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EQFNEWSLETTER

European Qualifications Framework

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Résumé

Cette cinquième édition du bulletin d'information du Cadre Européen de Certification (CEC), fournit des informations sur les derniers développements relatifs à la mise en œuvre du CEC.

Le bulletin débute par un éditorial de Sjur Bergan, Chef de la Division de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche du Conseil de l'Europe. Il fait part de ses réflexions sur l'actuelle coopération entre le CEC et le cadre des certifications de l'espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur.

Le premier article présente les résultats d'une récente étude du Cedefop sur le développement des Cadres Nationaux de Certification (CNC). Les progrès réalisés à ce jour par les différents pays y sont présentés de même que les leçons à en tirer jusqu'à présent et les futurs défis que les pays rencontreront lors du développement et de la mise en œuvre de ces CNC.

Les deux articles suivants décrivent les expériences danoise et hollandaise de référencement de leurs CNC par rapport au CEC. Ces articles explorent les processus employés, les principales difficultés à surmonter et quelques résultats à l'issue du processus de référencement.

Le soutien des experts internationaux lors du processus de référencement par rapport au CEC est quant à lui détaillé dans les deux articles qui suivent. L'article suivant, rédigé par Francis Petel, partenaire social français (CGPME) et membre de la Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP), pose un regard sur les aspects pratiques impliquant les partenaires sociaux dans la mise en œuvre du CEC. Dans cet article, Mr. Petel souligne l'importance de l'engagement des acteurs de premier plan et les recommandations permettant d'améliorer la coopération dans le futur.

L›article dernier évoque les principales conclusions du projet pilote ZOOM qui a développé une approche transparente et objective de comparaison des certifications par rapport au CEC en utilisant le principe du meilleur ajustement.

Un résumé de trois importantes conférences récentes est ensuite présenté.

Zusammenfassung

Willkommen zur fünften Ausgabe des EQR-Newsletters, der Sie über die neuesten Entwicklungen bezüglich der Umsetzung des Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmens informiert.

Sjur Bergan, Leiter der Abteilung für Hochschulwesen und Forschung des Europarats, beschreibt in seinem Leitartikel die derzeitige Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem EQR und dem Qualifikationsrahmen für den Europäischen Hochschulraum.

Im ersten Artikel des Newsletters werden dann die Ergebnisse einer jüngst veröffentlichten Cedefop-Studie über die Umsetzung der Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen in Europa präsentiert, das heißt, welche Fortschritte die Länder bis dato erzielt haben, welche Erkenntnisse dabei gewonnen wurden und welche Herausforderungen bei der zukünftigen Gestaltung und Umsetzung der NQR zu bewältigen sind.

Die beiden folgenden Beiträge beschreiben die Erfahrungen der Niederlande und Dänemarks bei der Verknüpfung ihrer nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen mit dem EQR und erläutern neben den Verfahren, die eingesetzt wurden, auch die Probleme, die zu bewältigen waren, und zu welchen Ergebnissen die Verknüpfung geführt hat.

In zwei weiteren Artikeln beschreiben zwei internationale Experten ihre Aufgaben sowie die Erfahrungen, die sie bei der Unterstützung einiger Länder bei der Verknüpfung mit dem EQR gesammelt haben. Anschließend schildert Francis Petel, französischer Sozialpartner (CGPME) und Mitglied der französischen Qualifikationsbehörde (CNCP), seine Eindrücke von der EQR-Konferenz in Budapest und erläutert die praktischen Aspekte, die bei Einbeziehung der Sozialpartner bei der Umsetzung des EQR zu berücksichtigen sind.

Es folgt ein Bericht über die Ergebnisse des ZOOM-Pilotprojekts, mit dem ein transparenter und objektiver Ansatz beim Vergleich von Qualifikationen und deren Angleichung an den EQR getestet wurde. Das Verknüpfungsverfahren erfolgte anhand des „Best-fit"-Prinzips.

Den Abschluss bildet ein kurzer Bericht über die wichtigsten Ergebnisse von drei Konferenzen, die kürzlich abgehalten wurden.

Editorial

Sjur Bergan, Head of Education Department, Council of Europe

It is an honour for me to be invited to write this editorial for the EQF Newsletter. It is, I believe, also an indication of the close cooperation between the EQF and, what is formally known as, the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and which is, for good reason, more commonly known as the QF-EHEA or even the "Bologna framework".

It may seem trivial that two frameworks cooperate but this cooperation is nevertheless worth dwelling on. The QF-EHEA was adopted by Ministers of the Bologna Process in May 2005, at approximately the time that the European Commission launched work on the EQF. The two frameworks are different in scope. On the one hand, the QF-EHEA, as the name implies, covers only higher education qualifications, whereas the EQF covers all levels of education and training. On the other hand, the QF-EHEA has a broader geographical scope, since it encompasses all 47 countries of the European Higher Education Area, whereas the EQF covers 32 countries. Put simply, all countries of the EQF are also in the QF-EHEA but the reverse is not necessarily true: 15 countries are in the QF-EHEA only.

A second potential issue is that while the two European frameworks are similar, the wording is not exactly the same. This is perhaps not ideal but the close cooperation that has now been established between the European Commission, which oversees the EQF assisted by CEDEFOP, and the Council of Europe, which coordinates work on qualifications frameworks within the EHEA, ensures that the continued development of the frameworks will be both coherent and compatible. Most importantly, even though there are slight differences between the two European framework, it is not difficult to develop a national qualifications framework that include qualifications from all parts of the education system and at all levels, including higher education, and make them compatible with both European frameworks. This was first demonstrated by Malta, which referenced its national frameworks against both the QF-EHEA and the EQF in a single exercise, and several other countries are now following suit. These include Croatia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Sjur Bergan,
Council of Europe

A third point worth making is that cooperation is as necessary at national as at international level. In many countries, those responsible for different parts of the education and training system cooperate well but in some countries they do not. When we organized the first joint meeting of the National Contact Points for the EQF with their counterparts in the QF-EHEA, called national correspondents, we discovered that in some cases this European meeting marked the first time the NCP and the correspondent from the same country met. However, both the NCPs and the correspondents play an essential role in developing and implementing national frameworks that are compatible with each other and that further lifelong learning throughout Europe.

The cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in this area will be even more important in the coming years. The reason is as simple as it is complex: the easy part is done. Few would claim that it is easy to develop a European or a national qualifications framework. This takes time, it requires cooperation among many stakeholders and a national framework has to be adapted both to the requirements of European cooperation and the particular situation and traditions of the country concerned. Nevertheless, developing a structure is far less difficult than making it work in practice and that is the challenge we will face now: how can we make sure not only that national frameworks are compatible on paper but also that they will be implemented coherently across Europe, in spite of our different traditions? How can we make sure that learning outcomes are not only "formally correct" but that they become an integral part of teaching and learning? Meeting challenges such as these will require continued cooperation between the EQF and the QF-EHEA, public authorities responsible for different parts of the education system, education institutions, staff, students, employers and other stakeholders. The challenge is a tough one, but if we want qualifications frameworks to be more than a new name for old ways, we need to rise to it.

These and other issues concerning the future development of the QF-EHEA are raised in the report that the EHEA Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks is preparing for the conference of EHEA ministers to be held in Bucharest at the end of April 2012. I hope to have the opportunity to describe some of these challenges in a future issue of the EQF Newsletter.

Developments of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe

The situation in November 2011

Jens Bjornavold and Slava Pevec-Grm, senior experts, Cedefop

Cedefop has now completed its third mapping of NQF developments[1]. Building on the 2009 and 2010 reports, this year's overview shows that countries have made significant progress in developing and (increasingly) implementing their frameworks. Covering 34 countries and a total of 38 frameworks, the report summarises the situation through the following key figures:

- 28 countries are developing or have developed comprehensive NQFs - covering all types and levels of qualifications. The Czech Republic, Italy, the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia and Liechtenstein are still to decide on the scope and architecture of their frameworks;
- NQFs in the Czech Republic, France, Italy and the UK (England/Northern Ireland), cover a limited range of qualifications types and levels or consist of various frameworks for different parts of the education and training system, without clearly defined links;
- 26 countries have proposed or decided on an 8-level framework. The other eight countries have NQFs with either 5, 7, 9, 10 or 12 levels;
- All countries use a learning outcomes based approach to define the level descriptors;
- 14 NQFs have been formally adopted in their countries;
- France, Ireland, Malta and the UK have fully implemented their NQF. Around 10 more countries are now entering the early implementation stage.

Different ambitions and purposes

International comparability of qualifications – as promoted by the EQF - is important to all countries and can be seen as the main reasons behind the rapid emergence of NQFs. But their development throughout Europe very much reflects national objectives and needs.

Countries, such as Croatia, Iceland and Poland, see their NQFs as reforming frameworks which seek explicitly to improve the coherence, relevance and quality of the existing system. This may imply far-reaching changes, such as developing new learning pathways and programmes, or changing the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. Other countries, for example Denmark and the Netherlands, see their NQFs as communication frameworks which aim to improve descriptions of existing qualifications systems and clarify available options for learners and policy makers. In effect, making better use of what is already there. NQFs in France and the UK (England/Northern Ireland) have a regulatory role.

NQF design

Some 26 countries have proposed or adopted eight levels for their NQF. This consensus contrasts with the earlier frameworks. For example, Ireland's NQF has 10 levels. The UK (Scotland) NQF has 12. The French NQF is being revised from a 5 to an 8-level structure. Of the newer frameworks, Iceland's and Norway's both have seven levels. Slovenia has proposed 10.

Some countries, for example the Netherlands and the UK (England/Northern Ireland and Wales), have introduced entry (or access) levels in their frameworks to include and reward elementary level learning (below EQF level 1). These entry levels make visible and reward learning which does not add up to a full qualification but might, if combined with other learning, eventually do so. Many users may benefit from this approach, for example those with learning difficulties and early school leavers.

Developing level descriptors based on learning outcomes for NQFs has been a challenge for all countries. This is illustrated by Germany and the Netherlands where the relationship between theory (knowledge) and practice (skills and competence) has come to the fore, being directly related to the question of whether vocationally and general academically oriented upper secondary education and training should be placed at the same level.

Countries have made efforts to adapt the EQF descriptors to their national context and needs. For example, there is a trend among countries to spec-

1 Cedefop, *Development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in Europe 2011*, Brussels/Thessaloniki, November 2011

ify further the 'competence' dimension of the EQF to capture better communication, social and professional competences. A group of countries, notably Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia, refer to competences rather than learning outcomes in their frameworks. These countries see competence as an overarching concept, addressing a person's ability to use – in a self directed way - knowledge, skills, attitudes and other personal, social and methodological capacities at work or in study situations and for professional and personal development.

Most NQFs cover all officially recognised qualifications (general and higher education and vocational education and training) awarded by national authorities. Many countries, such as Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, intend to include in their NQFs certificates and diplomas delivered by enterprises or sectors which are not currently regarded as 'official' qualifications. This is an important development as it enables individual learners to see how learning outcomes from different contexts – public and private – are related and can be combined.

One concern is that frameworks are promoted on the basis of too little evidence and are insufficiently tailored to national conditions and needs. Developments of NQFs have, however, been characterised from the start by intensive debate in many countries, for example on how to understand learning outcomes and how to apply these principles to today's education and training systems. The debate has been about working towards a shared understanding of the values and future of education and training rather than a technical discussion about adopting a particular structure or number of levels. Valuable lessons have also been learned that will support further NQF development and implementation.

NQFs – the impact

While it is true that qualifications frameworks are still emerging, there is already evidence of their impact. At European level, there is strong support for a common European reference framework and most countries will have joined by the end of 2012.

At national level, too, NQFs are providing impetus for reforms. Different parts of the education and training system – general and higher education and VET – are usually governed independently. The concept of a comprehensive framework has encouraged countries to seek stronger connections between these sub-systems, notably between vocational and academically oriented education and training. Strengthening these connections may potentially reduce barriers to access to learning and make it easier for learners to progress to and from different levels and types of learning.

Developing NQFs has required involvement from a broader set of stakeholders – from public and private sectors of education and training and the labour market – than usual. This may influence the nature and direction of the debate on education and training by forcing stakeholders to look beyond their own position and to consider the interaction and relationship, for example, between different sectors and institutions.

Many countries are using their NQFs to promote the use of learning outcomes. Progress in introducing learning outcomes can be mainly observed in initial vocational and higher education. General education is lagging behind in some countries in this regard, but developments are also taking place there.

NQFs add value by providing an independent reference point not only to compare existing qualifications, but also to improve them. In Finland, the higher education community see their new NQF and its descriptors as a neutral reference point for promoting dialogue and improving quality.

The following lessons can be drawn from developments so far:

- NQF implementation requires time for stakeholders to develop an understanding of the key concepts and to promote cultural change;
- Stakeholder involvement is important at all stages to ensure ownership;
- NQF development is an iterative process, in which the existing education and training system and the NQF are progressively aligned with each other;
- A balance is needed between implementation within, as well as between, different parts of the education and training system (for example between different types of VET as well as between VET and general and higher education);
- NQFs need to be flexible enough to accommodate different types of learning;
- NQFs may be more enablers than drivers of change; they must be aligned with other supporting policies and institutional requirements.

