

# July 2010 EQF NEWSLETTER



European  
Qualifications  
Framework



## Editorial

Jan Trzuszczński, Director-General for Education,  
Training, Culture and Youth, European Commission

3

## UK Qualifications Frameworks Referenced to the EQF

4

## The Development of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe: Cedefop Overview - June 2010

6

## National Qualifications Frameworks and the European Overarching Frameworks: Supporting Lifelong Learning in European Education and Training

8

## The Australian Qualifications Framework: Towards a Strengthened AQF

10

## What's New

12



## Résumé

Vous commencez la lecture du deuxième numéro du bulletin du Cadre Européen des Certifications (CEC) qui vous informe sur les derniers développements dans le domaine des cadres des certifications. La première édition a rencontré un succès considérable et déjà plus de 450 personnes sont abonnées à la version électronique de ce Bulletin.

Dans l'éditorial de ce deuxième numéro, M. Jan Truszczyński, directeur général pour l'Éducation, la Formation, la Culture et la Jeunesse (DG EAC) constate le développement intensif des Cadres Nationaux des Certifications (CNC) pour l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie.

L'éditorial est suivi par un article des points de coordination nationaux pour le CEC du Royaume-Uni. L'article présente les résultats du processus de référencement du CEC au Royaume-Uni. L'article se concentre spécifiquement sur l'information utilisée pour référencer les niveaux des CNC du Royaume-Uni aux niveaux du CEC; le rôle des différentes entités prenant part à cet exercice; et les leçons tirées, non seulement pour la compréhension au niveau international des CNC du Royaume-Uni, mais aussi pour leur usage domestique.

Un article présentant le deuxième inventaire des CNC en Europe par le Cedefop examine plus

particulièrement comment les pays lient les certifications de l'enseignement supérieur et de la formation professionnelle au sein du même cadre national intégré. L'article présente également des exemples de réformes nationales, qui sont plus larges que l'établissement des CNCs, et qui visent à appuyer l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie, en lien direct avec l'évolution des CNC.

Les évolutions plus générales au niveau européen sont ensuite examinées dans un article faisant un compte-rendu de la conférence internationale sur *les cadres nationaux et les cadres globaux européens: soutenir l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie au sein de l'éducation et de la formation en Europe*. Ce résumé met en évidence la nécessaire coordination dans la mise en œuvre des meta-cadres – le Cadre des Certifications pour l'Espace Européen d'Enseignement Supérieur et le Cadre Européen des Certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie – afin de soutenir le développement des cadres de certification compréhensifs aux niveaux nationaux.

Le dernier article, provenant d'Australie, présente les développements récents du CNC dans ce pays. Il annonce également que le thème des cadres des certifications sera au cœur du prochain dialogue politique dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation entre la Commission européenne et l'Australie.

## Zusammenfassung

Sie lesen die zweite Ausgabe des EQR Newsletters, der Sie über die neuesten Entwicklungen im Bereich Qualifikationsrahmen informiert. Die erste Ausgabe stieß auf beachtliche Resonanz und mehr als 450 Personen haben mittlerweile den Newsletter per E-Mail abonniert.

Im Leitartikel dieser zweiten Ausgabe kommentiert Jan Truszczyński, Generaldirektor für allgemeine und berufliche Bildung, Kultur und Jugend in der Europäischen Kommission, die intensive Weiterentwicklung von umfassenden nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen (NQR) für lebenslanges Lernen.

In einem weiteren Artikel präsentiert die nationale Koordinierungsstelle des Vereinigten Königreichs die Ergebnisse ihres nationalen Referenzierungsprozesses. Schwerpunkte sind die verwendeten Daten und Anhaltspunkte für die Zuordnung der Referenzniveaus des NQR des Vereinigten Königreichs zum EQR, die Rolle der Stakeholder in diesem Prozess sowie die daraus gewonnenen Erkenntnisse sowohl in Bezug auf das Verständnis des NQRs im internationalen Kontext als auch für die nationale Anwendung.

In einem Artikel über die zweite Cedefop-Studie über nationale Qualifikationsrahmen in Europa wird dargestellt, auf welche Weise Länder Qualifikationen aller Bereiche – inklusive Hochschulbildung und

beruflicher Aus- und Weiterbildung – in einem einzigen umfassenden nationalen Rahmen verbinden. Es werden außerdem Beispiele für umfassendere nationale Reformen zur Förderung des lebenslangen Lernens eingeführt, die mit der Entwicklung von nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen in Zusammenhang stehen.

