NQF state of play

Denmark 2022

Table of contents

Overview

Stage of development: [Operational stage]

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:
The NQF includes all levels and types of formal qualifications, along with qualifications awarded outside the formal system.

Number of levels:
Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:
Administrative decision on the Danish NQF for LLL approved by the Ministers for Education; for Science, Technology and Innovation; for Culture; and for Economic and Business Affairs (2009)
Integrated in sectoral legislation

NQF/EQF website:
⧉ Website

Qualifications register/database:
⧉ Register of qualifications and programmes in the NQF

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Denmark, the rate of learners leaving education and training early has slightly increased and is at 9.8 %. In 2021, the rate of tertiary education attainment was one of the highest in the EU (49.7 % of people aged 25–34, compared with the EU average of 41.2 %), while the rate of employment of recent graduates from all qualification levels is also high (European Commission. DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). In 2020, participation in initial vocational education and training (VET) was significantly lower than the EU average (38.2 % versus 48.7 %) (European Commission. DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). At post-secondary level, 74.1 % of learners follow a vocational pathway, while in short-cycle tertiary education the relevant share is 89.5 % ([1]). VET continues to be a high policy priority (European Commission. DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). The focus is on increasing the number of VET applicants and making more apprenticeship placements available (Cedefop and ReferNet, forthcoming).

1.2. NQF legal basis

In 2009, the Minister for Higher Education and Science (*Uddannelses- og forskningsministeriet*), Minister for Children and Education (*Børne- og undervisningsministeriet*), and Minister for Culture (*Kulturministeriet*) approved the DKQF for lifelong learning. No specific legal act on the DKQF has been adopted. The framework is integrated into sectoral legislation. In higher education, it is implemented via the Accreditation Act ([2]). At all other levels, it is integrated into educational orders.

Policy objectives

The overall objective of the DKQF, as expressed in the referencing report, is to support the transparency of qualifications and to further the opportunities for mobility and lifelong learning by:

a. providing a comprehensive overview of qualifications approved by national authorities, while simultaneously making routes through the education system visible, thus making it easier for learners to find out how to build upon the qualifications they already have;

b. aiding mutual recognition between national and international qualifications.

The framework secures the transparency of the education system; thus it promotes lifelong learning, learners' progression, irrespective of their prior learning, age or employment situation, and the mobility of workers. It also ensures a lack of dead ends and that available learning pathways are transparent, while supporting and consolidating the learning-outcomes-based foundation of Danish qualifications. The framework helps integrate qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, and microcredentials, into the formal education system, thus supporting lifelong learning. Integrating quality-assured private qualifications (awarded outside formal education and training) into the DKQF eases state-recognised education institutions' decisions on admission of learners and credit transfers, and helps employers to better understand the level and quality of these qualifications. It also functions as a transparency tool, allowing the recognition of cross-border qualifications, and there are plans to use it as a tool for validating non-formal and informal learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The DKQF is a learning-outcomes-based framework with eight levels and level descriptors defined based on knowledge (*viden*), skills (*færdigheder*) and competences (*kompetencer*). Knowledge descriptors emphasise the type of knowledge (knowledge of theory, practice, a subject or a field within a profession), the complexity of knowledge, and understanding (the ability to place one's knowledge in context). Skills descriptors refer to what a person can do or accomplish, and they reflect, for instance, the type of skills (practical, cognitive, creative or communicative) and the complexity of the task/problem-solving to which these skills can be applied. Competence descriptors refer to responsibility and autonomy, and cover, for instance, the type of work/study context in which knowledge and skills will be used, 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 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011). These descriptors are used to address both full and supplementary qualifications ([3]), and for assessing the levels of non-formal qualifications.

The DKQF draws a clear distinction between levels 1–5 and levels 6–8. The latter are identical to the level descriptors of the qualifications framework for higher education and contain explicit references to research-related outcomes. A broader descriptor has been designed for DKQF level 5 than the corresponding descriptor for short-cycle degrees in the national qualifications framework for higher education; this makes it possible to include level 5 qualifications acquired through some VET and maritime VET programmes.

