Evaluation of the NLQF
An example from the Netherlands and lessons learned

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Aim of the evaluation

○ Evaluation of the Dutch NLQF and the National Coordination Point NLQF (NCP NLQF)

○ Explore necessary adjustments needed for the upcoming legislative framework (inventory and assessment of major concerns of stakeholders and solutions found)

○ Approach
  ○ Literature study
  ○ Interviews stakeholders
  ○ Study international practices
 ○ Round table

Context

- NLQF consists of all formal government regulated qualifications and registered non-formal / non regulated qualifications
- National Coordination Point is responsible for the implementation of the NLQF:
  - assessing and registration of non-formal qualifications in the NLQF
  - manage the register of qualifications
  - communication and information on the NLQF
- Procedure for assessing non-formal qualifications
  - Step 1: validity test of the owner of the qualification
  - Step 2: assessing the level of the qualification
- Changing context: enabling environment for implementing the NLQF

How is the NLQF functioning in practice?

- Number of registered non-formal qualifications is still low
- Stakeholders consider NLQF as a valuable instrument (transparency in the education market)
- The registration procedure leads to quality improvement of providers of qualifications
- Difference in use and added value in VET and higher education
- No formal (legal) civil effect BUT practical civil effect
- The familiarity of employers and citizens with the NLQF is still low
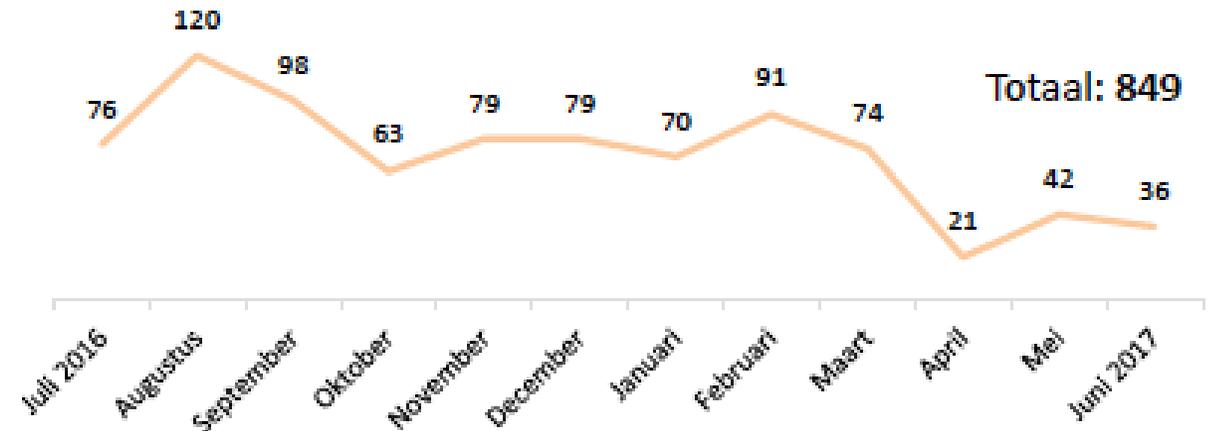- The delay implementing the legal framework causes hesitation and frustration amongst stakeholders

