

# DENMARK

## European inventory on NQF 2014

### Introduction

Denmark has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. Work on the framework started in 2006 and builds directly on the qualification framework for higher education established in 2006-07. Implementation of the eight-level framework has been a gradual process, 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 European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2011. The framework has now reached an operational stage and forms an integral part of the Danish education and training landscape. An evaluation of the NQF was finalised in October 2013; overall providing positive feedback on the results achieved so far. Work is now under way, between the Ministries of Education, Science and Employment, to decide on how to develop the framework further. Denmark has already started to indicate NQF and EQF levels in qualifications documents, the first examples of which were awarded early 2013.

### Main policy objectives

The Danish NQF (DK NQF) provides a comprehensive, systematic overview of public qualifications <sup>(1)</sup> that can be acquired within the Danish system.

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

The DK 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 qualifications framework for higher education at bachelor, master and doctoral levels and contain explicit references to research-related outcomes. The difference is

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<sup>(1)</sup> 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).

illustrated by 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 the knowledge, skills and competences of a particular qualification (type). A principle of 'full fit' is used for levels 6 to 8, as is the case for the Danish qualifications framework for higher education, implying that qualifications at this level have to be fully accredited <sup>(2)</sup> as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the qualifications framework 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 qualifications framework for higher education. For the moment, there are no publicly-recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at levels 6 to 8 that are not included in the higher education area (qualifications framework for higher education), and several 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. The first stage of developments was concluded by publishing the 2013 evaluation report. Results of this report are now being studied and will result in a set of priorities for the next few years. In the same way as in the Netherlands and Sweden, opening up towards private and non-formal qualifications is being considered. A mapping exercise was carried out in 2013 showing that a high number of certificates and qualifications operate outside and in parallel to the existing NQF.

## Stakeholder involvement

A broad range of stakeholders have 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 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.

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<sup>(2)</sup> The accreditation process in Danish higher education and how this links to the learning outcomes principle, is well documented in the 2013 report (Hansen et al., 2013).

The Danish EQF national coordination point (NCP) has taken on an active role in 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 Danish national academic recognition information centre). A main task for the NCP has been to coordinate stakeholders involved in the framework as well as to 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 inclusion of NQF/EQF levels in certificates and diplomas and Europass documents could change this (work is ongoing to include levels on certificates and diplomas, but is not completed).

It is interesting to note that follow-up to the 2013 evaluation is being carried out in cooperation between three ministries; Education, Science and Employment.

## Framework implementation

The NQF is now visible to the general public through two websites, both having reached an advanced level of development and implementation. The DK NQF provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications covered by this. The 'education guide' [*UddannelsesGuiden*] <sup>(3)</sup> addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes, access, etc. This website also provides comprehensive information on the NQF and qualifications levels and explains clearly the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners. The fact that NQF and EQF levels are now gradually being added to qualifications and certificates themselves is also of critical importance for increasing NQF visibility to citizens.

Evaluation of the DK NQF was carried out in 2013 to assess speed and quality of the formal implementation process, check how the framework is judged by potential users and provide a basis for future improvements. The evaluation report shows most stakeholders involved with the NQF <sup>(4)</sup> are positive towards the role it now plays. A total of 78% of respondents 'know well' the principles underpinning the framework and 64% are positive about the initiative. Neutral are 27% of those answering as regards the role played by the framework. It should be noted that the general public was not targeted by the evaluation, only

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<sup>(3)</sup> See <https://www.ug.dk/> [accessed 22.10.2014].

<sup>(4)</sup> A total of 848 persons were contacted; 425 persons (51%) responded.

representatives of stakeholders directly or indirectly associated with design and implementation of the framework.

## Level descriptors and learning outcomes

The eight-level structure adopted for the DK NQF is defined by knowledge (*Viden*), skills (*Færdigheder*) and competences <sup>(5)</sup> (*Kompetenser*). Danish level descriptors have been based on several different sources, including existing descriptions of learning outcomes in curricula and programmes, EQF descriptors and 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:

- (a) type of knowledge involved; knowledge about theory or knowledge about practice; knowledge of a subject or a field within a profession;
- (b) complexity of knowledge; degree of complexity and how predictable or unpredictable the situation in which the knowledge is mastered;
- (c) 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:

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

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

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

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<sup>(5)</sup> Note that the DK NQF, in contrast to the EQF, uses the plural 'competences'.

Table 1 **Level descriptor in the DK NQF for lifelong learning**

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

Source: Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011.

