Measuring the impact of the NQFs - Reflections from Ireland

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Quality and Qualifications Ireland

www.QQI.ie
Towards a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.
## Key Milestones in the Development of the NFQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>The NFQ was proposed by the <a href="#">Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999</a></td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications are published. The official launch of the NFQ</td>
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<td>The Grid of Level Indicators is published</td>
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<td>Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications are published</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Award Types are published</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Verification of Compatibility of Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>The NFQ was referenced to the EQF, the first National Qualifications Framework to complete this exercise</td>
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Irish Framework Implementation and Impact Study (2009)

- Assess implementation of the NFQ
- Assess policies on ATP
- Assess the initial impact of the Framework
Irish Framework Implementation and Impact Study (2009)

Methodology

• Background Paper
• Sector Inputs
• Public Consultation
• International Study Team
Irish Framework Implementation and Impact Study (2009)

Findings

• Framework implementation well advanced
• To early to conclude on impact of NFQ
Establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2012)

The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act reaffirms the statutory basis of the NFQ and entrusts maintenance and development of NFQ to QQI.

QQI is responsible for promoting, maintaining, further developing, implementing and reviewing the NFQ.
Measuring NFQ Impact

Methodological challenges

- NFQ as a social construct
- The multiple purposes of the framework
- Effect or Impact?
- NFQ as a social phenomenon
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2016-2017

- Examine the actual effects and impact of the NFQ
- Engage with a range of national stakeholders including policy makers
- Inform future policy direction for the NFQ
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2016-2017

WHEN?

STAGE 1
Project Inception

STAGE 2
Data Gathering and Primary Research

STAGE 3
Data Analysis and Report Drafting

[Dec 2017] STAGE 4
Finalise Report

HOW?

Phase 1: Independent expert paper on qualifications frameworks Reflections and Trajectories – Qualifications Policy Insights

Phase 2: QOI commissioned to Indecon International Economic Consultants an independent Policy Impact Assessment of the NFQ

Mixed methods: Qualitative and Quantitative
  » An on-line survey of national stakeholders
  » Bilateral interviews with key representative bodies

WHO?

Education and Training Providers, Social Partners, National Stakeholders including Policy Makers

In parallel: QOI continue to collect longitudinal data on public awareness levels of the NFQ
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2016-2017

FINDINGS: THE NFQ IMPACT ON...

Transparency of Qualifications
- The NFQ has made qualification pathways easier to explain and understand. 89%
- The NFQ has made the skills and competence of qualifications more visible. 80%
- The NFQ has made it easier to see how qualifications relate to each other. 84%
- The NFQ has made it easier to evaluate qualifications for work or study. 80%

Lifelong Learning, Progression and Mobility of Qualifications
- The NFQ has improved progression between qualifications achieved in school, in further & in higher education and training. 81%
- The NFQ has made it easier to value and recognise learning and qualifications achieved outside of the formal/public education and training system. 63%
- The NFQ has facilitated improved access to education and training courses. 68%

67% respondents strongly agree/agree that the NFQ has contributed to improving Ireland’s national performance in the area of Lifelong Learning.
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2016-2017

**FINDINGS: THE NFQ IMPACT ON...**

**Quality of Qualifications**

- Qualifications included in the NFQ are relevant for users (learners, employers etc.) (86%)
- Qualifications included in the NFQ are highly trusted, nationally and internationally (68%)
- Overall, the NFQ has enhanced the quality of qualifications in Ireland (78%)
- Qualifications included in the NFQ meet consistent quality standards wherever they are provided (57%)

**Employment/ Skills Matching**

- The NFQ has improved the dialogue between the world of qualifications & the world of work (63%)
- Vocational qualifications included in the NFQ signal relevant skills and competencies required for particular occupations (72%)
- The NFQ has facilitated better matching between skills and job vacancies (51%)

Reported awareness levels of the NFQ are at their highest level since commencing a longitudinal survey in 2014. Today, one in three claims to be aware of the NFQ.
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment 2016-2017

FINDINGS: THE NFQ IMPACT ON...

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practice

- The learning outcomes approach of the NFQ has improved the practice of course and curricula design. 74%
- The learning outcomes approach of the NFQ has improved teaching and learning practice. 64%
- The learning outcomes approach of the NFQ has improved assessment practice. 69%

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in Ireland and Irish Qualifications Abroad

- The NFQ has made it easier for qualifications achieved in other countries to be understood, compared and recognised in Ireland. 61%
- The NFQ has made a positive contribution to the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment. 70%

- The NFQ has made it easier for Irish qualifications to be understood, compared and valued in other countries. 69%
NFQ Policy Impact Assessment
2016-2017

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS...

#1
Promote greater awareness, understanding and effective use of the NFQ

#2
Embed NFQ in quality assurance policy and practice

#3
Maintain and strengthen the international dimension of NFQ

#4
Position the NFQ as a mechanism to support lifelong learning and skills agendas

#5
Ensure that the development of the NFQ is informed by the best available evidence and supported by strong stakeholder engagement
Measuring the impact of the NQFs - Reflections from Ireland

- NQFs as social constructs with multiple meanings – require interpretative analysis and insights not just quantitative accounts
- NQF effects are typically diffuse and non-linear
- Purpose of NQFs determines their kinds of impact – pragmatic research approaches are needed to reveal NQF contribution
- Importance of peer dissemination and engagement
- Not enough to ask do NQFs work?...need to understand for who? why? and under what conditions they work?
Towards a model of NQF Impact

Prevailing social, political and economic priorities and context

NQF Purpose
- Description
- Progressive/Incremental
- Disruptive

NQF Conditions
- System Infrastructure
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Timing/Policy windows

NQF Impacts
- Instrumental
- Conceptual
- Political
Thank you for your attention

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