

## Peer learning conference Thessaloniki 9-10 November 2017

Do national qualifications frameworks make a  
difference? Measuring and evaluating NQF impact

### Guidelines for working group session 2

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**The peer learning conference focuses on the following key question:**

**What would be lost if your country did not have an NQF? Do national qualifications frameworks make a difference in policies and practices and to the learners and citizens they are supposed to benefit?**

In the second working group session, this question will be addressed from the researchers' and external experts' perspective. Looking at the NQFs from this perspective is important, as it allows for reflection on the proven strengths and weaknesses of the NQFs as they are currently evolving across Europe (and the rest of the world).

Published research studies about the effects of NQFs are in short supply and findings often contested. Some commentators have expressed scepticism regarding the role of NQFs in supporting policy development and progressive reform. Many see the rapid development of frameworks as tools of policy borrowing, not sufficiently taking into account the policy context and policy problems of specific countries. It has further been asserted that NQFs are 'flying blind' in the sense that their introduction and operation is based on wishful thinking rather than robust evidence. Researchers have also expressed concern that frameworks are part of a broader neo-liberal toolkit that governments and other powerful interests use to control education and training systems. Robust and objective findings about the effects of NQFs can help to illuminate ideological bias that may otherwise remain hidden. Additionally, all NQF evaluation studies emphasise the importance of contextualisation of the NQF to provide a narrative within which the outcomes of an evaluation can be interpreted. Without contextual links, there may be a danger of adopting a technicist approach.

To date, available research on the effects of NQFs has focused on the first generation of transformational frameworks in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, potentially 'overselling' the role of frameworks and only to a limited extent focusing on the European developments taking place in the past decade. However, in recent years, as frameworks are moving towards operational status, European countries signal interest in a more systematic approach towards evaluating NQF effects.

The following questions help focus on the understanding of NQFs from the European perspective.

- (a) What evidence exists on the purpose/role and impact of NQFs?
- (b) To what extent does available evidence question the role of NQFs? To what extent does it support the claims made about NQFs?
- (c) What kind of evidence will be required in the future to measure and evaluate NQF impact?
  - (i) What baseline data or indicators could be useful in explaining NQF impact and could help continue political support for NQFs?
  - (ii) Which methodologies are most appropriate for measuring and evaluating NQF impact?
- (d) What kind of European cooperation on NQF impact assessment is possible and desirable? How can national approaches and findings contribute to the overall assessment of the EQF?

### **Structure of the working group session**

The second working group session will address this question from the perspective of the researchers and external experts. This discussion will be divided into three main sections:

- a) presentation of two countries in each working group followed by a Q&A session – (30 minutes);
- b) discussion in smaller groups of five to six participants covering different cases of NQFs (45 minutes);
- c) summary of discussions (15 minutes).

The summary of discussions will be delivered in the form of four to six key points from each small group to be presented to the overall working group.