010: it is the new Flemish agency for quality assurance (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming, AKOV), The committee for the referencing will be set up during 2010.

Important lessons and the way forward

Although in Flanders and Belgium there is a long tradition of involving stakeholders and social partners in education and training policy and legislation, the development and maintenance of an overarching classification of qualifications (like the FQS) requires continuous dialogue with all relevant stakeholders and delivery of suitable information to the different subgroups. This is a continual and very delicate task for policy-makers and qualification agencies.

Another challenge encountered in the development of the overarching Flemish framework was to find acceptable solutions to linking the existing higher education framework and procedures and the other parts of the qualifications structure: VET and general non-higher education. This discussion can be generally interpreted as a clash between a traditional input-based (institute-based) approach and the new learning outcomes approach. A learning outcomes approach (exemplified by the 2009 Act) will argue that qualifications should be attributed to levels according to the sets of competences, not according to its institutional origin. The input-based approach would argue for the opposite; because a qualification is located outside a particular institutional context (e.g. outside a higher education institute) the assignment of a level should be restricted to a certain level (e.g. not higher than level five of EQF). The Flemish experiences in this field are highly relevant both inside and outside Belgium and should be carefully examined in the time to come.

Main sources of information

The Act of 30 April 2009 is downloadable in English on
http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/files/DecreetVKS_ENG.pdf [cited 24.06.2010]

Belgium (Wallonia)

Introduction

The French Community of Belgium (the Walloon region and the French Community of Brussels) has been working on a national qualifications framework linked to the EQF since 2006. The work on a qualifications framework for higher education, linked to the Bologna process, has been going on in parallel. Although there is broad agreement on the need for an NQF as well as for the need to link Belgian qualifications to the European framework(s), the question of how to combine the

overarching perspective of the EQF with the more limited, sector approach of the EHEA has still to be fully solved.

Following the change in government in autumn 2009 some progress can now be observed. A national coordination point for the EQF referencing will be established from September 2010. This NCP, under the responsibility of the *Service francophone des metiers et des qualifications* (SFMQ), will also be responsible for coordinating issues related to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Suggestions have now been made, following the change of government, to build a framework on the principles outlined in Flemish qualifications framework (see above). This could possibly help to address and strengthen the links between the increasingly diverse education and training systems of the Belgian communities and give citizens a better understanding of how they relate to each other. A clarification of this is expected before mid-2010.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main rational for pursuing a comprehensive NQF is to increase the transparency of the existing education and training system. The framework is not, at least at this stage, seen as an instrument for reform of existing institutions and structures.

The work on a comprehensive NQF responding to the EQF was initiated by the joint government of the Belgian French Communities and Region (Wallonia and Brussels) in March 2006. The high level intergovernmental group (GIHN) was entrusted with the task of analysing the implications of the EQF, how to involve stakeholders and how to take forward testing and piloting. GIHN presented a report to the joint government in October 2006 outlining the main principles and objectives of an NQF. This report emphasised that the framework is mainly an instrument for transparency; it should not have any direct/automatic influence on decisions regarding recognition of individual certificates or diploma. The report further emphasised that the framework should aid the development of other tools and instruments for transparency, notably validation of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer. Importantly, the proposal outlined a staged approach to the positioning of qualifications according to a learning outcomes-based reference structure.

The Belgian NQF for LLL (W) and higher education

The French speaking community of Belgium has been developing a qualifications framework for higher education since 2007. This work is still in progress and is expected to lead to self-certification to the EHEA by 2010-11. The work on the QF for HE has been going on in parallel to the work on the qualifications framework for LLL and there is a reluctance in the higher education sector to associate itself with a comprehensive, EQF-related framework. The approval in May 2008 of a separate decree binding levels six-to eight to the bachelor, master and doctorate cycles of the EHEA confirmed this. Higher qualifications awarded outside the university sector were effectively prevented from being placed at one of these levels, even in cases where their profile and content would recommend such a levelling. In the period following 2008 the discussion on the link between higher education and the remaining parts of education and training has continued. Although still not formally expressed, a common view seems to be that levels six to eight need to be opened up to non-academic qualifications, for example advanced vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications. It is emphasised, and in line with the original 2006 proposal, that such a levelling is for transparency purposes only, it will not imply an automatic recognition of equivalences. Still to be formally confirmed, the change of government in autumn 2009 led to a reconsideration of the issue, possibly leading to stronger link between the two framework initiatives, using the approach of the Flemish framework allowing both academic and professional qualifications to be awarded at levels six to eight.

Involvement of stakeholders

The NQF initiative was undertaken by the joint government of the French region and initially followed up by a high level intergovernmental group. This somewhat centralised approach has been balanced in the practical follow up to the proposal throughout 2007-10. Although not approved in 2006, the original proposal from the GIHN has been followed up and further elaborated in a technical working group (FOREM ([37]), IFAPME ([38]), Brussels Formation and Ministry of Education). Their proposal has resulted in broad testing of an 'NQF methodology' involving stakeholders (teachers, social partners) from approximately 50 areas of trade and vocation. In spite of the lack of political clarification, the testing and piloting phases

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([37]) Le service public wallon de l'emploi et de la formation.
([38]) Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et des petites et moyennes entreprises.

have resulted in a wide involvement of stakeholders. This testing now forms an important base for the further development of the framework.

The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning may prove to be beneficial for the development of the NQF. Since 2006 a growing number of individuals have had their work experiences validated (more than 2000 last year) for a title of competences. This title is not the same as a qualification. While it can form part of a qualification, it is supposed to carry an independent value in the labour market, making visible prior learning and achievement of the individual in question. Due to their recent introduction, these titles are still relatively new to employers. Their future value will depend on the extent to which they are integrated into the NQF and how they are linked to (the better known) certificates and diploma.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure is envisaged, largely reflecting the EQF descriptors. It is not clear at this stage whether the Flemish proposal to distinguish between knowledge and skills on the one hand and context, autonomy and responsibility on the other hand will be taken into account when taking the NQF structure forward.

The question of entry levels, as raised by the UK and Iceland, has not been addressed by the French region. It is acknowledged, however, that the future framework needs to take into account the reintegration of drop-outs (in particular from VET) and to articulate a strategy for access and progression.

Use of learning outcomes

In the French-speaking region of Belgium, learning outcomes are integral to a range of recent and continuing reforms ([39]). These outcomes are, however, described in various ways and the extent to which they influence education and training practices differs. In compulsory education and training, learning outcomes are described in terms of *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*. For adult and higher education the term used is *capacités terminales*. In vocational education and training work continues to define and describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional

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([39]) Cedefop (2009). *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Cedefop reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3054_en.pdf [cited 24.06.2010].

standards) defined with the involvement of social partners. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also influenced university practices. The autonomy of universities means that the decision to apply learning outcomes has to be made by the institution itself, resulting in varying practices.

An interesting part of the NQF developments in this region of Belgium is the methodology for placing qualifications at learning outcomes-based NQF levels. This methodology is relevant also for other countries and can illustrate the challenges – and opportunities – inherent in applying a 'best fit' approach. The methodology is based on the following four steps (and questions):

(a) is it possible to position the qualification? In answering this it must be considered whether the qualification in question is relevant (to the labour market or as part of education and training progression), whether it is defined and awarded by an appropriate and authorised authority, whether there is a clear assessment procedure, and whether there is a title delivered at the end of the learning process?

(b) how is the qualification positioned to the levels and descriptors of the NQF and the EQF? In answering this, the following are considered: the type of activity, the context of the activity amd as the expected level of responsibility and autonomy;

(c) how does this qualification relate to other (equivalent) qualifications and to regulations in the labour market (and elsewhere)?

(d) at what level should the qualification be positioned? Based on the three steps described above a recommendation will be made. The decision on the positioning of the qualification is seen as important not only for transparency reasons, but also as a reference point for quality assurance and reform.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is seen as an integrated part of the overall work on the NQF. An EQF national coordination point will be established September 2010. As the development of the framework itself has been considerably delayed, a referencing to the EQF will probably not take place until the end of 2011 or the beginning of 2012.

Important lessons and the way forward

The experiences of the French-speaking region of Belgium show the importance of finding a workable link between higher education and the remaining parts of the education and training system. The Belgian experiences demonstrate the highly politicised character of NQF developments, warning against treating them as purely technical or administrative arrangements.

BULGARIA

Introduction

Bulgaria is currently developing a comprehensive, learning outcomes based national qualifications framework (NQF) covering all levels of the education and training system and their corresponding qualifications/degrees. The new Bulgarian government, acting since July 2009, see the NQF as a precondition for implementing the EQF and an important national priority ([40]).

The development of an NQF is given high priority in the programme of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (2009–13) ([41]). According to the 2010 action plan, a NQF draft is to be ready by 15 December 2010.

In April 2008, a task force was set up by order of the Minister of Education to develop proposals on how to relate the national qualification degrees to the EQF, to prepare a plan for sectoral qualifications development, and to submit a proposal for changes in the national legislation.

A separate task force prepared a draft qualifications framework for HE, based on Dublin descriptors. It also aligned the national descriptors of the existing higher education structure (BA, MA and Doctorate) introduced by the Higher Education Act (1995) with the cycles and descriptors introduced in the context of the European higher education area (EHEA). A draft set of national HE-descriptors has been elaborated as well.

([40]) Programme for the European Development of Bulgaria (2009 – 2013). Available from Internet:
http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/03.11.2009FINAL-ednostranen%20pechat1.pdf [cited
10.5.2010].
([41]) *Programme for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies (2009 – 2013).* Ministry of
Education, Youth and Science). Available from Internet: www.minedu.government.bg [cited
10.5.2010].

A draft set of descriptors for VET levels of the NQF were designed in January 2010. They are based on learning outcomes and are constructed by degrees of vocational qualification.

The work on the general education levels is forthcoming, taking into account the new secondary education structure to be set by a Law on school and pre-school education development to be adopted. This new educational structure will reflect onto the NQF levels.

The broad policy framework for NQF development includes:

(a) the national programme for school and pre-school education development (2006–15), which sets out the new structure of secondary education;
(b) the national lifelong learning strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2008–13);
(c) the national strategy for continuing vocational training (2005–10);
(d) acts governing different subsystems of education and training (in school education, VET, HE).

It is planned that a decree on the introduction of the NQF will be adopted by the Council of Ministers.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The overall objective of developing and introducing a comprehensive NQF compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make the levels of the Bulgarian educational system clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. This will improve the extent to which all target groups and stakeholders are informed about the national qualifications. It is hoped that this will raise trust in the education and training system and make mobility and recognition of qualifications easier. More specific aims addressed by NQF development are to:

(a) develop a device with translation and bridging function;
(b) promote mobility within the education system and in the labour market;
(c) promote learning outcomes orientation of qualifications;
(d) support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
(e) strengthen orientation towards a lifelong learning approach;
(f) strengthen cooperation between stakeholders.

Having a single NQF document which includes all qualifications that can be acquired in formal education and training is expected to make designing sectoral qualifications frameworks easier. These will make qualifications in the different economic sectors more transparent and aid recognition of qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has a leading role in drafting the NQF and coordinating its implementation. The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for coordinating the development work in which a broad range of stakeholders is involved.

The task force responsible for drafting the NQF includes experts from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, including the Bulgarian representative in the Bologna Follow Up Group, the National Agency for VET, and the National Information and Documentation Centre.

In January 2010 the task force was enlarged with the representatives from Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, employers' organisations, trade unions, representatives from the Rectors' Conference and representatives from the other national quality assurance bodies in education and training (National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency and the Quality Evaluation and Control in Education Centre to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science).

The draft NQF will be submitted to the working group on Education, mutual recognition of professional qualifications, youth, science and research (working group 16), where representatives of the responsible ministries and other institutions and stakeholders including social partners participate. The Council of European Affairs will also be involved in commenting on the NQF draft.

A broad national consultation process is planned to take place between January and April 2011. It is foreseen that the proposal will be officially approved and adopted by the Council of Ministers in form of a decree in October 2011.

Levels and descriptors

The NQF draft comprises eight levels and takes into account the specific features of the national education system.

Levels 6 to 8 in the draft are described according to the descriptors of the QF-EHEA and levels 1 to 5 in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The expected learning outcomes of qualifications reflect the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training (see below). The draft also takes into account the ISCED 97 approach to provide correspondence between the NQF levels and ISCED, thus seeking to combine the outcomes based approach with input-factors.

Use of learning outcomes

For the general education part and VET, standards are defined by the State educational requirements on the educational contents and the State educational requirements on acquisition of qualification by professions.

The state educational requirements are developed by expert groups, evaluated by tripartite committees (state institutions, employers, employees' representatives) and approved by the Minister of Education, Youth and Science.

In general education, the State educational requirements are related to the curriculum and the syllabus for each subject, as well as the knowledge and skills expected after the completion of the respective educational level.

The State educational requirements in VET include access requirements, a brief description of the profession, learning objectives, learning outcomes, requirements about facilities, and required qualifications of teachers and trainers. Learning outcomes are defined as knowledge, skills and personal capabilities.

For higher education, there are State educational requirements for acquisition of higher education at educational and qualification degrees of bachelor, master, and specialist (2003); they set the expected learning outcomes for each of these degrees. The specialist degree was replaced by the professional bachelor degree in 2007 by amendments and supplements of the Higher Education Act. At institution level there are qualification descriptions for each specialty (by educational and qualification degrees). These describe the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by the graduates.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is seen an integrated part of the overall work on the NQF. Both the NQF draft and the first draft of the referencing report will be prepared by 15 December 2010.

A task force for NQF development was set up in April 2008 to develop a table of concordance of the national qualifications degrees to EQF by 2010.

The alignment of HE qualifications to the QF-EHEA was completed in 2007, but a self-certification report was not provided. Bulgaria decided to prepare one comprehensive referencing report to reference its NQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA.

Main lessons and the way forward

One of the aims of the NQF is to provide greater system transparency. While the Bulgarian developments seek a comprehensive NQF addressing all levels and types of qualifications, the extent to which the framework will facilitate increased and simplified vertical and horizontal progression and transfer between education and training subsystems is not clear. The use of separate level descriptors for different parts of the framework may weaken the ability of the framework to influence existing borderlines between institutions and learning environments.

The development of sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQF) is considered very important. By SQFs the sectoral qualifications in economic sectors will be described in a more clear and transparent way for all target groups and stakeholders, using a learning outcomes approach and linking them to the credit system where applicable. It will also commit all the stakeholders and social partners by sectors to joining the process.

Main sources of information

The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science is designated as the EQF national coordination point (NCP), http://www.mon.bg [cited 24.06.2010]

CROATIA

Introduction

Croatia is developing a comprehensive, learning outcomes based NQF (the Croatian qualifications framework for lifelong learning, CROQF). It will link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. The main outline of the framework, reflecting the proposal of a national, high level committee, was adopted by the government in 2009. The report ([42]) lays down the theoretical basis for the CROQF (key concepts, number of levels, level descriptors, criteria for defining learning outcomes and volume and further steps to be taken). A decree regulating

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([42]) *Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir, Uvod u kvalifikacije/ Croatian Qualifications Framework, Introduction into Qualifications.* 2009. Available from Internet:
http://personal.unizd.hr/~mdzela/hko/HKO_Prirucnik.pdf [cited 18.3. 2010].

the implementation of the CROQF will be adopted in 2010. Qualifications in the HE area will constitute integral part of the proposed NQF for LLL.

The work on the CROQF started in 2006 and was given its current direction through the adoption, in 2007, of a five-year action plan and programme for 2008–12. The following steps were outlined:

- agree on a theoretical basis and instructions for the CROQF development with examples of qualifications (2009);
- develop guidelines for curricula development, proposal for legislative changes (2010);
- initiate a curriculum development process (2011–12).

The time-schedule indicated by the action plan has largely been held and continues to form the basis of the process.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Apart from its transparency function, the CROQF is seen as an important tool for reforming the national education and training system. It is a generally held view that the CROQF would be able to address and respond to some of the current needs of Croatian society and education and training. Besides helping the link to the EQF, and thus making Croatian qualifications better understood abroad, the framework is seen as reflecting national needs and priorities and as an instrument making it possible to develop and implement new education and training solutions specific to the Croatian context. There is a need to:

(a) better link education and training with labour market needs;
(b) improve social inclusion and equity;
(c) improve pathways between subsystem and between sectors;
(d) make qualifications transparent and more consistent;
(e) support lifelong learning and offer a good basis for validation of non-formal and informal learning;
(f) support quality assurance arrangements.

The short-term objective is to make the different types of qualifications more transparent and learning achievements and the system more understandable for individuals and employers. The framework platform allows partnership and commitment to develop.

In the medium and longer term it is expected that CROQF will contribute to making the qualification system and qualifications more coherent and consistent, thus improving access and progression possibilities. This should also make it easier to develop procedures and standards for validating and recognising non-formal and

informal learning, help to improve responsibility and accountability of institutions and promote lifelong learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

There is a strong political commitment to the new NQF developments, including in the Government.

The work was initiated in 2006 by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. The High Level Committee for the CROQF development was established in September 2007, was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and comprised 27 members, representing different ministries, social partners, schools, universities and agencies. The committee cooperated closely with the Bologna follow-up group and lately also with the National Curricula Committee.

In April 2008, an operational team, composed of members of different ministries, social partners, and agencies, was established by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports to support the High Level Committee. Its main tasks are to prepare documents for adoption by the committee and conduct research.

In February 2010 a new High Level Committee for putting the CROQF in place was formally established with 20 members, representing different ministries and all stakeholders, from students to employers. It is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister. At the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports a new operational team has been established. It consists of members from the ministry (management), of all relevant national agencies and centres (implementation), and national and international experts (advice).

Levels and descriptors

The CROQF is a qualifications and credit framework. It has eight reference levels, in line with the EQF, but with additional four sublevels at levels 4 (4.1, 4.2), 5 (5.1, 5.2), 7 (7.1, 7.2) and 8 (8.1, 8.2), reflecting the particularities of the Croatian qualification system. Each qualification will be defined in terms of profile, reference level and the volume (measured as credit points). For example, a qualification with the volume of minimum 180 ECVET points (from which a minimum 120 ECVET points are acquired on the fourth reference level or higher) will be referenced to the level 4.1. For a qualification at level 4.2 min. 240 ECVET points are required (of them a minimum 180 ECVET points on the fourth reference level).

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual) and skills (cognitive and practical and social skills are included). A third column is defined as responsibility and autonomy. It is emphasised that key competences should be included in each qualification ([43]).

The CROQF introduces two classes of qualifications, 'full' and 'partial'.

Use of learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of the CROQF development and is supported by all relevant stakeholders.

A wider committee of experts from all stakeholders was nominated in September 2007, whose role has been to define common standards. They have served as a base for development of more concrete descriptions for all qualifications, using measurable learning outcomes and competences. A methodology has been prepared.

The VET reform agenda includes a move towards an outcome-based approach in standards and curricula. Pilot occupational standards and outcomes-based curricula are being developed in adult education. A new approach to evaluation of schools outputs introduces a system of common final exams for grammar schools and other four-year secondary schools in Croatian language, mathematics, the first foreign language, and the mother tongue for ethnic minority pupils.

Higher education has been subject to extensive changes. The decision (in 2001) to take part in the Bologna process has made it necessary for Croatia to adjust significantly its higher education system. Setting up of undergraduate (first cycle) and integrated (second cycle) programmes started in 2005. The change of curricula is aiming at development of competences needed on the labour market, but the functional link between higher education institutions and the labour market, and social community in particular, has not yet been well established.

Croatia is considering the introduction of arrangements for validating non-formal and informal learning, largely in response to the requirements of the European integration process and more specifically to the requirements for participation in the Integrated Lifelong Learning European Community programmes. A government agency for adult education was recently established. It will be in charge of accrediting non-formal education providers.

([43]) *Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir, Uvod u kvalifikacije/ Croatian Qualifications Framework, Introduction into Qualifications.* 2009. p. 47.available on Internet
http://personal.unizd.hr/~mdzela/hko/HKO_Prirucnik.pdf [cited 18.3. 2010].

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing process of the CROQF to the EQF is planned to start in 2010 and expected to be completed in 2011. International experts and representatives of the main national and international partners will be involved. The second stage of the EQF implementation, introducing a reference to the EQF in all new qualifications, should be completed by 2012.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The relatively rapid and successful development of the CROQF illustrates the importance of stimulating active and broad participation throughout the entire process. If complemented by targeted support to and training of stakeholders, this can point towards genuine partnerships. The involvement of the deputy prime-minister in the initial process may also have contributed to the success as it signals the priority attributed to the initiative. Active collaboration at international level can also provide new insights, help develop adequate expertise and mirror broader national development.

How to engage institutions and groups of interests have proved challenging tasks. However, some effects are already visible: strong demand for information from different groups signal increased awareness and interest in the CROQF and its potential benefits; cooperation among different stakeholders has been strengthened. A progressive, step-by-step development is emphasised.

Main sources of information
The EQF national coordination point (NCP) for Croatia is the High Level National Committee for the CROQF Implementation, Croatian Government, http://hko.vlada.hr [cited 24.06.2010].

CYPRUS

Introduction

Cyprus is developing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF), which will include all levels and types of qualifications in line with the qualification framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) and the EQF for lifelong learning.

The system of vocational qualifications is under way and will constitute an integral part of the proposed NQF.

A decision to create a comprehensive NQF was taken by the Council of Ministers in 2009. In line with this decision, a committee for design, implementation and monitoring of the NQF development was set up. A first NQF draft with timetable for implementation was prepared in April 2010 and consultation is planned to take place in autumn 2010.

A law on NQF implementation is expected to be adopted by the end of 2010.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Main policy objectives to be realised through NQF development are:
(a) aiding the comparability of national qualifications in Europe;
(b) improving transparency, quality and relevance of qualifications;
(c) enabling increased progression and mobility;
(d) strengthening the link with the labour market;
(e) strengthening the partnerships between different subsystems of education and training.

Involvement of stakeholders

The General Directorate for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated and coordinates the NQF developments.

The committee in charge comprises representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resources Development Authority.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure is proposed to cover the main characteristics of the national qualification system and will be compatible with EQF principles and categories. EQF level descriptors are taken as a starting point for further developments. The discussion on the inclusion of partial qualifications with relevance for the labour market will be part of the national consultation process.

Use of learning outcomes

While more emphasis will be put on learning outcomes, input aspects will also remain important.

The gradual development taking into account different practices and expectations of different stakeholders is acknowledged.

A competence-based vocational qualifications system has been set up under the responsibility of the Human Resources Development Authority. It will support validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Assessment of VET courses is related to occupational standards.

Learning outcomes are being expressed as part of a subject and stage-based general education system. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as knowledge, skills and attitudes and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. There are level descriptors indicating the standards a learner should achieve, when awarded certificates at different levels of education.

Lessons learned and the way forward

Broad involvement of different stakeholders taking into account the specifics of the national situation and learning from good practices in other countries are important.

Main sources of information
Ministry of Education and Culture: http://www.moec.gov.cy [cited 24.06.2010]

CZECH REPUBLIC

Introduction

The Czech Republic is currently developing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for lifelong learning. The aim is to produce a comprehensive NQF covering all types of qualifications in all subsystems of education and training.

Work on an NQF started in 2005. Eight levels were proposed and level descriptors drafted mainly by VET stakeholders. In 2009, the project Q-Ram started. The goal of this project is to develop a QF for HE. Whether this framework will be a sub-framework of a comprehensive NQF or a parallel framework remains to be discussed and decided.

Soon after drafting the NQF, work started on a new national qualifications system (NQS). The core of the new NQS is a publicly accessible register of all complete and partial qualifications and their qualification and assessment standards. The objective is to create a transparent overview providing comprehensive information on qualifications to pupils and students, parents, employers, schools and those interested in education.

The Act on the Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results (2006) ([44]) is of fundamental importance to these developments as it establishes the legislative basis on which the NQS is built. The NQF and the NQS together form important elements of the overall lifelong learning strategy of the Czech Republic.

From 2005 to 2008, two projects (the NSK project on the development of NQS, and UNIV project on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning) run by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports sought to develop and partially implement the NQF and the NQS. They were funded with support from the European Social Fund (ESF). Both significantly reinforced the role and influence of the social partners (especially employers) on the qualifications structure as well as the contents and implementation of educational programmes leading to qualifications.

In 2009, a new ESF-funded project of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports called The development and implementation of the NQF and NQS (NSK2) was started. It will complete and support further NQF and NQS development. The part of the NQF concerned with the tertiary subsystem will be designed under the Q-RAM project.

([44]) The Act No. 179 of 30 March 2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results is available on the http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/the-act-on-the-recognition-of-further-education-results [cited 24. 06. 2010].

Both projects, as they link to VET and HE respectively, will address qualifications at levels five and six. These levels present a special challenge and discussions continue. There are plans to reform higher professional schools (implemented since 1995) which offer tertiary professional programmes (lasting from 3 to 3.5 years) to correspond better to the level five.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The NQF and NQS developments can be seen as key instruments in a national strategy aiming at an open area of lifelong learning and a more permeable education and training system. The main elements of this strategy, reflecting identified and agreed needs, are as follows:
(a) linking the subsystems in the national education system and improving its permeability;
(b) making the whole system more readable for all stakeholders, namely learners and employers;
(c) linking initial and continuing education and learning;
(d) building the base for recognising learning outcomes irrespective of the way they were achieved;
(e) systematic involvement of all stakeholders in vocational education and training and in the development of national qualifications;
(f) response to European initiatives such as making qualifications more transparent and supporting the mobility of learners and workers;
(g) support for disadvantaged groups and people with low qualification levels.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education, which came into force in 2007, sets out the basic responsibilities, powers and rights of all stakeholders.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports coordinates the activities of the central administrative authorities (ministries) and approves, modifies, removes and issues the list of partial and complete qualifications. It funds the activities of the National Qualification Council.

Authorising bodies (other ministries) grant authorisation to individuals or legal entities upon verification that they meet the requirements stipulated by the law. They monitor the fulfilment of requirements for assessment, collect data as set out in the

law and submit them to the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) for central record keeping. They also participate in preparing and updating qualifications and assessment standards.

Authorised bodies (schools, associations, companies, public or private providers of further education, etc.) assess applicant learning outcomes regardless of the way they were achieved.

Social partners (chambers of employers, professional organisations, schools, representatives of universities) participate in the development of qualification and assessment standards.

The National Qualifications Council acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) in the area of qualifications.

NUOV manages and administers the NQS and, in cooperation with the National Qualifications Council, the MEYS, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other stakeholders, prepares proposals of qualification and assessment standards and submits them for approval to MEYS, publishes qualifications and assessment standards, and includes them in the NQS.

The inclusion of social partners is voluntary and mostly consultative. Sectoral councils have been set up from 1998. Labour market involvement has been more systematic at upper secondary level and the aim of the project NSK2 and QRAM is to involve social partners in a more systematic manner at all levels.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports entrusted to NUOV, which is also the EQF national coordination point, the practical development and operational coordination of the NQF and NQS. The functions of the Czech NCP consist of:

(a) the NUOV work group, which develops documents and proposals, provides the operational agenda, coordinates communication with all relevant national and international parties;

(b) the advisory group, which focuses on consultation, the dissemination of information and evaluation of methodology and NCP outputs;

(c) the work group of the National Qualifications Council, which will relate Czech qualifications levels to the EQF.

Levels and descriptors

In January 2010, the governing committee of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) approved the document Qualification Levels in the National Qualification System with an eight-level qualification structure and the level descriptors.

The qualifications levels are differentiated by levels of competence. A conversion table refers to the EQF levels and includes references to the national system of occupations and the current education levels.

In the tertiary education system, the framework will consist of two layers. The general layer will be the national descriptors, based on the Dublin descriptors and partly incorporating the EQF descriptors. These descriptors will cover levels five to eight and address tertiary professional qualifications, bachelor, master and doctorate degrees. Drafting of these structured descriptors is at the final stage of development and approval of descriptors is expected in spring 2010.

The next layer will be based on subject specific benchmarks, i.e. the descriptors which cover specificities for a certain cluster of disciplines. These descriptors will be developed in cooperation with all stakeholders (see below); they will also reflect the needs of the labour market, will underline specificities of a respective cluster and will serve as contours for institutions to define the professional profile of their degree programmes.

Use of learning outcomes

A competence-based and learning outcomes oriented approach is common to VET and HE. It has broad political support. This is documented and confirmed by the curricular reform of vocational education (including relevant methodologies) and by the act on the verification and recognition of results of further education. It is embedded in the Czech lifelong learning strategy.

The competence model is the fundamental principle that links occupation, qualification, learning and educational programmes, examination, recognition and certification. It is not only applied in the NQS development, but also in the national system of occupations, allowing for better matching and mapping skill needs and supply.

Each competence has both a skill and a knowledge component. This implies that competences have not only a 'knowledge' dimension, i.e. field or discipline, but also an 'activity' dimension. The activity dimension is considered primary. The classification, therefore, starts from a two-level numerical code for the type of work activity, which was developed on the basis of detailed investigation and abstraction of work activities. To that, subject or discipline category is added, taking into account particular specialisations.

The qualifications and assessment standards represent the starting point for the development of comprehensive educational programmes. Students learn key competences and expand their general and vocational (professional) education. The

NQS consists of qualifications and assessment standards for complete and partial qualifications. Arrangements for the recognition of learning outcomes, including non-formal and informal learning, are currently being developed and the aim is to establish this as an integrated part of the NQS and NQF.

The School Act, which came into force in 2005, legally regulates curricular reform at secondary school level, emphasising learning outcomes and strengthening the influence of the social partners, especially employers. Key competences (ICT skills, learn to learn, problem solving) have become very important. Modularisation of courses was introduced to improve transferability between various pathways and initial and continuous education (ReferNet, 2008).

In the Q-RAM project (on the development of qualifications framework for the HE), the learning outcomes approach has been crucial in the development of generic descriptors and subject benchmarks and will be further promoted in specific study programmes.

Referencing to the EQF

The NCP (NUOV) will play a key role in the process (see above). A steering committee for referencing was set up in 2009. A draft report is expected to be prepared by 2010 and the final report by 2011. The MEYS is the responsible body that approves all proposals, decisions and documents prepared by the NCP.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The present situation in the development of the NQF and the NQS in the Czech Republic is the result of a targeted effort to create a system that will build on the good starting situation in vocational education and qualifications, will maintain the advantages related to this and will add new opportunities and the necessary European dimension. This development has been confirmed for a long time by activities that are directly connected to the description of qualifications and broad involvement of different stakeholders.

The new MEYS's project NSK2 and Q-RAM will build on the achievement and experience gained. They aim to address some current challenges, e.g. how to strengthen the vertical and horizontal permeability of the education and qualification system and to overcome the divide between pre-university and university education and better link VET and HE. This is exemplified by the current discussions and planned reform of higher professional schools. Both projects also aim to involve

labour market stakeholders in a more systematic manner in the qualifications development, not only at lower levels but also at levels five to eight.

The choice to link together the NQS/NQF approach with information systems developed for the labour market is interesting and shows the importance of agreeing on a conceptual approach (in this case competences) able to bridge qualifications and occupations.

