

The United Kingdom European inventory on NQF 2018

The UK education and training system performs relatively well according to most EU 2020 benchmarks. Participation of children aged four and above in early childhood education and care has reached 100% and student basic skills are at a high and stable level. The percentage of 15-year-olds with underachievement in reading, mathematics and science is below the EU average (17.9%, 21.9% and, respectively, 17.4% in 2015). The percentage of students who leave school early has been decreasing and has reached the EU average (10.6% in 2017); unlike in most EU countries, it is higher among native students than among those born outside the UK. The employment rates of recent graduates are above EU averages for all levels of qualification. One of the main challenges in the school system is the availability and retention of teachers; the government has increased support for training, recruiting and retaining teachers in all parts of the UK. The tertiary educational attainment rate is among the highest in the EU (48.3% in 2017), despite concerns around the high levels of student debt. Two-year 'accelerated' undergraduate degrees have been proposed as a solution to reduce the time required to obtain a degree and thus reduce university costs. Participation in study mobility programmes abroad is relatively low at 3.2 % of total graduates in 2016 (compared to 9% the EU average); 50% of it has been as part of EU programmes. Initiatives to develop vocational education and training (VET) are being implemented in all parts of the UK. Efforts are focused on developing apprenticeship programmes, improving the quality of provision, the attractiveness of VET and engagement with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Participation in upper secondary VET has increased over recent years across the UK. Mismatches in terms of qualification level and field of study, on the one hand, and job profile on the other hand are higher compared to the EU average. Adult participation in lifelong learning is above the EU average, at 14.3% in 2017, but it has been declining. Various policy measures and initiatives in all parts of the UK aim to support retraining and upskilling of individuals across the lifespan (European Commission, 2018).

Starting in the 1980s, several qualifications frameworks were developed in the UK, partly reflecting the fact that education and qualifications policy has been devolved to the four UK nations, and partly reflecting the different needs and interests of subsectors of education and training. Between 2008 and 2015, five qualifications frameworks were operational in parallel: the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; the

national qualifications framework (NQF); the qualifications and credit framework (QCF); the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), the Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF), of which the FQHEIS is a constituent part; and the credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW), of which the FHEQ is a constituent part. The Scottish qualifications framework and the credit and qualifications framework of Wales are comprehensive frameworks covering all levels and types of qualification.

In October 2015 a new regulated qualifications framework (RQF) was introduced for England and Northern Ireland, replacing the QCF and the NQF ⁽¹⁾. The RQF covers all general and vocational qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) ⁽²⁾ and by the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment Regulation (CCEA Regulation) ⁽³⁾. The most significant change introduced by the RQF is the lifting of standardised requirements for the design of qualifications. RQF is a descriptive framework and uses the same eight levels (plus three entry levels) as the QCF but introduces some changes in the way qualification size is calculated.

While these developments show that frameworks develop and change continuously, they also show that the visibility and overall impact of frameworks depends on the political context they operate within. This is particularly visible in England and Northern Ireland, where the existence of parallel frameworks may have partly contradicted their ability to support transparency and learning progression. The introduction of the RQF addressed this problem.

The Scottish and Welsh frameworks contrast developments in England and Northern Ireland, operating as comprehensive frameworks and setting themselves ambitious targets for lifelong learning. Following an evaluation of the CQFW ⁽⁴⁾ and changes to regulation of qualifications, the CQFW has become more embedded in education and training policy and practice in Wales. The abolition of the QCF has influenced the CQFW; starting from 2015, all regulated qualifications in Wales refer to the new RQF level descriptors while non-regulated

⁽¹⁾ Relevant documents: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework> [accessed 19.3.2019].

⁽²⁾ Ofqual: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about>

⁽³⁾ CCEA: http://ccea.org.uk/about_us/what_we_do

⁽⁴⁾ Welsh Government (2014). *The credit and qualifications framework for Wales: a qualitative review of its impact*. Social research report No 73/2014. <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2014/140717-credit-qualifications-framework-qualitative-review-impact-en.pdf>

qualifications (the lifelong learning pillar) continue to refer to the original CQFW descriptors. The Scottish framework is considered a key tool for stakeholders and is increasingly emerging as the most visible and consistent of the UK frameworks.