NQFs - the challenges

As more and more NQFs enter the implementation stage, several challenges must be addressed to ensure their success.

Critically, countries must be clear about their rationale for allocating qualifications to the levels in both the European and national frameworks. Decisions on national levels must reflect the real learning outcomes of the qualifications and be accepted. This is essential to guarantee trust between countries. Given the key role NQFs play in linking national qualifications systems to the EQF, without this trust the impact of the EQF in promot-

ing European mobility will be severely hampered. Quality assurance is central to building acceptance and trust.

Descriptors should be closely linked to the learning outcomes on which they are based. The success and impact of NQFs very much depends on the shift to learning outcomes. Completion of national level descriptors, in most countries, should reflect that learning outcomes are applied in a way that, systematically addresses standards, curricula, assessment and learning methods. Exchanges of experience at European and national levels support mutual learning on how best to define and describe learning outcomes.

Another key challenge is the need to deepen the participation and involvement of educational institutions in the discussion on how to align NQF developments with education and training systems and practice.

If NQFs are to play a bridging or integrating role, the interaction between different levels and parts of the education and training system needs to be clearly addressed by the frameworks. The efforts in Poland, for example, to define coherent level descriptors at national level and also for the different sub-systems (general, VET and academic education and training) should enable the NQF to reduce barriers within the education and training system. The validation of non-formal and informal learning as reflected in the NQFs is a way to improve the links between levels and types of qualifications and will make it easier for people to understand, choose and move between different types and levels of learning.

Whether countries see their NQFs as reforming frameworks or as communication frameworks, European and national qualifications frameworks are changing the way that people see education and training.

By requiring people to take a broader perspective and to consider the education and training system as a whole, qualifications frameworks are promoting the case for lifelong learning.

The 2011 report along with the 2009 and 2010 reports can be downloaded from: **www.cedefop.europa.eu**

Referencing the Danish Qualification Framework

Allan Bruun Pedersen, Senior Adviser, Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education
Danish Agency for International Education[1] (Danish National Contact Point for EQF)

Introduction

The Danish referencing report was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in May 2011 in Budapest following the Hungarian Presidency conference on the EQF. The referencing report describes the Danish educational system and presents a thorough semantic comparison between the levels in the national framework and those in the EQF. Presenting it marked the end of the beginning of establishing a Danish Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning. The referencing process was orchestrated by a Coordination Committee consisting of the four ministries responsible for education in Denmark. The Danish Evaluation Institute wrote the report. In order to ensure broad ownership to the NQF, the Committee invited stakeholders to join the process through consultation and a concluding seminar. The outcomes of the seminar later formed the basis for a specific chapter in the referencing report.

Challenges

The referencing process was fenced in by the ten criteria set up by the EQF Advisory Group. The main challenge was to present the multi-faceted and complex educational system in a clear and understandable way. Further, as Denmark was one of the first countries in Europe to develop a qualification framework for higher education, we had already undergone the self-certification according to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. For obvious reasons, Denmark did not want to repeat this process. The solution was to include minor, but necessary, repetitions in some chapters of the report itself and include the full self-certification report as an annex. Furthermore, it proved to be challenging to involve stakeholders from higher education institutions in the referencing process, since the stakeholders felt that they were repeating a process recently undertaken during the self-certification of the Danish Qualifications Framework to the Bologna Framework. The Danish process thus underlined the advantages of completing the referencing process and the self-certification in a joint process.

Outcomes

The EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG) received the referencing report very well. The group applauded the balance struck between details and overview in the chapters describing the educational system as well as the clear evidence based, and transparent referencing of the levels of the Danish framework to the EQF.

Members of the EQF AG pointed out that the distinction between full and supplementary qualifications did not appear entirely clear. In addition, members observed that there are different criteria for referencing higher education qualifications and vocational education and training qualifications to the Danish Framework for Lifelong Learning. The explanation stems from the already mentioned fact that the Danish higher education framework was already in place when the decision was made to implement the EQF.

Other comments concerned the fact that the Danish NQF only includes formal qualifications. This is the result of a current lack of credible quality assurance mechanisms for assessing learning outcomes of private educational programmes. However, an evaluation of the Danish NQF in 2012-2013 will include a mapping of private education in Denmark with the purpose of integrating these qualifications into the NQF in the near future.

Finally, some members expressed concern that the Nordic team of experts did not have sufficient arm's length to the Danish system to ensure an impartial assessment. However, the educational systems in the Scandinavian countries are more diverse than is frequently thought, particularly as concerns the VET systems. Hence, the structure and conclusions of the final report bears several crucial fingerprints of the international experts.

Subsequently, the comments of the EQF AG were taken into account in a revision of the report.

The most important lesson learnt and underlined by the Danish stakeholders is the importance of a robust and thorough referencing process in all countries in order to avoid inflationary referencing of national levels to the EQF levels.

1 The name of the agency is currently being changed – the authorised English name is not available at the time of writing this.

The EQF will only serve its purpose as translation device and recognition tool, if the referencing of levels in all countries is based on a critical analysis of actual learning outcomes. In this respect, the Danish referencing process confirms that international experts play a crucial role in the referencing process.

New measures and methods were implemented during the Danish process, making Denmark sort of a 'Guinea-pig' for the new procedures. Most notably, the Commission and the EQF AG introduced pre-presentations of the report in the EQF AG as well as written comments on the referencing reports. These measures will definitely strengthen the quality of the process, but in relation to the Danish referencing process, they caused some obstacles by making the referencing process a moving target.

As stated previously, the conclusion of the referencing report only marks the setting of the cornerstones. A national qualification framework must be constantly reviewed and developed in line with on-going reforms, where for instance the growing emphasis on learning outcomes is expected to colour curricula, influence exams and facilitate international mobility and cross border recognition.

The next big step in Denmark will certainly be the analysis of the integration of non-formal education in the Danish NQF. In this respect, Denmark will be able to draw upon the experience of other countries.

For more information on the Danish NQF: **http://en.iu.dk/transparency/qualifications-frameworks**

Ministry of Science
Technology and Innovation

Referencing the Dutch National Qualifications Framework

Marijke Dashorst, project leader, Dutch Qualification Framework

An introduction to the Netherlands NQF structure

The Dutch National Qualifications Framework (NLQF) is a systematic classification of all qualification levels in the Netherlands. It includes both qualifications regulated by the Government and qualifications which have significance and 'qualifying' power in the labour market. These qualifications are often provided by private suppliers of education and training or even companies. The Dutch education authorities believe that registration in the NLQF will strengthen the value of these qualifications. Bringing these two different types of qualifications together in one qualifications framework will provide more transparency and insight into the levels of the main qualifications in the Netherlands.

