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Foreword

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) ⁽¹⁾ have, during the last five years, turned into key instruments for the restructuring and reform of education, training and qualifications systems in Europe. While very few countries had considered this approach prior to 2005, the situation today is very different. As this report will show, the majority of EU and EEA countries (as well as candidate countries to the EU) are currently working actively on the development and implementation of national frameworks ⁽²⁾. While the number of countries having fully implemented an NQF is still low (Ireland, France, Malta and the UK), almost all EU and EEA countries are now signalling that they will introduce comprehensive, overarching NQFs covering all parts of their education, training and qualifications systems.

The key explanation to this rapid development of comprehensive, overarching NQFs is the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF) ⁽³⁾. Adopted in 2008 by the European Parliament and Council, the EQF is as a common device to 'translate' and compare qualifications across Europe. The Recommendation invites countries to relate their qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 by:

- referencing, in transparent manner, their qualification levels to the levels set out by EQF and, where appropriate;
- developing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in accordance with national legislation and practice.

The rapid development of NQFs confirms that the EQF is seen as a relevant and important reference for countries. As the overview will show, the majority of countries are actively pursuing the 2010 deadline and giving priority to the linking up to the European reference framework ⁽⁴⁾. The impact of the EQF can be also seen in the way countries are structuring their NQFs. The majority of countries have chosen to introduce an eight-level

⁽¹⁾ The distinction between a national qualifications framework (NQF) and a national qualifications system (NQS) is defined, by the EQF Recommendation, in the following way and applies to the analysis to follow in this report.

An NQS means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework.

An NQF means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

⁽²⁾ Due to practical reasons, Spain and Lithuania are not covered by this report. These countries will be covered in the next version of the report.

⁽³⁾ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1-7. Available from Internet: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF> [cited 7.9.2009].

⁽⁴⁾ According to the latest feedback to the European Commission, 26 out of 31 countries have stated that they will complete their referencing at the latest by 2011.

reference structure; they have also used the EQF level descriptors as starting point for their national work.

While NQFs are important to reach the European objectives, they are increasingly seen as instruments for addressing national objectives. While given a regulatory role in some countries (for example the UK), NQFs are mainly seen as communication or transparency tools whose main task is to clarify the relations – vertically as well as horizontally – between the different parts of the national system. The aim is to make national qualifications easier to understand and use, both for national citizens and for foreigners. This turns NQFs into important tools for strengthening the permeability of national systems and for facilitating access to and progression in learning.

While most stakeholders agree on this general objective, experiences so far show that NQF developments are indeed political processes which in some cases trigger conflicting points of view. Frameworks provide a new platform for dialogue – across traditional borderlines of subsystems, sectors and institutions – facilitating discussion on how to improve current practices and how to remove barriers to education, training and learning. It is important to keep in mind this political character of the new national frameworks; to understand them as neutral, technical instruments seems inappropriate.

This report is the first in a series to be produced by Cedefop on a regular basis (twice a year) to provide an overview of European NQF developments. The main purpose of these regular reports is to support the exchange of experiences which already takes place between countries. Based on a comparative approach, our aim is to gradually deepen our analysis of national developments and provide more detailed information on solutions implemented.

The picture presented in this report reflects the situation mid 2009 and is presented according to eight main headlines and themes:

- introductory remarks,
- rationale and main policy objectives,
- involvement of stakeholders,
- levels and level descriptors,
- use of learning outcomes,
- referencing to the EQF,
- lessons learned and the way forward,
- main sources of information.

The conclusions drawn in this report are based on the interpretations of Cedefop⁽⁵⁾ and are not the responsibility of those generously providing the background information. It is our hope that this first report will provide a basis for dialogue, making it possible to improve and deepen our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and the overall added value of NQFs in the period to come.

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⁽⁵⁾ Informants in the different countries have provided feedback to the draft chapter to avoid mistakes and misinterpretations.

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- the national representatives in the EQF advisory group (see the list of interviewees).
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Table of contents

Foreword	1
Acknowledgements	3
Austria	5
Belgium	8
Belgium (Flanders)	8
Belgium (Wallonia).....	12
Bulgaria	15
Croatia.....	18
Cyprus.....	21
Czech Republic	22
Denmark.....	27
Estonia	30
Finland	34
France	37
Germany	40
Greece	43
Hungary.....	45
Iceland.....	48
Ireland	50
Italy	53
Latvia.....	56
Lithuania.....	58
Luxembourg	58
Malta	60
The Netherlands.....	64
Norway	66
Poland	69
Portugal.....	71
Romania.....	74
Slovakia.....	77
Slovenia	79
Spain	82
Sweden	83
Turkey	85
United Kingdom.....	87
England and Northern Ireland.....	87
Scotland.....	90
Wales.....	92
List of interviewees – Member States representatives in the EQF Advisory Group.....	94
Short overview of the NQF developments.....	96
EQF implementation plan	116

Introduction

There is a political strategy and support by all stakeholders to develop an overarching Austrian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes.

The NQF is planned to be designed and implemented by 2010, when all qualifications of the formal qualification system will be referenced to the Austrian NQF and initial steps taken to integrate non-formal and informal learning.

The NQF development process started after the EQF consultation process in 2006. Most Austrian stakeholders involved in the consultation process agreed on the need for developing an NQF. The first 'fact-finding phase' (February to October 2007) aimed to gather and analyse information, to do research work and to prepare a consultation paper.

The resulting document was used in a broad national consultation process which took place from January to September 2008. A total of about 270 responses were received and the expert team presented its conclusions and recommendations in November 2008 to the National steering group. The report (*Konsolidierung der Stellungnahme zum Konsultationspapier*) analysing the feedback from different stakeholders identified a number of open questions and challenges for the further NQF development (see below).

Based on the results of a broad consultation process (see involvement of stakeholders) the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research are preparing a policy paper to devise the strategy for the Austrian NQF implementation.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main objective of the Austrian NQF is to map all obtainable national qualifications and present them in relation to each other and to make implicit levels of the Austrian qualification system explicit. NQF should help to make Austrian qualifications better understood and comparable in Europe.

Main objectives are:

- facilitating transparent referencing of Austrian qualifications to EQF;
- enhancing transparency and comparability of qualifications;
- strengthening the understanding of Austrian qualifications abroad (internationally);
- improving permeability between VET and HE;
- reinforcing the use of learning outcomes in standard setting, curricula and assessment;
- supporting lifelong learning and enabling stronger links between adult learning sector and the formal education and training system;
- recognising broader range of learning forms (including non-formal and informal learning).

The NQF development process is organised into three strands: formal qualifications, qualifications acquired in non-formal learning (for example in adult education institutions outside the formal education and training system) and informal learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

The General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has initiated and is coordinating the NQF development in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research which is in charge of higher education.

In 2006, an NQF project group was set up. It includes representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. The group coordinates NQF agendas within both ministries and is responsible for strategic planning, commissioning research studies and communication with stakeholders. Members of this group are director general for VET (Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture) as chair, the director general for universities and universities of applied science (Federal Ministry for Science and Research) as co-chair and coordinators of several departments of these two ministries (VET; general education; adult education and lifelong learning; legal issues; management of staff and school; research; universities and universities of applied sciences).

In February 2007, a National NQF steering group was initiated. It is a decision-making body. It includes 23 members of all ministries, social partners and *Länder*. As they are in charge of qualifications development, validation and certification processes in different subsystems and sectors, their main task is also to involve stakeholders from their sphere of influence in the NQF development.

Levels and descriptors

Based on the NQF consultation process an eight-level structure is considered to be sufficiently distinctive to the main characteristics of the Austrian qualification system.

It is proposed that the EQF descriptors, based on knowledge, skills and competence shall be used as a starting point and the basis to develop the NQF.

The national NQF steering groups will discuss whether additional information is necessary (e.g. to include additional table(s) with further dimensions that are considered important for better constructing the levels).

Use of learning outcomes

Austria is moving to strengthen the learning outcome approach in all parts of the education and training system as it will be central to the positioning of qualifications onto the NQF. Many qualifications are already learning outcome oriented, but the approach has not been applied consistently across all sectors and institutions.

In 2005, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture launched a project to develop educational standards for core subject areas in general and VET. The educational standards for VET schools and colleges define 'content' (subject and knowledge areas and topics with specified goals), 'action' (cognitive achievements required in the particular subjects) and additionally personal and social competences related to the respective field are included. Four competences are described: subject-matter competence (declarative

knowledge), methodological competence (procedural knowledge), social competence (ability to communicate, cooperate and interact) and personal competence (being able to steer own actions by self-motivation and self-control).

In apprenticeship (dual system), the training regulation is issued for each profile by the Federal Ministry of Economics. It consists of the 'occupational competence profile' (*Berufsprofil*) with related activities and work descriptions and 'job profile' (*Berufsbild*) with knowledge and skills to be acquired by apprentices.

The *Lehrabschlussprüfung* (final apprenticeship examination) is to assess whether the candidate has acquired the necessary skills and competences for entry to qualified work. It comprises a theoretical and a practical test. Master craftsperson examinations (for manual trade vocations) and examinations to prove the respective competence (for other regulated trades) are organised by the economic chambers in the *Länder*.

In higher education, a 'qualification profile', which describes aims of learning outcomes and definitions of learning outcomes for each module was introduced by the University Act (*Universitätsgesetz*) in 2002.

Referencing to the EQF

The National steering group will presumably be transformed into a referencing committee by the beginning of 2010. The referencing process is expected to start mid 2010. Draft and final referencing reports are expected to be prepared by the end of 2010.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

A broad consultation process was organised in Austria and feedback was received from stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training and social partners. The report analysing the feedback identified a number of open issues and challenges for the further development. It also reflects the (sometimes conflicting) views of different stakeholders.

The consultation paper emphasised that NQFs will have an orientation and communication function to make the existing qualification system visible and help individuals to compare their qualifications and engage in further learning activities. This was broadly supported in the consultation process. However, further debate is needed to decide whether and to which extent NQF should also be used to drive national reform.

Another issue to be addressed in the near future is the allocation of national qualifications to NQF level. There are still several open questions to be discussed (e.g. the issues of partial qualifications, allocation of VET qualifications to levels 6 and above, how to apply the principle of best fit, procedures and operational structures).

Further development is needed to clarify questions relating to the learning outcomes approach in terms of concepts and sound assessment methodologies and tools. How to balance outcome orientation and input factors will be one of the central questions to be answered in the near future.

Experience until now has shown that stakeholder involvement in all phases of the NQF development is both crucial and beneficial. In Austria, a good platform for cooperation

between different stakeholders has been created. Further involvement of stakeholders to strengthen ownership and commitment will be needed. To ensure successful NQF implementation implies the need to engage and include education and training providers and universities.

It is also important that research on learning outcomes in different subsystems of the education and training has been strengthened in recent years.

Main sources of information

Information on the consultation paper, the process and the research work is available on the website of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture:

<http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/nqr/index.xml>.

The EQF National Coordination Point (NCP) has not been designated yet.

BELGIUM

Belgium (Flanders)

Introduction

On 30 April 2009 the Flemish Parliament in Belgium adopted an Act on the qualification structure ⁽⁶⁾ (*kwalificatiestructuur*) introducing an overarching qualification framework. This framework, based on an eight-level structure described by the two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, is now being implemented.

While the Flemish framework is seen as a precondition for referencing to the EQF, it is first and foremost an instrument for improving the national qualifications system. The overall objective is to strengthen the transparency of qualifications and to clarify the mutual relations, vertically and horizontally, between these. A qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process has been developed and implemented (2003). The relationship between the two framework initiatives has been intensively discussed throughout the development process and the 2009 Act takes this into account in its terminology, framework descriptors and procedures.

⁽⁶⁾ The Flemish Government and Parliament: 30 April 2009 – Act on the qualification structure. The Flemish Community of Belgium is responsible for education and training policy and legislation in the Flemish Region and for Dutch-speaking education institutions within the Brussels-Capital region. The Flemish qualification structure is a classification of Flemish qualifications by using an eight-level qualification framework.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The 2009 Act defines the Flemish qualification structure (FQS) as ‘... a systematic classification of recognised qualifications based on a generally adopted qualifications framework (FQF)’. The qualification structure (including the qualification framework) aims at making qualifications and their mutual relations transparent, so that relevant stakeholders in education (students, pupils and providers) and in the labour market (social partners) ‘... can communicate unambiguously about qualifications and the associated competences’ (2009 Act, Chapter I, Article 3).

The Act underlines that the qualification structure (including the qualification framework) should act as a reference for quality assurance, for the development and renewal of courses as well as for the comparison (nationally and at European levels) of qualifications. The quality assurance is being concretely followed up through the establishment of a new Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming, AKOV). The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also to a certain extent influenced the practices of universities. In vocational education and training work is ongoing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners. They will cover all types and levels of qualification, except the higher education qualifications at level 5 to level 8 ⁽⁷⁾, and can thus be seen a key to the overall credibility and success of the overarching framework, domestically as well as at European level (in relation to the EQF).

The Act emphasises furthermore the role of the qualification structure and framework as a reference for validation of non-formal and informal learning and as an orientation point for guidance and counselling.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Flemish NQF process is based on a broad involvement of stakeholders at all stages of the process, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training. Other relevant ministries (labour market, culture, youth, sport) have also been involved in the development. From the education and training side the involvement of all relevant sectors (general education, initial vocational education, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, including short cycle higher education) has been important. The link and overlap between professional and higher or general educational qualifications has been a challenge and the active involvement of stakeholders representing the different levels and types of qualifications has been important.

The adoption of the framework in 2009 has moved the work into a new stage. Stakeholders are concluding that ‘the framework is for real’ and thus paying more attention to the details of its implementation. This requires intensified provision of information, and the

⁽⁷⁾ The quality assurance of higher education qualifications from level 5 to level 8 is followed up through the NVAO (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*). The NVAO is the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders for Higher Education established by an international treaty.

ministry is now organising for experts The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also to a certain extent influenced the practices of universities. In vocational education and training work is ongoing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also to a certain extent influenced the practices of universities. In vocational education and training work is ongoing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners. a series of information sessions on the topic. Later on, a communication campaign to a broader public will be set up in collaboration with the stakeholders.

Levels and descriptors

The decision to base the framework on an eight-level structure described by two main categories of knowledge/skills and context/autonomy/responsibility, reflects a development process which started in 2005. A first proposal contained a 10-level structure but – influenced by the discussion on the EQF – was reduced to eight levels. The relationship between professional and higher education qualifications came immediately to the forefront of discussions. It was acknowledged that while higher education institutes (universities and university colleges) have a ‘monopoly’ on the bachelor, master and doctorate titles, this does not rule out the parallel (at levels 6-8) placing of vocationally oriented qualifications. Several stakeholders (for example representing the adult education institutions providing higher VET courses for adults) asked explicitly for the placing of particular VET qualifications at levels 5 or 6. The identification of this ‘grey zone’ between academically and vocationally-oriented higher education qualifications resulted in the adoption of a set of descriptors using the same general logic at all levels. Representatives from higher education argued that the EHEA (Dublin) descriptors would be the optimal way of describing levels 6-8 as it would allow for a direct integration of the HE framework into the new NQF. This was also linked to an argument that the learning outcomes at levels 6-8 best could be focused on the category of ‘knowledge’. This was not accepted by the majority of involved stakeholders – recognising the need for broad descriptors covering more qualifications – academic, educational and professional.

Another important discussion in the development phase was the question of how to understand the lowest level of the framework. Should there for example be an access level leading into level 1? In particular social partners expressed the fear that introducing a ‘lowest level’ (level 1 or an access level below level 1) could have a negative, stigmatising effect. In the adopted proposal level 1 is defined as starting, not access level.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is not new to the Flemish education and training system: there is a broad political support to the approach. As regards practical implementation

progress varies, in particular when looking at teaching methodologies and assessment practices. The continuing VET sector is probably the most experienced in this field. A competence-based approach is well integrated, referring to professional requirements in the labour market. The use of competences in the Flemish initial VET system has in recent years been inspired by Dutch developments (in particular the MBO reform). Learning outcomes are also present in general education, for example by the setting of learning objectives in national core curricula. The developments in higher education have been influenced by the Bologna process, but are mainly dependent on initiatives taken at the level of single institutions or associations of higher education institutes. While reflecting a diverse situation, a clear shift to learning outcomes can be observed in Flanders. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process, which has to a certain extent influenced the practices of universities. In vocational education and training work is ongoing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners.

The learning outcomes approach is the key to the new Flemish framework. The 2009 Act underlines that the two main types of Flemish qualifications, professional and educational qualifications, are 'well defined sets of competences to which a level of the Flemish qualification framework is assigned' (2009 Act, section II, articles 8 and 9). In professional qualifications these sets of competences are to be exercised within a profession; in educational qualifications they indicate what is required to function and participate in society as well as for progressing in education and training. The Act stresses that both professional and educational qualifications can be found at all eight levels of the framework. This signals an explicit move away from an input-based (provider-based) way of categorising and levelling qualifications.

The new qualification structure strengthens the position of qualifications standards in the Flemish qualification system. These standards are essential when describing and defining the sets of competences referred to above and are seen as necessary for increasing the coherence of the system. Without such coherence, introducing a certain common core of competences across institutions, transfer of qualifications will be difficult, creating dead ends and slowing down progression.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010. The EQF coordination point will be set up late 2009, the committee for the referencing will be set up during 2010.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

Although in Flanders and Belgium there is a long tradition of involving stakeholders and social partners in education and training policy and legislation, the development and maintenance of an overarching classification of qualifications (like the FQS) requires a continuous dialogue with all relevant stakeholders and the deliverance of suitable information

to the different subgroups. This is a never-ending and very delicate task for policy-makers and qualification agencies.

Another challenge encountered in the development of the overarching Flemish framework was to find acceptable solutions to the linking of the already existing higher education framework and procedures and the other parts of the qualifications structure: VET and general non-higher education. Generally speaking, this discussion can be interpreted as a clash between a traditional input-based (institute-based) approach and the new learning outcomes approach. A learning outcomes approach (exemplified by the 2009 Act) will argue that qualifications should be attributed to levels according to the sets of competences, not according to its institutional origin. The input-based approach would argue for the opposite; because a qualification is located outside a particular institutional context (e.g. outside a higher education institute) the assignment of a level should be restricted to a certain level (e.g. not higher than level 5 of EQF). The Flemish experiences in this field are highly relevant both inside and outside Belgium and should be carefully examined in the time to come.

Main sources of information

The Act of 30 April 2009 is downloadable in Dutch on http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/evc_beleid/regelgeving.html

Belgium (Wallonia)

Introduction

The French Community of Belgium (the Walloon region and the French Community of Brussels) has been working on a national qualifications framework linked to the EQF since 2006. The work on a qualifications framework for higher education, linked to the Bologna process, has been going on in parallel. Although there is broad agreement on the need for an NQF as well as for the need to link Belgian qualifications to the European framework(s), the question of how to combine the overarching perspective of the EQF with the more limited, sector approach of the EHEA has still to be fully solved.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The work on an overarching NQF responding to the EQF was initiated by the joint government of the Belgian French Community in March 2006. The high level intergovernmental group (GIHN) was entrusted the task of analysing the implications of the EQF, how to involve stakeholders and how to take forward testing and piloting. GIHN presented a report to the joint government in October 2006 outlining the main principles and objectives of an NQF. This report emphasised that the framework is mainly an instrument for transparency; it should not have any direct/automatic influence on decisions regarding recognition of individual certificates or diploma. The report furthermore emphasised that the

framework should facilitate the development of other tools and instruments for transparency, notably validation of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer. Importantly, the proposal outlined a stepwise approach to the positioning of qualifications according to a learning outcomes-based reference structure.

This proposal was not approved by the joint government. The decision seems to be closely linked to the reluctance of the higher education sector to associate itself with an overarching, EQF-related framework. The approval in May 2008 of a separate decree binding levels 6-8 to the bachelor, master and doctorate cycles of the EHEA confirmed this. Higher qualifications outside the university sector were in effect prevented from being placed at one of these levels, even in cases where their profile and content would recommend such a levelling. In the period following 2008 the discussion on the link between higher education and the remaining parts of education and training has continued. Although still not formally expressed, a common view seems to be that levels 6-8 need to be opened up to non-academic qualifications, for example advanced vocational qualifications. It is emphasised, and in line with the original 2006 proposal, that such a levelling is for transparency purposes only, it will not imply an automatic recognition of equivalences. To make progress on the NQF, a political decision on these matters will be necessary and is expected.

Involvement of stakeholders

As described above the NQF initiative was taken by the joint government of the French region and initially followed up by a high level intergovernmental group. This somewhat centralised approach has been balanced in the practical follow up to the proposal throughout 2007-09. Although not approved in 2006 the original proposal from the GIHN has been followed up and further elaborated in a technical working group (FOREM⁽⁸⁾, IFAPME⁽⁹⁾ – and Brussels Formation). Their proposal has resulted in a wide ranging testing of an ‘NQF methodology’ involving stakeholders (teachers, social partners) from approximately 50 areas of trade and vocation. In spite of the lack of political clarification, the testing and piloting phase have resulted in a wide involvement of stakeholders.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure will be applied, to a large extent reflecting the EQF descriptors.

Use of learning outcomes

In the French-speaking region of Belgium, learning outcomes are integral to a range of recent and ongoing reforms⁽¹⁰⁾. These outcomes are, however, described in various ways

⁽⁸⁾ Le service public wallon de l'emploi et de la formation.

⁽⁹⁾ Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et des petites et moyennes entreprises.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop. *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2009. (Cedefop reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=525 [cited 7.9.2009].

and the extent to which they influence education and training practices differ. In compulsory education and training learning outcomes are described in terms of *socles de compétences* and *compétences terminales*. For adult and higher education the term used is *capacités terminales*. The insistence on a learning outcomes approach in the Bologna process has also influenced the practices of universities. In vocational education and training work is ongoing to define and describe qualifications in term of learning outcomes. These descriptions will be based on the job profiles (professional standards) defined with the involvement of social partners.