Qualifications at levels 1–5 are assigned according to a 'best fit' principle, while qualifications at levels 6–8 are assigned according to a 'full fit' principle; this means that qualifications at this level have to be accredited (Hansen et al., 2013) as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and the qualifications framework for higher education. The process of levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training to the DKQF was set in 2019. This includes levelling microcredentials to the DKQF. The procedures and requirements for levelling these qualifications match almost exactly the procedures and

requirements outlined in the Council recommendation on the European approach to microcredentials adopted in June 2022 ([4]). The requirements to be met include learner-centred learning outcomes, a clear purpose of the education programme, assessment of the programme, and quality assurance measures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The DKQF is a comprehensive framework covering all types and levels of qualifications awarded and quality-assured by public authorities (general education, VET, higher education and supplementary qualifications). It also includes qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, including microcredentials, meaning private and public education programmes not under the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education, and the Ministry of Culture. There are 43 such qualifications whose levels are assessed by the Danish Accreditation Institution (*Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution*) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). All currently publicly recognised qualifications at levels 6–8 are also included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

In general, learning outcomes, which were in place in Denmark before the implementation of the DKQF and EQF, are increasing the transparency of qualifications and promoting lifelong learning.

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. However, the descriptions are often divided according to subject, meaning that there is not always a comprehensive presentation of the overall learning outcome for the entire qualification. For example, in VET, learners must comply with both defined learning outcomes and competence objectives to gain admission to the main course after the basic course, and to be awarded a VET certificate. In higher education, all qualifications are clearly described using learning-outcomes-based terminology. This shift from input- to output-based steering is supported by the country's quality assurance approach to accreditation; learning outcomes are an important reference point for accreditation of new and existing programmes (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011).

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

The country's order on accreditation establishes that the Danish Accreditation Institution evaluates if higher education institutions have consistent measures to ensure that intended learning outcomes at different degree levels can be achieved through their study programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). For each degree level, there is a typological description of required learning outcomes. Higher education institutions must design learning outcomes following this typology, and ensure that graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes in completing the study programme.

When including qualifications in the DKQF, there are procedures for accreditation and/or approval of new qualifications, and quality assurance procedures for the levelling of qualifications ([5]).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The interdepartmental national coordination committee for the DKQF, established in 2006, is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the DKQF. The committee comprises representatives from the education, culture and higher education ministries. Since 2018, the Danish Accreditation Institution has been an advisory member of the committee.

At operational level, the higher education ministry is the EQF national coordination point (NCP) ([6]), while the education ministry represents the country in the EQF Advisory Group. Two people work for the EQF NCP – 1.5 full-time equivalents – one person from the education ministry and one from the culture ministry (as a member of the committee). The activities are mainly funded through the EQF NCP contract and the ministries (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The coordination committee for the DKQF meets at least three or four times per year. The committee consists of two people from the education ministry, two from the higher education ministry, one from the culture ministry and one from the Danish Accreditation Institution ([7]).

The EQF NCP functions as the information office for questions relating to the EQF and the correlation between the EQF and the DKQF, including how the DKQF levels align with the EQF levels. It also provides information on the background of the EQF and the purpose of establishing it, and administers and develops the DKQF website. One of the main tasks for the EQF NCP, in addition to coordinating the stakeholders involved in the DKQF's implementation, is disseminating information to the wider public. Responsibility for other areas, such as the levelling of qualifications to the DKQF and quality assurance of qualifications, lies with the education, culture and higher education ministries. The Danish Accreditation Institution is responsible for the process of levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training to the DKQF ([8]).

