



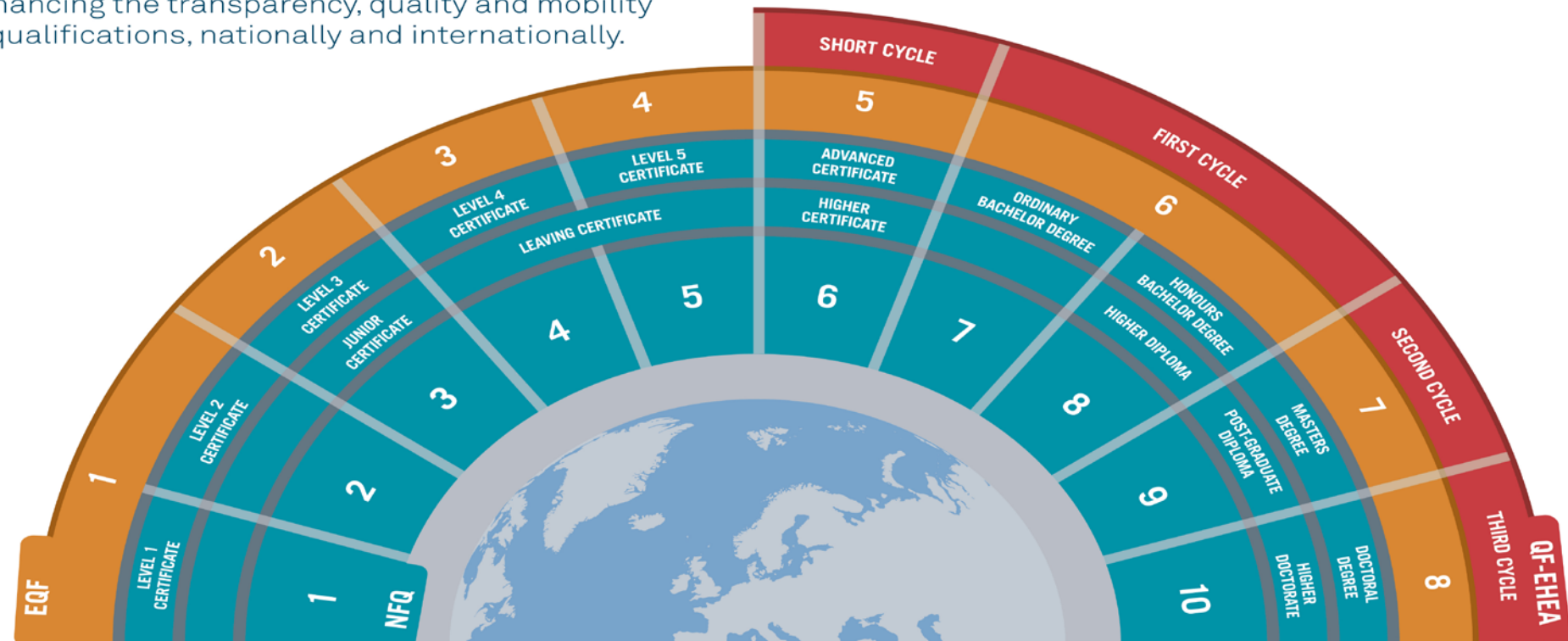
The Impact of NQFs – Reflections from Ireland

JOHN O'CONNOR, QUALITY AND QUALIFICATIONS IRELAND

THESSALONIKI, 9-10 NOVEMBER, 2017

Qualifications Frameworks - Going Global

Enhancing the transparency, quality and mobility of qualifications, nationally and internationally.



- NFQ
- EQF
- QF-EHEA

Irish National Framework of Qualifications
European Qualifications Framework
Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

Framework Implementation and Impact Study (2009)

- ▶ Assess implementation of the Framework and policies on access, transfer and progression
- ▶ Support deeper implementation
- ▶ Identify gaps, drivers and obstacles
- ▶ Assess the initial impact of the Framework

Framework Implementation and Impact Study (2009)

▶ **Methodology**

- ▶ Background Paper
- ▶ Sector Inputs
- ▶ Targeted Consultation
- ▶ Public Consultation
- ▶ International Study Team

▶ **Findings**

- ▶ Implementation well advanced, but premature to conclude on impact of NFO

▶ **Recommendations**

- ▶ Wide ranging recommendations to foster continuous systemic engagement and set NFO agenda for new institutional arrangements.