The NLQF has nine levels: an entry level and levels 1 to 8. All 17 of the existing types of Dutch qualifications have been allocated to one of these nine levels. Level 1-8 of the NLQF have been referenced to the eight levels of the EQF.

The referencing process

In the Netherlands, referencing of the NLQF to EQF was initiated before the work on developing the NLQF itself was concluded.

The referencing process involved experts from the different educational sectors and the main stakeholders in education with the addition of three international experts. It also included consultation with the wider public and all the different providers of education and training led by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science. The consultation consisted of round table meetings with different groups of stakeholders, social partners, education and training providers and companies; testing of the referencing to the NLQF/EQF with representatives of the world of education and training; and last but not least consultation over the internet with the wider public.

Challenges and barriers, and how they were overcome

The development of the NLQF and the referencing to the EQF should be considered as a work in progress. It is likely that as the framework is rolled out and tested, amendments will be required and changes will be made. In addition, developments at a European level and the referencing decisions made by neighbouring countries may also lead to changes to levelling decisions.

One of the main difficulties in the process of developing the NLQF was the placement of pre-university qualifications/school leaving certificates. There was much debate on whether this should be placed at NLQF level 4 plus or level 5. The experts in the Netherlands have now proposed to the Minister to place pre-university education on level 4plus and VET level 4 and secondary higher general education on level 4 in the NLQF. As a result, level 4 has been extended and is referenced to level 4 of the EQF. The Minister has given her agreement to revising the NLQF and the proposal is currently before Parliament.

The generic classification of VET qualifications was another problem, because it was argued that the level of learning outcomes of some of these qualifications would place them at NLQF level 4, while others were at level 5. This has resulted in an offer for providers of VET education and training to request the National Coordination Point for the NLQF to review the classification of some level 4 education programmes in order to consider a level 5 classification, if their learning outcomes match those at level 5.

Good practice

The most successful feature of the development of the NQLF and referencing to the EQF has been the involvement of experts and stakeholders from the outset of the process. This has quality assured the process and increased credibility within the discussions about levelling.

The decision to open up the NLQF to qualifications not regulated by the Government has also been one of the driving forces behind gaining interest in the NQLF and building a more integrated framework.

For more information on the Dutch NQF: http://www.nlqf.nl/

NLQF

Experiences of EQF referencing processes - reflections from two international experts

Carita Blomqvist, Head of Unit, International Recognition and Comparability of Qualifications, Finnish National Board of Education

Improving international understanding and recognition of qualifications is one of the key aims of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The international experts play an important role in the referencing process as they contribute significantly to the effort to meet these aims. I have had the pleasure to participate in three referencing processes, in Ireland, Estonia and Norway; and in three self-certification processes, in Sweden, the Netherlands and Flanders. All the processes have been different in the way they have been organised as well as in content, but in some respects similarities can also be found.

All these countries, except for Ireland, have either been in a consultation/testing phase, or their National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has only recently been formally adopted at the time when the international experts began to be involved in the process. In my experience this has been beneficial as it has allowed the international experts to truly engage in the discussion. In addition both the analysis of the qualifications and the rationale behind their placement in NQFs and EQFs has been complex in all the countries. While the international experts cannot understand a national qualification system as deeply as the national stakeholders, they can help with its moderation and then help to explain the rationale for decisions made at a national level to the international audience.

Open dialogue and mutual trust between the national authorities and the international experts is a prerequisite for a successful process. It is important that the role of international experts is clearly explained to all national stakeholders. When meeting national stakeholders, international experts gain an understanding of different or even conflicting views, and how the developments are linked to broader education and labour market policy issues. They are also given the opportunity to ask questions which might help to clarify these linkages. My experience is that the ability and willingness to link developments and involve all (important) national stakeholders adds to the consistency and commitment, and thus supports the further implementation process.

Being an international expert also requires commitment, concentration and responsibility. Experience of foreign qualifications in general and of the specific countries' education system in particular also helps. International experts also learn throughout the process and they should be able to admit that sometimes their first thoughts are not necessarily correct. The processes often evolves and not necessarily quickly. There is always a lot of reflection and work undertaken to develop the referencing and self-certification reports. Even if the national authorities have the main responsibility, from my experiences I have found that the international experts' comments, both in discussions as well as in written statements, have been taken into consideration.

In spite of differences in the processes of creating an NQF, in my experience the EQF is fulfilling one of its most important purposes, which is a common reference framework which can serve as a translation instrument between different qualifications systems.

FINNISH NATIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

Eduard Staudecker, Strategy Development (VET), Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Austria

I have had the honour of being one of the country experts participating in the EQF referencing processes in Croatia, Finland and, recently, Poland. Over the last few years, each of these countries has made significant progress towards implementing European processes and policies. One of the most significant is referencing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) to the EQF.

Within these countries different strategies to implement NQFs can be observed. But what do these countries have in common?

One similarity is that they all see the relevance of NQFs for their national education systems, especially Croatia and Poland, who are trying to initiate educational reforms through their NQF developments, in order to respond to Europe-wide trends and meet national needs in relation to skills and abilities. Another similarity is that political expectations are high, and the management of the process is being influenced by parliamentary decisions. In Finland – with a longstanding tradition of focusing state tasks on education and human resources - the NQF and EQF referencing are touching national politics. Regarding the main focus of the referencing to the EQF, i.e. the learning outcomes approach, it is obvious that Finland has a head start; however this does not in fact appear to make implementation any easier.

From an outsider's point of view, working with these three countries has been impressive experience in cooperation and exchange of knowledge. I personally see the role of an international NQF expert not in being a "…man giving good advice, when he is not at home" as Oscar Wilde said. Rather, I see the main function and role more as a "transporter of NQF-competences". My main tasks have involved filtering the available information, trying to get a good insight into the qualification systems, asking questions of understanding and making criticisms, as well as reporting from my experience in Austria. Surprisingly, I found this experience to be particularly valuable to national stakeholders within countries, because most countries appear to be facing the same basic problems in implementation.

There are still some difficulties when it comes to referencing higher levels qualifications, in particular higher education qualifications and higher level vocational qualifications to NQF levels that correspond to EQF levels 6-8. This is often due to long-established institutional structures and the different concepts of learning outcomes used within higher education and vocational education and training. And this problem exists irrespective of the country that I am advising as an expert. Another common problem is the time schedule put forward in the EQF Recommendation, which I consider to be too ambitious. Finally, as I mentioned already, in some cases, political decisions are often having a significant influence on decision making and the management of the EQF referencing process. Politicians can potentially add an enormous push in speed and resources; however, they can also slow down the whole development considerably. Hence, I believe that at this stage of the EQF implementation, a constructive dialogue between political decision makers is highly important, but political influence on the detailed work should be avoided.

