Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks

Volume I:
Thematic Chapters

PRE-COPY ISSUED FOR THE ASEM MINISTERS OF EDUCATION MEETING, RIGA, APRIL 2015.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

ETF Working together Learning for life

CEDEFOP European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a non-profit international institute of UNESCO. The Institute undertakes research, capacity-building, networking and publication on lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education. Its publications are a valuable resource for educational researchers, planners, policymakers and practitioners.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is a European Union-funded agency that supports the development of vocational education and training systems in 30 neighbouring countries, known as partner countries. These include places that border, or are close to, European Union member states, from the Balkans and the former Soviet republics of central Asia to the Middle East and North Africa. The ETF's mission is to help its partner countries develop the skills of their populations in order to promote political stability, economic development and human rights.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training. It provides information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice. Cedefop was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75.

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This Global Inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks is the result of collaborative work between the European Training Foundation (ETF), the Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-UIL). Arjen Deij and Michael Graham (ETF), and all members of the ETF qualifications team, Jens Bjornavold, Slava Pevec Grm and Ernesto Villalba (Cedefop), Borhene Chakroun and Katrien Daelman (UNESCO), and Arne Carlsen and Madhu Singh (UNESCO-UIL) are the authors of thematic chapters. This publication would not have been possible without the close cooperation of national and regional agencies. We are very grateful for the extensive help and guidance provided by national and regional experts, particularly in compiling the country and regional cases.

TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR DAVID RAFFE

While preparing this publication we received the sad news that David Raffe, Professor of Sociology of Education, University of Edinburgh, had died unexpectedly.

For us, experts and stakeholders involved in developing and supporting qualifications systems, David's conceptualizations and analysis of qualifications systems development and reforms have been essential in understanding the nature and processes of these reforms and their impacts. In particular David was promoting policy learning rather than policy borrowing, and drawing attention to questions that qualifications systems reform raised. David was not only asking what the NQFs are promising, he also was keen to analyse to what extent these reforms are being implemented and the diversity of purposes and impacts on education and training systems.

As inter-agency group active in the field of qualifications systems reforms, we celebrate his life's work and what he has given to researchers, practitioners and decision-makers.

INTRODUCTION

The context for this publication is unique in many ways. First, the year 2015 is a landmark for the adoption of new Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations Assembly. Education and training are at the heart of the sustainable development post-2015 agenda and are considered essential for the success of all sustainable development goals. Second, the scale of qualifications framework development has reached an unprecedented level. Since the 2013 edition of the Inter-agency Inventory on Qualifications Frameworks (QFs), at least twenty new countries have decided to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF). This figure now exceeds 150. The United Nations lists 193 sovereign states, so NQF coverage extends to approximately three in four countries.

Given the diversity of country contexts, it is remarkable how much consensus exists around the world that learning outcomes based qualification frameworks are appropriate tools for the reform and expansion of educational and training provision in ways that will raise skills levels, improve labour market productivity, and contribute to sustainable development.

SCOPE OF THE INVENTORY

The underlying premise of the Inventory follows from the goal of monitoring and characterizing the development of NQFs as implemented by Member States. The Inventory involves both a mapping of global qualification reforms and thematic chapters that discuss key trends and policy issues emerging from qualifications framework reforms and development.

This Inventory provides a broad overview of the status and scope of qualifications frameworks internationally as at the end of 2014. This Inventory includes the NQFs of eighty-six countries and seven regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs). The Inventory acts as an observatory of progress and achievement of NQF goals through country case studies. Specifically, the case studies look at the main policy objectives, stakeholder involvement, the framework adopted for implementation, the focus on learning outcomes and the use of level descriptors. The case studies also consider the ways in which the validation of non-formal learning is considered (if any), and how these links to the NQF. The case studies finish with important lessons and future plans.

The global mapping draws on inventories from agencies (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-UIL)) and communication with country officials and experts. It also draws on extensive research in the field of qualifications, as captured in the list of countries and regions covered. In this regard it is important to note that several related initiatives were under way at the same time as this report. Examples include, but are not limited to, research UNESCO is leading about the use of level descriptors with an aim to develop world reference levels (Keevy and Chakroun, forthcoming). CEDEFOP has conducted a review of quality assurance of certifications (CEDEFOP, forthcoming). ETF has published a report regarding the appropriate approaches to develop better qualifications (ETF, 2014) and UIL has examined links between recognition practices and NQFs (Singh and Duvekot, 2013).

THEMATIC FOCUS OF THE INVENTORY

The Inventory shows that most countries are reforming their qualifications systems to improve the quality of qualifications and their relevance to the labour market and learner needs. As noted by Jens Bjornavold and Slava Pevec Grm in Chapter 1, our overall understanding of the role and function of NQFs has evolved, and it is becoming increasingly clear that frameworks can combine communication and transformation functions and roles in different ways, reflecting the particular national situations and contexts.

