

# NQFs as a topic for academic research

## Some personal remarks

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3s, Vienna, Austria

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make a Difference?’  
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# The sociology of academic research on NQFs

Impossible to draw a clear line between academic and other research in this area.

Many ‘special issues’<sup>1</sup>.

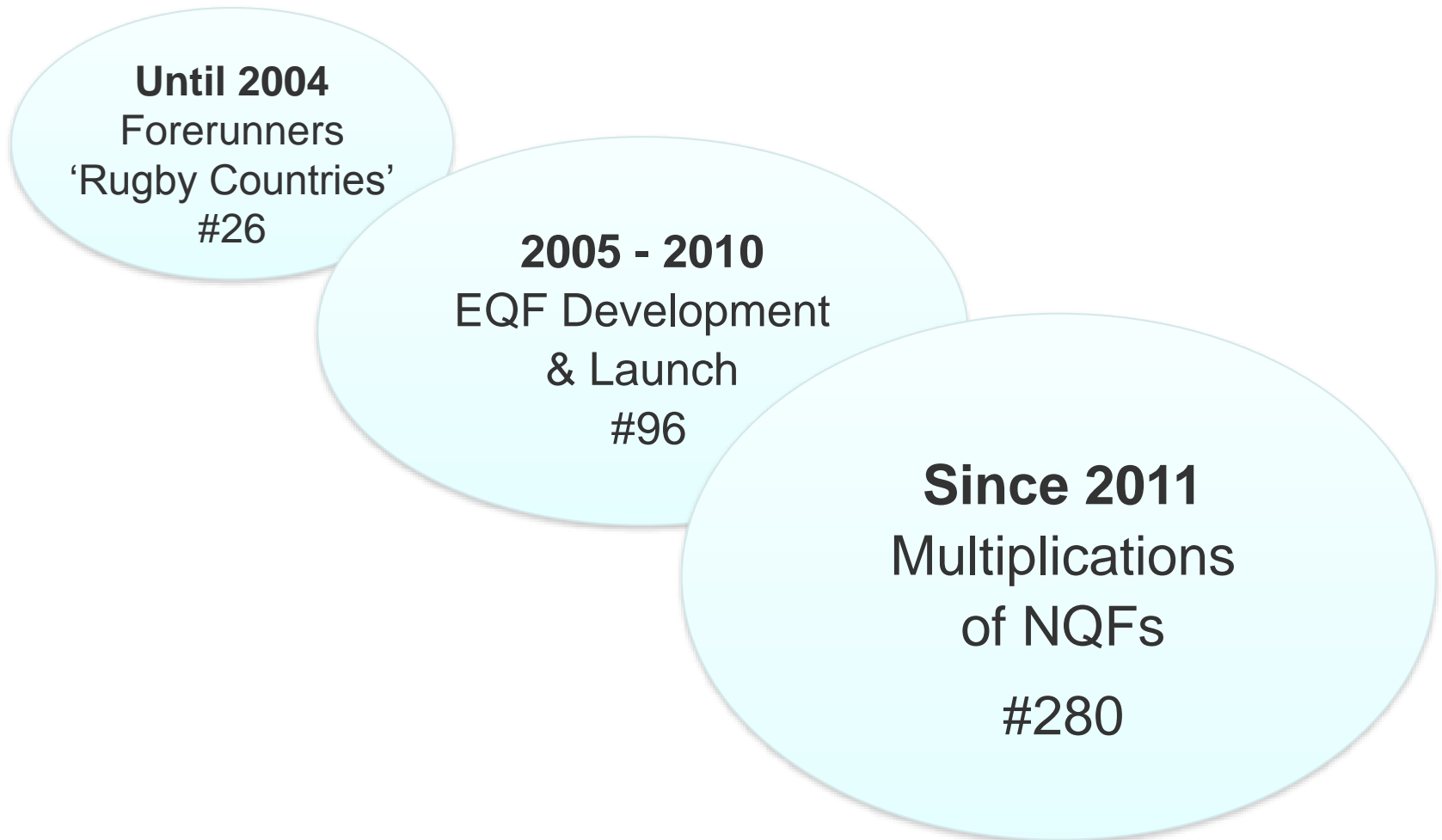
Most of the academic research builds on contracted research for CEDEFOP, ETF, ILO, or the EC.