Furthermore, it is clear from my experiences that international experts are sometimes not able to fulfil the expectations of stakeholders abroad and influence internal decisions. If an expert did not agree with the assignment of a qualification to a certain level, he may still have to accept this as it was developed as a result of a national discussion and could reflect national needs. In case of disagreement, I would opt for a precise but short written statement by the expert to be included in the referencing report. However, the decision to include such a statement in the report should also be up to the national authorities.

It should perhaps go without saying that there are of course benefits in being an international expert. This is particularly beneficial when it comes to participating in your own country's referencing and review process and you can share the deep knowledge acquired about other qualification systems and the wider experience of the processes gained.

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The involvement of social partners in the EQF referencing process:

Some personal reflections after attending the Budapest EQF Conference (May 2011)

Francis Petel, French social partner (CGPME), and member of the French Qualification Authority (CNCP)

In May 2011, the Hungarian Presidency organised a conference on the European Qualifications Framework in Budapest. The conference provided opportunities for exchanges between representatives of national authorities, other competent bodies and national level social partners.

This reminded me that the same city hosted the conference 'From consultation to recommendation' in February 2006, which was the real kick-off event of the EQF project. Then Loukas Zahilas (now working for CEDEFOP) reported from a workshop which considered what common principles and criteria are required to link sectoral qualifications systems and frameworks to the EQF. He wrote: *"We strongly recommend creating (where not in place) or strengthening linkages between the national frameworks and the national sectoral qualifications. Practical suggestions: Elaboration of common standards by sectoral stakeholders in terms of learning outcomes based processes"*.

The importance of sectoral input is also stressed in the text of the EQF Recommendation[1]: "*The European Qualifications Framework should, moreover, enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualification systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems"*.

Two years later in 2008, the EQF launch conference in Brussels had a similar workshop which concluded: *"Cooperation between sectors and the national authorities should be encouraged where appropriate, based on the common use of the EQF language and be based on quality assurance. We should work towards agreed sectoral interpretations of level descriptors. The greater the involvement of all relevant stakeholders along the way, the fewer problems we will face later."*

These statements opened up several tracks for further action:

- The development and recognition of sectoral qualifications;
- The development of common standards by NQFs and sectoral qualifications; and
- Cooperation between sectors and NQFs over the EQF level referencing and moreover on the interpretation of level descriptors.

In May 2011, a workshop during the EQF conference in Budapest focused on the necessity of cooperation between stakeholders. The workshop was attended by more than 50 participants representing a large number of countries and built on stakeholders' experiences gathered in the last few years while taking the EQF and NQF process forward.

The necessity of linking education and the professional world

There is a necessity for such a global objective because:

- The knowledge society requires frequent skills upgrading. "New skills for new jobs" makes it necessary for companies and professionals to identify skills and match them to regularly updated job profiles;
- Increased professional mobility from company to company, sector to sector and country to country make it more important for individuals to have a common currency for skills and competencies;
- Lifelong learning is a fact of life. Initial education is not sufficient to provide individuals with the skills they need for a lifetime of work. Adult learning, access to new competencies and to qualifications at any age is a minimum requirement to face social and economic challenges;
- Adult education has to adapt teaching, assessment and certification in order to respond to employers' needs. This requires an adaptation of initial education systems, an opening of higher education to competency based education and, as a minimum, strong cooperation between economic and educational actors;
- Learning outcomes (LOs) have to be adopted because they are learner centred, focusing on outcomes that are visible and understandable by professionals, and as the White Paper on Education and Training (1995 -p.7-8) says: *"The unfamiliarity of the different national systems leaves the prospective employer at a loss when it comes to evaluating the applicant's actual level of skills"*.

1 Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C11/01) http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm

Various levels of difficulties

Although necessary, cooperation between NQFs, social partners and sectors seems to remain in the starting blocks. Some European countries find this easier because of a longer tradition of such cooperation.

Obstacles appear at various levels. At the political level, there can be strong opposition from national authorities to allow other than a "soft" advisory role to professionals in cooperation of qualifications. Similarly, social partners, when organised, very often focus on employment and work conditions and do not consider the importance of qualification frameworks.

At the institutional level, ministries of education may strongly influence the process and focus on initial education standards and dialogue between the components of the national education systems (general education, vocational education, higher education). This can keep the real objective – to provide employers with the competencies they need - being marginalised. In addition, the difficulty for employers and employees to jointly propose solutions to national authorities or to cooperate in the construction of sectoral qualifications makes it difficult for the national authorities to identify potential credible partners.

At a more practical level, negotiation and cooperation require commonly shared definitions and tools. Since the launch of the Lisbon strategy, a huge clarification task has been achieved. EQF National Coordination Points, the learning outcomes approach, Europass, ECVET, etc are words and acronyms now shared by most participants in the process. However, they often have different uses and understanding when they are used at a national and local level. It is very tempting to adapt terms to the current local reality rather than to change the reality itself. Cooperation projects at European level may help. Finally, keeping a limited range of simple and clear instruments (the EQF reference levels for one) is a necessity to avoid entropy.

Stepping stones for future cooperation: some suggestions

1. Dialogue between education specialists and human resource professionals is a key success factor for cooperation. The reality is that they speak two different languages, even when they use similar terms, such as "competence". It means that it is often impossible to use the same terminology for learning outcomes and occupational standards. Learning outcomes refer to the outcome of an education process, while occupational standards refer to a contextualized competence. The common reference should rather be "activity" than "competence". A professional can thus identify the activity that a qualified worker is able to perform; the educational specialist will derive the necessary learning outcomes to be assessed and the HR specialist will be able to identify the competences that are expected. In this respect, "autonomy and responsibility" are not directly "professional competencies" but identify the type of activities which can be performed at the matching level. Occupational standards ("référentiels métiers") and learning outcomes based qualification descriptors are both useful tools for dialogue. Nevertheless, one should not expect a line to line match between the two.
2. Dialogue between social partners and the representatives of higher education is also vital. For the last 20 years, the demand for graduates with high level competences and tertiary level qualifications has grown. Qualifications in HE (at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate level) are input driven and refer to work load, research, and, when referring to learning outcomes, not directly to industry driven learning outcomes, but to applied knowledge. There should be greater cooperation between sectoral representatives and higher education, starting opening higher levels to adult education that is underpinned by learning outcomes based assessment.
3. Professional bodies, sectoral organisations and social partners should get organised representation of the economic and social interests of their field in their respective country. Economic sectors, both employers and employees, should cooperate with professional sectors who can be less representative but very often more focused on job requirements, professional developments, and related qualifications.
4. Quality processes should be taken seriously into account both by national authorities and sectors. The existing quality tools should be systematically used (EQAVET[2] network, EQARF framework and related tools). Trust at European level relies upon transparency and the use of commonly shared quality standards.
5. At the same time, initiatives such as ESCO[3] are being developed. A dialogue has been opened between the three DGs (Education, Employment, Internal Markets). This dialogue is important to clarify the use of the various tools that have been developed and their potential relationships. The results of the Budapest workshop conference show that "first steps have to be taken first" and that cooperation at national level between national authorities and social partners is a preliminary necessity if we consider the ultimate goal, which is the success of the "learning society".