Wales

Introduction and context

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) was adopted in 2002 and launched in 2003. Its purpose is to act as an overarching structure to provide clarity for the existing education sub-systems. The CQFW is an all-inclusive meta-framework that encompasses a wide range of learning under three ‘pillars’: the higher education pillar (levels 4 to 8), the regulated qualifications pillar (entry 1 to level 8) and the lifelong learning pillar (entry 1 to level 8) (Welsh Government, 2018a). The framework has no regulatory functions, but helps to bring together the main stakeholders involved in regulating Welsh qualifications.

The CQFW is operational and can be seen as a second generation framework, departing from sector frameworks established from the 1990s onwards. Following evaluation of the CQFW in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2014) ⁽⁵⁾ a number of changes have been introduced, partly reflecting the setting up of Qualifications Wales ⁽⁶⁾, a new government body responsible for regulated qualifications (outside higher education). Changes were introduced to the quality-assured lifelong learning pillar of the framework, seeking to clarify the way non-formal and informal learning is recognised.

Abolition of the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) in England and Northern Ireland has also influenced the CQFW. From 2015 onwards all regulated qualifications refer to the new Ofqual level descriptors introduced for the regulated qualifications framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland ⁽⁷⁾. Non-regulated qualifications continue to refer to the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

⁽⁵⁾ See the relevant web page of the Welsh Government: <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/evaluation-impact-credit-qualifications-framework-wales/?lang=en> [accessed 19.3.2019].

⁽⁶⁾ Qualifications Wales webpage: <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/> [accessed 19.03.2019].

⁽⁷⁾ See the chapter on UK England and Northern Ireland of the [European NQF inventory 2018](#).

Policy objectives

The CQFW has been designed to provide greater clarity on the qualifications system in Wales. It is seen as an ‘enabling tool’ in relation to the Welsh Government’s economic and skills policies and goals. It should therefore:

- (a) offer a national qualifications framework for learners in Wales of all ages and abilities;
- (b) provide a common currency for learning achievement;
- (c) support the recognition of credit and qualifications across all levels, enabling learners to progress;
- (d) support providers in articulating pathways of progression that are easily understood and are transferable and consistent within Europe and the wider international community.

The CQFW embraces three common principles:

- (a) expression of achievement as learning outcomes;
- (b) the demands made by that learning on the learner (level);
- (c) credit can be applied.

Together, these principles underpin all types of learning in all sections of education and training. 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:

- (a) higher education;
- (b) regulated general and vocational qualifications.

The lifelong learning pillar 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.

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. The CQFW is also a communications framework that aims ‘to provide a language and route map to make it easier for learners, parents, education professionals and employers to understand progression routes’ (Welsh Government, 2014).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The CQFW encompasses a wide range of qualifications and other credit-based accredited training (that can be awarded to learners undertaking a wide range of learning, covering general and vocational training) and non-accredited delivery (Welsh Government, 2018a). There are eight levels plus entry levels in the CQFW. The higher education pillar includes higher education certificates, diplomas and degrees at levels 4 and above. The regulated qualifications pillar includes school leaving qualifications (GCSEs, GCE A Levels) and all-age vocational qualifications (NVQs, certificates, diplomas, awards). Qualifications Wales regulates the awarding bodies for this pillar. The lifelong learning pillar includes units of accredited learning⁽⁸⁾ and professional learning⁽⁹⁾. The providers in this pillar are required to meet the CQFW high level principles: the credit, learning time, recognised standards, levels/level descriptors, title, purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The CQFW level descriptors were revised in 2009 and are structured in three categories: knowledge and understanding; application and action; and autonomy and accountability⁽¹⁰⁾. With the introduction of RQF in England and Northern Ireland in 2015, the revised RQF level descriptors – defined in terms of knowledge and skills – have been adopted for the regulated qualifications pillar of the CQFW and apply for vocational and general education qualifications, as can be seen by the table below.

⁽⁸⁾ This is called ‘unitised accredited learning’ (UAL) which is unit-based provision and has a credit value.

⁽⁹⁾ This is called ‘vendor/industry/professional’ (VIP) learning that tends to be sector/industry specific training and/or workforce development programmes (Welsh Government, 2018a).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Detailed graph on level descriptors:
<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/level-descriptors.pdf>
[accessed 19.3.2019].