In HE, there is the specific challenge for institutions of how to bridge the 'traditional' approach based on the curricula and courses into the 'modern' learning outcomes methodology. This work is just beginning, but there are some emerging interesting examples of the initiatives from within the HEIs which the Q-RAM project will use.

Main sources of information

The National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) is the EQF NCP, which manages the operational agenda and creates proposals of the NCP for the referencing qualifications levels to the EQF: http://www.nuov.cz [cited 24.06.2010]

Register on all approved qualification and assessment standards is available from http://www.narodni-kvalifikace.cz/ [cited 24.06.2010]

Q-RAM project: http://www.msmt.cz/european-union/ipn-in-the-field-of-tertiary-education-research-and-development/qualification-framework-for-tertiary-education [cited 24.06.2010]

DENMARK

Introduction

A comprehensive Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning is currently being put in place. A detailed outline of the framework was agreed by all the main stakeholders and published by the Ministry of Education in June 2009. It provides the basis for an implementation stage to be finalised mid/end 2010.

The work on the framework was initiated in 2006 when an inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives from the ministries of education, research, technology and development, culture as well as economy was set up. The Danish NQF work is closely linked to continuing reforms of the education and training system, particularly in vocational education and training. The current proposal also builds on the

qualification framework for higher education established in 2006-07 and integrates this into the comprehensive framework. The idea of a comprehensive qualifications framework was first raised in the context of the 2005-06 work on a national strategy on globalisation (A Government strategy for Denmark in the global economy) where a coherent qualifications system aiming at permeability and transparency was emphasised. European developments also played a significant role and the setting up of the inter-ministerial group in 2006 was triggered by the preparatory work on the EQF launched by the European Commission and the Council in 2004-05.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main purpose of the Danish NQF is to provide a better overview over all officially recognised public qualifications in the Danish system ([45]) and to support mutual recognition of Danish and foreign qualifications. This overview is supposed to make visible the pathways leading to a qualification, how they can be acquired and what they can be used for. Being fully based on a learning outcomes approach, the framework aims to make it easier to compare different degrees and certificates and to see how they relate to each other. The framework can also be a reference point for new qualifications, making it easier to identify their level and profile. The framework can thus be seen as an effort to realise an education, training and learning system always making it possible for individuals to progress, be this vertically or horizontally and irrespective of their prior learning, age or employment situation.

The following concrete purposes are listed. The Framework should

(a) support lifelong learning by making visible the different pathways inherent in the education system;

(b) create a basis for comparison and recognition within the Danish system and thus facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning (*Realkompetanse*);

(c) support mutual recognition of Danish and foreign qualifications by establishing a reference between the Danish NQF and the EQF;

(d) through a focus on learning outcomes clarify the relationship between education and training and the labour market.

The main objective of the Danish NQF is to increase transparency and facilitate comparison and translation (domestically as well as internationally); it has limited regulatory functions for qualifications at levels one to five. The qualification framework for higher education, however, forms a part of the legal basis for Danish

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([45]) A qualification is defined as the 'outcomes of learning processes having been assessed and documented through the issuing of a publicly/officially recognised degree or certificate'.

higher education and has a regulatory function by law on accreditation of higher education.

A separate framework for VET was considered as part of work on reforming VET. However, it was decided, as part of the setting up the inter-ministerial working group, to adopt an approach including all public qualifications from compulsory school certificates to university degrees, emphasising overview, permeability and mutual recognition of qualifications (reference to EQF). Following lengthy discussions (mostly between the ministries involved) a solution was reached on an eight-level structure covering all existing levels and types of officially recognised public qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

In the proposal the following main stakeholders have been identified:
(a) Danish and foreign pupils and students (who need a comprehensive overview over the system);
(b) employers and employees (who need a framework for judging and comparing qualifications);
(c) guidance and counselling services (who need a comprehensive overview);
(d) Danish and foreign education and training institutions and authorities (who need a framework for overview, guidance and for aiding recognition);
(e) political authorities and institutions (to describe, develop and evaluate education and training).

The inter-ministerial group set up in 2006 reflects this broad range of stakeholders and consisted of representatives from the ministries of education, research, technology and development, culture, and economy. The social partners have been systematically consulted and involved throughout the process by means of seminars, national consultation and involvement of relevant education councils and training committees, as have representatives of the different education and training institutions. The role of the social partners is being described as both positive and critical and their positive support to developments is seen as a precondition for moving towards implementation in 2010. Some social partners have seen the NQF as an instrument for national reform, but its European and international implications have been less emphasised. Other social partner representatives, notably employers, have questioned the direct added value for companies. Some concerns have been expressed by the social partners as regards the possible impact on curriculum development and existing governance structures and practices.

Levels and descriptors

The eight-level structure referred to above is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences ([46]) (*Kompetenser*). The Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, notably existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, and the Bologna descriptors. They have been designed to be relevant to different types of qualifications, theoretically as well as practically oriented. Knowledge descriptors emphasise the different types of *viden* involved, their complexity and the extent of understanding/comprehension required at a particular level. Skills descriptors focus on the types of *færdigheder* involved, the complexity of tasks to be solved and the communicative challenges. Competences are described by emphasising the context, the aspects of cooperation and responsibility and the aspect of learning (to learn).

These descriptors are currently being used to place national qualifications at their relevant levels. The placing of VET qualifications, in particular, has posed some challenges. While these qualifications were previously seen as belonging to one level, the introduction of staged qualifications in VET and the use of the learning outcomes approach has lead to a more differentiated structure having VET qualification at more levels. This is presented as a positive development, promoting new flexible learning opportunities and making VET qualifications more attractive.

The Danish NQF for LLL and its link to higher education

Denmark approved its qualifications framework for higher education in 2008-09. This approval reflected a long preparatory period dating back to 2003. Denmark has played a very active role in promoting the framework concept in the Bologna cooperation. The first comprehensive report on the framework for qualifications in the EHEA was published by the Danish Ministry of science, technology and innovation in 2005.

Although applying the general descriptor approach outlined above at all levels, the new Danish NQF draws a clear distinction between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8 in the framework. Levels 6-8 are identical with the levels descriptors in the Danish QF for HE (Bologna) at bachelor, master and doctoral-level, and contain explicit references to research related outcomes. The difference is illustrated by the use of two different principles for referring qualifications to the framework. A qualification at

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([46]) Note that the Danish NQF, as opposed to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

levels 1-5 are referred according to a 'best fit' principle where the final decision is based on an overall judgement of knowledge, skills and competences. A principle of 'full fit' is used for levels 6-8, as is the case for the Danish QF for HE, implying that qualifications at this level have to be fully accredited as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the QF for HE for qualifications at these levels.

This distinction, which is not used by any other EU or EEA country, implies that all qualifications at levels 6-8 need to be defined and accredited according to the QF for HE. For the moment there are no publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at level 6-8 that are not included in the higher education area (QF for HE), and a number of non-university qualifications have been or are expected to be accredited as bachelors and masters (for example related to arts, the armed services and police) and thus included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

The discussions on the best/full fit principle were quite intensive in period leading up to the 2009 proposal. While the distinction between best and full fit makes it clear that the Danish NQF consists of two clearly distinct elements, and thus will avoid any confusion, it may also be argued that the distinction will prevent development of higher level qualifications outside the strict cycle approach, for example in the form of part-qualifications addressing particular, knowledge, skills or competence dimensions.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of the education and training system and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. VET, in particular, has a strong tradition in defining qualifications in terms of competence, but higher education and the different parts of general education are also making progress. It is being admitted, however, that it will be necessary to deepen the understanding of the learning outcomes approach at all levels, for example by developing guidelines.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is treated as an integrated part of the overall implementation of the NQF. The Danish referencing report is planned for the beginning of 2011. The referencing of VET qualifications levels to the EQF may

prove a challenge. A coherent use of learning outcomes will make it necessary, according to a 'best fit' principle, to place existing VET qualifications at different levels of the national framework. Such a development is already in progress with introduction of staged qualifications in the Danish VET system.

A NCP has been established (Danish Agency for International Education).

Important lessons and the way forward

Denmark has made rapid progress in developing the qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Based on the roadmap presented in June 2009, Denmark will have a fully developed NQF by end 2010 and will also have completed the referencing to the EQF by early 2011. This success has largely been achieved by accepting that not all problems can be solved immediately and a NQF will need to develop also beyond 2012.

The distinction between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8 is seen as a compromise solution to establish an overall coherent qualification framework, also including the levels and the qualifications of the Danish 'Bologna' qualification framework.

Another issue which raised, but not solved, is the potential inclusion of certificates and diploma awarded outside the public domain. This issue will be considered on the basis of the evaluation of the framework and further work on how inclusion of non-public certificates and diplomas can be included in the future development of the framework. An important lesson to be drawn from the Danish case is the need for a pragmatic, step-by-step approach.

Main sources of information
An information web-tool on the Danish qualification framework is to be developed and expected to be finalised by mid-2010.

The web page of the Danish NCP (IU) – Agency for International Education is: http://en.iu.dk/ [cited 5.07.2010]

ESTONIA

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) is currently being developed in Estonia. (47) It will encompass all qualifications from general, vocational, professional as well as higher education and training. The framework builds on a learning outcomes (competence) approach and supports validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and HE.

The framework-initiative is based on the amended Professions Act which came into force in September 2008 (48) and supports the transition from the present competence-based five-level qualification system to a new eight-level framework.

The qualifications framework for higher education, reflecting the principles of the European higher education area, was adopted in August 2007 and described by the higher education standard. It has three levels. The first level contains two qualification types assigned to the sixth level of the NQF: a bachelor's degree and applied higher education diploma. The second level contains a master's degree and is referenced to the seventh level, while the third level contains a doctorate degree assigned to the eight level of the NQF. General descriptors follow the logic of Dublin descriptors, but are adjusted to the national needs. (49)

Qualifications at level 5 of the NQF are subject to intensive discussion in the country. The main question asked is whether VET or HE legislation should govern these types of curricula and qualifications (there are differences in theory/practice proportions, teacher's qualifications, financing mechanisms). Some post secondary technical education programmes have been upgraded into applied higher education programmes according to the needs of the labour market. (50)

The Estonian Qualification Authority (QA) (Kutsekoda) was established in 2001 with the aim of developing the professional qualifications system. Besides the

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(47) The implementation of the EQF and the NQF has a broad political support. The Government of the Republic adopted a Development Plan for Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2009-13, with focus on the implementation of the EQF, raising quality updating, curricula and recognition of prior learning. Available on http://www.jkhk.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=6092/EN_KH_arengukava_181109.pdf [cited 19.04.2010].

(48) Amended Professions Act (English version) is available on the website of the Estonian Qualifications Authority http www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/oigusaktidkutseseadus [cited 19.04.2010].

(49) VET Policy Report Estonia 2010. ReferNet.

(50) Reet Neudorf. 1996. *Survey on Tertiary Professional/Vocational Education,* available http://www.innove.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=5644/Tertiary_education_1997.pdf [cited 23. 03. 2010].

Ministry of Education and Research, this qualifications authority is the main institution involved in the implementation of the NQF however, other ministries, institutions (National Examination and Qualification Centre, employers, agencies, etc.) are involved. The Estonian QA has been organising the activities of professional councils as well as the development, amendment and improvement of the professional standards, and establishment of assessment criteria. The Estonian Qualification Authority is designated to act as EQF national coordination point since 2009.

These developments are supported by a number of European Social Fund (ESF) projects such as Development of the qualification system, Developing VET system, and Developing HE systems quality – Primus.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The goal of the eight-level NQF is to improve the comparability between formal school-leaving certificates/diplomas and work-based (professional) competences and qualifications, which open the entrance to the labour market. In Estonia, the graduation certificate from a VET or HE institution alone does not give the graduate a professional qualification. The primary professional award (qualification) can be obtained by passing a professional examination by awarding bodies in the professions. Currently, only one third of VET graduates take this exam. According to the Professions Act, from 2011, VET and HE institutions, which have curricula based on professional standards and are accredited for the quality, could apply to become an awarding body of the professional qualifications together with the school leaving diploma or certificate.

In the past years, different sectoral approaches to understanding and using the previous five-level qualifications framework were developed, reflecting that occupational standards and educational programmes were relatively weakly linked.

The policy objectives addressed by NQF are:
(a) improve the link between education/training and labour market;
(b) increase consistency of educational offer and qualification system;
(c) provide transparency for employers and individuals;
(d) increase the understanding of Estonian qualifications;
(e) introduce common quality assurance criteria;
(f) support validation of non-formal and informal learning;
(g) monitor the supply and demand for learning.

It is expected that development of the NQF will increase the coherence of the education and training system and help to introduce coherent methods for standard-

setting. The NQF is also seen as an instrument for broader involvement of stakeholders in education and training, thus potentially strengthening ownership and mutual trust.

Involvement of stakeholders

The main institutions involved in the development of the NQF are: the Ministry of Education and Research (coordinating body); the Ministry of Social Affairs; the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications; the Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (REKK); the Qualifications Authority; the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions; the Estonian Employers' Confederation; and the Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation.

The Ministry of Education and Research coordinates and performs national monitoring on qualification preparation and development. The Qualifications Authority coordinates 16 professional councils and provides technical support to the Board (see below); it cooperates with other institutions e.g. The National Examinations and Qualifications Centre, The Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA).

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Estonian Employers' Confederation and Central Federation of Trade Unions participate in professional councils which are responsible for preparing, amending, renewing or validating professional standards. The National Examination and Qualification Centre is responsible for preparing, registering and developing national VET curricula.

A Board of chairmen of professional councils has been introduced by the amended Professions Act to improve cross-sectoral cooperation and coherence in the qualification system.

The representatives of public affairs, employers and employees are represented in the Board of the Estonian QA, which makes strategic decisions for the authority. Technical support is provided by QA, which cooperates with other institutions, e.g. the National Examination Centre, Agency for Quality in HE.

Close cooperation with the Bologna implementation is ensured through the National Commission, which monitors the implementation of the ESF programme. Financial support is provided though ESF and national budget (financing of QA).

Levels and descriptors

The NQF is based on eight levels. Level descriptors of the NQF for LLL are identical to the EQF level descriptors. They are defined as knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive skills – use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking – and practical skills, i.e. manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) and scope of responsibility and autonomy. [51]

As Estonian QF level descriptors are identical to the EQF level descriptors it is very important to develop quality criteria and procedures to assign qualifications types to NQF levels.

There is currently a discussion about including also partial qualifications in the NQF, which should have value on the labour market; and using units in the qualifications design.

Use of learning outcomes

There is strong will and support for introducing the learning outcomes approach as a part of the national reform programme for general education, VET and HE. Linked to this is an increased focus on recognition of prior learning. Teacher training is seen as a necessary part in realising this strategy, which also is supported by research projects.

The learning outcomes of different types of VET are described in the vocational education standard, which came into force in November 2009. Learning outcomes of vocational education correspond to levels II to IV of the NQS and are described at the level of minimum. The learning outcome approach describes professional knowledge and skills as well as transversal skills (communicative, social and self-awareness competence, independence and responsibility). All types of VET will be formally linked with NQF levels by the end of 2013.

The programmes in VET (currently 48 national programmes) are modularised and outcome-based. All the programmes will be reassessed in the future taking into consideration possible changes in the occupational (professional) standards, aiming at increased compatibility of educational and professional (occupational) qualifications. This will be step-by-step development in each sector. All initial VET study programmes will be learning outcomes based by 2014.

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[51] *Amended Professions Act* (English version) is available on the web site of the Estonian Qualifications Authority. Available from Internet:
http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/oigusaktidkutseseadus [cited 24.06.2004].

As a result of a previous project, 700 professional standards (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence) have been elaborated. A new model of occupational standards is to be gradually developed in the period 2008 13 as an obligatory basis for curriculum development. Estonia aims at integrating occupational and educational standards as a foundation for qualification standards.

Learning outcome based programmes have been implemented in HE institutions as from September 2009. The Universities Act and Applied Higher Education Institutions Act now allow for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in HE curricula. Similar amendments to the VET Institutions Act came into force in November 2009.

The adopted Estonian lifelong learning strategy emphasises the principle that all strategic national, regional and local documents should pay attention to the development of the lifelong learning system, including the recognition of prior learning and work experience.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010 and is planned to be presented to the EQF AG in June 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A specific challenge in the last few years has been to improve methodological coherence across different sectors in standard-setting (700 standards followed different concepts). This experience has been important for the overall implementation of the learning outcomes approach in VET (and beyond) and crucial for improving communication between education and training and the labour market.

The five years of experience with a competence framework for VET will be used for further development of NQF and supporting more coherent national policies for lifelong learning. The NQF will act as a common reference point for education and the labour market and thus support mutual trust between education and the labour market; and recognition of learning outcomes acquired in different settings.

Main sources of information
The Estonian Qualification Authority is designated as EQF national coordination point (NCP) www.kutsekoda.ee [cited 24.06.2010]

Information on NQF development is available from Internet: http://www.valew.eu/project-valew/project-partners/6-estonian-qualification-authority [cited 24.06.2010]

The information about national VET curricula is available from Internet: http://www.ekk.edu.ee/valdkonnad/kutseharidus/kutseoppe-riiklikud-oppekavad [cited 24.06.2010] Information about accreditation of HE institutions is available from Internet: http://www.ekak.archimedes.ee/en [cited 24.06.2010]

FINLAND

Introduction

Finland is currently working on a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) covering all officially recognised qualifications (general, vocational education and training and higher education). This work is based on the national development plan for education and research for the period 2007-12 ([52]). According to the plan, the functioning and clarity of the Finnish qualifications system will be enhanced by preparing a national framework by 2010. A proposal for this framework (a National framework for qualifications and other competences), a basis for a wide-ranging consultation among all relevant stakeholders, was finalised on 30 June 2009. A public consultation was organised in the period August-October 2009. Approximately 90 statements from stakeholders were received.

The work on the Finnish framework started as late as August 2008 but has progressed rapidly since then. A qualification framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, has been developed since 2005 and will form an integrated part of the comprehensive framework for lifelong learning. According to the proposal which was finalised in June 2009, a new Decree regulating the framework should be prepared and it would be presented to the Finnish Parliament for adoption in 2010. This Decree will present the Finnish national framework for qualifications and other competence, including descriptors for each level.

([52]) See: http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2008/liitteet/opm11.pdf [cited 10.5.2010].

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The work on the Finnish NQF was directly triggered by the debate on the EQF. While Finnish stakeholders supported the idea of a European reference framework, they originally saw little added value of an NQF in Finland. The Finnish system, it was argued, was already transparent, it was already to a large extent based on a learning outcomes approach and it allowed users to build on and combine qualifications in a flexible way. Finland, therefore, expressed the opinion, for example in the 2006 response to the EQF consultation, that a referencing could be accomplished without an NQF. Now, reflecting the changes made to the 2006 EQF proposal from the Commission and following extensive national discussions, there is agreement that a NQF has a role to play and can add value. This is particularly related to the need to increase national and international transparency and to aid the comparability of qualifications. This can be done by improving the functioning and clarity of the national qualifications system, unifying and increasing recognition of prior learning and specifying the principle of lifelong learning, and emphasising a perspective focusing on a learning orientation and learning outcomes. The framework also provides a reference for future national developments. The introduction of a coherent set of learning outcomes based on levels is also seen as a way to aid the referencing to the EQF.

In the mandate given to the August 2008 working group it is emphasised that the NQF should include qualifications defined in the legislation of the Ministry of Education and other branches of the administration. It is further stated that the NQF will not include practices/requirements linked to the regulation of the labour market (regulating professional practices etc.). The mandate emphasises, however, the role of the framework for promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning (prior learning).

An issue which has been discussed but not concluded is how to open the framework up to 'qualifications' acquired outside the traditional, formal education and training system (for example originating from professional training in occupations or sectors). While such an opening is being stressed as an ambition, it is seen as a long term challenge requiring concrete solutions, not least as regards quality assurance arrangements.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Finnish NQF process has been organised to include as broad a range of stakeholders as possible. While initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of

Education, the working group responsible for preparing the NQF proposal consisted of the following representatives: The Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Defence Command Finland (Ministry of Defence), Finnish National Board of Education, Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (AKAVA), Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK), the Association of Vocational Adult Education Centres (AKKL), Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE), Vocational Education Providers in Finland (KJY), Finnish Association of Principals, The Finnish Council of University Rectors, Finnish Adult Education Association, the National Union of University Students in Finland and the Union of Finnish upper secondary students.

The broad range of stakeholders included in the working groups signals an inclusive approach seeking as strong ownership as possible from the start. This approach was further strengthened by carrying out a wide-ranging consultation process in autumn 2009. Of the approximately 90 proposals received, none questioned the idea of developing and implementing an NQF. The decision to base the NQF on a specific Decree, and thus the involvement of the Finnish Parliament, could further strengthen the basis of the initiative.

The Finnish NQF for LLL and its link to higher education

As indicated above, a qualification framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, has been developed since 2005 and will form an integrated part of the new comprehensive framework for lifelong learning. The higher education sector has been generally supportive of the development of the NQF and has contributed actively to the design of the framework. This seems to reflect the existing Finnish education and training system where the interaction between general, vocational and higher education and training institutions operates more smoothly than in some other countries. It may be explained by the traditionally strong role played by the non-university higher education sector (promoting vocational training at bachelor and master level) and by the increasingly important competence-based qualifications approach applied for vocational qualifications at levels corresponding to 4 and 5 (and possibly 6) of the EQF. The competence based approach, gradually developed since the 1990s, is based on the principle that candidates without a background in formal training can be assessed for a qualification. Of particular interest to NQF developments is the recent proposal (still to be decided) to open up

the framework in such a way that individuals with an existing higher education degree can have their work-based experiences assessed for the award of a qualification (in the range of 30-60 ECTS points). This is an interesting way to appreciate and formally value how a general academic oriented education needs to be complemented by practical and vocationally oriented learning. The broad acceptance of the competence-based approach, and its expansion into new areas, may be seen as an important factor explaining the broad consensus characterising the Finnish NQF developments and the, relatively speaking, lack of conflict regarding the linking of general, vocational and higher education qualifications.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level framework described through knowledge, skills and competence is suggested ([53]). The descriptors have been inspired by the EQF but adopted to suit the national context. This is particularly the case for competence where additional aspects like entrepreneurship and languages have been added, potentially as a way to strengthen the dimensions of key-competences and lifelong learning. The descriptors for levels 6-8 correspond to the descriptors of the earlier proposal for a higher education qualifications framework. The table shows the components used to define and describe levels in the Finnish NQF

• Knowledge	
• Work method and application (skills)	
• Responsibility, management and entrepreneurship	Levels 1-8
• Evaluation	
• Key skills for lifelong learning	

The 2009 proposal outlines some basic principles for placing ('the best fit') specific qualifications. First, qualifications of the same type will generally be placed at the same level. Second, individual VET qualifications may in some cases be

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([53]) See Annex 3

placed at one level higher than the basic qualification if the requirement level clearly differs from other qualifications of the same type. This is important as it signals a willingness to use the learning outcomes approach actively and an acknowledgement that this may lead to different level placing within one group or type of qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

The use of a learning outcomes approach is not new to the Finnish qualification system. Finnish VET, for example, has used a competence based approach since the early 1990s. This approach has made it possible to integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning into the system, allowing for flexible access, progression and certification. Learning outcomes are increasingly used to define qualifications also in other parts of the education and training system. This is illustrated by higher education where extensive work is currently being carried out in this field.

These learning outcomes approaches are determined in different ways, for example by the national core curricula, by national requirements for vocational qualifications, and in the laws and decrees regulating higher education. So far, no common standards or requirement have been introduced. The approaches used by different subsystems and institutions therefore vary considerably. While this may allow for tailor made and fit-for purpose solutions; it may also threaten the overall consistency of the approach.

Assessment of learning outcomes is an area which will be given particular attention. Finnish upper secondary vocational qualifications have a long tradition in assessing learning outcomes and work has also started in higher education.

Referencing to the EQF

The Finnish national coordination point for EQF (the National Board of Education) was appointed in June 2008 (before the work on the NQF started). The referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF has started along with the work of the Committee which has prepared the proposal for the national framework of qualifications and other competence; a draft report is expected in the second half of 2010. The final referencing report is expected to be presented to the EQF AG in late 2010.

Important lessons and the way forward

The Finnish debate illustrates that the added value of NQFs can not be taken for granted but has to be judged according to the national context and according to specific national needs. The change in position from 2006 (in the response to the EQF consultation concerning the draft document) to 2008 (the setting up of the NQF working group) can therefore be seen as an appreciation of the potential of NQFs as a reference for future national developments and for international cooperation.

Main sources of information
www.minedu.fi [cited 24.06.2010]
www.oph.fi/recognition [cited 24.06.2010]

FRANCE

Introduction

The setting up, in 2002, of the national committee on vocational qualifications (CNCP) signalled the establishment of the French national qualifications framework. Supported by a register (*répertoire*) of vocational qualifications and the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (*validation des acquis de l'experience*), the French framework can be seen as a first generation of European qualifications frameworks. A coherent set of descriptors is already in use at all levels and for all qualifications, differentiated through the concepts of skills, knowledge and competence.

Taking into account experience since 2002, and in particular the impact of the EQF, a revision of the original framework is now under way. The five-level structure introduced already in 1969 will therefore (probably) be changed, most likely into an eight-level structure, but it is the current established French NQF which will be referenced to the EQF. A note on this revision, and on the referencing to the EQF, was sent to the Prime Minister early autumn 2009. This note presented the objectives set at European level, outlined the methodologies to be used to reach these, and list the changes which needs to be made to the existing structure. This process was finalised by the end of 2009 but is now being considered by the French National Conseil de la statisitique and other relevant stakeholders. If accepted it will

pave the way towards what we may term a second generation French qualifications framework to be implemented from 2010 and onwards.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The revisions currently taking place do not change the basic objectives underpinning the French framework, transparency and quality assurance. The development of the EQF has strengthened the international comparative dimension of the work, as has the support to the Bologna process.

We can observe a strong focus on skills (in French the term *compétence* covers skills, knowledge and competence) in the French NQF. This reflects what is perceived as a problem in education and training in general and in higher education in particular, an increasing number of students find themselves without jobs after finishing university. Recent policy initiatives and reforms have emphasised the need for universities to improve the balance between research and employability to permit better inclusion of students on the labour market. Universities have been obliged to reformulate and clarify their qualifications also in terms of labour market relevance, in effect obliging them to use the same qualifications descriptors (skills, knowledge, competence) as other parts of the education and training system. This movement towards employability, and the obligations of universities to adapt, has been present in French policies since 2006.

For the moment the general baccalaureate (general upper secondary education) is not covered by the national committee on vocational qualifications (CNCP) This committee, and its qualifications register, covers all the vocational qualifications, including all the HE qualifications with a vocational and professional purpose. It is possible, although not yet decided, that the revised structure also will cover the baccalaureate.

Involvement of stakeholders

CNCP is a platform for cooperation between all ministries involved in design and award of qualifications (Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Labour, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Culture, Youth and Sports, Defence, Finance), for the social partners and other relevant stakeholders (chambers, etc.) included in the coordination of the French qualifications system and framework. This broad involvement is seen as necessary (both for technical and administrative reasons) to

be able to capture the diversity of qualifications existing in France, but also for reasons of credibility and ownership.

The role of the CNCP as the 'gatekeeper' of the French framework is important. Any qualification registered in the CNCP irrespective of institutional origin (public, private, national, sectoral) can, in principle, be included in the framework. Registration of private qualifications requires, however, that they meet the criteria set by the CNCP as regards overall quality. This function is demonstrated through the gradual increase in qualifications covered by the framework.

A new law in November 2009 requires the CNCP to give advice prior to any creation of a new qualification by public institutions, including higher education institutions. CNCP is also entitled to be informed about any vocational qualification created by social partners – even in cases where there exists no intention to register them in the national register.

Levels and descriptors

The original five-level structure introduced in 1969 will be used as basis for referencing the French framework to the EQF grid. A new eight-level structure may be introduced in the near future. Exactly when this happens depends on the results of discussions with the key stakeholders, including the national statistics authorities. These levels will be defined through a coherent set of descriptors to be used at all levels and for all qualifications. The descriptors will be differentiated through the concepts of skills, knowledge and competence. It is worth noting that the French have decided, differently from most other countries, to put skills first in the listing of descriptor. This can be seen as a political signal, emphasising the importance of developing qualifications relevant to labour market needs.

The new descriptors are used as a basis for a revision of qualification profiles. Bachelor/master qualifications are currently being redefined and described on the basis of the new descriptor structure.

Use of learning outcomes

There is a common policy on learning outcomes (sometimes expressed as 'competence') covering the entire education and training system, including initial, compulsory education. The approach is fully accepted within vocational education and training and, gradually, in other parts of the education and training system. The approach was strengthened by the 2002 Law on validation of non-formal and

informal learning (VAE) and its emphasis on learning outcomes as the basis for the awarding of any kind of certified qualification. The learning outcomes approach is still only partially introduced in higher education. According to an overview from 2008, only a minority of the existing 83 universities has fully implemented this approach. Traditionally university qualifications have been input-based and focused on the knowledge and research aspect. Under the pressure of the new law of August 2009 (*Loi sur les responsabilités et libertés des universités*) there is increasing obligation for the universities to set new services dedicated to employability). That requires a better description of the learning outcomes both for the employers and the students.

The learning outcomes description of the qualifications is required by the ministry giving (or not) accreditation for the qualifications (every four years). The Bachelor Follow-up Committee has produced very detailed papers on the way bachelor degrees should be designed.

In addition, there are many inter-university teams working on learning outcomes with the triple purpose of helping the implementation of the VAE, registration of the degrees in the RNCP and employability of the students.

A systematic effort is now being made to support the introduction and use of a learning outcomes-based perspective, in particular addressing higher education. A nationwide process has been initiated by the ministry and meetings have been/are being held at regional level explaining the rationale behind the learning outcomes approach. Initial vocational qualifications are defined according to the same logic as for higher education qualifications, in terms of skills, knowledge and competences. There are different forms of VET provisions, influencing the way learning outcomes are assessed. We can speak of four main approaches:

(a) qualifications based on training modules, the learning outcomes of each module being assessed separately;

(b) qualification based on a two-block approach, theory plus practical experience, the learning outcomes of the two blocks being assessed separately;

(c) qualification linked to a single, coherent block of learning outcomes/ competences requiring a holistic approach to assessment of learning outcomes;

(d) qualification based on units of learning outcomes, which can be assessed separately, and capitalised independently of any kind of learning process.

All four operate on the basis of a learning outcomes/competence-based approach, though in different ways.

The emphasis given to transparency is demonstrated by the way the French NQF actively use the Europass certificate supplement. This format is seen as important for transparency reasons and as relevant at all levels, including higher education.

The supplement has a strengthened competence/learning outcomes dimension. The main focus is on the three descriptor elements – knowledge, skills and competences – but the link to quality assurance and to validation of non-formal and informal learning is also addressed by the framework.