2 European Quality Assurance reference framework for Vocational Education and Training: http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx

3 European Skills, Competences and Occupations Taxonomy

Zooming in on EQF level 6 - Report from an EQF project

Sabine Tritscher-Archan, Zoom project coordinator, Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft, Austria

Background

Coordinated by ibw (Institut fuer Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft, www.ibw.at) and carried out with five partners from Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, France and Slovenia, the ZOOM project[1] took place alongside the development processes of the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and/or the referencing process of the respective NQFs to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in all these five countries. It focussed on the master craftsperson qualification in two sectors, motor vehicle technology and electrical engineering, to pilot a transparent and objective approach to comparing qualifications and levelling these to the EQF using the best fit principle and involving foreign experts in the referencing process.

The ZOOM-approach

Step 1: Input descriptions

All project partners drew up basic descriptions of the master craftsperson qualifications in the sectors in their countries in a common template to provide an overview. This information included, for example, the length of study period, access requirements and assessment.

Step 2: Learning Outcome descriptions and comparison tool

Learning Outcome (LO) descriptions were produced for each of the qualifications by the project partners with the help of sector experts who were asked to participate in moderated workshops. This was designed to facilitate comparisons and make it possible to allocate the qualification to a certain NQF/EQF level. An electronic LO comparison tool was also developed to help participants in the project[2].

Step 3: Classification Report and expert consultation

To support the argumentation and decisions reached on levelling by each partner country a Classification Report (CR) was developed which included:

- further information on the master craftsperson qualification, such as the examination and evaluation process to corroborate the suggested level; and
- the results of a 'weighting and rating activity' of the units making up the qualification involving sector experts.

Step 4: Peer visits

Two experts from each partner country visited one other partner country to discuss the CR and give feedback on the arguments provided for the level proposed from the perspective of 'critical friends'.

Conclusions and suggestions about the approach

The work on ZOOM gave rise to several conclusions and suggestions:

Learning outcomes

- Benefit: The LO approach was basically perceived to be positive and as having advantages over the 'traditional' description of qualifications in terms of inputs. In particular for sector experts it was much easier to understand the (learner oriented) LO descriptions than to read a (teacher oriented) curriculum. Curricula often differ in terms of structure, length, degree of details and information provided. LO descriptions, however, have the same focus, that is, the presentation of the knowledge, skills and competence (KSC) that learners possess after having completed a period of learning.
- Challenge: LOs can be described in single components, i.e. listing knowledge, skills and competence separately, or in a holistic way, i.e. summarising KSC. In ZOOM both ways were chosen in order to see the advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches. The 'component' approach, however, proved to be quite challenging, in particular for sector experts, as they were not used to thinking of KSC as 'separate entities'. People from the educational field had fewer difficulties, yet nevertheless found the 'component' approach to be more complicated and also to a certain ex-

1 The project ZOOM has been funded with support from the European Commission (project number 147848-LLP-1-2008-1-AT-EQF)

2 The tool can be viewed at http://zoom.mediabase.at/

tent artificial since knowledge, skills and competence are interrelated.

- Suggestion: While the 'component' approach may sometimes be useful (e.g. when defining a new qualification or when modifying an existing curriculum), the holistic way of describing LOs proved to be the more practical method for sector experts.

Classification Report

- Benefit: The comprehensive description of the master craftsperson qualification was considered very helpful for establishing transparency and creating a better understanding of the information supporting the allocation of the qualification to an NQF/EQF level. Even though the level classification is seen to be a trade off involving many stakeholders, the documentation makes this process more objective and more transparent. The expert consultation was regarded as a useful instrument to support the NQF/EQF level.
- Challenges: The expert consultation undertaken for the 'weighting and rating activity' of the qualification units as part of the CR was perceived very positively. Experts (sector experts as well as NQF/EQF experts) were first asked to allocate percentages to each unit according to its importance in relation to the whole qualification. Once all experts had done so, an average (arithmetic mean) was calculated. Then the experts were asked to classify each unit to an NQF/EQF level. Once all experts had done this, an average was calculated for each unit. The average of the percentages ("importance") was then multiplied by the average of the classification ("unit-classification"). This led to the weighting factors. The sum of the weighting factors was then divided by 100. The results represented the suggested NQF/EQF level. A big challenge in this approach was the classification of units to the NQF/EQF levels. Not all experts knew how to do this or had experience in linking LO descriptions with the EQF descriptors. The suggested level allocations of experts sometimes differed considerably and this distorted some of the results.
- Suggestion: Expert consultations should be done in moderated workshops. This is particularly important at this early stage of the NQF implementation since many experts are still unfamiliar with the NQF concept and lack know-how. An experienced moderator can provide information, support the consultation process and thus contribute to the quality assurance of the results. As regards the process, it is vital to make experts aware that the allocation of single units is only an intermediary analytical step. Only whole qualifications are classified to the NQF/EQF. The approach sketched out above was primarily used to operationalise the best fit principle. This principle says that qualifications are classified to the level that best matches the LO description. In order to find "the centre of gravity" of the master craftsperson qualifications this step was necessary. As a result of the experience in this project, the ZOOM partnership also recommends undertaking one more step in this expert consultation. Instead of simply adding up all results and afterwards dividing them by the number of experts, the experts should be presented with the results in order to be able to explain their choices, reflect upon them and – if necessary – adjust them ("Delphi method"). Very diverging results can be discussed and substantiated in this way. This approach likewise contributes to the best fit principle that is central to the NQF/EQF classification.

Peer Visits

- Benefit: Many partners considered them useful for the exchange and clarification of information and appreciated the feedback from 'critical friends'.
- Challenge: Not all project participants were in favour of involving foreign experts in the classification process. They argued that during peer visits primarily positive aspects were addressed and well equipped VET institutions presented. Thus, peer visits were less of a "reality check" than one could assume.
- Suggestions: The success of peer visits depends strongly on the organisation and intention behind them. Foreign peers should not only be presented with positive aspects but deliberately be shown elements that work less well. It is the peers' critical but constructive feedback from a different context and their suggestions that should be seen as the added value of such visits. Peer visits should not be seen as the only means for establishing mutual trust in the level allocated but as one element in a range of measures.