An interesting part of the NQF developments in the French region of Belgium is the methodology for placing qualifications at learning outcomes-based NQF levels. This methodology is relevant also for other countries and can illustrate the challenges – and opportunities – inherent in applying a ‘best fit’ approach. The methodology is based on the following four steps (and questions):

- is it possible to position the qualification? In answering this it have to be considered whether the qualification in question is relevant (to the labour market or as part of education and training progression); whether it is defined and awarded by an appropriate and authorise authority; whether there is a clear assessment procedure; and whether there is a title delivered at the end of the learning process.
- how is the qualification positioned to the levels and descriptors of the NQF and the EQF? In answering this, the following is considered: The type of activity, the context of the activity as well as the expected level of responsibility and autonomy.
- how does this qualification relate to other (equivalent) qualifications and to regulations in the labour market (and elsewhere)?
- at what level should the qualification be positioned? Based on the three steps described above a recommendation will be made. The decision on the positioning of the qualification is seen as important not only for transparency reasons, but also as a reference point for quality assurance and reform.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is seen as an integrated part of the overall work on the NQF. It is expected that a referencing report will be presented to the EQF AG in 2010, the exact timing has yet to be clarified.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The experiences of the French-speaking region of Belgium shows the importance of finding a workable link between higher education and the remaining parts of the education and training system. The Belgian experiences demonstrate the highly politicised character of NQF developments, warning against treating them as purely technical or administrative arrangements.

Introduction

Bulgaria is currently developing an overarching national qualifications framework (NQF), based on learning outcomes, i.e. it will include all levels of the education and training system and their corresponding qualifications/degrees. It is expected to be in place by 2010.

The developments are set in the National Lifelong Strategy (LLL) (2008–13) adopted by a Council of Ministers' Decision in October 2008 as a measure to ensure transparency of qualifications.

In April 2008, a task force was set up by an Order of the Minister of Education to develop proposals how to relate the national qualification degrees to the EQF, to prepare a plan for sectoral qualifications development, and to submit a proposal for changes in the national legislation. Currently, the task force is working on the VET-related part. As for general education the working group is waiting for the adoption of a new Law on school and pre-school education development by the Parliament. A new secondary education structure is to be set by this law and it will reflect onto the NQF levels.

The part related to higher education (HE) levels has already been designed in December 2007 by a separated task force. It carried out a self-evaluation of the national descriptors of the currently acting (since 1995) structure of the educational and qualification degrees (bachelor, master and doctorate) introduced by the Higher Education Act (1995) and further amended in the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). A draft of national descriptors for each educational and qualification degree has been elaborated as well. The current NQF draft for higher education is compatible both with the qualifications framework (QF) in the EHEA and the EQF for lifelong learning.

The broad policy framework for NQF development includes:

- the national programme for school and pre-school education development (2006–15), which sets out the new structure of secondary education;
- the national lifelong learning strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2008–13);
- the national strategy for continuing vocational training (2005–10);
- acts governing different subsystems of education and training (in public education, VET, HE).

It is planned that a decree on the introduction of the NQF will be adopted by the Council of Ministers.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The overall objective of developing and introducing an overarching NQF compatible with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is to make the levels of Bulgarian educational system clearer and easier to understand by describing them in terms of learning outcomes. This will improve the extent to which all target groups and stakeholders are informed about the national qualifications. It will help raise trust in the education and training system and make mobility

and recognition of qualifications easier. More specific aims addressed by NQF development are:

- to develop a device with translation and bridging function;
- promoting mobility within the education system and in the labour market;
- promoting learning outcomes orientation of qualifications;
- support validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning;
- stronger orientation towards lifelong learning approach;
- stronger cooperation with the stakeholders.

Having a single document which includes all qualifications that can be acquired in formal education and training is expected to make designing sectoral qualifications frameworks easier.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Science has a leading role in drafting the NQF and in coordinating its implementation. The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for coordinating the development work.

In the development work, a broad range of different stakeholders is involved:

The task force responsible for drafting the NQF includes experts from the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Agency for VET, the National Information and Documentation Centre and the Bulgarian representative in the Bologna Follow Up Group.

The draft NQF will be submitted to Working Group 16 'Education, mutual recognition of professional qualifications, youth, science and research', where representatives of the responsible ministries and other institutions and stakeholders including social partners participate. The Council of European Affairs will also be involved to comment on the NQF draft.

A broad national consultation process is planned to discuss the NQF draft with different stakeholders. It is foreseen that the proposal will be officially approved and adopted by the Council of Ministers in form of a decree.

Levels and descriptors

The NQF draft comprises eight levels like in the EQF, taking into account the specific features of the national education system and ISCED 97. This was considered the most optimal option.

The levels in the NQF draft are described according to the descriptors of the QF-EHEA and the EQF in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The expected learning outcomes of qualifications are described by the legal acts governing different subsystems of education and training (see below).

Use of learning outcomes

For the general education part and VET, standards are set and described in the State educational requirements on acquisition of qualification by professions and in the State educational requirements on the educational contents.

The State educational requirements in VET include: access requirements, a brief description of the profession, learning objectives, learning outcomes, requirements about facilities, and required qualifications of teachers and trainers. Learning outcomes are defined as knowledge, skills and personal capabilities. The state educational requirements are developed by expert groups, evaluated by tripartite committees (state institutions, employers, employees' representatives) and approved by the Minister of Education and Science.

In general education, the State educational requirements are related to the curriculum and the syllabus for each subject, as well as the knowledge and skills expected after the completion of the respective educational level.

For higher education, there are State educational requirements for acquisition of higher education at educational and qualification degrees of Bachelor, Master, and Specialist (2003); they set the expected learning outcomes for each of these degrees. The Specialist degree was replaced by the Professional Bachelor degree in 2007 by amendments and supplements of the Higher Education Act. At institution level there are qualification descriptions for each specialty (by educational and qualification degrees). They describe the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by the graduates.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is seen as an integrated part of the overall work on the NQF. A task force for NQF development was set up in April 2008 to develop a table of concordance of the national qualifications degrees to EQF by 2010.

The alignment of HE qualifications to QF-EHEA and to EQF through self evaluation was completed in 2007.

Main lessons learned and the way forward

The development of sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQF) is considered very important. By SQFs the sectoral qualifications will be described in more clear and transparent way for all target groups and stakeholders, using learning outcomes approach and linking them to the credit system where applicable. It will also commit all the stakeholders and social partners by sectors together to join the process.

Main sources of information

The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Education and Science is designated as the EQF national coordination point (NCP), <http://www.minedu.government.bg>

Introduction

An overarching NQF based on learning outcomes is being developed, i.e. the Croatian framework for lifelong learning (CROQF) will link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. It is expected to be completed by 2009.

The work started in 2006, when the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a joint working group of experts from vocational education and training and higher education. In July 2007, a proposal of CROQF Baselines was adopted by the government. It contains: basic terminology, list of existing legislation, goals, principles, proposal with levels, an annex with the description of the current education system and EQF, and NQF examples from some European countries.

In September 2007, the High Level Committee approved a five-year action plan and programme for 2008–12 with the following activities:

- instruction for CROQF development with examples of qualifications (2009);
- guidelines for curricula development, proposal for legislative changes (2010);
- development of curricula (2011–12).

The rationale and the main policy objectives

It is agreed that CROQF could help to address some current needs of the Croatian society and education and training system. Besides the EQF development national priorities are a strong impetus to develop a CROQF. There is a need to:

- better link education and training system with the labour market needs;
- improve social inclusion and equity;
- improve pathways between subsystem and between sectors;
- make qualifications transparent and more consistent;
- support lifelong learning and have a good basis for validation of non-formal learning;
- support quality assurance arrangements.

The short-term objective is to make the different types of qualifications more transparent and learning achievements and the system more understandable for individuals and employers. A platform will be created to support a strong partnership and commitment.

In the medium and longer term, it is expected that CROQF will contribute to making the qualification system and qualifications more coherent and consistent, thus improving access and progression possibilities. This should also make it easier to develop procedures and standards for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, help to improve responsibility and accountability of institutions and promote learning.

It is also generally accepted that qualifications should be described in a way that can be understood abroad to support recognition of Croatian qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

There is a strong political commitment to the NQF developments, the CROQF process is embedded at government level.

The work was initiated in 2006 by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. A High Level Committee for development of CROQF was established in September 2007. It is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and comprises 27 members. They represent different ministries, social partners, schools, universities and agencies.

The Committee cooperates closely with the Bologna follow-up group and lately also with the National Curricula Committee.

In April 2008, an operational team, composed of members of different ministries, social partners, and agencies, was established by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports to support the High Level Committee. Its main tasks are to prepare documents for adoption by the Committee and conduct research.

Levels and descriptors

The CROQF will have eight levels with additional four sublevels at levels 4, 5, 7 and 8, reflecting the particularities of the Croatian qualification system. The levels reflect the NQS and are in line with EQF.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge (theoretical and factual) and skills (cognitive and practical, additionally social skills are included). A third column is defined as responsibility and autonomy.

The CROQF will introduce two classes of qualifications, 'full' and 'partial' qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of the CROQF development and is supported by all relevant stakeholders.

A wider commission of experts from all stakeholders was nominated in September 2007, whose role it is to define common standards. They will serve as a basis for development of detailed descriptions for all qualifications based on measurable learning outcomes and competences. A methodology is being prepared.

The VET reform agenda includes a move towards outcome-based approach in standards and curricula. In adult education, occupational standards and outcomes-based curricula are being developed on a pilot basis. A new approach to evaluation of schools outputs introduces a system of common final exams for grammar schools and other four-year secondary schools in Croatian language, mathematics, the first foreign language, and the mother tongue for ethnic minority pupils.

Higher education was subject to the most extensive changes in Croatia. By its decision to take part in the Bologna process in 2001, Croatia agreed to adjust its higher education system to the EHEA. The implementation of undergraduate (first cycle) and integrated (second cycle) programmes started in 2005. The change of curricula is aiming at development of competences needed on the labour market, but the functional link between

higher education institutions and the labour market, and social community in particular, has not been established yet.

Croatia is beginning to consider the validation of non-formal and informal learning, largely in response to the requirements of the European integration process and more specifically to the requirements for participation in the Integrated Lifelong Learning European Community programmes. A government agency for adult education was recently established. It will be in charge of accrediting non-formal education providers.

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing process of the CROQF to the EQF is planned to start in 2010 and should be completed by the end of this year. International experts and representatives of the main national and international partners will be included. The second stage of EQF implementation, introducing a reference to the EQF in all new qualifications, should be completed by 2012.

The lessons learned and the way forward

The development work showed that broad partnership, support to and adequate training of all stakeholders at different levels and stimulating active participation are considered to be important factors for success. Active collaboration at international level can provide new insights, help develop adequate expertise and mirror national development in the broader picture.

How to ensure the use of coherent concepts across different subsystems and sectors and how to engage institutions and groups of interests have proved to be challenging tasks so far. However, some effects are already visible: strong demand for information from different groups signal increased awareness and interest in the CROQF and its potential benefits; cooperation among different stakeholders has been strengthened. A progressive, step-by-step development is emphasised.

Main sources of information

The EQF national contact point (NCP) for Croatia is the High Level Committee for Development of CROQF, Croatian Government, <http://hko.vlada.hr>

Introduction

Cyprus is developing an overarching national qualifications framework (NQF), which will include all types of qualifications in line with the qualification framework for European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the EQF for lifelong learning.

The system of vocational qualifications whose implementation has begun is expected to constitute an integral part of the future NQF for all levels of education and training.

Consultation among major stakeholders has taken place (see below). A proposal to create an overarching NQF was approved by the Council of Ministers. In July 2008, the Council of Ministers decided to set up a Committee in charge of design, implementation and monitoring of the NQF development.

The rationale and the main policy objectives

Main policy objectives to be realised through NQF development are:

- facilitating the comparability of national qualifications in Europe;
- improving transparency, quality and relevance of qualifications;
- enabling increased progression and mobility;
- strengthening the link with the labour market;
- strengthening the partnerships between different subsystems of education and training.

Involvement of stakeholders

The General Directorate for Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated and coordinates the NQF developments.

The Committee in charge (see above) comprises representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resources Development Authority.

A subgroup has started working on the design and principles of the NQF; the draft will be discussed in the broad consultation process. An administrative office will be set up to support the work of the Committee. Consultation with social partners is ongoing.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure is envisaged to cover the main characteristics of the national qualification system and be compatible with the EQF also in terms of principles and categories. The discussion on the inclusion of partial qualifications with relevance for the labour market will be part of the national consultation process.

Use of learning outcomes

While more emphasis will be put on learning outcomes, inputs aspects will also remain important.

The gradual development taking into account different practices and expectations of different stakeholders is acknowledged.

A competence-based vocational qualifications system has been set up under the responsibility of the Human Resources Development Authority. It will support validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Assessment of VET courses is related to occupational standards.

Learning outcomes are being expressed as part of a subject and stage-based general education system. In the curriculum, learning outcomes are described as knowledge, skills and attitudes and awareness learners are expected to achieve at the end of each stage. There are level descriptors indicating the standards learner should achieve, when awarded certificates at different levels of education.

Lessons learned and the way forward

Broad involvement of different stakeholders taking into account the specifics of the national situation and learning from good practices in other countries are important.

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education and Culture: <http://www.moec.gov.cy>

CZECH REPUBLIC

Introduction

In 2005, work on a national qualifications framework (NQF) started in the Czech Republic. The framework will be overarching and cover all types of qualifications in all subsystems of education and training. The core of the NQF is a publicly accessible register (repertoire) of all complete and partial qualifications and their qualifications and assessment standards. The objective is to create a transparent overview providing comprehensive information on qualifications to pupils and students, parents, employers, schools and those interested in education.

The Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education (2006) is of fundamental importance as it establishes the legislative basis on which the NQF is built. The NQF forms an important element of the lifelong learning strategy of the Czech Republic.

From 2005 to 2008, two projects (the NSK project – Development of NQF and UNIV project – Recognition of non-formal and informal learning) run by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports aimed at developing and partially implementing the NQF. They were

funded with support from the European Social Fund (ESF). Both significantly reinforced the role of the social partners (especially employers) and their influence on the qualifications structure as well as the contents and implementation of educational programmes leading to attaining qualifications.

At the level of tertiary education the decision to develop a national qualifications framework for tertiary education was taken by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 2005. The ministry made the development of this framework a priority objective in its strategic plan for 2006-10. The conditions for implementing the framework are provided for by the existing legislation on HE institutions and tertiary technical schools. The national generic descriptors were suggested as to follow from the Dublin descriptors while taking into account of the EQF descriptors and the needs of the Czech education system. It is supposed that the part for tertiary education will create a subsystem of the overarching NQF, thus respecting the specific features of the qualifications which are gained at higher education and tertiary professional schools.

In 2009, a new project of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports called The development and implementation of the NQF (NSK2) started. It will complete and support further NQF development. The part of the NQF concerned with the tertiary subsystem will be designed under Q-RAM project funded from the ESF as well.

The rationale and the main policy objectives

The national objective to create an open area of lifelong learning and support recognition and permeability was a key factor. The proposal and the subsequent project of the NQF development (NSK) were broadly discussed (see below) and became the backbone of the Czech lifelong learning strategy.

The objectives, based on the identified needs, are as follows:

- linking the subsystems in the national education system and improving its permeability;
- making the whole system more readable for all stakeholders, namely students and employers;
- linking initial and continuing education and learning;
- building the base for the recognition of learning outcomes irrespective of the way they were achieved;
- systematic involvement of all stakeholders in vocational education and training and in the development of qualifications (at national level);
- response to European initiatives such as making qualifications more transparent and supporting the mobility of learners and workers;
- support for disadvantaged groups and people with low qualification levels.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education, which came into force in 2007, sets out the basic responsibilities, powers and rights of all stakeholders involved.

- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports coordinates the activities of the central administrative authorities (ministries), approves, modifies, removes and issues the list of partial and complete qualifications and funds the activities of the National Qualification Council.
- Authorising bodies (other ministries) grant authorisation to individuals or legal entities upon verification that they meet the requirements stipulated by the law, monitor the fulfilment of requirements for assessment, collect data as set out in the law and submit them to the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) for central record keeping, participate in the preparation and updating of qualifications and assessment standards.
- Authorised bodies (schools, associations, companies, public or private providers of further education, etc.) assess applicants' learning outcomes regardless of the way they were achieved.
- Social partners (chambers of employers, professional organisations, schools, representatives of universities) participate in the development of qualification and assessment standards.
- The National Qualifications Council acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in the area of qualifications.
- NUOV manages and administers the NQF and in cooperation with the National Qualifications Council, the MoEYS, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other stakeholders prepares proposals of qualification and assessment standards and submits them for approval to MoEYS, publishes qualifications and assessment standards, includes them into the NQF.

NUOV is entrusted by the MoEYS with important responsibilities including the research, development and coordination of the NQF. The Czech NCP's task is also to coordinate and ensure cooperation of various activities including the Bologna process. Therefore it consists of:

1. the NUOV work group – develops documents and proposals, provides the operational agenda, coordinates communication with all relevant national and international parties, etc.;
2. the advisory group – focuses on consultation, the dissemination of information and evaluation of methodology and NCP's outputs. It includes representatives of the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions, the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic, the Regional Authority of the Ústí Region, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, NUOV, the Czech Confederation of Commerce and Tourism, the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Masaryk University, Charles University and the Centre for Higher Education Studies;
3. the work group of the National Qualifications Council will relate Czech qualifications levels to the EQF.

Levels and descriptors

The proposal suggests eight levels similar to EQF levels. In August 2009, the governing committee of the MoEYS approved the document Qualification levels in the NQF, descriptors of levels and their referencing to the EQF. The document describes the levels 1-4. Descriptors of levels 5-8 will be discussed and approved by the end of 2009.

The qualifications levels are differentiated by levels of competences (see below).

A conversion table refers to the EQF levels and includes references to the national system of occupations and the current education levels.

In the tertiary education system there will be three layers of descriptors. The most general will be the national descriptors, as mentioned above, based on the Dublin descriptors and incorporating the EQF descriptors at the same time. These descriptors will frame all fields of education at the given level (5-8, i.e. tertiary professional, bachelor, master and doctorate).

The next layer will be based on more specified sectoral descriptors, i.e. the descriptors which cover specificities for a certain cluster of disciplines. These descriptors will be developed in cooperation of all stakeholders (see below). In such a composition the developed descriptors will reflect the needs of the labour market will underline specificities of a respective cluster and will serve as contours for institutions to make the third level – programme descriptors and define the professional profile of the degree programme.

The programme descriptors will specify the programme and descriptors could be used even for its components. The programme descriptors have to be subordinated to the 'sectoral descriptors' otherwise it would not be possible to interlink the NQF with the national system of occupations.

Use of learning outcomes

A competence-based learning outcomes approach is the common denominator of all educational processes or activities and is accepted in VET and HE. It has political support, which is documented and confirmed by the curricular reform of vocational education (including relevant methodologies), by the Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education and is embedded in the Czech lifelong learning strategy.

The NQF consists of qualification and assessment standards for complete and partial qualifications.

The competence model is the fundamental principle that links occupation – qualification – learning and educational programmes – examination, recognition and certification. It is not only applied in the NQF development, but also in the national system of occupations.

Each competence has both a skill and a knowledge component. Each competence is therefore classified both according to the type of activity and level of knowledge (expertise). This implies that competences have not only a 'knowledge' dimension, i.e. field or discipline, but also an 'activity' dimension. The activity dimension is considered primary. The classification therefore starts from a two-level numerical code for the type of work activity, which was developed on the basis of detailed investigation and abstraction of work activities. To that, subject or discipline category is added, taking into account particular specialisations.

The School Act, which came into force in 2005, legally regulates the curricular reform at secondary school level, emphasising learning outcomes and strengthening the influence of the social partners, especially employers.

The qualifications and assessment standards represent the starting point for the development of comprehensive educational programmes. Students learn key competencies and expand their general and vocational (professional) education.

The concept and particularly the methodology of the recognition of learning outcomes including non-formal and informal learning are currently being developed.

Referencing to the EQF

The NCP will play a key role in the process (see above). A steering committee for referencing was set up in 2009. A draft report is expected to be prepared by 2010 and the final report by 2011. The MoEYS is the responsible body that approves all proposals, decisions and documents prepared by the NCP.

The lessons learned and the way forward

The present situation in the development of the NQF in the Czech Republic is the result of a targeted effort to create a system that will build on the good starting situation in vocational education and qualifications, will maintain the advantages related to this and will add new opportunities and the necessary European dimension. This development has been confirmed for a long period of time by a number of important activities that are directly connected to the description of qualifications and broad involvement of different stakeholders. The new MoEYS's project NSK2, which started in May 2009, will build on the achievement and experience gained.

In tertiary education, several seminars were held in 2008 to facilitate discussion. The results of these seminars were incorporated into the draft documents. Further discussion is expected as the work progresses. Detailed discussions will be held in 'sectoral (branch) boards' composed of representatives of higher education institutions, tertiary professional schools, accreditation commission, employers and students as well as graduates in the respective fields. There is specific challenge for institutions how to bridge the 'traditional' approach based on the curricula and courses into the 'modern' learning outcomes methodology. This work is at the beginning, but there are some emerging interesting examples – e.g. the project designed together with the universities of technology.

Main sources of information

- The National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) is the EQF NCP, which manages the operational agenda and creates proposals of the NCP for the referencing qualifications levels to the EQF: <http://www.nuov.cz>.
- Register on all approved qualification and assessment standards is available on <http://www.narodni-kvalifikace.cz>

Introduction

An overarching Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning is currently being put in place. A detailed outline of the framework was published in June 2009 and provides the basis for an implementation stage to be finalised mid/end 2010. The work on the framework was initiated in 2006 when an inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives from the ministries of education, research, technology and development, culture as well as economy was set up. The Danish NQF work is closely linked to ongoing reforms of the education and training system particularly in vocational education and training, and the current proposal also builds on the qualification framework for higher education established in 2006/07 and integrates this into the overarching framework. The idea of an overarching qualifications framework was first raised in the context of the 2005-06 work on a national strategy on globalisation ('A Government strategy for Denmark in the Global Economy') where a coherent qualifications system aiming at permeability and transparency was emphasised. European developments also played a significant role in and the setting up of the inter-ministerial group in 2006 was triggered by the preparatory work on the EQF launched by the European Commission and the Council in 2004/05.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main purpose of the Danish NQF is to provide a better overview over all officially recognised public qualifications in the Danish system⁽¹¹⁾ and to support mutual recognition of Danish and foreign qualifications. This overview is supposed to make visible the pathways leading to a qualification, how they can be acquired and what they can be used for. Being fully based on a learning outcomes approach the framework aims to make it easier to compare different degrees and certificates and to see how they relate to each other. The framework can thus be seen as an effort to realise an education, training and learning system always making it possible for individuals to progress, be this vertically or horizontally and irrespective of their prior learning, age or employment situation. The following concrete purposes are being listed. The framework should:

- support lifelong learning by making visible the different pathways inherent in the education system;
- create a basis for comparison and recognition within the Danish system and thus facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning (*Realkompetanse*);
- support mutual recognition of Danish and foreign qualifications by establishing a reference between the Danish NQF and the EQF;

⁽¹¹⁾ A qualification is defined as the 'outcomes of learning processes having been assessed and documented through the issuing of a publicly/officially recognised degree or certificate'.

