

European Inventory on NQF 2012

THE UNITED KINGDOM

A total of five different qualifications frameworks currently operate in the UK. In England and Northern Ireland we find the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) established in 2001, the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) established during the period 2006-08 and the NQF established in 2003. The Scottish qualifications framework has operated since 2001; in Wales the credit and qualifications framework of Wales (CQFW) has also been in place since 2001. This multitude of frameworks is partly explained by the gradual devolution of powers to the UK nations, in particular giving more autonomy to Scotland and Wales. The many frameworks also reflect the needs and interests of subsectors of education and training, explaining the existence of a separate framework for higher education qualifications in England and Northern-Ireland and the continued co-existence of the QCF and NQF. In contrast, Scotland and Wales have chosen to develop comprehensive frameworks covering all levels and types of qualifications. These developments show that frameworks have come to stay and can play an important role in promoting and modernising education, training and lifelong learning. They also show that frameworks develop and change continuously. This has been the case for England, where policy directions have changed frequently and to some extent, seen from the outside, reduced rather than improved the transparency of qualifications. From the perspective of the new and emerging frameworks introduced throughout Europe 'post EQF', the Scottish and Welsh frameworks are important learning cases. Both are comprehensive and have set themselves ambitious targets for lifelong learning. The relative complexity of the UK situation has led to the publishing of a brochure (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland et al., 2011) ⁽¹⁾ explaining to users how the frameworks interact as well as how they link to the Irish framework.

⁽¹⁾ See *Qualifications can cross boundaries: a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland*.
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quals_cross_boundaries.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

Wales

Introduction

The CQFW is a descriptive voluntary framework developed by bringing together a number of subframeworks already in existence in Wales: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ); the NQF for regulated national courses; and the quality assured lifelong learning. It embraces both academic and vocational qualifications and can be described as comprehensive. The CQFW can be seen as a second generation framework emerging from the NQF for England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In certain areas, for example for general upper secondary qualifications (GCSEs) the Welsh framework overlaps with the frameworks of England and Northern Ireland. Recent developments, in 2012, where England will discontinue the GCSEs while Wales will retain them, may have consequences for the CQFW. Some stakeholders believe that the split on GCSEs will result in an even more independent CQFW, developing more according to the Scottish NQF model.

Main policy objectives

The CQFW is positioned as a key part of Wales' lifelong learning policy and strategy. For formal education and training, the framework supports all recognised, credit-based learning within:

- higher education,
- regulated general and vocational qualifications.

This means that the CQFW enables any learning post-14 to be formally recognised but is not in itself a regulatory mechanism; any regulatory requirements are supplied through its relationship with regulating bodies. The framework is unit-based; it defines one credit as 10 hours of learning time and has nine levels (the lowest subdivided into three) with supporting level descriptors.

The system for quality assured lifelong learning forms a third and integrated pillar of the CQFW. It takes as its starting point that all learning wherever and whenever it takes place should be valued and recognised, making the Welsh framework one of the few European frameworks where validation and/or recognition of prior learning is fully integrated. In the last few years much effort has been invested in putting this system into practice. While enjoying some success, the number of individuals actually using this opportunity has been relatively limited and there is currently a discussion on how to adjust the approach, for example by reducing the complexity of procedures.

The CQFW can be considered an 'open framework' in the sense that its unit-based approach at the outset is oriented towards a multitude of awarding bodies and education and training formats. This aids inclusion of units developed (for example) by the private sector and as part of continuing and enterprise-based education and training. This means that the procedures and quality criteria applied within the quality-assured lifelong learning (QALLL)

can exemplify how an NQF can establish links beyond the traditional, formal education and training sector.

Level descriptors and learning outcomes

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.

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 was referenced to the EQF as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010.

Table **Level correspondence established between the CQFW and the EQF**

CQFW	Entry level 1	Entry level 2	Entry level 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
EQF			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

As with England and Northern Ireland, no link was established between the FEHQ and EQF. This was based on the argument from the HE-sector that no additional benefit of such a link could be observed. This decision can be reviewed in the future, possibly in 2013, depending on the developments of the EQF and feedback from potential users of the frameworks.

Main sources of information

Wales – Welsh government acts as NCP.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/creditqualificationsframework/;jsessionid=C19211C601E5A0EFC47151D5B921CEE3?lang=en>
[accessed 12.3.2013].