The committee consults stakeholders such as rectors' conferences, trade committees and social partners on all developments regarding the framework's implementation, including its regular updates. All stakeholders have, for example, been consulted on the principles and procedures used for the inclusion in the DKQF of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. Regarding higher education, the

main stakeholders are the rectors' conferences. In VET, the main stakeholders are the social partners, who are involved in designing VET programmes and in levelling VET qualifications to the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

5.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The education and higher education ministries are responsible for the legislative framework for the assessment of prior learning and for introducing national initiatives to implement the legislation. A legal framework for validation of prior learning (VPL), based on common principles in adult education and training, has been in place since 2007 ([9]). This ensures individuals' legal rights to have their prior learning validated in relation to the standards of a given education and training programme no matter where and how the competences have been acquired, and includes the possibilities of obtaining a full or partial qualification. The recommended VPL arrangement includes four phases (Husted, 2019): identification, documentation, assessment and recognition. The implementation of VPL is decentralised at the provider level, and carried out by educational institutions providing VET, higher education, and adult education and training. The results of the validation are guaranteed by the linkage to the DKQF. Most qualifications in the DKQF can be acquired by validation. The certificates issued as a result of the VPL are the same as those obtained for completing the formal programme. A survey showed that in the 2010s the use of VPL was increased, and that there was strong support for and more widespread use of the concept of recognising adults' prior learning, particularly within adult higher education (academy profession degrees, EQF level 5) (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2019). However, more than half of the respondents fully or mainly agreed that there was a general lack of knowledge about VPL among the population (Husted, 2019).

A project aiming to develop both common guidelines and digital tools for higher education institutions' use of VPL was launched in December 2018. A working group with representation of the labour market and higher education institutions has also been set up. The working group developed and submitted recommendations on how to promote the use of VPL to the higher education ministry in April 2020. In 2021, following the recommendations, a revised order on validation was adopted, which, among other things, simplified rules on validation, introduced more flexible rules for admission to formal programmes through validation, and monitored developments of validation in a newly established network of

higher education institutions ([10]).

5.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications

The DKQF is used in the recognition of foreign qualifications to reference them to its levels and compare their learning outcomes with the DKQF level descriptors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). As of 2020, recognition decisions include references to the DKQF level of the Danish qualification to which a foreign qualification is compared ([11]).

5.3. Promoting lifelong learning

The DKQF supports lifelong learning by providing transparency and indicating existing learning pathways in the education and training system. Its use in VPL is seen as a key element in promoting lifelong learning (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The DKQF is operational and has already gone through the review stage (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The framework has been established and DKQF/EQF levels are indicated on certificates. There is also a qualifications database, which is used for the recognition of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. There have been two evaluations of the framework; the latest focused on the process and principles of levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training to the DKQF (see Section 7.6) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

Most of the formal qualifications at levels 1–5 have DKQF and EQF levels on the certificate or diploma. Formal qualifications at levels 6–8 have DKQF and EQF levels indicated on the diploma supplements. The qualifications awarded outside formal education and training levelled to the DKQF have DKQF and EQF levels on the certificates, and have learning outcomes described on diploma supplements and in Europass certificates (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.3. NQF dissemination

The main communication channel for dissemination of information on the DKQF is its web page (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). The web page provides information for national and international target groups, presenting the DKQF and the qualifications it covers. The website for the national database (see Section 7.4) addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes and access. This website also provides comprehensive information on the DKQF and qualification levels, and explains the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners. The Danish Accreditation Institution has a web page explaining the procedures for applying for accreditation of non-formal qualifications ([12]). Information on referencing qualifications awarded outside formal education has been sent to all state-recognised education institutions. The purpose was to raise awareness among them of the level and quality of these DKQF qualifications to secure informed decisions regarding credit transfers and the admission of applicants holding these

qualifications ([13]).

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The database UdannelsesGuiden describes all formal study programmes, including their DKQF levels; it is coordinated by the education ministry. It provides information on the institutions offering these programmes, including links to the institutions, information on entry requirements and content descriptions. Some qualifications are registered without a DKQF level and an EQF level. This applies to a few programmes outside the formal education system that are eligible for study grants ([14]). The DKQF coordination committee is currently discussing a procedure to include descriptions of the non-formal qualifications in the database. The database website provides information in Danish about education and training options, and programmes in upper secondary education and training, vocational college education, higher education, and further and continuing education. Learning outcomes are not described in the database but are described in diploma supplements and Europass certificates. The database is connected to the website for foreign learners, which provides information in English. The database is also an important tool for job centres (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.5. Awareness and use of the NQF