Referencing to the EQF

Work on referencing to the EQF has been going on since 2006. A draft referencing report will be presented to the EQF AG in 2010. This work has, from the start, been organised as an official process, involving all ministries, social partners and other stakeholders represented in the CNCP. On average, a group of approximately 25 persons meet regularly, also including representatives of the regions, statisticians, etc. The referencing work has been supported by the EQF test and pilot projects, notably the Leonardo da Vinci Net-testing project. A conclusion drawn on the basis of these experiences is that we need to develop the same methodology for all qualifications levels and the referencing must be done in the same way for VET and for HE. Current practices have not been conducive for this. Until now higher education institutions have described their qualifications curricula on the basis of knowledge but added the goals of the qualifications in terms of activities and competences, while other awarding institutions/bodies use skills, knowledge and competence. The aim is gradually to introduce a common approach covering all types and levels of qualifications.

The referencing of the lowest level of French qualifications to the EQF has posed a particular challenge. The current level 5 (lowest in the 1969 system) should, when applying a learning outcomes perspective, be referenced to both levels 2 and 3 of the EQF. Such a differentiation will not be applied in the upcoming referencing but may be considered in the future. A transition period has therefore been agreed where the current lowest level will be referred to EQF level 3 whatever is the profile and learning outcome profile of the qualification in question. Practices will change after 2010 and take into account the actual differences in learning outcomes in the specific cases.

Some concern is expressed over the different (and potentially inconsistent) choices now being made by countries in referencing of particular qualifications and how this may influence the French qualifications. This seems especially to be the case for qualifications at levels 5 and 6 of EQF: nursing qualifications as well as master craftsmen (*Meister*) are typical examples.

Important lessons learned and the way forward

There is a less clear distinction between VET and higher education in France compared to many other European countries. Since the 1970s vocational courses and programmes have formed an important and integrated part of traditional universities and both bachelor and master degrees (with a vocational profile) are awarded. Outside the universities we find specialised technical and vocational schools offering courses and certificates at a high level. These schools are run by different ministries covering their respective subject areas (agriculture, health, etc.), or by chambers of industry. The i*ngénieurs* coming out of these institutions or students in business schools hold qualifications at a high level, equivalent to those coming out of universities with a master degree. It is the Ministry of HE that delivers the level (*grade*) of bachelor and master and recognises the diplomas. This has an integrating effect on the diplomas awarded by other ministries such as culture or industry.

This situation, in effect questioning the whole distinction between VET and higher education, explains the fact that higher education qualifications are an integrated part of the French framework and that some of the tensions observed in other countries are less clearly expressed in France.

Main sources of information
Information is available on the web site of the national committee on vocational qualifications (CNCP): http://www.cncp.gouv.fr/ [cited 05.07.2010]

GERMANY

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen,* DQR) is currently being developed in Germany. It will include qualifications obtained in general education, higher education and vocational education and training. In the first phase, only full formal qualifications will be referenced to the DQR. In a later phase, informally and non-formally acquired competences will also be included.

The preparations for the framework started in 2007. Following extensive preparatory work, a proposal for a German NQF was published in February 2009 ([54]). This proposal provides the basis for an extensive testing phase to be followed by full scale implementation. The current (2009-10) piloting stage uses qualifications from selected sectors (IT, metal, health and the trade sector) as 'testing ground' to link exemplarily qualifications to the level of DQR. The main aim is to verify that the matrix and level indicators are suitable and usable. Stakeholders and experts from school-based and work-based VET, continuing education and training, general education, HE, trade unions and employers collaborate in testing the NQF proposal.

An NQF for the higher education sector (related to QF-EHEA) was established in 2005 and put in place since then. In January 2010, the self-referencing report of the NQF for HE to be compatible with the QF-EHEA was published ([55]). The relationships and links between the NQF for HE and NQF for lifelong learning are currently being discussed in Germany. The NQF for HE is likely to remain the main reference for higher education as its descriptors are more detailed than the descriptors in the proposed NQF for LLL and it is designed to suit the specific needs of HE. QF for HE has a strong emphasis on knowledge component and development of competences such as responsible citizenship, cultural awareness etc. However, the envisaged NQF for LLL aims at integrating all areas of learning.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The work on the DQR responds to the EQF initiative. An important objective of it is to allow for a transparent referencing of qualifications acquired in Germany to the EQF and to use it as tool to improve opportunities for German citizen in the European labour market. Another important objective is to map all obtainable qualifications, present them in relation to each other, and make them easily understood and comparable.

These two main objectives have been translated into the following detailed aims. The DQR is expected to:
(a)   increase transparency in the German qualification system;
(b)   promote reliability, transfer opportunities and quality assurance;
(c)   improve the visibility of the equivalence and differences between qualifications;
(d)   aid recognition of German qualifications elsewhere in Europe;

([54])   The discussion proposal is available from Internet: www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de [cited 19.04.2010].
([55])   See http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/documents/NQF_Germany_self-certification_English.pdf [cited 19.04.2010].

(e)   support the mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries and within Germany;

(f)   increase the skills orientation of qualifications;

(g)   reinforce the learning outcomes orientation of qualification processes;

(h)   improve opportunities for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;

(i)   foster and enhance access and participation in lifelong learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

A national steering group (*Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*) was jointly established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Republic of Germany at the beginning of 2007. This coordination group has appointed a working group *Arbeitskreis DQR* which comprises stakeholders from higher education, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and the labour market as well as researchers and practitioners. Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely with their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) a *DQR Büro* (DQR office) has been set up to provide technical and administrative support to the process.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure has been proposed to cover all main types of German qualifications.

Level descriptors describe competences required to obtain a qualification. The draft DQR differentiates between two categories of competence: professional and personal. The table shows the components used for describing levels in the DQR.

The term competence lies at the heart of the DQR and signals readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and for occupational and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as action skills (see below).

Level indicator			
Structure of requirements			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	*Skills*	*Social competence*	*Self-competence*
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, judgment	Team/leadership skills, involvement and communication	Autonomy/responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence

Descriptors are expressed as alternatives, e.g. 'field of study *or* work' and 'specialised field of study *or* field of occupational activity'. The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in proposal of DQR.

Use of learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is supported by all major stakeholders. One important aim of the DQR is to support further use of learning outcomes in standard-setting, curricula and assessment.

Learning outcomes are expressed in the various formulations of standards of *Kompetenz* that have been developed in particular for VET, where a concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action skills) has gradually assumed a key role in qualifications definition, alongside clear input requirements about place, duration and content of learning. The action skills are described in terms of a typology of competences: *Fachkompetenz* (professional competence), *Personalkompetenz* (personal) and *Sozialkompetenz* (social).

In general education no specific action skills for qualifications are provided. Curricula are often not written with a specific focus on learning outcomes. The recently introduced national *Bildungsstandards* could be taken as a first attempt to define a minimum set of learning outcomes for school subjects for primary education (*Hauptschule*), the intermediate leaving certificate (*Realschule*) and for the upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Abitur*). [56]

In higher education, the shift to learning outcomes took place in a broader sense when introducing bachelor and master studies in recent years. Module handbooks are defined in terms of learning outcomes.

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[56] See: http://iea-rc.org/bildungsstandards00.html?&L=1 [cited 19.04.2010].

DQR also aims at improving opportunities for recognising informally acquired learning outcomes and strengthening lifelong learning. Model and research projects have been running to support further development.

Referencing to the EQF

The joint steering committee set up by the Federal Government and the *Länder* in 2007 is in charge of the referencing process, advised and coordinated by the DQR Büro. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010 and the final report is to be submitted by 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The development of the DQR is embedded in the broader context of reforms in Germany to strengthen the outcome-based orientation of German education and training system. It is also linked to initiatives to support permeability between VET and HE, e.g. the ANCOM initiative involves all relevant stakeholders from VET and HE to support recognition of learning outcomes.

The development of the DQR is also characterised by a comprehensive vision and a coherent set of level descriptors, spanning all levels of education and training. This approach makes it possible to identify and better understand the similarities and differences between qualifications in different parts of the education and training system. Because it refers to the level and type of learning outcome, this approach can make it possible to judge whether, for example, a VET qualification can form a basis for a HE qualification. To develop a permeable system with better horizontal and vertical progression possibilities is at the heart of DQR developments.

The NQF development is also characterised by a strong and broad involvement of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training (general education, school and work-based VET, HE), stakeholders from the labour market, ministries and *Länder*.

Main sources of information
The national steering group (Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe) is designated as EQF national coordination point (NCP).

The information on the DQR development is available from Internet: www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de [cited 24.06.2010]

GREECE

Introduction

Greece is currently developing an NQF for LLL, which will include all parts and levels of education, training and qualification system. A consultation paper on NQF development was prepared by a high level committee and presented for open public consultation planned to be carried out between March and September 2010. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall process, but a broad range of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training, employment and NGOs are involved. A web site http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/ [cited 24.06.2010] has been prepared for comments and contributions.

Following the consultation phase, Greece will start referencing qualifications to the levels of NQFs in two pilot sectors (tourism and environmental professions). The new law on lifelong learning was adopted in September 2010, providing the legal framework for NQF implementation.

A qualifications framework for higher education is being put in place separately from the NQF for LLL. Some coordination between the two initiatives are ensured by the involvement of higher education representatives in the high level committee mentioned above. The NQF is expected to be in place by 2011.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

It is agreed that the NQF could help to address the following challenges and needs:
(a) to increase coherency and consistency of the national qualification system and reduce fragmentation of current subsystems;
(b) to improve access and progression possibilities, eliminate dead ends and foster lifelong learning opportunities;
(c) to develop coherent approaches and procedures to certification and quality assurance;
(d) the need to have a solid basis for the development of recognition for non-formal and informal learning.

The short-term objective is to develop coherent national certification procedures covering both IVET (there is an existing system) and CVET to support the consistency and portability of qualifications.

In the more medium term the following objectives will be pursued:

(a) to improve transparency and currency of qualifications through clear learning outcomes description;
(b) to develop procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning;
(c) to improve access, progression and recognition possibilities;
(d) to improve quality and portability of qualifications.

Long-term objectives will be developing coherent lifelong learning strategies and practices; improving coherence of national reform policies; and using the NQF as a development instrument for change.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs in 2008. Under its umbrella a high level committee to develop Greek NQF was initially established in the framework of Operational programme for employment and training (2007–13) in spring 2008. Its status was formalised in spring 2009. It was chaired by the General Secretary for LLL (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs). Its members represented: OEEK, the organisation for VET (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs); the General Secretariat for LLL (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs); EKEPIS, National Accreditation Centre for CVET (Ministry of Employment and Social Protection); the General Confederation of Greek Workers; ESSEEKA Committee, national system of VET linked to employment (both ministries involved); and the Confederation of Greek industries and representatives of universities and external experts.

The Ministry of National Education coordinates the process; responsibilities among partners will be agreed in the future. Administrative support is provided by the General Secretariat for LLL unit. Financial support will be provided under the ESF operational programme for employment and training (2007-13). The project is being supported by research conducted on different aspects of Greek education and training subsystems.

Levels and descriptors

According to the consultation proposal the Greek NQF will be a comprehensive framework covering all parts and levels of education and training. An eight-level structure has been proposed reflecting existing education and training systems in Greece. EQF level descriptors are taken as a starting point for further developments. Levels are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Use of learning outcomes

A new common methodology for the creation of job profiles/occupational standards based on learning outcomes was created by Ministerial Decision No 110998/2006. This common methodology is an innovative development for VET in Greece as it changes traditional input orientation to a learning outcomes approach. It is currently used in CVET, but is planned to be the common basis for all VET qualifications.

Learning outcomes approaches exist in the practical part of the IVET exams, operated by OEEK on a decentralised basis.

In general education, a new frame for the development of a 'new school' has been politically launched and renewal of curricula is planned.

Discussions on the development of the QF for HE have started. It is expected that this work will reinforce the learning outcome approach in HE.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of the national qualifications system levels to the EQF should take place in 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in the NQF development and consultation process is seen as crucial.

One of the issues to be discussed in the consultation process will be the referencing of qualifications awarded by private colleges which cooperate with foreign accreditation bodies, mainly from the UK and the USA. In Greece, there is a clear division between non-university, mostly private, institutions and the university sector, which is public and charges no fees in accordance with the Greek Constitution. Universities have the exclusive right to award traditional HE qualifications (MA, BA and Doctorate). Referencing higher education qualifications awarded outside traditional universities using learning outcomes-based level descriptors is seen as a challenge.

Compared to many other countries, Greece has a weak tradition in the use of learning outcomes for defining and describing qualifications. This may limit the extent to which a new NQF can influence policies and practices, and in particular influence progression between different levels and types of qualifications.

Main sources of information

The General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLLL), Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the NQF implementation body and the national coordination point (NCP): http://www.gsae.edu.gr [cited 24.06.2010]

HUNGARY

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) for LLL is being developed in Hungary. It will embrace all national qualifications and all subsystems in accordance with the broad (general) national level descriptors which will allow subsystems to adopt more specific descriptors.

The national register of VET qualifications (NRQ) and the current revision of professional and examination requirements in VET sectors, as well as continuing changes in the cycle system and the focus of the regulation towards outcomes in higher education in the Bologna process, are elements contributing to the establishment of a single NQF.

The conceptualisation of an NQF started in early 2006 and was completed in 2008. A preparatory working group developed a concept paper on designing and implementing an NQF in Hungary. Two other working groups collected and analysed data to prepare the draft proposal for the NQF level descriptors and the mechanisms to support its operation. Finally, in June 2008, the Government adopted a Decision (No 2069/2008) on the development of an NQF for life long learning and on joining the EQF by 2013 [57]. The decision provides the legal basis and policy framework for the development of the NQF. It also sets out the road map, defines tasks, responsibilities and the appropriate financial and human resources.

The first (2008-10) phase of NQF developments is taken forward as part of the mostly EU-funded social renewal operational programme of the New Hungary Development Plan (2007–13) [58]. The estimated costs of the development and establishment of the NQF are HUF 800 million (approximately EUR three million).

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[57] Government Decision (No 2069/2008) on the development of an NQF for life long learning. Available from Internet http://www.okm.gov.hu/kozoktatas/2069-2008-kormhat [cited 24.06.2010].
[58] See Social Renewal Operational Programme 2007-2013. The Government of the Republic of Hungary. Available from Internet: http://www.nfu.hu/umft_operativ_programok [cited 23.03.2010].

The NQF is being designed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. In the phase of the operation to be ended in 2010, a comprehensive proposal encompassing all subsystems of education and training (school-based general education and VET, higher education, adult education) will be submitted to the government by the two responsible ministries. In the second (implementation) phase (2010-12), based on the Government decision, the relevant ministries will wok together to create – in their respective fields of competence – the necessary political, legal, financial and institutional conditions for implementing the NQF.

According to the decision on the establishment of the NQF, the formal referencing to the EQF will take place by 2013 the latest.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The development of an NQF will address the following issues:

(a) make the harmonisation of the different subsystems easier, promote the national qualification system becoming more coherent and support national policy coordination;

(b) support lifelong learning and enable stronger links between the adult learning sector (which is unregulated) and the formal education system, make easier the recognition of a broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning);

(c) improve transparency, transferability and comparability of national qualifications by showing the relationship between qualifications (there are many qualifications at levels 4, 5 and 6);

(d) consolidate and reinforce the use of learning outcomes in standard-setting, curricula and assessment and establish a common approach for describing learning outcomes in different subsystems (currently there are different approaches in HE, general education or VET);

(e) through referencing the NQF to the EQF, make Hungarian qualifications easier to understand abroad and make them more comparable, and more transparent, thus enhancing mutual trust;

(f) introduce common national quality standards; improve the relevance of qualifications in the labour market; and support the career orientation and counselling system.

Involvement of stakeholders

The overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the NQF is shared between the Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

A high-level inter-ministerial committee was set up in October 2008 to programme, harmonise and monitor all phases of the NQF development and implementation process. It is chaired by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture jointly with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. It comprises representatives of different ministries, the National Council for Public Education, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Higher Education and Research Council, employers' and employees' associations represented in the National Interest Reconciliation Council, the national economic chambers, teachers', parents' and students' associations.

The administrative support to the High level inter-ministerial committee is provided by the Department for EU Relations of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Levels and descriptors

Three projects were launched in 2009 to develop NQF levels and descriptors as well as indicate how they can be applied in the different subsystems of education and training: higher education, general education and VET.

In early October 2009, experts and stakeholders involved in these projects, plus members of the high-level inter-ministerial committee, reached a tentative agreement regarding the levels and descriptors of the NQF. It is proposed to describe the levels in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, autonomy and responsibility.

An eight-level structure is suggested, with the final decision to be based on in-depth analysis of each level. Particular attention will be paid to the ordinary and advanced level of school leaving exam, higher VET levels, post graduate specialist training and profession-specific post-graduate examinations.

The question of introducing a preliminary or entry level ('zero') has been raised. This level would mainly concern the learning taking place before entering primary education, e.g. in kindergarten. It has been argued that an important aim of education and training is to reduce differences between pupils from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The kindergarten (and the testing of school maturity) could be used to counter-balance disadvantage: presenting it as an

integrated part of a comprehensive framework could make sense. It could be argued that this contradicts the learning outcomes approach used for the remaining levels of the framework, and would define the entry level exclusively on the basis of institutional input. The expert group also argued that kindergarten does not provide any qualification, therefore it is not sensible to extend the framework with another level.

The learning outcome based first levels are considered very important for adults, for the reintegration of dropouts and for migrants.

Use of learning outcomes

In recent years, the conditions for the establishment of a qualification system based on learning outcomes in education and training, especially in VET, have been put in place. Focus on learning outcomes has strong support among different stakeholders and is the subject of research studies in different subsystems of education and training. An assessment and evaluation system is being developed.

A number of steps have been taken towards a competence-based approach. As of 2007, a national core curriculum based on key competences has been put in place in school-based education and the national competence assessment has been introduced in public education. Since 2006 the final secondary school examination (maturity examination) has been reformed, enabling more accurate assessment of acquired competences by students.

In the VET sector, in 2004–06, the national register of qualifications (NRQ) was reformed and 400 competence-based vocational qualifications (including partial qualifications) referenced into a five-level structure were developed.

The shift to learning outcomes in post-secondary VET is taking place through the introduction of competence profiles, which are being used as the basis for qualifications and curricula design and are at the core of the competence-based examination system. Qualifications consist of core and optional modules.

In HE, learning outcomes have appeared in qualifications requirements through regulatory measures and acts. All first and second cycle HE qualifications in Hungary are described in terms of both inputs and outcomes criteria. However, student-centred learning, outcomes-based orientation and use of learning outcomes in designing programmes and learning units are still a key challenge in the HE sector.

Hungary is in the first stages of introducing the validation of informal and non-formal learning into its education system. Sporadic and fragmented, many times experimental, practice appears in different fields and institutions of the education

sectors. Although legislative provisions are in place, implementation has not been yet developed.

Referencing to EQF

The referencing process will start in the second quarter of 2011. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2013, at latest.

Lessons learned and the way forward

One of the main roles of the NQF is to function as an interface between education and the labour market; therefore, it is crucial to get different stakeholders from education and the labour market on board. It is expected that the NQF will create a common language and improve communication and responsiveness of education and training to new needs of the labour market and individuals and also promote widely the concept of lifelong learning.

Involvement of international experts in the referencing process will be a challenge due to languages requirements and should be cofinanced through EU grants.

Main sources of information

The Department for EU Relations of the Ministry of Education and Culture acts as EQF national coordination point (NCP). Final decision on the tasks, composition and location of the NCP will be taken by 2010, http://www.okm.gov.hu [cited 24.06.2010].

ICELAND

Introduction

Iceland has decided to develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework covering all levels and types of qualifications. The main elements of this framework are now gradually being put in place. The work on the Icelandic framework started in autumn 2007 and reflected work already done in higher education, linked to the Bologna process. The work on the HE framework had already started in 2006 and

was implemented in 2007. The Higher education sector supports the development of the NQF and will use the learning outcomes based approach in the further development of programmes (also linked to participation in the Tuning project).

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The Icelandic NQF is seen as an important tool for reforming the national education and training system. While a transparent description of the existing system is considered to be important – for national and European purposes – this is seen simply as a precondition for increasing the flexibility of the qualification system and for increasing participation in learning. The framework approach, combining levels with a systematic use of learning outcomes, is seen as a way to identify and reduce gaps between different forms of education and training, for example between primary, secondary and upper secondary levels. The framework approach also makes it possible to articulate the context within which the different qualifications are located and thus clarify the relationship between them. The introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning, on which work started early in the decade, can be seen as an integrated part of this effort.

The discussion on the potential added value of an Icelandic NQF has been going on since 2006. Central to this discussion has been the wish to contribute to a shift in traditional thinking about learning. Wide ranging discussions on themes such as qualifications, learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and competences have been held, playing an important role in moving forward strategic thinking on education goals.

The new legislation on upper secondary education in Iceland has been instrumental in preparing the ground for a new approach based on levels and descriptors. Introducing the term qualification instead of education programmes, the central role played by learning outcomes is now clarified. The new act further stipulates that the implementation of the qualifications framework will take place gradually. The levels and their descriptors are generally seen as important for placing and locating programmes and courses in a more transparent way. This is a precondition for showing the connections and progression routes between different programmes. The development of an explicit set of levels is also seen as part of a strategy for guiding individuals, showing what knowledge, skills and competences are expected at different levels.

The question of key competences will also be considered in the light of the new qualification framework as they are important at all levels. Applying learning outcomes within a comprehensive framework approach aids articulation and

implementation of key competences. A lifelong learning approach has been at the heart of the discussion on qualification frameworks. This is why the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture took the opportunity provided by the work on EQF and NQF to plan a national debate on education, focusing on the progression from pre-school to higher education through concepts such as key competences, knowledge, skills and competences. This has led to a renewal of thinking within the education society, among teachers and trainers and other stakeholders, and providers have welcomed the opportunity to take a fresh look at what they are doing and review their commitment to excel.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall coordination of the work on the NQF.

In 2008 the Ministry set up nine working groups covering the entire scope of qualifications and all the different parts of the education and training system. These working groups have been helpful in redefining and redescribing existing qualifications in terms of developing learning outcomes based curricula. Providers are looking to the results of this work when planning and reviewing their study programmes., Social partners are represented in the working groups covering VET along with representatives of teachers, etc.

Occupational councils covering the full scope of sectors and occupations will support the implementation of the NQF. These councils, currently being set up, will make possible an extended dialogue on the match between the learning outcomes offered by the education and training system and the skills needs of the occupations.

Closely linked to the above developments is the process within higher education to develop learning outcomes-based course descriptors. Inspired by the Tuning approach, two institutions are currently involved and plan to come up with a proposal by 2011.

In general, the Icelandic framework has been received positively by the different stakeholders. This also applies to teachers and trainers who are actively involved in the reforms related to learning outcomes, curricula and key-competences.

Levels and descriptors

A ten-level framework of qualifications is now being discussed in Iceland. No decision has been made. This proposal builds on the previous seven-level approach but introduces three lower levels. Only the seven 'original' levels will be referenced to the EQF (the Icelandic level 1 will cover levels 1 and 2 of the EQF). The introduction of three lower levels signals a wish to develop not only a transparent but also an inclusive framework, able to address the (diverse) education, training and learning needs of the entire population, reflecting lifelong learning from early age onto learning as an adult. The lower levels will make it possible to articulate the key competences needed and how different levels are connected and can be used for progression.

Use of learning outcomes

Compared to the EQF descriptors, the Icelandic national descriptors are more detailed and specific. This reflects that some stakeholders, in particular outside VET, are not accustomed to, and find it difficult to, use the learning outcomes approach. Particular emphasis has been given to the skills element of the descriptors, underlining that this is an aspect not only relevant to VET but also to general and higher education. A systematic use of learning outcomes, referring to a national set of descriptors, is seen as important for a number of different purposes, not least for the future design of qualifications. It will help to clarify the balance of knowledge, skills and competences for different programmes at different levels and bring added value to current practices where each school has a large say on the form and content of the programme or course. The use of learning outcomes-based levels and descriptors will make it easier to assess whether schools operate at the same level of learning outcomes or whether there are major differences between them.

The learning outcomes based approach is also seen as a basis for strengthening the role of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The existence of explicitly defined levels distinguishing knowledge, skills and competence will make it easier to fully integrate validation arrangements.

Referencing to the EQF

Preparations for referencing have started and a draft referencing report is expected by the end of 2010. Level 4 of the Icelandic qualifications framework is seen as a

parallel to EQF level 5 and is seen as decisive level for bridging VET and higher education and for ensuring permeability of the overall education and training system. A referencing of the Icelandic qualifications system to the EQF is seen as bringing added value and allowing for comparability.

Important lessons learned and the way forward

The experiences linked to the introduction of a learning outcomes-based approach are being summarised as very positive and stimulating for the overall reform of the education and training system. This process, however, is also challenging in the sense that many stakeholders have little experience in applying a learning outcomes-based approach in practice. The novelty of the approach, and the uncertainty this causes, has required the Ministry to provide guidance and pay particular attention to the development reflecting the Icelandic situation.

Main sources of information

Information and documents covering the Icelandic developments can be found at http://www.nymenntastefna.is/ [cited 24.06.2010]

IRELAND

Introduction

The comprehensive national framework of qualifications of Ireland (NFQ) was proposed through the Qualifications (Educations and Training) Act 1999 and launched in October 2003 after broad consultation with different stakeholders. The ten levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced; qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training and higher education are included. It is a comprehensive, integrated and learning outcomes based framework.

The NFQ has reached an advanced stage of implementation, with more consistent approaches to the use of learning outcomes across different subsystems, especially in sectors, led by FETAC (Further Education and in Awards Council) and HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council). In universities and the school sector implementation was voluntary and impact smaller [59]. Credit transfer

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[59] Allais,, S. Raffe, D., Young, M. (2009). *Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues. Employment Working Paper No. 44*, p. 31. ILO, Geneva. Availabe on http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_119307/index.htm [cited 28.06.2010].

and recognition of non-formal learning are pursued and cooperation with different stakeholders in education and training is being strengthened.

The majority of national awards are now included in the NFQ, including those made by the State Examinations Commission, Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC), the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

In July 2006 the National Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI) published policies and criteria on inclusion of the awards of certain international and professional awarding bodies in the NFQ ([60]). A number of awards made by professional and international awarding bodies are now included in the NFQ.

The national framework of qualifications has been developed and is being maintained by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which was set up in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Ireland was the first EU Member State to reference its national framework of qualifications to the EQF. The final referencing report was adopted by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on the 28 May 2009 and is available on http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html [cited 28.06.2010]. The report was adopted by EQF Advisory group in September 2009.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society' in which learners can avail of learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives, was a key factor in the changes that have taken place in Ireland. This led to the need for a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications that could accommodate all shapes and sizes of education and training in Ireland. The policy goals of the NQF are to:

(a) create an open, learner-centred, coherent, transparent and widely understood system of qualifications in Ireland that is responsive to the needs of individual learners and to the social and economic needs of the country;

(b) ease access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners within and across the different levels and subsystems of education and training;

(c) increase mobility through understanding and recognition of Irish qualifications abroad and fully participate in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

([60]) Amended in June 2010 and available from internet:
http://www.nqai.ie/documents/AlignmentofIntSectoralAwardswiththeNFQPolicyApproach-FINAL08.0610.pdf [cited 30.5.2010].

The process was strongly supported by major stakeholders in the country. In the meantime the NFQ has become widely known and is used as a tool for supporting evolutionary changes in education, training and qualification system ([61]).

The implementation of the NFQ has been monitored by the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI) which published the Framework implementation and impact study report, prepared by an external team of national and international experts. The study aimed at assessing the extent to which the NFQ is being implemented and to support deeper implementation of the framework. The study concluded with nineteen recommendations concerning the further implementation of the Framework and access, transfer and progression possibilities ([62]).

Involvement of stakeholders

The development of the NFQ was initiated by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and developed and implemented in the extended consultative period with a range of stakeholders. The Bologna process has been an important part of the NFQ development on a voluntary but strong partnership basis.

Broad cooperation with different stakeholders is ensured through the Authority and the Consultative Group of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

The design and implementation of the NFQ has been supported by different research studies within the country and the process also has a strong external dimension through interactive research with non-European countries (Australia, New Zealand).

The Irish NFQ and higher education

The Irish NFQ is 'the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between education and training awards' ([63]). This indicated clearly the aim of the NFQ to be inclusive of all learning

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([61]) The Framework Implementation and Impact Study emphasised the importance of further strengthening the visibility of the framework in relation to the labour market (assisting development of career pathways, certifying learning achievements acquired at work, guidance etc.) The study is available on the website of the IQA, http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html [cited 28.06.2010].
([62]) See:Ihttp://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html, p. 51- 55, [cited 28.06.2010].
([63]) See: *Polices and criteria for the establishment of the NFQ.* Available from Internet: http://www.nqai.ie/framework_policies_criteria.html [cited 28.06.2010].

including the highest levels learning achievements. In that sense it is a comprehensive and integrating framework. The Qualifications Authority has determined that all qualifications at levels 7 to 10 are higher education and training awards ([64]). At level 6, further education and training awards (regulated by FETAC) and higher education awards (regulated by HETAC) are differentiated.

Self-certification of the compatibility of the Irish NFQ with the QF-EHEA was completed in 2007 ([65]). This self-certification included all qualifications at levels 7 to 10 of the NFQ, as well as vocationally oriented higher qualifications and HETAC qualifications at level 6 (i.e. higher certificate).

The implementation of the framework in HE is based on the partnership between the Qualifications Authority and awarding bodies (i.e. HETAC, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and universities). The framework has a regulatory role in respect of qualifications awarded by HETAC and DIT as it regulates the design and award of qualifications and sets standards. Universities participated in the process on voluntary basis. They set standards for their awards which are broadly compatible with the level descriptors and awards-types descriptors. Therefore the inclusion of universities awards is based on the understanding that the standards of these were consistent with those in the framework. Substantial progress has been made in relation to the inclusion of major university diplomas at levels 8 and 9 and their non-major awards. However it will take time to include the full range of awards including those of associated colleges ([66]).

It is also of note that referencing process of the NFQ to the EQF, completed in 2009, built on the experiences and conclusions of the self-certification process. The referencing report emphasised the different nature of these two processes. The self-certification was concerned with verifying the extent to which particular qualification marks or does not mark the completion of the Bologna three cycles. The EQF referencing, in contrast, establishes transparent links between national qualifications levels and EQF levels and does not concern a particular qualification.

Levels and descriptors

The three main blocks of the NFQ are ten levels, level descriptors and award-types. The ten levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most

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([64]) See: http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html, p. 11.
([65]) The report certifying the compatibility of the NFQ and the QF-EHEA is available from Internet:
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/national.asp [cited 28.06.2010].
([66]) See http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html, p. 13.

advanced; qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training and higher education are included.

Each level of the NFQ is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge (breadth, kind), know–how and skills (range, selectivity) and competence. Competence is subdivided into context, role, learning to learn, insight. Knowledge, skills and competences are defined as expected learning outcomes to be achieved by the holder of the qualification.