Changes to level descriptors

Level	Knowledge descriptor (the holder...)	Skills descriptor (the holder can...)
Level 1	Has basic factual knowledge of a subject and/or knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined routine tasks and address simple problems. Is aware of aspects of information relevant to the area of study or work.	Use basic cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined routine tasks and procedures. Select and use relevant information. Identify whether actions have been effective.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications#level-descriptors>

Higher education qualifications are assigned to levels in accordance with the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland ⁽¹¹⁾. The lifelong learning pillar continues to use the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

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:

- (a) the level of the outcomes of learning;
- (b) the volume of outcomes, described by the number of CQFW credit points.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) is managed by a strategic operational partnership comprising the Welsh Government, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and Qualifications Wales. Other external agencies, awarding bodies, higher education and training providers are invited to join the advisory group as appropriate. All partners support the CQFW in aiding transparency and assisting learners in planning their progression

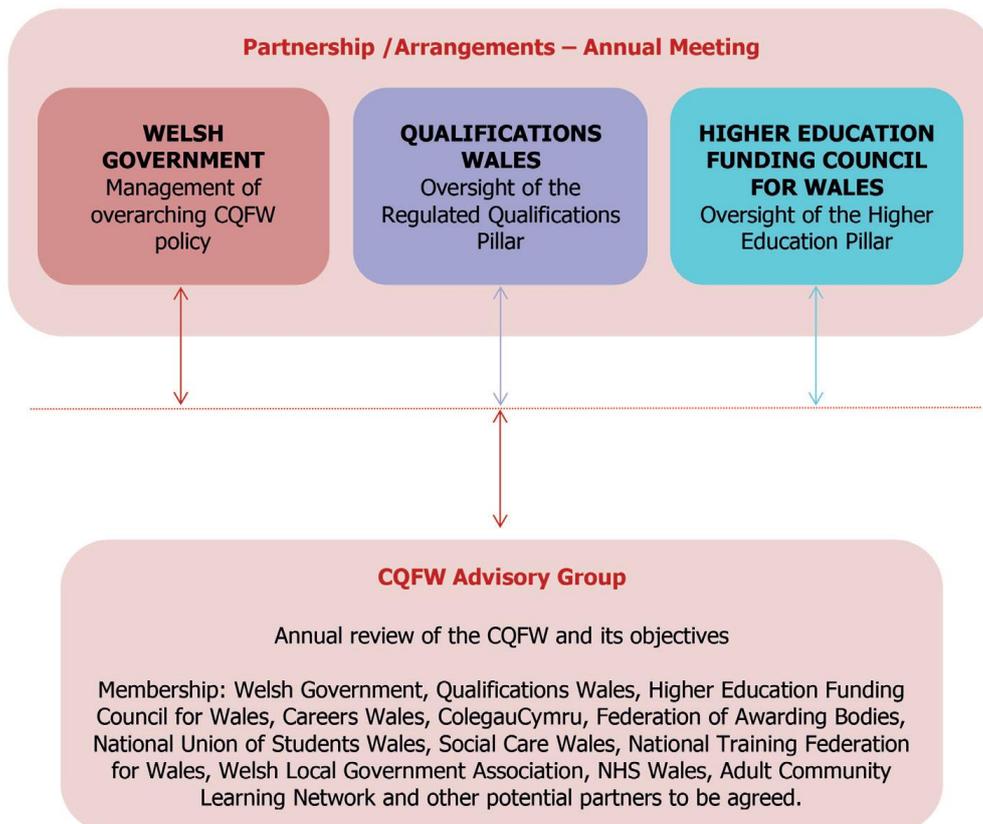
⁽¹¹⁾ Quality Assurance Agency (2014). *UK Quality code for higher education. Part A: setting and maintaining academic standards. The frameworks for higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies.*
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

pathways (Welsh Government, 2018a). The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) ⁽¹²⁾ is a membership organisation representing the seven largest awarding bodies offering qualifications in the UK, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications.

The 2014 evaluation noted that the CQFW was particularly well established in certain sectors: higher education and adult and community learning. For other sectors, however, engagement was lower. Stakeholders generally perceived engagement with the framework to be low among employers and most learners, and that there is a need to increase awareness of – and buy-in to – the framework across education and training sectors. This mixed assessment was balanced by the fact that stakeholders are generally aware of the CQFW and its roles and it is considered a useful information tool, providing coherent understanding of the Welsh qualifications system. Since 2014, this has been addressed by a targeted programme of awareness-raising, including the production of brochures and web materials, as well as engagement with learning providers and employers through the CQFW advisory group. The CQFW has also been embedded in Welsh Government targets in, for example, apprenticeship provision and learner attainment.