Awareness of the DKQF is strongest among those who design study programmes and learning outcomes, and those working in quality assurance and recognition authorities. It is used in the accreditation process in higher education; furthermore, any new qualification must be designed in line with the DKQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). It is also well known by labour market stakeholders, and guidance and counselling practitioners. Learners, workers and jobseekers are less familiar with the framework. The DKQF is also used in the quality assurance of qualifications during validation procedures, while DKQF/EQF levels are actively used in designing qualifications and in recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

6.6. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

The first evaluation of the framework was completed in 2013, looking at the implementation of the framework and assessing the need to review it ([15]). In 2022, an evaluation of the process and principles of levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training to the DKQF was completed ([16]). This evaluation involved impact studies and interviews with the institutions that had applied for levelling of their

qualifications. The key findings were that non-formal providers have professionalised all aspects of their programmes, including quality assurance, certification and programme design involving learning outcomes. It also revealed that there is a need to better communicate the impact of levelling these qualifications to the DKQF, especially in terms of progress to the formal system, credit transfer and connecting them to the formal system (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Both evaluations concluded that information on the DKQF should be better communicated to reach a wider audience, and raise awareness of the purpose and use of the framework.

6.7. Impact of the NQF

The DKQF has reinforced the transparency of qualifications, and has led to better understanding of qualification levels and progress pathways in education and training. It has also improved the permeability of the boundary between the formal education sector and non-formal and informal learning. The DKQF contributes to raising trust in VPL, as results of the validation are linked to the DKQF and the validation certificates are the same as those obtained for completing the formal programme.

All qualifications must be designed, and learning outcomes written, to adhere to the DKQF. This has helped to introduce learning outcomes into the education sector, and it is being introduced outside formal education through the new procedures for non-formal qualifications. This has helped and will help those in education, training and the labour market to better understand the achieved learning outcomes and qualification levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Referencing to the EQF

The national qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area in 2010. The DKQF was referenced to the EQF in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011). The process of levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training to the DKQF, and the introduction of a new type of qualification at master's level, might call for an updated report. This will be discussed by the co-ordination committee of the DKQF in 2023 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Important lessons and future plans

Levelling qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, including microcredentials, to the DKQF has been a major development. In general, the framework has increased the transparency of qualifications, contributed to better presenting learning pathways, and promoted linkages between the non-formal and formal education sectors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022). Nevertheless, the DKQF continues to draw a clear distinction between levels 1–5 and levels 6–8. The DKQF is an important recognition tool, improves the quality assurance of achieved learning outcomes and is used for validation. The evaluations of the framework have initiated discussions on improving communication about the framework. The evaluations concluded that greater efforts should be made to disseminate information on the DKQF's purpose and use, along with communicating the connections between DKQF qualifications, primarily targeting formal education providers. Updating the country's referencing report is also a priority (European Commission and Cedefop, 2022).

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 5.4.2023]

- Danish Accreditation Institution

- Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science

- DKQF website

- Database UdannelsesGuiden

- Danish Evaluation Institute (2011). *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework. Copenhagen.*

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**PhD degree (Ph.d. grad)** **Category** Certificate or degree	8
7	**Master's degree – Candidatus (Kandidat og masteruddannelser)** **Category** Certificate or degree **Master's degree in arts/fine arts** **Category** Certificate or degree **Master's degree** **Category** Certificate or degree	7

6	**Bachelor's degree (Bachelor og diplomuddannelser)** **Category** Certificate or degree	6
	Bachelor's degree in arts **Category** Certificate or degree	
	Professional bachelor's degree (Professionsbacheloruddannelser) **Category** Certificate or degree	
	Diploma degree **Category** Certificate or degree	
	Copenhagen International School of Performing Arts: 3-year professional acting course **Category** Level-assessed private and public education programme Outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education, and Ministry of Culture.	
	Financial advisor wealth advisory (Eksamineret finansrådgiver formuesrådgivning) **Category** Level-assessed private and public education programme Outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education, and Ministry of Culture.	
5	**VET certificate** **Category** Certificate or degree	5

Academy profession degrees (Erhvervsakademi uddannelser)
Category

Certificate or degree

Certificate for supplementary single-subject courses at academy profession level
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

Adult VET certificate
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

Acupuncture (AkupunkturAkademiet)
Category

Level-assessed private and public education programme

Outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education, and Ministry of Culture.