The NQF comprises levels, award-types and named-awards. Four classes of award-types have been determined: major, minor, special-purpose and supplemental. This is to ensure that the framework can capture all types and sizes of learning undertaken by a learner.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach was central to the establishment of the NFQ and the associated legislation and system reform. It is grounded upon principles, aims, and elements of implementation relating to learning outcomes. The outcomes are expressed as knowledge, skills and competences on a ten-level framework intended to apply to all qualifications. The outcomes are indicators of what a person knows, can do and understand, rather than time spent on a programme. The new regulation for awards in the NFQ states that new awards are made on the basis of learning outcomes. The principles for all curriculum development leading to qualification now derive from the NFQ. The Framework implementation and impact study [67] concluded that a learning-outcomes based approach has been implemented in all subsystems, but is progressing at variable speeds. The NFQ had a stronger reform role in sectors led by FETAC and HETAC. Implementation was slower then expected. 'There may still be a gap between redesigned and rewritten programmes and actual delivery and perception of these on the ground' [68].

The NFQ allows for the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning and there is legislation in place which means that any individual has the right to apply for recognition of prior learning. However the study identified areas for improvement in the operation and application of recognition of prior learning.

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[67] *The Framework Implementation and Impact Study, Executive summary.* Availabe from Internet: http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html,
[68] See:http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html, pg 39.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of the Irish NQF to the EQF has been completed. The referencing process was assisted by a national steering committee, composed of representatives of major stakeholders from education and training as well as international experts.

The following link between the NFQ and the EQF was established:

NFQ	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
EQF	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8

The final referencing report was adopted by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on the 28 May 2009 and is available on
http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html [cited 28.06.2010].

Lessons learned and the way forward

The implementation of the NFQ very much relies on the broad partnership approach, step-by-step development, and strong support of different stakeholders. The deeper the implementation, the more need for support from different stakeholders.

An international team of experts who prepared the Framework implementation and impact study report summarised some key features in developing NQFs ([69]):

(a) the implementation of an NQF requires time to develop understanding ey concepts and to promote cultural change;

(b) the importance of stakeholder involvement in all phases of development and implementation to ensure ownership;

(c) the NQF development is an iterative process, in which the existing education and training system and the framework are progressively aligned with each other;

(d) It is important to find balance between implementation within subsystems and the cross-system developments;

(e) the need for a framework to be loose enough to accommodate different types of learning;

([69]) See: http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html,, p 50.

(f)   qualifications frameworks may be more enablers than drivers of change; alignment with other supporting policies, institutional requirements is needed.

Main sources of information

The most important information is available on the websites of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which is also the national coordination point (NCP): http://www.nqai.ie [cited 28.06.2010] and http://www.nfq.ie [cited 28.06.2010].

ITALY

Introduction

Work aiming at establishing an Italian national qualifications and certification framework has been going on since 2003. The responsibility for taking forward this initiative is shared between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research. Political process started in 2003.

The national committee (*Tavolo nazionale*) set up by the Ministry of Labour in 2006 has been a key player in developing the NQF. This committee not only involves representatives of the two responsible ministries but also representatives of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and the social partners.

In 2006, Italy started preparing a common methodology, including a national learning outcomes approach, providing the basis for closer integration of the different parts of the qualification system. An inventory of regional standards of competences was prepared and methodology successfully tested in tourism and the mechanical sector. Other sectors (e.g. chemical, food and agriculture) are about to be mapped with the same methodology. Some regions adopted regional standards using the same methodology. Currently, the ISFOL is supporting the Ministry of Labour in creating a national database of job descriptions and standards (occupational and training standards) developed in Italy in recent years, which are clustered in 24 economic and professional areas ([70]).

The relationships between the State and the Regions concerning the governance and institutional issues are currently being discussed. On 17 February 2010, an

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([70]) More information is available on http://www.nrpitalia.it/isfol/nup/admin/aep_rep.php [cited 03.05.2010].

important agreement between Ministry of Labour, Regions and Social Partners was signed in relation to the training policies to be jointly implemented through the current year. This agreement called Guidelines for Training in 2010 ([71]) sees the national qualification system in a wider European context and underlines the key-role to be played by a learning outcomes approach in aiding individual learning. Also, recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been mentioned within these guidelines as a strategic focus in the perspective of human capital competitiveness and lifelong learning aims.

A concrete result of the development processes, on the way since 2006, is the recent reform in upper secondary education ([72]) introducing new levels defined by learning outcomes and reflecting the EQF level descriptors. It introduces three main secondary school pathways: general (*lycées*), technical and vocational education pathway, leading to five-year diplomas and learning outcomes linked to the EQF. Moreover, the vocational education and training system managed by Regions will operate according to agreed national standards (consistent with the EQF levels). Three-year vocational qualifications and four-year vocational diplomas will be awarded. The implementation will start in September 2010 and will continue up to 2013. Levels and level descriptors are seen as important for placing programmes in a more coherent way and to show progression routes between programmes.

The work on the QF for HE has been under way since 2005. The first draft was prepared in 2008 and broad consultation process with the main stakeholders of the university sector (Rector's conference, academic community and students) was organised. Cooperation between NQF development and the Bologna process is ensured through the participation of the Bologna representative in the national committee.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

In Italy the development of an NQF should respond to several needs:
(a) the NQF is a national structure that should make the integration of the different systems within the national context easier;
(b) it responds to the request of the EQF recommendation designed to ease the dialogue between educational systems and the labour market;

([71]) Available from web-site http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/formazione_2010 [cited 7.04.2010].
([72]) Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on http://nuovilicei.indire.it/ [cited 28.06.2010].

(c)   it should also make geographic and professional mobility of individuals easier, both at national and European levels;

(d)   it should also help individuals, along the course of their life, in capitalising their non-formal and informal experiences. The system should promote social inclusion with reference to people who do not hold regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market;

(e)   the national standard system, based on the learning outcomes approach, is the precondition for national validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education, University and Research and Ministry of Labour and Social Policies are leading the NQF development and implementation process in agreement with the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and the social partners.

At the technical level, ISFOL (the national institute for development of vocational training) is involved in implementing the national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners.

The monitoring of the implementation of the NQF to prepare the referencing process to the EQF will be operated by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, with the support of the NCP appointed at ISFOL.

Levels and descriptors

The structures of the NQF levels and level descriptors have not yet been defined, although there are components in place, e.g. in HE and more recently at upper secondary level. Italy uses a learning outcomes approach and the EQF level descriptors as a basis for further developments. The national coordination point is currently working on this topic.

In the QF for HE, Dublin descriptors are used nationally for three cycles agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities. Short cycle qualifications will be defined by sub-descriptors taking into account differences in specific elements of qualifications (e.g. workload, length, access etc).

Use of learning outcomes

The Italian education and training system has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics.

The upper secondary education system has recently aligned qualifications and curricula to the EQF learning outcomes structures. In February 2010, the reform regulation of the upper secondary education system was adopted [73].

In the vocational training system, where the Regions have the main responsibility, according to the reforms of the Italian Constitution (National Law No 3, October 2001, concerning Modifications of V Title of second part of Italian Constitution) an update of the local qualification system adopting the learning outcomes approach has been launched. Curricula will be redesigned according to EQF indicator and descriptors. Three-year vocational qualifications and a four-year vocational diploma will be awarded.

The higher (non-academic) professional education and training pathway (IFTS) uses a national standard system based on competences since 2000. Moreover, after the Decree of 25 January 2008, the National Committee on IFTS agreed to update the standards to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. There will be a regional supply of training courses in IFTS (one year) and a national supply of IFTS courses (two years). The one-year courses are already based on national standards of profiles and competence units of learning outcomes; however, they will be implemented in accordance with the local needs. The two-year courses will soon be based on learning outcomes standards.

In academic education (universities) the policy-makers strengthened the need to align diplomas and certificates to the commitments of the Bologna process. In particular, the National Decree that reforms the academic system (first cycle, three years) and *Laurea Magistrale* (second cycle, two years) states that the new programmes have to be based on learning outcomes compatible with Dublin descriptors. The enterprises involved in the reform of the university system agreed on the learning outcomes approach, considering it very close to the labour market.

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[73] Regulation for upper secondary school reform was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2010. The institutional consultation round and the relevant information on reform can be found on http://nuovilicei.indire.it/ [cited 28.06.2010].

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared by the end of 2010. Higher education qualifications have already been linked to the EQF levels; the three cycles of the Bologna structure have been referenced to EQF levels 6-7-8.

ISFOL has been designated the national coordination point (NCP) by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. It formed a technical group to plan actions aimed at referencing the qualifications system to the EQF by the given deadlines. This technical group started networking with other European NCPs to guarantee the transparency and consistency of the correlation between the levels of NQF and the EQF levels.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The first lesson learned is that the establishment of the NQF is a very important national issue to give individuals a transparent way to obtain qualifications and to progress in their careers. However, it is still very complex and ambitious.

The law that reformed Title V of the Constitution (2001) made this process even more complicated in the complexity of the relationships between the State and the Regions (some regions are working to establish their own regional qualifications systems.

This reform, combined with the autonomy of several stakeholders (autonomy of the regional authorities in regulating training; autonomy of universities and schools; autonomy of the enterprises in offering 'qualifications' in the workplace, etc.) created a difficult situation to manage. The stakeholders involved are aware of the fundamental importance of a national system that should constitute the 'real infrastructure' for different educational and labour market policies.

Language differences and use of coherent concepts across sectors and stakeholders cause some challenges.

Recently introduced education and training reforms gave an indication that Italian VET and HE systems are increasingly being aligned with the European objectives on transparency and comparability expressed by Bologna process and the EQF ([74]).

([74]) National ReferNet Policy Report Italy 2010 not published.

Main sources of information

For policy-related information the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, for the technical level, ISFOL, which acts as national coordination point (NCP): http://www.isfol.it [cited 28.06.2010]

LATVIA

Introduction

Latvia is developing a national qualifications framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes in line with the needs of different subsystems of education and training and lifelong learning. It will take the existing five-level qualification structure in vocational education and training and three-cycle structure in higher education into account.

A qualification framework for higher education in the context of EHEA has already been prepared. Its descriptors have been approved by the Higher Education Council and will soon become a part of the new Higher Education Law.

A concept of attractiveness of VET was approved in December 2009 by the Cabinet of Ministers. It includes the linking the five existing Latvian qualifications levels to the eight levels of EQF.

The Ministry of Education and Science plans to submit amendments to the regulation on classification of education ([75]) with the aim to redefine some key terms (e.g. qualification, qualification level, knowledge, skills and competence) and to define qualifications levels and corresponding general level descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence.

An ESF project is planned to support further development of NQF.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of a comprehensive NQF should address the following issues:

([75])   The document MK 2008.gada 2.decembra noteikumi Nr.990 "Noteikumi par Latvijas izglītības klasifikāciju'. Avaialble from http://izm.izm.gov.lv/normativie-akti/mk-noteikumi/citi.html [cited 28.07.2010].

(a) to increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
(b) to develop an overarching NQF in line with the needs of lifelong learning and the higher education sector (three levels);
(c) to strengthen the link between the labour market and education;
(d) to strengthen the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in the design and award of qualifications;
(e) to increase understanding of national qualifications and ease linking them to the EQF.

Development of NQF and referencing of national qualifications to EQF are parallel processes.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in the development of the NQF. For the higher education level also higher education institutions, social partners, the Rectors' Council and the Higher Education Council are involved; in VET social partners are involved.

Levels and descriptors

The Latvian NQF will have eight levels: four addressing primary and secondary education and VET; four for higher education level qualifications. Levels 1-4 will be defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

The descriptors for higher education qualifications based on Dublin descriptors and Bloom taxonomy have been drafted and adopted by the Higher Education Council. Descriptors for basic and secondary education level qualifications are being elaborated.

Use of learning outcomes

There is a growing emphasis on learning outcomes in Latvia, although the term is not widely used and there is not yet a systematic approach. Skills and knowledge are the commonly used terms.

Draft legislation for HE introduces the terms and principles of learning outcomes. In general education, subject-based outcomes have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Standards for VET are labour market linked (through tripartite agreements) and stipulate goals of education programmes as well as their content. There are two types of standards: occupational (professional) and vocational education standards.

The occupational standards stipulate the basic and specific requirements for a specific professional qualification and describe the knowledge and skills requirement as determined by the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers (Regulation on the professional standards, 2000 and the Order of developing occupational standards (2002). Standards have been developed for all occupations. The Ministry of Education and Science has established a register of occupational standards.

The standards of the state vocational education stipulate the goals of the educational programmes, compulsory educational content, and assessment procedures for the education obtained. They are determined by the Regulation on the standard for state vocational secondary education (2000) and the Regulation on the standard for state vocational higher education (2001) adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Referencing to the EQF

A referencing committee was set up in September 2009. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011.

Main sources of information
The Academic information centre is designated as national coordination point (NCP) in Latvia: http://www.aic.lv/portal/en [cited 28.06.2010]

LITHUANIA

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework is currently being prepared in Lithuania.

Lithuania started work on a NQF in 2006 with the launching of the project Creation of the national system of qualifications of Lithuania, supported by the European Social Funds (ESF). Between 2006 and 2008 extensive work was carried

out, addressing the main conceptual and methodological challenges involved in setting up an NQF. Important outcomes of this work included the design of NQF level-descriptors, the preparation of a methodology for the design of learning outcomes based sectoral-occupational standards ([76]) and the preparation of pilot models of sectoral-occupational standards in the construction and hospitality sectors. Based on this preparatory work, the Lithuanian government adopted a Decree on the qualifications framework in 2010 ([77]). The implementation of the NQF has started.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

A main reason for developing an NQF is to ensure a better correspondence between labour market needs and provision of qualifications (in vocational, higher and continuing education and training). The NQF is expected to improve the links and increase the transferability from vocational education and training to higher education, from initial VET to continuing vocational training, and to establish links to non-formal and informal learning. The NQF is also seen as an important instrument to increase the attractiveness and value of vocational qualifications, improving the image of VET and encouraging the valuing of vocational knowledge, skills and competences on the same level as academic knowledge and credentials. The NQF is finally seen as systematically ensuring the quality of qualifications. To realise this vision, a series of short-, medium- and long-term, objectives have been identified and agreed upon

On a short-term basis, procedures for the implementation and maintenance of the NQF are to be put in place. This will be paralleled by a focus on the implementation of the learning outcomes approach in VET and the adjustment of the system of assessment of competences and awarding of qualifications.

On a medium-term basis, learning outcomes based sectoral-occupational standards will be further developed and implemented. Work on implementing the

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([76]) Sectoral-occupational standards describe the qualifications typical for the occupations in the whole sector, for example, currently designed samples of these standards are sectoral-occupational standards of construction and sectoral-occupational standards for the hospitality sector. These sectoral-occupational standards provide the 'maps of qualifications' (list of qualifications structured according to typical occupations) in the sectors and the descriptors of the contents of these qualifications.

([77]) In 2007 amendment to the Law on Vocational Education and Training indicated that the qualifications provided by the vocational education and training institutions shall be structured and leveled within a NQF. While paving the way for a national framework, the formal basis for the framework is provided by the spring 2010 Decree, jointly prepared by the ministries of Education and Science and Social Affairs and Labour. Available from Internet: http://www.litlex.lt/scripts/sarasas2.dll?Tekstas=1&Id=136839 [cited 28.06.2010].

learning outcomes approaches in VET will continue but will be supplemented by work in higher education. A modular system of initial vocational training at national level will also be developed, supported by a system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

On a longer-term basis, the modular system of initial vocational training will be implemented, as will recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work on the NQF was initiated by the Labour Market Training Authority of Lithuania, which took the initiative to launch the ESF-funded project for designing the NQF. This work has been widely supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Centre for Methodology of Vocational Education and Training, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, the Centre for Vocational Education and Research at Vytautas Magnus University.

In the design-stage there has been significant involvement of the VET and higher education representatives. The providers of qualifications, and especially higher education institutions, were important contributors to this process: their representatives formed the majority in the group of experts which developed NQF descriptors and their impact in the process of designing of descriptors was the most important. However, a certain lack of involvement of employers, employees and learners (students' organisations) was noticed. This lack of involvement seems not to be related to any opposition to the idea of an NQF and is rather due to lack of resources and expertise, particularly noticeable in complicated design and development process like this. It is worth noting that development of the NQF, and the discussions following from this, led to a growing awareness of trade unions to take active part in its implementation. They see the NQF as an instrument for protecting the rights and status of employees.

The Ministry of Education and Science now has main responsibility for the coordination and governing of implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. This includes coordination of all processes related to the design, provision and awarding of qualifications. The concrete functions and activities will be delegated or ordered by the Ministry to the different public institutions or expert groups. A National Authority of Qualifications was established in 2008 to coordinate the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. This authority was abolished in 2009, following revised priorities of the Parliament elected in late 2008. The responsibility for offsetting up the NQF is now taken over by the Ministry of

Education and Science which will create an institution for the governance of qualifications within its institutional remit.

On of the important problems is that the stakeholders in general are poorly informed about the NQF, its aims, objectives and potential. Successful implementation of the framework will require more systematic dissemination of information addressing all stakeholders, particularly social partners.

Worries are expressed (see for example Tutlys et.al., op.cit. p.42) that no efficient cooperation platform has been created allowing all involved stakeholders to participate fully in the development and implementation of the NQF. This can be seen as a weakness as level of ownership to the NQF may suffer, reducing mutual trust.

The Lithuanian NQF for LLL and higher education

A very important part of the Lithuanian NQF currently being developed is rooted in the reforms of the vocational education and training sector starting as early as 1997 (VET level descriptors). This is reflected in a general approval of the NQF idea by VET stakeholders. To take on the role as a comprehensive framework, however, the Lithuanian NQF must be 'owned' by other parts of the qualifications systems, notably higher education. The fact that EQF levels 6-8 correspond, in principle, to the Bologna cycles aids the link to the QF-EHEA and does not seem to represent a serious obstacle.

Tutlys et.al. (op.cit., p.52) [78] points to other factors which may influence the attitudes of higher education institutions to the NQF and thus decide the extent to which the framework will strengthen the overall permeability of the Lithuanian qualifications system. It is expected that the non-university part of higher education will be more supportive to NQF implementation than universities. The lack of clear division of roles and functions between the universities and the non-universities may, however, create a problem when implementing the NQF and will raise issues regarding learning pathways and progression routes. The overall support from higher education, including universities, will largely depend on the quality of information disseminated on the NQF and whether universities can be convinced that the framework provides added value and not only a new and limiting bureaucratic structure.

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[78] Tutlys et.al. (2010). *Background case study on Lithuania.* Available from Internet:
http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/projects/lang--en/WCMS_126588/index.htm [cited 25.05.2010].

Levels and descriptors

The Lithuanian NQF has eight levels, reflecting both the realities of the Lithuanian qualifications system and the requirements posed by the introduction of the EQF. The group of experts established for designing the NQF has analysed the existing education and qualifications levels provided by the VET and higher education. There can be distinguished two existing frameworks of levelling of qualifications and education in Lithuania: five vocational education levels introduced in 1997 and updated in 2001 and the three levels of the higher education introduced in 1992. Considering this existing structure of levels of qualifications and degrees, and the need to adjust the NQF levels to the EQF, it was decided, that eight is the optimal number of levels for the NQF in Lithuania.

The level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: – characteristics of activities and types of competences. This is illustrated below.

PARAMETERS	
Characteristics of activities	**Types of competences**
- complexity of activities - autonomy of activities - changeability of activities	- functional competences - cognitive competences - general competences

(Row label: CRITERIA)

Source: Tutlys et.al. (2010)

The descriptors of the qualification levels distinguish between specific typical functional, cognitive, and general competences, and reflect the evolution of competences on the route from a lower to higher qualification. The full range of qualifications is structured in a hierarchy of levels that span from general secondary schools, vocational secondary schools, and labour market training institutions to higher education. The level reference structure is also designed to capture learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning and through lifelong learning opportunities. For a detailed presentation of the Lithuanian level descriptors see the annex.

The Lithuanian NQF uses transversal descriptors. The challenge of balancing sector-specific descriptors on the one hand and general, transversal descriptors on the other hand was quite acutely felt by the experts involved. It was, therefore, agreed to apply the logic of transversal descriptors, stressing the specific requirements of the structuring of qualifications nationally. It is important to add, however, that the transversal descriptors are relevant reference points for sectors by

articulating general competences as well as addressing aspects like complexity and autonomy of activities.

According to projections of how qualifications will be registered on the framework, the designed NQF of Lithuania is based on complete (full) qualifications. However, the NQF will, in the medium- and long-term, introduce units of qualifications defined as the combinations of the competences needed for the execution of certain tasks of activities. Methodologically, it provides the possibility of referencing of the units of qualifications to certain levels of the NQF, but such possibilities are not yet foreseen by the legal documents.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is used and accepted in vocational education and training for defining and describing qualifications and for setting standards. The existing VET standards, which describe the qualifications provided by the initial VET institutions, are based on competences. The definition of competence in the Lithuanian NQF corresponds to the definition of learning outcomes (used by the EQF). The university sector is still at an early stage in the use of learning outcomes for defining and describing degrees and qualifications. A national project for setting up the ECTS system has been launched recently and this may aid the use of learning outcomes in defining higher education degrees and qualifications. In vocationally oriented higher education, standards are already defined and described in terms of competences.

The VET sector uses a learning outcomes (competences) approach in curriculum design. The training curricula are described in terms of competences according to the VET standards. However, the VET curricula also provide the indications of the corresponding subjects, which provide the knowledge and skills related to the outlined competences. University curricula are largely referring to subjects (input) and oriented to the time and/or credits. A redefinition of university curricula according to a learning outcomes based approach is still at an initial stage.

Formally the assessment of learning in VET and vocational higher education is based on the learning outcomes, because the VET standards prescribe the assessment specifications. However, the systematic assessment of learning outcomes in VET still requires adopting different new methods and approaches of the assessment, especially in the assessment of the practical skills. The assessment of learning in the universities is based on the subjects and credits.

The current situation of learning outcomes reflects the different traditions and approaches of sectors. While the VET sector has made some progress in standards

and curriculum design, the provision of training is mostly oriented to subject and time/duration. Learners are thus only to a limited degree able to tailor their own learning programme or pathway. It is expected that the shift to learning outcomes will be reinforced by the introduction of the modular training system nationally, as well as by the introduction of recognition of the non-formal and informal learning.

Important lessons and the way forward

The designing of the NQF should be open and inclusive to all stakeholders and interested parties. Some have pointed out that when there is insufficient involvement of the stakeholders in this process (for example trade unions, sectoral organisations) it is much more difficult to disseminate the message about the framework and to implement it. Increased involvement of employers, trade unions and educational institutions is seen as a precondition for successful implementation of the framework and eventually for ownership. Experience of the problems faced in setting up the NQF in Lithuania shows that designing the NQF requires cooperation enabling all stakeholders to be continuously informed on and involved.

Effective design and implementation of the NQF requires strong and constant political will from the government: it must become an integrated part of national education and employment policies and strategies. If such integration into main-stream policies fails, the implementation of the NQF can be seriously threatened.

Effective implementation of the NQF is not feasible without a strong networking of all stakeholders, including civil society and social partners.

LUXEMBOURG

Introduction

Following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, a first outline of a comprehensive NQF was presented to the Council of Ministers in early 2009. Work has continued on this basis, resulting in the agreement (March/April 2010) of a set of descriptors covering all levels and types of education and training. Following a new presentation to, and discussion in, the Council of Ministers a consultation process involving main stakeholders will be carried out in 2010. This process is foreseen to be concluded

by the adoption of the framework (and the referencing to the EQF) in the first half of 2011.

The new law on vocational education and training adopted in autumn 2008 provided the basis for the NQF, in particular for the learning outcomes approach. This approach is now being applied on a more general basis also to other areas of education and training.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of the EQF is seen as an opportunity to make explicit the existing (implicit) education and training levels and the relationships between them. This is important not only for the users of qualifications (to support the individual lifelong learning and to enable employers to see the relevance of qualifications) but also for education and training providers (as a reference point for quality assurance and reform). Increased transparency of qualifications is a key objective underpinning the Luxembourg national framework.

On a longer term-basis, the NQF is seen as an instrument for including qualifications awarded outside the existing, official system. This reflects that a high number of citizens hold these kind of unofficial and non-recognised certificates and diplomas. An NQF with clear, learning outcomes-based levels and descriptors could aid inclusion of these: examples of this are found in sectors like construction and banking and may, in a worst case scenario, prevent learning progress. To accomplish this, concrete approaches for the accreditation and quality assurance of these new qualifications have to be put in place.

While procedures for inclusion of these non-traditional qualifications will be necessary as a part of the new framework, the emerging system for validating non-formal and informal learning can support an open and flexible approach. It is the intention to integrate fully the validation system into the NQF, stating that any qualification at any level can be achieved, either through school or by having prior learning assessed and validated (this includes higher education qualifications, the only exception being the baccalaureate)

Involvement of stakeholders

The NQF process is being coordinated by the Ministry of Education. Representatives (administrative as well as pedagogical) of the different education and training subsystems (general education, vocational education, higher

education), first discussed the framework (descriptors and linked qualifications).The next step was consultation with other ministries following the Council of Ministers in 2009. This inter-ministerial group, involving all relevant ministries (Education, Labour Market, etc.) addressed mainly the legal and financial implications of the framework.

Following a new discussion in the Council of Ministers during May 2010, further consultation is envisaged in 2010. This consultation will include all relevant stakeholders from the previous one, plus the social partners (Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts and Chamber of Employees), the main sectoral organisations (crafts, bank, industry, Horeca) and professional bodies such as architects, medicine etc. They will discuss the proposal and deliver the conclusion to the minister in autumn 2010.

The Luxembourg NQF for LLL and higher education

The attitude of higher education towards the NQF was originally sceptical. Stakeholders from this sector argued that EQF levels 6-8 should be mainly based on the Dublin descriptors of the EHEA. Following discussions during 2009 and early 2010, and fine-tuning of descriptors at level 6-8, a common set of descriptors have been accepted by everybody, including higher education.

Level 5 is now seen as the bridging level between both subsectors: in this level we find both VET qualifications and higher education qualifications. This means that the *Meister* qualifications (master craftsman) will probably be placed at level 5, beside the higher technician certificate (BTS). This opens the door for VET qualifications.

Levels and descriptors

Luxembourg has decided to introduce an eight-level reference structure. While the number of levels corresponds with the EQF, the descriptors reflect experiences gained over several decades. At each level, descriptors are differentiated according to knowledge, skills and attitude. The decision to use these concepts reflects gradual development of a learning outcomes or 'competence'-based approach in vocational education and training. During the 1970s and the 1980s this approach was strongly influenced by the German tradition in this field. The 'Siemens method' for developing professional standards played a particularly important role as education standards were directly deduced from these. In recent years these

approaches have been further developed through extensive cooperation with a number of other European countries, notably the countries with a dual VET system (Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland). Links to France are also strong, to a certain extent influencing the way qualifications are designed and described.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is increasingly influencing education and training in Luxembourg, in particular following the adoption of the 2008 Law on VET reform. This has made it possible, already in the proposal presented to the Parliament in early 2009, to indicate how single qualifications and qualifications types will be placed in the national framework. It has been indicated (although not decided) that traditional VET qualifications (professional diploma) could be placed at the national level 3. A baccalaureate diploma (general upper-secondary) could be placed at level 4, as will the diploma of a technician (post-secondary VET). The *Meister* could be placed at level 5. Stakeholders, including social partners, agree that the new profiles developed on the basis of the 2008 VET reform makes referencing possible.

While the learning outcomes approach is firmly embedded in the VET sector, and even in primary education, reforms are now introducing a learning outcomes based approach to secondary and upper-secondary education and training. The same is happening in higher education. In a mid-term perspective, the whole Luxemburgish system will be based on learning outcomes.

Problems are still faced over the extent to which learning outcomes influence teaching and assessment. Efforts are being made by the ministry to provide more information to schools and teachers on this.

Referencing to the EQF

Luxembourg is expected to reference to the EQF in mid 2011, following the adoption of the NQF.

MALTA

Introduction

Malta launched its comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) in June 2007, encompassing all levels of formal, informal and non-formal education and training.

The framework is governed by Legal Notice 347 of October 2005 ([79]) which will be subsequently amended to reflect the development of the Malta Qualification Framework (MQF). Basic elements of the MQF have been put in place by establishing the Malta Qualifications Council (October 2005) and a proposal for preparing an eight-level framework. The proposal was supported by the main stakeholders (employers, trade unions, major public and private education and training providers) in a broad consultation process ending in June 2007. In May 2007, four working documents on MQF were published, focusing on the conceptual framework, a reform strategy for VET, a quality assurance policy for VET, and level descriptors for key competences at levels 1, 2 and 3 of the MQF.

The main objective of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) is to steer the development of the MQF and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the framework which is not already provided for by compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies ([80]). Other tasks are to establish policies and criteria for the MQF, to approve and ensure the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes, endorse and ensure the publication of procedures to be implemented by training providers, endorse vocational education and training programmes, endorse certificates awarded and keep and issue official records of certification awarded. It works closely together with all stakeholders including the National Commission for Higher Education. In 2010 the MQC will be transformed into the Quality Assurance and Qualification Agency to ensure closer relationships between the qualifications structure and quality of qualifications types/levels.

Malta was the first Member State to prepare one single, comprehensive report addressing both the EQF and the QF-EHEA in 2009. ([81])

([79]) See: http://docs.justice.gov.mt/lom/legislation/english/subleg/343/26.pdf [cited 28.06.2010].
([80]) Higher and further education institutions use MQF on a voluntary basis by tuning their programmes to the MQF using learning outcomes descriptors
([81]) Malta Qualification Council. Available from Internet: http://www.mqc.gov.mt/referencingreport?l=1 [cited 28.06.2010].

The rationale and main policy objectives

The MQF addresses the following issues:
(a) valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
(b) parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways including vocational and professional degrees and academic programmes of studies;
(c) access and progression;
(d) lifelong learning and mobility;
(e) level rating of qualifications;
(f) learning outcomes qualifications;
(g) quality assurance mechanisms that cut across all levels of the framework.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Malta Qualification Council (MQC) initiated the work on the MQF following Legal Notice 347 of 2005. The key role of all stakeholders including social partners was assured in a broad consultation process during the design, development and implementation of the MQF in:
(a) education and training: the Ministry of Education, public and private education and training institutions; the guidance and counselling services unit;
(b) the labour market: trade unions; employers' associations, designated authorities;
(c) human resources managers and others: parents' associations; student councils, the general public and non-governmental organisations.

The MCQ has the legal competence to coordinate the MQF. The Ministry of Education, Employment and Family commits an annual national budget towards the running of MQC.

Levels and descriptors

The Maltese NQF has eight levels of qualifications. It is compatible with the higher education qualifications framework as agreed in the Bologna process for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the Dublin descriptors. The same level descriptors cover all levels and types of education and training. and are based on those published by the Government of Malta in Legal Notice 347/2005 and approved in June 2007.