Die allgemeinen Entwicklungen in Europa werden in einem Bericht über die internationale Konferenz zum Thema *Nationale Qualifikationsrahmen und die europäischen Referenzrahmen: Förderung des lebenslangen Lernens in der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung in Europa* dargestellt. Diese Zusammenfassung beleuchtet unter anderem die Koordination bei der Umsetzung der europäischen Metarahmen – Qualifikationsrahmen für den Europäische Hochschulraum und Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen – um die Entwicklung von Qualifikationsrahmen auf nationaler Ebene zu fördern.

Schließlich werden in einem Artikel aus Australien die dortigen neuesten Entwicklungen im Bereich NQR dargestellt. Es wird darin außerdem angekündigt, dass das Thema Qualifikationsrahmen demnächst im Mittelpunkt eines politischen Dialogs über allgemeine und berufliche Bildung zwischen der Europäischen Kommission und Australien stehen wird.

# Editorial

Jan Trzuszczynski, Director-General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, European Commission

Free movement of citizens is a pillar of the European Union and mobility has long been identified as a key strategic factor for sustainable long-term economic growth in Europe. The need for mobility is now stressed more strongly than ever in the Europe 2020 strategic document, within the flagship initiatives "Youth on the Move" and the "Agenda for new skills and jobs". For European citizens to move freely it is necessary, among other things, that their qualifications are easily understood and recognised throughout Europe, whether they pursue further learning in another institution in another country or seek for employment abroad.

In this respect, the added value of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is clear: it acts as a translation device between qualifications systems which reflect very different education and training systems in Europe. While keeping this diversity, the EQF uses the common language of learning outcomes to support a better understanding, easier comparability and transparency of qualifications throughout Europe.

The eight common reference levels of the EQF are defined through descriptors of knowledge, skills and competences, which represent a valid reference in all languages and all national systems. This approach is crucial, because it allows countries to connect with each other, bridging across education and training subsystems, covering all levels of quali-

fications and promoting the validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning settings.

This approach is as relevant for national objectives as it is to pursue European cooperation. And this is not a theoretical statement from the Commission: I note that Member States have decided to adopt the learning outcomes approach over and above the specific needs of the EQF implementation.

As reported by **Cedefop in the article on p.6**, all countries have developed or are developing comprehensive national qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning where levels are defined through learning outcomes. These comprehensive frameworks will facilitate more flexible learning pathways for individuals across general education, vocational education and training and higher education. Validation of prior learning, including experiential learning, will become easier at all levels, both within and between education and training subsystems.

I am also glad to note that, in line with the development of comprehensive national frameworks, there is a strong convergence between the national processes to implement the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA within the Bologna Process) and the EQF. These European frameworks support mobility and lifelong learning throughout Europe using the learning outcomes approach, as was confirmed by representatives of all countries gathered in Dublin on 15 April 2010 (**see article on p.8**). The capacity of bringing together, at European level and in each country, stakeholders from different educational sub-systems and economic sectors to discuss common challenges is a major achievement of the implementation of the EQF and the QF EHEA.

Jan Trzuszczynski,  
Director-General  
for Education,  
Training, Culture  
and Youth,  
European  
Commission



Education and Culture DG

# UK Qualifications Frameworks Referenced to the EQF

Aileen Ponton, on behalf of the UK National Coordination Points

The UK has three existing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) which are all based on learning outcomes and reasonably well understood and used by a wide range of stakeholders. All three have been in existence for some time. Consequently, the authorities were able to move quite quickly in referencing these to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and in overcoming the challenges that this entailed. During 2008–2009, three National Coordination Points (NCPs) undertook the task of referencing the qualifications frameworks in the UK to the EQF. The three NQFs are:

- the Qualifications and Credit Framework (England and Northern Ireland)
- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

Details on the constitution of the NCPs and the structures which supported them can be found in the report on referencing the qualifications frameworks of the UK to the EQF: .