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Measuring outputs / impacts

Outputs
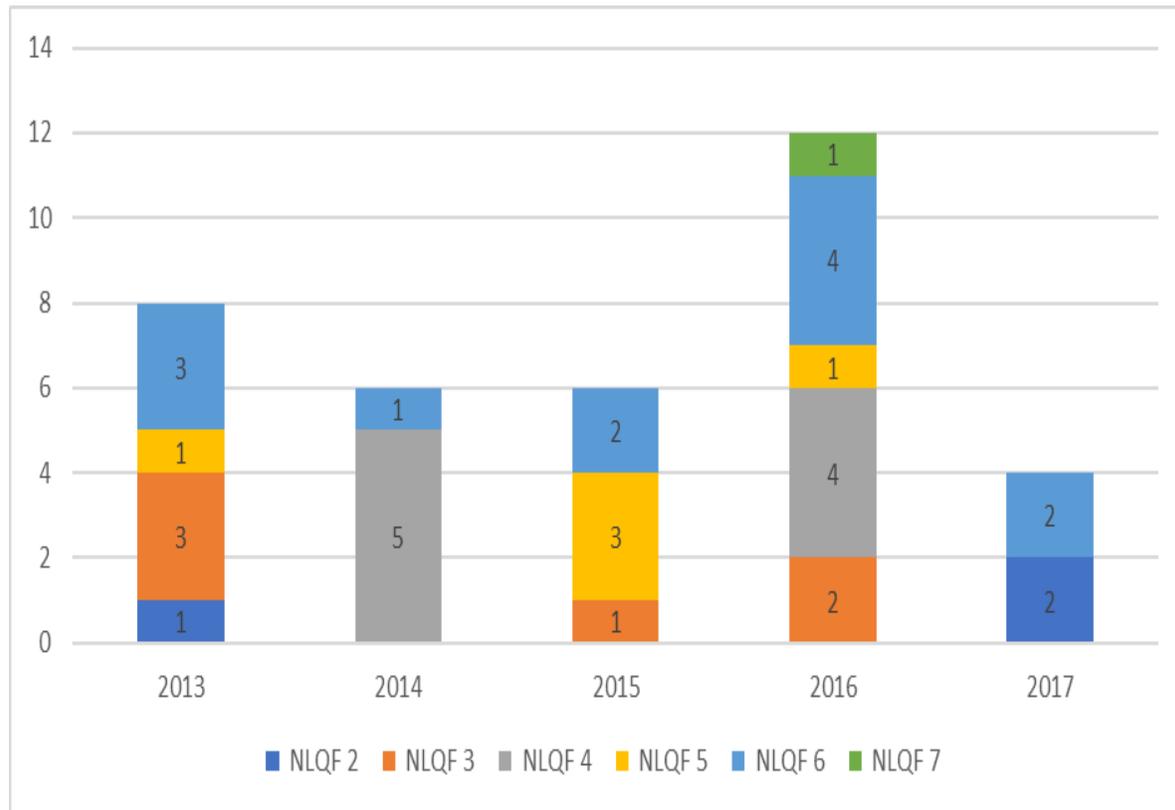
Impacts

NLQF

Ontwikkeling aantal vacatures met NLQF
in de afgelopen 12 maanden

Totaal: 849

What are the concerns of stakeholders?

- NLQF as such and scope:
  - A: Use and purpose of the NLQF
  - B: Needs and necessarity for including non government regulated qualifications
  - C: Confusing whether the NLQF relates to individual qualification levels or not.
  - D: Lack of visibility of the NLQF amongst employers and employees
- System consequences of the NLQF:
  - E: Confusion about the status of the state regulated versus non state regulated qualifications that are positioned at the same level and possible negative effects on the value of formal qualifications (Ad, Bachelor, and Master).
  - F: Unequal playing field between publicly funded education providers versus non publicly funded providers in the possibility to provide modular certificates (with reference to the NLQF level)

What are the concerns of stakeholders?

- Procedural aspects:
  - G: the registration procedure assesses plans (foreseen learning outcomes) instead of actual realised learning outcomes
- Roles and responsibilities:
  - H: lack of clarity whether the registration of non-formal qualifications is a quality judgment and how it is related to the formal accreditation system for higher education
  - I: The role of the Inspection of education is not clear in the legislative proposal

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To what extent are the concerns valid?

○ Partial valid concerns are :
  ○ C: Confusing whether the NLQF relates to the individual qualification level

  ○ E: Confusion about the status of the state regulated versus non state regulated qualifications that are positioned at the same level and possible negative effects on the value of formal qualifications (Ad, Bachelor, and Master).

  ○ I: The role of the Inspection of education is not clear in the legislative proposal

○ Valid concerns are:

  ○ D: Lack of visibility of the NLQF amongst employers and employees

  ○ H: lack of clarity whether the registration of non-formal qualifications is a quality judgment and how it is related to the formal accreditation system in higher education (pseudo accreditation).

What solutions can be found for the valid concerns identified?

○ Wales, Scotland, Poland and France

○ In all countries an assessment is made of the foreseen learning outcomes of a qualification (and not about the level of the holder of the qualification)

○ In countries were the NQF is existing for a longer time you see more visibility and higher awareness of the NQF, and the instrument is used more often in the education and labour market

○ The confusion about the status of formal versus non-formal qualifications at the same level is not common (such as in Wales and Scotland), or is solved by means of communication (such as in Poland)

○ Whether registration in the NLQF can also be considered a quality judgement, is a point that receive attention in other countries as well

○ The role of the inspection of education is not explicitly discussed in other countries

Recommendation(implication on legisalative proposal and implementation traject)

○ **Recommendation 1:** Start the process of adopting and implementing the legislative framework as soon as possible
  - ○ *Improve the definition of the concept of qualification (not individual), learning results (intended versus realised)*

○ **Recommendation 2:** Solve a number of issues during the implementation : communication
  - ○ *the visibility of the NLQF is stimulated by referring to EQF levels on diplomas*
  - ○ *In order to create clarity on the different types of qualifications within the NLQF (formal versus non formal) one should consider using different labelling (colours; numbers)*
  - ○ *The use of NLQF in communication activities of providers should be done according to strict and clear guidelines and protocols in order to reduce confusion in the market*

○ **Recommendation 3:** Solve a number of issues during the implementation: adjustment of structures and procedures of NCP
  - ○ Much confusion about the NLQF relates to the fact that it is seen as quality label (which is formal not the case)
  - ○ The validity test, or certain parts of it (like external examination and quality assurance), for providers should be left of the official procedure and become independent and conditional for registration

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Lessons for evaluating impact

- To early to assess impact (formally not implemented)
- Theory based evaluation are more appropriate (assessing "policy theory'. What works for whom in what context? Enabling factors)
- Evidence on NQF implementation from other MS
- Difficult to measure hard impacts, but reconstruct the contribution story
- Using story telling approaches
- Some evidence on impact (civil effect; quality improvement providers)
- Use evaluations for learning purposes as well (action research / dialogue / consensus building)