Another global phenomenon is the validation of non-formal and informal learning. As demonstrated by Ernesto Villalba and Madhu Singh in Chapter 2, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning can be better achieved through the use of learning outcomes based NQFs which can influence standards, curricula and assessment criteria. Through the use of these, individuals' knowledge, skills and competences can be referenced and understood by different sectors and stakeholders of the economy and society at large. NQFs also constitute a source of quality assurance of validation processes.

In Chapter 3, Madhu Singh explores formalizing approaches linking NQFs to informal sector skills development, particularly in low and middle-income countries and emerging economies with large informal sectors. These formalizing tendencies are seen in terms of the existence of a system of regulated learning outcomes based qualifications, opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, support from competent authorities and the private sector, incorporation of existing informal sector skills initiatives, and the permeability of education and training systems. Other drivers and levers are also recommended.

In Chapter 4, Arjen Deij and Michael Graham note that many countries now have some or most of the necessary elements of a modernized qualifications system in place. Many have passed legislation, developed quality assurance systems to regulate the new system, and developed occupational standards. However, Deij and Graham observe that in most cases NQFs remain empty of qualifications, and universally the urgent need is to populate these frameworks. The degree of regulation is determined by historical, cultural and sociopolitical factors. Legislation is often required to start the NQF implementation, but legislation is a process done in different steps, and is bound to change during the implementation. In Chapter 5, Arjen Deij and Michael Graham recommend that countries start the legislative process with broad-framework legislation, confirming the objectives, the levels of the NQF and general principles, but leave details to secondary legislation that can be more easily updated.

Borhene Chakroun and Katrien Daelman note in Chapter 6 that RQFs are the other type of framework that are emerging as tools for supporting cross-border mobility of learners and workers, and acting as a means for fair and transparent recognition of qualifications. Chakroun and Daelman present a UNESCO-driven initiative to develop a set of World Reference Levels of learning outcomes that are expected to act as 'generalizable indicators' of levels of learning and a 'shared hierarchy that allows comparisons of any kind of learning' or a 'common metric'.

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CHAPTER 1: BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

INTRODUCTION

Before 2005 national qualifications frameworks (NQF) had been set up in three European countries: France, Ireland and the United Kingdom. By 2015, frameworks had been introduced in all the thirty-eight countries taking part in the cooperation on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).[1] As more of these frameworks are now moving into an operational stage, their role as agents of change is becoming more apparent. While the character and strength of their impact differs between countries and across sectors, this chapter will show that NQFs are now increasingly influencing the character and workings of national education and training systems.

Following a presentation of main developments in Europe, this chapter reflects on the different ways in which NQFs are influencing education, training and employment policies and practices in European countries. The concluding part discusses the implications of these developments on our overall understanding of the role and function of NQFs, exemplified by the distinction between communication, reforming and transformational frameworks introduced by David Raffe (*2009b,* 2011).

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN EUROPE: OVERALL PROGRESS

At the beginning of 2015, thirty-eight European countries had developed forty-two national qualifications frameworks. The following figures reflect the situation:

- Thirty-four countries[2] are working towards comprehensive NQFs covering all types and levels of qualifications (compared with thirty in 2013).
- Four countries have introduced partial NQFs covering a limited range of qualification types and levels or consisting of separate frameworks operating apart from each other. This is exemplified by the Czech Republic and Switzerland, where separate frameworks for vocational and higher education (HE) qualifications have been developed; by France where only vocationally and professionally oriented qualifications are included in the framework; and by Italy, where frameworks are restricted to qualifications from HE.
- Twenty-nine NQFs have been formally adopted (compared with twenty-four in 2013).
- Eighteen countries have reached operational stage (compared with sixteen in 2013). In seven of these – Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, France, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – NQFs are fully operational (compared with five in 2013).
- Thirty-two countries have proposed or adopted eight-level frameworks (twenty-eight in 2013).
- Twenty-seven countries have presented referencing reports[3] showing how their national frameworks relate to the EQF.
- Twenty-four NQFs are self-certified against the Bologna framework, fifteen jointly with EQF referencing.
- Nine countries indicate EQF levels on certificates, diplomas or Europass documents (up from six in 2013).

The EQF has been a main catalyst for the rapid developments and implementation of NQFs in Europe. Almost all countries have seen NQFs as necessary for relating national qualifications levels to the EQF in a transparent and trustworthy manner. By February 2015, twenty-four countries had referenced their national qualifications levels to the EQF: Austria, Belgium (FL, FR), Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland,

[1] These are the twenty-eight EU member states as well as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iceland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Lichtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey,

[2] In the United Kingdom (where education is devolved to the individual constituent countries), the frameworks for Scotland and Wales are comprehensive. The Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (QCF) includes only vocational / professional qualifications.

[3] Cyprus, Greece and Romania still need to complete this process

Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. In addition three countries, Cyprus, Greece and Romania, were in a dialogue with the EQF Advisory Group on the finalization of their reports. The remaining countries are expected to follow in the near future. It is worth noting that the number of countries in EQF cooperation increased during 2014 from thirty-six to thirty-eight,[4] showing that the EQF is seen as increasingly relevant.