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/Latest-News/NewPublicationUKQualifications-FrameworksEQFReferencingReport.aspx>

All three NCPs followed similar processes in establishing the relationships between their respective frameworks and the EQF. In each case, initial research was undertaken, exploring the issues involved in referencing the respective frameworks to the EQF, and establishing a baseline referencing as the basis of a consultation process. As part of this initial research, all of the NCPs used expert consultants to undertake the technical referencing. These consultants:

- Reviewed both sets of level descriptors to look at their language and their scope (for example there are three areas in the EQF descriptors and five in the SCQF descriptors)
- Reviewed the fit with the EQF descriptors of some of the major qualifications
- Reviewed that the social context (progression routes and articulation between qualifications; agreed benchmarking which already existed between the UK NQFs; and typical qualifications entry and exit points) was not distorted

Each NCP had a Steering Group which ran from the beginning to the end of the process. In addition to the main stakeholders, each of these groups

included two international experts, training providers, employer representatives, trade unions, learners' representatives and certifying bodies. The constitution of the groups was different in each country but it always completely reflected the appropriate governance arrangements required as well as the need for wide stakeholder involvement. Each NCP:

- developed a communication strategy to both raise awareness about the referencing and to consult;
- took account of the outcome of the verification exercise with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area;
- issued the final referencing proposals, draft report and all consultation documents to key groups and individuals to ensure buy-in; and
- included a description of existing quality assurance processes in order to support mutual trust.

The UK EQF Coordination Group was established to provide a forum for the three NCPs and other key stakeholders to share information on the process of completing the referencing and to work together to provide a coherent approach to the adoption of the EQF across the UK. This forum is now being reviewed to support the UK authorities in carrying out a similar role in relation to European Quality Assurance Reference Framework and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training as we found it so helpful in supporting our work across the UK.



The consultations brought into focus a range of issues that concerned stakeholders' role in the referencing of the UK frameworks to the EQF. They also enabled the NCPs to identify adjustments that were required in the initial baseline referencing proposed in each of the NCP reports. Finally, the consultations enabled NCPs to establish definitive alignments to the EQF levels as the basis of the final referencing reports for each framework. This stakeholder engagement was crucial to the final outcomes of the referencing and to the continued engagement of stakeholders in our own NQFs as well as with the EQF. As a result we all learnt lessons from going through that process. These included:

- The important role of international experts both to validate the referencing process and to provide comments on the language used and the usefulness of information provided from a European perspective.
- The concerns of stakeholders regarding the lack of referencing of the lowest two levels of UK frameworks to the EQF<sup>1</sup>. Concerns have been expressed that such lack of referencing to a European framework could be seen to devalue the qualifications at those levels of the NQF.
- The need to explain best fit (which is not always about a "level to level" match). This principle needed to be well explained to the stakeholders and clear evidence had to be provided to support the referencing outcome.
- The awareness of potential issues around linkages between sectoral frameworks, NQFs and the EQF and how these relationships or linkages might be managed.
- The usefulness of peer comments provided through the EQF Advisory Group (we made a number of changes to our final report to take account of additional requests for clarity).

In addition there were many useful messages about the importance of clear communication about the EQF and, just as importantly, about our own NQFs. We learnt a lot about the importance of full consultation on the referencing and the detail behind it. Finally, the three NCPs really did benefit from working together on specific aspects of the work, sharing information on processes, agreeing communication strategies, considering issues that had arisen and how we might address them. Each NCP learnt something about their own NQF from the referencing. For example, in relation to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, we learnt that we need to look at the language of our level descriptors in the light of the EQF and other factors and refresh them to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose. We also learnt that even though we had to carry out a 12 level to 8 level referencing, this was possible and having to explain the outcome actually made us think more clearly about the role and purpose of level descriptors and how we communicated our own framework. In England and Northern Ireland we learnt that one of the NQF level descriptors is possibly not as clear as it should be and needs to be reviewed in the near future.

We were delighted to be able to share some of this with colleagues at our launch event on 26 and 27 April attended by over 140 people from 23 countries. The presentations and the launch report can be found here <http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/LatestNews/PresentationsfromUKEQ-FLaunchConference.aspx>



<sup>1</sup> The UK NQFs have levels which are below the EQF level 1 and hence are not referenced at all to the EQF

# The Development of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe

## Cedefop Overview - June 2010

Slava Pevac-Grm and Jens Bjornavold, Cedefop

The second overview of the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) prepared by Cedefop in June 2010 confirms the importance and priority attributed to the development of NQFs across Europe. The report pays particular attention to the relationship between NQFs for lifelong learning (developed in response to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)) and the qualifications frameworks for higher education (developed in response to the Qualifications Framework for European Higher Education Area) as this relationship is at the core of the development of comprehensive frameworks currently being designed in most countries. The report will be available on the Cedefop's website in August 2010.

