



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

National qualifications frameworks in Europe – opportunities and challenges

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- Nasjonale kvalifikasjonsrammeverk i Europa oktober 2012
- Nasjonale kvalifikasjonsrammeverk og nivå 5-8
- Nasjonale kvalifikasjonsrammeverk og validering
- Nasjonale kvalifikasjonsrammeverk og åpningen mot arbeidslivet
- Det svenske rammeverket sett fra Europa

Cedefop mapping of NQF-developments 2012

Covers a total of 41 frameworks

- 27 EU member states
- 3 EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway)
- 5 candidate countries (Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, FYROM and Turkey)
- Switzerland (joined EQF cooperation in 2012)

3 frameworks in Belgium, 3 in the UK



Design of NQFs - October 2012

- 29 countries are developing/have designed NQFs for lifelong learning, covering all levels and types of qualifications;
- Frameworks in the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Switzerland, UK (England/Northern Ireland) cover limited range of qualifications or consist of a range of various frameworks for parts of E&T;
- 21 NQFs have been formally adopted (by decrees, laws, formal agreements and/or amendments to existing legislation);
- A limited number of countries have still to decide on the scope of their frameworks



Design and implementation of NQFs

October 2012

- 26 countries have proposed an 8-level framework, others with 5, 7, 9, 10 or 12 levels:
- All countries have introduced learning outcomes-based level descriptors;
- France, Ireland, Malta, UK, Czech Republic (vocational qualifications) have fully implemented NQFs;
- 8-10 NQFs have reached early operational stage (e.g. Denmark, Belgium (FL), Netherlands, Portugal....);



Common objectives – different ambitions

- NQFs are seen as key instruments to achieve the link to EQF (15 countries have completed referencing to EQF so far);
- NQFs are accepted by all countries as communication and transparency tools - making the existing qualifications system more transparent, clarify relationships between qualifications;
- Some countries, e.g. Croatia, Iceland, Poland, Romania – see their frameworks as tools to support reform;
- The objectives of the frameworks change as they mature; ambitions tend to increase over time.

NQFs and levels 5-8



The meaning of 'higher levels'

- Higher levels of education and training are sometimes seen as the 'territory' of universities and academic education and training
- The existence of two European qualifications frameworks, the EQF and the qualifications frameworks for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) demonstrates this
- While universities play a key role, higher levels of education and training are characterised by an increasing multitude of providers and qualifications
 - A first distinction between qualifications with an academic orientation and qualifications with a professional/vocational orientation
 - A second distinction between qualifications facilitating further education and learning and qualifications with a direct labour market orientation



Level 5

Level 5 lies at the cross-roads of general, vocational and academic education and training

- A few cases of general upper secondary qualifications at level 5
- Vocational upper secondary qualifications are quite common at NQF level 5
- Post secondary VET – organised outside the higher education sector - is a significant qualification in many countries
- Short cycle higher education – organised by higher education institutions - are normally conceived as building blocks for degree studies, exists in a majority of European countries.

Precise statistics lack, but the number of students in ISCED 5a and 5b programmes (EU + candidate countries) was in 2009 approximately 26 million, of which 6 million followed the vocationally oriented 5b programmes



The balancing of academic and vocational profiles at levels 5-8

- Policy emphasis on academic tertiary education and lack of focus on vocational orientation at this level (Greece and Portugal);
- Integrated qualifications systems seeking to strengthen overall labour market relevance: France;
- Vocationally oriented tertiary education and integrated part of higher education policies:
 - higher professional education and university education increasingly integrated: Norway;
 - higher professional education and university education kept separate (Czech Republic, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland);
- Limited introduction of dual system principles, Germany, Sweden;



New stakeholders and cooperation modes at levels 5-8

- Employer involvement in curriculum development (Denmark)
- Work based assignments and company based thesis work (Finland, UK)
- Apprenticeships (France, Netherlands, Norway)
- Private, corporate education and training (Germany, Ireland)
- Courses tailored to company needs (Netherlands)
- Fully work-based learning (Germany)

Resistance towards this opening up of tertiary education and training to the labour market is strong in some countries (Greece, Portugal, Romania...)



The added value of NQFs for level 5-8

NQFs can play an important role in increasing the transparency of qualifications at higher levels, notably by demonstrating

- the different profiles – knowledge, skills and/or competences
- the mix of purposes - for further learning or employment
- the vertical and horizontal linkages between qualifications - and implications for access, transfer and progress

NQFs can be developed into platforms for dialogue and participation, suitable for addressing

- imbalances between qualifications types and levels
- missing qualifications
- the overall balance of education and training

NQFs – possible shortcomings

Different designs influence the ability of NQFs to promote transparency of qualifications at levels 5-8:

- **A majority of countries uses the same descriptors for all levels - explicitly avoiding borderlines**
- Some national frameworks cover only a part of national qualifications (for example the Czech NQF addressing VET)
- Some countries operate with a multitude of partly related sub-frameworks (like England/Northern Ireland)
- Some NQFs draw a line between levels 1-5 and 6-8, leaving higher levels to the university sector (Denmark, Greece, Iceland)
- Some use separate descriptors for levels 6-8, distinguishing between academically and vocationally oriented qualifications (Austria and Belgium)
- Some use sub-levels (for example Norway for 5 and 6)

NQFs and validation of non-formal and informal learning



NQFs and validation of non-formal and informal learning

- Today, few countries have established a strong link between NQFs and validation
- With some exceptions validation of non-formal and informal learning is fragmented, is not extensively used, well known or trusted
- An increasing number of countries state, however, that they want to use the emerging NQFs as instrument to 'mainstream' validation of non-formal and informal learning



Conditions for creating synergies between NQFs and validation arrangements

- Agree that qualifications in principle, and partly or fully, can be acquired through any learning experiences, formal, non-formal or informal
- The need to introduce a comprehensive national strategy on validation, avoiding the kind of fragmentation and part-solutions existing today
- The need to develop explicit quality criteria for validation, firmly integrated into the NQF, ensuring the credibility of the validation process and its result
- Learning outcomes!!!!!!

Proposal for EU Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

- Launched 5 September 2012
- Invites Member States
 - to establish national systems for validation
 - to make it possible for individuals to acquire qualifications partly or fully on the basis of non-formal and informal learning
 - To ensure that validation arrangements are firmly integrated into NQF and the principles these build on

http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20120905_en.htm

Opening up NQFs to the labour market and private sector



Opening up NQFs to the labour market and private sector

- A number of countries see the NQF as an instrument to open up to and include the training and learning taking place outside the initial, formal education and training sector
- Countries like France, Scotland and Ireland has made progress by putting in place mechanisms allowing non-traditional qualifications to become parts of NQFs
- Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands are making progress in opening up NQFs to the extensive ' non-formal sector' existing in these countries



Opening up NQFs to the labour market....

- Countries see this opening up of frameworks as an opportunity to create a complete map of all education and training provisions in their country
- A main challenge is to agree on the procedures and quality criteria for inclusion
- France exemplifies this open approach; the national register of professional certification contains qualifications from a wide range of providers, including social partners
- The Scottish and Irish NQFs operate with part qualifications and qualification units (major, minor and specialised awards in Ireland) – allowing for flexibility



Opening up NQFs to the labour market....

All French certificates (also emerging from the private sector) have to comply to the same quality criteria, for example that all qualifications can be acquired through validation (for example)

- Who delivers the award
- Which occupations and functions are addressed
- Description of the competences (generic and specific) expected
- How will the award be updated in view of changes in the labour market, and who will take care of this update
- Comparable awards
- Access
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Assessment

The Swedish NQFs seen from Europe