- through a focus on learning outcomes clarify the relationship between education and training and the labour market.

The main objective of the Danish NQF is thus to increase transparency and facilitate comparison and translation (domestically as well as internationally), it has limited regulatory functions. The qualification framework for higher education forms a part of the legal basis on which Danish higher education is based and has by law on accreditation of higher education a regulatory function.

A separate framework for VET was considered as part of a work on reforming VET, but it was, as part of the setting up the inter-ministerial working group, decided to adopt an approach including all public qualifications from compulsory school certificates to university degrees emphasising overview, permeability and mutual recognition of qualifications (reference to EQF). Following lengthy discussions (mostly between the ministries involved) a solution was reached on an eight-level structure covering all existing levels and types of officially recognised public qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

In the proposal the following main stakeholders have been identified:

- Danish and foreign pupils and students (need a comprehensive overview over the system);
- employers and employees (need a framework for judging and comparing qualifications);
- guidance and counselling services (need a comprehensive overview);
- Danish and foreign education and training institutions and authorities (need a framework for overview, guidance and for facilitating recognition);
- political authorities and institutions (to describe, develop and evaluate education and training).

The inter-ministerial group set up in 2006 reflects this broad range of stakeholders and consisted of representatives from the ministries of education, research, technology and development, culture as well as economy. The social partners have been systematically consulted and involved throughout the process including seminars, national consultation and involvement of relevant education councils and training committees, as have representatives of the different education and training institutions. The role of the social partners is being described as both positive and critical and their positive support to developments is seen as a precondition for moving towards implementation in 2010. Social partners have widely seen the NQF as an instrument for national reform, its European and international implications have been less emphasised. Some concern has been expressed by the social partners as regards the possible impact on curriculum development and existing governance structures and practices.

Levels and descriptors

The eight-level structure referred to above is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences⁽¹²⁾ (*Kompetenser*). The Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, notably existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, the Bologna descriptors, etc. They have been designed to be relevant to different types of qualifications, theoretically as well as practically oriented.

- Knowledge descriptors emphasise the different types of viden involved, their complexity and the extent of understanding/comprehension required at a particular level.
- Skills descriptors focus on the types of *færdigheder* involved, the complexity of tasks to be solved and the communicative challenges involved.
- Competences are described by emphasising the context, the aspects of cooperation and responsibility and the aspect of learning (to learn).

Although applying these general principles at all levels, there's a clear distinction between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8. Levels 6-8 contain clear references to the 'Dublin descriptors' developed for the Bologna process and contains explicit references to research related outcomes. The difference between these two main parts of the framework is illustrated by the use of two different principles for referring qualifications to the framework. This implies that qualifications at levels 1-5 are referred according to a 'best fit' principle where the final decision is based on an overall judgement of knowledge, skills and competences. A principle of 'full fit' is used for levels 6-8, implying that a qualification at this level have to be fully accredited as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities (and the QF for higher education) for qualifications at these levels.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of the education and training system and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. VET in particular have a strong tradition in defining their qualifications in terms of competence, but also higher education and the different parts of general education are 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.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing to the EQF is treated as an integrated part of the overall implementation of the NQF. The Danish referencing report is planned for October 2010.

The referencing of VET qualifications levels to the EQF may prove a challenge. A coherent use of learning outcomes will make it necessary, according to a 'best fit' principle,

⁽¹²⁾ Note that the Danish NQF, in opposition to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

to place existing VET qualifications at different levels of the framework. Such a development is already in progress with introduction of stepwise qualifications in the Danish VET system. Some worry is expressed in relation to the practices in other countries; will the referencing of VET qualifications be based on a genuine 'best fit' approach or will countries also to some extent base their referencing on political considerations?

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

Denmark has made rapid progress in developing their qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Based on the roadmap presented in June 2009 Denmark will have a fully implemented NQF by 2010 and will also have completed the referencing to the EQF by then. This success has largely been achieved by accepting that not all problems can be solved immediately and an NQF will need to develop also beyond 2012. The distinction between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8 is seen as a compromise solution in order to establish an overall coherent qualification framework also building on the level structure and principles of the Danish 'Bologna' qualification framework. Another issue which has been raised, but not solved, is the potential inclusion of certificates and diploma awarded outside the public domain. This issue will be considered on the basis of the evaluation of the framework and further work on how inclusion of non public certificates and diplomas can be including in the future development of the framework. An important lesson to be drawn from the Danish case is the need for a pragmatic, step-by-step approach.

ESTONIA

Introduction

An overarching national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) is currently being developed in Estonia. It will cover the full range of professional competences. The framework builds on a learning outcomes (competence) approach and supports validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and HE.

The framework-initiative is based on the amended Professions Act which came into force in September 2008 and supports the transition from the present competence-based five-level qualification system to the new eight-level framework.

The learning outcomes descriptors for HE levels were approved in August 2007 by the Higher education standard in accordance with the qualification framework for European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Since January 2009 the levels of HE are linked with the NQF, described in the Professions Act. The outcome-based programmes will be implemented in HE institutions as from September 2009.

Similar processes as regards learning outcome approach are taking place in VET. The learning outcomes of different types of VET are described in the Vocational education

standard, which is currently being discussed in the Parliament and is expected to be approved and enter into force in January 2010. All types of VET will be formally linked with the levels of NQF. The programmes in VET (currently 44 national programmes) are modularised and outcome-based. All the programmes will be reassessed in the future taking into consideration possible changes in the occupational (professional) standards, thus aiming at increased compatibility of educational and professional (occupational) qualifications. This will be step by step development in each sector.

These developments are supported by a number of European Social Fund (ESF) projects such as 'Development of the qualification system', 'Developing VET system' and 'Developing HE systems quality –Primus'.

The Estonian Qualification Authority (QA) (Kutsekoda) was established in 2001 with the aim to further develop the professional qualifications system. Besides the Ministry of Education and Research, this qualifications authority is the main institution involved in the implementation of the NQF, but also different ministries, institutions (National Examination and Qualification Centre, employers, agencies, etc.) are involved. The Estonian QA has been organising the activities of professional councils as well as the development, amendment and improvement of the professional standards, and establishment of assessment criteria.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The goal of the eight-level NQF is to improve the comparability between formal school leaving certificates and work-based (professional) competences and qualifications, which open the entrance to the labour market. In Estonia, the graduation certificate from a VET or HE institution alone does not give the graduate a professional qualification. The primary professional award (qualification) can be obtained by passing a professional examination by awarding bodies in the professions. Currently only one third of VET graduates take this exam.

In the past years, different sectoral approaches towards understanding and using the previous five-level qualifications framework were developed. Occupational standards and educational programmes were weakly linked. The policy objectives addressed by NQF are:

- improve the link between education/training and labour market;
- increase consistency of educational offer and qualification system;
- provide transparency for employers and individuals;
- increase the understanding of Estonian qualifications;
- introduce common quality assurance criteria;
- support validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- monitor the supply and demand for learning.

It is expected that development of the NQF will increase the coherence of the education and training system and help to introduce coherent methods for standard setting. The NQF is also seen as an instrument for broader involvement of stakeholders in education and training, thus potentially strengthening ownership and mutual trust.

Involvement of stakeholders

The main institutions involved in the development of the NQF are: the Ministry of Education and Research (coordinating body), the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (REKK), the Qualifications Authority, the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions, Estonian Employers' Confederation, and Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation.

- The Ministry of Education and Research coordinates and performs national monitoring on qualification preparation and development.
- The Qualifications Authority coordinates 16 professional councils and provides technical support to the Board (see below); it cooperates with other institutions e. g. the national examination centre, the agency for quality in HE.
- The Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Estonian Employers' Confederation and Central Federation of Trade Unions participate in professional councils which are responsible for preparing, amending, renewing or validating professional standards.
- The National Examination and Qualification Centre is responsible for preparing, registering and developing VET curricula.

A Board of chairmen of Professional Councils has been introduced by the amended Professions Act to improve cross-sectoral cooperation and coherence in the qualification system.

All stakeholders are represented in the Board of Estonian QA, which make strategic decisions. Technical support is provided by QA, which cooperate with other institutions, e.g. the National Examination Centre, Agency for Quality in HE.

Close cooperation with the Bologna implementation is ensured through the National Commission, which monitor the implementation of the ESF programme. Financial support is provided through ESF and national budget (financing of QA).

Levels and descriptors

The NQF is based on eight levels, which reflect EQF levels and descriptors (knowledge, skills and competence).

There is a discussion ongoing on:

- including also partial qualifications in the NQF, which should have value on the labour market;
- using units in the qualifications design.

Use of learning outcomes

There is strong will and support to introduce and implement the learning outcomes approach as a part of the national reform programme for general education, VET and HE. Linked to this is an increased focus on recognition of prior learning. Teacher training is seen as a necessary part in realising this strategy, which also is supported by research projects.

As a result of a previous project 700 professional standards (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence) have been elaborated and 44 new outcome-based curricula for VET have been prepared and will be implemented in the next years.

A new model of occupational standards is to be gradually developed in the period 2008-13 as obligatory basis for curriculum development. Estonia aims at integrating occupational and educational standards as a foundation for qualification standard.

The adopted Estonian lifelong learning strategy emphasises the principle that all strategic national, regional and local documents should pay considerable attention to the development of the lifelong learning system, including the recognition of prior learning and work experience.

The Universities Act and Applied Higher Education Institutions Act now allow for accreditation of prior and experiential learning in HE curricula. Similar amendments to the VET Institutions Act are passing the parliament in the moment and will be in force in January 2010.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A specific challenge in the last few years has been to improve methodological coherence across different sectors in standard setting (700 standards followed different concepts).

The five years of experience with a competence framework for VET will be used for further development of NQF and supporting more coherent national policies for lifelong learning. The NQF will act as a common reference point for education and the labour market and thus support mutual trust between education and labour market; and recognition of learning outcomes acquired in different settings.

Main sources of information

- Estonian Qualification Authority is designated as EQF national contact point (NCP) www.kutsekoda.ee
- Information on NQF development is available on <http://www.valew.eu/project-valew/project-partners/6-estonian-qualification-authority>

Introduction

Finland is currently working on an overarching national qualifications framework covering all officially recognised qualifications (general, vocational education and training and higher education). An outline of this framework, to be used as a basis for a wide-ranging consultation among all relevant stakeholders, was finalised 30 June 2009. The work on the Finnish framework started as late as August 2008 but has progressed rapidly since then. A qualification framework for higher education, in line with the Bologna process, has been developed since 2005 and will form an integrated part of the overarching framework for lifelong learning. A new Law regulating the framework is currently being prepared and is expected to be presented to the Finnish Parliament for adoption in 2010. This Law will bring together all the qualifications as they have been provided in various existing acts and decrees and enable the description of requirement levels, etc.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The work on the Finnish NQF was directly triggered by the debate on the EQF. While Finnish stakeholders supported the idea of a European reference framework, they originally saw little added value of an NQF in Finland. The Finnish system, it was argued, was already transparent, it was already to a large extent based on a learning outcomes approach and it allowed users to build on and combine qualifications in a flexible way. Finland therefore expressed the opinion, for example in the 2006 response to the EQF consultation, that a referencing could be accomplished without an NQF. According to these arguments an NQF would add little value but instead require time and resources better used elsewhere. Following an extensive debate this position has changed. There's now agreement that an NQF has a role to play in future improvements of the national qualification system, in particular by offering a reference for future reforms and by further clarifying learning pathways and progression routes. The introduction of a coherent set of learning outcomes-based levels is furthermore seen as a way to facilitate the referencing to the EQF.

In the mandate given to the August 2008 working group it is emphasised that the NQF should include qualifications defined in the legislation of the Ministry of Education and other branches of the administration. It is furthermore stated that the NQF will not include practices/requirements linked to the regulation of the labour market (regulating professional practices, etc.). The mandate emphasises, however, the role of the framework for promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning (prior learning).

An issue which have been discussed but not concluded is how to open the framework up to 'qualifications' acquired outside the traditional, formal education and training system (for example originating from professional training in occupations or sectors). While such an opening is being stressed as an ambition, it is seen as a long term challenge requiring concrete solutions – not least as regards quality assurance arrangements.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Finnish NQF process has been organised to include as broad a range of stakeholders as possible. While initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Education, the working group responsible for preparing the NQF proposal consisted of the following representatives: the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Defence Command Finland (Ministry of Defence), Finnish National Board of Education, Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland – AKAVA, Confederation of Finnish Industries – EK, Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions – SAK, Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Finnish Confederation of Professionals – STTK, the Association of Vocational Adult Education Centres – AKKL, Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences – ARENE, Vocational Education Providers in Finland – KJY, Finnish Association of Principals, The Finnish Council of University Rectors, Finnish Adult Education Association, The National Union of University Students in Finland and the Union of Finnish upper-secondary students.

The wide scope of stakeholders included in the working groups signals an inclusive approach seeking as strong ownership as possible from the start. This approach is further strengthened by the intention to carry out a wide ranging consultation process autumn 2009. The decision to base the NQF on a specific Law, and thus the involvement of the Finnish Parliament, could further strengthen the basis of the initiative.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level framework described through knowledge, skills and competence is suggested. The descriptors have been inspired by the EQF but adopted to suit the national context. This is in particular the case for competence where additional aspects like entrepreneurship and languages have been added. This may be seen as a way to strengthen the dimensions of key competences and lifelong learning. The descriptors for levels 6-8 have been adjusted to Dublin descriptors.

Use of learning outcomes

The use of a learning outcomes-based approach is not new to the Finnish qualification system. Finnish VET, for example, has used a competence-based approach since the early 1990s. This approach has made it possible to integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning into the system, allowing for flexible access, progression and certification. Learning outcomes is increasingly used to define qualifications also in other parts of the education and training system. This is illustrated by higher education where extensive work is currently being carried out in this field.

These learning outcomes approaches are determined in different ways, for example by the national core curricula, by national requirements for qualifications and in the laws and decrees regulating universities. So far, no common standards or requirement have been introduced in this field. The approaches used by different subsystems and institutions

therefore vary considerably. While this may allow for tailor made and fit-for-purpose solutions; it may also threaten the overall consistency of the approach.

While there is a broad agreement on the positive potential of a learning outcomes approach, disagreements on the concrete application of the approach are common. Some question whether the focus on outcomes weakens attention to the learning process and the facilitating role of teachers and trainers. The role of the teachers in taking forward the learning outcomes approach will be decisive.

Assessment of learning outcomes is an area which will be given particular attention. Work has started in higher education but will also be followed up for the rest of the education and training system.

Referencing to the EQF

The Finnish National Coordination Point for EQF (which will be the National Board of Education) was appointed already in June 2008 (before the work on the NQF started). The referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF has started and a draft report is expected in the first half of 2010. The final referencing report is expected to be presented to the EQF AG early 2010.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The Finnish debate illustrates that the added value of NQFs can not be taken for granted but has to be judged according to the national context and according to specific national needs. The change in position from 2006 (in the response to the EQF consultation) to 2008 (the setting up of the NQF working group) can therefore be seen as an appreciation of the potential of NQFs as a reference for future national developments and for international cooperation.

Main sources of information

- www.minedu.fi
- www.oph.fi/recognition

Introduction ⁽¹³⁾

The setting up, in 2002, of the National committee on professional certificates (CNCP) signals the establishment of the overarching French national qualifications framework. Supported by a register (repertoire) on professional certificates and the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (*validation aquis experientielle*), the French framework can be seen as a 1st generation of European qualifications frameworks.

Taking into account experiences made since 2002, and in particular the impact of the EQF, a revision of the original framework is now underway. The five-level structure introduced already in 1969 will therefore (probably) be changed, most likely into an eight-level structure. A coherent set of descriptors is already in use (although not exclusively, some countries use them as regulatory instruments) at all levels and for all qualifications, differentiated through the concepts of skills, knowledge and competence.

A note on this revision, and on the referencing to the EQF, is currently being prepared for the Prime Minister. This note will present the objectives set at European level, outline the methodologies to be used to reach these as well as list the changes which needs to be made to the existing structure. This process will be finalised by the end of 2009 and pave the way towards what we may term a second generation French qualifications framework to be implemented from 2010 and onwards.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The revisions currently taking place do not change the basic objectives underpinning the French framework – *transparency and quality assurance*. The development of the EQF has strengthened the international comparative dimension of the work, as has the support to the Bologna process.

We can observe a strong focus on *skills* in the French NQF. This reflects what is perceived as a problem in education and training in general and in higher education in particular. More and more students are without jobs after finishing university. Recent policy initiatives and reforms have emphasised the need for universities to better balance between research and employability. Universities have therefore been obliged to reformulate and clarify their qualifications also in terms of labour market relevance, in effect obliging them to use the same qualifications descriptors (skills, knowledge, competence) as other parts of the education and training system. This movement towards employability, and the obligations of universities to adapt, has been present in French policies since 2006.

⁽¹³⁾ This chapter on France will require further elaboration in cooperation with French colleagues. The description and analysis should therefore be seen as a preliminary draft only reflecting the interpretations of Cedefop.

Involvement of stakeholders

CNCP is a platform for cooperation between all ministries involved with qualifications (Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Labour, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Finance), for the social partners and other relevant stakeholders (Chambers, etc.) included in the coordination of the French qualifications system and framework. This broad involvement is seen as necessary (both for technical and administrative reasons) to be able to capture the diversity of qualifications existing in France, but also for reasons of credibility and ownership.

The role of the CNCP as the 'gatekeeper' of the French framework is important. Any qualification, irrespective of institutional origin (public, private, national, sectoral) can in principle be included in the framework. This requires however that they meet the criteria set by the CNCP as regards overall quality. This function is demonstrated through the gradual increase in qualifications covered by the framework.

Levels and descriptors

As indicated above the original five-level structure introduced in 1969 will (probably) be changed in the near future, most likely into an eight-level structure. These levels will be defined through a coherent set of descriptors to be used at all levels and for all qualifications. The descriptors will be differentiated through the concepts of *skills, knowledge and competence*. It is worth noting that the French have decided, differently from most other countries, to put skills first in the listing of descriptor elements. This can be seen as a political signal emphasising the importance of developing qualifications relevant to labour market needs.

The new descriptors are used as a basis for a revision of qualification profiles. Bachelor/master qualifications are currently being redefined and described on the basis of the new descriptor structure. A reading committee has been set up at national level responsible for verifying the new descriptors. Members of this committee are representatives of the Ministry of Education, of university presidents, CNCP, lifelong learning offices in universities and Bologna experts. The process started in April 2009 and will finish next May. The process can be said to challenge existing practices.

Use of learning outcomes

France does not use the term learning outcomes, but speaks of competence. The approach is common in initial, compulsory education and fully accepted within vocational education and training. The approach was strengthened by the 2002 Law on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VAE) and its emphasis on learning outcomes as the basis for the awarding of certificates. The learning outcomes approach is still only partially introduced in higher education. Of the total of 86 universities only a minority has fully implemented this approach. Traditionally university qualifications have been input-based and very much focussed on the knowledge and research aspect.

A systematic effort is now being made to support the introduction and use of a learning outcomes-based perspective – in particular addressing higher education. A nationwide

process has been initiated by the ministry and meetings have been/are being held at regional level explaining the rationale behind the learning outcomes approach.

Initial vocational qualifications are defined according to the same logic as for higher education qualifications, in terms of skills, knowledge and competences. There are different forms of VET provisions though, influencing the way learning outcomes are used. We can speak of three main approaches:

- qualifications based on training modules, the learning outcomes of each module being assessed separately;
- qualification based on a two-block approach, theory + practical experience, the learning outcomes of the two blocks being assessed separately;
- a qualification linked to a single, coherent block of competences requiring a holistic approach to assessment of learning outcomes.

All three approaches operate on the basis of a learning outcomes/competence-based approach, though in different ways.

The strong emphasis given to transparency is demonstrated by the way the French NQF actively use the Europass certificate supplement. This format is seen as important for transparency reasons and as relevant at all levels, including higher education. The supplement has been strengthened as regards the competence/learning outcomes dimension. The main focus is on the three descriptor elements – knowledge, skills and competences – but the link to quality assurance and to validation of non-formal and informal learning is also addressed by the framework.

Referencing to the EQF

Work on the referencing to the EQF has been going on since 2006. A draft referencing report will be presented to the EQF AG in 2010. This work has from the very start been organised as an official process – involving all ministries, social partners and other stakeholders represented in the CNCP. In average a group of approximately 25 persons meet on a regular basis, also including representatives of the regions, statisticians, etc. The referencing work has been supported by the EQF test and pilot projects, notably the Leonardo da Vinci ‘Net-testing project’. Effort has been made to use concrete cases as starting points. A conclusion drawn on the basis of these experiences is that we need to develop the same methodology for all qualifications levels and the referencing must be done in the same way for VET and for HE. Current practices have not been conducive for this. Today HE describe their qualifications on the basis of knowledge alone, while other awarding institutions/bodies use skills, knowledge and competence.

The referencing of the lowest level of French qualifications to the EQF has posed a particular challenge. The current level 5 (lowest in the 1969 system) should, when applying a learning outcomes perspective, be referenced to both levels 2 and 3 of the EQF. The Ministry of Education is currently not interested in allowing such a differentiation. A transition period have therefore been agreed: the current lowest level will automatically be referred to EQF level 3 until 2010, whatever is the profile and learning outcome profile of the qualification in

question. Practices will change after 2010 and take into account the actual differences in learning outcomes in the concrete cases.

Some concern is expressed as regards the different (and potentially inconsistent) choices now being made by countries as regards referencing of particular qualifications. The problems seem to appear around levels 5 and 6 of EQF, nursing qualifications as well as master craftsmen (*Meister*) are typical examples.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

There is a less clear distinction between VET and higher education in France compared to many other European countries. Since the 1970s vocational courses and programmes have formed an important and integrated part of traditional universities and both bachelor and master degrees (with a vocational profile) are awarded. Outside the universities we find specialised technical and vocational schools offering courses and certificates at a high level – a system dating back to Napoleon. These schools are run by different ministries covering their respective subject areas (agriculture, health, etc.). The *Ingénieurs* coming out of these institutions hold qualifications at a high level, equivalent to those coming out of universities.