All 31 countries<sup>1</sup> (27 members of the European Union, the EU candidate countries (Croatia and Turkey) as well as European Economic Area countries (Iceland and Norway) are developing/introducing or already implementing an NQF for lifelong learning. The vast majority of countries aim to develop and introduce a comprehensive NQF covering all levels and types of qualifications (general education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education) and seeking stronger integration between subsystems. This shows a movement towards the development of coherent national qualifications systems. Countries also increasingly emphasise that a coherent use of the European tools (in particular frameworks, validation arrangements and quality assurance standards and guidelines) can help create transparent, permeable, flexible and inclusive national qualification systems and conditions for genuine lifelong learning. However, the extent to which the NQFs are able to create links and bridges between subsystems varies between countries. Three types of NQF can be observed:

- NQFs that are characterised by a comprehensive and coherent set of level descriptors, spanning across all levels of education and training. This approach makes it possible to identify and better understand the similarities and differences between qualifications in different subsystems of education and training. As the descriptors refer to the level and types of learning outcomes, this approach makes it possible to judge, for example, how a vocational education and training qualification can form a basis for a

higher education qualification. NQFs in Scotland, Ireland, Malta, France and Lithuania as well as the draft Croatian, German, Icelandic and Polish NQFs all have broad and inclusive level descriptors and indicate that higher levels may be open to qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions.

- NQFs, where a distinction is introduced between levels 1-5 and levels 6-8, the latter being restricted to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions (in compliance with the Bologna cycles). This seems to be the case for example in the Danish, Romanian and Belgium (Wallonia) frameworks.
- NQFs (such as the one in Austria) where a compromise has been reached, dividing levels 6-8 into parallel strands, and developing two sets of level descriptors. These cover, on the one hand, qualifications awarded by higher education institutions (Bologna process) and on the other, professionally or vocationally oriented qualifications awarded outside higher education institutions.

There are differences between the various NQFs in terms of specific objectives, purposes, designs and implementation strategies. This is because the individual frameworks are part of each country's own qualification system with their own particular historical and political traditions. Countries put much effort into developing NQF descriptors which reflect national traditions, structures and objectives. Many NQFs build on existing reforms in education and training subsystems and some have developed sub-frameworks, notably for higher education as part of the Bologna process.

European NQFs are at different stages of their development. Some considerable progress has been made since the last overview published by Cedefop in September 2009<sup>2</sup>. An increasing number of countries are moving from the early conceptualisation and design stage to consultation/testing (Finland, Greece (ongoing) and Iceland) and official adoption. Norway has recently decided to develop a comprehensive NQF reflecting lengthy discussion in this area. The UK, France and Ireland have recently completed their NQF reviews or are currently undergoing a revision. Ireland, for example, has recently carried out the Framework Impact and

1 Of the 32 countries having signed up to the EQF, Lichtenstein is the only one not developing an NQF for lifelong learning. Lichtenstein is, however, developing a framework for higher education in line with the Bologna process.

2 Cedefop 2009. Development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe, (September 2009), available on [http://cedefop.europa.eu/en/files/6104\\_en.pdf](http://cedefop.europa.eu/en/files/6104_en.pdf)

Implementation Study<sup>3</sup>, which proposed 19 recommendations for the further development of the framework.

Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal have formally adopted an NQF through decrees or laws. A number of countries (e.g. Croatia and Finland) expect such decrees to be adopted during 2010. The choice of legal instruments very much reflects national traditions. While a minority of countries started their work by adopting a decree or a law (for example the Czech Republic in 2006), others are amending existing legal arrangements. The Danish and Icelandic frameworks both refer to recent education and training reforms but do not propose any independent NQF legislation. The evidence provided by Cedefop's analysis, however, shows that NQFs in the next few years are likely to influence the legal basis of national education and training systems. This will in most cases not take place through the adoption of a single legal act, rather by revision of a broad range of decrees and laws. In Poland and Hungary, for example, an analysis is currently being carried out to identify how the emerging NQF will influence laws and decrees in place in different education and training subsystems.