NFQ Policy Impact Assessment

2017- I

- ▶ Contribution of NFQ to transparency and coherence of qualifications system
- ▶ Contribution of NFQ to the quality of qualifications and associated teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- ▶ Contribution of NFQ to meaningful qualification pathways
- ▶ Contribution of NFQ to International mobility for holders of qualifications
- ▶ Contribution of NFQ to Employability
- ▶ Governance and future policy priorities for NFQ

NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2017- II

- ▶ **Methodology**

- ▶ Background Paper
- ▶ External Contractor
- ▶ Quantitative and Qualitative Data

- ▶ **Findings**

- ▶ NFQ is here to stay
- ▶ Still, risk that NFQ is taken for granted
- ▶ Reputational currency of NFQ is fundamental
- ▶ NFQ as a forum for dialogue on qualifications and skills

NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2017- III

► Implications

- Locating NFQ in a hybrid quality and qualifications agency changes things
- Transparent levelling processes and outcomes, really matter
- Mandate for NFQ needs periodic re-visiting
- Significance of policy connectedness for NFQ relevance
- NFQ as a process not just an outcome
- How to use the findings of policy impact assessments?

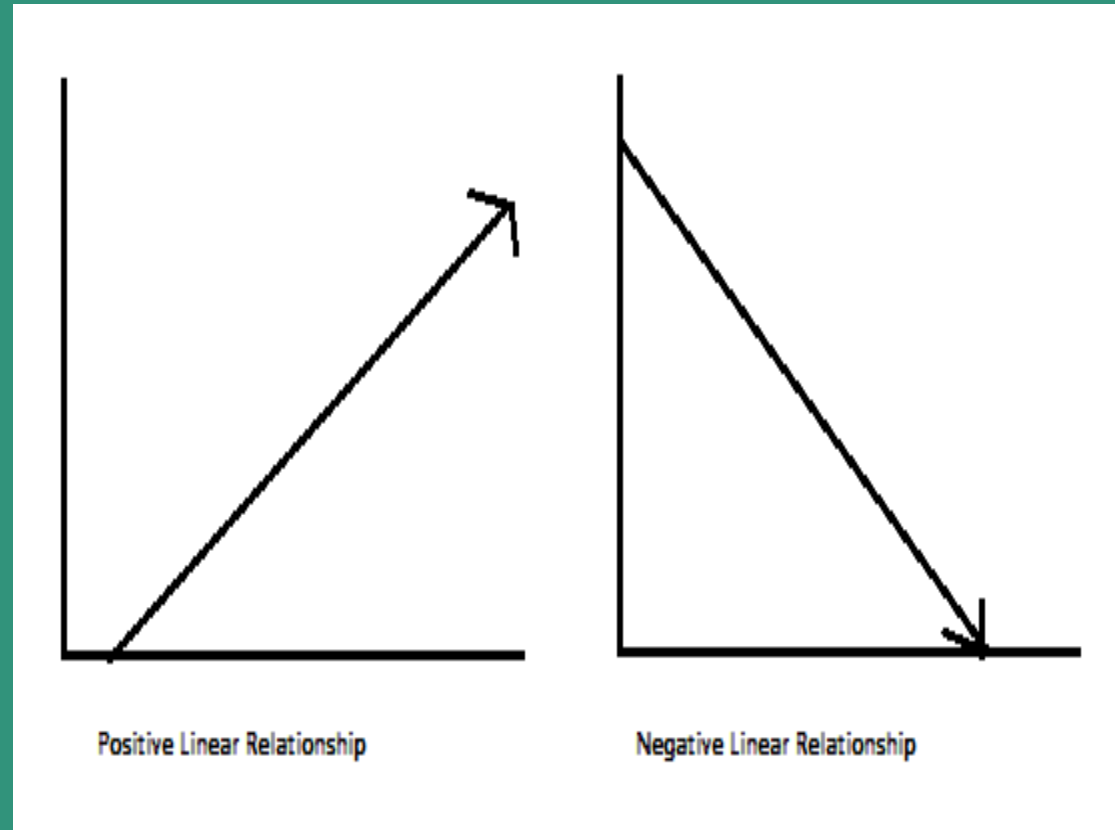
NQF Impact – Questions about method

- ▶ **The multiple purposes of NQFs**
 - ▶ -Instrumental
 - ▶ -Conceptual
 - ▶ -Political



NQF Impact – Questions about method

- ▶ The problem with causal models of NQF Effects
- ▶ NQFs don't work!