Nordic acupuncture education (Nordisk akupunturuddannelse)
Category

Level-assessed private and public education programme

Outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education, and Ministry of Culture.

Certified private client advisor (certificeret privatkunderådgiver)
Category

Level-assessed private and public education programme

Outside the remits of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education, and Ministry of Culture.

4	**General upper secondary school certificate (Gymnasiale uddannelser)** **Category** Certificate or degree	4
	Certificate for 2-year general upper secondary programme (higher preparatory examination) **Category** Certificate or degree	
	VET certificate **Category** Certificate or degree	
	Certificate for supplementary single-subject courses at upper secondary level **Category** Certificate for supplementary qualifications Acquired in adult education and training.	
	Adult VET certificate **Category** Certificate for supplementary qualifications Acquired in adult education and training.	
	Certificate for single subject VET **Category** Certificate for supplementary qualifications Acquired in adult education and training.	

3	**VET certificate**	3
	Category	
	Certificate or degree	

Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)
Category

Certificate or degree

Certificates for supplementary, single-subject VET courses
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

Higher preparatory courses, single-subject courses
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

General adult education level D
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

Adult VET certificate
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

Certificates for single-subject courses in VET
Category

Certificate for supplementary qualifications

Acquired in adult education and training.

2	**Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school – 10th grade (10. klasse afgangsprøve)**	2
	Category	
	Certificate or degree	
	Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	
	Category	
	Certificate or degree	
	Basic VET certificates	
	Category	
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications	
	Acquired in adult education and training.	
	General adult education (levels E and F, approximately 10th grade)	
	Category	
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications	
	Acquired in adult education and training.	
	Adult VET certificate	
	Category	
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications	
	Acquired in adult education and training.	
	Basic programme VET	
	Category	
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications	
	Acquired in adult education and training.	

1	**Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade) (Folkeskolens afgangsprøve)**
	Category
	Certificate or degree
	Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)
	Category
	Certificate or degree
	Certificate for preparatory adult education
	Category
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications
	Acquired in adult education and training.
	Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates to ninth grade)
	Category
	Certificate for supplementary qualifications
	Acquired in adult education and training.

Acronyms

DKQF	Danish national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VPL	validation of prior learning

References

[URLs accessed 5.4.2023]

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Danish Evaluation Institute (2011). *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework. Copenhagen.*

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Danish Evaluation Institute (2022), *Evaluering af niveauvurdering og indplacering af private og offentlige uddannelsesprogrammer*. Copenhagen.