Most NQFs in Europe are presented as communication frameworks aiming to make education, training and qualification systems visible and more understandable to different stakeholders (students, employers, providers, and teachers), and to clarify the vertical and horizontal links between different types of qualifications. In some countries these 'communication frameworks' represent the first step towards reform of existing systems. The reforming role of NQFs has increasingly been emphasised by countries and they are seen as key instruments influencing national education, training and qualification systems. The report provides evidence that many current reforms are linked to the development of an NQF, for example:

- revising the methodological framework for qualifications development in Romania and Estonia;
- developing and implementing learning outcomes-based standards and curricula in Croatia and Lithuania;
- developing validation procedures for recognition of non-formal learning in the Czech Republic;
- implementing reforms at upper secondary education, linking programmes and qualifications to learning outcomes-based levels and designing new learning pathways in Italy and Iceland.

We can also observe that NQFs may have different goals for different education and training subsystems and ambitions may change in the course of the development. This is well illustrated in the above

mentioned evaluation study of the Irish framework where the incremental character of the process is underlined, showing that the targets will change as stakeholders get involved in the continuous process of framework development and implementation. The national framework had a stronger reforming and regulatory role in vocational and further education and non-university higher education in the first phase and proposals for further developments in other subsystems were suggested by the study.

The broad involvement of stakeholders continues to be seen as crucial for success. The breath and depth of the dialogue and discussion clearly indicates the importance attributed to the NQF in different countries. The high level of stakeholder involvement (including the occasional disagreement) signals that frameworks are taken seriously and that this may challenge existing structures, practices and interests. The discussion and degree of stakeholder involvement in Austria and Germany in the early stages of developments contrasts the more limited involvement and engagement observed in some other countries. The success and impact of the frameworks will depend on the broad and sustainable involvement of stakeholders as a precondition for strengthening ownership of comprehensive national frameworks. Cedefop's analysis provides evidence that NQFs are creating platforms for new partnerships between different institutions which go beyond their remits. In Germany, for instance, stakeholders and experts from school-based and work-based vocational education and training, higher education, general education and adult education collaborate in testing the NQF proposal. Sustaining cooperation between this broad range of stakeholders (which includes education and training providers), remains a challenge for the coming years.

Another challenge identified by countries is how to balance the need for system-wide approaches (and overall permeability) in comprehensive NQFs with the necessity to implement requirements of NQFs (such as learning outcomes based qualifications or quality assurance of assessment) within the educational subsystems taking into account specific needs of these (for example higher education or vocational education and training).

To better understand the conditions for success and the impact of NQFs on the end-users (such as individuals or employers) there is an identified need to develop systematic monitoring, evaluation and indicators at national and international level, and to further strengthen research into NQFs.

Cedefop's regular mapping and analyses of NQFs developments is embedded in its long-term effort to analyse and understand how qualifications are developed, awarded and used in Europe as well as to complement its other comparative studies and analyses on the changing role of qualifications.



**CEDEFOP**

<sup>3</sup> The study is available on [http://www.nqai.ie/framework\\_study.html](http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html)

# National Qualifications Frameworks and the European Overarching Frameworks: Supporting Lifelong Learning in European Education and Training Conference - 15 April 2010, Dublin

Sean O'Reilly, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

This article briefly presents the key outcomes of a conference on the theme of qualifications frameworks (both National and European) and lifelong learning.

The conference was co-hosted by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Higher Education Authority, supported by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Irish Universities Quality Board. It attracted an international audience of over 150 delegates from countries across the European Union and beyond. Participants included representatives of national education and training institutions and agencies; international education and training agencies responsible for developing national qualifications frameworks and verifying compatibility / referencing against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area ('Bologna' Framework) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) respectively; ENIC/NARIC<sup>1</sup> representatives;

European representative and policy bodies; quality assurance agencies; professional bodies and student representatives. The conference brought together these various communities to contribute to building mutual trust and understanding in order to better achieve the shared goals of supporting individuals' lifelong learning and mobility.