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 (VET). A supplementary qualification can be a supplement (addition) to a qualification, a part (module) or an independent entity not related 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 of defining qualifications in terms of competence, but higher education and different parts of general education are also making progress. It is clear, however, that it is necessary to deepen understanding of the learning outcomes approach at all levels, for example by developing guidelines.

## Validating non-formal and informal learning and links to the NQF <sup>(6)</sup>

Validation in Denmark is well established and regulated by legislation covering upper general education, VET, adult education and higher education. Implementation is highly decentralised, while legislation provides a framework to assure quality in validation, the actual process can only be carried out by education providers. They are responsible for guidance and for validation within their educational and training programmes. Also, the responsibility for quality assurance and evaluation lies with educational institutions. Other bodies can be involved at an early phase, providing information, guidance and support.

A 2010 action plan outlined a range of initiatives across adult learning areas, aiming to identify the players in guidance and counselling; explore possible broader approaches to validation in adult learning, including vocational and employment angles; strengthen information to support broader implementation;

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<sup>(6)</sup> This section draws mainly on input from European Commission et al., 2014.

and develop a code of conduct as a measure to ensure quality. A renewed legislative framework for VET, including further promotion and development of validation especially targeted at adults, is currently being prepared by the government, as part of the 2013 plan for growth and employment in Denmark <sup>(7)</sup>. The foreseen implementation phase for this reform is 2014-15.

The DK NQF, adopted in 2009 and referenced in 2011, includes all types and levels of qualifications awarded by public authorities. Almost all qualifications described in the NQF are accessible or can be acquired based on validation. Arrangements for validation cover all education sectors and establish links between them. However, links between validation in the public sector and the private and third sectors are weak or missing. The most comprehensive measures are found in VET and adult learning, while higher education does not use validation to the same extent. Validation can be used to award full or partial qualifications, grant exemptions from modules or parts of courses, grant access to higher education programmes or other formal education (mostly adult learning programmes), and tailor training specifications for individual training pathways towards a full qualification.

As a second stage of development/implementation of the NQF, it has been considered if the framework may be opened up to qualifications and certificates from the private and non-formal sectors. Private sector organisations and the social partners are important stakeholders in development of validation programmes and contribute significantly. There is a tradition of collaboration between enterprises and formal education providers on competence development for workers, supported by the social partners. Third sector/non-formal education stakeholders play an important part in providing information and guidance on validation possibilities and in supporting learners in identifying and documenting their prior learning.

## 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). The result shows a strong convergence between the Danish framework and the EQF, but a linking of Danish level 1 to EQF level 2.

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<sup>(7)</sup> See <http://www.fm.dk/publikationer/2013/vaekstplan-dk-staerke-virksomheder-flere-job/> [accessed 16.10.2014].

Table 2 **Levels correspondences established between the DK NQF and the EQF**

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

Source: Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011.

## Important lessons and future plans

The DK NQF can now be considered fully operational.

Potential inclusion of certificates and diplomas awarded outside the public domain is currently being addressed. Accomplishment of this will further strengthen relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners.

### Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 22.10.2014]

A website for the DK NQF is available on: <http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks>

The Danish Agency for Higher Education acts as NCP: <http://ufm.dk/en/the-minister-and-the-ministry/organisation/danish-agency-for-higher-education/about-the-agency>

Table 3 The national qualification framework in Denmark

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
8	PhD degree		8
7	Master degree ( <i>Candidatus</i> )  Master degree in arts/fine arts  Master degree		7
6	Bachelor degree  Bachelor degree in arts  Professional bachelor degree  Diploma degree		6
5	VET (journeyman's) certificate Academy profession degrees		5
4	Upper secondary school leaving certificate  Certificate for two-year upper secondary programme (higher preparatory examination)  VET (journeyman's) certificate	Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at upper secondary level  Adult VET certificate  Certificate for single subject VET	4
3	VET (journeyman's) certificate	Basic programme VET  Certificates for supplementary, single subject VET courses  Higher preparatory courses, single course subjects  General adult education level D  Adult VET certificate  Certificates for single subject courses in VET	3
2	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (10th grade)	Basic VET certificates  General adult education (levels E	2

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	EQF levels
		and F, approximates 10th grade)  Adult VET certificate	
1	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade)	Certificate for preparatory adult education  Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates ninth grade)	2

(\*) Acquired in adult education and training.

Source: Adapted from Danish Evaluation Institute, 2011.

## List of abbreviations

DK NQF	Danish national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

## References

[URLs accessed 7.10.2014]

European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Denmark*. <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/870>

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