This situation, in effect questioning the whole distinction between VET and higher education, explains the fact that higher education qualifications are an integrated part of the French framework and that some of the tensions observed in other countries are less clearly expressed in France.

Main sources of information

<http://www.cncp.gouv.fr/CNCP/index.php>

GERMANY

Introduction

An overarching national qualifications framework for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen – DQR*) is currently being developed in Germany. It will include qualifications obtained in general education, higher education and vocational education and training. In the first phase only full formal qualifications will be referenced to the DQR. In a later phase also informally and non-formally acquired competences will be included.

The preparations for the framework started in 2007. Following extensive preparatory work proposal for a German NQF was published in February 2009. This proposal provides the basis for an extensive testing phase to be followed by full scale implementation. The ongoing (2009) piloting stage use qualifications from selected sectors (IT, metal, health and the trade sector) as ‘testing ground’.

An NQF for the higher education (related to QF-EHEA) was implemented in 2005.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The work on the DQR responds to the EQF initiative. The main purpose of it is to ease transparent referencing of qualifications acquired in Germany to the EQF and to use it as tool for enhancing the opportunities for German citizen on the European labour market. Overall objective is to map all obtainable qualifications, present them in relation to each other and make them easily understood and comparable.

Main aims of developing the DQR are:

- increasing transparency in German qualification system;
- promoting reliability, transfer opportunities and quality assurance;
- improving the visibility of the equivalence and differences between qualifications;
- facilitating the recognition of German qualifications elsewhere in Europe;
- supporting the mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries and within Germany;
- increasing the skills orientation of qualifications;
- reinforcing the learning outcomes orientation of qualification processes;
- improving opportunities for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- fostering and enhancing access and participation in lifelong learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

A national steering group (*Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*) was jointly established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Republic of Germany at the beginning of 2007. This coordination group has appointed a working group called 'Arbeitskreis DQR' which comprises stakeholders from higher education, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and labour market as well as researchers and practitioners. Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) a *DQR Büro* (DQR Office) has been set up to provide technical and administrative support to the process.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure has been proposed to cover all main types of German qualifications.

Level descriptors describe competences required to obtain a qualification. They are defined in terms of professional and personal competence.

The draft DQR differentiates between two categories of competence:

- 'professional competence' (*Fachkompetenz*), which is subdivided into 'knowledge' (breadth and depth) and 'skills' (instrumental and systemic skills);

- ‘personal competence’ (*personale Kompetenz*), which is subdivided into ‘social competence’ (teamwork, leadership, communication skills) and ‘self-competence’ (autonomy/responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence).

The term competence lies at the heart of the DQR and signals readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and for occupational and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as action skills.

Descriptors are expressed as alternatives, e.g. like ‘field of study *or* work’ and ‘specialised field of study *or* field of occupational activity’. The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in proposal of DQR.

Use of learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is supported by major stakeholders. One important aim of the DQR is to support the use of learning outcomes in standard setting, curricula and assessment.

Learning outcomes are expressed in the various formulations of standards of *Kompetenz* that have been developed in particular for VET, where a concept of *Handlungskompetenz* (action skills) has gradually assumed a key role in qualifications definition, alongside clear input requirements about place, duration and content of learning. The action skills is described in terms of a typology of competences: *Fachkompetenz* (professional competence), *Personalkompetenz* (personal) and *Sozialkompetenz* (social).

In general education no specific action skills for qualifications are provided. Curricula are often not written with a specific focus on learning outcomes. The recently introduced *Bildungsstandards* could be taken as a first attempt to define a minimum set of learning outcomes for school subjects.

In higher education the shift to learning outcomes took place in a broader sense when introducing Bachelor and Master Studies in the recent years. Module handbooks are defined in terms of learning outcomes.

DQR also aims at improving opportunities for the recognition of informally acquired learning outcomes and strengthening lifelong learning. Model and research projects have been running to support further development.

Referencing to the EQF

The joint steering committee set up by the Federal Government and the *Länder* in 2007 is in charge of the referencing process – advised and coordinated by the DQR Büro (see above). In 2010 all qualifications will be referenced to the DQR. Afterwards the DQR will be referenced to the EQF. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010 and the final report is to be submitted by 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The development of the DQR is at a too early stage to identify any particular problem.

Main sources of information

The National Steering Group (Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe) is designated as EQF national coordination point (NCP).

The information on the DQR development is available on www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de

GREECE

Introduction

The work on a national qualifications framework (NQF) started in 2008. A High level committee for a Greek NQF development was established initially in spring 2008 under the umbrella of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. Its status was formalised in spring 2009. Its main task is to prepare an NQF proposal, which should be available for public consultation in autumn 2009. It is expected that NQF will be in place by 2011.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The rationale and main policy objectives which NQF will help to fulfil will be based on the analyses of all subsystems of education and training and qualifications development. It is agreed that NQF could help to address some current challenges and needs:

- the need to increase coherency and consistency of the national qualification system and reduce fragmentation of current subsystems;
- to improve access and progression possibilities, eliminate dead ends and foster lifelong learning opportunities;
- to develop coherent approaches and procedures to certification and quality assurance;
- the need, finally, to have a solid basis for the development of recognition for non-formal and informal learning.

The short-term objective is to develop coherent national certification procedures covering both IVET (there is an existing system) and CVET to support the consistency and portability of qualifications.

In the more medium term the following objectives will be pursued:

- to improve transparency and currency of qualifications through clear learning outcomes description;
- to develop procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- to improve access, progression and recognition possibilities;
- to improve quality and portability of qualifications.

Long-term objectives will be developing coherent lifelong learning strategies and practices; improving coherence of national reform policies; using NQF as a development instrument for change.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs in 2008. Under its umbrella a High level committee to develop Greek NQF was initially established in the framework of Operational programme for employment and training (2007–13) in spring 2008. Its status was formalised in spring 2009. It is chaired by the General Secretary for LLL (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs). Its 10 members represent: OEEK – the organisation for VET (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs), the General Secretariat for LLL (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs), EKEPIS – National Accreditation Centre for CVET (Ministry of Employment and Social Protection), the General Confederation of Greek Workers, ESSEKA Committee – National System of VET linked to Employment (both ministries involved), and the Confederation of Greek industries and representatives of universities and external experts.

The Ministry of National Education coordinates the process; responsibilities among partners will be agreed on in the future. Administrative support is provided by the General Secretariat for LLL unit. Financial support will be provided under the ESF operational programme for employment and training (2007-13). Research will be conducted on different aspects of Greek education and training subsystems.

Levels and descriptors

Most probably an eight-level reference structure will be proposed. It reflects the existing education and training system in Greece and is in accordance with the EQF.

Use of learning outcomes

A new common methodology for the creation of job profiles based on learning outcomes was created by Ministerial Decision No 110998/2006. This common methodology is an innovative development for VET in Greece as it changes the traditional input orientation to a learning outcomes approach. It is currently used in CVET, but is planned to be the common basis for all VET qualifications.

Learning outcomes approaches exist in the practical part of the IVET exams, which is operated by OEEK on a decentralised basis.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of the national qualifications system levels to the EQF should take place in 2011 under the NQF Committee umbrella.

Lessons learned and the way forward

Although still at a preliminary phase, the EQF/NQF developments have brought together the main national stakeholders (ministries, education and training organisations, universities, social partners) and this creates the necessary consensus and conditions of mutual trust for the required changes.

Another important dimension is the emergence of issues like validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance and qualifications standards which will support of the process of establishing the NQF.

Main sources of information

The National Committee of Lifelong Learning/General Secretariat for LLL, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the national contact point (NCP): <http://www.gsae.edu.gr>

HUNGARY

Introduction

An overarching national qualifications framework (NQF) is being developed in Hungary. It will embrace all national qualifications and all subsystems in accordance with the broad (general) national level descriptors which will allow subsystems to adopt more subsystems specific descriptors.

The national register of VET qualifications (NRQ), the current ongoing revision of professional and examination requirements and reforms in different subsystem of education and training shall facilitate the establishment of a single NQF.

The development work started in 2007 as part of the mostly EU funded social renewal operative plan of the New Hungary Development Plan (2007–13). In 2008, the Government Decision No 2069/2008 was adopted. It represents the legal basis and policy framework for the development of the NQF and sets the road map, defines tasks, responsibilities as well as the appropriate financial and human resources.

In the first phase of the development (2008–10), an NQF is being designed under the responsibility of the Ministry for Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. A comprehensive proposal with necessary measures in all subsystems of education and training (public education, VET, higher education, adult education) will be submitted to the Government at the end of the first phase. In the second (implementation) phase (2010-12), to be based on the final Government decision, the relevant ministries have to create – in their respective fields of competence – the necessary political, legal, financial and institutional conditions for implementing the NQF.

According to the Decision on the establishment of the NQF, the formal referencing to the EQF will take place by 2013.

The estimated costs (HUF 800 million) of the development and establishment of the NQF will be covered by the resources of the mostly EU funded social renewal operative programme of the New Hungary Development Plan.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The development of an NQF addressed the following issues:

- make the integration of the different subsystems easier, the national qualification system more coherent and to support national policy coordination;
- support lifelong learning and enable stronger links between the adult learning sector (which is of unregulated nature) and the formal education system, make the recognition of a broader range of learning forms easier (including non-formal and informal learning);
- improve transparency, transferability and comparability of national qualifications by showing the relationship between qualifications (there are many qualifications at levels 4, 5 and 6; there is no clear relationship between Bachelor qualifications and higher VET qualifications);
- reinforce the use of learning outcomes in standard setting, curricula and assessment and establish a common approach to describing learning outcomes in different subsystems (currently there are different approaches in HE, general education or VET);
- make Hungarian qualifications easier to understand abroad and make them more comparable;
- introduce common national quality standards; improve the relevance of qualifications in the labour market; and to support the career orientation and counselling system.

Involvement of stakeholders

The development of the NQF and the involvement of social and professional stakeholders were initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

A high-level inter-ministerial committee was set up in 2008. Its tasks are to schedule, harmonise and monitor all phases of the NQF development and implementation process. It is chaired by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture and co-chaired by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. It comprises representatives of different ministries, the National Council for Public Education, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Higher Education and Research Council; employers' and employees' associations represented in the National Interest Reconciliation Council, the national economic chambers, teachers', parents' and students' associations.

Working groups are:

- collecting and analysing data to prepare the proposal for the NQF level descriptors and the mechanisms to support its operation;
- drafting the recommendation on the output regulatory tools of the individual education and training subsystems compatible with the NQF.

The administrative support to the High level inter-ministerial committee is provided by Department for EU Affairs in the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Levels and descriptors

A proposal regarding NQF levels and level descriptors is currently under development. EQF levels serve as a reference for NQF development. The necessity to introduce a level, lower than EQF level one and sublevels within levels are being considered. But no decision has been taken yet.

Use of learning outcomes

In recent years, the conditions for the establishment of a qualification system based on learning outcome in education and training, especially in VET, have been put in place. Focus on learning outcomes has a strong support among different stakeholders and is subject of research studies in different subsystems of education and training. An assessment and evaluation system is being developed.

Steps towards a competence-based approach have been taken. As of 2007, a national core curriculum based on key competences has been put in place in school education; the national competence assessment has been introduced in public education; since 2006 the final secondary school examination (maturity examination) has been reformed, making it a stronger regulatory tool.

In 2004–06 the National Register of Qualifications (NRQ) was reformed. 400 VET competence-based qualifications (including partial qualifications) referenced into a five-level structure were developed.

The shift to learning outcomes in post-secondary VET is taking place through the introduction of competence profiles, which are being used as the basis for qualifications and curricula design and are at the core of the competence-based examination system. Qualifications consist of core and optional modules.

In HE, the development and the implementation of outcomes and qualifications requirements have been implemented through regulatory measures and acts. All first cycle qualifications in Hungary are described in terms of both inputs and outcomes criteria. Preparation of master and PhD level programmes has started.

Hungary is in the first stages of introducing the validation of informal and non-formal learning into its education system. Although legislative provisions are in place, implementation has not been yet developed.

Referencing to EQF

The referencing process will start in the second quarter of 2011. The draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2013.

Lessons learned and the way forward

One of the main roles of NQF is to function as an interface between education and the labour market; therefore it is crucial to get different stakeholders from education and labour market on board. It is expected that NQF will create a common language and improve communication and responsiveness of education and training to new needs of the labour market and individuals.

Involvement of international experts in the referencing process will be a challenge due to languages requirements and should be co-financed through EU grants.

Main sources of information

The Department for EU Affairs in the Ministry of Education and Culture acts as EQF national contact point (NCP) until the final decision on the tasks, composition and location of the NCP will be taken, most probably in the beginning 2011, <http://www.okm.gov.hu>.

ICELAND

Introduction

Iceland is developing an overarching national qualifications framework which is expected to become operational by 2010. The work started autumn 2007 and a first, complete draft is expected to be finalised autumn 2009. Work on a qualifications framework for higher education, linked to the Bologna process, started already in 2006 and can thus be said to precede the overarching framework now being developed. The qualifications framework for higher education was implemented in 2007.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main reason for developing an NQF is to increase transparency of qualifications by introducing a learning outcomes and competence-based approach at all levels and for all parts of the education and training system. Increased transparency is seen as a precondition for increasing the flexibility of the qualification system and for increasing participation in learning, not least by adults. The introduction of a system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, on which work started early in the decade, can be seen as an integrated part of this effort. The emphasis on a more flexible qualification system can be seen as an effort to respond to the high drop-out rate from vocational education and training (close to 26 %). While the drop-out rate reflects the particular character of the Icelandic labour market, it underlines the need for an open and flexible education and training system, allowing individuals at all ages to move from education to work and back again.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall coordination of the work on the NQF but has set up nine working groups, with five members in each group, covering the entire scope of qualifications and all the different parts of the education and training system. Three groups cover academic qualifications, the remaining general and vocational education and training. In the working groups covering VET, social partners are represented along with representatives of teachers, etc. Social partners are in general positive to work, but so far not very active. The main aim until now has been to allow the different groups to develop their own understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a learning outcome-based NQF and thus develop ownership. Following up from this the ministry envisages that a closer dialogue between the different groups will be necessary to address issues of permeability and progression. Closely linked to the NQF developments is the process within higher education to develop learning outcomes-based course descriptors. Inspired by the 'Tuning' approach, two institutions are currently involved and plan to come up with a proposal by 2011.

Levels and descriptors

The Icelandic NQF will be based on a seven-level structure distinguishing between knowledge skills and competence. Because of the special structure of the Icelandic education system level 1 and 2 of the EQF correspond to level 1 of the Icelandic NQF. That explains why seven levels have been chosen for the Icelandic NQF and not eight levels. The levels are seen as important for placing and locating programmes and courses in a more transparent way. This is a precondition for showing the connections and progression routes between different programmes. The development of an explicit set of levels is seen as part of a strategy for guiding individuals, showing what knowledge, skills and competences are expected at different levels.

Use of learning outcomes

Compared to the EQF descriptors, the Icelandic national descriptors are more detailed and specific. This reflects that some stakeholders, in particular outside VET, are not accustomed to and find it difficult to use the learning outcomes approach. Particular emphasis has been given to the skills element of the descriptors, underlining that this is an aspect not only relevant to VET but also to general and higher education. A systematic use of learning outcomes, referring to a national set of descriptors, is seen as important for a number of different purposes, not least for the future design of qualifications. It will help to clarify the balance of knowledge, skills and competences for different programmes at different levels and bring added value to current practices where each school has a large say on the form and content of the programme or course. The use of learning outcomes-based levels and descriptors will make it easier to assess whether schools operate at the same level of learning outcomes or whether there are major differences between them.

Referencing to the EQF

Preparations for referencing have started and the referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010. Level 4 of the Icelandic qualifications framework is seen as a parallel to EQF level 5 and is seen as decisive level for bridging VET and higher education and for ensuring permeability of the overall education and training system. A referencing of the Icelandic qualifications system to the EQF is seen as bringing added value and allowing for comparability.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The experiences linked to the introduction of a learning outcomes-based approach are being summarised as very positive and stimulating for the overall reform of the education and training system. This process, however, is also challenging in the sense that many stakeholders have little experience in applying a learning outcomes-based approach in practice. The novelty of the approach, and the uncertainty this causes, has required the ministry to provide extensive guidance and pay particular emphasis to the development of descriptors reflecting the Icelandic situation.

Main sources of information

Information and documents covering the Icelandic developments can be found at <http://www.nymenntastefna.is/> and <http://eng.menntammalaraduneyiti.is/Acts>

IRELAND

Introduction

The overarching National Framework of Qualifications of Ireland (NFQ) was proposed through the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and launched in 2003 after a broad consultation process with different stakeholders. The 10 levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced; qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training and higher education are included.

The NFQ has reached an advanced stage of implementation, with more consistent approaches to the use of learning outcomes across different sectors. Credit transfer and recognition of non-formal learning are pursued and cooperation with different stakeholders in education and training is being strengthened.

The majority of national awards are now included in the NFQ, including those made by the State Examinations Commission, Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC), the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

In July 2006 the National Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI) published policies and criteria on inclusion of the awards of certain international and professional awarding bodies into NFQ. A number of awards made by professional and international awarding bodies are now included in the NFQ.

The National Framework of Qualifications has been developed and is being maintained by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which was set up in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society' in which learners can avail of learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives, was a key factor in the changes that have taken place in Ireland. This led to the need for a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications that could accommodate all shapes and sizes of education and training in Ireland. The policy goals of the NQF are to:

- create an open, learner-centred, coherent, transparent and widely understood system of qualifications in Ireland that is responsive to the needs of individual learners and to the social and economic needs of the country;
- ease access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners within and across the different levels and subsystems of education and training;
- increase mobility through understanding and recognition of Irish qualifications abroad and to fully participate in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

The process was strongly supported by major stakeholders in the country. In the meantime the NFQ has become widely known and is used as a tool for supporting evolutionary changes in education, training and qualification system.

The implementation of the NFQ is being monitored by the National Qualifications Authority. The first Framework Implementation and Impact Study is expected to be published in autumn 2009.

Involvement of stakeholders

The development of the NFQ was initiated by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and developed and implemented in the extended consultative period with a range of stakeholders. The Bologna process has been an important part of the NFQ development on the voluntary but strong partnership basis.

Broad cooperation with different stakeholders is ensured through the Authority and the Consultative Group of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

The design and implementation of the NFQ has been supported by different research studies within the country and the process also has a strong external dimension through interactive research with non-European countries (Australia, New Zealand).

Levels and descriptors

The 10 levels of the framework capture all learning, from initial stages to the most advanced; qualifications achieved in schools, further education and training and higher education are included.

Each level of the NFQ is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge (breadth, kind), know-how and skills (range, selectivity) and competence. Competence is subdivided into context, role, learning to learn, insight. Knowledge, skills and competences are defined as expected learning outcomes to be achieved by the holder of the qualification.

The NQF comprises levels, award-types and named-awards. Four classes of award-types have been determined: major, minor, special-purpose and supplemental. This is to ensure that the framework can capture all types and sizes of learning undertaken by a learner.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach was central to the establishment of the NFQ and the associated legislation and system reform. It is grounded upon principles, aims, and elements of implementation relating to learning outcomes. The outcomes are expressed as knowledge, skills and competences on a 10-level framework intended to apply to all qualifications. The outcomes are indicators of what a person knows, can do and understand, rather than time spent on a programme. The new regulation for awards in the NFQ states that new awards are made on the basis of learning outcomes. The principles for all curriculum development leading to qualification now derive from the NFQ.

The NFQ allows for the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning and there is legislation in place which means that any individual has the right to apply for recognition of prior learning.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of the Irish NQF to the EQF has been completed. The referencing was assisted by a national steering committee, composed of representatives of major stakeholders from education and training as well as international experts. The final referencing report was adopted by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on the 28 May 2009 and is available on http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html. It will be presented to the EQF AG in September 2009. The Irish NFQ will thus be the first framework to meet EQF deadline of 2010.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The effective implementation of the NFQ very much relies on the broad partnership approach, step-by-step development and strong support of different stakeholders. The deeper the implementation, the more need for support from different stakeholders.

Main sources of information

The most important information is available on the websites of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which is also the national contact point (NCP): <http://www.ngai.ie> and <http://www.nfq.ie>.

ITALY

Introduction

The aim of establishing a national qualifications and certification framework has been for several years the focus of a wide-ranging reform initiative and an important issue for the national institutions, namely the the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies and Ministry of Education, University and Research. Political process started in 2003.

Currently, these institutions are involved in defining a new structure at national level to renew the link to labour market's need and to improve the integration between the different systems on the basis of the professional standards. The political debate between national institutions (Ministry of Labour is leading the process) and regions concerns the process of implementation, e.g. the architecture and tools of the national qualification system (standards and devices), the governance of the processes, the tasks and responsibilities.

The main features of this process are to develop a coherent national learning outcomes approach, which can be considered as the basis for the integration of the different 'parts' of the NQF, improving a common language, a national methodology based on learning outcomes, and linking together needs of individuals and labour market.

The national committee (*Tavolo nazionale*) has been a key player in the development of the NQF. This committee contains representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and the social partners.

The aim is to build a framework based on 'broadband vocational profiles' and structured in unites of competences in different economic sectors.

Recently the testing phase in the tourism and mechanical sector has been successfully carried out. The results were positive; the applied methodology works and the partnership with the social partners was very fruitful. The learning outcomes approach has been adopted and tested. Nevertheless, the results of these processes need to be discussed at methodological and political level with different stakeholders to agree on common guidelines.