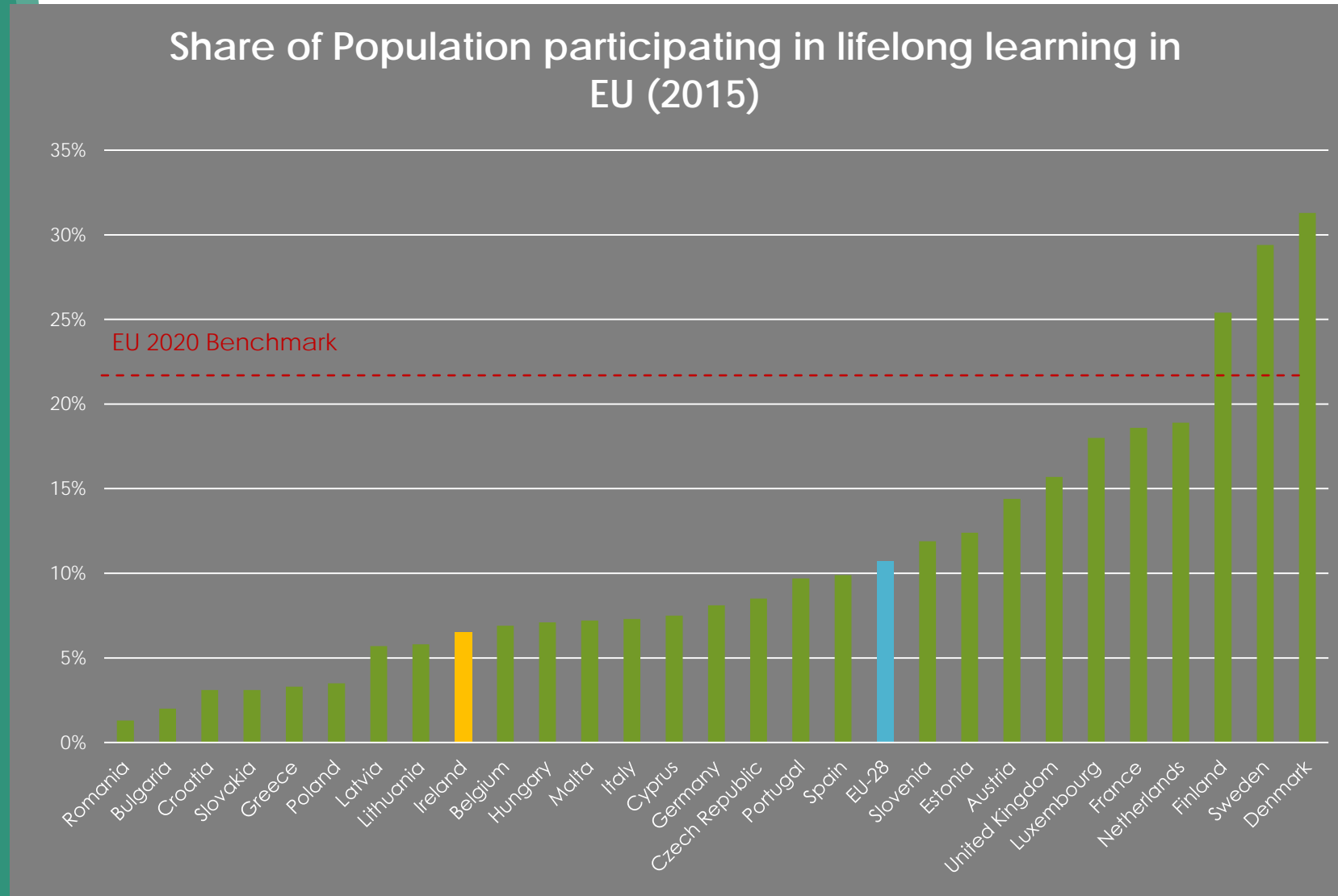
NQF Impact – Questions about method

- ▶ The problem of Counterfactuals
 - ▶ -NQF made a difference compared to what?
 - ▶ -The 'what if' questions.



Non-Impact of the Irish NFO?

'The (Irish) NFO will drive the movement towards lifelong learning' (2003)



Non-Impact of the Irish NFAQ?

