

**2nd POLICY LEARNING FORUM:****Defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications***Cedefop, Thessaloniki 13-14 October 2016***Comments and observations from international expert****Michael Graham****Relevance to ETF partner countries**

The topic of learning outcomes is highly relevant to ETF's partner countries. We cooperate with 29 countries in total, spanning the Western Balkans and Turkey, to the former Soviet States including Central Asia, to North Africa and the Middle East. Most are transition or developing societies, seeking to reform their VET systems as part of wider efforts to reform their economies and societies to meet the challenges of the modern world.

Notwithstanding their significant diversity historically, economically and socially, 25 of the countries, from our analysis, are seeking to introduce or embed learning outcomes approaches in qualifications and curricula. All of these 25 are doing so via the medium of NQFs.

Countries are pursuing NQFs for reasons familiar to the EU countries, and indeed the wider world, namely, for labour market relevance in their qualifications; to open up access and build progression; to introduce national standards and thereby better ways to assess quality; to provide a visible entry point to the national qualifications system, internally and internationally. No country is implementing an NQF without outcomes and no country is introducing outcomes unless they have an NQF.

Progress in implementing outcomes approaches in partner countries

Outcomes approaches run wider than deeper in most partner countries. We can usually tell the depth of penetration by looking at NQF level descriptors, qualification types, qualifications and curricula and teacher training. As a general rule, the more advanced the NQF, the deeper the application of outcomes. So Turkey and Georgia, whose NQFs are quite advanced in implementation have significant numbers of outcomes-based qualifications, and embed outcomes approaches in some VET curricula. By contrast, where countries have only plans or laws, such as Egypt and Lebanon, there is little real change in teaching and learning, and no benefit to learners.

NQF descriptors are nearly always EQF-influenced or derived, but then types may be limited and even in more advanced cases, most VET qualifications are not outcomes-based, e.g. in Serbia, which has significant numbers of outcomes-based qualifications. Progress is most obvious where there is use of occupational standards and a labour-market driven agenda. Three in four of our partner countries use occupational standards, so in VET, there is application of outcomes approaches. It is worth saying that CVET and wider adult education – often under the umbrella of

the Ministry of Labour - sees more rapid progress than initial VET, which usually answers to the Ministry of Education. Higher education is in most cases exposed to outcomes approaches via Bologna.

Some specific partner country challenges

Outcomes approaches rely on NQFs being progressed. Usually, this is quickest where there is a specialised agency in charge of the qualification system, such as in Georgia, Montenegro or Turkey.

Outcomes are usually specified in law as the conceptual basis of new qualifications, especially in VET, but some countries do admit non-outcomes based qualifications to their NQF.

Countries have technical capacity, but lack other resources, in particular staffing numbers and money. This makes them in most cases (not the likes of Turkey or Israel, of course) dependent on donors for much of the implementation of their programme. While helpful in bringing new methodologies and applying technical expertise, they come with their own agenda – and different national donors have differing priorities in the same partner country – which can be at odds with national methodologies e.g. this has happened in Albania, where donors step outside the national approach for developing new VET qualifications.

Another issue is more about “hardware” i.e. institutional organisation and coordination, so that laws are not proportionate, stakeholder platforms often absent, allocation of roles to institutions is not clear etc. These weaknesses hinder progress in implementing outcomes approaches.