For full information on this project, visit **www.zoom-eqf.eu** results.

Conference "Academic Validation in the Context of the European Qualifications Framework: Using learning outcomes in higher education"

Ewa Chmielecka, Institute for Educational Research (Warsaw)

An international conference was held in Warsaw, Poland on November 9 2011 on the "Academic Validation in the Context of the European Qualifications Framework". The purpose of the conference was to share best practice in the use of learning outcomes in higher education. The conference was organised by the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange which is also National Coordination Point for the EQF in Poland.

The conference began with a plenary session on "How are qualifications frameworks able to promote the shift towards learning outcomes?" The key issues raised from the subsequent discussions were:

- Should qualification frameworks mainly reflect the existing feature of educational systems, or should they become a tool to reform those systems?
- What are the manifest and hidden aims of qualifications frameworks, what are their expected results and side effects, what benefits and (eventually) drawbacks can result from their implementation?

In relation to the last item, participants agreed that only an improper implementation of qualification frameworks - for example, an implementation that does not sufficiently balance the needs of main stakeholders - could result in negative consequences.

The second plenary session was on the relationship between the recognition of learning outcomes and external quality assurance in higher education. Three speakers from Scotland, Germany and Poland presented models of national accreditation and its relationship to the NQF.

This was followed by three parallel workshops on institutional practices and the adaption of the learning outcomes approach.

One workshop addressed similarities and differences between the use of the learning outcomes approach in designing curricula in academic education and vocational education and training. The following points were brought forward in the workshop:

- Higher education needs to be more diversified and include academic as well as vocationally oriented curricula. But there is no boundary dividing these programs into two categories; HE programmes inhabit a continuum from the purely academic to the purely vocational;
- Credit systems like ECVET and ECTS credits may be used to demonstrate if a programme reflects an academic or vocational direction;
- Teachers, whose professional experiences were attained outside of the academic world, are more likely to map learning outcomes towards the labour market than scholars with a university career;
- Regardless of the type of learning outcomes, Bloom's Taxonomy is still the best tool to formulate them;
- Artificial differentiation between the learning outcomes used by different educational sectors should be avoided.

The topic of the second workshop was internal quality assurance systems in the context of the learning outcomes approach. Workshop speakers pointed out that in their respective countries (DE, PL), quality assurance in education was introduced in response to the popularisation of higher education in the 1980s and 1990s and hence preceded the Bologna Process.

Among the conclusions of this workshop were:

- Quality Assurance in education is needed for the simple reason that funding comes from public funds;
- Learning outcomes in curricula should not be defined in too great detail, and it should be clear how they will be assessed.

The topic of the third workshop was the recognition of personal and social competences – transversal competences in HE programs and their assessment. The two cases presented focused on the development of innovation competences by means of specially devised innovation pedagogy and the development of creativity in teachers

within a single course. In the ensuing discussion, the following points emerged:

- Social and personal competences are more often developed in non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- Regardless of the learning context, learning outcomes have to be identified, assessed and validated to be acknowledged as an attainment;
- Learning outcome objectives should ideally be negotiated between learners, teachers and employers, as the latter are very often more interested in graduates' social competences than in their subject-specific knowledge and skills;
- Both teachers and learners should be furnished with tools enabling them to assess themselves and reflect on the learning process. The European Language Portfolio and European Teacher Portfolio were mentioned as examples of such tools, which can help to identify competences, self-assess them and document their attainment;
- Paradigm shifts cannot be decreed, so each institution must develop its strategy to ensure student-centred learning, adequate teaching and learning methods, sufficient resources and infrastructure;
- Academic teachers should undergo training, take part in peer learning activities, develop their reflective approach to teaching/learning and be able to critically self-assess their teaching skills in order to provide adequate conditions for the development and appreciation of social and personal competences in their students.

A panel discussion on the methodology of levelling in the NQF – the rules of assigning levels and their compliance with the methods of the validation of learning outcomes – addressed the strategies to assigning actual qualifications to levels adopted by various countries. Panellists indicated that real-world decisions come by as a result of mediation of politics and substantive/rational arguments, especially in the case of such forms of education as post-graduate studies or occupational certificates (medicine, law) attained after having achieved a Master's diploma.

The overall conclusion of the conference was that it had contributed to the creation of a community of persons truly engaged in introducing qualifications frameworks, and in this way, building mutual trust, the most significant factor of success for European and national qualifications frameworks.

The day after the conference a "Poland Day" seminar took place on the problems of implementing NQF in higher education in Poland[1]. Its main aims were to build on the discussions from the conference and to discuss new legislative proposals (published in October and November 2011) that would require Polish schools of higher education to develop curricula based on learning outcomes, as well as introduce other elements of qualifications frameworks to the educational process.

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1 On the same day there was also a joint meeting of national correspondents to the QF-EHEA and EQF National Coordination Points (EQF-LLL)

EQF, EQAVET and ECVET:
Stronger by working together

Mike Coles, external expert

Vocational learning is diverse in scope and settings, which means that there are a broad variety of VET qualifications and standards within and between countries. The EQF, which covers all levels and kinds of quaifications in a lifelong learning spectrum, aims to make VET qualification levels and their underpinning standards more transparent and understandable to people who want to move between countries to work and learn as well as to those people who want to recruit people from other EU countries. The EQF levels are steadily becoming international references for qualifications.

But VET qualification standards also depend on the quality of teaching and training provision, and for this reason the community of practice - *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training* (EQAVET) – has developed a powerful European tool for quality assurance that works in a complementary way to the EQF to support the achievement of highly trusted VET provision and monitoring tools for measuring VET quality.

A further tool to stengthen international mobility is the opportunity for people to gain credit for work or study abroad even when the learning they have undertaken is not sufficient to build a whole qualification. This can be supported by the *European Credit transfer system for VET* (ECVET), which is a set of conventions that facilitates theportability and recognition of smaller elements of learning (as part of a qualification) between Member States.

All three European tools draw on and support each other and can be seen as three sides of a triangle. These tools are new and developing fast and there is a risk that as they are used more commonly in countries they can take tracks that reduce their interdependency and eventually confuse the users of the tools. With this in mind, key players responsible for the implementation of each of the three tools held a seminar on 14-15 November 2011 in Bonn, Germany, for an intense exchange to protect and extend synergies between the tools.