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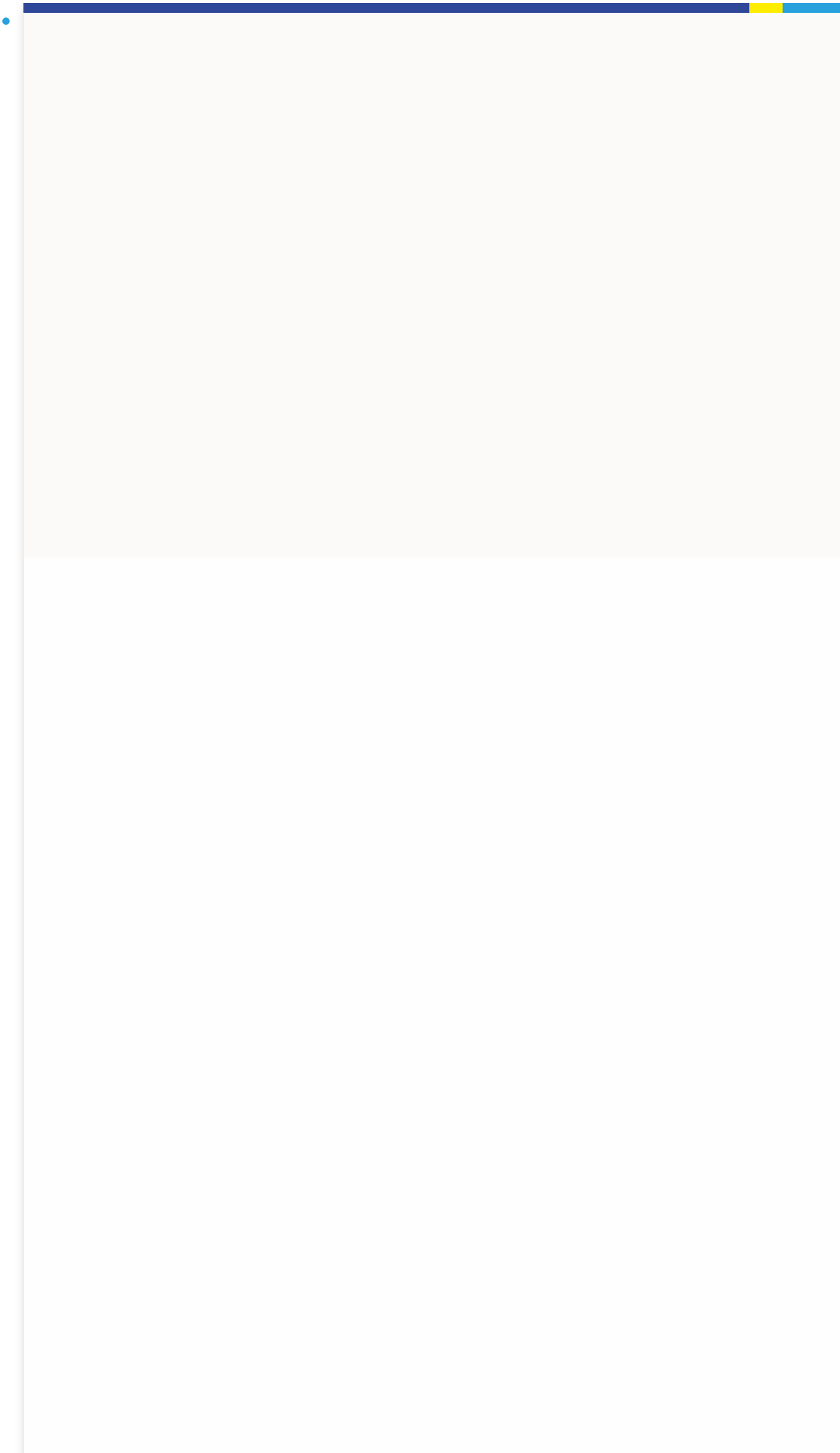
Husted, B. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update – Country report: Denmark*. Cedefop, Thessaloniki.

Ministry of Higher Education and Science (2020). Types of qualifications.

Notes

[1]More information at Eurostat [educ_uoe_enra13], accessed 2 December 2022.

[2]The Accreditation Act (AkkrediteringsbekendtgÃ¸relsen): BEK nr 1558 af 02/07/2021: BekendtgÃ¸relse om akkreditering af videregÃ¥ende uddannelsesinstitutioner og godkendelse af videregÃ¥ende uddannelser(in Danish).

[3]Supplementary qualifications are particularly important for adult education and continuing VET. A supplementary qualification can be an addition to a qualification, or a part (module) or an independent entity not related to any other qualification.

[4]Council recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability - adoption.

[5]More information on quality assurance procedures.

[6]More information on the EQF NCP.

[7]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

[8]The levelling of qualifications awarded outside the formal system is a fee-based process.

[9]Law on changes of different laws under the merit of the Ministry of Education (Lov om Ã¦ndring af forskellige love pÃ¥ Undervisningsministeriets omrÃ¥de) (in Danish).

[10]More information in BekendtgÃ¸relse om realkompetencevurdering i forhold til akademi- og diplomuddannelser pÃ¥ Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriets omrÃ¥de (in Danish).

[11]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

[12]For more information (in Danish), see Dupont Skovgaard (n.d.).

[13]Source: internal communication with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

[14]The providers of these programmes can also apply for referencing of their programmes through the non-formal route.

[15]More information about the qualifications frameworkâs background (in Danish).

[16]For more information (in Danish), see Danish Evaluation Institute (2022).

Related content

2022

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