The NQF development work is broadly based on various laws or/and agreements between ministries and regions, e.g.:

- the Law No 53/2003 – Delegation to the National Government to draw up general standards for education and minimum service levels in education and training;
- Government/Regions agreements for the national framework of initial qualification VET system: June 2003 (Development of the three-year initial qualification pathways for 14-17

years old trainees), January 2004 (Key competence standards); October 2004 (Certification and validation devices); November 2005 (Mutual recognition of certification and competences between Regions); October 2006 (Technical and vocational competence standards). These agreements are very important to define the common national characteristics of these pathways and ensure national recognition of qualifications;

- reorganisation of the higher technical education and training pathway (IFTS) and the establishment of higher technical institutes (Decree, January 2008). It was agreed to develop common national standards based on learning outcomes.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

In Italy the development of an NQF should respond to several needs:

- the NQF is a national structure that should make the integration of the different systems within the national context easier;
- it responds to the request of the EQF Recommendation designed to ease the dialogue between educational systems and the labour market;
- it should also make geographic and professional mobility of individuals easier, both at national and European levels;
- it should also help individuals, along the course of their life, in capitalising their non-formal and informal experiences. The system should promote social inclusion with reference of people, who do not hold regular qualifications and competences needed in the labour market;
- the national standard system, based on the learning outcomes approach, is the preconditions for a national validation of non formal and informal learning system.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies is coordinating the NQF development and implementation in agreement with the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and the social partners (see *Tavolo nazionale*).

At the technical level ISFOL (National Institute for Development of Vocational Training) is involved in implementing the national methodologies and coordinates sectoral and professional expert groups involving social partners.

The monitoring of the implementation of the NQF to prepare the referencing process to the EQF will be operated by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, with the support of the NCP recently appointed at ISFOL.

Levels and descriptors

The structures of the NQF levels and level descriptors have not yet been defined, although there is a common understanding between the national institutions (the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education). The NCP is presently working on them.

Use of learning outcomes

The Italian education and training system has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics:

- in compulsory school the practice is based on the learning processes and important role of students. On the contrary in high school, the approach is still based on training input (important role of the teacher) instead of the assessment and certification process;
- in academic education (universities) system the policy-makers strengthened the need to align diplomas and certificates to the commitments of the Bologna process. In particular, the National Decree that reforms the academic system (first cycle – three years) and *Laurea Magistrale* (second cycle – two years) states that the new programmes have to be based on learning outcomes. The enterprises involved in the reform of the university system agreed on the learning outcomes approach considering it very close to the labour market;
- the higher technical education and training pathway (IFTS) in particular, is based on learning outcomes approach. In this subsystem, there is a national standard system based on competences since 2000. Moreover, after the Decree of 25 January 2008, the National Committee on IFTS agreed to update the standards to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach;
- in the vocational training system, where the regions have the main responsibility, according to the reforms of the Italian Constitution (National Law No 3, October 2001, concerning 'Modifications of V Title of second part of Italian Constitution') an update of the local qualification system by adopting the learning outcomes approach has been launched.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010. Higher education qualifications have already been linked to the EQF levels; the three cycles of the Bologna structure have been referenced to EQF levels 6-7-8.

ISFOL has been designated as national coordination point (NCP) by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. It formed a technical group to plan actions aimed at referencing the qualifications system to the EQF by the given deadlines. It started networking with other European NCP to guarantee the need for transparency and consistency of the correlation between the levels of NQF and the EQF levels.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The first lesson learned is that the establishment of the NQF is a very important issue at national level to give individuals a transparent way to obtain qualifications and to progress in their careers. However, it is still very complex and ambitious.

The law that reformed Title V of the Constitution (2001) made this process even more complicated as the regions are working to establish their own regional qualifications systems.

This reform, combined with the autonomy of several stakeholders (autonomy of the regional authorities in regulating training; autonomy of universities and schools; autonomy of the enterprises in offering ‘qualifications’ in the workplace, etc.) created a difficult situation to manage. The stakeholders involved are aware of the fundamental importance of a national system that should constitute the ‘real infrastructure’ for different educational and labour market policies.

Main sources of information

For policy-related information the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies, for the technical level, ISFOL, which acts as national contact points (NCP): <http://www.isfol.it>

LATVIA

Introduction

The development of an overarching national qualifications framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes in line with the needs of different subsystem of education and training and lifelong learning is envisaged. It will take the existing five-level qualification structure into account.

At higher education level, the development of QF in the context of EHEA – has started and will be based on the three level structure; legally it will be introduced by the new Higher Education Law.

In VET, a Concept of attractiveness of VET has been prepared and sent to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval. It includes the linking the five existing Latvian qualifications levels to the eight levels of EQF.

The Ministry of Education and Science plans to submit amendments to the Law on Education with the aim to redefine some key terms (e. g. qualification, qualification level, knowledge, skills and competence); to define qualifications levels and corresponding general level descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence; to provide guidelines for referencing the Latvian qualifications levels to EQF levels; to define the basis for defining learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence) in new education programmes.

An ESF project is planned to support further development of NQF.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of an overarching NQF should address the following issues:

- to increase transparency and consistency of qualifications;
- to develop an overarching NQF in line with the needs of lifelong learning and higher education sector (three levels);

- to strengthen the link between labour market and education;
- to strengthen the cooperation of all stakeholder involved in the design and award of qualifications;
- to increase understanding of national qualifications and ease linking them to the EQF.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Science has the leading role in the development of the NQF. For the higher education level also higher education institutions, social partners, Rectors' Council and the Higher Education Council are involved and in VET social partners are involved.

Levels and descriptors

The Latvian NQF will most probably have eight levels, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Descriptors have not been developed yet.

The descriptors for higher education cycles were firstly drafted in 2006 and are currently being redrafted.

Use of learning outcomes

There is a growing emphasis on learning outcomes in Latvia although the term is not widely used and there is not a systematic approach yet. Skills and knowledge are the commonly used terms.

Draft legislation for HE introduces the terms and principles of learning outcomes. In general education subject-based outcomes have been defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Standards for VET are labour market linked (tripartite agreement) and stipulate goals of education programmes as well as content. There are two types of standards: occupational (professional) and vocational education standards.

The occupational standards stipulate the basic and specific requirements for a specific professional qualification and describe the knowledge and skills requirement as determined by the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers (Regulation on the professional standards, 2000 and the Order of developing occupational standards, 2002). Standards have been developed for all occupations. The Ministry of Education and Science has established a register of occupational standards.

The standards of the state vocational education stipulate the goals of the educational programmes, compulsory educational content and assessment procedures for the education obtained. They are determined by the Regulation on the standard for state vocational secondary education (2000) and the Regulation on the standard for state vocational higher education (2001) adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Referencing to the EQF

A referencing committee will be set up in September 2009. By then also the referencing process shall start. Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared early 2011.

Main sources of information

The Academic information centre is designated as national coordination point (NCP) in Latvia: <http://www.aic.lv/portal/en>

LITHUANIA

Information on Lithuania is missing for this report but will be provided in the next version.

LUXEMBOURG

Introduction

Following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, an outline of an overarching NQF was presented to the Council of Ministers early 2009. Following some discussions during spring 2009, this proposal will now (probably) be followed up by an inter-ministerial working group as well as a group of stakeholders. The plan is to proceed quickly with this work and an NQF could be formally established during 2010. The new Law on vocational education and training adopted autumn 2008 very much provides the basis for the NQF, this is particularly the case as regards the learning outcomes approach – an approach now being applied on a more general basis also for other parts of the education and training system.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of the EQF is seen as an opportunity to make explicit the existing (implicit) education and training levels and the relationships between them. This is important not only for the users of qualifications (to support the lifelong learning of individuals and to enable employers to see the relevance of qualifications) but also for education and training providers (as a reference point for quality assurance and reform). Increased transparency of qualifications is thus a key objective underpinning the Luxembourg national framework. On a longer term-basis the NQF is seen as an instrument for opening up towards and including qualifications awarded outside the existing, official system. This reflects that a high number of citizens hold these kind of unofficial and non-recognised certificates and diploma. An NQF with clear, learning outcomes-based levels and

descriptors could facilitate the inclusion of these. Examples of this are found in important sectors like construction and banking and may in a worst case scenario prevent learning progress. To accomplish this, concrete approaches for the accreditation and quality assurance of these new qualifications have to be put in place.

Involvement of stakeholders

The NQF process is being coordinated by the Ministry of Education. A wide range of stakeholders will be involved in the development and implementation stage to follow from autumn 2009 and onwards. Apart from representatives (administrative as well as pedagogical) of the different education and training sub-sectors (general education, vocational education, higher education), social partners will play an active role, as will the Chambers of commerce and industry. In the final stage of the work the inter-ministerial group referred to above will play a coordinating role, involving all relevant ministries (Education, Labour Market, etc.). This group will address the legal and financial implications of the framework.

Levels and descriptors

Luxembourg has decided to introduce an eight-level reference structure. While the number of levels corresponds with the EQF, the descriptors reflect experiences gained over several decades. At each level, descriptors are differentiated according to knowledge, skills and attitude. The decision to use these concepts reflects gradual development of a learning outcomes or 'competence'-based approach in vocational education and training. During the 1970s and the 1980s this approach was very much influenced by the German tradition in this field. The 'Siemens method' for developing professional standards played a particularly important role as education standards were directly deduced from these. In recent years these approaches have been further developed through extensive cooperation with a number of other European countries, notably the countries with a dual VET system (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland). Links to France are also strong, to a certain extent influencing the way qualifications are designed and described.

Use of learning outcomes

As stated above, the learning outcomes approach is now firmly embedded into the Luxembourg education and training system, in particular following the adoption of the 2008 Law on VET reform. This advanced stage of implementation has made it possible, already in the proposal presented to the Parliament early 2009, to indicate how single qualifications and qualifications types will be placed in the national framework. It has for example been indicated (although not decided) that traditional VET qualifications (professional diploma) could be placed at the national level 3. A *baccalaureat diploma* (general upper-secondary) could be placed at level 4, as will the diploma of a technician (post-secondary VET). A lot of discussion has taken place in relation to placing of nurses in the level structure. For the moment a basic nursing qualification is placed at level 4, a nurse with specialisation at level

5, the same level as a master craftsman (*Meister*). In general the experiences from placing national qualifications into a learning outcomes-based structure are positive. Involved stakeholders, including social partners, agree that the new profiles developed on the basis of the 2008 VET reform makes a referencing possible.

As in other countries the introduction of learning outcomes at the political level and as a way of redefining and describing qualifications is progressing well. Problems are still faced as regards the extent to which learning outcomes influence teaching and assessment. Efforts are being made by the ministry to provide more information to schools and teachers on this.

Referencing to the EQF

Luxembourg will set up a referencing committee in the first quarter of 2010 and expect to present a report to the EQF AG before summer 2010.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The presentation of the first outline of an overarching NQF to the Council of Ministers showed that the introduction of new (learning outcomes-based levels) could have an impact on existing level structures used to regulate jobs and salaries. This is an issue to be considered by the inter-ministerial group to be set up.

The attitude of higher education, represented by higher education towards the NQF is still somewhat sceptical. Stakeholders from this sector still argue that EQF levels 6-8 should be exclusively based on the Dublin descriptors of the European higher education area. This is not accepted by other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education in charge of coordinating the work.

MALTA

Introduction

Malta launched its overarching national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) in June 2007, encompassing all levels of formal, informal and non-formal education and training.

It is governed by Legal Notice 347 of October 2005 which will be subsequently amended to reflect the development of the Malta Qualification Framework (MQF). Basic elements of the MQF have been put in place by establishing the Malta Qualifications Council (October 2005) and a proposal for preparing an eight level framework. The proposal was supported by the main stakeholders (employers, trade unions, major public and private education and training providers) in a broad consultation process ending in June 2007. In May 2007, four working documents on MQF were published, focusing on the conceptual framework, a reform

strategy for VET system; a quality assurance policy for VET system and level descriptors for key competences at levels 1, 2 and 3 of the MQF.

The main objective of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) is to steer the development of the MQF and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the framework and which is not already provided for by compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies. Other tasks are to establish policies and criteria for the MQF, to approve and ensure the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes, endorse and ensure the publication of procedures to be implemented by training providers, endorse vocational education and training programmes, endorse certificates awarded and keep and issue official records of certification awarded.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The MQF addresses the following issues:

- valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways including vocational and professional degrees and academic programmes of studies;
- access and progression;
- lifelong learning and mobility;
- level rating of qualifications;
- learning outcomes qualifications;
- quality assurance mechanisms that cut across all levels of the framework.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Malta Qualification Council (MQC) initiated the work on the MQF following Legal Notice 347 of 2005. The key role of all stakeholders including social partners was assured in a broad consultation process during the design, development and implementation of the MQF in:

- education and training: the Ministry of Education, public and private education and training institutions; the guidance and counselling services unit;
- the labour market: trade unions; employers' associations, designated authorities;
- human resources managers and others: parents' associations; students' councils, the general public and non-governmental organisations.

The MCQ has the legal competence to coordinate the MQF. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport commits an annual national budget towards the running of MQC.

Levels and descriptors

The Maltese NQF has eight levels of qualifications. It is compatible with the higher education qualifications framework as agreed in the Bologna process for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the Dublin descriptors.

The MQF level descriptors are presented side by side to the EQF level descriptors to facilitate a comparative understanding of both systems. They were built upon those published by the Government of Malta in Legal Notice 347/2005 and approved in June 2007 when the official MQF was launched by the Minister of Education.

MQF has been influenced by the eight-level classification of the EQF but it responds directly to a long-standing system of a Maltese qualifications system. The MQF level descriptors are more detailed than those of the EQF and more contextualised to the Maltese culture and national social, economic and political priorities.

Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, competence and learning outcomes. Learning outcomes summarise the knowledge, skills and competences and points out specific skills such as communications skills, judgemental skills and learning skills which progress throughout the MQF. The level descriptors measure complexity, volume and the level of learning expected for the particular qualification. They give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degree of autonomy and responsibility.

Progression in the MQF is recorded in terms of:

- knowledge and understanding,
- applying knowledge and understanding,
- communication skills,
- judgemental skills,
- learning skills,
- autonomy and responsibility.

Another feature of the MQF's level descriptors is that they are focused on the individual; the verb in singular form shows that the level descriptors are designed with the individual in mind.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to reforms in Malta across the whole education and training systems.

One of the tasks of the Malta Qualifications Council is to ensure and issue the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes and to ensure that such standards and procedures are implemented. The MQF is based on the principle that levels of education and qualifications can be measured by what a person is capable of doing rather than by what an individual has been taught.

At level 3 of the MQF the learner should have achieved the key competences which would lead the individual to access and progression into further and higher education.

For VET, the MQF is intended to ensure that the contents of VET curricula are led by key competences and learning outcomes based on the feedback from industry.

For general education the national minimum curriculum defines learning outcomes as educational objectives that enables learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. The School Leaving Certificate has been re-designed following a series of consultation meetings between the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Malta

Qualifications Council (MQC) to include informal and non-formal learning as well as the individual's personal qualities.

A variety of assessment methods is used in VET and general education. Assessment for VET is based on standards. Learners at upper-secondary level are also expected to undertake an independent cross-curricular study.

Informal and non-formal education and training as well as recognition of prior learning are an important part of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. A policy document on the validation of informal and non-formal learning was launched in June 2008 and a consultation process is in progress.

Referencing to EQF

Malta started the referencing process in January 2009. The exchange of information with Scotland and England, Ireland and South Africa was organised and international experts were involved. The final draft report was prepared in July 2009.

The MQF captures the principles of the QF-EHEA and so the referencing process also includes the referencing to QF-EHEA.

Lessons learned and the way forward

The development of the MQF has served as a catalyst for educational reform and innovation as well as for the building of a new culture of learner-centred qualifications.

The consultation period on the development of the MQF and the preparation of the Referencing report of the MQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were two interrelated processes that led to a bridging exercise between stakeholders particularly in education and employment. Such experiences have built the capacity to ensure quality in education, relevancy to the labour market and a certification process.

There were the following four main issues of controversy at national context:

- the parity of esteem of vocational education and general education. Before the establishment of the MQF academic qualifications had a higher status compared to the professional qualifications;
- the concept of why is there a need for sectoral frameworks when Malta already has an NQF. This issue is still debatable;
- a credit system to cut across the MQF is seen as a challenging task for private and public training providers to re-design their qualifications accordingly;
- the validation of informal and non-formal learning is not easily accepted by the general education route and is not generally accepted as having the same parity of esteem as the academic higher levels of the MQF. The issue is still being debated.

Main sources of information

Malta Qualifications Council is designated national coordination point (NCP). Information is available on <http://www.mqc.gov.mt>.

THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

The Netherlands started preparations for an overarching NQF in January 2009. A first proposal (mainly on the procedures to be followed) was presented to the Ministry of Education in May 2009. The framework builds on the qualifications framework for higher education developed (from 2006) in the context of the Bologna process. The timing of the current work is closely linked to the deadlines set by the EQF Recommendation. The NQF is considered a crucial precondition for carrying out this referencing. The intention is to establish the NQF by mid-2010. The work is also supported by external expert bodies. Following the presentation of a draft proposal end 2009 a testing phase will take place during spring 2010. While the international dimension has been important for the timing of the initiative, the national reform potential of the NQF is increasingly being acknowledged. Having potential for strengthening the transparency of national qualifications, the NQF is increasingly seen as an instrument which could facilitate lifelong learning.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The main objective of the Dutch NQF will be to increase the transparency of the education and training system, in particular by showing the relationship between the different levels and categories of education and training provisions. The introduction of a complete set of learning outcomes-based levels is seen as a precondition for succeeding with this. An NQF could also be used as an instrument to better include qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system, for example by other ministries (labour market, agriculture, etc.) as well as by enterprises and sectors (in the Netherlands referred to as 'non-formal qualifications'). AN NQF could provide a reference making it possible for individuals as well as employers to overview the totality of qualifications on offer, irrespective of their institutional origin. While an inclusive approach is seen as important for transparency and for facilitating lifelong learning, the practical challenges involved in such an open approach will have to be discussed and clarified.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the development and implementation of the NQF. The work will be based on close involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. The following organisations and interest groups are therefore involved: The association of VET Schools (MBO Raad), the association of HE schools (HBO-raad), the sector organisation for green education in the Netherlands (AOC Raad), association of general education schools (VO-raad), the association of universities (VSNU), the association of sector centres of expertise on vet and the labour market (COLO), the umbrella organisation for all (well reputed) privately funded education in the Netherlands (Paepon), the

Confederation of Dutch Employers (VNO NCW), the interdepartmental project department for Learning & Working (PLW), the Accreditation Organisation for Higher Education of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) as well as the Dutch inspectorate of education. Other ministries, for example responsible for labour market issues and finance, have so far not been included in the Dutch work.

Levels and descriptors

The number of levels and their descriptors will be decided during the consultation process to take place in the coming year. It is stressed that these levels and descriptors must be able to reflect the current Dutch education and training system in a realistic way. The introduction of a coherent set of learning outcome-based levels is seen as a key element in the framework as it will introduce a common language and a common reference which so far has been lacking. While taking into account the descriptors used by the EQF, the Dutch descriptors will have to reflect national traditions and approaches. It is therefore unlikely that the knowledge, skills and competence differentiation in the EQF will be taken over directly. This is due to the existing use of the term competence in the Netherlands, a concept which is seen to include and transcend the knowledge and skills dimension.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes (or rather) competence oriented approach is broadly accepted and implemented in the Dutch education and training system. The Cedefop 2009 study on 'The shift to learning outcomes' ⁽¹⁴⁾ reports on a strong tradition of 'objectives-led' governance of education and training in the Netherlands and may be seen as conducive for a competence-based approach. The vocational education and training sector is probably the most advanced as regards competence orientation. Following an extensive reform process, a new VET competence-based structure has been developed and implemented. The same tendencies can be observed in general education and in higher education, although somewhat less systematically. The introduction of the qualifications framework for higher education has contributed to the overall shift to learning outcomes, as has the involvement of single institutions in the so called Tuning project (reference).

Referencing to the EQF

The Netherlands intend to meet the 2010 deadline of the EQF Recommendation. The referencing process will formally start in the third quarter of 2010 and is expected to result in a draft referencing report to be presented to the EQF Advisory group in the fourth quarter this year. It is emphasised that this referencing will be totally dependent on the introduction of a

⁽¹⁴⁾ Cedefop. *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2009. (Cedefop Reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=525 [cited 7.9.2009].

coherent set of learning outcomes-based levels covering the whole education and training system.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The Dutch NQF work is still at an early stage. Some stakeholders have expressed scepticism towards the initiative. The Dutch qualification system has undergone heavy reform in recent years (VET and HE) and express difficulties in coping with yet another reform. On the contrary, others see the new NQF as able to build on and add value to these reforms. The success of the Dutch process in the coming year will largely depend on whether the last perspective comes to dominate the debate.

NORWAY

Introduction

No decision has been made regarding the establishment of an overarching Norwegian NQF. Instead work has been initiated on separate (sector) frameworks, notably for higher education (reflecting the Bologna process), vocational education and training and for post-secondary vocational education (*Fagskoler*). These initiatives have been described (by the Ministry of Education) as NQF developments (NQF for HE, NQF for VET, NQF for *Fagskoler*).

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Some stakeholders argue, as in Finland before 2008, that an overarching NQF brings limited added value and that time and resources can be better spent elsewhere. The existing Norwegian education and training system, it is commonly stated, is sufficiently transparent and permeable: subsectors and levels are well connected, there are few dead-ends and individuals will normally not face many problems when moving horizontally or vertically in the system. This is partly the result of the arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning established during the last decade (*Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse*), but also due to other schemes which have been introduced in recent years (for example *Yrkesveien* allowing VET candidates to progress directly into relevant parts of HE). Importantly, the learning outcomes approach has been widely accepted and implemented, facilitating access, transfer and progression. However, some problems and obstacles remain, for example related to the lack of fully implemented validation arrangements outside upper-secondary level. A particular problem exists in relation to tertiary/post-secondary vocational education and training (*Fagskoler*). This is a heterogeneous education and training category, covering more than 100 different programmes with a duration ranging from six months to two years. None of these programmes have so far been described in terms of learning outcomes which

puts it apart from the rest of the Norwegian education and training system now almost fully based on this principle. An overarching NQF could, according to some stakeholders, help to clarify the relationship between the *Fagskoler* and neighbouring qualifications in VET and in HE. The doubts regarding the added value of an NQF have been strengthened by the feeling that this is an instrument imposed from the outside (via the Bologna process and the EQF recommendation). Treated mainly as a technical issue, the added value of an overarching NQF has yet to be fully recognised by all stakeholders involved.