An issues paper was prepared by Dr Bryan Maguire of HETAC and made available in advance of the conference<sup>2</sup>. This identified a number of issues for consideration. These were framed around five themes as follows:

- **Why two meta-frameworks?**
- **How are qualifications frameworks supporting mobility?**
- **European Directives on the regulation of professions and the meta-frameworks**
- **The role of sectoral qualifications frameworks**
- **Qualifications frameworks on the global stage**

The aim of the conference was to generate discussion around each of these themes in order to inform future policy development. The themes were explored in the issues paper and a number of questions were raised for each. These formed the basis for discussion at the event. This is summarised below.

## Two Meta- frameworks

The conference heard that the existence of two meta-frameworks gave some potential for confusion and agreed that dissemination of targeted information to key audiences is essential to minimise this. The primacy of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) over the meta-frameworks was stressed. Stakeholders need to engage with the national system and the benefits of the meta-frameworks will follow. If frameworks are to have any effect then NQFs must meet national challenges for the development of education and training systems.



1 European Network of Information Centres/ National Academic Recognition Information Centres. See: <http://www.enic-naric.net>

2 The background paper can be downloaded here: <http://www.nqa.ie/documents/QualificationsFrameworksConf-April2010.pdf>

## Recognition and Mobility

The issues paper highlighted the separation that exists in many countries between those parts of the system that are responsible for NQF development and those engaged in qualifications recognition. It was noted that NQFs never stand alone: they are linked to other instruments of recognition. In order to support recognition and mobility, the importance of closer cooperation between people dealing with recognition and those dealing with NQFs was stressed. Equally, the discussion highlighted the need for learning-outcomes-based NQFs to be underpinned by robust quality assurance and to be referenced to the meta-frameworks in a transparent way in order to build mutual trust between countries.

## Professional Directives

Conference participants noted that European Directive 2005/36/EC<sup>2</sup>, which governs recognition of qualifications in relation to regulated professions across the EU, contains much that is useful to support mobility but also that certain aspects can cause difficulty in some cases. There was broad agreement that the review of the Directive in 2012 provides a timely opportunity to consider the interplay between the Directive and European meta-frameworks. Indeed, participants expressed their willingness to engage with the review as well as the importance of including Directorate General Internal Market in any future discussion on qualifications frameworks.

## Sectoral Qualifications and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks

The value of sectoral qualifications within the education and training environment was noted. Consideration was given to how such qualifications (either international or relating to a particular sector within a country) could engage with the qualifications systems organised by national authorities. There was broad agreement that it would be helpful to develop additional guidance on how to describe such qualifications in order to increase appreciation and understanding of them, for example, demonstrating that they are based on learning outcomes, or describing their quality assurance arrangements.

## Global perspective

The conference concluded with a global perspective. Speakers, including those from Australia and the United States, highlighted the benefits of countries learning from each other. Over 100 countries worldwide are in the process of developing NQFs and there are also examples of several transnational (meta-) frameworks. The Bologna and EQF processes were seen by participants as major influences on the way NQFs are being developed. Further consideration of how European and global developments can be articulated would be beneficial and, indeed, necessary if we are to increase mobility for learners worldwide.

Full details of the conference, including the pre-conference issues paper, Conference Statement and Conference Report, are available at <http://www.nqai.ie/QualificationsFrameworksConference2010.html>



<sup>2</sup> Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications in Official Journal of the European Union L 255/22 available online: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:255:0022:0142:en:PDF>

# The Australian Qualifications Framework: Towards a Strengthened AQF

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a considerable uptake internationally in the development and application of qualifications frameworks that apply to national education systems.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) has been in place since 1995, making it one of the more long-established national qualifications frameworks in operation. The introduction of the AQF has enabled a common structure for designing, developing and issuing nationally recognised qualifications throughout Australia and for supporting linkages between these qualifications.

## The Australian Context

The AQF operates within the Australian federal system of government. The Australian Constitution sets out the respective powers of the Commonwealth (Australian) Government and the governments of the six states. There are also two territories, which do not have constitutional power to make laws but have been ceded self-government by the Commonwealth.

State governments traditionally hold the constitutional power to legislate on education matters. With up to nine governments sharing responsibility for education, the AQF provides a national framework to ensure consistency of both quality and learning outcomes across the various jurisdictions.

The AQF was developed under instruction from State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)<sup>1</sup>. MCEETYA established an AQF Advisory Board to protect the AQF qualifications guidelines and to promote and monitor national implementation of the AQF.<sup>2</sup>

The AQF is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (Technical And Further Education institutions which are publicly funded and private providers) and the higher education sector (universities and

private providers). The AQF was introduced Australia-wide on 1 January 1995 and was phased in over five years, with full implementation by the year 2000.