The MQF has been influenced by the eight-level classification of the EQF but it responds directly to a long-standing system of a Maltese qualifications system. The MQF level descriptors are more detailed than those of the EQF and more contextualised to the Maltese culture and national social, economic and political priorities.

Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, competence and learning outcomes. Learning outcomes summarise the knowledge, skills and competences and highlight specific attributes such as communications skills, judgemental skills and learning skills which progress throughout the MQF. The level descriptors measure complexity, volume and the level of learning expected for the particular qualification. They give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degree of autonomy and responsibility.

Progression in the MQF is recorded in terms of:

(a) knowledge and understanding,

(b) applying knowledge and understanding,

(c) communication skills,

(d) judgemental skills,

(e) learning skills,

(f) autonomy and responsibility.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to reforms in Malta across the whole education and training systems. One of the tasks of the Malta Qualifications Council is, therefore, to introduce national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes and to ensure that the are systematically implemented and used.

For general education, the national minimum curriculum defines learning outcomes as educational objectives that enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. The School Leaving Certificate has been redesigned following a series of consultation meetings between the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) to include informal and non-formal learning as well as the individual's personal qualities.

For VET, the MQF is intended to ensure that the contents of VET curricula are led by key competences and learning outcomes based on the feedback from industry. At level 3 of the MQF the learner should have achieved the key competences which would lead the individual to access and progression into further and higher education.

A variety of assessment methods is used in VET and general education. Assessment for VET is based on standards. Learners at upper-secondary level are also expected to undertake an independent cross-curricular study.

Informal and non-formal education and training, as well as recognition of prior learning, are an important part of the Malta Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. A policy document on the validation of informal and non-formal learning was launched in June 2008 and consultation process is in progress.

Referencing to EQF

Malta was the first Member State to prepare one comprehensive Referencing report to reference its qualifications to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. It was presented to the EQF AG in September 2009 and officially launched by the Minister of Education in November 2009. The direct correspondence with the EQF levels was established.

MQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

The referencing report is available on the website of the Malta Qualification Council http://www.mqc.gov.mt/referencingreport?l=1

Lessons learned and the way forward

The development of the MQF has served as a catalyst for education reform and innovation as well as for the building of a new culture of learner-centred qualifications and improving permeability between VET and HE.

The consultation period on the development of the MQF and the preparation of the referencing report of the MQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were two interrelated processes that led to a bridging exercise between stakeholders from different subsystems of education and employment. There were the following four main issues of controversy at national context:

(a) the parity of esteem of vocational education and general education. Before the establishment of the MQF, academic qualifications had a higher status compared to the professional qualifications. The process is still in an experimentation phase, with discussions and further consultation, but

experience already shows that VET and HE institutions have strengthened their cooperation. There is now more evidence that VET qualifications are recognised as entry points into HE not only within VET institutions but also in university courses (e.g. engineering, tourism management IT). Academic qualifications are widely considered as entry points into VET programmes;

(b) validation of informal and non-formal learning is not easily accepted by the general education route and is not generally accepted as having the same parity of esteem as the academic higher levels of the MQF. The proposal for the new school leaving certificate gives, for the first time, value to all formal, non-formal and informal learning activities. It will be introduced in October 2010 ([82]);

(c) a credit system to cut across the MQF is seen as a challenging task for private and public training providers to redesign their qualifications accordingly;

(d) the concept of why is there a need for sectoral frameworks when Malta already has an NQF. This issue is still debatable.

Main sources of information

Malta Qualifications Council is the designated national coordination point (NCP). Information is available on http://www.mqc.gov.mt [cited 28.06.2010]

THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

The Netherlands started preparations for a comprehensive NQF in January 2009. A first proposal (mainly on the procedures to be followed) was requested by and presented to the Ministry of Education in May 2009. The framework builds on the qualifications framework for higher education developed (from 2005) in the context of the Bologna process. The timing of the current work is closely linked to the deadlines set by the EQF Recommendation. The NQF is considered a crucial precondition for carrying out this referencing. The intention is to establish the NQF by 2010 and present the referencing report in early 2011. The work is supported by external expert bodies. Following the preparation of a draft proposal, which is in

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([82]) Discussion paper School leaving certificate, Malta Qualifications Council in collaboration with the Directorate for Standards and Quality in Education, January 2010. Not published.

progress, an introduction and testing phase will take place during 2010. While the international dimension has been important for the timing of the initiative, the national reform potential of the NQF is increasingly being acknowledged, especially as an instrument to include non-formal qualifications in lifelong learning.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

One of the objectives of the Dutch NQF will be to increase the transparency of the education and training system, in particular by showing the relationship between the different levels and categories of education and training provisions. The introduction of a set of learning outcomes-based levels, and attachment of this to the formal existing levels, is seen as a precondition for success in relating the national system to the EQF. An NQF could also be used as a better instrument for including qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, for example by enterprises and sectors (in the Netherlands referred to as 'non-formal qualifications'). An NQF could provide a reference, making it possible for individuals as well as employers to assess the totality of qualifications on offer, irrespective of their institutional origin. While an inclusive approach is seen as important for transparency and for aiding lifelong learning, the practical challenges involved in such an open approach have to be discussed and clarified.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the development and implementation of the NQF. The work will involve a wide range of stakeholders, including the following organisations and interest groups: the association of VET schools (MBO Raad), the association of universities of applied sciences (HBO-raad), the sector organisation for green education in the Netherlands (AOC Raad), association of general education schools (VO-raad), the association of universities (VSNU), the association of sector centres of expertise on VET and the labour market (COLO), the umbrella organisation for (well respected) privately funded education in the Netherlands (Paepon), the Confederation of Dutch Employers (VNO NCW), the Accreditation Organisation for Higher Education of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) as well as the Dutch inspectorate of education. The interdepartmental Project department for Learning & Working (PLW) includes the two Ministries: Education, Culture and Science and Social Affairs and Employment. Other ministries, for example responsible for finance, have so far not directly been

included in the work on the NQF, although indirectly the influence is big because of their requests for proposals to economise on expenses for education.

During the development of the NQF and the referencing process, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science acts as the National coordination point (NCP). After completion of the process an organisation will be assigned as the regular NCP for the implementation of the NQF. Although the decision on the appointment of this NCP is foreseen in the autumn of 2010, several parties have shown interest.

The development period foreseen for the Dutch NQF (January 2009 to mid-2010) is causing some concern. There is a danger that it will be difficult to develop 'ownership' and that some will see the framework as an artificial construction adding relatively limited value to existing structures and practices. The success of the NLQF in terms of strengthening transparency and promoting lifelong learning therefore depends on the ability to continue – also after the formal establishment of the framework – to involve as broad a group of stakeholders as possible.

The Dutch NQF and higher education

The comprehensive framework currently being developed builds on the qualifications framework for higher education developed (from 2005) in the context of the Bologna process. This culminated in the national qualifications framework for higher education in the Netherlands, which was verified by an independent external committee of peers, February 2009. The NVAO, the accreditation organisation for the Netherlands and the Flemish community of Belgium, guarantees implementation through the accreditation process, which is obligatory for all formally recognised higher education. In January 2010, brochures in English and Dutch were published for wider communication purposes. The brochure, the national qualifications framework verification documents, is available at the website of the NVAO in the English section www.nvao.net.

Levels and descriptors

The number of levels and their descriptors will be decided during the consultation process to take place in the coming year. It is stressed that these levels and descriptors must be able to reflect the current Dutch education and training system in a realistic way. The introduction of a coherent set of learning outcome-based levels is seen as a key element in the framework as it will introduce a common language and a common reference which has been lacking. While taking into

account the descriptors used by the EQF, the Dutch descriptors will have to reflect national traditions and approaches. It is unlikely that the knowledge, skills and competence differentiation in the EQF will be taken over directly. This is due to the existing use of the term competence in the Netherlands, a concept which is seen to include and transcend the knowledge and skills dimension.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes (or rather) competence-oriented approach is broadly accepted in Dutch education and training. The Cedefop 2009 study on *The shift to learning outcomes* [83] reports on a strong tradition of 'objectives-led' governance of education and training in the Netherlands and may be seen as conducive for a competence-based approach. The vocational education and training sector is probably the most advanced as regards competence orientation. Following extensive reform, a new VET competence-based structure has been developed and implemented. The same tendencies can be observed in general education and in higher education, although less systematically. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes, as has the involvement of single institutions in the Tuning project.

The strong position of the learning outcomes approach is reflected in the relatively widespread use of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands (EVC). The emerging NLQF is seen as an instrument to further strengthen the role of validation and turn it into an integrated part of the qualifications system. The use of validation as an integrated part of the framework will help to connect with a wider range of learning activities and learning settings, for example in the private sector.

Referencing to the EQF

The Netherlands intend to meet the 2010 deadline of the EQF recommendation. The referencing process will formally start in the third quarter of 2010 and is expected to result in a draft referencing report to be presented to the EQF Advisory group at the end of the fourth quarter this year. It is emphasised that this referencing will be

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[83] Cedefop (2009). *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Cedefop reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3054_en.pdf [cited 24.06.2010].

totally dependent on the introduction of a coherent set of learning outcomes-based levels covering the whole education and training system.

The need to carry out the referencing to the EQF in parallel to the development of the NQF is seen as a particular challenge. Compared to Ireland and the UK, where NQFs were already in place before the referencing started, the complexity of the Dutch process is substantially increased. Whether and how this will influence the potential impact of the Dutch NQF, is still too early to assess.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The Dutch NQF work is still at an early stage. Some stakeholders have questioned the added value of the initiative, highlighting the fact that the Dutch qualification system has undergone significant reform in recent years (both for VET and HE) and that yet further reform may prove counterproductive. In contrast, others see the new NQF as able to build on and add value to these reforms. The success of the Dutch process in the coming year(s) will largely depend on whether the latter perspective comes to dominate the debate. Stakeholders close to the process stress the need to develop a comprehensive communication strategy in the coming period to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are involved in developing the framework and setting it in place.

NORWAY

Introduction

Work has started in Norway to establish a comprehensive national qualifications framework (*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjons-rammeverk for livslang læring*, NKR). This decision, made by the Ministry of Education [84] in autumn 2009, brings Norway in line with developments in other EU and EEA countries.

Based on existing work in different areas of education and training (notably in higher education, vocational education and training and in post-secondary

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[84] An administrative decision was made by the Ministry of Education but with reference to Parliamentary Proposal (Stortingsmelding) 44/2008 'Utdanningslinja'.
http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2008-2009/stmeld-nr-44-2008-2009-/1/8.html?id=565240 [cited 28.06.2010].

vocational education), an extensive process has been started aiming at producing a consultation proposal by October 2010. A finalised proposal for the NKR is expected by the first quarter of 2011, eventually expected to result in a Ministerial decree (*Forskrift*), thus giving it a clear formal basis.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Although still at an early stage, the design and development of the Norwegian NQF is focussed on describing the existing national education and training system in a transparent way. This description is seen as a pre-condition for referencing to the EQF – an objective which is widely accepted by everybody involved in the process.

Stakeholders are careful in underlining that the new NQF is not an instrument for reform. The existing Norwegian education and training system, it is stated, is already fairly flexible and transparent and learners will normally not face many problems when moving horizontally or vertically in the system. Arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning (*Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse*) as well as schemes supporting progression between levels (for example *Yrkesveien* allowing VET candidates to progress directly into relevant parts of HE) contribute to this. Most importantly, the use of learning outcomes as a basis for defining and describing qualifications, is already a key-feature of the Norwegian system, influencing general and vocational education and training at initial, secondary, upper secondary and higher levels.

However, some problems remain and it is (increasingly) acknowledged that a NQF may help to solve these. A particular challenge exists in relation to post-secondary vocational education and training (*Fagskoler*). This is a heterogeneous education and training category, covering more than 100 different programmes with a duration ranging from six months to two years. None of these programmes have so far been described in terms of learning outcomes – which sets it apart from the rest of the Norwegian education and training system now almost fully based on this principle. The development of the NQF may help to clarify the relationship between post-secondary VET and the education and training system as a whole.

The process and the involvement of stakeholders

Until autumn 2009, the Norwegian NQF work was divided into a number of separate strands.

- The establishment of a national qualifications framework for higher education was concluded in spring 2009. Reflecting strong support from the sector itself, the framework and its principles are widely recognised and form the basis on which higher education is developing in Norway. This is illustrated by the use of learning outcomes where (for example) the University of Oslo has re-defined more than 300 studies according to this principle. For the moment work is going on in relation to short-cycle programs in higher education.

- Work on a 'framework' for vocational education and training was initiated in 2008. The background for this was a request from the Ministry of Education to the Directorate for education to prepare level descriptors for these qualifications, thus enabling a referencing to the EQF. A working group consisting of representatives from vocational education and training institutions, regional authorities as well as sector and branch representatives presented its conclusions end 2008.

- Work on a 'framework' for post-secondary vocational education and training started, as already indicated, in 2008 and aim to identify the main characteristics of this sub-sector as well as indicate how a learning outcomes based approach can be used to define and describe qualifications awarded by these institutions.

During 2008 and 2009, the social partners – taking part in the consultative group established by the Ministry – criticised what they saw as a too fragmented approach to framework developments. In May 2009 they requested better coordination of various processes and activities in order to arrive at one comprehensive qualification framework. The criticism by the social partners led to a major review of the process by the Ministry of Education early autumn 2009. Most importantly, the Ministry made a clear decision to work towards one framework and see the three strands of work described above as contributing to this overall approach. Following this review the process is now based on the following structure:

- A internal project group has been established in the Ministry consisting of representatives from all relevant departments (both general and vocational)and the Directorate for Education. The work is directed by a steering group at the level of Directors General.

- A dedicated EQF reference group continues its work and will meet regularly during 2010 and 2011 to discuss principles and progress. All relevant stakeholders are included in this group, including social partners, education unions, representatives of schooling and university systems, students' unions,

and public agencies in the education sector. The group meets when needed, minimum 3 to 4 times a year. Representatives from this group will be directly involved in the referencing process.

- A broader consultative group on 'European education and training policies' involving a broad range of stakeholders (including NGOs and the voluntary sector) also exists, and is kept informed about the implementation of the EQF (and other European instruments).

Levels and descriptors

Descriptors covering all relevant levels and types of qualifications are currently being developed and will be presented in October 2010. Already existing practices and proposals may however give some indications on the issues currently being discussed.

In the NQF for higher education, level descriptors have been defined according to the terms *kunnskap* (knowledge), *ferdigheter* (skills) and *generell kompetanse* (general competence). These descriptors thus already take into account the EQF proposal and will facilitate a future link to other subsectors of education and training.

In 2008 a working group appointed by the Directorate for Education and Training worked with the development of descriptors for VET. This group also took the EQF descriptors as reference point for their work. The group suggested combining knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (responsibility and autonomy) with planning (of material and immaterial processes), execution of work (production/services) and documentation/evaluation. This combination allowed for a fairly precise description and levelling of different VET qualifications The work of the expert group illustrated that it is possible to identify different levels of learning in VET qualifications. While most VET qualifications would be placed at what would correspond to EQF level 4, some could be placed at levels 3 and 5 respectively.

There has been a broad consultation process on these proposals during spring 2010. Whether the proposed differentiation would be politically acceptable is a different question and will be discussed on the basis of the consultation process.

The levelling issue has also been raised by the work on post-secondary VET (*Fagskoler*). Early tentative suggestions to refer these qualifications to EQF level 6 were criticised by other stakeholders, notably universities. Given the diversity of this education and training sector, a learning outcomes based levelling would probably show wide spread, but with a concentration around EQF level 5. The fact that these qualifications now will be defined in terms of learning outcomes will facilitate

referencing but it seems clear that credible referencing will require it to be done within a broader context; taking into account both VET and HE.

Work on other levels (i.a. compulsory education and general upper secondary) has started within the framework of the overall NKR-process. Drafts are expected late summer 2010.

Use of learning outcomes

As already stated there is broad consensus in Norway on the relevance of the learning outcomes approach. *Kunnskapsløftet*, a wide-ranging reform started in 2004 and implemented in 2006, has been of particular significance and implied a comprehensive redefinition and rewriting of curricula objectives at all levels of basic education and training (i.e. primary and secondary education and training, years 1-13). Finding its main expression in a national core-curriculum addressing all levels of education and training, the introduction of the learning outcomes approach has started to influence assessment and evaluation forms in education and training, in particular in VET. The introduction of a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning has also increased awareness on the potential of the learning outcomes approach. It is difficult to judge to what extent the learning outcomes perspective is influencing pedagogical approaches and learning methods. The Directorate for Education and Training is currently carrying out a wide-ranging research-based evaluation of the education and training system and it is possible that some of this research may throw some light on these issues and in particular the relevance of the Learning Outcome approach at different levels.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2011.

POLAND

Introduction

The work on a comprehensive Polish NQF covering the whole Polish education and training system was officially started in August 2008. A working group was responsible for the project named Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework. This work builds on the work on a qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process which has already been going on for some time (since 2006). The working group submitted its proposal in December 2009. On 17 May 2010 The NQF Steering Committee adopted this proposal as the basis for further developments in designing and implementing the Polish NQF; a final proposal is expected by the end of 2010.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The Polish NQF has been initiated in direct response to international developments, the Bologna process and EQF. This reflects that Poland supports European objectives on transparency and comparability expressed in these processes.

A draft proposal for a qualifications framework for higher education was finalised in 2007, but not implemented. Instead it was decided, following the adoption of EQF in April 2008, to pursue a comprehensive framework. This new NQF would build on the conclusions of the higher education framework but go beyond this and include all levels and types of qualifications. The work on the NQF is informed by reforms in different parts of the education and training systems, notably the implementation of learning outcomes based curricula for general education (2009), the current development of learning outcomes based curricula for VET, and the work on professional standards. All these initiatives can be seen as building blocks for a qualification framework, redefining and describing the qualifications in the respective sectors. The work on new standards for the vocational field has mainly been carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, emphasising the need to strengthen the relevance of qualifications for the labour market.

The introduction of an NQF will require changes in the existing legal basis for education and training. The development of the qualifications framework for higher education has already resulted in proposals (by the Ministry for Research and

Higher Education) for amendments to the law on higher education. Analysis is currently being carried out to clarify which further legal changes will be necessary.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of National Education initiated the work on the NQF. An outline of the work to be covered was presented to the Prime Minister's office and is now, following the formal approval by the NQF steering committee, directing the development and implementation work. The original working group responsible for developing the draft framework covered a broad range of stakeholders, representing higher education, general education, vocational education and training, employers and institutions directly concerned in setting up the framework.

To take forward the implementation of the NQF, the Prime Minister has appointed two bodies:

(a) a lifelong learning strategy team consisting of all institutional stakeholders. (Ministry of National Education, Ministry for Research and HE, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health). This team is led by the Ministry of National Education.

(b) a NQF steering committee consisting of all institutional stakeholders (Ministry of National Education, Ministry for Research and HE, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health. On 17 May the Ministries of Health, Culture, and Defence joined the committee). This committee is run by the Ministry of Research and HE and is supported by the Polish NCP. All projects supporting the development and implementation of the NQF will be coordinated by the steering committee.

While the work on the Polish NQF is characterised by involvement of stakeholders from all parts of education and training, the role of higher education is of particular interest. Contrary to what we see in some other countries, the higher education sector has been instrumental in arguing for a comprehensive framework addressing the permeability of the system.

The authorities have decided that the development and implementation of the NQF will require additional administrative and research support. For this reason two external institutions were involved from mid 2009; the Institute of Educational Research and the 'Cooperation Fund' foundation. The Institute of Educational Research is now conducting the main designing work for the Polish EQF.

Levels and descriptors

The draft NQF proposal, accepted by all main institutional stakeholders, consists of seven levels. The level descriptors are mainly inspired by the EQF and consists of the following key categories:

(a)   knowledge:
    (i)   scope;
    (ii) depth of understanding;

(b)   skills:
    (i)   communication;
    (ii) problem solving'
    (iii) using knowledge in practise;

(c)   attitudes:
    (i)   identity/autonomy;
    (ii) cooperation;
    (iii) responsibility.

Any other sectors (general education, HE, VET) are encouraged to develop the descriptors according to their specific needs and profile but always with clear reference to the core descriptors. This is exemplified by VET where the complexity of work tasks, autonomy in professional work and readiness to take responsibility for individual and group work (including intellectual, emotional and ethical aspects) have been taken into account. These specifications reflect the basic concepts of professional qualification standards introduced in Poland in recent years. It is important to note that all levels are open to vocational education and training.

Use of learning outcomes

One of the main objectives of the work, which started in August 2008, is to undertake a 'stocktaking of qualifications and competences' in the existing Polish education and training system. This reflects that the learning outcomes approach has received relatively limited attention in the Polish system so far, an impression which is confirmed in the recent Cedefop study on *The shift to learning outcomes* [85]. The work on the new national qualifications standards for vocational qualifications and the new national curricula for primary and secondary education may point towards a learning outcomes-based approach by clarifying the objectives

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[85]   Cedefop (2009). *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Cedefop reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3054_en.pdf [cited 24.06.2010].

of the relevant qualifications for users. In higher education institutions are obliged, by existing regulations, to implement curricula based on learning outcomes.

The development of the NQF implies a strong emphasis on the promotion and dissemination of the learning outcomes approach. For the period 2009-11 approximately 100 training sessions on learning outcome oriented curriculum design has been planned and are currently being carried out, mainly in the HE sector as part of the activities of the Bologna expert team and the Building good practices movement initiated by the Ministry for R&HE.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2011.

Important lessons learned and the way forward

The NQF work has provided a platform for dialogue between stakeholders, in particular in education and training, normally working in separate bureaucratic and institutional segments. The NQF introduces an instrument for coordination which, so far, has been lacking. Potentially this may provide the basis for a more coherent system, reducing barriers to lifelong learning. A number of concrete challenges have been identified:

(a) stock-taking of qualifications – creating an inventory – is proving a challenge. It is not clear how many qualifications exist and it is still open how these are going to be registered and what form a future register will take;

(b) the work is time-consuming, in particular as the implementation will require changes in the legal basis of education and training. As the Polish system is deeply law-driven, this is a serious challenge;

(c) while there are in principle no problems linked to the inclusion of state-owned qualifications, the links to and inclusion of other (private) qualifications pose a bigger challenge.

PORTUGAL

Introduction

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) (*Quadro Nacional de Qualificações,* QNQ) is being implemented in Portugal. Established by Decree No 782/2009 (Portaria No 782/2009) ([86]), an outline of the framework (including levels and level descriptors) was published in July 2009. According to the Decree, the setting up of the framework should be concluded by October 2010.

The development work started in 2007, when the Decree Law No 396/2007 was adopted as a legal basis for the development of the Portuguese qualifications framework. In March 2007, an agreement was signed between the Government and the social partners on the following key elements to support development and the implementation of the NQF:

(a) a National Agency for Qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education was established in 2007;

(b) a national qualifications catalogue was created in 2007. Based on learning outcomes, this is a central reference tool for VET provisions. The catalogue currently lists 254 qualifications for 40 areas. It defines for each qualification an occupational profile, a training referential (that awards double certification of education level and vocational qualification level) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences referential;

(c) further development of a system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning (taking forward the existing national system of recognition, validation and certification of competences) will incorporate it into NQF. The validation system will refer to the qualification standards in the national catalogue, both to 'educational' competences (nine or twelve years of school) and 'occupational' competences.

A Qualifications Framework for HE in line with the EHEA has been put in place separately (Law 49/2005 and Decree law 74/2006) ([87]). The link between both frameworks will be discussed during the referencing process.

([86]) See:
http://portal.iefp.pt/pls/gov_portal_iefp/docs/PAGE/PNRQ/RECONHECIMENTO_PROFISSIONAL/ SISTEMA_NACIONAL_QUALIFICACOES/QUADRO%20NACIONAL%20DE%20QUALIFICA%C7 %D5ES%20.PDF [cited 10.5.2010].

([87]) National report on Bologna reform. Available from Internet:
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National_Report_Portugal_2009.pdf [cited 8.04.2010].

Level 5 is seen as the bridging level between VET and HE. In this level there are VET qualifications as well as HE qualifications; the VET qualifications are called technological specialisation courses and there are short-cycle qualifications within the first cycle in the QF for HE.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

There is a need for increasing transparency, coherency and consistency in the Portuguese qualification system. The NQF is expected to aid the integration of different subsystems (academic qualifications, VET qualifications, higher education qualifications, sectoral qualifications (such as tourism, agriculture, transport) into a single (overarching), transparent and coherent framework and support policy coordination at national level. By means of the NQF, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to both labour market and society in general should be improved and mobility in education and training and in the labour market facilitated. The NQF could increase the legibility of qualifications, improve the overall permeability of the education and training system and form the basis for a referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF.

Involvement of stakeholders

The initial work on the NQF was carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with the support of the Ministry of Education. The involvement of stakeholders is deemed essential for successful implementation of the framework. An agreement was signed between the government and the social partners in March 2007 on the creation of an NQF.

The National Agency for Qualifications is the designated national coordination point (NCP) for offsetting up the EQF in Portugal. It cooperates with the General Directorate of Higher Education. The implementation of the NQF is being supervised by the National Council for Vocational Training.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure was adopted to cover the main characteristics and qualifications of the Portuguese qualification system. It is compatible with EQF in terms of categories and principles.

The level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude. Currently, the National Agency for Qualifications is developing more detailed level descriptors in order to differentiate more precisely between the levels of learning outcomes, thus making the referencing to NQF levels easier, as well as to respond to the specificities of different economic sectors.

The adopted NQF does not yet allow placing of partial qualifications on the framework, but the issue is important and must be addressed by the working group.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcome approach plays an important role in reforming the Portuguese education and training system.

In general education, the national curriculum for basic education (essential competences) is a national reference document for planning learning activities at both school and class levels. It includes general and specific competences which learners are expected to develop at compulsory education level. For each subject or subject area the document identifies and defines the respective profile of competences (in terms of attitudes, skills and knowledge) that all students should have developed by the end of each cycle, or for the whole of the three cycles of compulsory education.

In VET, reforms concentrate on the learning outcomes dimension of developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. The Institute for Quality in Training (IQT), identified, in the last decade, skill trends and training needs and developed occupational profiles for all economic sectors. These occupational profiles are competence-based: knowledge, technical know-how and social and relational competences. This work on occupational profiles and sectoral studies will serve for the further development of the national qualifications catalogue, using a methodology to develop competence standards for each qualification. This methodology is being consolidated and is being tested. Assessment will be related to standards through units of competence.

The National Agency for Adult Education and Training was, until 2006, responsible for implementation of a referential framework of key competences. This work was taken over by National Agency for Qualifications.

There have been a number of policies and initiatives developed for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Comprehensive national systems for validation are in place and have engaged many people, especially since the introduction of the *Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*. This initiative gives a new opportunity to all those already in the labour market without full upper-secondary education. It operates

through adult education and training courses, and the national system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

Referencing to the EQF

The National Agency for Qualifications is the national coordination point (NCP) for offsetting up the EQF in Portugal.

A referencing committee was established in December 2009 on the basis of the regulation adopted in July 2009, to assure transparency in the methodology used in the referencing process and the involvement of relevant stakeholders. The committee comprises the National Agency for Qualifications, which coordinates the referencing process, and of representatives of all subsystems of the education and vocational training system with competence to regulate qualifications and quality assurance processes. These include the General Directorate of Higher Education (DGES), the General Directorate of Innovation and Curriculum Development (DGIDC), the General Directorate of Employment and Labour Relations (DGERT) and the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES). Coherent referencing, which aims to reference national qualifications levels to the EQF and the QF-EHEA, is seen as an important opportunity to discuss further the links between the framework NQF for LLL and the QF for HE.

In February 2010 a working group was created to support and discuss the methodology adopted for the referencing process and to support and validate the writing of the referencing report.

Lessons learned and the way forward

During the development and discussions, the following issues have been raised and need further work and elaboration:
(a) the inclusion of partial qualification in the NQF;
(b) the integration of school-based competences and occupational-based competences in the same standard;
(c) the NQF as a bridge between different subsystems including higher education.

Main sources of information
The National Agency for Qualifications is the NCP for the implementation of EQF in Portugal. Information is available on the http://www.en.anq.gov.pt/ [cited 28.06.2010]

ROMANIA

Introduction (⁸⁸)

A learning outcomes based national qualification framework (NQF) is being developed in Romania. The framework aims to bring together nationally recognised qualifications from both initial and continuing VET, apprenticeship at the workplace and higher education.

The development builds on the reform in vocational education and training and development of competence-based qualifications since the 1990s. A NQF for VET was established already in 2005, based on a tripartite agreement signed by the Prime Minister, the Employers' National Confederation and the Trade Union's National Confederation. This framework was based on a five-level structure with a common register for qualifications, quality assurance arrangements and accreditation for VET qualifications.

The National Adult Training Board was appointed the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), legally introduced by Adult Board Law (2004). The main tasks of the NQA are to:

(a) ensure a methodological national framework;

(b) manage the national register of qualifications for all qualification levels;

(c) work with and coordinate sector committees (including mainly employers and trade unions);

(d) cooperate with the National Agency for Qualifications in HE.

Parallel processes are on the way in higher education. A qualifications framework for HE in line with the Bologna process and the EQF has been developed since 2005. In June 2009 the Methodology on the use of the national qualifications framework in HE (⁸⁹) was approved by the Order of the Minister of Education. It provides the basis for broad implementation in higher education.

The development work continues to incorporate a three-level structure for HE into a NQF for LLL. One of the main challenges is to link these two development processes, structures and stakeholders from VET, HE and the labour market towards a more comprehensive framework. This is seen as very important in strengthening the overall coherence and permeability of the Romanian qualification system.

(⁸⁸) This chapter on Romania will require further elaboration in cooperation with Romanian colleagues. The description and analysis should be seen as a preliminary draft reflecting the interpretation of Cedefop.

(⁸⁹) Available from Internet: www.acpart.ro

Rationale and the main policy objectives

There is a general view that the NQF could help to address some current needs in Romanian society and education and training. There is a lack of coherence in the qualification system (for example, weak links between IVET, CVET and HE), qualifications should better respond to the labour market needs and there is a need for more transparency of learning outcomes and mobility of trainees and labour force. National qualifications also have to be understood abroad and linked to EQF.

The development of the NQF addresses the following policy objectives:
(a)   aiding comparability of Romanian qualifications in Europe;
(b)   improving the transparency, quality and relevance of Romanian qualifications;
(c)   enabling more progression and mobility:
   (i) between different subsystems through the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
   (ii) between different working areas (including migrants) through transparency of competences;
(d)   better linking IVET and CVET and developing new pathways.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection in cooperation with social partners in 2005. The development of the NQF for VET has been coordinated since 2005 by the National Qualifications Authority on two levels. The decision making body is the board, which has 15 members: five represent ministries, five trade unions and five employers' confederations.

Within the National Qualifications Authority, there is a technical unit (about 40 staff), which provides support to the board, coordinates activities and prepares documents. The coordination with Bologna implementation is assured through participation of the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation in the board.