Independent projects funded by research funds (e.g. ERC, FRP, Horizon) are rare.

NQFs are not a preferred topic for researchers in education.

A small group of researchers, little debate

# Three phases of research on NQFs



# number of papers in peer reviewed journals in *Science Direct* containing 'qualifications framework' in abstract or title.

# Main Research Topics

## Design, Descriptors, Types

([Young 2007](#), [Hanf and Rein 2008](#), [Young 2008](#), [Méhaut and Winch 2012](#), [Mile and Mislav 2012](#), [Lester 2015](#))

## Implementation, Impact, Success Factors

([Young 2009](#), [Allais 2010](#), [Tau and Modesto 2011](#), [Raffe 2012](#), [Young and Allais 2016](#), [Allais 2017](#), [Pilcher, Fernie et al. 2015](#))

## Diffusion, Europeanisation, Globalisation, LLL

([Kleibrink 2011](#), [Elken 2015](#), [Elken 2016](#), [Elken 2016](#), [Mikulec and Ermenc 2016](#), [Mikulec 2017](#))

# Strengths

Elaborated tools to describe differences and classify NQFs

Revealing relations between QFs and society at large (e.g. neo-liberalism<sup>2</sup>)

# Weaknesses

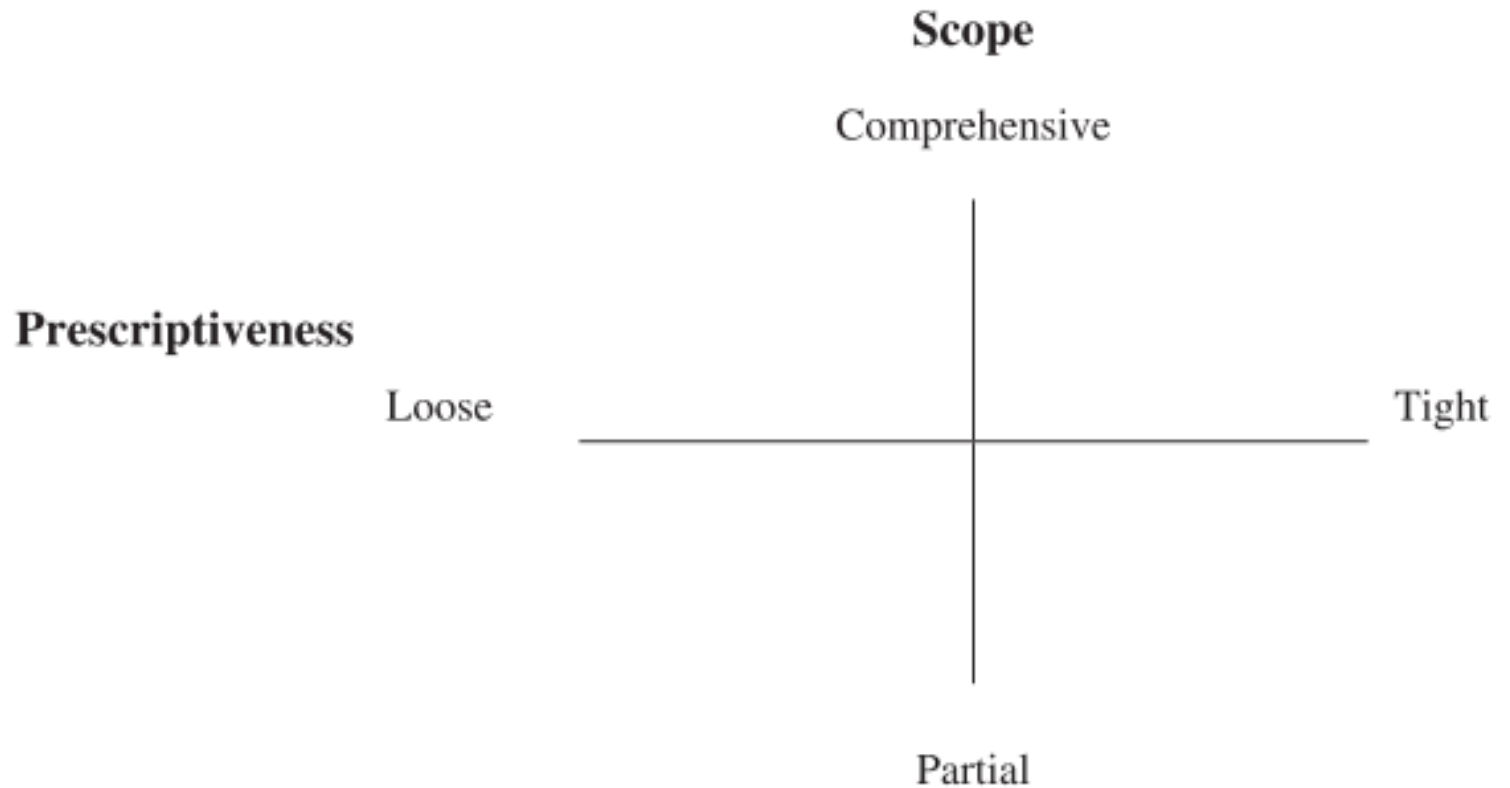
Overemphasis on descriptions<sup>3</sup>, lack of ‘empirical’ studies

