

# DENMARK

## European inventory on NQF 2016

### Introduction and context

Denmark has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. The work on the framework started in 2006 and builds directly on the qualifications framework for higher education established in 2006/07. Implementation of the eight-level framework has been a gradual process, starting in June 2009 when the proposal for the framework was adopted by the Minister for Education, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, the Minister for Culture and the Minister for Economic and Business Affairs. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2011. An evaluation of the NQF was finalised in October 2013, providing generally positive feed-back on the results achieved so far. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in most qualifications and qualification supplements being issued (starting 2013). The NQF and the levelling of qualifications is a visible part of national education databases, indicating that the framework has now reached operational stage and forms an integrated part of the Danish education and training landscape.

### Policy objectives

The Danish NQF provides a comprehensive, systematic overview of public qualifications <sup>(1)</sup> that can be acquired within the Danish system.

The framework supports development of a transparent education, training and learning system without dead ends; it supports learner progression irrespective of prior learning, age or employment situation.

The NQF adopted in 2009 is considered to be a first step in a long-term development process. The first development stage was concluded by publishing the 2013 evaluation report. The results of this report are now being studied and will result in a set of priorities for the next few years. In the same way as in the

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Danish Evaluation Institute specifies this as '...all qualifications that have been awarded pursuant to an act or executive order and that have been quality assured by a public authority in the Danish education system' (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011, pp. 13-14).

Netherlands and Sweden, an opening up towards private and non-formal qualifications is being considered. A mapping was carried out in 2013 showing that a high number of certificates and qualifications operate outside and in parallel to the existing NQF.

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Danish qualifications framework draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical with the levels descriptors in the Danish qualifications framework for higher education at bachelor, master and doctoral-level, and contain explicit references to research related outcomes. Qualifications have been referred to the NQF using two different principles. A qualification at levels 1 to 5 is referenced according to a 'best fit' principle where the final decision is based on overall judgement of the knowledge, skills and competences of a particular qualification (type). A principle of 'full fit' is used for levels 6 to 8, as is the case for the Danish qualifications framework for higher education, implying that qualifications at this level have to be fully accredited <sup>(2)</sup> as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the qualifications framework for higher education for qualifications at these levels.

This distinction implies that all qualifications at levels 6 to 8 need to be defined and accredited according to the qualifications framework for higher education. For the moment there are no publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at level 6 to 8 that are not included in the higher education area (qualifications framework for higher education); some 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 included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

The eight-level structure adopted for the Danish NQF is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences <sup>(3)</sup> (*Kompetenser*). Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, including existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, and the Bologna descriptors. They have been designed to

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<sup>(2)</sup> The process of accreditation in Danish HE, and how this links to the learning outcomes principle, is well documented in the 2013 report:  
[http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOQA/Reports/Learning\\_outcomes\\_in\\_external\\_quality\\_assurance\\_approaches\\_NOQA\\_report\\_%20220413\\_250613.pdf](http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOQA/Reports/Learning_outcomes_in_external_quality_assurance_approaches_NOQA_report_%20220413_250613.pdf)

<sup>(3)</sup> Note that the Danish NQF, in contrast to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

be relevant to different types of qualification, theoretically as well as practically oriented. Knowledge (*Viden*) descriptors emphasise the following:

- (a) the type of knowledge involved; knowledge about theory or knowledge about practice; knowledge of a subject or a field within a profession;
- (b) the complexity of knowledge; the degree of complexity and how predictable or unpredictable the situation in which the knowledge is mastered;
- (c) understanding; the ability to place one's knowledge in a context. For example, understanding is expressed when explaining something to others.

Skills descriptors refer to what a person can do or accomplish and reflect the following aspects:

- (a) the type of skill involved; practical, cognitive, creative or communicative;
- (b) the complexity of the problem-solving; the problem-solving these skills can be applied to and the complexity of the task;
- (c) communication; the communication that is required; the complexity of the message; to which target groups and with which instruments?

Competence descriptors refer to responsibility and autonomy and cover the following aspects:

- (a) space for action; the type of work/study related context in which knowledge and skills are brought to play, and the degree of unpredictability and changeability in these contexts;
- (b) cooperation and responsibility; the ability to take responsibility for one's own work and the work of others, and the complexity of the cooperative situations in which one engages;
- (c) learning; the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and that of others.

#### Level descriptor in the Danish NQF for lifelong learning

Knowledge/ <i>Viden</i>	Skills/ <i>Faerdigheter</i>	Competences/ <i>Kompetenser</i>
Type and complexity	Type	Space for action
	Problem solving	Cooperation and responsibility
Understanding	Communication	Learning

These descriptors are used to address both full and supplementary qualifications. The role of supplementary qualifications is particularly important for adult education and for continuing vocational education and training. A supplementary qualification can be a supplement (addition) to a qualification, a part (module) or an independent entity not related to any other qualification.

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of education and training and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. VET has a strong tradition of 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.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

A broad range of stakeholders has been involved throughout the development and implementation period. The social partners have been systematically consulted and involved and their role is being described as constructive and as a precondition for the implementation of the framework. Some social partner representatives, notably employers, have questioned the direct added value for companies, pointing to the need to move into a second and more inclusive development stage.

The Danish EQF national coordination point has taken on an active role in the day-to-day coordination of the framework and its implementation. The NCP is located in the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, which also hosts the DK national academic recognition information centre (NARIC). A main task for the NCP has been to coordinate stakeholders involved in the framework as well as disseminating information to a wider public. It is acknowledged that the NQF is insufficiently visible to the general public at this stage, but that the inclusion of NQF/EQF levels into certificates, diplomas and Europass documents is gradually changing this.

## Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways <sup>(4)</sup>

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda in Denmark for about 20 years and is seen as a key element in promoting lifelong learning. Competence assessment, and the possible outcomes in terms of access, exemption or acquisition of certificates, varies among the

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<sup>(4)</sup> This section draws mainly on input from the 2016 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

education and training sectors (VET, higher education and adult education sectors). A legal framework for validation of prior learning based on common principles in adult education and training has been in place since 2007. Validation of prior learning (VPL) is regulated by laws which state that assessment of the validation application must be conducted by the education institution offering the corresponding study programmes. Other bodies can be in charge of information, identification, guidance and counselling, in a broader perspective, in the phase leading up to the assessment process ('the pre-phase'). These bodies include trade unions, employers' associations, job centres, unemployment insurance funds, civic education institutions, study committees and '*eVejledning*' (online guidance service) that can be involved in the pre-phase and often collaborate with the education institution in the validation process. Implementation of the legislation is decentralised.

It is acknowledged that there is a need to link VPL activity for individuals more to the development of job profiles. This means involving employers at workplace level in a more responsible way to show job perspectives to employees potentially having a VPL. In many ways Denmark has a well-functioning education system which provides good conditions for VPL. However, more commitment is called for, from stakeholders including employers at company level, social partners and key actors in education. This is especially the case at VET and CVET schools where the social partners are occupying all seats on the boards and where they are able to be more strategic, giving greater priority to VPL activity. Official statistics should be more comprehensive and systematic, covering all VPL activity, and should be presented in an updated version.

In recent years, the situation in relation to the validation of prior learning has not significantly changed. Legislation has remained the same in most education sectors though it was changed in the VET system as of August 2015 to include new VET for adults (EUV) programmes for 25-year-olds or older, building on initial validation of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning and work experience. In spring 2016 the government launched a number of new initiatives targeting refugees. These promoted the use of validation and recognition of refugees' skills and competences and included a new web portal on existing measures and tools, based on a tripartite agreement with the social partners and a bipartite agreement with the municipalities in Denmark.

Concerns about the use of validation of prior learning as a coherent and integrated process (including information, identification, documentation, assessment and certification stages) has been a focus of public debate in recent years. Awareness of different tasks and stages of the validation process has

increased among different stakeholders, such as job centres, trade unions, guidance institutions, education institutions, actors from working life and the third sector. Funded projects, such as the Interreg programme – which aims to develop tools to be used in an integrated process – include the above activities which then take place in a collaborative process between stakeholders. Nevertheless, the use of validation arrangements by stakeholders remains low and needs improvement.

## NQF implementation

The NQF is now visible to the general public through two (interconnected) websites. The NQF.DK website <sup>(5)</sup> provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers. The UG.DK website <sup>(6)</sup> addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes, and access. This website also provides comprehensive information on the NQF and the qualifications levels and explains clearly the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners. The fact that NQF and EQF levels are now being gradually added to qualifications and certificates is also important for increasing the visibility of the NQF to citizens.

The 2013 evaluation of the Danish NQF was carried out to assess the speed and quality of the formal implementation process, to check how the framework is judged by potential users, and to provide a basis for future improvements. The evaluation report shows that most stakeholders involved with the NQF <sup>(7)</sup> are positive about the role it now plays, while 78% of respondents 'know well' the principles underpinning the framework and 64% are positive about the initiative. 27% of those answering are neutral as regards the role played by the framework. It should be noted that the general public was not targeted in the evaluation, only representatives of stakeholders directly or indirectly associated with framework design and implementation.

Denmark has not, as is the case in neighbouring Sweden, started a discussion on how to open up the framework towards the non-formal sector and certificates/qualifications awarded/quality assured outside the public sector.

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<sup>(5)</sup> [www.nqf.dk](http://www.nqf.dk)

<sup>(6)</sup> <https://www.ug.dk/>

<sup>(7)</sup> A total of 848 persons were contacted; 425 persons (51%) responded.

## Referencing to the EQF

Referencing to the EQF is treated as an integral part of NQF implementation and was completed in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011). The result shows a strong convergence between the Danish framework and the EQF with a linking of Danish level 1 to EQF level 2.

## Important lessons and the way forward

The Danish national qualifications framework can now be considered operational.

Potential inclusion of certificates and diplomas awarded outside the public domain is currently being addressed. Accomplishment of this will strengthen the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners.

### Further sources of information

[URLs accessed 27.1.2017]

The Danish NQF website: <http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks>

The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education; acts as EQF national coordination point: <http://ufm.dk/en/the-minister-and-the-ministry/organisation/danish-agency-for-science-and-higher-education>

The Danish Evaluation Institute: <http://english.eva.dk/>

## Danish national qualifications framework (DK NQF)

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
8	PhD degree		8
7	Master degree ( <i>Candidatus</i> ) Master degree in arts/fine arts Master degree		7
6	Bachelor degree Bachelor degree in arts Professional bachelor degree Diploma degree		6
5	VET (journeyman's) certificate Academy profession degrees		5

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
4	Upper secondary school leaving certificate Certificate for two-year upper secondary programme (higher preparatory examination) VET (journeyman's) certificate	Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at upper secondary level Adult VET certificate Certificate for single subject VET	4
3	VET (journeyman's) certificate	Basic programme VET Certificates for supplementary, single subject VET courses Higher preparatory courses, single course subjects General adult education level D Adult VET certificate Certificates for single subject courses in VET	3
2	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (10th grade)	Basic VET certificates General adult education (levels E and F, approximates 10th grade) Adult VET certificate	2
1	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade)	Certificate for preparatory adult education Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates ninth grade)	2

Source: Adapted from Danish Evaluation Institute (2011).

## List of abbreviations

DK NQF	Danish national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
EUV	VET for adults
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

## References

[URLs accessed 7.1.2017]

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