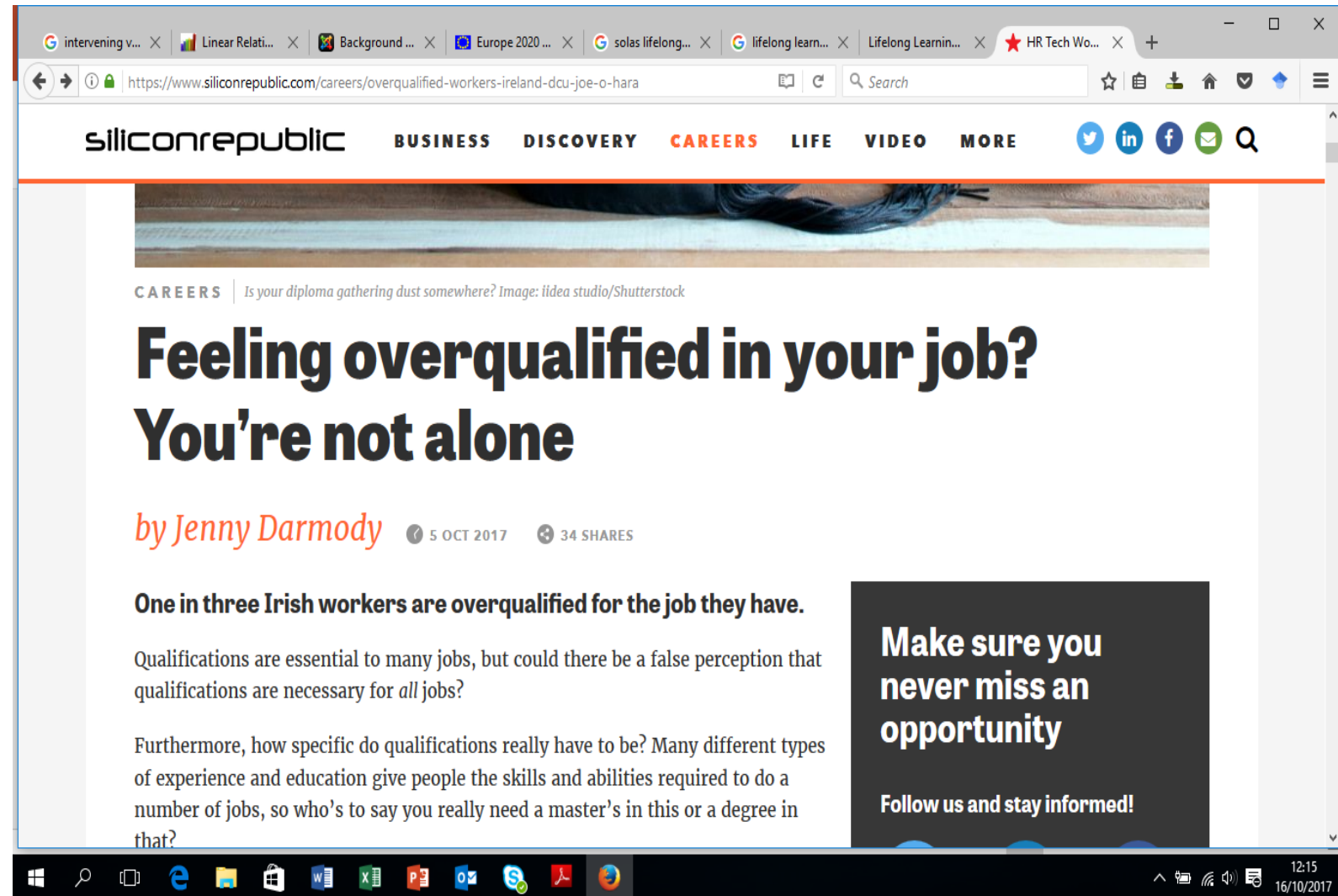
'The (Irish) NFAQ will drive the movement towards lifelong learning' (2003)

Lifelong Learning participation since introduction of NFAQ



Are desired qualification impacts, desirable?

- ▶ 53% 25-34 year-olds with tertiary education in Ireland (OECD 2016)(36% in 2003)
- ▶ PIAAC (2012) Significant Qualifications mismatch – 30% of workers in Ireland reported that they had higher qualifications than they needed.



Towards a model of NQF Impact...



Final thoughts...and a question...

- ▶ NQF effects are typically diffuse and non-linear
- ▶ NQFs as social constructs with multiple meanings - require interpretative analysis and insights not just quantitative accounts
- ▶ Not enough to ask do NQFs work?...need to understand for who? why? and under what conditions they work?
- ▶ Purpose of NQFs determines their kinds of impact - pragmatic research approaches are needed to reveal NQF contribution.
- ▶ Scope for policy-makers and researchers to collaborate and to co-produce knowledge of and for NQFs
- ▶ Role of knowledge brokers and 'clearing houses' to systematically build and disseminate the 'evidence' about NQFs
- ▶ Many questions about the impact of NQFs, the most important one is 'do we really want to know?'

joconnor@qqi.ie

www.QQI.ie

www.nfq.ie