

European Inventory on NQF 2012

DENMARK

Introduction

Denmark has developed a comprehensive NQF covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. The work on the framework started in 2006 and builds directly on the qualifications framework for higher education established in 2006-07. Implementation of the eight-level framework has been a gradual process, in effect starting in June 2009 when the proposal for the framework was adopted by the Minister for Education, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, the Minister for Culture and the Minister for Economic and Business Affairs. The NQF was referenced to the EQF in May 2011. The framework has reached an early operational stage, supported by the EQF national coordination point established in 2010.

Main policy objectives

The Danish NQF provides a comprehensive, systematic overview of public qualifications that can be acquired within the Danish system. The Danish evaluation institute specifies this as '...all qualifications that have been awarded pursuant to an act or executive order and that have been quality assured by a public authority in the Danish education system (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011, pp. 13-14) (¹).

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

The Danish NQF draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical with the level descriptors in the Danish QF for higher education at bachelor, master and doctoral-level, and contain explicit references to research related outcomes. The difference is illustrated by the use of two different principles for referring qualifications to the framework. A qualification at levels 1 to 5 is 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 to 8, as is the case for the Danish QF for HE, implying that qualifications at this level have to be fully accredited as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the QF for higher education for qualifications at these levels.

This distinction implies that all qualifications at levels 6 to 8 need to be defined and accredited according to the QF for HE. For the moment there are no publicly recognised

(¹) *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework*, pp. 13-14.

http://www.iu.dk/dokumentation/kvalifikationsrammer/National_report_Referencing_DK_Qualifications_Framework_to_EQF.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

qualifications in the Danish education system at level 6 to 8 that are not included in the higher education area (QF for HE), and a number of non-university qualifications have been, or are expected to be, accredited as bachelors and masters (for example related to arts, the armed services and police) and thus included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

The NQF adopted in 2009 is considered to be a first step in a long-term development process. A second stage, opening the framework up to qualifications and certificates in the private and non-formal sector, is envisaged. The work on this second stage will have to focus on the procedures for inclusion and, in particular, on how quality assurance and accreditation can be handled. This work was initially foreseen to have started in 2012 but has been delayed.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

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

While the Ministry of Education is in charge of the NQF project the Danish EQF national coordination point has taken on an active role in the day-to-day coordination of the framework and its implementation. The NCP is located in the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation (which also hosts the DK national academic recognition centre, NARIC). A main task for the NCP is to coordinate stakeholders involved in the framework as well as disseminate information to a wider public. It is acknowledged that the NQF is not very visible to the general public at this stage, but that the inclusion of NQF/EQF levels into certificates and diplomas and the Europass documents could change this (work to include levels on certificates and diplomas is ongoing).

The NQF is visible through two advanced websites, offering comprehensive background information and regular updates on development and implementation: the NQF.DK, which provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers; and the UG.DK, addressed to a national target group, providing comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes, access, etc. The UG.DK also provides general information on the NQF and the qualifications levels, and explains the concept of learning outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The eight-level structure adopted for the Danish NQF is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences ⁽²⁾ (*Kompetenser*). Danish level descriptors have been based on a number of different sources, including existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, the EQF descriptors, and the Bologna descriptors. They have been designed to be relevant to different types of qualification, theoretically as well as practically oriented. Knowledge (*Viden*) descriptors emphasise the following:

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

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

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

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

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

Table **Level descriptors in the Danish NQF for lifelong learning**

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

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

⁽²⁾ Note that the Danish NQF, in contrast to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

to any other qualification. The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of education and training and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. VET has a strong tradition in defining qualifications in terms of competence, but higher education and the different parts of general education are also making progress. It is being admitted, however, that it will be necessary to deepen the understanding of the learning outcomes approach at all levels, for example by developing guidelines.

Referencing to the EQF

Referencing to the EQF is treated as an integral part of overall implementation of the NQF and was completed in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011) ⁽³⁾. The result shows a strong convergence between the Danish framework and the EQF but a linking of Danish level 1 to EQF level 2. Some concern has been raised during 2012 that the five Nordic countries seem to go for different solutions to referencing of primary and (lower) secondary general qualifications to the EQF.

⁽³⁾ *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework.*
http://www.iu.dk/dokumentation/kvalifikationsrammer/National_report_Referencing_DK_Qualifications_Framework_to_EQF.pdf [accessed 15.12.2012].

Table **Level correspondence established between the Danish national qualifications framework (DK NQF) and the EQF**

DK NQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

A NCP has been established at the Danish Agency for Universities and International Education.

Important lessons and the way forward

Denmark is now moving towards a fully operational national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. This success has largely been achieved by accepting that not all problems can be solved immediately and an NQF will also need to develop beyond 2012.

The potential inclusion of certificates and diplomas awarded outside the public domain is an issue which will have to be addressed in the coming period. This could strengthen the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners.

Main sources of information

A website for the Danish qualifications framework is available on <http://en.iu.dk/transparency/qualifications-frameworks> [accessed 6.12.2012].

The Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation acts as NCP. <http://en.fivu.dk/the-ministry/organisation/agencies/danish-agency-for-universities-and-internationalisation> [accessed 12.3.2013].