The development in higher education has been coordinated by the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership between Universities and Representatives of the Social and Economic Environment (ACPRT). The Agency works closely together with the main stakeholders from higher education (academic staff representatives, students, main professional organisations, employers' organisations, ministries and other public bodies).

Research is being carried out by the National Institute for Educational Sciences, National Centre for Development of Vocational and Technical Education and the National Qualifications Authority.

Romanian NQF for LLL and its link to higher education

The work on the NQF for HE started in 2005. The ACPRT was designated the National Authority for Qualifications in HE (Government Decision No 1357/2005) ([90]). It developed a methodology for a national register for higher education qualifications and the first proposal of the NQF, including level descriptors for higher education. The methodology was then tested in 17 selected first- and second-cycle study programmes in eight different fields of study. Based on the results of the project and a broad public debate during 2007-08, the methodology on the use of the national qualifications framework in HE was amended and finally approved by the Order of the Minister of Education in June 2009 ([91]). It provided the legal basis for broad implementation of the NQF for HE. A register of HE qualifications is being established.

Learning outcomes-based level descriptors in line with QF-EHEA and EQF, have been developed. They are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Competence is classified in two categories:
- professional competences ([92]);
- transversal competences ([93]).

The matrix integrates two perspectives for referencing qualifications to the NQF levels: the vertical perspective indicates the progress in professional and transversal competences. Eight generic level descriptors have been identified:

(a) knowledge, understanding and use of specific languages;

(b) explanation and interpretation;

(c) application, transfer and problem-solving;

(d) critical and constructive reflection;

([90]) See: *The National Report on Bologna reform*, 2009. Available from Internet: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National_Report_Romania_2009.pdf [cited 28.06.2010].

([91]) The Methodology on the use of the National Qualifications Framework in HE. Available from Internet: www.acpart.ro [cited 28.06.2010].

([92]) Professional competence is understood as 'proven capacity to select, combine adequately knowledge, skills and other attainment (such as values and attitudes) which are specific to a professional activity in order to solve successfully problem situations related to the respective profession effectively and efficiently.' www.acpart.ro (ibid, p. 10).

([93]) Transversal comptences are 'those capacities that transcend a certain field or study programme, having a transdisciplinary nature: teamwork, oral and written communication in mother tongue / foreign languages /.../)etc' www.acpart.ro (ibid, p 10)

(e) creativity and innovation;

(f) autonomy and responsibility;

(g) social interaction;

(h) personal and professional development.

The horizontal axis presents the generic descriptors linked to three university cycles: BA, MA and Doctorate. Three levels defined in the NQF for HE (BA, MA and Doctorate) are referenced to EQF levels 6, 7, and 8.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure reflecting EQF will be proposed. Level descriptors are being developed, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Level descriptors for HE have been already developed and approved.

Use of learning outcomes

There is a strong commitment to use a learning outcome approach as a part of the national reform programme.

Learning outcomes are already embedded in competence-based VET reform and the establishment of arrangements for validating non-formal learning. Many learning programmes developed in VET are based on competences.

Occupational standards are used in IVET, and are based on actual elements of competence that are to be proved in the workplace. Vocational training standards are newly-established qualification standards approved by the Minister of Education, which are based on learning outcomes to be achieved by the holder of qualification.

The system of recognition centres for adult learning is based on competences defined as learning outcomes. This approach to assessment relies on assessment tools like the use of student portfolios, presentation of projects and assignments that the learner has produced after negotiation or agreement with teachers or trainers, and formative assessment of learning experience in the community or workplace.

The decision to adopt the principles of the EQF in Romania is considered an important motivation to revise the existing methodological framework for qualifications development. As part of the process of continuous improvement, the methodologies used in the previous Phare projects, 2004 and 2005, have been evaluated, reviewed and updated in Phare 2006. New methodologies developed in Phare project 2006 are oriented on learning outcomes. A new format for

qualifications, based on learning outcomes, was developed. About 15 qualifications per sector for 19 sectors were developed.

Referencing to the EQF

The timing for the referencing to the EQF has yet to be fixed, but preparations have started. The National Qualifications Authority, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the National Agency for Quality Assurance for Pre-university Education (IVET) are working within their level of competence. The national steering group for referencing has yet to be decided.

Lessons learned and the way forward

In the course of the work it has become clear how difficult it is for the stakeholders from VET and HE to develop joint understanding of learning outcome orientation. However, this is an important prerequisite for increasing comparability and transfer opportunities between qualifications in the two subsystems and ensuring that the NQF can act as a bridge between education subsystems in various different ways.

It is also important to emphasise the need to have structures in place and sustainable financing. The sustainable financing of sectoral committees is deemed crucial for the implementation of the NQF. In 2009 the Law 268/2009 ([94]) was adopted, which provides for sustainable financing. Sectoral committees will be reorganised to an institution for social dialogue and for public interest, with well-defined responsibilities for qualifications. They will be financed by the State for administrative and services costs.

As a consequence of the Phare projects 2004–06, the National Qualifications Authority is implementing three projects, jointly financed by the ESF:

(a) CNC–FPC: Implementation and validation of NQF – from qualifications to training programmes;
(b) CALISIS: Quality assurance in Romanian continuous education system;
(c) FPC–Formator: Development of human resources for Romanian continuous education system.

([94]) Available from Internet:
http://www.euroticket.ro/legislatie/lege_aprobare_oug_28_2009_reglementare_masuri_protectie_sociala_268_2009.php [cited 28.06.2010].

Main sources of information

The National Qualifications Authority is appointed as EQF national coordination point (NCP). Information is available on the http://www.cnfpa.ro [cited 28.06.2010].

The Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership between Universities and Representatives of the Social and Economic environment (ACPRT), www.acpart.ro [cited 28.06.2010].

SLOVAKIA

Introduction

A comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning is currently being developed in Slovakia. It will include qualifications from VET, general education, HE and adult learning.

The work is based on the Government decision on EQF implementation in Slovakia, adopted in February 2009 [95]. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family was signed in October 2009.

The development is complemented by adoption of following acts: the Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009 [96], the School Act No 245/2008 [97], and the Lifelong Learning Act No 568/2009, adopted in December 2009 [98].

A national register of qualifications is being established with the aim of including all national qualifications from different subsystems of education and training. Development of the national register of occupations is in progress, based on amendment of Act No 5/2004 on employment services valid since May 2008.

It is planned that the NQF will be in place by 2011. Development is based on the national project Lifelong learning, lifelong guidance and national qualification system, co-financed by the ESF.

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[95] The decision is available from internet only in Slovak language
http://www.rokovania.sk/appl/material.nsf/0/A88DD30FE66CF39DC125754700489C17?OpenDocumen t [cited 03.05.2010].
[96] http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/Legislativa/Zakony/184-2009.pdf [cited 03.05.2010].
[97] http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/Legislativa/Zakony/245_2008.pdf [cited 03.05.2010].
[98] http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/Legislativa/Zakony/568_2009.pdf [cited 030.05.2010].

The rationale and main policy objectives

The main policy objectives which NQF will help to fulfil will be based on analyses of all of education and training subsystems and qualifications development. It is agreed that the NQF could help to address some current challenges, i.e. to:

- link education and labour market needs better;
- improve the transparency and consistency of qualifications.

The main pillars of the NQF are the national register of qualifications and national register of occupations. The aim of the NQF is to create a system environment that will support comparability of learning outcomes achieved by various forms of learning and education and to enable recognition of real knowledge and competences independently of the way they were acquired.

Involvement of stakeholders

Work on the NQF was initiated and is coordinated by the Ministry of Education. A steering group was established, chaired by the Director General for Lifelong Learning. The members come from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Culture. Administrative and research support is provided by the Ministry of Education while financial support will be provided by the Structural Funds (ESF).

A ministerial working group was created to analyse existing qualification and to do preparatory work together with employers and employees.

Coordination between NQF and Bologna implementation had already been established through cooperation with the National team of Bologna experts and the higher education department at Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure is envisaged to cover the main characteristics of the national qualification system and be compatible with the EQF also in terms of principles, categories and level descriptors. The final number of levels has not been defined yet.

University qualifications will be included in the comprehensive NQF.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach has been recognised as a part of the reform
agenda and is being integrated in all new developments. The modernisation
programme Slovakia 21 – reform programme, and the National Reform Programme
2008-10 ([99]) were adopted by the government of Slovakia to achieve better visibility
of learning outcomes in the education system. The learning outcomes approach is
described in some action plans, e.g. related to:

• the change of the accreditation processes at higher education institutions with
  the shift of emphasis to the output indicators instead of criteria focused on input;
• improved employability through increased interconnection between the content
  of education and the demands of the labour market.

In general education (primary/secondary) learning outcomes are being
implemented in line the School Act No 245/2008.

In VET, the learning outcomes approach is being reinforced through the new
Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009.

It is expected that work on the NQF will have an impact on the use of learning
outcomes in the higher education.

The Act on lifelong learning aims to contribute to unified accreditation and
certification practices by recognising partial qualifications based on competence
acquired regardless of the learning setting.

Referencing to the EQF

The national steering group for referencing to the EQF was established in 2009. The
referencing process will start in mid 2010 and the referencing report will be ready by
March 2013.

Lessons learned and the way forward

To establish a good partnership platform is one of the preconditions for developing
NQF.

([99]) http://www.finance.gov.sk/en/Default.aspx?CatID=450 [cited 28.06.2010].

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education – Lifelong Learning Department is the EQF NCP:

http://www.minedu.sk [cited 28.06.2010]

SLOVENIA

Introduction

A comprehensive Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF) is being developed. The development builds on a series of reforms since the mid 1990s in all education and training subsystems (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education) and introduction of the certification system in 2000.

In 2006, the Slovenian government adopted the Decree on the introduction and use of the classifications system of education and training (Klasius) ([100]) (OG, No 46/2006), which provides the basis for building the national framework. It is a key national standard to collect, process, analyse and demonstrate the statistical and analytical data which are important to illustrate the social, economic and demographic developments in Slovenia.

Other elements underpinning the SQF are the national register of occupational standards and the register of assessment qualifications catalogues for national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The registers are created by the National Professional Qualifications Act (2000, amended 2003, 2006 and 2009) ([101]). A third register, of national VET programmes, includes assessment catalogues and vocational titles of VET diplomas, governed by the Vocational Education and Training Act (2006) ([102]) and for higher VET by the new Higher Vocational Act (2004) ([103]). Higher education is governed by Higher Education Act ([104]).

([100]) Decree *Uredba o uvedbi in uporabi standardne klasifikacije izobraževanja* (KLASIUS) was published in the OJ of the Republic of Slovenia, 46/2006. Available from Internet: http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=73174 [cited 28.06.2010].

([101]) The emended *Zakon o nacionalnih poklicnih kvalifikacijah* was published in the OJ of the R of Slovenia No 1/2007 and 85/2009). Available from Internet: http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r06/predpis_ZAKO1626.html [cited 28.06.2010].

([102]) Zakon o poklicnem in strokovnem izobrazevanju was published in the OJ of the Republic of Slovenia No 79/2006. Available from Internet: http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r02/predpis_ZAKO982.html [cited 28.06.2010].

([103]) *Zakon o visjem strokovnem izobrazevanju* was published in the OJ of the republic of Slovenia No 86/2006. Available from Internet: http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r03/predpis_ZAKO4093.html [cited 28.06.2010].

The developments are supported by the Slovenian qualifications framework project (2009-12) jointly financed by ESF. The project, which falls under the competence of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, is managed by the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

The rationale and main policy objectives

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid-1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well, when it comes to permeability. There are almost no dead-ends at upper-secondary level and individuals will move vertically and horizontally without major obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and to increase coherence in lifelong learning strategy; to improve the link between education and certification and the responsiveness of qualifications to labour market and individual needs and to have a reliable tool for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal knowledge and skills.

The main issues and policy objectives addressed are:

(a) improving transnational understanding of Slovenian qualifications as well as the possibilities of transfer and recognition;

(b) supporting coherent approaches to lifelong learning by providing access, progression, recognition of learning, coherence and better use of qualifications;

(c) improving transparency of qualifications for individuals and employers;

(d) need for the education and training system to be more responsive to employers' needs and their involvement in assessment and certification;

(e) ensuring capacity to certify knowledge, skills and competence that have not yet been incorporated in formal education and training programmes and provide better links and transferability between education and training and certification;

(f) improving efficiency in achieving qualifications focused on the needs of the labour market (e.g. requalification);

(g) enabling individualised pathways mainly for adults and drop-outs;

(h) improving access to qualifications issues by the tertiary system and thus increasing the percentage of people with post-secondary VET and higher education qualifications.

([104]) *Zakon o visokem solstvu* was published in OJ of the Republic of Slovenia No. 119/2006, amended No 59/2007 and No 86?2009. Available from Internet: http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=2006119&stevilka=5079 [cited 28.06.2010].

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport in close cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs in 2005 through EQF consultation process.

In 2005 and 2006, several conferences on the development of the EQF were organised with all stakeholders.

In 2006, a working group with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Science and Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia prepared the proposal of Klasius.

In January 2009, a national steering committee for referencing NQF levels to the EQF was nominated by the Government. It is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport (chair), the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the Statistical office, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training and social partners. Administrative support is provided by the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training. Financially the project is supported by the national budget and the ESF.

Levels and descriptors

The Klasius has an eight-level structure with two sublevels (at levels 6 and 8). This structure is based on national tradition and is embedded in many collective agreements.

The level descriptors for NQF are defined in terms of outcome criteria: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility; key competences (learning competence, social and communisation skills); and professional and vocational competences.

For qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes, additional input criteria are used, e.g. access requirements, typical length of the programme and inputs in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and HE defined also in credit points.

There is a proposal to include three types of qualifications:
(a) those awarded after completion of education programmes at all levels (general, vocational or higher);
(b) those achieved through recognition of non-formal and informal learning in line with the national standards (NVQs);

(c) other certificates and qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training and not issued by the national authorities.

VET qualifications are defined in modules. The term 'partial qualifications' is not used but, within the VET programmes, it is possible to exit with an NVQ as a partial qualification, which has a clear national standard and value on the labour market.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is already embedded in the Slovene education system and well accepted. The term 'educational outcomes' is used by the Decree on the introduction and use of the classifications system of education and training (Klasius) and defined as 'the set of knowledge, skills and competences for 'life and work' achieved by learners in the process of formal, informal and non-formal learning. Educational outcomes are certifiable as a rule'. ([105])

Education programmes have moved from a content-based to an objectives-based approach. The relationships between objectives and outcomes, and between learning objectives/outcomes and learning standards, are now being discussed. A balance is sought in emphasising the role played by general knowledge and acquired key competences, sufficiently broad technical knowledge and certain pedagogical processes in the defining educational outcomes.

In VET, the learning outcome approach is seen as a very useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to 'real life' and the needs of the labour market. The basis for all VET qualifications is a system of occupational profiles and standards, identifying knowledge and skills required in the labour market. National VET framework curricula define expected knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by students. Syllabuses usually follow the Bloom taxonomy/concept of learning outcomes. Broad competence in catalogues for modules/subjects is defined as ability and readiness to use knowledge, skills and attitudes in study and work contexts.

In addition to the national VET framework curriculum, the school curriculum was introduced and represents an important innovation in Slovenia giving schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning, and especially in taking into account the local environment and employers' needs when developing the curriculum.

Assessment in VET (at levels 4 and 5) consists of assessment in the form of project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge); written tests are

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([105]) Decree *Uredba o uvedbi in uporabi standardne klasifikacije izobraževanja* (KLASIUS) was published in the OJ of the Republic of Slovenia, 46/2006, available on http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=73174 [cited 28.06.2010].

also used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics).

New programmes in general education (compulsory and upper secondary) include learning outcomes to be achieved either at the end of the three stages in compulsory education or at the end of upper-secondary education tested in the external Matura examination.

The National Professional Qualifications Act (2000, amended 2003, 2006 and 2009) enables validation of vocationally-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school. The NVQ and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on assessment qualifications catalogues (catalogues of standards for professional knowledge and skills).

Referencing to the EQF

A National steering committee at government level for referencing NQF levels to the EQF was nominated in January 2010. The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training was designated EQF national coordination point (NCP).

A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by April 2011 and the final report by 2012.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A broad partnership approach and commitment of all stakeholders is important. Further development of the NQF should be based on the requirements and needs of the national context and experiences gained, using the existing infrastructure and no additional bureaucracy. Developing common concepts and ensuring consistent use of common concepts and terminology is a challenge.

Main sources of information

National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, where qualifications registers are accessible: http://www.cpi.si [cited 28.06.2010]

Statistical Office of Slovenia, where the Classifications System of Education and Training (Klasius) is available at: http://www.stat.si/Klasius [cited 28.06.2010]

SPAIN

Introduction

Spain is currently developing an NQF for lifelong learning (Spanish qualifications framework, MECU), based on learning outcomes. It will link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. The higher four levels of MECU will be linked to the qualifications framework for higher education (MECES), which is being put in place separately. A preliminary draft of the QF for HE has been prepared and is being discussed with all relevant stakeholders. Links between both frameworks are envisaged. It is expected that the Royal Decree on the introduction of MECU will be adopted by the Spanish Government at the beginning of 2011.

The development work started in January 2009. The Ministry of Education has drawn up a first draft of the NQF which is now being presented to, and discussed with, different stakeholders.

Development work builds on reforms in all subsystems of education and training. The NQF development is broadly based on various acts and decrees, defining and regulating different education and training subsystems, including:

(a) non-university formal education qualifications: Act on Education (2/2006) [106], Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training (5/2002) [107], Royal Decree establishing vocational training general organisation within the education system (1538/2006) [108].

(b) higher education qualifications: Universities Act (6/2001, amended 4/2007) [109], Royal Decree on establishing the organisation of official university education

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[106] (*Ley Orgánica de Educación*, LOE).
http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?coleccion=iberlex&id=2006/07899 [cited 28.06.2010].

[107] *Ley Orgánica de las Cualificaciones y de la Formación Profesional,* LOCFP).
http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?coleccion=iberlex&id=2002/12018 [cited 28.06.2010].

[108] See http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?coleccion=iberlex&id=2007/00092 [cited 28.06.2010].

[109] (*Ley Orgánica 6/2001*, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades).
http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2001-24515 [cited 28.06.2010].
(*Ley Orgánica 4/2007*, de 13 de abril, de Universidades).
http://www.educacion.es/dctm/universidad2015/documentos/legislacion/a16241-16260.pdf?documentId=0901e72b80049f3b[cited 28.06.2010].

(1393/2007) ([110]), Royal Decree on establishing the procedures for universities to issue the Diploma Supplement ([111]).

(c) professional competences: Royal Decree for the recognition of professional competences acquired through professional experience ([112]).

The rationale and the main policy objectives

One of the main objectives of developing a Spanish qualifications framework compatible with the EQF and the QF- EHEA is to make Spanish qualifications clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. It will improve the extent to which all stakeholders are informed about the national qualifications. It will raise trust and make mobility easier. NQF will support lifelong learning, improve access and participation in lifelong learning for everyone, including disadvantaged people. Through the NQF it will be easier to identify, validate and recognise all kind of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning), regardless of the way they were acquired. It will support better use of qualifications at national and European level.

One of its important aims is also facilitating and improving access and participation in lifelong learning and transition within the various subsystems of education and vocational training. The HE representative emphasised the progression from short cycle to university programmes and to open up higher education for non-traditional learners, who might have no school leaving certificate. Another challenge is to put procedures in place for recognition of non-formal learning.

The MECU should have an important communication role:

(a) for broader society: to enable citizens to judge the relative value of qualifications. Increased transparency is a prerequisite for the transfer and accumulation of skills;

(b) for students to develop flexible learning pathways and to use opportunities for mobility;

(c) for employers: to allow them to assess better the profile, content and relevance of qualifications for the labour market;

(d) for training providers: to allow them to compare the profile and content of their learning offer with national standards.

([110]) See http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/10/30/pdfs/A44037-44048.pdf [cited 28.06.2010].
([111]) See http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2003/09/11/pdfs/A33848-33853.pdf [cited 28.06.2010].
([112]) See http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2009/08/25/pdfs/BOE-A-2009-13781.pdf [cited 28.06.2010].

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is coordinating the NQF development and implementation in close cooperation with other ministries (Ministry for Labour and Immigration, Ministry of Science and Innovation, Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health and Social Policy, Ministry of the Treasury). The development work includes a wide range of other stakeholders such as social partners (unions, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises), institutional coordination bodies (e.g. Sectoral Conference of Education, General Conference for University Policy), consultative bodies (State School Council, Vocational Training Council, Arts Education Council, University Council), agencies for evaluation and others (professional corporations and associations).

Close cooperation with the Bologna process is ensured with members represented in the both Committees for NQF for LLL (MECU) and in the group for QF and HE (MECES).

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level framework has been proposed to cover all main types of Spanish qualifications. The four highest levels will be compatible with the Spanish QF for HE. Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. They have been inspired by the EQF level descriptors, but adopted to suit national context. This is particularly the case for skills, where the ability to communicate in different languages and analytical skills are emphasised. Competence is defined as autonomy and responsibility and including learning skills and attitudes.

Broad generic descriptors for NQF will be supplemented with more detailed descriptors for sub-frameworks if needed (e.g. for professional qualifications).

Descriptors for all levels are based on the same general principles. The descriptors for levels 5-8 are compatible with the Dublin descriptors, so these MECU levels can be compared to the MECES levels.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the NQF and is supported by all relevant stakeholders. It is expected that the development of both the NQF for LLL and the QF for HE will further support the shift

to learning outcomes in all the education and qualification levels to make qualifications more readable and easier to compare.

The Ministry of Education has established national core curricula for the various levels of education: primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education and vocational training. They are determined by the central government. The core curricula determine the general objectives for each stage of education as well as specific objectives for each area or subject. The core curricula also establish the content and evaluation criteria for each area.

The new VET qualifications are already defined in terms of learning outcomes. The professional modules contained in each qualification gather the learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment criteria that show that the qualification holder knows, understands and is able to do as expected after the completion of the learning programme. These learning outcomes are closely related to work activities and the required professional competences.

In HE, new study programmes have to include expected outcomes and achievement of learning objectives set for the student. All study programmes have to be accredited according to the guidelines established at national level.

The new Royal Decree for the recognition of professional competences (1224/2009), which was adopted in July 2009, regulates the procedures for the validation of professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and professional experience. The national catalogue of occupational qualifications is used as the reference for occupational qualifications identified in the production system and organised in the catalogue by competence levels.

Referencing to the EQF

The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011. The Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training was appointed by the government to coordinate and launch the process and act as the national contact point (NCP).

Lessons learned and the way forward

Since Spain is at an early stage of development of the NQF for LLL it is too early to speak about particular problems. However, there is a challenge to link the two NQF development processes and to strengthen cooperation between all relevant stakeholders from all subsystems.

Main sources of information

The Ministry of Education is the main source of information on the NQF development, (MECU and MECES), also for all formal qualifications, including VET diplomas http://www.educacion.es/portada.html

The Directorate General for Vocational Training has been designated the national contact point (NCP) ([113]).

The National Register of Occupational Qualifications (standards) is available on the web site of the National Institute for Qualifications (INCUAL). Available from the Internet: https://www.educacion.es/iceextranet/

SWEDEN

Introduction

On the 23 December 2009 the Swedish Government formally decided, by authorising the national agency for higher vocational education (*Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan*) to develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework covering all parts of the public education and training system. According to the decision, the NQF should be developed in such a way that it makes it possible for stakeholders outside the public system, in the labour market and sectors, to link their qualifications to the reference framework. Based on the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders and experts, a proposal is scheduled to be presented to the Government at the beginning of October 2010. The framework is primarily seen as a necessary precondition for referencing to the EQF and for establishing a transparent and trustworthy link between Swedish qualifications and the EQF but is also seen as an instrument for further strengthening the transparency and permeability of the Swedish education and training system.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of a Swedish NQF builds on a strong basis. The learning outcomes approach is broadly accepted and widely implemented,

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([113]) The IFIIE (Institute for Teacher Training, Research and Education Innovation) depends on the Directorate General for Vocational Training

relations between qualifications at different levels and in different areas are well defined and structured and there are relatively few barriers to access, transfer and progression. The development of the NQF is, therefore, only partly seen as part of a national reform strategy: it is primarily seen as a way to aid referencing to the EQF. The December 2009 decision states that the framework should make it easier for both individuals and employers to understand and compare the level of Swedish qualifications with those existing in other EU Member states. While the impact of the NQF on existing public education and training may be limited (apart from further strengthening its overall transparency), the explicit aim to open up to stakeholders outside the public system, for sectors involved in education and training, could influence future developments of the Swedish system. The reference framework, it is stated in the December 2009 decision, ought to be gradually developed in line with the interests of working life and sectors. Further, for education and training areas outside the direct responsibility of the state it could be possible to offer a voluntary link to the EQF via the NQF. How to solve this is left to further discussions between labour market stakeholders and public authorities. Based on the discussions in other countries it seems clear that such an inclusive approach requires clear mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation of qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Research carries the overall responsibility for the work on the NQF and the referencing to the EQF. The Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (YH) has been given the mandate to coordinate the development of the framework and will also (as of 1 July 2009) constitute the Swedish national contact point for EQF. A number of expert and working groups were formally established following the December 2009 decision.

(a) a national coordination group is being chaired by YH and consists of representatives of the national agency for education (Skolverket), the national agency for higher education (Högskolverket), the employers federation, regional authorities, main trade union associations and the public employment services;

(b) a national reference group consisting of organisations and agencies forming part of the public education and training system, or being closely associated to this. Examples of participants in this group are the Swedish University Association, the Swedish Student Association and the Swedish Association for Popular Education (*Folkbildning*);

(c) project groups have been set up to specify and test (among other things) level descriptors within different sectors and fields of activity, in sectors such as construction, electronics, transportation, care and the arts as well as for guidance and validation;

(d) a small expert group (three members) have also been set up to prepare an outline of the framework in terms of levels and descriptors. The draft produced by the expert group is supposed to provide an independent starting point for the work of the other groups.

A first draft of level-descriptors has been presented to and discussed by the working groups mentioned above. This draft provides a basis for further work and there exists a broad agreement that the new NQF should contain eight levels and operate according to the main categories of knowledge (*kunskap*), skills (*faerdigheter*) and competence (*kompetens*).

The discussions on the draft proposal have not only looked at the descriptors for each level but also at the progression between levels. Particular emphasis has been given to the overall balance of the descriptors (for example between education and the labour market, between academically and practically oriented learning). There is agreement that the framework must be able to reflect all forms of learning, including non-formal and informal learning taking place outside schools.

The concept of competence has been subject to particular scrutiny. This partly reflects differences in usage of the Swedish *kompetens* and the English competence. The decision to retain the concept reflects that no clear alternative has been identified and a general wish to stay close to the vocabulary used across Europe.

From the start, stakeholders have expressed the wish to develop a framework with a clear national profile, giving priority to issues considered to be of particular importance in Swedish society. Which issues to address, and how to address these in a clear and unambiguous way, is still being discussed. A possibility will be to develop an accompanying text supporting the national implementation of the level descriptors.

Continuing Swedish work is also closely linked to the parallel work in other Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway) and a Nordic reference group has been set up allow for exchange of experiences.

The national qualifications framework for LLL and the link to higher education

A first proposal for a qualifications framework for higher education (in relation to the European higher education area) was presented in June 2007. Building on this proposal, the Swedish government commissioned the national agency for higher education to take the work forward, resulting in the publishing of the framework in 2009. The higher education framework is seen to be a fully integrated part of the

emerging comprehensive NQF. This is reflected in the December 2009 decision where the national agency for higher vocational education is asked to cooperate closely with the national agency for higher education on issues relating to the Bologna framework. The key role given to the (new) national agency for higher vocational education in coordinating the development of the NQF is of particular interest in this context. The national agency was set up as late as 2008 with the responsibility of administering what is a new strand of Swedish education and training. Providing high-level education and training directly relevant to the labour market, *Yrkeshögskolan* has attracted a lot of interest both among individuals and employers. Offering an alternative to the traditional university sector, for example by combining theoretically and practically oriented learning, the new institutions can be seen as complementing existing education and training provisions and qualifications. The national agency thus seems to be well placed for addressing the challenge of integrating successfully the existing framework for higher education into the comprehensive framework to be presented in October 2010.

Levels and descriptors

The number of levels and the type of descriptors still has to be developed and decided. The learning outcomes perspective is firmly established in the Swedish system and will provide a clear basis for the proposal to be presented in October 2010.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes perspective is an important and largely accepted and implemented feature of Swedish education and training. At political level, the learning outcomes approach is closely linked to the 'objective-based governance' in use since the early 1990s. While the term learning outcomes is not commonly used (the term 'knowledge objectives' is used for compulsory education), the principles behind are well known and generally in place. The core curricula for compulsory education have recently been revised, further strengthening and refining the learning outcomes-based approach.

The situation in the universities in the shift to learning outcomes is mixed. These are autonomous institutions where national authorities have less direct influence. The Bologna process has been influential, as have a number of local initiatives.

A particular challenge faced is the extent to which the learning outcomes perspective is influencing assessment practices. Professionals may have problems seeing that assessment methods and criteria have to relate directly to the objectives expressed in the curricula. This is a continuing process illustrating the long-term challenge involved in the shift to learning outcomes.

A project group will be set up to focus on the link between the NQF and validation. Sweden has been working on validation for several years, for example reflected in an expert proposal to the Government from 2007. While some progress can be noted in this field, not least reflecting the extensive use of learning outcomes, validation is not fully integrated into the national qualification system. Some voices have been raised regarding the potential role of the new NQF for more systematically opening up to validation of non-formal and informal learning as an integrated part of the qualifications system. It is still too early to judge how this will be taken forward.

Referencing to the EQF

The development of the NQF will be given high priority in 2010. Following the October 2010 proposal, the actual referencing to the EQF is expected to be carried out. A draft report will be ready for the EQF AG by mid-2011 and the final referencing report is expected to ready by the fourth quarter of 2011. The national coordination point for EQF was established on 1 July 2009 and will play a key role both in relation to the NQF and the EQF referencing.

Important lessons learned and the way forward

While the development of the Swedish NQF is still at an early stage, work is now progressing fast and involving a broad group of stakeholders. An interesting feature of the Swedish approach is that the NQF is seen as a way to open up the qualifications system to new stakeholders, for example in the private sector. It remains to be seen how this will be accomplished, in particular regarding quality assurance issues, but is of interest beyond the borders of Sweden.

TURKEY

Introduction

A Turkish national qualifications framework (NQF), which will cover general, vocational and higher education and training is being developed, building on the experience of the broad EQF consultation process in 2005, the VET reform in 1990s and the outcomes of the Strengthening vocational education and training projects (2002-07). Many elements of the NQF are in place and further development will involve drawing the various elements together. A draft NQF for lifelong learning is expected to be in place by 2010.