⁽¹²⁾ More information can be found at JCQ website: www.jcq.org.uk/

Figure 1. CQFW governance structure



Source: Welsh Government (2018a). <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf>

A number of changes were introduced in 2015, including the CQFW governance structure, by setting up of Qualifications Wales (¹³); this is a new government-sponsored but independent body responsible for non-higher education qualifications. Qualifications Wales has a range of regulatory powers to support the system and take action if there is non-compliance. Its main purpose is to promote the interests of learners and public confidence in the qualification system. In order to offer regulated qualifications in Wales an awarding body must be recognised by Qualifications Wales (Welsh Government, 2018).

Changes were also introduced to the lifelong learning pillar of the framework, seeking to clarify the way non-formal and informal learning is recognised. The units of accredited learning in this pillar are designed primarily by awarding

(¹³) For further information see Qualifications Wales at: www.qualificationswales.org

bodies and, in some cases, employers, professional bodies, colleges or voluntary sector bodies.

The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the CQFW. Higher education is a devolved area, which means that most decisions about higher education policy in Wales are taken by the Welsh Government. Higher education institutions are private bodies/charities which are independent of government and are quality regulated by the HEFCW. This body ensures the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is in place for assessing the quality of higher education; it also scrutinises the performance of universities and other designated providers (Welsh Government, 2018). In *Taking Wales forward 2016-21* ⁽¹⁴⁾ a commitment was made to update governance arrangements for further and higher education. In June 2017, proposals to create a new commission to oversee the higher and further education sector in Wales were published by the Education Secretary ⁽¹⁵⁾ as a Welsh Government white paper titled *Public good and a prosperous Wales: building a reformed PCET system* ⁽¹⁶⁾. It set out how the new body (referred to as the Tertiary Education and Research Commission), would succeed the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, will regulate the post-compulsory education and training sector, as well as have responsibility for research and innovation (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Quality assurance of lifelong learning is not overseen centrally; it is assumed that sectors will utilise their own internal existing quality assurance practices and processes to comply with the CQFW's high-level principles. There is no regulatory process for unitised accredited learning (UAL) ⁽¹⁷⁾, nor is there a

⁽¹⁴⁾ Welsh Government (2016). *Taking Wales forward: 2016-21*.

<https://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

⁽¹⁵⁾ Sources: <https://gov.wales/newsroom/educationandskills/2017/new-commission-with-responsibility-for-higher-and-further-education-in-wales-to-be-created/?lang=en> and <https://beta.gov.wales/tertiary-education-and-research-commission-wales> [accessed 19.3.2019].

⁽¹⁶⁾ Welsh Government (2017). *Public good and prosperous Wales: building a reformed PCET system*.

https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-02/170620_consultation-en.pdf

⁽¹⁷⁾ Lifelong learning units are not regulated qualifications. For more details regarding the process for recognition of Unitised Accredited Learning within the CQFW, see the Welsh brochure on CQFW (p. 27), available at:

<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf>

regulatory process for approval of vendor/industry/professional (VIP) learning. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance ⁽¹⁸⁾ has been developed for the implementation of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), a constituent part of CQFW. This guidance applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards granted by a higher education provider.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽¹⁹⁾

Only formal and non-formal learning is recognised by the CQFW; the framework does not recognise informal learning because it does not comply with the CFQW high-level principles ⁽²⁰⁾ and it has no set objectives in terms of learning outcomes. Non-formal learning can be recognised in a number of ways in Wales. The terms recognition of prior learning (RPL), accreditation of prior learning (APL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) are used interchangeably.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is possible for individuals using their previously acquired learning to obtain or access formal qualifications on the CQFW, including higher education and vocational qualifications ⁽²¹⁾. Access to higher education courses includes opportunities for recognition of prior learning. While the CQFW recognises the importance and benefits of RPL, there is currently no formal RPL policy in Wales and, use of RPL remains at the discretion of individual providers. Data are not collected at national level, except in the higher education sector, where they are only collected in relation to RPL provision (APEL modules) and not in relation to access aided via RPL. However,

⁽¹⁸⁾ More information on Quality Assurance Agency can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-qualitycode/part-a-setting-and-maintainingacademic-standards

⁽¹⁹⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., forthcoming).