In May 2008, MCEETYA replaced the AQF Advisory Board with the AQF Council to provide Education and Training Ministers with strategic and authoritative advice on the AQF to ensure it is nationally and internationally robust and supports flexible cross-sectoral linkages and pathways. The AQF Council<sup>3</sup> is led by an independent Chair and Council members represent the three education sectors<sup>4</sup>, governments and industry.

Currently the AQF<sup>5</sup> consists of the framework itself and a suite of associated policies which are:

- The national guidelines for each of the current national qualification types<sup>6</sup> issued in the senior secondary school, vocational education and training and higher education sectors<sup>7</sup>;

1 In 2009 the employment and tertiary education functions of MCEETYA were taken over by the newly formed Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE). Consequently, the Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC) now reports to MCTEE.

2 [http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/docs/IGA\\_FFR\\_ScheduleF\\_National\\_Skills\\_and\\_Workforce\\_Development\\_National\\_Agreement.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Skills_and_Workforce_Development_National_Agreement.pdf)

3 More information about the mission, the strategic plan and the members of the AQF Council can be found here: <http://www.aqf.edu.au/AboutUs/tabid/104/Default.aspx>

4 In the AQF, 'education sector' would refer to education sub-systems in a European context. See <http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/AQFQualifications/tabid/98/Default.aspx>

5 See the *Overview of the Australian Qualifications Framework* page:

[http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Documents/Handbook/AQF\\_Handbook\\_1-12.pdf](http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Documents/Handbook/AQF_Handbook_1-12.pdf)

6 There are currently 15 qualification types in the AQF

7 See <http://www.aqf.edu.au/PoliciesandPublications/tabid/196/Default.aspx#addition>

- The **policies and guidelines** for articulation, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning<sup>8</sup>;
- A **register of authorities** empowered by governments to accredit qualifications<sup>9</sup>;
- A **register of institutions** authorised to issue qualifications and protocols for issuing qualifications<sup>10</sup>; and
- A **governance structure** for monitoring the implementation of the AQF and for advising Ministers, including recommendations for change. Currently this function is undertaken by the AQF Council.<sup>11</sup>

## Strengthening the AQF

Significant change has occurred in the workforce and the education and training environments since the inception of the AQF in 1995. The AQF Council is currently undertaking a process to strengthen the framework and ensure that it reflects the contemporary environment.

In particular, there have been significant developments in education delivery methods and course design, and huge advances in information technology. Vocational education and training (VET) courses extend into secondary schools through “VET in schools” programs and school-based apprenticeships which offer alternative pathways to students. Universities have become increasingly involved in delivering vocational courses, and there has been a growth in “dual sector” institutions offering both higher education and vocational education and training courses. Furthermore, the internet has transformed delivery methods so dramatically that what were traditionally localised providers are now operating in regional, national and even international markets.

Australia is a leading destination for international students. The quality assurance provided by the AQF underpins the strong confidence held in Australian education around the world.<sup>12</sup>

The strengthening of the AQF coincides with a number of initiatives being implemented across the tertiary education sectors. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments have, through a series of national agreements, undertaken to invest in significantly improving educational outcomes for a number of target groups within the Australian population. This includes increasing the proportion of 20–64 year olds with trade qualifications or higher and doubling the number of higher qualification completions by 2020.

To meet the challenges laid out above, the AQF Council has undertaken an extensive project with a proposed new architecture for the AQF at its centre. The proposed strengthened AQF features are:

- A levels structure with ten levels expressed as learning outcomes
- An integrated set of qualification types positioned on the levels structure
- Revised qualification type descriptors for each of the existing qualification types expressed as learning outcomes
- A measurement of the notional duration of learning for each qualification type.<sup>13</sup>

The proposed model is likely to be presented to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) for Ministers’ consideration by the end of 2010.

Whatever shape a strengthened AQF ultimately takes it will build upon the groundbreaking work set out by the original model. Despite being 15 years old, the AQF continues to serve Australia’s education sectors well, as well as having been a standard against which so many nations around the world have established their own frameworks.