Passing the Vocational Qualifications Authority Law (No 5544, 2006) was legally the most important stage for NQF development. Through this law, a tripartite Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) was established in 2006, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with the objective of developing the strategy for implementing the national qualification system and preparing a proposal for a comprehensive NQF. VQA has already developed secondary legislation on occupational standards and sectoral committees in 2007; the work on the development of procedures and supporting documents and guidelines started at the beginning of 2008. Secondary legislation for qualifications, assessment and certification was published in 2008. One of its important roles is to cooperate closely with the Council of Higher Education.

The European project (IPA-2009-2012) Strengthening vocational qualifications authority and national vocational qualification system in Turkey will support further activities and provide necessary consultancy.

The QF for higher education was adopted in January 2010 by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE)

The rationale and main policy objectives

According to Government programme documents, one of the main objectives of creating the NQF is to reduce mismatches and increase effective employment and training programmes.

The following policy objectives are addressed by developing an NQF:
(a) to strengthen the relationship among education and training and employment;
(b) to develop national standards based on learning outcomes;

(c) to encourage quality assurance in training and education;

(d) to provide qualifications for vertical and horizontal transfers and develop national and international comparability platforms;

(e) to ensure access to learning, advances in learning and recognition and comparability of learning;

(f) to support lifelong learning.

On a short-term basis, all new VQA qualifications developed according to the new legislation (Law 5544) will be included into the NQF.

In the medium- (or long-) term, it is expected that all formal qualifications (secondary and higher education diplomas and other qualifications) will be placed in a single comprehensive framework and transition between all kinds of qualifications will be possible. One of the expected benefits is that, through the NQF, the qualifications will be more labour-market oriented and dynamic. In addition, for individuals the NQF will provide career mobility, flexibility, all kinds of learning activities to be valued, and progression routes to be clearly defined.

The NQF for LLL and higher education

Development and implementation of the NQF for HE along with the principles of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy have been given high priority by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), which is the national authority and responsible body for HE in Turkey. Initial work was started after Bergen Communiqué in 2005. To organise the process, a national committee was set up by the CoHE on April 28, 2006. Since then there has been a great interest in continuing work for the development of the NQF by HE institutions as well as other stakeholders.

At the initial stage of development, it was agreed that the definitions on qualifications and competences, which are set up in the overarching QF for EHEA based on the Dublin descriptors, would be applied in Turkey. Accordingly, the Committee drafted the level descriptors compatible with those of the EHEA first, second and third cycles as well as the short cycle. After the broad consultation process with all relevant stakeholders (all universities, National Ministry of Education, national student union, the business world including employers and employees, NGOs) it was decided to redraft the level descriptors and to take both overarching QF (the EQF and the QF for EHEA) into account when developing descriptors for all levels and profiles of HE. It was emphasised that this would aid lifelong learning orientation and would be a step towards one single comprehensive framework in the future.

The higher education system in Turkey also includes vocational qualifications at the level of short cycle, which are strongly linked to vocational education at secondary level. Both types of vocational qualifications are embedded at level 5 in the NQF, which is seen as bridge between VET and HE.

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) is an autonomous public body responsible for planning, steering, governing and supervising HE and for developing QF for HE, in which qualifications at levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 are included. There are two further bodies responsible for education and national qualifications in Turkey: the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for developing qualifications up to the fifth level, and the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) is responsible for developing national occupational standards and vocational and professional qualifications to be placed at levels 1-8, except for the regulated occupations defined in the Law Article 1 ([114]).

Involvement of stakeholders

The work on the NQF development was initiated by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in 2005 through the EQF consultation process. After the VQA was established, the authority has been coordinating the process.

As the goal is a a single comprehensive national framework, encompassing all stages of formal and all kinds of informal learning, the important precondition is to develop effective and sustainable cooperation between stakeholders across all three sectors. The other challenge would be to develop the quality assurance of learning outcomes of education and training underpinning the whole NQF. This would require development of some comprehensive quality assurance approaches and mechanisms in the future.

The Bologna process initiated the NQF for HE and the Higher Education Council executes the activities. Coordination between the NQF developments and the Bologna reform is achieved through defining the strategic issues among the related authorities and agreement on implementation in a coordinated manner.

Employee, and employer and professional organisations are members of the executive board of the VQA with representatives from government: Ministries of Labour and Education, and the Higher Education Council.

([114]) VQA Law Article 1 paragraph 2 defines these professions: medical doctors, dentists, nurses, mid-wives, pharmacists, veterinary doctors, engineers and architects as well as any other professions requiring education on a graduate level as a minimum, for which conditions for inception of respective professions are regulated by law.

Working groups composed of members of different stakeholders will be established to prepare the proposal and consultancy will be provided through European project. The draft will be discussed in the broad consultation process with all relevant stakeholders and then approved.

Levels and descriptors

According to the agreement in the consultation process, the NQF will consist of eight levels defined through learning outcomes and will cover general, vocational and higher education. EQF descriptors have been taken as a starting point for further development of national descriptors. They are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Higher education has determined descriptors in terms of learning outcomes, which are compatible with EQF-LLL. Competence is further divided into four components: autonomy and responsibility, learning to learn, field specific competences, and social and communication skills with an emphasis on foreign languages competences and ICT.

Use of learning outcomes

The Learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the NQF and is the stated intention of all current reforms in all subsystems of education and training supported by main stakeholders. The Ministry of National Education has launched a curriculum reform in secondary education (for both general and vocational and technical schools). Vocational qualifications will be learning outcome-based. In higher education, the implementation of the learning outcome approach is an essential part of the implementation of the NQF for higher education.

A format for national occupational standards (NOS) was determined and describes labour market needs in terms of duties and tasks with corresponding performance criteria. Qualifications developed from occupational standards are described in terms of learning outcomes. Awarding criteria for the occupational standards and vocational qualifications setting bodies were developed. Modules which form programmes within the Ministry of National Education secondary education programmes are based on learning outcomes. In the VQA qualification structure, assessment methods are designed to assess learning outcomes.

Referencing to the EQF

A referencing committee, composed of members of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and other relevant stakeholders is planned to be set up in 2010. A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A very important condition to developing an effective process of establishing NQF is to have clear responsibilities, defined roles and a coordination body which has a clear mandate. Reaching agreement on establishing the VQA in Turkey was an important milestone.

Main sources of information

The Vocational Qualification Authority (VQA) is the NCP. Information is available on its website: www.myk.gov.tr [cited 28.06.2010].

For QF for HE detailed information is available on its website: http://bologna.yok.gov.tr [cited 28.06.2010].

UNITED KINGDOM

England and Northern Ireland

Introduction

The qualifications and credit framework (QCF) is a jointly regulated credit and qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The framework covers all levels and types of qualifications, except for higher education qualifications which are covered by the Framework for higher education (FHEQ) and linked to the Bologna process. The QCF has been designed to be an organising structure for units and qualifications in the three country (England, Northern Ireland and Wales) national qualifications frameworks and supports the accumulation and transfer of credit achievement over time. The QCF recognises skills and

transfer of credit achievement over time. The QCF recognises skills and qualifications by awarding credit for qualifications and units. It is thus supposed to enable people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes. The QCF went through a two-year test and trial period (summer 2006 – April 2008) and was formally adopted in autumn 2008.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The following four aims were identified for the QCF. It should:
(a) ensure a wider range of achievements can be recognised within a more inclusive framework;
(b) establish a framework that is more responsive to individual and employer needs;
(c) establish a simpler qualifications framework that is easier for all users to understand;
(d) reduce the burden of bureaucracy in the accreditation and assessment of qualifications ([115]).

The QCF also sets out a series of strategic benefits of implementing the new framework. These are:
(a) the framework is simple to understand, flexible to use, and easy to navigate;
(b) the framework is responsive so that employers and learning providers can customise programmes of learning/ training to meet particular needs;
(c) unit achievement is recognised and recorded;
(d) all learners have an individual learner achievement record;
(e) improved data quality in relation to qualifications and achievement for users, stakeholders and government;
(f) the introduction of the QCF reduces administrative bureaucracy and costs.

Involvement of stakeholders and legal basis

Responsibilities for regulating the QCF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland lie with the following qualifications regulators:

([115]) Working specification for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials: Version 2. (Please note that this working specification is due to be replaced by regulatory arrangements for the QCF in August 2008. The regulatory arrangements will actually contain the updated technical requirements for the QCF.)

- in England, the qualifications regulator for all external qualifications is the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (OfQual).
- in Northern Ireland, the qualifications regulator is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which regulates external qualifications other than NVQs.

The English/Northern Irish Framework and higher education

A separate framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) has been established for England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This framework is a five-level framework and is based on the concept that qualifications is awarded for the demonstrated achievement. These levels are comparable to levels 4-8 of QCF although a different approach (descriptors) are used to describe them. The five levels of the FHEQ are differentiated by a series of generic qualifications descriptors that summarise the knowledge, understanding and the types of abilities that holders are expected to hold. The FHEQ is certified against the QF-EHEA (Bologna), but not against the EQF.

The attitude of FEHQ in relation to the EQF is significantly different from that signalled by the QCF. A 'scoping group' was set up in 2008 to explore the relationship between FHEQ and the EQF and concluded that, while they support the lifelong learning goals of the EQF, the group was not aware of any additional benefits which might accrue to the HE sector at present by referencing the FHEQ to the EQF. The group recommends that the position can be reviewed again, taking into account the developments of the EQF, the development of the Bologna process and a monitoring of levels of interest expressed by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Levels and descriptors

The QCF comprises nine levels from entry level (sub-divided into entry level 1-3) to achievement at level 8.

The level descriptors provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the nine levels. The level descriptors are designed to enable their use across a wide range of learning contexts and build on those developed through the Northern Ireland credit accumulation and transfer system (NICATS), the existing level descriptors of the national qualifications framework (NQF), and a

range of level descriptors from frameworks in the UK and internationally. The five upper levels are intended to be consistent with the levels of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Level is an indication of the relative demand made on the learner, the complexity and/or depth of achievement, and the learner's autonomy in demonstrating that achievement. The level descriptors are concerned with the outcomes of learning and not the process of learning or the method of assessment. The indicators for each level are grouped into three categories:

(a) knowledge and understanding;
(b) application and action;
(c) autonomy and accountability.

Apart from the system of levels, the QCF consists of a system of units and credits. One credit is based on 10 hours of learning, regardless of where and when the learning took place. QCF also includes principles for assembling qualifications from units, specifying which units must be achieved for each qualification. A set of principles for recognising prior certified and non-certified learning is also included.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach underpins the English and Northern Ireland qualifications systems. Actively promoted since the 1980s, this perspective is broadly accepted and implemented.

Referencing to the EQF

The QCF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The following relationship was established:

QCF	Entry level 1	Entry level 2	Entry level 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF			1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8

The higher education framework (FHEQ) is not formally referenced to the EQF. While this option was discussed during the referencing process, agreement was not reached on this point. As the five upper levels of the QCF are consistent with the FHEQ, an implicit and indirect link is established.

Important lessons learned and the way forward

The adoption of the QCF demonstrates the need to develop NQFs further. As a 'second generation' framework, the QCA introduces much stronger credit transfer elements, moving beyond the scope of the former NQF. This evolution has gone on for more than a decade, underlining the need for a long-term perspective in this field.

While the QCF is now linked to the EQF, this is not the case for the FHEQ. Whether this will remain a permanent solution is unclear.

Main sources of information

http://www.qcda.gov.uk/8150.aspx [cited 28.06.2010]

Scotland

Introduction

The SCQF promotes lifelong learning in Scotland. The framework was originally implemented in 2001 but has been gradually revised and refined in the period following this. The SCQF is organised as a company (see below) which is a unique solution in Europe; a charity was set up in 2006. The framework covers all levels and types of qualifications. The SCQF is not a regulatory framework. The SCQF assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond, thereby clarifying opportunities for international progression routes and credit transfer. The SCQF sees itself as an integrating framework. The framework supports everyone in Scotland, including learning providers and employers, by:

- helping people of all ages and circumstances to get access to appropriate education and training so they can meet their full potential;
- helping employers, learners and the general public to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of learning, and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

Level descriptors and criteria for inclusion are common across all levels and types of qualifications.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The objectives pursued by the SCQF are:
(a) to support lifelong learning;
(b) to clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and programmes of learning at whatever level;
(c) to show learners, and others, possible routes for progression and credit transfer;
(d) to show the general level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualifications;
(e) to enable credit links to be made between qualifications or learning programmes to assist learners to build on previous successes.

It will do this by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand and providing a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities. There are three strategic goals for the SCQF partnership for the period 2007-11 in line with the objects of the company:
(a) maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF;
(b) promote and develop the framework as a tool to support lifelong learning;
(c) develop and maintain relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally.

SCQF has a clear ambition to promote integration and progression across levels and types of qualifications. While the existence of a common set of descriptors and criteria is seen as an important precondition, the development of an integrated framework is seen as a long-term task. Particular attention is being paid (for example) to sectors like construction and health where the framework is used to clarify progression routes.

Involvement of stakeholders

The framework is maintained by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership which is a company limited by guarantee and also a Scottish charity. The partnership is made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency, the Association of Scotland's Colleges and Scottish Ministers.

A high degree of ownership can be observed towards the SCQF. This reflects that the framework established in 2001 brought together three previously developed frameworks covering different types and levels of qualifications, ranging from the

qualifications of higher education institutions, Scottish vocational qualifications and the national and higher national qualifications.

Levels and descriptors

There are 12 levels in the Scottish framework, described on the basis of common level descriptors which apply to all types of learning programmes and qualifications ([116]).

It is worth noting that the SCQF, in the same way as the other UK frameworks, operates with access (entry) levels. Levels 1-3 are seen as important in addressing individuals with particular learning needs and as an important part of an overall lifelong learning strategy. For some, the access level can function as a way back to formal education and training.

Use of learning outcomes

This is a requirement of the framework that learning is described in terms of learning outcomes.

Closely linked to the learning outcomes approach is the use of recognition of prior learning. While RPL has been in development since the 1990s, there is still debate on how to make further progress. A main distinction made is between RPL as exclusively about recognition of prior formal learning and RPL as recognition of non-formal and informal or experiential learning. A toolkit has been developed for the last and more challenging form of recognition and will be used as a basis for future developments.

Referencing to the EQF

The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The work on the referencing started in June 2008. The internal Scottish process was organised through the Board of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP). This board appointed a quality committee to look after the integrity of the framework. This committee is in charge of

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([116]) See Annex 3

any work which involves referencing the SCQF to any other framework. It established a steering group to manage the activities of the NCP, including:

(a) referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF levels;

(b) promoting and applying the European principles for QA in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;

(c) ensuring all methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;

(d) providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system;

(e) ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at European level.

The steering group included representation from major stakeholders along with two European experts. Scotland has completed its self-assessment against the EHEA as part of the Bologna process. This work is now being taken account of within the referencing of the full SCQF to the EQF.

The work of the group resulted in the following referencing:

SCQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
EQF			1	2	3	4	5	5	6	6	7	8

Main sources of information

http://www.scqf.org.uk/ [cited 28.06.2010]

Wales

Introduction

The CQFW is a descriptive voluntary framework which was developed by bringing together a number of sub-frameworks already in existence in Wales: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ); the National Qualification Framework (NQF) for regulated national courses; and the quality assured lifelong learning. It embraces both academic and vocational qualifications and can be described as comprehensive. The CQFW can be seen as a second generation framework emerging from the NQF for England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The CQFW is positioned as a key part of Wales' lifelong learning policy and strategy.
(a) CQFW enables any learning post-16 to be formally recognised and is not in itself a regulatory mechanism; any regulatory requirements are supplied through its relationship with regulating bodies;
(b) CQFW is unit-based, defines one credit as 10 hours of learning time and has nine levels (the lowest subdivided into three) with supporting levels descriptors;
(c) the technical specifications apply to all post-16 learning.

Levels and descriptors

There are nine levels in the CQFW: entry plus eight levels. There are common level descriptors which apply to all types of learning programmes and qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

All qualifications and learning programmes within the CQFW are based on learning outcomes and must have quality assured assessment of these outcomes. The CQFW uses two measures to describe qualifications:
• the level of the outcomes of learning;
• the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

Referencing to the EQF

The CQFW was referenced to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010. The referencing work started in June 2008 and was carried out by an EQF coordination group in June 2008. The role of the group was:

(a) referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF;

(b) promoting and applying the principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;

(c) ensuring the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and the resulting decisions are published;

(d) providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system;

(e) ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at European level.

The following links was established between the CQFW and the EQF (this corresponds to the link between QCF and EQF).

CQFW	Entry level 1	Entry level 2	Entry level 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF			1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8

As with England and Northern Ireland, the group which was established to 'scope' the link between the FEHQ and EQF concluded that no additional benefit from linking to the EQF could be identified. This decision can, however, be reviewed in the future, depending on the developments of the EQF and the feedback from potential users of the frameworks.

Main sources of information

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/?lang=en [cited 28.06.2010]

ANNEX 1
List of interviewees ([117])

Country	Name and surname	Institution
Austria	Eduard Staudecker	Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
	Florian Pecenka	Federal Ministry of Science and Research
Belgium (Flanders)	Rita Dunon	Flemish Ministry of Education
	Wilfried Boomgaert	Flemish Ministry of Education
Belgium (Wallonia)	Jo Leonard	Ministry of Education, French-speaking region of Belgium
Bulgaria	Mimi Daneva	Ministry of Education, Youth and Science
	Ivana Radonova	Ministry of Education, Youth and Science
Croatia	Mile Dzelalija	Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
Cyprus	-	-
Czech Republic	Miroslav Kadlec	National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education
	Petr Černikovský	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Denmark	Jan Jørgensen	Ministry of Education
Estonia	Külli All	Ministry of Education and Research
	Heli Aru	Ministry of Education and Research
Finland	Carita Blomquist	National Board of Education
France	Yolande Fermon	Direction générale pour l'enseignement supérieur
	Brigitte Bouquet	CNCP
	Anne Marie Charraud	CNCP
Germany	Jutta Mahlberg	Federal Ministry of Education and Research
	Birger Hendriks	KMK (Kultursministerkonferenz)
Greece	Alexandra Ioannidou	Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs
Hungary	Zoltan Loboda	Ministry of Education and Culture
	Csilla Stéger	Ministry of Education and Culture
Iceland	Bjorg Petursdottir	Ministry of Education
	Olafur Kristjansson	Ministry of Education
Ireland	Jim Murray	National Qualifications Authority
Italy	Gabriella di Francesco	ISFOL
	Luca Lantero	CIMEA - Italian ENIC/NARIC
Latvia	Baiba Ramina	Academic Information Center
Lithuania	Vidmantas Tutlys	Vytautas Magnus University
Luxembourg	Jos Noesen	Ministry of National Education
Malta	James Calleja	Malta Qualifications CouncilMinistry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
The Netherlands	Marlies Leegwater	Ministry of Education
	Karin van der Sanden	Ministry of Education
Norway	Jan Levy	Ministry of Education
	Halfdan Farstad	Ministry of Education

([117]) The main conclusions of the report regarding the relationship EQF-Bologna were presented to the 2nd meeting of the Bologna National correspondents for qualifications frameworks in Dublin 16 April 2010.

Country	Name and surname	Institution
Poland	Ewa Chmielecka	Warsaw School of Economics
Portugal	Elsa Caramujo	National Agency for Qualifications
Romania	Felicia Zarojanu	National Adult Training Board
	Sorin Zaharia	Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership between Universities and representatives of the Social and Economic Environment (ACPRT)
Slovakia	Jaroslav Juriga	Ministry of Education
Slovenia	Elido Bandelj	National Institute for Vocational Education and Training
	Meta Dobnikar	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
Spain	Carmen Baños Saborido	Ministry of Education
	Laureano Gonzalez-Vega	ANECA – Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación
Sweden	Stefan Skimutis	Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education
	Carina Linden	Ministry of Education
Turkey	Ahmet Gözüküçük	The Vocational Qualification Authority
	Mehmet Durman	Council of Higher Education
United Kingdom England and Northern Ireland Scotland Wales	Mike Coles	QCDA
	Aileen Ponton	SCQF

Short overview of the NQF developments

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Austria	NQF will include qualifications from all parts of education and training system and will aid validation of non-formal and informal learning At levels 6-8 two strands in the NQF will coexist: ● the Dublin descriptors will be used for allocating qualification related to Bologna cycles ● VET and adult learning qualifications, provided outside HE institutions, will be allocated to the NQF based on EQF descriptors and aditional criteria. A framework with communication and orientation function	Eight levels are adopted	● Knowledge ● skills ● competence EQF level descriptors are used as national descriptors Additional table(s) (e.g. criteria and procedures) are being developed	Broad partnership approach Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research prepared the policy paper on NQF implementation in October 2009	Design stage Broad consultation was carried out between January and June 2008 About 270 responses were received	Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture initiated and is coordinating the developments in cooperation with Federal Ministry of Science and Research All ministries and *Länder* representatives are involved as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training	Referencing to EQF will start in autumn 2010 Referencing report is expected to be prepared in February 2011 OeAD (Österreischischer Austauschdienst) – Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research is designated the national coordination point (NCP)
Belgium (Flanders)	Comprehensive NQF has been developed A framework with communication and orientation function A qualifications framework linked to the QF-EHEA has been developed (since 2003) and forms an integrated part of the comprehensive NQF	Eight levels have been adopted	● knowledge/skills ● context/ autonomy/ responsibility	An Act on the qualification structure, providing explicit basis for the NQF, was adopted April 2009	Established in April 2009 Implementation stage	The Ministry of Education is the competent authority Other ministries are involved (labour, finances) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training Broad consultation has been carried out at different stages of the process	Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010 and submitted in 2011

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Belgium (Wallonia)	NQF is under preparation A framework with communication and orientation function A possibility that the NQF developed by the Flemish community can be used as model and inspiration.	Eight levels are proposed	● knowledge ● skills ● competence Proposals so far have been linked to EQF descriptors for levels 1-5, Dublin descriptors for levels 6-8.	A separate Decree was adopted in 2008 linking levels 6-8 exclusively to Bologna cycles. The links between 1-5 and 6-8 are currently being debated again, a decision is pending	Design and consultation stage Testing and piloting phase in 50 areas of trades and vocation have been going on since 2007-08	Initiated by the joint government of the French region. Followed up through a working group involving relevant education and training stakeholders. Broad testing in sectors.	Referencing to EQF is seen as an integrated part of the work on NQF Referencing report is expected to be prepared during 2011 and presented to EQF AG in 2012
Bulgaria	Comprehensive NQF will include all levels of education and training Level descriptors for HE, VET and general education are developed A framework with communication and orientation function	Eight levels are proposed	Levels 1-5 are defined in terms of: ● knowledge ● skills and ● competence At levels 6-8 Dublin descriptors are used	Embedded in the Government Programme for European Development of Bulgaria (2009-13) and the Programme for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies (2009-13)	Design stage	Ministry of Education, Youth and Science is the competent authority Stakeholders from Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, public agencies (National agency for VET, National documentation and information centre, National statistical institute, quality assurance agencies) and representative in Bologna follow-up group are included	Referencing to EQF is seen an integrated part of the work on NQF NQF draft and draft referencing report will be prepared by 15 December 2010. The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate acts as NCP
Croatia	Comprehensive NQF for LLL (CROQF) will include all education and training subsystems A framework with communication and orientation function	Eight levels with additional sublevels at 4, 5, 7 and 8 are adopted	Comprehensive set of level descriptors spans all levels of education and training, defined as: ● knowledge (theoretical and factual) ● skills (cognitive, practical and social) ● responsibility and autonomy	Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a joint working group of experts form VET and HE in 2006 Baseline for CROQF was adopted by the government in July 2007 5-year action plan prepared (2008-12) Croatian Qualifications Framework, Introduction to Qualifications was adopted by the Government in 2009	Implementation stage	Ministry of Science, Education and Sport is the competent authority Other ministries are involved (economy, labour, health, foreign affairs, environmental protection) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training	Referencing to EQF will start in 2010 The High level committees for CROQF implementation acts as NCP

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Cyprus	Comprehensive NQF will include all types of nationally recognised qualification	Eight levels are proposed	● knowledge ● skills ● competence EQF level descriptors are used as starting point	Council of Ministers decision to develop a comprehensive NQF was adopted in July 2008	Design stage A first NQF draft was prepared in April 2010	Ministry of Education and Culture is the competent authority The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resources Development Authority are involved	
Czech Republic	Comprehensive NQF will include various types of qualifications from all subsystems of education and training Based on the register of approved full and partial qualifications and assessment standards Framework with communication and orientation function	Eight levels are adopted	Qualifications levels are differentiated by level of competence Each competence has a knowledge and skills component Each competence is classified according to activity dimension (considered primary) and knowledge dimension (field or discipline)	Work started in 2005 The Act on the verification and recognition of further education results, adopted in 2006, is the legal basis for NQF development Embedded in the national LLL strategy	Early implementation stage	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is the competent authority Other ministries act as authorising bodies Education and training providers, universities are authorised bodies Social partners participate in the qualifications development National qualification Council is an advisory body National VET Institute (NUOV) manages and administrates the NQF	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011 National VET Institute (NUOV) was designated as NCP

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	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Denmark	A comprehensive NQF will include all officially recognised public qualifications from all subsystems of education and training The qualifications framework for HE was approved in 2007-08 and forms part of the comprehensive framework Communication and orientation function, but regulating function in HE Clear distinction between the levels 1-5 and level 6-8 Different principles of referring national qualifications used: - best fit at levels 1-5 - full fit at level 6-8	Eight levels have been agreed	● knowledge (different types of knowledge, complexity and understanding) ● skills (different types of skills, complexity of tasks, communication) and ● competence (context, cooperation and responsibility, learning to learn) Levels 6-8 have clear reference to Dublin descriptors. Level descriptors reflect EQF descriptors, Dublin descriptors, existing descriptors of learning outcomes of curricula and programmes, research related outcomes in HE	Work started in 2006 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education and referring to the 2006 government strategy on Denmark in the global economy A detailed outline of the framework with the roadmap was published in June 2009 Amendments to existing legal basis will take place	Implementation stage	Ministry of Education is coordinating the work but the proposal and its implementation is based on a broad involvement of other ministries, social partners, representatives of education and training subsystems, etc.	Referencing to EQF is seen as an integrated part of the work on NQF Referencing report is planned early 2011
Estonia	Comprehensive NQF for LLL will include all national qualifications from general, vocational, higher education and vocational and professional qualifications Three levels of QF for HE (established in 2007) are linked to the levels 6-8 of the NQF for LLL A board of chairmen of 16 professional councils was introduced to improve coherence between sectors	Eight levels are adopted	NQF level descriptors are identical to EQF level descriptors and defined as: ● knowledge ● skills ● responsibility and autonomy	Developments are based on the five-level qualification framework The amended Professional Act (September 2008) is the legal basis for NQF development	Implementation stage	Ministry of Education and Research is the competent authority Other ministries are involved (social affairs, economic affairs) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training and public agencies (National Examination and Qualifications centre, Qualifications Authority) Estonian Qualification Authority (QA) (Kutsekoda) (2001) manages and administrates the NQF	Estonian Qualification Authority is the NCP Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2011

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Finland	Comprehensive NQF will include all publicly recognised qualifications (by Ministry of education and other branches of the public administration). Framework will have a communication and orientation function, but is also seen as a way to strengthen validation of non-formal and informal learning	Eight levels have been agreed	The descriptors have been inspired by EQF descriptors, but adopted to suit the national context; the following categories are used: ● knowledge ● work method and application (skill) ● responsibility, management and entrepreneurship ● evaluation ● key skills for lifelong learning Descriptors 6-8 have been adjusted to Dublin descriptors	Work started in August 2008 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education An NQF outline was finalised in June 2009 A specific Law on the NQF will be presented to the Parliament for adoption (2010) and will present the framework, the descriptors and other features contained by it	Implementation stage	Ministry of Education is the competent authority, but other ministries, social partners and representatives of the subsystems of education are closely involved in the process A consultation was carried out on the basis of the June 2009 proposal (90 responses received, all supportive of the NQF idea).	The referencing to EQF has started The National Board of Education has been appointed the NCP A referencing report is expected to be prepared late 2010
France	The current NQF covers all levels and types of vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications The framework has a regulatory function, in particular through the role played by CNCP (national committee on professional certificates). The CNCP can be seen as the 'gatekeeper', regulating which qualifications are to be officially accredited Validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important part of the framework The baccalaureate (which gives access to higher education) is not part of the jurisdiction of the CNCP	Five levels exist for the moment; an eight-level structure is being considered	The French levels are distinguished on the basis of: ● skills ● knowledge ● competence	A note on possible revisions to be made to the existing framework was presented to the Prime Minister in autumn 2009 The note is based on the conclusions of a representative working group currently looking into these questions The discussion on a change to a new, eight-level structure is continuing, for example with the national statistical office	Implemented, currently revision stage	The CNCP coordinates the register of qualifications. All relevant ministries, social partners, chambers and representatives of education and training subsystems are represented in the Committee	The final referencing report will be presented to the EQF Advisory Group in October 2010 (and will reflect the existing five-level structure). The national committee on professional qualifications (CNCP) is the NCP

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Germany	Comprehensive NQF for LLL (*Deutscher Qualifikatiosnrahmen* – DQR) will include qualifications from all subsystems and aid validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences A framework with communication and orientation functions NQF for HE was established in 2005 and self-certified to the QF-EHEA in January 2009	Eight levels are proposed	The level descriptors are defined in two categories of competence: ● professional competence is subdivided into: knowledge (breadth and depth) and skills (instrumental and systemic skills); ● personal competence is subdivided into social competence (teamwork, leadership, communication skills) and self-competence (autonomy/ responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence)	A process started in 2007, when a national steering group was jointly established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of *Länder* In February 2009, first proposal of the German NQF was published	Testing phase During 2009 and first half of 2010 examples from IT, metal, health and trade sectors will be referenced to NQF levels	Federal Ministry of Education and Research and Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of *Länder* have jointly initiated the work Broad range of stakeholders is included from HE, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and labour market, researchers and practitioners	National steering group acts as NCP and will be in charge of referencing Referencing report is expected to be submitted by 2011
Greece	Comprehensive NQF will include qualifications from all subsystems of education and training	Eight levels are proposed	● knowledge ● skills ● competence EQF level descriptors are used as starting point	Work started in 2008 in the framework of the operational programme for employment and training (2007-13). In February 2010, first proposal of the Greek NQF was published. Law on lifelong learning is expected to be prepared in 2010. It will be the formal basis for NQF implementation	Consultation from March to September 2010	Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the competent authority Stakeholders from public institutions, social partners, representatives of universities and external experts are included	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2012 The General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLLL) is the NCP:

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Hungary	Comprehensive NQF will include qualifications from all subsystems of education and training It will have more a regulative aspect	Eight-level structure is suggested	A tentative agreement on levels and level descriptors has been reached Discussion on whether key competences should be included alongside knowledge, skills and competence (autonomy and responsibility)	Work started in 2007 in the framework of the New Hungary Development Plan (2007-13) NQF development is based on the Government Decision No 2069/2008. It sets the road map, defines tasks, responsibilities and financial and human resources	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of Education and Culture initiated the work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour Stakeholders from public institutions, social partners, universities as well as teachers', parent and student associations are included	Referencing process will start second quarter of 2011 Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2013 at latest Department for EU Relations of the Ministry of Education and Culture acts as the NCP until the final decision is taken in 2010.
Iceland	Comprehensive NQF will include qualifications from all subsystems of education and training and non-formal and informal learning QF for HE was implemented in 2007 and will form part of the new NQF	Ten levels proposed (three entry levels and seven qualifications levels).	Level descriptors are more detailed and specific than EQF level descriptors but use similar concepts as starting points: ● knowledge ● skills ● competence	Work started in autumn 2007 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education An NQF draft is expected in autumn 2010	Design and testing phase	Ministry of Education (competent authority) is coordinating the work but bases its decisions on close involvement of other ministries, social partners and representatives of the education and training system (for example teachers)	Preparations for referencing have started and a report is expected to be prepared during 2010
Ireland	Comprehensive and integrating NFQ (national framework of qualifications) has been implemented since 2003 It includes all learning from initial stages to the most advanced; from schools, further education and HE Referencing report to link national qualifications levels to EQF was adopted in May 2009 by NQA and presented in September 2009 to the EQF Advisory Group	Ten levels are adopted Four award types are included: major, minor, special-purpose and supplemental	Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of: ● knowledge (breadth, kind) ● skills (range, selectivity) ● competence (context, role, learning to learn, insight)	NQF is legally based on the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 Bologna process has been an important part of the NFQ on the voluntary basis Policies and criteria on inclusion of awards of certain international and professional bodies were published by NQAI) in July 2006	Implementation Framework implementation and impact study was published in September 2009 Nineteen recommendations for further implementation were proposed	NQF work was initiated by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Extended consultation period with a range of stakeholders from all subsystems and social partners was organised The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) was established (2001). It has developed, maintained and monitored the NQF	The final referencing report was adopted in May 2009 and presented to the EQF Advisory group in September 2009

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Italy	NQF is being developed Draft QF for HE prepared in 2008 Framework with communication and orientation function	The number of levels has not been defined yet	Level descriptors are being developed	Since 2003, various laws and agreements between ministries, social partners and regions were adopted (e.g. Guidelines for Training in 2010)	Conceptual, design and partly testing phase Learning outcomes based methodology was tested in the tourism and mechanical sector and is now being further tested in the chemical, food and agriculture sector	NQF development was initiated by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies in close cooperation with Ministry of Education, University and Research The key player in the NQF development has been National Committee (*Tavalo Nazionale*). It consists of representatives of both ministries, regions, autonomous provinces and social partners ISFOL prepares and implements national methodologies and coordinates expert groups	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010 ISFOL is designated the NCP
Latvia	Comprehensive NQF is being developed	Eight levels are proposed: four will cover primary and secondary education and VET and four HE qualifications	Descriptors for level 1-4 are defined as: ● knowledge ● skills ● competence Descriptors for HE based on Dublin descriptors and Bloom taxonomy were adopted by Higher Education Council in 2009	NQF development is based on existing five-level structure in VET and three-level structure in HE Amendments to the regulation on classification of education are planned	Design stage	Ministry of Education and Science is the competent authority	Referencing committee was set up in September 2009 Draft referencing repost is expected to be prepared by 2011 The Academic information centre is designated as NCP
Lithuania	A comprehensive NQF covering all levels and types of qualifications is currently being developed	Eight levels are adopted	Level descriptors reflect two parameters, characteristics of activities (complexity, autonomy, changeability) and types of competence (functional, cognitive and general)	A Decree on the NQF was adopted in 2010. It provides the legal and political basis for the NQF implementation	Implementation stage	The Ministry of Education and Science holds the main responsibility of developments	

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Luxembourg	Comprehensive NQF will cover all levels and types of education and training NQF draft proposal was presented to Council of Ministers in early 2009. Agreement was reached in early 2010 on a set of level descriptors. These will provide the basis for implementation.	Eight levels have been agreed	Level descriptors are differentiated according to: ● knowledge ● skills ● attitude	Work started in 2006 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education The new law on vocational education and training adopted in autumn 2008, is key to the NQF developments.	Design and early implementation stage	Ministry of Education (competent authority) coordinates the work but in close cooperation with other ministries, representatives of all subsystems of education and training and social partners	Referencing process will start second half of 2010 Referencing report is expected to be submitted by mid 2011
Malta	Single comprehensive NQF for LLL (MQF) was launched in June 2007 It encompasses all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education and training A single referencing report to link national qualifications levels to EQF and QF-EHEA was officially launched in November 2009	Eight levels are adopted	Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence and learning outcomes Learning outcomes summarise knowledge, skills and competence and point out specific skills such as communication skills, judgment skills and learning skills They give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degree of autonomy and responsibility	NQF development started in 2005 It is based on the Legal Notice 347 (2005)	Implementation since 2007 Supporting documents were published: ● an NQF for LLL, ● guidelines for VET systems, ● a quality assurance policy for VET, ● frameworks for validation of informal and non-formal learning	The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education (competent body) in close cooperation with stakeholders from education and training, labour market, social partners and others: parent associations; student councils, and non-governmental organisations Malta Qualifications Council was set up in 2005. It coordinates and administrates the NQF Broad consultation process was organised in first half of 2007 with all relevant stakeholders	Single comprehensive referencing report was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in September 2009
The Netherlands	A comprehensive NQF will include all nationally recognised qualifications; aid validation of non-formal and informal learning and mainly have a communication and orientation function. The plan is to complete the design of the NQF by the end of 2010. The NQF builds on and integrates the QF for higher education already developed (since 2005)	The number of levels has not been decided yet	Level descriptors will be decided during the consultation process but is emphasised that they have to reflect existing Dutch approaches and traditions. It is likely that the term competence will be used as an overarching concept	Work started in January 2009 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education A first proposal, mainly outlining the process for developing an NQF, was presented to the Ministry in May 2009	Design stage	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (competent authority) will organise a process including all relevant stakeholders in education and training as well as in the labour market	Referencing process will start towards the end of 2010 A referencing report is expected to be presented in 2011

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Norway	Work on a comprehensive NQF has now started, bringing together initiatives in higher education, vocational education and post-secondary vocational education and training. A proposal is expected in October 2010 and will be used as a basis for a national consultation. A framework for higher education was completed in spring 2009 reflecting the QF-EHEA.	Yet to be decided.	First drafts of descriptors for different subsystems (VET, post-secondary VET) have been drafted and are being discussed in the context of the comprehensive framework	The NQF will probably be based on a Ministerial Decree (*Forskrift*).	Design stage	Ministry of Education coordinates the work. The involvement of social partners and other key-stakeholders is considered of particular importance to making progress in this area	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011
Poland	A proposal for a comprehensive NQF covering all levels and types of Polish qualifications has been suggested. The framework will have an orientation and communication function but will also influence current and future the reforms of the Polish education and training system. A final proposal to provide a basis for implementation is expected by the end 2010. The work builds on the work on a QF for HE started in 2006/07.	A seven-level Polish NQF is proposed	Descriptors are defined by ● knowledge (scope, depth of understanding); ● skills(communication, problem solving, using knowledge in practice) ● attitudes (identity, autonomy, cooperation, responsibility)	Work started in August 2008, following an initiative of the Ministry of Education A proposal for a comprehensive NQF was presented in December 2009 and an analysis is currently being carried out to see what legal amendments are required.	Design and consultation stage	Ministry of National Education is coordinating the work but with involvement of other ministries and the full range of subsystems of education and training	Referencing report is expected to be submitted in 2011

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Portugal	Comprehensive NQF will include: school qualifications, VET qualifications, HE qualifications and sectoral qualifications Further development of the system of non-formal and informal learning is an important element of NQF development The national qualification catalogue, created in 2007, is the backbone of the NQF QF for HE was put in place in 2007. QF with communication and transparency role	Eight levels are adopted	Level descriptors are defined in broad categories of: ● knowledge ● skills ● attitude QF for HE is based on Dublin descriptors	NQF is legally based on the Decree No 782/2009 on the implementation of the NQF Work started in 2007, when the agreement between Government and social partners was signed and the Decree Law No 396/2007 on the establishment of the NQF was adopted	Established in 2009 Implementation stage	Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity initiated the work in close cooperation with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education National Agency for Qualifications was set up in 2007; it will work closely with General Directorate of Higher Education The NQF implementation will be supervised by the National Council for Vocational Education	National Agency for Qualifications is the NCP Referencing committee was established in December 2009 Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Romania	NQF will bring together all nationally recognised qualifications from IVET, CVET, apprenticeship at workplace and HE NQF developments build on the five-level structure in VET. QF for HE is being set up in parallel Methodology on the use of the NQF for HE was approved in June 2009	Eight levels will be proposed	Level descriptors are being developed, defined in: ● knowledge ● skills ● competence. In QF for HE two categories of competences are defined: ● professional competences (knowledge, skills) and ● transversal competences (autonomy and responsibility, social interaction and professional development	Development started in 2005 and builds on the five-level structure for VET and on the Tripartite Agreement signed by the Prime Minister, the Employers' National Confederation and the Trade Unions' National Confederation Development is continuing to incorporate the QF for HE into the comprehensive NQF	Design and early implementation stage	Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation initiated the work in close cooperation with Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection Other ministries are involved (regional development, finance, etc.) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training National Adult Training Board was appointed National Qualifications Authority (NQA) in 2004. Its main role is to ensure methodological framework at national level and manage the NQF Agency for qualifications in HE (ACPRT) was designated the National Authority for qualifications in HE	Preparations for referencing have started
Slovakia	Comprehensive NQF will include national qualifications from all subsystems of education and training Main pillars of the NQF development are the national register of qualifications and the national register of occupations	Eight levels are envisaged Final number of NQF level has not been decided yet	EQF level descriptors are taken as starting point	NQF development started in 2009 and is based on the Government Decision on EQF implementation (February 2009) Memorandum of Cooperation between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has been prepared	Conceptualisation and design stage	Ministry of Education has initiated and is coordinating the developments Other ministries (labour, interior, health, economy, regional development, transport, agriculture and culture) are involved	Referencing group was established in 2009. The referencing process will start mid 2010. The referencing report is expected to be prepared by March 2013

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Slovenia	Comprehensive NQF will include all nationally recognised qualifications and support validation of non-formal and informal learning Main pillars are the register of occupational standards, assessment qualifications catalogues for NVQs and register of national VET framework curricula which includes assessment standards and VET titles	Eight levels with two sublevels at level 6 and 8 are adopted	The level descriptors are defined in terms of outcome criteria: ● knowledge ● skills ● autonomy and responsibility ● learning competence, social and communication skills ● vocational and professional competences For qualifications acquired after nationally accredited programmes additionally input criteria are used (access requirements, volume of learning expressed in credit points in HE and VET, typical length of programmes)	In 2006, Government Decree (No 46/2006) on the Introduction and use of the classification system of education and training (Klasius) was adopted	Design and early implementation stage	Ministry of Education and Sport in close cooperation with Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Statistical office initiated the development Ministry of Labour is involved as well as social partners and the National institute for VET	A national steering committee was established in January 2010 Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011 National Institute for VET acts as NCP.
Spain	NQF for LLL (MECU) is being developed It will include and coordinate qualifications from different subsystems of education and training QF for HE (MECES) is being put in place in parallel NQF for LLL will have an orientation and communication function	Eight levels are proposed. The four highest levels will be compatible with the QF for HE	EQF level descriptors are being used as starting points. They are defined in terms of: ● knowledge ● skills ● competence	NQF developments are based on various acts. A royal Decree on the introduction of MECU will be adopted by the Spanish Government in the beginning of 2011	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of Education is coordinating the NQF development in close cooperation with other ministries (e.g. labour and immigration, science, industry, tourism and commerce etc.)	The IFIIE (Institute for Teacher Training, Research and Education Innovation) within the Directorate General for Vocational Training has been designated as NCP Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011
Sweden	A comprehensive NQF covering all existing public education and training qualifications is currently being developed on the basis of a mandate given by the government. A proposal is expected in October 2010. The Swedish NQF builds on and integrates the QF for higher education presented in 2007.	Still to be decided	Level descriptors are currently being developed. The learning outcomes based approach is firmly established in Sweden and will underpin the proposal.	The Swedish Government decided on the 23 December 2009 to develop a comprehensive NQF.	Design stage	Ministry of Education (competent authority) coordinates the process. An inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of different ministries (education, labour, business and finance) has been set up.	Referencing process will start late 2010, following the presentation of the NQF proposal in October. A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 4th quarter of 2011 The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational education is designated as NCP

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Turkey	Comprehensive NQF will cover general, vocational and higher education QF for HE has been adopted in January 2010 by the Council of HE (CoHE)	Eight levels will be proposed	EQF descriptors have been taken as a starting point. They are defined as: ● knowledge ● skills ● competence In HE competence is further divided into: ● autonomy and responsibility ● learning to learn ● field specific competences ● social and communication skills (with emphasis on foreign languages and ICT)	Work started in 2005 It is legally embedded in the Vocational Qualification Authority Law (No 5544/2006) Supported by the project Strengthening VET (2002-07)	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of National Education (competent authority) initiated the work Since 2007, the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) has been coordinating the process Broad range of stakeholders is included via Board of the VQA: employees' and employers' organisations and professional organisations and representatives from government (Ministries of Labour and Education, Higher Education Council	Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011 Vocational Authority (VQA) acts as the NCP
United Kingdom	**England and Northern Ireland** have formally introduced a qualifications and credit framework (QCF) in 2008. This framework has regulatory functions. A separate framework for higher education, FHEQ, exists for England, Northern Ireland and Wales	A nine-level structure (including entry levels) has been adopted	For England and Northern Ireland, each level is divided into: ● knowledge and understanding ● application and action ● autonomy and accountability	In England the qualifications regulator is the office of the qualifications and examinations regulator (OfQual), In Northern Ireland the regulator is the Council for Curriculum, examinations and assessment (CCEA).	Implemented and reflects development of frameworks starting late 1980s		The QCF has been referenced to the EQF (February 2010. The Framework for higher education has not been referenced to the EQF, only to QF-EHEA

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
	Scotland has implemented a comprehensive framework, the SCQF, with orientation and communication functions	A 12-level structure (including entry levels) has been adopted	For Scotland, each level is defined in terms of five broad categories: ● knowledge and understanding ● practice (applied knowledge and understanding) ● generic cognitive skills (e. g evaluation, critical analysis) ● communication, numeracy and IT skills ● autonomy, accountability and working with others			Framework is maintained by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities of Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency, Association of Scotland Colleagues and Scottish Ministers	The Scottish Framework was referenced to the EQF in February 2010
	Wales has implemented an overarching framework, the CQFW, with orientation and communication functions. A separate framework for HE exists, the FHEQ	A nine-level structure (including entry levels) has been adopted	For Wales, each level is divided into: ● knowledge and understanding ● application and action ● autonomy and accountability		Implemented, reflects a long tradition in framework developments		Referenced to the EQF in February 2010. The Framework for higher education has not been referenced to the EQF, only to QF-EHEA

ANNEX 3
Examples of level descriptor in EQF and NQFs

This annex provides examples to illustrate descriptors used by countries for their NQF level 5 which are also in line with EQF level 5. Developing descriptors for this level is a challenge in many countries as it is considered to bridge VET and HE. The examples are structured to explain main elements and concepts used for defining levels in the NQFs (e.g. knowledge, skills, competence etc) and then presentation of the level descriptor as such.

a) Descriptors defining levels in the EQF:

Level descriptors elements		
Knowledge	*Skills*	*Competence*
● factual and/or ● theoretical	● cognitive ● practical	● autonomy and ● responsibility

The learning outcomes relevant to level 5 ([118]) are ([119]):

Knowledge	*Skills*	*Competence*
comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

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([118]) Descriptor for level 5 is compatible with the descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle).

([119]) Source: *Recommendations on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*, available on http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF [cited 30.06.2010].

b) Two main types of level descriptors defining levels 1-8 in Belgium Flanders:

Level descriptor elements	
Knowledge Skills	Context Autonomy Responsibility

Example of level descriptor 5 ([120]):

● expanding the information in a specific area with concrete and abstract data, or completing it with missing data; using conceptual frameworks; being aware of the scope of subject-specific knowledge ● applying integrated cognitive and motor skills ● transferring knowledge and applying procedures flexibly and inventively for the performance of tasks and for the strategic solution of concrete and abstract problems	● acting in a range of new, complex contexts ● functioning autonomously with initiative ● taking responsibility for the achievement of personal outcomes and the stimulation of collective results

c) Three main level descriptors elements defining levels 1-8 in Croatia :

Level descriptors elements		
Knowledge: ● factual ● theoretical	**Skills**: ● cognitive ● practical ● social	**Autonomy and responsibility**

([120]) Source: *Act on the qualification structure.* Available on
http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/files/DecreetVKS_ENG.pdf [cited 24. 06.2010].

Example of the descriptor 5 ([121]**):**

Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and responsibility
● **factual:** Analysing and synthesising of factual knowledge in a field of work or study, giving rise to the awareness of the frontier of knowledge in the field, plus evaluating ● **theoretical:** Analysing and synthesising of theoretical knowledge in a field of work or study, giving rise to the awareness of the frontier of knowledge in the field, and their evaluation	● **cognitive:** Simple abstract creative thinking (required to generate solutions to abstract problems) in partially unpredictable conditions ● **practical:** Producing complex movements and an advanced use of methods, instruments, tools and materials in partially unpredictable conditions as well as developing simple methods, instruments, tools and materials ● **social:** Management and realisation of complex communication and cooperation in a group in partially unpredictable conditions	● **autonomy:** Taking part in the management of activities in partially unpredictable conditions ● **responsibility:** Taking full responsibility for managing, and limited responsibility for evaluating the development of activities in partially unpredictable conditions

d) Integrated description of competence characteristics (the notion of competence encompasses knowledge and skills and the capacity to combine them); used for defining levels 1-8 in the Czech Republic. ([122]) The level descriptors are closely linked to the complexity of working activities. Additionally the level descriptors are linked to the levels of educational attainments and types of educational programmes (not shown in the table.

([121]) Source *Hrvatski kvalifikacijski okvir/Croatian Qualifications Framework*, Introduction into Qualifications. 2009. Availabe on Internet http://personal.unizd.hr/~mdzela/hko/HKO_Prirucnik.pdf [cited 24. 06.2010].
([122]) The level descriptors might be modified in the light of future developments.

Example of level descriptor 5 ([123]):

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Description of competences

Be familiar with documentation, norms, standards and regulations in use in the field to the extent that he or she can explain them to others in standard situations

Select appropriate procedures, methods, tools, raw materials etc. from various options, according to conditions and requirements

Evaluate the quality of his or her products or services, and those of others

Carry out quality control, determine the causes of deficiencies and their consequences and decide how to eliminate them

Identify problems which occur while following the selected procedures, determine their causes and implement the required changes to the procedure

Identify social, economic and environmental aspects of any problems which arise

Distinguish between usual and unusual behaviour from individuals and objects in the workplace, determine causes and context of unusual behaviour, and draw conclusions and formulate proposals

Analyse moderately complex systems, phenomena and processes

Evaluate the relevance of technical information to resolving standard problems

Evaluate the methods of others from the point of view of using them in his or her own work

Carry out selected procedures, with modifications depending on conditions and requirements including taking into account social, economic, and ecological considerations

Independently carry out common technical tasks by standards methods

Solve problems requiring abstraction and employ simple research methods

Use technical information from a variety of sources in problem solving

Integrate several components into complex solutions

Formulate proposals for improvements including proposals for new processes

Design moderately complex procedures and products

Present his or her work, products or services, discuss problems and find solutions, communicate effectively and present convincing arguments

Direct a group carrying out moderately complex technical tasks depending on unforeseen conditions and requirements

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([123]) Source: *Qualifications levels in the national Qualifications Systems*, Ministry of Education and Sport. January 2010. Unpublished.

e)   **Five dimensions of level descriptors defining levels 1-8 in Finland.** The level descriptors are linked to qualifications and syllabuses (not shown in the table).

• Knowledge	
• Work method and application (skills)	
• Responsibility, management and entrepreneurship	Levels 1-8
• Evaluation	
• Key skills for lifelong learning	

Example of level descriptor 5 ([124]):

Knowledge:
Possesses comprehensive and/or specialised knowledge of the facts and theory and is capable of utilising this knowledge and skills in a creative manner when solving abstract problems. Understands the boundaries of knowledge in different fields.

Work method and application (skills)
Possesses comprehensive cognitive and practical skills which are needed when solving abstract problems creatively. Works independently in changing operating environments.

Responsibility, management and entrepreneurship
Possesses the capability to manage and oversee complex operating environments that change unpredictably. Possesses the capability to oversee task performed by others.
Possesses the capability to work as an independent entrepreneur in the field.

Evaluation
Evaluates and develops his/her own as well as others' performance and work.

Key skills for lifelong learning

([124]) Source: *National framework for qualifications and other competence. Report of the Ministry of Education.* 2009. Appendix 1.

Possesses the capability for continuous learning. Knows how to communicate verbally and in writing both to audiences in the field and outside it. Possesses the capability to communicate at an international level and interact in his/her field in one official language and at least one foreign language.

The following qualifications are linked to level 5: Specialist vocational qualifications, vocational qualification in air traffic control, Further qualification in the construction industry, Finish police sergeant's examination, sub-officer qualification (rescue services).

f) An overarching competence descriptor for levels 1-8 and four main characteristics defining levels in German qualifications framework:

Level indicator			
Structure of requirements			
Professional competence		**Personal competence**	
Knowledge	*Skills*	*Social competence*	*Self-competence*
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, judgment	Team/leadership skills, involvement and communication	Autonomy/responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence

Example of level descriptor 5 ([125]):

Be in possession of competences for the autonomous planning and processing of comprehensive technical tasks assigned within a complex and specialised field of study or field of occupational activity subject to change.			
Professional competence		**Personal competence**	
Knowledge	*Skills*	*Social competence*	*Self-competence*
Be in possession of integrated professional knowledge within a learning area or integrated occupational knowledge within a field of activity. This also includes deeper, theoretical professional knowledge. Be familiar with the scope and limitations of the field of study or field of occupational activity.	Be in possession of an extremely broad spectrum of specialised, cognitive and practical skills. Plan work processes across work areas and evaluate such processes accordingly, giving comprehensive consideration to alternative courses of action and reciprocal effects with neighbouring areas. Provide comprehensive transfers of methods and solutions.	Plan and structure work processes in a cooperative manner, including within heterogeneous groups, instruct others and provide well-founded learning guidance. Present complex facts and circumstances extending across professional areas in a targeted manner to the appropriate recipients of such information.	Reflect on and assess own learning objectives and learning objectives set externally, undertake self-directed pursuit of and assume responsibility for such objectives, draw consequences for work processes within the team.

([125]) Source: *Discussion proposal for a German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*
Prepared by the 'German Qualifications Framework Working Group'. Available on
www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de/ [cited 24. 06.2010].

g) The learning outcomes descriptors are broken down into eight knowledge, skills and competence sub-strands in a ten-level framework in Ireland

Level descriptors elements		
Knowledge	*Know-how and skills*	*Competence*
● breadth ● kind	● range ● selectivity	● context ● role ● learning to learn ● insight

Even though not a part of a formal framework, a synoptic learning outcomes descriptor is used to explain and understand the nature of learning outcomes at a given level.

For level 6 the following summary descriptor is provided:
Learning outcomes at this level include a comprehensive range of skills which may be vocationally-specific and/or of a general supervisory nature, and require detailed theoretical understanding. The outcomes also provide for a particular focus on learning skills. The outcomes relate to working in a generally autonomous way to assume design and/or management and/or administrative responsibilities. Occupations at this level would include higher craft, junior technician and supervisor.

Example of the level descriptor with eight sub-strands for level 6 ([126]):

Level descriptors elements		
Knowledge	*Know-how and skills*	*Competence*
● Breadth Specialised knowledge of a broad area. ● Depth Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory.	● Range Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools. ● Selectivity Formulate responses to well defined abstract problems.	● Context Act in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non-routine activities; transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of contexts. ● Role Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple complex and heterogeneous groups. ● Learning to learn Learn to evaluate own learning and identify needs within a structured learning environment; assist others in identifying learning needs. ● Insight Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others.

h)   Concise and detailed descriptors for levels 1-8 in Lithuania.

The detailed level descriptors are defined according to two parameters: characteristics of activities and types of competences:

PARAMETERS		
	Characteristics of activities	**Types of competences**
CRITERIA	- complexity of activities - autonomy of activities - changeability of activities	- functional competences - cognitive competences - general competences

Level descriptors include:

([126]) Source: *Outline National Framework of Qualifications – Determinations* made by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. Available on http://www.nqai.ie/docs/framework/determinations/determinations.pdf [cited 24. 06. 2010] Level 6 was referenced to the EQF level 5.

- activity specifications;
- contents of qualifications and the way of acquisition;
- possibilities for further learning and the upgrading of qualification;
- types of recognition of qualifications.

Brief indicator of qualification level 5 ([127]):

Qualifications at level 5 are related to two main fields of activity: application of the complex technologies or sophisticated methods of activities and the organisation of the various technological activities. Qualification is composed of comparatively universal competences transgressing the limits of the particular workplace and permitting to understand, organise and to control the activities carried out in several or more different workplaces. The qualifications of this level are acquired at the secondary VET institutions and adult vocational training centres, as well as through short-cycle studies at the colleges.

Detailed level descriptor for level 5:

Activity specifications

Activity is complicated and consisting of comparatively wide variety of specialised actions and operations differentiated by their contents and volume. Two fields of activity can be seen as inherent in this level of qualifications: work with complex technologies and sophisticated specific methods of work demanding high level of responsibility and the organisation of the various technological activities. The performer accomplishes the work tasks autonomously, organises and supervises the work of the employees having qualifications at levels 1-4. The technological and organisational specifications of the activity are very changeable and rarely forecast.

Contents of qualifications and the ways of acquisition

Qualification is composed of comparatively universal competences going beyond the limits of one specific workplace and permitting to understand and organise activities effectively in several different workplaces. These competences are related to the control and management of the complex technologies and to the application of the sophisticated methods of the performance and technological organisation. Team working and management competences are also very important for this level of qualification. Qualification at the fifth level is acquired at institutions of the

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([127]) Source: *Governmental decree on the national qualifications framework*, available in Lithuanian language on
http://www.litlex.lt/scripts/sarasas2.dll?Tekstas=1&Id=136839 [cited 24. 06. 2010].

secondary vocational education and training (VET schools and the centres of vocational training for adults) and at the short study cycle (2 years) at colleges.

Possibilities of the further learning and the upgrading of qualification
Qualifications at this level offer the opportunity to seek qualifications level 6 by entering the university and college.

Recognition of the qualification
Level 5 qualifications are recognised by specified organisations which can award certificates of qualification.

i)   Three main types of level descriptors and detailed learning outcomes specified for levels 1-8 in Malta:

Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and summarises learning outcomes for a specific level in terms of:
- knowledge and understanding,
- applying knowledge and understanding,
- communication skills,
- judgemental skills,
- learning skills,
- autonomy and responsibility.

Example of level descriptors 5 ([128]):

Knowledge:
1. understands knowledge in a field of study that builds on advanced general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks leading to further studies to complete the first cycle; ;
2. develops strategic and creative responses in researching solutions to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;
3. makes judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues.

Skills:
1. demonstrates transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge, in creating solutions to problems;

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[128]   Source: *Level descriptors fo the Malta qualifications framework (MQF).* Malta Qualifications Council. Available on http://www.mqc.gov.mt/malta-qualifications-framework [cited 24. 06. 2010]. Level 5 of the MQF was referenced to the level 5 in EQF.

2. conveys ideas in a well structured and coherent way to peers, supervisors and clients using qualitative and quantitative information;
3. has the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;
4. evaluates own learning and identifies learning needs necessary to undertake further learning;

Competences:

1. manages projects independently that require problem-solving techniques where there are many factors, some of which interact and lead to unpredictable outcomes;
2. shows creativity in managing projects, manages people and reviews performance of self and others; train others and develop team performance;
3. expresses a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement of solidarity with others;
4. has the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.

Learning outcome

MQF learning outcomes	
1. Knowledge and understanding;	understands advanced textbooks which may lead to further academic or vocational learning and researches solutions to abstract problems;
2. Applying knowledge and understanding;	demonstrates operational capacity and management skills using creativity;
3. Communication skills;	interacts with others to convey abstract and concrete solutions to problems in a field of work or study;
4. Judgmental skills;	formulates practical and theoretical responses to abstract and concrete problems and makes judgements on social and ethical issues;
5. Learning skills	evaluates own learning and can improve key competences for further learning, and promotes team training;
6. Autonomy and responsibility	is responsible for the effective and efficient management of projects and people within agreed timeframes;

g) Five main characteristics used for defining level descriptors at levels 1-12 in SCQF in Scotland:

- knowledge and understanding;
- practice: applied knowledge and understanding;
- generic cognitive skills;
- communication, ICT and numeracy skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others

Examples of level descriptors for levels 7 and 8 ([129]):

Knowledge and understanding	
Level 7	**Level 8**
Demonstrate and/or work with: • A broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general; • Knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles; • An awareness of the evolving/changing nature of knowledge and understanding; • An understanding of the difference between explanations based on evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation and of the importance of this difference.	Demonstrate and/or work with: • A broad knowledge of the scope, defining features and main areas of a subject/discipline; • Detailed knowledge in some areas; • Understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and concepts; • Limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms; • An outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	
Level 7	**Level 8**
Use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts.	Use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex. Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues. Adapt routine practices within accepted standards.

([129]) Source: *SCQF Handbook*:
http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/LatestNews/SCQFHandbookUserGuide2009.aspx [cited 24. 06. 2010]. Levels 7 and 8 were referenced to the EQF level 5.

Generic cognitive skills

Level 7	Level 8
Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject/discipline. Use a range of approaches to addressing defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts.	Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues that are within the common understandings of the subject/discipline. Use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues. Critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

Level 7	Level 8
Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline, for example: ● Convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form; ● Use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts; ● Use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data; ● Use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination; ● Use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.	Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with a subject/discipline – for example: ● Convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes; ● Use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data; ● Use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

Level 7	Level 8
Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level. Take supervision in less familiar areas of work. Take some managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure. Manage limited resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts. Take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work with others in support of current professional practice, under guidance.	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level. Take significant managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work. Manage resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts. Take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work in support of current professional practice, under guidance. Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes of practices, under guidance.

The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe
(August 2010)

The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe

(August 2010)

The second Cedefop overview on the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) confirms the importance and priority attributed to the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) across Europe. Thirty-one countries (27 members of the European Union, the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey and European Economic Area countries (Iceland and Norway) are developing or implementing a national qualification framework. These frameworks help link national systems of qualification to the European Qualification Framework. Member States also see them as tools that support national reforms and coherent lifelong learning policies. NQFs are instrumental in promoting the use of the learning outcomes approach and in addressing barriers between vocational education and training and higher education in Europe.

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