⁽²⁰⁾ The high level pillars refer to the credit, learning time, recognised standards, levels/level descriptors, title, purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria (Welsh Government, 2018a).

⁽²¹⁾ RPL is a learner-centred voluntary process. The learner should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support credit through RPL (Welsh Government, 2018b).

one recent development is that the Welsh Government published a brochure ⁽²²⁾ on the CQFW (Welsh Government, 2018a) that includes an outline of principles related to RPL. Its content is aimed at those working within the education/training and advice and guidance sectors. Opportunities for RPL are developed from a sectoral perspective, with different approaches for VET, higher education and adult learning. A bottom-up approach is taken, with awarding organisations and learning providers developing their own policies (and practices in the case of providers) for RPL. In 2017, the publicly funded National Health Service of Wales, (NHS) Wales ⁽²³⁾ developed a *Recognition of prior learning framework and toolkit*, which is designed to support progression and staff development through lifelong learning, non-accredited in-house learning or work-based learning qualifications which are no longer available (Welsh Government, 2018b).

The lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW is also intended to recognise non-formal learning provision on the CQFW. The focus of the lifelong learning pillar is to accredit learning provision from outside higher education and regulated qualifications pillars of the CQFW. Gaining CQFW credit value is dependent on the learner completing assessment based on learning outcomes ⁽²⁴⁾. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) offer a third opportunity to validate workplace learning. They are aimed mainly at people in employment, proving the ability to perform an occupation to a nationally recognised occupational standard.

While RPL arrangements are in place, there is no evidence to suggest that RPL is well utilised. There are also no systems to coordinate validation across the different sectors of learning in Wales and no sectors are given priority. The question of trust in the outcomes of RPL is not really an issue, since outcomes (access, award of credits/qualifications) are based on evidence gathered by assessors and are not usually different to those acquired by learners who have pursued a formal route. The lifelong learning pillar of the CQFW serves to increase trust in, and recognition of, non-formal learning provision, which is acknowledged and accredited through this pillar.

⁽²²⁾ Welsh Government (2018a). *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales*.
<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-01/cqfw-brochure.pdf>
This brochure is not a regulatory document.

⁽²³⁾ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus>

⁽²⁴⁾ Credit can be awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes that have been verified through the appropriate rules, regulations and assessment for each of the pillars. This is done through the achievement of units certificated through a regulated recognised body (Welsh Government, 2018a).

According to stakeholders interviewed in 2014 and 2016, potential obstacles to further development include the lack of strategic drive to promote RPL at national level, lack of awareness among learners of RPL opportunities, lack of expertise among providers, or lack of confidence to carry out RPL or trust in RPL processes (in the higher education sector). It is also possible that the lack of dedicated funding for RPL (except in the higher education sector) is a disincentive to what can be perceived as a process that is difficult to administer and time-consuming (for both individual applicants and providers).

While RPL is possible 'on paper', it is not clear how much it is actually offered and taken up in practice; it appears that implementation is low. In the higher education sector, for instance, the RPL Wales project found that, although there is good practice in some (departments of) universities, this is limited. A more uniform approach, which can be applied across all qualifications and situations, is called for in the progress report for the RPL Wales project, to help to ensure that the Welsh workforce is able to face the changes taking place in the country's labour market. The CQFW is a potential enabler for validation in Wales. One of the main impacts identified by stakeholders is greater recognition of prior learning through the lifelong learning pillar, with particular benefits for disadvantaged learner groups, helping to raise aspirations and promote progression opportunities. Stakeholders identified the flexibility created by the CQFW as a benefit and, through RPL, the framework is said to have helped employers and employees to avoid duplication of training.

NQF implementation

The CQFW was formally adopted in 2002 and was launched in 2003. The ten-year implementation plan ran from 2003 to 2014. This reflected the view that framework implementation takes time and requires a long-term development perspective. The framework is an overarching meta-framework, including all levels and types of qualification and is considered to be an integral part of the qualification system. It consists of three pillars: regulated qualifications, higher education qualifications and lifelong learning pillar. The CQFW has reached an advanced operational stage and can be seen as a second generation framework. From 2015 onwards all regulated qualifications refer to the new RQF level descriptors. Higher education qualifications refer to the qualifications framework

for higher education and the lifelong learning pillar continues to use the 2009 CQFW level descriptors.