Involvement of stakeholders

Different working groups have been addressing issues relevant to NQF developments. The work within the Bologna process has resulted in the establishment of an NQF for higher education (2009). Two other technical working groups have been addressing vocational education and training at upper-secondary level as well as tertiary/post-secondary VET (*Fagskoler*), the former administered by the Directorate for Education on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Research, the latter by the ministry itself. Both groups, which have now finalised their work and reported to the ministry, contained representatives of social partners and the education and training institutions alike. In addition, the ministry has established a consultative (EQF) group where the main social partner organisations are represented. A broader consultative group on 'European education and training policies' involving a broad range of stakeholders (including NGOs and the voluntary sector) may be seen as relevant to the implementation of the EQF (and other European instruments).

The social partners have criticised what they see as a too fragmented approach to EQF. In recent input to the ministry (May 2009) they request better coordination of the various processes and activities, in order to arrive at one comprehensive qualification framework. This criticism seems partly to reflect the mixed experiences gained from referring VET and *Fagskole* qualifications (on a tentative basis) to the EQF.

It is too early to say something about specific division of roles and responsibilities in this field in the future. It seems clear, however, that the success of a future Norwegian NQF, whatever form it takes, will depend on the strong involvement of social partners and other relevant interest groups.

Levels and descriptors

In the NQF for higher education level descriptors have been defined according to the terms *kunnskap* (knowledge), *ferdigheter* (skills) and *generell kompetanse* (general competence). These descriptors thus take into account the EQF proposal and will facilitate a future link to other subsectors of education and training.

The VET working group has finalised their proposal for level descriptors. The plan is that the ministry will prepare a proposal for VET descriptors and send on a broad hearing in the autumn of 2009. Norwegian VET currently consists of 186 qualifications and there are indications, based on the work of the expert group and using a learning outcomes-based approach, that some social partner or other interest groups might claim that it is possible to

identify different levels of learning outcomes among this group of 186. This would require a grouping at (probably) two levels (for example EQF levels 3 and 4). Whether such a differentiation would be politically acceptable is a different question and will need to be discussed in the coming period.

The level issue has also been raised by the work on tertiary/post-secondary VET (*Fagskoler*). Universities questioned early tentative suggestions to refer these qualifications to EQF level 6, pointing to problems with the procedure as well as the content. Given their diversity, referencing to different levels (for example 4-6) may be the most realistic solution. The fact that these qualifications now will be defined in terms of learning outcomes will facilitate referencing but it seems clear that credible referencing will require it to be done within a broader context; taking into account both VET and HE.

The lack of a comprehensive set of qualifications levels covering the entire education and training system has not stopped the Norwegians from starting work on EQF referencing. Experiences so far indicate, however, that the lack of comprehensive and explicit levels complicates this process, in particular regarding the vertical and horizontal relationships between different subsystems and their qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

There is broad consensus in Norway on the relevance of the learning outcomes approach. *Kunnskapsløftet*, a wide-ranging reform started in 2001 implemented in 2006, has been of particular significance and implied a comprehensive redefinition and rewriting of curricula objectives at all levels of basic education and training. The approach is gradually introduced at all levels of education and training, with the process planned for tertiary VET in 2009-10.

Finding its main expression in a national core-curriculum addressing all levels of education and training, the introduction of the learning outcomes approach has started to influence assessment and evaluation forms in education and training, in particular in VET. The introduction of a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning has also increased awareness on the potential of the learning outcomes approach. It is difficult to judge to what extent the learning outcomes perspective is influencing pedagogical approaches and learning methods. The Directorate for Education and Training is currently carrying out a wide-ranging research-based evaluation of the education and training system and it is possible that some of this research may throw some light on these issues and in particular the relevance of the Learning Outcome approach at different levels.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2011. A National Coordination Point will be appointed late 2009, early 2010.

Introduction

The work on an overarching Polish NQF covering the whole Polish education and training system was officially started in August 2008 by the appointment of a working group responsible for the project named 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework'. This work builds on the work on a qualification framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process which has already been going on for some time (since 2007). A draft proposal on a Polish NQF is expected towards the end of 2009 and will be used as a basis for wide-ranging consultation and for the final decision to be made by relevant authorities. A final date for implementation has yet to be set. The draft proposal will, however, contain medium and long-term roadmap for the implementation of the framework.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The Polish NQF has been initiated in direct response to international developments, the Bologna process and EQF. This reflects that Poland supports the European objectives on transparency and comparability expressed in the above processes. The importance given to the international dimension is reflected in the ongoing cooperation arrangements with other countries, for example Austria, Croatia and Scotland (in addition to the active participation in Bologna and EQF-related activities).

The precise conception of the NQF will, however, build on previous and ongoing reform work at national level, the most important being the work on 'national qualifications standards' for vocational qualifications and new national curricula for general primary and secondary education. Both these initiatives can be seen as building blocks for a qualification framework, redefining and re-describing the qualifications in the respective sectors. The work on new standards for the vocational field has mainly been carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, emphasising the need to strengthen the relevance of qualifications for the labour market.

The introduction of an NQF will require changes in the existing legal basis for the education and training system. The development of the qualifications framework for higher education has already resulted in proposals (by the Ministry for Research and Higher Education) for amendments to the Law on higher education. An analysis is currently being carried out to clarify which further legal changes will be necessary.

While no firm date for implementation of the NQF has been set, representatives of the government has expressed their intention to follow the deadlines set at EU level for referencing to the EQF.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of National Education initiated the work on the framework and is responsible for overall coordination. An outline of the work to be covered was presented to the Prime Minister's office for approval (a preliminary approval as given, final and formal approval is still pending). The working group responsible for developing the draft framework covers a broad range of stakeholders, representing higher education, general education, vocational education and training, employers as well as institutions directly concerned by the setting up of the framework. The different ministries involved in the process take part in the meetings of the working group. In parallel to this, in June 2009, a steering group for the Polish NQF was set up. This group covers some of the main stakeholders (in education and training as well as employment) and will play a key role in taking forward the consultation process and implementing the framework from 2010 and onwards.

The authorities has decided that the development and implementation of the NQF will require additional administrative and research support. For this reason two external institutions will be involved (from mid 2009) in the work (The Institute of Educational Research and the 'Cooperation Fund' foundation).

Levels and descriptors

The number of levels and their descriptors are currently being considered by the expert group. The following main structure is currently being discussed:

- knowledge: depths, extent and holism/specialisation;
- skills: problem solving, communication, practical application of knowledge;
- other competences (attitudes?): identity (self-identity?), responsibility, cooperation.

Use of learning outcomes

One of the main objectives of the work starting August 2008 is to undertake a 'stocktaking of qualifications and competences' in the existing Polish education and training system. This activity reflects that the learning outcomes approach has received relatively limited attention in the Polish system so far, an impression which is confirmed in the recent Cedefop study on 'The shift to learning outcomes'⁽¹⁵⁾. The work on the new 'national qualifications standards' for vocational qualifications and the new national curricula for primary and secondary education may point towards a learning outcomes-based approach by clarifying the objectives of the relevant qualifications for the users in question. In higher education institutions are obliged, by existing regulations, to implement curricula based on learning outcomes. Follow up work has been initiated.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Cedefop. *The shift to learning outcomes: policies and practices in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2009. (Cedefop Reference series; 72). Available from Internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=525 [cited 7.9.2009].

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2011.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The NQF work has provided a platform for dialogue between stakeholders (in particular in the education and training system) normally working in separate bureaucratic and institutional segments. The NQF introduces an instrument for coordination which so far has been lacking. Potentially this may provide the basis for a more coherent system, reducing barriers to lifelong learning.

PORTUGAL

Introduction

An overarching national qualifications framework (NQF) is being developed in Portugal. An agreement was signed between the Government and the social partners in March 2007 on the following key elements to support development of the NQF:

- a National Agency for Qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education was established in 2007;
- the national qualifications catalogue was created in 2007 (it will be progressively based on learning outcomes) as a central reference tool for VET provision. The catalogue currently lists 240 qualifications for 40 education and training areas. It defines for each qualification: an occupational profile, training referential (that awards a double certification – education level and vocational qualification level) and a recognition, validation and certification of competences referential;
- further development of a system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning (taking forward the existing national system of recognition, validation and certification of competences) and incorporate it into NQF. Validation system will refer to the qualification standards in the national catalogue, both to 'educational' competences (9 years of school or 12 years of school) and 'occupational' competences.

The development of the Portuguese qualification framework (*Quadro Nacional de Qualificações* – QNQ) is legally based on the Decree Law No 396/2007. This Decree creates the NQF (article No 5), identifies the main aim of the NQF and assumes the principle associated to the EQF in terms of learning outcomes. It also refers that the NQF will be regulated by another legal document jointly prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education. This Decree No 782/2009 (Portaria No 782/2009) was published in July 2009. It regulates the NQF implementation (e.g. defines levels and level descriptors).

The NQF is expected to be in place by October 2010.

The rationale and the main policy objectives

There is a need for increasing transparency, coherency and consistency in the Portuguese qualification system. The NQF should facilitate the integration of different subsystems (academic qualifications, VET qualifications, higher education qualifications, sectoral qualifications (like tourism, agriculture, transports ...)) into a single (overarching), transparent and coherent framework and support policy coordination at national level. By means of the NQF, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to both labour market and society in general should be improved and the mobility in the education and training system and in the labour market facilitated. NQF should contribute to legibility of qualifications, more permeability between subsystems and easier referencing of national qualifications to the EQF levels.

Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of stakeholders is deemed essential. An agreement was signed between the government and the social partners in March 2007 on the creation of an NQF and on a set of key elements to support development of the NQF. The initial work was done by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with the support of the Ministry of Education.

The National Agency for Qualifications is designated national coordination point (NCP) for the implementation of EQF in Portugal. It will develop its functions in cooperation with the General Directorate of Higher Education. The implementation of the NQF will be supervised by the National Council for Vocational Training.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure is proposed to cover the main characteristics and qualifications of the Portuguese qualification system. It is compatible with EQF in terms of categories and principles.

The level descriptors are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude. It is assumed that further development of the level descriptors will be needed to differentiate more precisely between the levels of learning outcomes to make referencing to NQF level easier and to respond to the specificities of different economic sectors.

The proposal for the NQF does not yet allow placing partial qualifications on the framework, but it is a very important matter to be reflected by the working group.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcome approach has a very important dimension in the reforms in all subsystems of education and training in Portugal.

In general education, the national curriculum for basic education: Essential competences is a national reference document for the planning and development of the curriculum at both school and class levels. It includes general as well as specific competences which learners are expected to develop at compulsory education level. For each subject or subject area the

document identifies and defines the respective profile of competences (in terms of attitudes, skills and knowledge) that all students should have developed by the end of each cycle, or for the whole of the three cycles of compulsory education.

In VET, reforms are concentrating strongly on the learning outcomes dimension of developing qualifications standards and curriculum development. The Institute for Quality in Training (IQT), identified, in the last decade, skill trends and training needs and developed occupational profiles for all economic sectors. These occupational profiles are competence-based, using a typology: knowledge, technical know-how and social and relational competences. This work on occupational profiles and sectoral studies will serve for the further development of the National Qualifications Catalogue, using a methodology to develop competence standards for each qualification. This methodology is being consolidated and will be tested in a set of qualifications in the second half of 2009. Assessment will be related to standards through units of competence.

With regards to adult education and training, the National Agency for Adult Education and Training was, until 2006 responsible for the implementation of a referential framework of key competencies. This work was taken over by National Agency for Qualifications.

There have been a number of policies and initiatives developed in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Portugal. As a result, comprehensive national systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning are in place, and have engaged a large number of people, especially since the introduction of the *Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*. This initiative gives a new opportunity to all those already in the labour market without full upper-secondary education. It operates through adult education and training courses, and the national system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC).

Referencing to the EQF

National Agency for Qualifications is the national coordination point (NCP) for the implementation of EQF in Portugal. A referencing committee will be established on the basis of the legal regulation adopted in July 2009.

Lessons learned and the way forward

During the development and discussions following issues have been raised, which need further work and elaboration:

- the level descriptors specification (what level of detail) is needed to enable referencing to NQF levels; there is a need for further common methodological work;
- the inclusion of partial qualification in the NQF;
- the integration of school-based competences and occupational-based competences in the same standard;
- NQF as a bridge between different subsystems including higher education and cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Main sources of information

The National Agency for Qualifications is the NCP for the implementation of EQF in Portugal. Information is available on the <http://www.anq.gov.pt>.

ROMANIA

Introduction

An overarching national qualifications framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes is being developed in Romania, which will bring together all nationally recognised qualifications from both initial and continuing VET, apprenticeship at the workplace and HE. It is expected to be completed by 2010.

The development builds on the NQF for VET, which was based on a Tripartite Agreement signed in 2005 by the Prime Minister, the Employers' National Confederation and the Trade Union's National Confederation. It provided for a five-level structure with a common register for qualifications, quality assurance arrangements and accreditation for VET qualifications.

The development work is currently ongoing to incorporate three-level structure for HE into an overarching NQF. The work is supported by the National Agency for Qualifications in HE, established in 2007.

The National Adult Training Board was appointed the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), legally introduced by Adult Board Law (2004). The main tasks of the NQA are to:

- ensure methodological framework at national level;
- to manage the national register of qualifications for all qualification levels;
- to work with and coordinate 23 Sector Committees (including mainly employers and trade unions);
- cooperate with the National Agency for Qualifications in HE.

The development of the NQF is supported by main stakeholders and is embedded at the inter-ministerial level.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

There is a general view that NQF could help to address some current needs of the Romanian society and education and training system. There is a lack of coherency in the qualification system (for example: weak link between IVET and CVET); qualifications should better respond to the labour market needs; there is a need for more transparency of learning outcomes and mobility of trainees and labour force. Apart from that, national qualifications have to be understood abroad and linked to EQF.

The development of the NQF therefore addresses the following policy objectives:

- facilitating the comparability of Romanian qualifications in Europe;
- improving transparency, quality and relevance of Romanian qualifications;
- enabling more progression and mobility:
 - between different subsystems through the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
 - between different working areas (including migrants) through transparency of competences;
- better linking IVET and CVET and supporting developed pathways.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection in strong cooperation with social partners in 2005. The development of the NQF has been coordinated since 2005 by the National Qualifications Authority on two levels. The decision making body is the Board, which has 15 members: five represent ministries, five trade unions and five employers' confederations.

Within the National Qualification Authority, there is a technical unit (about 50 staff), which provides support to the Board, coordinates activities and prepares documents. The coordination with Bologna implementation is assured through participation of the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation in the Board.

Research is being carried out by the National Institute for Educational Sciences, National Centre for Development of Vocational and Technical Education and National Qualifications Authority.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level reference structure reflecting EQF will be proposed. Level descriptors are being developed, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The NQF allows including whole qualifications and competence units, which are certified and recognised on the labour market.

Use of learning outcomes

There is a strong commitment to use a learning outcome approach as a part of the national reform programme.

Learning outcomes are already embedded in the competence-based VET reform and the establishment of arrangement for validation of non-formal learning. Many learning programmes developed in VET are based on competences.

Occupational standards are used in IVET, and are based on actual elements of competence that are to be proved in the workplace. Vocational training standards are newly established qualification standards approved by the Minister of Education, which are based on learning outcomes to be achieved by the holder of qualification.

The system of recognition centres for adult learning is based on competences defined as learning outcomes. This approach to assessment relies strongly on assessment tools like the use of student portfolios, presentation of projects and assignments that the learner has produced after negotiation or agreement with teachers or trainers, and formative assessment of learning experience in the community or workplace.

The decision to adopt the principles of the EQF in Romania is considered an important motive to revise the existing methodological framework for qualifications development. As part of the process of continuous improvement, the methodologies used in the previous Phare projects, 2004 and 2005, have been evaluated, reviewed and updated in Phare 2006. New methodologies developed in Phare project 2006 are oriented on learning outcomes. A new format for qualifications, based on learning outcomes, was developed.

Referencing to the EQF

The timing for the referencing to the EQF has yet to be fixed, but preparations have started. National Qualifications Authority, National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and National Agency for Quality Assurance for Pre-university Education (IVET) are working within their level of competence. The national steering group for referencing has yet to be decided.

Lessons learned and the way forward

In the course of the work it has become clear how difficult it is for the stakeholders from VET and HE to develop a joint understanding of learning outcome orientation. However, this is an important prerequisite for increasing the comparability and transfer opportunities between qualifications in the two subsystems and ensuring that the NQF can act as bridge between the educational subsystems in various different ways.

It is also important to emphasise the need to have structures in place and sustainable financing. The financing of sector committees must be solved in the near future in order to assure a smooth development of the system. To set up the financing agreement (especially for the sector committees) is crucial for the implementation of NQF.

Main sources of information

National Qualifications Authority is designated as EQF national coordination point (NCP). Information is available on the <http://www.cnfpa.ro>.

Introduction

An overarching NQF is currently being developed in Slovakia.

The work is based on the Government Decision on EQF implementation in Slovakia, adopted in February 2009. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has been prepared and will be signed in October 2009.

The development is complemented by adoption of following acts: the Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009, the School Act No 245/2008 and the Higher Education Act, No 131/2002. The Lifelong Learning Act is expected to be adopted by the end of 2009.

A national register of qualifications is being established with the aim to include all national qualifications from different subsystems of education and training. Development of the national register of occupations is in progress based on amendment of Act No 5/2004 on employment services valid since May 2008.

It is planned that NQF will be in place by 2011. Development is based on the national project Lifelong learning, lifelong guidance and national qualification system, co-financed by ESF.

The rationale and main policy objectives

The rationale and main policy objectives which NQF will help to fulfil will be based on the analyses of all subsystems of education and training and qualifications development. It is agreed that NQF could help to address some current challenges, i.e. to:

- better link education and labour market needs;
- improve transparency and consistency of qualifications.

Main pillars of the NQF are the national register of qualifications and national register of occupations. The aim of the NQF is to create a system environment that will support comparability of learning outcomes achieved by various forms of learning and education and to enable recognition of real knowledge and competences independently on the way they were acquired.

Involvement of stakeholders

Work on NQF was initiated and is coordinated by the Ministry of Education. A steering group was established, chaired by Director General for Lifelong Learning. The members come from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Culture. Administrative and

research support is provided by the Ministry of Education while financial support will be provided by the Structural Funds (ESF).

A ministerial working group was created to analyse existing qualification and to do preparatory work together with employers and employees.

Coordination between NQF and Bologna implementation had already been established.

Levels and descriptors

An eight-level structure is envisaged to cover the main characteristics of the national qualification system and be compatible with EQF also in terms of principles, categories and level descriptors. The final number of levels has not been defined yet.

Partial qualifications will be separately described in NQF.

University qualifications will be included in the NQF especially on the bachelor, master and doctorate level.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach has been recognised as a part of the reform agenda and is being integrated in all new developments. Modernisation programme 'Slovakia 21' – reform programme was adopted by the government of Slovakia to achieve better visibility of learning outcomes in the education system of Slovakia.

In the general education (primary/secondary) learning outcomes are being implemented in line the School Act No 245/2008.

In VET, the learning outcomes approach is being reinforced through the new Vocational Education and Training Act No 184/2009.

It is expected that work on the NQF will have an impact on the use of learning outcomes in the higher education.

The future Act on lifelong learning is aiming to contribute to unified accreditation and certification practices by recognition of partial qualifications based on competence acquired regardless of the learning setting.

Referencing to the EQF

In 2008, the national steering group for referencing to EQF was established. The referencing process will start in January 2010 and the referencing report is expedited to be prepared by April 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

To establish a good partnership platform is one of preconditions for developing NQF.

Main sources of information

Ministry of Education – Lifelong Learning Department is the EQF NCP: <http://www.minedu.sk>

Introduction

An overarching Slovenian qualifications framework is being developed. The development builds on a series of reforms since the mid 1990s in all education and training subsystems (in VET, higher education, general education and adult education) and introduction of the certification system in 2000.

In 2006, the Slovenian government adopted the Decree on the introduction and use of the classifications system of education and training (Klasius) (OG, No 46/2006), which provides the formal basis for building the national framework. It is a key national standard to collect, process, analyse and demonstrate the statistical and analytical data which are important to illustrate the developments in the social, economical and demographical situation in Slovenia.

Other elements underpinning the SQF are the national register of occupational standards and the register of assessment qualifications catalogues for national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The registers are created by the National Professional Qualifications Act (2000, amended 2006). A third register is the register of national VET programmes, which includes assessment catalogues and vocational titles of VET diplomas, governed by the Vocational Education and Training Act (2006) and for higher VET by the new Higher Vocational Act (2004).

The developments will be supported by the Slovenian qualifications framework project (2009-12) co-financed by ESF.

The rationale and main policy objectives

All subsystems of education and training in Slovenia have been reformed since the mid 1990s. There is a general view that the system functions well, when it comes to permeability. There are almost no dead-ends at upper-secondary level and individuals will move vertically and horizontally not facing big obstacles. However, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between different education and training subsystems and to increase coherence in lifelong learning strategy; to improve the link between education and certification system and responsiveness of the qualifications to the labour market needs and individuals needs and to have a reliable tool for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal knowledge and skills.

The main issues and policy objectives addressed are:

- improving transnational understanding of Slovenian qualifications as well as the possibilities of transfer;
- supporting coherent approaches to LLL by providing access, progression, recognition of learning, coherency and better use of qualifications;
- improving transparency of qualifications for individuals and employers;

- necessity for the education and training system to be more responsive to employers' needs and their involvement in assessment and certification;
- insuring capacity to certify knowledge, skills and competence that have not yet been incorporated in formal education and training programmes and provide better links and transferability between education and training and certification system;
- improving efficiency of the process of achieving qualifications focused on the needs of the labour market (e.g. re-qualification);
- enabling individualised pathways mainly for adults and drop-outs;
- improving access to qualifications issues by the tertiary system and thus increasing the percentage of people with post-secondary VET and higher education qualifications.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport in close cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs in 2005 through EQF consultation process.

In 2005 and 2006, several conferences on the development of the EQF were organised in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

In 2006, the working group with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Science and Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia prepared the proposal of Klasius (see above).

Further development will be coordinated by the Steering committee, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Economy, National Institute for Vocational Education and Training and social partners. Administrative support will be provided by the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training. Financially the project will be supported by national budget and ESF.

There is an unofficial agreement between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education that the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training will be designated EQF national contact point (NCP).

Levels and descriptors

The Klasius has an eight-level structure with two sublevels (at levels 6 and 8). This structure is based on the national tradition and is embedded in many collective agreements.