**EU-Australia co-operation in education and training** is underpinned by policy dialogue at government level and bilateral projects among institutions. In autumn 2010, the policy dialogue between the EU and Australia will focus on qualifications frameworks. The EQF Newsletter will provide further information about the main messages from the policy dialogue.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education, Employment  
 and Workplace Relations**

8 See <http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Documents/Credit%20Transfer%20Project%20-%20Final%20draft%20policy.pdf>

9 See <http://www.aqf.edu.au/RegisterAccreditation/AQF/AQFRegister/tabid/174/Default.aspx>

10 Idem

11 See <http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/TheAQF/tabid/108/Default.aspx>

12 Australian Qualifications Framework Council, May 2009, Strengthening the AQF: A Proposal, page 6. [http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Documents/022105r08\\_AQF\\_StrengtheningTheAQF\\_A4\\_HR.pdf](http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Documents/022105r08_AQF_StrengtheningTheAQF_A4_HR.pdf)

13 Australian Qualifications Framework Council, October 2009, Strengthening the AQF: An Architecture for Australia’s Qualifications, page 3. <http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/o/Strengthening%20the%20AQF%20-%20An%20Architecture%20for%20Australias%20Qualifications.pdf>

## Government decision on the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework

On 4 May 2010, the Lithuanian government adopted a decision on the Lithuanian national qualifications framework. This decision contains the structure of the qualifications framework in terms of levels and level descriptors. The NQF in Lithuania is planned to have eight qualifications levels described in terms of complexity, autonomy and variability of activities that the learner should understand, know and be able to do upon the completion of a qualification.

The decision (in Lithuanian only) can be consulted here: [http://www.lrv.lt/bylos/Teises\\_aktai/2010/05/15258.doc](http://www.lrv.lt/bylos/Teises_aktai/2010/05/15258.doc)

## Study on credit systems and qualifications frameworks

Cedefop has recently published a study entitled *Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks: An international comparative analysis*. The study analyses the development of credit systems and qualifications frameworks and their relationships across a sample of European and non-European countries: Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the UK-EWNI (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the UK-Scotland. It discusses how credit systems (and more broadly credit arrangement) and qualifications frameworks actively shape certain aspects of qualifications systems as well as adding value to describing qualifications systems. It also explores how these two tools jointly support articulation between learning pathways and progression also underlying their limits with this regard. Finally the study reflects on the possible developments for European instruments in the area of qualifications. The study is available at [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505_en.pdf)

## The ECVET Network launched

The implementation of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) triggers a number of actions at European level, including the setting up of the ECVET Users' Group (bringing together government appointed representatives of competent institutions) and the ECVET Network (open to all institutions with responsibilities and competence in areas related to ECVET implementation). The ECVET Users' Group met for the first time on 27-28 May 2010 and the first forum of the ECVET Network took place on 24-25 June 2010. Because of its focus on learning outcomes and lifelong learning, the implementation of ECVET is closely related to that of the EQF and discussions in the ECVET Users' Group underlined opportunities for development of synergies.

## Interested in the outcomes of expert discussions on the learning outcomes approach?

Since 2006, countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 work programme and now in Education and Training 2020 actively take part in discussions on national qualifications frameworks, the learning outcomes approach and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Learning Outcomes Group (formerly cluster on the recognition of learning outcomes) organises peer learning activities which bring together national experts who discuss topics high on countries' policy agendas in these areas. Examples of themes recently tackled are Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks as tools to support lifelong learning or Stakeholders involvement in National Qualifications Frameworks. After each peer learning activity a succinct synthesis report is produced and published in an electronic format for further dissemination. The peer-learning activities' reports can be accessed on the web-site of the knowledge system for lifelong learning ([www.kslll.net](http://www.kslll.net)) in the section on peer-learning clusters, under the heading Recognition of learning outcomes.

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.

The next issue of the EQF Newsletter will be published in Autumn 2010. If you would like to subscribe to the EQF Newsletter, please register by sending an email to the following email address:

[eac-eqf-newsletter@ec.europa.eu](mailto:eac-eqf-newsletter@ec.europa.eu)

Please forward any comments or suggestions regarding the EQF Newsletter to the same email address.



**Corrigendum:** In the first issue of the EQF Newsletter the contact details of the Croatian National Coordination Point were incorrect. The correct contact details are:

Ministry of Science, Education and Sport,  
Donje Svetice 38, 10000 Zagreb



CEDEFOP