Wales has a qualification database, *QiW database* ⁽²⁵⁾ which is owned and managed by Qualifications Wales, the regulator of regulated qualifications pillar qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales. This database contains details of all qualifications that are approved or designated for teaching in Wales for learners aged below 19, excluding higher education. Any qualifications that are approved or designated ⁽²⁶⁾ by Qualifications Wales are eligible for funding by a local authority or by Welsh Government. This is related to education providers and not the learners. The database contains information on qualification titles, numbers, the awarding body that awards each qualification as well as links to further qualification information. There are 102 383 current and archived qualifications in the database.

NQF levels are indicated on Europass certificates ⁽²⁸⁾ and diplomas as well as in the qualification database. However, EQF levels have not been included on certificates/diplomas or supplements, but are included in the database. No plans have been made to insist on EQF levels appearing on certificates but the NQF managers in the UK maintain ongoing consultations on this with the organisations that award certificates.

Evaluation of the framework was undertaken in 2014. The CQFW was seen as playing a generally positive and constructive role in the Welsh qualification landscape and there is support among all stakeholders to continue the work started a decade ago. The main strengths of the CQFW were related to its role in allowing for greater validation of non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior and informal learning). The framework was generally seen to have raised learner aspirations and contributed to promoting progression. The opportunity to add new units to the lifelong learning pillar of the framework was seen as beneficial to the flexibility of the framework and as a condition for addressing the needs of special-needs groups. Further, the CQFW was seen as supporting a 'common currency' of credit that has made it easier to articulate and communicate achievements across sectors, levels and geographic areas. A

⁽²⁵⁾ More information on the qualification database: <https://www.qiw.wales/>

⁽²⁶⁾ QiW is an independent system. All qualifications in QiW will be allocated a unique identification code known as a Qualifications Wales Approval/Designation Number.

⁽²⁷⁾ Archived refers to qualifications that have passed their operational end date within the last two years.

⁽²⁸⁾ More information on Europass certificate supplements: [UK Naric homepage](#)

broad range of stakeholders ⁽²⁹⁾ appreciated the flexibility offered by the unit-based approach.

The evaluation offered a good insight into the challenges involved in setting up national qualifications frameworks. Most stakeholders consider that the potential of the CQFW has not been used in practice as much as originally hoped. Despite having been used in some sectors, the ‘concept has not taken off on a great scale’. Some stakeholders pointed out that credit accumulation and transfer has not played the role originally expected; learners and employers seem to be more focused on full qualifications than credits in the current situation. Although the most important criticism of implementation of the framework was directed to the Welsh Government and the lack of ‘strategic investment’ in it, its governance is managed by a strategic operational partnership.

In terms of use of the NQF by different stakeholders, credit size and levels are used by universities in setting entry requirements and selecting students. The levels of qualifications are included in job advertisements, while accessible publicity materials (leaflets, videos ⁽³⁰⁾) are continually evolving and widely distributed in the country. The Welsh Government has provided information sessions to Careers Wales staff regarding updates to the curriculum, which included the CQFW. An employer ⁽³¹⁾ and a learner guide ⁽³²⁾ were developed in 2018 to aid comprehension of the framework by these target groups.

Wales is currently in the process of updating the referencing report due to the changes in the level descriptors, the creation of Qualification Wales and the changes to quality assurance in higher education. This report will be presented to the EQF advisory group in June 2019. The approach to referencing will be based on a thorough mapping of level descriptors of CQFW as well as on desk-based

⁽²⁹⁾ These stakeholders, including awarding bodies, sector skills councils, training providers and third sector organisations, noted this approach as a major benefit, allowing for rapid renewal of provisions and for meeting the needs of diverse groups of learners. The framework, by providing an overview, also made it possible to avoid duplication of units and qualifications, delivering economic benefit (Welsh Government, 2014).

⁽³⁰⁾ <https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw-overview> [accessed 19.3.2019].

⁽³¹⁾ <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/credit-and-qualifications-framework-for-wales-employer-guide.pdf> [accessed 19.3.2019].

⁽³²⁾ <https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw-learner-guide> [accessed 19.3.2019]. Learners can be helped to plan their progression pathways with this guide.

review of evidence including policy documents, regulatory requirements and quality assurance processes (Welsh Government, 2018a). A CQFW advisory group, with membership drawn from wider key stakeholders, such as representatives from government, regulators, learning providers, employers and learners, will be created.