Ill-defined entity, QF as ‘regulation, process or system’?

Studied in isolation, no yardstick?

False assumptions due to heterogeneity (e.g. impact on LM)

# Tools: Example 1



Raffe's typology of scope and tightness of qualifications frameworks.

# Tools: Example 2

	Primary characteristics	
	Framework of communication	Outcomes-led framework
<b>Purpose</b>	Rationalization of qualifications	Reform, transformation or overhaul of the education system
<b>Assumptions about knowledge</b>	Knowledge as 'given'. (Some attempt to create transparency)	Implicit social constructionist; outcomes are primary
<b>Role of institutions</b>	Institutions lead the process of comparing qualifications, making judgements about programmes, and so on.	Outcomes are defined separately from institutions, which then design learning programmes against the outcomes.
	Implied characteristics	
<b>Speed of development and approach of implementation</b>	Incremental, bottom-up	Break with the past— fast, top-down
<b>Definition of levels</b>	Qualification defined	Level descriptors
<b>Prescriptiveness</b>	Loose	Tight

## Secondary characteristics

<b>Scope</b>	Partial, sectoral	Comprehensive
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Could apply to either end of above spectrum

<b>Unit based or qual based</b>	Qualification based	Unit based
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# Suggestions for the future

1. Conduct a proper literature review
2. Initiate a large-scale project funded by ERC or Horizon2020
3. Integrate research on NQFs with research on development / use of qualifications and long term change in VET
4. Better define the research entity (QFs as ‘...‘)
5. Consider other empirical data (e.g. learner experiences)
6. Consider the limits of comparability



# Notes

- 1 *Journal of Education and Work*, 2003 (special issue on NQFs)  
*European Journal of Education*, 2007 (special issue on NQFs)  
*European Journal of Vocational Training*, 2008 (special issue on EQF)  
*Journal of European Industrial Training* 2008 (special Issue on VET and Europe)  
*Journal of Education and Work*, 2017 (special issue in honor of David Raffe (1950 – 2015))

- 2 *'However, the data gathered through comparative analysis also revealed that the impact of the EQF is rather limited as the core concept and philosophy of learning outcomes from the VET policy of Anglo-Saxon dominant educational model did not result in the fulfilment of the neoliberal objective to separate educational outcomes from the educational institutions and programmes lying beneath them. (...) Therefore, the normative resonance (Sedelmeier, 2011) between EQF (Anglo-Saxon) ideas and established NQFs in Scandinavian, Germanic, Mediterranean and Post-communistic contexts remains rather low.'*  
(Mirolec, 2017, p. 19).

- 3 *'Focusing on types of qualifications frameworks may prevent researchers from really seeing what is happening with the education/labour market interface, and result in no more than descriptive studies of what policy makers wish was happening (...). Focusing attention on them, through further research or further development and application of typologies, may reinforce the idea that they are something which exist in their own right, and can be studied as such; the existing research suggests this is not the case.'*  
Allais (2017, p. 775)

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# Looking forward to your feedback!

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