Seminar participants agreed that the use of learning outcomes for curricula and qualifications was important for all the tools and there is always more to do to find better ways to write and use learning outcomes. It was also agreed that the tools have undoubtedly created synergies between them and these need to be further optimised. If the tools are to be sustainable in countries there may be scope for simplification so that the obvious benefits can outweigh the cost of their operation. With this cost-benefit analysis in mind it was considered important to monitor the scale and kinds of use of the tools so that adjustments can be made which lead to greater added value for European citizens.

The participants in the Bonn seminar agreed that more should be done to promote the cooperation between the teams responsible for the three tools including operations at European level.

Worldwide representation and expertise sharing on the implementation of qualifications frameworks

Epke Vogel, ETF, Community of Practice on Qualifications

The European Training Foundation (ETF) held its conference "Qualifications Frameworks from Concept to Implementation" in Brussels on 6 and 7 October 2011[1]. The discussions between over 150 experts, policy makers and practitioners coming from a wide variety of EU partner countries, EU member states and third countries proved that considerable progress has been made by many countries since the first ETF event on qualifications frameworks in 2009. While in 2009 the event discussed the rationale for frameworks of qualifications, in 2011 the focus had moved towards implementation arrangements and implications for institutions and systems.

1 Material from the conference can be found on the following link: http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/EV_2011_International_Conference_-_Qualifications_frameworks:_from_concepts_to_implementation_?opendocument

It was evident that there is strong political support in many countries around the world for qualifications frameworks. Moreover, senior EU officials and politicians present emphasised the central place of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF) in achieving objectives in the Europe 2020 strategy.

The study that ETF carried out in preparation for this conference, and which was also presented, underlined that qualifications frameworks are useful tools in classifying and linking qualifications and making them more relevant and understandable for citizens. That is why the study speaks of *frameworks of qualifications*.

Participants agreed that relevance includes relevance to the labour market and making qualifications attractive to learners. Qualifications based on learning outcomes can be more useful to learners. But the use of learning outcomes and associated systems, such as validation, remains in many countries in its early stages. Therefore, it is necessary to support the application of learning outcomes through engaging teachers and schools leaders, for example, in their development

Developing relevant qualifications and possible practical arrangements of implementation for developing meaningful frameworks, in particular institutional arrangements and involvement of stakeholders, were key items of discussion during the whole conference.

The various speeches, presentations and workshops confirmed the importance of the national context to defining and shaping arrangements for the development and implementation of NQFs. It has been made clear that there is no single, transferable model framework for implementing qualifications frameworks. But there are common issues and useful experiences to learn from. For example:

- framework development should be linked to clear policy objectives that would help define what measures, including institutional arrangements and investment, need to be taken;
- stakeholders should be involved from the very beginning, and not just at later stages;
- consistent, all-party political backing is needed to ensure stability in implementation;
- implementation should be incremental and frameworks would never be finished products.

Several speakers warned against the risk of building systems for the sake of systems. They recommended that national authorities should also carefully examine the impacts of NQFs on institutions, such as schools and colleges, as well as on employers and individuals. What impact do qualifications frameworks have on citizens' lifelong learning opportunities and employability?

Partners from international organisations and from third countries have proposed several initiatives in order to promote international cooperation and sharing. For example, the South African Qualifications Authority proposed a common study on the real costs of NQF development.

Closing the conference, DG EAC Director Pierre Mairesse stressed how important it was that all actors, in particular UNESCO, worked together to bring forward the cooperation between regional frameworks, which might in perspective develop into a global approach to qualification frameworks.

Ahead of us are some crucial years during which professionals in many of ETF partner countries will need all the support they can get from an international community of colleagues. Precisely for that reason, ETF took the opportunity to launch its Qualifications Platform, an online community of professionals engaged in developing and implementing frameworks of qualifications during the conference. The ETF qualifications webpage, which includes information on the Qualifications Platform, can be accessed via: **www.qualificationsplatform.net.**

Looking forward to further discussions, ETF plans to hold its next international event on NQFs in 2013. Its agenda will be shaped by international progress and experiences in NQF development in the next two years.

The NQF conference on implementation of qualification frameworks in Brussels on 6 and 7 October 2011

ETF Working together Learning for life

What's New

Cedefop conference on the involvement of stakeholders in European tools

A conference hosted by Cedefop on 'The role of the social partners in implementing European tools and principles' was held in Brussels, Belgium on 24-25 November 2011.

The conference focused on discussing the challenges of implementing European tools and principles and the roles and responsibilities of social partners in this endeavour. Participants explored the role European tools and principles can play in supporting the renewal and reform of VET and lifelong learning, the benefits they can provide to individual learners and employees and what role sectors should play in taking forward the implementation of these tools and principles.

Further information on the conference is available online: **http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/18446.aspx**

Peer learning activity on school leaving qualifications that give access to higher education

A peer learning activity (PLA) on school leaving qualifications that give access to higher education took place in Tallinn, Estonia on 20-21 September 2011. The PLA was hosted by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and was attended by 40 delegates from 22 countries, as well as representatives from DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) and Cedefop.

The PLA enabled stakeholders to discuss the approaches and criteria applied by countries to reference their school leaving qualifications that give access to higher education to the EQF, via national qualifications levels and explored the potential impact of referencing on existing arrangements in the recognition of qualifications for further learning purposes.

The report from the PLA will be published in January on the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning (KSLLL) website at: **http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm?year=2020**

Peer learning activity on validation and National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs)

A peer learning activity (PLA) on the role of national qualification frameworks in promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) took place in Warsaw, Poland on 7-8 November 2011. The PLA was hosted jointly by the Educational Research Institute in Poland, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland. It brought together 77 representatives from 12 countries.

The PLA explored the role that national qualification frameworks can play as a facilitator and promoter of the acceptance and use of validation as well as the obstacles that may prevent the potential of NFIL from being realised, and the actions required to enable these obstacles to be overcome.

The report from the PLA will be published on the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning (KSLLL) website at: **http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/Default.cfm?year=2020**

EQF Note 4 on Using Learning Outcomes

The European Commission, in close cooperation with Cedefop and the European Training Foundation, recently published a Note on Using Learning Outcomes. This Note is the fourth in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) Series written for policy makers and experts who are involved at a national or European level in the implementation of the EQF. The Note was written in response to a high level of interest in sharing experiences on how the 'learning outcomes' approach is used in the implementation of the EQF.

The Note includes a question and answer section which helps define the scope and applicability of learning outcomes, followed my guidance and examples on how learning outcomes can be applied in different settings. It also includes information on shifting towards a policy to introduce learning outcomes.

Note 4 can be accessed at **http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm**

The EQF Newsletter presents news and articles on developments related to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework. This newsletter is produced by GHK Consulting on behalf of the European Commission.

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