Referencing to the EQF

The CQFW was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) as a part of the overall UK referencing process in February 2010 (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency et al., 2010). An updated referencing report is currently being drafted and is planned to be submitted to the EQF advisory group in mid-2019. A framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) was linked to the Bologna process and was self-certified to the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2009 ⁽³³⁾, and will also be incorporated in the updated referencing to the EQF.

Important lessons and future plans

The framework has matured over time and has become an integral part of the qualifications system in Wales. Evaluation of the CQFW was carried out in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2014) focusing on strengths and weaknesses of the framework. Overall, stakeholders responding to the evaluation recognised the role played by the CQFW as an overarching framework; there was general support for its further development and implementation. They pointed out that the increasing divergences between the Welsh and the English education and training systems offer an opportunity for the CQFW to present the Welsh qualification landscape and to inspire its further development and reform.

The changes introduced in Wales in recent years aimed to increase the awareness of the framework and simplify the levels of understanding and profile of the framework. The lifelong learning pillar was considered to have had an

⁽³³⁾ QQA (2009). *Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (FQ-EHEA)*
http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications_frameworks/81/2/FHEQSelfCert_596812.pdf

impact on disadvantaged learners and contributed to overall lifelong learning strategies. It helped to introduce learners with low educational attainment to more formal learning in ‘achievable, bite-size pieces’, providing an understanding of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and evidence (European Commission et al, (forthcoming)). One of the ten recommendations, based on the findings of the 2014 evaluation ⁽³⁴⁾ was to ‘revise the aims and objectives so that it evolves to become a ‘functional’ national qualifications framework which acts as a vehicle for describing the qualifications system in Wales’. To this end, the CQFW advisory group will review the CQFW and its objectives annually.

Future plans involve review of the CQFW planned referencing report by the steering group and approval by CQFW advisory group members, as well as promoting and distributing that report. Maintaining relationships with other UK nations to ensure alignment of frameworks across the UK and Europe is still needed. Revising existing publicity materials and using them to further promote and raise the profile of the CQFW would support the commitment to the framework.

Main sources of information:

- CollegesWales (ColegauCymru) is the EQF NCP: <http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/>
- Welsh Government CQFW website: <https://beta.gov.wales/qualifications>
- Qualification database in Wales (QiW): <https://www.qiw.wales/>
- QCA et al. (2010). *Referencing the qualifications frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European qualifications framework*.
<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/2011-05-16-uk-eqf-referencing-report.pdf>
- QQA (2009). *Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the framework for qualifications of the European higher education area (FQ-EHEA)*.
http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications_frameworks/81/2/FHEQSelfCert_596812.pdf

⁽³⁴⁾ See Welsh Government (2014).

Credit and qualifications framework for Wales

CQFW levels	Qualification types	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree Industry qualifications (e.g. chartered accountant)	8
7	Master degree Vocational qualifications Postgraduate certificate in education Apprenticeships	7
6	Bachelor honours degrees Vocational qualifications Professional certificate in education Apprenticeships	6
5	Foundation degree Vocational qualifications Higher national diploma Apprenticeships	
4	Certificates of higher education Vocational qualifications Higher national certificate Apprenticeships	5
3	Welsh baccalaureate advanced Vocational qualifications AS / A level Access to higher education Apprenticeships	4
2	Welsh baccalaureate national Vocational qualifications Essential skills General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades A* to C) Apprenticeships	3
1	Welsh baccalaureate foundation Vocational qualifications Essential skills General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) (grades D to G)	2
Entry 1-3	Entry level qualifications	1

Source: Welsh Government, 2017. See [CQFW diagram](#).

Abbreviations

APEL	accreditation of prior experiential learning
APL	accreditation of prior learning
CQFW	credit and qualifications framework for Wales
EQF	European qualifications framework
FHEQ	framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
FQHEIS	framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland
GCE A level	general certificate of education advanced level
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
JCQ	Joint Council for Qualifications
NHS	National Health Service of Wales
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVQs	national vocational qualifications
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCF	qualifications and credit framework
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regulated qualifications framework
UAL	unitised accredited learning
VET	vocational education and training
VIP	vendor, industry, professional learning

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