The level descriptors for NQF are defined in terms of outcome criteria: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility; key competences (learning competence, social and communication skills) and professional and vocational competences.

For qualifications acquired after completion of nationally accredited programmes additionally input criteria are used, e.g. access requirements, typical length of the programme and inputs in terms of volume of learning activities in VET and HE defined also in credit points.

There is a proposal to include three types of qualifications:

- those awarded after completion of education programmes at all levels (be it general, vocational or higher);
- those achieved through recognition of non-formal and informal learning in line with the national standards (NVQs);
- other certificates and qualifications acquired in further and supplementary training and not issued by the National Authorities.

VET qualifications are defined in modules. The term partial qualifications is not used, but within the VET programmes it is possible to exit with an NVQ as a partial qualification, which has a clear national standard and value on the labour market.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is already well embedded in the Slovene educational system and generally well accepted. The term educational outcomes is used by the Decree on the introduction and use of the classifications system of education and training (Klasius) and defined as ‘the set of knowledge, skills and competences for “life and work” achieved by learners in the process of formal, informal and non-formal learning. Educational outcomes are certifiable as a rule’.

Educational programmes have moved from a content-based to an objectives-based approach. The relation between objectives and outcomes, and between learning objectives/outcomes and learning standards, are now being discussed. A balance is being sought in emphasising the role played by general knowledge and acquired key competences, sufficiently broad technical knowledge and certain pedagogical processes in the definition of educational outcomes.

In VET, the learning outcome approach is seen as a very useful way of bringing vocational programmes and schools closer to ‘real life’ and the needs of the market. The basis for all VET qualifications is a system of occupational profiles and standards, identifying knowledge and skills required in the labour market. National VET framework curricula define expected knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by students. Syllabuses usually follow the Bloom taxonomy/concept of learning outcomes. Broad competence concept in catalogues for modules/subjects is defined as ability and readiness to use knowledge, skills and attitudes in study and work contexts.

In addition to the national VET framework curriculum, the school curriculum was introduced and represents an important innovation in Slovenia giving schools increased autonomy in curriculum planning and especially in taking into account the local environment and employers’ needs when developing the curriculum.

Assessment in VET (at levels 4 and 5) consists of assessment in the form of project work, testing practical skills and underpinning knowledge), additionally written tests are used at level 5 to test theoretical professional knowledge and knowledge of general subjects (Slovenian language, foreign languages, mathematics).

New programmes in general education (compulsory and upper secondary) include learning outcomes to be achieved either at the end of the three stages in compulsory

education or at the end of upper-secondary education tested in the external Matura examination.

The National Professional Qualifications Act (2000, amended 2006) enables the validation of vocationally-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school. The NVQ and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on assessment qualifications catalogues (catalogues of standards for professional knowledge and skills).

Referencing to the EQF

A National steering committee at government level for referencing NQF levels in relation to the EQF is expected to be nominated by July 2009.

A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by September 2010 and the final report by 2011.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A broad partnership approach and commitment of all stakeholders is important. Further development of the NQF should be based on the requirements and needs of the national context and experiences gained, using the existing infrastructure and no additional bureaucracy. Developing common concepts and insuring consistent use of common concepts and terminology is a challenge.

Main sources of information

National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, where qualifications registers are accessible: <http://www.cpi.si>

Statistical Office of Slovenia, where the Classifications System of Education and Training (Klasius) is available at: <http://www.stat.si/Klasius>

SPAIN

Information on Spain is missing for this report but will be provided in the next version.

Introduction

In October 2008, the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research announced their intention, in a meeting with representatives from other ministries, social partners and national authorities to start work on an overarching national qualifications framework. This framework is seen as an instrument for implementing the EQF as well as a way to further strengthen the transparency and permeability of the Swedish qualifications system. As a first step this framework will cover the existing public education and training system. On a longer term basis the objective is to open up this framework to bodies and stakeholders outside the public sector on a voluntary basis, for example enterprises and sectors awarding certificates or diploma of some kind.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The development and implementation of a Swedish NQF builds on a strong basis. The learning outcomes is broadly accepted and widely implemented, relations between qualifications at different levels and in different areas are well defined and structured and there are thus relatively few barriers to access, transfer and progression. Developing an NQF is therefore primarily seen as a way to facilitate the referencing to the EQF, the opportunity to further strengthen the transparency and permeability of the national system is acknowledged. An NQF could be used as an instrument to better include players outside the public system, for example enterprises and sectors involved in education and training and awarding certificates or diploma. An NQF would offer a reference making it possible for individuals as well as employers to overview the totality of qualifications on offer, irrespective of their institutional origin. To realise such an open approach, however, requires clear mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation of qualifications. An inclusive approach is seen as important for transparency and for facilitating lifelong learning.

Involvement of stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Research carries the overall responsibility for the work on the NQF and the referencing to the EQF. Based on preparatory work carried out by this ministry, in October 2008, representatives of relevant ministries (education, business, labour market and finance), the social partners, different sectors as well as education and training institutions were invited to a meeting for a first discussion on the topic. It is envisaged that this group will continue to meet on a regular basis in the coming period.

The technical work will be supported by an inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of education, labour market, business and finance ministries.

A particular role is attributed to a new institution set up this year. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (*Myndigheten för Yrkeshögskolan*) is designated as

the Swedish national coordination point for EQF and will support and work in parallel to the intergovernmental working group referred to above. The agency is given the responsibility to coordinate and support validation of non-formal and informal learning and how this will be linked to a Swedish NQF.

Levels and descriptors

As the main technical work will start autumn 2009, the number of levels and the type of descriptors still has to be developed and decided. The learning outcomes perspective is firmly established in the Swedish system and will provide a clear basis for the proposal to be presented in 2010.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes perspective is an important and to a large extent accepted and implemented feature of the Swedish education and training system. At political level the learning outcomes approach is closely linked to the 'objective-based governance' in use since the early 1990s. While the term learning outcomes is not commonly used (the term 'knowledge objectives' is used for compulsory education), the principles behind are well known and to a large extent implemented. The core curricula for compulsory education have recently been revised, further strengthening and refining the learning outcomes-based approach.

The situation in the universities as regards the shift to learning outcomes is mixed. These are autonomous institutions where national authorities have less direct influence. The Bologna process has been influential, as have a number of local initiatives.

A particular challenge faced is the extent to which the learning outcomes perspective is influencing assessment practices. Professionals may have problems seeing that assessment methods and criteria have to relate directly to the objectives expressed in the curricula. This is an ongoing process illustrating the long term challenge involved in the shift to learning outcomes.

Referencing to the EQF

The development of the NQF will be given priority in 2009/10, the actual referencing to the EQF is expected to start late 2010. A draft report will be ready for the EQF AG mid 2011, the final referencing report is expected to be ready by fourth quarter of 2011. The national coordination point for EQF was established on 1st July 2009 and will play a key role both in relation to the NQF and the EQF referencing.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The development of the Swedish NQF is still at an early stage. What distinguishes Sweden from most other countries is the emphasis on the NQF as a reference for future developments and as a way to open up the qualifications system to new stakeholders, for

example in the private sector. It remains to see how this will be accomplished, in particular regarding the quality assurance issues, but is of interest beyond the borders of Sweden.

TURKEY

Introduction

A national qualifications framework (NQF), which will cover general, vocational and higher education and training is being developed in Turkey, building on experience of the broad EQF consultation process in 2005 and outcomes of the Strengthening vocational education and training projects (2002-07). Many elements of the NQF are in place and further development will involve drawing the various elements together. The NQF for higher education (in line with the Bologna process) was adopted in 2006. A draft NQF is expected to be in place by 2010.

Passing the Vocational Qualifications Authority Law (No 5544, 2006) was legally the most important stage for NQF development. According to this law a tripartite Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) was established in 2007, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with the objective to develop the strategy for implementing the national qualification system and to prepare a proposal for an overarching NQF. VQA has already developed secondary legislation on occupational standards and sectoral committees in 2007; the work on the development of procedures and supporting documents and guidelines started in the beginning of 2008. Secondary legislation for qualifications, assessment and certification was published in 2008.

The European Project (IPA-2009-2012) Strengthening Vocational Qualifications Authority and National Vocational Qualification System in Turkey will support further activities and providing necessary consultancy.

The rationale and main policy objectives

According to Government programme documents, one of the main objectives of creating the NQF is to reduce mismatches and increasing effective employment and training programmes.

The following policy objectives are addressed by developing an NQF to:

- strengthen the relationship among education and training and employment;
- develop national standards for learning outcomes;
- encourage quality assurance in training and education;
- provide qualifications for vertical and horizontal transfers and develop national and international comparability platforms;
- ensure access to learning, advances in learning and recognition and comparability of learning;

- support lifelong learning.

On a short-term basis, all new VQA qualifications developed according to the new legislation (Law 5544) will be included into the NQF.

In the medium (or long) term, it is expected that all formal qualifications (secondary and higher education diplomas and other qualifications) will be placed in a single framework and transition between all kinds of qualifications will be possible. One of expected benefits is that by the means of NQF the qualifications will be more labour-market oriented and dynamic. In addition, for individuals NQF will provide career mobility, flexibility, all kinds of learning activities to be valued, and progression routes to be clearly defined.

Involvement of stakeholders

The work on the NQF development was initiated by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in 2005 through the EQF consultation process. After the VQA was established, the Authority has been coordinating the process.

In the higher education area, the Bologna process initiated the NQF for HE. The Higher Education Council executes the activities. Coordination between the NQF developments and Bologna reform is achieved through defining the strategic issues among the related authorities and agreement on implementations in a coordinated manner. Employees' and employers' organisations and professional organisations are members of the Executive board of VQA besides representatives from Government (Ministries of Labour and Education, Higher Education Council) and also take part in the process.

Working groups composed of members of different stakeholders will be established to prepare the proposal and consultancy will be provided thorough European project. The draft will be discussed in the broad consultation process with all relevant stakeholders and then approved.

Levels and descriptors

According to the agreement in the consultation process, the NQF will consist of eight levels defined through learning outcomes and will cover general, vocational and higher education. EQF descriptors have been taken as starting point for further development of national descriptors. Higher education has determined descriptors in terms of competence components; apart of autonomy and responsibility there is an emphasis on foreign languages competences, learning to learn, field specific competences, ICT, social and communication skills.

Use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the NQF and is stated intention of all ongoing reforms in all subsystems of education and training supported by main stakeholders. The Ministry of National Education has launched a curricula reform in secondary education (for both general and vocational and technical schools).

Vocational qualifications will be learning outcome-based. In higher education, the implementation of learning outcome approach is an essential part of the implementation of the NQF for higher education.

A national format for national occupational standards (NOS) was determined and describes the labour market needs in terms of duties and tasks with corresponding performance criteria. In the qualifications developed from the occupational standards, these are described in terms of learning outcomes. Awarding criteria for the Occupational Standards Setting Bodies were developed. Modules which form programmes within the Ministry of National Education secondary education programmes are based on learning outcomes. In VQA qualification structure assessment methods are designed to assess learning outcomes.

Referencing to the EQF

A referencing committee, composed of members of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), Council for Higher Education (CoHE) and other relevant stakeholders is planned to be set up in 2009. A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010.

Lessons learned and the way forward

A very important condition to developing an effective process of establishing NQF is to have clear responsibilities, defined roles and a coordination body which has a clear mandate. Reaching agreement on establishing the VQA in Turkey was an important milestone.

Main sources of information

The Vocational Qualification Authority (VQA) is the NCP. Information is available on its website: www.myk.gov.tr

UNITED KINGDOM

England and Northern Ireland

Introduction

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is a jointly regulated credit and qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The framework covers all levels and types of qualifications. It has been designed to be a simple and rational organising structure for units and qualifications that reforms the three country (England, Northern Ireland and Wales) national qualifications frameworks (NQF) and is capable of supporting the accumulation and transfer of credit achievement over time. The QCF is a new way of

recognising skills and qualifications by awarding credit for qualifications and units. It enables people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes. The QCF went through a two-year test and trial period (summer 2006 – April 2008) and was formally adopted in autumn 2008.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The following four aims were identified for the QCF. It should:

- ensure a wider range of achievements can be recognised within a more inclusive framework;
- establish a framework that is more responsive to individual and employer needs;
- establish a simpler qualifications framework that is easier for all users to understand;
- reduce the burden of bureaucracy in the accreditation and assessment of qualifications (¹⁶).

The QCF furthermore sets out a series of strategic benefits of implementing the new framework. These are:

- the framework is simple to understand, flexible to use, and easy to navigate;
- the framework is responsive so that employers and learning providers can customise programmes of learning/ training to meet particular needs;
- unit achievement is recognised and recorded;
- all learners have an individual Learner Achievement Record;
- improved data quality in relation to qualifications and achievement for users, stakeholders and government;
- the introduction of the QCF reduces administrative bureaucracy and costs.

Involvement of stakeholders and legal basis

Responsibilities for regulating the QCF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland lie with the following qualifications regulators:

- in England, the qualifications regulator for all external qualifications is the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (OfQual).
- in Northern Ireland, the qualifications regulator is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which regulates external qualifications other than NVQs.

Levels and descriptors

The QCF comprises of nine levels from Entry level to level 8 and covers all types of achievement.

(¹⁶) Working specification for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials: Version 2. (Please note that this working specification is due to be replaced by regulatory arrangements for the QCF in August 2008. The regulatory arrangements will actually contain the updated technical requirements for the QCF.)

The level descriptors provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the nine levels. As the framework is inclusive, the level descriptors are designed to enable their use across a wide range of learning contexts. The level descriptors build on those developed through the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS), the existing level descriptors of the national qualifications framework (NQF), and a range of level descriptors from frameworks in the UK and internationally. The five upper levels are intended to be consistent with the levels of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Level is an indication of the relative demand made on the learner, the complexity and/or depth of achievement, and the learner's autonomy in demonstrating that achievement. The level descriptors are concerned with the outcomes of learning and not the process of learning or the method of assessment. The indicators for each level are grouped into three categories:

- knowledge and understanding,
- application and action,
- autonomy and accountability.

Use of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach underpins the English and Northern Ireland qualifications systems. Actively promoted since the 1980s, this perspective is broadly accepted and implemented.

Referencing to the EQF

The QCF will be referred to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process. A draft referencing report has been produced (August 2009) and will be presented to the EQF AG late autumn 2009. The QCF will thus be one of the first frameworks to meet EQF deadline of 2010.

The most important lessons learned and the way forward

The adoption of the QCF demonstrates the need to continuously further develop NQFs. As 'a second generation' framework the QCA introduces a much stronger credit transfer elements moving beyond the scope of the former NQF. This evolution has gone on for more than a decade, underlining the need for a long term perspective in this field.

Main sources of information

<http://www.qcda.gov.uk/8150.aspx>

Scotland

Introduction

The SCQF promotes lifelong learning in Scotland. The framework was originally implemented in 2001 but has been gradually revised and refined in the period following this. The SCQF is organised as a company (see below) (which is a unique solution in Europe) and a charity was set up in 2006. The framework covers all levels and types of qualifications. The SCQF is not a regulatory framework. The SCQF assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond, thereby clarifying opportunities for international progression routes and credit transfer. The SCQF is seen as a bridging framework as it brings together other sub frameworks within a meta framework. However it also has full integration in that the level descriptors and criteria for inclusion are completely common.

The framework supports everyone in Scotland, including learning providers and employers, by:

- helping people of all ages and circumstances to get access to appropriate education and training so they can meet their full potential;
- helping employers, learners and the general public to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of learning, and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The SCQF:

- describes the courses and programmes that lead to qualifications;
- helps develop 'progression routes' for individual to follow;
- allows individuals to make the most of the opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications.

The SCQF is intended to help describe programmes of learning that lead to the various qualifications; support the development of routes to progress from qualification to qualification; and maximise the opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications. It will do this by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand and providing a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities. There are three strategic goals for the SCQF partnership for the period 2007-11 in line with the objects of the company. These are to:

- maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF;
- promote and develop the framework as a tool to support lifelong learning;
- develop and maintain relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally.

Involvement of stakeholders

The framework is maintained by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership which is a company limited by guarantee and also a Scottish charity. The partnership is made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency, Association of Scotland's Colleges and Scottish Ministers.

Levels and descriptors

There are 12 levels in the Scottish framework. These levels are described on the basis of common level descriptors which apply to all types of learning programmes and qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

This is a requirement of the framework that learning is described in terms of learning outcomes.

Referencing to the EQF

The SCQF will be referred to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The referencing work started in June 2008 and a draft referencing report has now been produced (August 2009). This will be presented to the EQF AG late autumn 2009. The SCQF will thus be one of the first frameworks to meet EQF deadline of 2010.

The internal Scottish process has been organised through the Board of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP). This board has appointed a Quality Committee to look after the integrity of the framework. This committee is therefore in charge of any work which involves referencing the SCQF to any other framework. It has established a Steering Group to manage the activities of the NCP, including:

- referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF levels;
- promoting and applying the European principles for QA in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- ensuring all methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system;
- ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at European level.

The Steering Group includes representation from major stakeholders along with two European experts. Scotland has completed its self assessment against the EHEA as part of the Bologna process. This work is now being taken account of within the referencing of the full SCQF to the EQF.

Main sources of information

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

Wales

Introduction

The CQFW is a descriptive voluntary framework which was developed by bringing together a number of sub-frameworks already in existence in Wales: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ); the National Qualification Framework (NQF) for regulated national courses; and the quality assured lifelong learning. It therefore embraces both academic and vocational qualifications. The CQFW can be seen as a second generation framework emerging from the NQF for England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

The CQFW is positioned as a key part of Wales' lifelong learning policy and strategy.

- CQFW enables any learning post-16 to be formally recognised and is not in itself a regulatory mechanism; any regulatory requirements are supplied through its relationship with regulating bodies;
- CQFW is unit-based, defines one credit as 10 hours of learning time and has nine levels (the lowest subdivided into three) with supporting levels descriptors;
- the technical specifications apply to all post-16 learning.

Levels and descriptors

There are nine levels in the CQFW – Entry plus eight levels. There are common level descriptors which apply to all types of learning programmes and qualifications.

Use of learning outcomes

All qualifications and learning programmes within the CQFW are based on learning outcomes and must have quality assured assessment of these outcomes. The CQFW uses two measures to describe qualifications:

- the level of the outcomes of learning;
- the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

Referencing to the EQF

The CQFW will be referred to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process. The referencing work started in June 2008 and a draft referencing report has now been produced (August 2009). This will be presented to the EQF AG late autumn 2009. The CQFW will thus be one of the first frameworks to meet EQF deadline of 2010.

The Welsh referencing work was carried out by an EQF coordination group in June 2008. The role of the group was:

- referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- promoting and applying the principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- ensuring the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and the resulting decisions are published;
- providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system;
- ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at European level.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) is currently carrying out a self assessment against the EHEA as part of the Bologna process. The EHEA is compatible with the EQF.

Main sources of information

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/?lang=en>

List of interviewees – Member States representatives in the EQF Advisory Group

Country	Name and surname	Institution
Austria	Eduard Staudecker	Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
Belgium (Flanders)	Wilfried Boomgart	Flemish Ministry of Education
Belgium (Wallonia)	Jo Leonard	Ministry of Education, French-speaking region of Belgium
Bulgaria	Mimi Daneva	Ministry of Education and Science
Croatia	Mile Dzelalija	Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
Cyprus	Charalambos Constantinou	Ministry of Education and Culture
Czech Republic	Miroslav Kadlec	National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education
Denmark	Jan Reitz Jørgensen	Ministry of Education
Estonia	Küllli All	Ministry of Education and Research
Finland	Sirkka Liisa Karki Carita Blomquist	Both National Board of Education
France	Anne Marie Charraud	CNCP
Germany	Melanie Form	Federal Ministry for Education and Research
Greece	Vana Kanellopoulou	Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Vice Minister's Bureau
Hungary	Zoltan Loboda	Ministry of Education and Culture
Iceland	Bjorg Petursdottir	Ministry of Education
Ireland	Jim Murray	National Qualifications Authority
Italy	Gabriela di Francesco	ISFOL
Latvia	Baiba Ramina	Academic Information Center
Lithuania	-	
Luxembourg	Jos Noesen	Ministry of National Education
Malta	James Calleja	Malta Qualifications Council Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
The Netherlands	Karin van der Sanden	Ministry of Education
Norway	Halvdan Farstad	Ministry of Education
Poland	Ewa Chmielecka	
Portugal	Elsa Caramujo	National Agency for Qualifications

Country	Name and surname	Institution
Romania	Victor Iliescu	Ministry of Education, Research and Youth
Slovakia	Jaroslav Juriga	Ministry of Education
Slovenia	Anton Simonič Elido Bandelj	Ministry of Education and Sport
Spain	-	-
Sweden	Dan Fagerlund Fritjof Karlsson Carina Lunden	All from the Ministry of Education
Turkey	Ahmet Gözüküçük	The Vocational Qualification Authority
United Kingdom England and Northern Ireland Scotland Wales	Mike Coles	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Short overview of the NQF developments

