

European Inventory on NQF 2012

SWITZERLAND

Introduction

While Swiss education and training is generally considered to be of high quality, many of its qualifications are relatively unknown in other countries, potentially hindering Swiss citizens seeking employment abroad. Switzerland sees the link to European cooperation on qualifications frameworks, both the EQF and the QF-EHEA, as an opportunity to strengthen the transparency and comparability of its national qualifications in a European and wider international context. In 2009 Switzerland adopted an NQF for higher education (nqf.ch-HS) ⁽¹⁾ in line with the Bologna-process. In 2011 the proposal for an NQF for vocational and professional qualifications (NQR-CH ⁽²⁾) was launched for public consultation (15 February to 15 May 2012). This latter framework is explicitly oriented to the EQF and suggests the introduction of an eight-level structure defined through knowledge, skills and competence. Switzerland joined the EQF Advisory group in 2012 and will seek to reference its qualification levels to the EQF in the foreseeable future. Switzerland also sees referencing to the EQF as a part of aligning to the Copenhagen process on co-operation in VET. Due to reorganisation at federal level, it is possible that some form of linkage between the two framework initiatives will be created. Whether this will result in one comprehensive framework covering all levels and types is not clear. As the framework for higher education has not been self-certified to the QF-EHEA, it is still possible that Switzerland will go for a joint referencing/self-certification.

Main policy objectives

The proposal for the Swiss national qualifications framework for vocational and professional education and training (VET/PET) (*Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen für Abschlüsse der Berufsbildung* – NQR-CH-BB) was presented in February 2012. The framework consists of eight learning outcomes based levels described through knowledge, skills and competence, as in the EQF. While limited to vocationally and professionally-oriented qualifications, it could be argued that the current proposal is modelled as a comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning. It is clear, however, that moving in this direction will require a political decision. Whether such development is possible is not clear. The recent reorganisations at ministerial level, bringing the responsible departments closer together, could provide a closer link between the two initiatives. Even in a case where the two frameworks are taken forward

⁽¹⁾ Information on the NQF for higher education can be found at www.crus.ch/information-programme/qualifikationsrahmen-nqfch-hs.html [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽²⁾ Following feedback received in the consultation process, the name of the NQR-CH has been changed to NQR-CH-BB, indicating that it is not an overarching framework but rather one for VET and PET (BB = *Berufsbildung*). The new name will be used in this publication.

separately there will be a need to clarify the relationship between professional qualifications at levels 5 to 8 of the NQR-CH-BB and the three levels (cycles) of higher education covered by the nqf.ch-HS.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

The development of the NQR-CH-BB has been rapid and was initiated in 2009-10. During 2011 the responsible ministry ⁽³⁾ organised a series of roundtables where representatives of cantons, trade associations, and the social partners participated. Based on the oral and written comments received on the proposal during these gatherings, the documents forming the basis for the consultation spring 2012 ⁽⁴⁾ were amended.

The proposal has received support from the stakeholders (cantons, trade associations and social partners), linked to two issues in particular. First, the NQF is seen as a precondition for increasing the visibility and value of Swiss qualifications abroad and supporting employment opportunities for Swiss citizens. Second, the NQF builds directly on the shift to learning outcomes initiated by the 2004 reform of the federal act on vocational and professional education and training. This reform introduces a more outcomes-oriented approach to defining VET programmes and qualifications. A total of more than 600 different qualifications have been redefined in a dialogue between trade associations and public authorities, preparing the ground for the overarching learning outcomes approach now taken forward by the NQR-CH-BB. The NQF for higher education, in contrast, enjoys a weaker link to stakeholders outside the education sector itself. However, in their responses to the consultation, most participating stakeholders point to the problem caused by the limited scope (vocational and professional education and training) of the NQR-CH-BB as well as to the lack of clarity caused by the existence of two framework initiatives in Switzerland. A message from the stakeholders is to develop one, comprehensive framework covering all qualifications.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes has been fundamental to reforming Swiss vocational and professional qualifications in recent years. This work has led to the gradual development of methods for writing learning outcomes ⁽⁵⁾. The use of learning outcomes for general and higher education is more limited but can be observed in these areas as well.

⁽³⁾ *Eidgenössisches Volkswirtschaftsdepartement (EVD).*

⁽⁴⁾ Reactions to the consultation are available at <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/themen/01051/01071/01076/01312/index.html?lang=de> [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽⁵⁾ For information on the method for writing learning outcomes as well as for examples of profiles, consult <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/themen/hoehere/00160/index.html?lang=de> [accessed 5.12.2012].

The level descriptors of the NQR-CH-BB build on the main categories of the EQF but also reflect extensive national experience in using learning outcomes for the description and definition of qualifications. While staying close to the knowledge and skills categories, the main elements of the descriptors are presented below:

Table **The main elements of descriptors in the Swiss NQF**

· Knowledge	· Declarative knowledge	
	· Understanding	
· Skills	· Procedural skills	
	· Senso-motoric skills	
· Competences	· Vocational or professional competence	
	· Personal competence	· Self-competence
		· Social competence
		· Leadership competence

Links to other tools and policies

The proposal for NQR-CH-BB is closely linked to the use of diploma and certificate supplements. These will be given to all candidates awarded a qualification and will indicate its profile as well as its level according to the NQR-CH (and in the future, the EQF). The Swiss version of the diploma and certificate supplement will not be identical to the ones currently used by European universities and will contain a more generic description of the qualification achieved, as much as possible in line with the Europass diploma and certificate supplement.

The Swiss system for validation of informal and non-formal learning has reached an advanced level of implementation. Through the so called *Validation des acquis*, individuals are offered a structured procedure where prior learning can be registered, where professional competences can be certified, and where a formal qualification is issued.

There is currently no plan to link a credit system to the proposed NQF.

Referencing to the EQF

There is currently no indication on when a referencing to the EQF can take place. This will depend on progress made on the NQR-CH as well on how its link to the nqf.ch-HS will be addressed.

Important lessons and the way forward

Swiss NQF developments are in a critical phase where the linkages between the two existing initiatives have to be clarified. The eight-level structure proposed by the NQR-CH

provides, compared with other European countries, a very good technical basis for moving towards a comprehensive NQF. However, a technical basis is not sufficient. What is needed is a political mandate indicating in which direction developments should now go.

On a general level Switzerland is in a good position to introduce a learning outcomes based framework. Work during the last decade on the shift to learning outcomes and on validation provides a very good starting point for such a development.

Main sources of information

Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) participates in the NCP meetings as observer. <http://www.bbt.admin.ch/index.html?lang=en> [accessed 12.3.2013].