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Austria	<p>Overarching NQF will include qualifications from formal education and training system and will facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>A framework with communication and orientation function</p>	8 levels are proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - skills - competence <p>EQF level descriptors are used as starting point</p>	<p>Broad partnership approach</p> <p>Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Federal Ministry of Science and Research are preparing the policy paper on NQF implementation</p>	Design and consultation stage	<p>Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture initiated and is coordinating the developments in cooperation with Federal Ministry of Science and Research</p> <p>All ministries and <i>Länder</i> representative are involved as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training</p> <p>Broad consultation was carried out between January and September 2008</p> <p>About 270 responses</p>	<p>Referencing to EQF will start mid 2010</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be prepared by the end of 2010</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Belgium (Flanders)	Overarching NQF has been developed A framework with communication and orientation function	8 levels are adopted	- Knowledge/skills - context/ autonomy/ responsibility	An Act on the qualification structure, providing explicit basis for the NQF, was adopted April 2009	Implementation stage	Ministry of Education is the competent authority Other ministries are involved (labour, finances) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training Broad consultation has been carried out at different stages of the process	Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010
Belgium (Wallonia)	NQF is under preparation A framework with communication and orientation function	8 levels are proposed	- Knowledge - skills - competence Reflecting EQF descriptors for levels 1-5, Dublin descriptors levels 6-8. The relationship between these two segments now being discussed	A separate Decree binding bachelor, masters and doctors to levels 6-8 was adopted in 2008 Political debate is ongoing on the links between 1-5 and 6-8, decision is pending	Design and consultation stage Testing and piloting phase in 50 areas of trades and vocation	Initiated by the joint government of the French region. Followed up through a working group involving relevant education and training stakeholders. Broad testing in sectors.	Referencing to EQF is seen an integrated part of the work on NQF Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Bulgaria	<p>Overarching NQF will include all levels of education and training</p> <p>NQF for HE was drafted separately in 2007</p> <p>A framework with communication and orientation function</p>	8 levels are proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - skills and - competence <p>Based on EQF levels, QF-EHEA, ISCED 97</p>	Embedded in the national LLL strategy, adopted by Council of Ministers' Decision, October 2008	Conceptualisation and design stage	<p>Ministry of Education and Science is the competent authority</p> <p>Stakeholders from public agencies (National agency for VET, National documentation and information centre, National statistical institute) and representative in Bologna follow-up group are included</p>	<p>Referencing to EQF is seen as an integrated part of the work on NQF</p> <p>The European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate acts as NCP</p>
Croatia	<p>Overarching NQF for LLL (CROQF) will include all education and training subsystems</p> <p>A framework with communication and orientation function</p>	8 levels with additional sublevels at 4, 5, 7 and 8 are proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge (theoretical and factual) - skills (cognitive, practical and social) - responsibility and autonomy 	<p>Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a joint working group of experts for VET and HE in 2006</p> <p>Baseline for CROQF were prepared in 2007</p> <p>Baseline were adopted by the government in July 2007</p> <p>5-year action plan prepared (2008-12)</p>	Conceptualisation and design stage	<p>Ministry of Science, Education and Sport is the competent authority</p> <p>Other ministries are involved (economy, labour, health, foreign affairs, environmental protection) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training</p>	<p>Referencing to EQF will start in 2010</p> <p>The High level committees for development of CROQF acts as NCP</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Cyprus	Overarching NQF will include all types of nationally recognised qualification	8 levels are proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - skills - competence EQF level descriptors are used as starting point	Council of Ministers' decision to develop an overarching NQF was adopted in July 2008	Conceptualisation and design stage	Ministry of Education and Culture is the competent authority The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Human Resources Development Authority are involved	
Czech Republic	Overarching NQF will include various types of qualifications from all subsystems of education and training Based on the register of approved full and partial qualifications and assessment standards Framework with communication and orientation function	8 levels are proposed Levels 1-4 have been approved in August 2009, level descriptors for levels 5-8 will be approved by the end of 2009	Qualifications levels are differentiated by level of competence Each competence has a knowledge and skills component Each competence is classified according to activity dimension (considered primary) and knowledge dimension (field or discipline)	Work started in 2005 The Act on the verification and recognition of results of further education, 2006, is the legal basis for NQF development Embedded in the national LLL strategy	Design and partly implementation stage	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is the competent authority Other ministries act as authorising bodies Education and training providers, universities are authorised bodies Social partners participate in the qualifications development National qualification Council is an advisory body National VET Institute (NUOV) manages and administrates the NQF	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011 National VET Institute (NUOV) was designated as NCP

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Denmark	<p>Overarching NQF for LLL will include all officially recognised public qualifications from all subsystem of education and training</p> <p>QF for HE was established in 2006/07 and forms a part of the overarching framework</p> <p>Communication and orientation function, but regulating function in HE</p> <p>Clear distinction between the levels 1-5 and level 6-8</p> <p>Different principles of referring national qualifications used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - best fit at levels 1-5. - full fit at level 6-8 	8 levels are proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge (different types of knowledge, complexity and understanding) - skills (different types of skills, complexity of tasks, communication) and - competence (context, cooperation and responsibility, learning to learn) <p>Levels 6-8 have clear reference to Dublin descriptors</p> <p>Level descriptors are based on: EQF descriptors, Dublin descriptors, existing descriptors of learning outcomes of curricula and programmes, research related outcomes in HE</p>	<p>Work started in 2006 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education and referring to the 2006 government strategy on 'Denmark in the global economy'</p> <p>A detailed outline of the framework with the roadmap was published in June 2009</p> <p>Amendments to existing legal basis will take place</p>	Implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education is coordinating the work but the proposal and its implementation is based on a broad involvement of other ministries, social partners, representatives of education and training subsystems, etc.</p>	<p>Referencing to EQF is seen an integrated part of the work on NQF</p> <p>Referencing report is planned for October 2010</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Estonia	<p>Overarching NQF for LLL will include all range of professional competences from all subsystem of education and training and non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>Learning outcomes for HE were approved in August 2007 and since January 2009 linked to the overarching NQF</p> <p>A board of chairmen of 16 professional councils was introduced to improve coherence between sectors</p>	8 levels are adopted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - skills - competence 	<p>Developments are based on the 5-level qualification framework</p> <p>The amended Professional Act (September 2008) is the legal basis for NQF development</p>	Implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education and Research is the competent authority</p> <p>Other ministries involved (social affairs, economic affairs) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training and public agencies (National examination and qualifications centre, Qualifications authority)</p> <p>Estonian Qualification Authority (QA) (Kutsekoda) (2001) manages and administrates the NQF</p>	<p>Estonian Qualification authority is the NCP</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010</p>
Finland	<p>Overarching NQF will include all publicly recognised qualifications</p> <p>The framework will facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>Framework with communication and orientation function</p>	8 levels have been proposed	<p>The descriptors have been inspired by EQF descriptors, but adopted to suit the national context</p> <p>In competence, aspects like entrepreneurship and languages are added</p> <p>The descriptors 6-8 have been adjusted to Dublin descriptors</p>	<p>Work started in August 2008 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education</p> <p>An NQF outline was finalised in June 2009</p> <p>A specific Law on the NQF will be presented to the Parliament for adoption (2010)</p>	Implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education is the competent authority, but other ministries, social partners and representatives of the subsystems of education are closely involved in the process</p> <p>A consultation will be carried out on the basis of the June 2009 proposal</p>	<p>The referencing to EQF has started</p> <p>The National Board of Education was appointed the NCP</p> <p>A referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
France	<p>Overarching NQF covers all levels and types of qualifications</p> <p>Validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important part of the framework</p> <p>The framework has a regulatory function, in particular through the role played by CNCP (National committee on professional certificates) as the framework 'gatekeeper' regulating which qualifications are to be officially accredited</p>	<p>Five levels exist for the moment; an eight-level structure is being considered</p>	<p>The French levels are distinguished on the basis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skills - knowledge - competence 	<p>A note on possible revisions to be made to the existing framework will be presented to the Prime Minister in autumn 2009</p> <p>The note is based on the conclusions of a representative working group currently looking into these questions</p>	<p>Implemented, currently revision stage</p>	<p>The CNCP, in charge of coordinating the framework, is representing all relevant ministries, social partners, chambers and representatives of education and training subsystems</p>	<p>The work on the referencing has been going on since 2006</p> <p>The final referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010</p> <p>The national committee on professional qualifications (CNCP) is the NCP</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Germany	<p>Overarching NQF for LLL (<i>Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen – DQR</i>) will include qualifications from all subsystems and facilitate the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences</p> <p>A framework with communication and orientation functions</p> <p>NQF for HE was implemented in 2005</p>	8 levels are proposed	<p>The level descriptors are defined in two categories of competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional competence is subdivided into: knowledge (breadth and depth) and skills (instrumental and systemic skills); - personal competence, which is subdivided into social competence (teamwork, leadership, communication skills) and self-competence (autonomy/ responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence) 	<p>A process started in 2007, when a national steering group was jointly established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of <i>Länder</i></p> <p>In February 2009, first proposal of the German NQF was published</p>	<p>Testing phase</p> <p>During 2009 examples from IT, metal, health and trade sectors will be referenced to NQF levels</p>	<p>Federal Ministry of Education and Research and Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of <i>Länder</i> have jointly initiated the work.</p> <p>Broad range of stakeholders is included from HE, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and labour market, researchers and practitioners</p>	<p>National steering group acts as NCP and will be in charge of referencing</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be submitted by 2011</p>
Greece	NQF for LLL	Most probably eight levels will be proposed	Yet to be developed	Work started in 2008 in the framework of the Operational programme for employment and training (2007-13)	Exploratory stage	<p>Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is the competent authority</p> <p>Stakeholders from public institutions, social partners, representatives of universities and external experts are included</p>	<p>Referencing process will start in 2011</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be prepared late 2011</p> <p>National Committee of LLL/ General secretariat of LLL is the NCP</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Hungary	Overarching NQF will include qualifications from all subsystem of education and training	Has still to be decided	Level descriptors are being developed	Work started in 2007 in the framework of the New Hungary Development Plan (2007-13) NQF development is based on the Government Decision No 2069/2008. It sets the road map, defines tasks, responsibilities and financial and human resources	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of Education and Culture initiated the work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour Stakeholders from public institutions, social partners, universities as well as teachers', parents' and students' associations are included	Referencing process will start second quarter of 2011 Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2013 Department for EU Affairs is the NCP until the final decision is taken
Iceland	Overarching NQF will include qualifications from all subsystem of education and training and non-formal and informal learning QF for HE was implemented in 2007 and will form part of the new NQF	7 levels will be proposed Level 1 of the EQF is not seen as relevant	Level descriptors are more detailed and specific than EQF level descriptors but use similar concepts as starting points: - knowledge - skills - competence	Work started in autumn 2007 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education An NQF draft is expected in autumn 2009	Conceptual and design phase	Ministry of Education (competent authority) is coordinating the work but bases its decisions on close involvement of other ministries, social partners and representatives of the education and training system (for example teachers)	Preparations for referencing have started Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Ireland	<p>Overarching NFQ (national framework of qualifications) has been implemented since 2003</p> <p>It includes all learning from initial stages to the most advanced; from schools, further education and HE</p> <p>Referencing report to link national qualifications levels was adopted in May 2009</p>	<p>10 levels adopted</p> <p>Four award types are included: major, minor, special-purpose and supplemental</p>	<p>Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge (breadth, kind) - skills (range, selectivity) - competence (context, role, learning to learn, insight) 	<p>NQF is legally based on the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999</p> <p>Bologna process has been an important part of NFQ on the voluntary basis</p> <p>Policies and criteria on inclusion of awards of certain international and professional bodies were published by NQAI) in July 2006</p>	<p>Implemented</p> <p>First framework implementation and impact study was published in autumn 2009</p>	<p>NQF work was initiated by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment</p> <p>Extended consultation period with a range of stakeholders from all subsystems and social partners was organised</p> <p>The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) was established (2001). It has developed, maintained and monitored the NQF</p>	<p>Referencing of Irish NQF was completed in spring 2009</p> <p>The final referencing report was adopted in May 2009 and presented to EQF Advisory group in September 2009</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Italy	NQF is being developed HE qualifications (three cycles) have been linked to the EQF levels 6-8	Levels have not been defined yet	Level descriptors are being developed	Since 2003, various laws and agreements between ministries and regions were adopted (e.g. Law No 53/2003)	Conceptual, design and partly testing phase Methodology was tested in the tourism and mechanical sector	NQF development was initiated by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies in close cooperation with Ministry of Education, University and Research The key player in the NQF development has been National Committee (<i>Tavolo Nazionale</i>). It consists of representatives of both ministries, regions, autonomous provinces and social partners ISFOL prepares and implements national methodologies and coordinates expert groups	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010 ISFOL is designated as NCP
Latvia	Overarching NQF is being developed	8 levels are planned	- Knowledge - skills - competence Descriptors for HE were firstly drafted in 2006	NQF development is based on existing 5-level structure Acts are in preparation	Exploratory stage	Ministry of Education and Science is the competent authority	Referencing committee will be set up in September 2009 Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011 The Academic information centre is designated as NCP

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Luxembourg	<p>Overarching NQF will cover all subsystems of education and training</p> <p>NQF draft proposal was presented to Council of Ministers early 2009.</p> <p>NQF is planned to be set up during 2010</p>	8 levels are proposed	<p>Level descriptors are differentiated according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge - skills - attitude 	<p>Work started in 2006 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education</p> <p>The new law on vocational education and training adopted autumn 2008, provides the basis for NQF development</p>	Design and early implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education (competent authority) coordinates the work but in close cooperation with other ministries, representatives of all subsystems of education and training and social partners</p>	<p>Referencing process will start first quarter 2010</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be submitted by mid-2010</p>
Malta	<p>Malta overarching NQF for LLL (MQF) was launched in June 2007</p> <p>It encompasses all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education and training</p>	8 levels are adopted	<p>Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence and learning outcomes</p> <p>Learning outcomes summarise knowledge, skills and competence and point out specific skills such as communication skills, judgment skills and learning skills</p> <p>They give a broad profile of what an individual should know and do with varying degree of autonomy and responsibility</p>	<p>NQF development started in 2005</p> <p>It is legally based on the Legal Notice 347 (2005)</p>	<p>Implementation since 2007</p> <p>Supporting documents were published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an NQF for LLL, guidelines for VET systems, a quality assurance policy for VET, frameworks for validation of informal and non-formal learning 	<p>The work was initiated by the Ministry of Education (competent body) in close cooperation with stakeholders from education and training, labour market, social partners and others: parents' associations; students' councils, and non-governmental organisations</p> <p>Malta Qualification Council was set up in 2005. It coordinates and administers the NQF</p> <p>Broad consultation process was organised in first half of 2007 with all relevant stakeholders</p>	<p>Referencing process started in January 2009</p> <p>Final draft referencing report was prepared in July 2009 and presented to the EQF Advisory Group in September 2009</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
The Netherlands	Overarching NQF will include all nationally recognised qualifications, facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning and mainly have a communication and orientation function	The number of levels have not been decided yet	Level descriptors will be decided during the consultation process	Work started in January 2009 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education A first proposal, mainly outlining the process for developing an NQF, was presented to the Ministry in May 2009 The NQF builds on the QF for HE	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (competent authority) will organise a process including all relevant stakeholders in education and training as well as in the labour market	Referencing process will start in the third quarter of 2010 Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared end 2010
Norway	Frameworks for HE, VET and post-secondary education are being considered and developed The question of an overarching framework still pending	Not yet decided, will depend on the decision on whether to proceed with an overarching framework	First drafts of descriptors for different subsystems (VET, post-secondary VET) have been produced and are being discussed. A complete set of descriptors will require a decision on an overarching framework		Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of Education coordinates the work. The involvement of social partners is considered of particular importance for making progress in this area	Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011
Poland	Overarching NQF will cover the whole Polish education and training system The framework will have an orientation and communication function	Number of levels has not been decided yet	Level descriptors are being developed	Work started in August 2008, following an initiative of the Ministry of Education The work builds on the work on a QF for HE since 2007	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of National Education is coordinating the work but with involvement of other ministries and the full range of subsystems of education and training	Referencing report is expected to be submitted in 2011

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Portugal	<p>Overarching NQF will include: school qualifications, VET qualifications, HE qualifications and sectoral qualifications</p> <p>Further development of the system of non-formal and informal learning is an important element of NQF development</p> <p>The national qualification catalogue, created in 2007, is the backbone of the NQF</p>	8 levels are adopted	<p>Level descriptors are defined in broad categories of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge - skills - attitude 	<p>Work started in 2007, when the agreement between Government and social partners was signed</p> <p>Legally, the NQF development is embedded in the Decree Law No 396/2007 and Decree No 782/2009 on the implementation of the NQF</p>	Conceptual and design stage	<p>Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity initiated the work in close cooperation with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education</p> <p>National Agency for Qualifications was set up in 2007; it will work closely with General Directorate of Higher Education</p> <p>The NQF implementation will be supervised by the National Council for Vocational Education</p>	<p>National Agency for Qualifications is the NCP</p> <p>Referencing committee will be established in autumn 2009</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be prepared in 2010</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Romania	<p>Overarching NQF will bring together all nationally recognised qualifications from IVET, CVET, apprenticeship at workplace and HE</p> <p>NQF development is based on the national register of qualifications</p>	8 levels will be proposed	<p>Level descriptors are being developed, defined in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge - skills - competence 	<p>Developments started in 2005 and builds on the five-level structure for VET</p> <p>It was based on the Tripartite Agreement signed by the Prime Minister, the Employers' National Confederation and the Trade Unions' National Confederation</p> <p>Development is currently ongoing to incorporate the QF for HE into the overarching NQF</p>	Conceptual, design and early implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation initiated the work in close cooperation with Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection</p> <p>Other ministries are involved (regional development, finance, etc.) as well as social partners and other relevant stakeholders from education and training</p> <p>National Adult Training Board was appointed National Qualifications Authority in (NQA) in 2004. Its main role is to ensure methodological framework at national level and manage the NQF</p>	Preparations for referencing have started

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Slovakia	<p>Overarching NQF will include national qualifications from all subsystems of education and training</p> <p>Main pillars of the NQF development are the national register of qualifications and the national register of occupations</p>	<p>8 levels are envisaged</p> <p>Final number of NQF level has not been decided yet</p>	<p>EQF level descriptors are taken as starting point</p>	<p>NQF development started in 2009 and is based on the Government Decision on EQF implementation (February 2009)</p> <p>Memorandum of Cooperation between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has been prepared</p>	<p>Exploratory stage</p>	<p>Ministry of Education has initiated and is coordinating the developments</p> <p>Other ministries (labour, interior, health, economy, regional development, transport, agriculture and culture) are involved</p>	<p>Referencing group was established in 2009.</p> <p>The referencing process will start in January 2010.</p> <p>The referencing report is expected to be prepared by April 2011</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Slovenia	<p>Overarching NQF will include all nationally recognised qualifications as well support validation of non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>Main pillars are the register of occupational standards, assessment qualifications catalogues for NVQs and register of national VET framework curricula which includes assessment standards and VET titles</p>	8 levels with 2 sublevels at level 6 and 8 are adopted	<p>The level descriptors are defined in terms of outcome criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge - skills - autonomy and responsibility - learning competence, social and communication skills - vocational and professional competences <p>For qualifications acquired after nationally accredited programmes additionally input criteria are used (access requirements, volume of learning expressed in credit points in HE and VET, typical length of programmes)</p>	In 2006, Government Decree (No 46/2006) on the Introduction and use of the classification system of education and training (Klasius) was adopted	Design and early implementation stage	<p>Ministry of Education and Sport in close cooperation with Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Statistical office initiated the development</p> <p>Other ministries will be involved (labour, economy) as well as social partners and the National institute for VET</p>	<p>Referencing process will start January 2010</p> <p>Referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011</p> <p>National Institute for VET acts as NCP at the moment</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Spain							<p>CIDE acts as NCP at the moment</p> <p>Referencing committee will be set up in autumn 2009 and by then referencing process will start</p> <p>Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2011</p>
Sweden	Overarching NQF will cover existing public education and training system	Not developed yet	Level descriptors will be developed in the coming period	Work on NQF development started in November 2008 following an initiative of the Ministry of Education	Conceptualisation and design stage	<p>Ministry of Education (competent authority) coordinates the process.</p> <p>A inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of different ministries (education, labour, business and finance) will be set up.</p>	<p>Referencing process will start late 2010</p> <p>A draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 4th quarter of 2011</p> <p>The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational education is designated as NCP</p>

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
Turkey	Overarching NQF will cover general, vocational and higher education QF for HE has been adopted in 2006	8 levels will be proposed	EQF descriptors have been taken as starting point HE has determined descriptors in terms of competence components: apart of autonomy and responsibility there is emphasis on foreign languages, learning to learn, field specific competences, ICT, social and communication skills	Work started in 2005 It is legally embedded in the Vocational Qualification Authority Law (No 5544/2006) Supported by the project Strengthening VET (2002-07)	Conceptual and design stage	Ministry of National Education (competent authority) initiated the work Since 2007, the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) has been coordinating the process Broad range of stakeholders is included via Board of the VQA: employees' and employers' organisations and professional organisations and representatives from government (Ministries of Labour and Education, Higher Education Council)	Draft referencing report is expected to be prepared by 2010 Vocational Authority (VQA) acts as the NCP
United Kingdom	England and Northern Ireland have implemented an overarching framework (QCF). This framework has regulatory functions	A 9-level structure has been adopted	For England and Northern Ireland, each level is divided into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge and understanding - application and action - autonomy and accountability 		Implemented	Framework is maintained by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	A draft referencing report has been produced in August 2009

	The scope of the framework	Number of levels	Level descriptors	Political and legal basis for the NQF	Stage of work	Involvement of stakeholders and consultation	Referencing to the EQF
	<p>Scotland has implemented an overarching framework, the SCQF, with orientation and communication functions</p>	<p>A 12-level structure has been adopted</p>	<p>For Scotland, each level is defined in terms of five broad categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge and understanding - practice (applied knowledge and understanding) - generic cognitive skills (e. g evaluation, critical analysis) - communication, numeracy and IT skills - autonomy, accountability and working with others 			<p>Framework is maintained by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership made up of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities of Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency, Association of Scotland Colleagues and Scottish Ministers</p>	<p>A draft referencing report has been produced in August 2009</p>
	<p>Wales has implemented an overarching framework, the CQFW, with orientation and communication functions</p>	<p>A 9-level structure has been adopted</p>	<p>For Wales, each level is divided into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge and understanding - application and action - autonomy and accountability 				<p>A draft report has been produced in August 2009</p>

EQF implementation plans

Main forecasts by countries, 09/2009 ⁽¹⁷⁾

16	Countries referencing by 2009 or 2010 - fully on schedule	16	26
10	Countries referencing by 2011		
1	Country beyond the deadlines		
4	Countries not yet able to estimate		

Estimate dates of final referencing report (as provided by countries, September 2009)

2009	Ireland (EIRE)
2009	Malta (MT)
2010	France (FR) Belgie (BE) Danmark (DK) Eesti (EE) Luxembourg (LU) Italia (IT) Nederland (NL) Österreich (AT) Portugal (PT) Suomi (FI) United Kingdom (UK) Iceland (IS) Croatia (HR) Turkey (TR)
2011	Ceska Republica (CZ) Deutschland (DE) Ellas (EL) España (ES) Latvia (LV) Polska (PL) Slovenija (SI) Slovensko (SK) Sverige (SE) Norway (NO)
2013	Magyarország (HU)
No estimate yet	Kypros (CY) Lithuania (LT) Romania (RO) Bulgaria (BG)

⁽¹⁷⁾ This information was collected by the European Commission and presented at the EQF Advisory Group meeting on 10 September 2009.

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