The development of NQFs in Europe also reflects the Bologna process and the agreement to implement qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). Twenty-four countries have formally 'self-certified' their HE qualifications to the QF-EHEA. Countries are increasingly combining referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA.[5] Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia have all produced joint reports on both processes, reflecting the priority given to the development and adoption of comprehensive NQFs covering all levels and types of qualification. It is expected that this approach will be chosen by most countries preparing to reference to the EQF in 2015. This development reflects the increasingly close cooperation between the two European framework initiatives, which is also illustrated by regular meetings between EQF national coordination points and Bologna framework coordinators.

NQFs IN EUROPE: COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES

The initial technical and conceptual design of NQFs has now been finalized in most countries. The following common characteristics can be identified:

- NQFs have primarily been designed as comprehensive and address all levels and types of qualifications (vocational education and training (VET), HE and general education) (in thirty-four of the thirty-eight countries, as noted above). The remaining countries – the Czech Republic, France, Italy and Switzerland – have developed frameworks with a limited scope, or have chosen to develop and implement separate frameworks for VET and HE. Some countries, such as Germany and Austria, have agreed on comprehensive NQFs but are taking a step-by-step approach under which some qualifications (for example school leaving certificates at upper secondary level) have still to be included.
- Comprehensive European NQFs can mostly be described as 'loose frameworks'. This enables them to embrace the full range of concepts, values and traditions existing in the different parts of the education and training system covered by the framework. Whether a framework is tight or loose depends on the stringency of conditions a qualification must meet to be included (Tuck, 2007). Loose frameworks introduce a set of comprehensive level descriptors to be applied across subsystems, but allow substantial specialization within each subframework.[6] Tight frameworks are normally regulatory frameworks, and define uniform specifications for qualifications to be applied across sectors. The examples of early versions of frameworks in South Africa and New Zealand show that attempts to create tight and 'one-size-fits-all' variants generated a lot of resistance and undermined the overarching role of the framework. These experiences have led to general reassessment of the role of these frameworks, pointing to the need to protect diversity (Allais, *2011c*; Strathdee, 2011). In contrast to this, in most European countries, the inclusion of formal qualifications in the NQFs is based on sector-based legislation, not on uniform rules covering the entire framework. This is illustrated by the proposed Polish framework, where generic, national descriptors are supplemented by more detailed ones for the subsystems of general, vocational and higher education. While not so explicitly addressed by other frameworks, the basic principle applies across the continent.
- NQFs are widely considered to be an important tool

[4] The two new countries are Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[5] Self-certification reports verify the compatibility of the national framework for higher education with the QF-EHEA.

[6] For example for VET or HE.

in supporting national lifelong learning strategies, notably by opening up to qualifications awarded in non-formal learning contexts, by promoting validation of non-formal learning and by reducing barriers to progress in education, training and learning. The overarching perspective of comprehensive frameworks is critical for achieving lifelong learning objectives.

- The majority of countries have introduced eight-level frameworks. Three exceptions in the recently developed frameworks are Norway and Iceland, which have seven levels, and Slovenia, which uses ten levels. The seven-level framework in Norway reflects the formal education and training structure, where no qualifications were identified below NQF/EQF level 2. One of the reasons that Slovenia chose to adopt ten levels was to better accommodate legacy awards such as *magister znanosti*. The prevailing similarities in structure among the majority of countries demonstrate that international comparability of the NQF structure is considered a priority.
- While all countries emphasize that their NQFs are communication and transparency tools designed to improve the transparency and comparability of national qualifications systems, many countries also see NQFs as contributing to incremental reform, notably as regards the shift to learning outcomes and improved stakeholder cooperation and dialogue. This allows the existing education and training system and the learning outcomes based framework to be gradually and progressively aligned with each other, and makes it possible to develop understanding of, and buy-in to, the key concepts of NQF among major stakeholders.
- Although a broad range of stakeholders participate in the design and development of frameworks, NQFs predominantly address the needs of the education and training sector, and to a lesser extent those of the labour market (Raffe, *2012a*). They tend to be seen as only partly relevant to (for example) employees and employers.
- All countries have introduced learning outcomes based level descriptors, reflecting the EQF level descriptors (knowledge, skills, competence). Evidence shows, however, that many countries combine this with links to inputs, and emphasize that these two approaches are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.
- CEDEFOP's evidence (*2015a*) shows that the roles and functions of NQFs differ between countries and sectors. They range from (a limited number of) frameworks with a regulatory function to (a majority of) frameworks of a descriptive and classification character whose impact can only be of an indirect one.

IMPACT OF NQFs

National authorities have frequently stated (CEDEFOP, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015a) that national qualifications frameworks are designed and mandated to *describe national qualification systems, not change them*. Only a few countries have explicitly underlined the role of frameworks as an instrument for reform and change. This creates the impression that most NQFs will play only a limited role in the overall modernization of education and training systems. CEDEFOP's evidence – contrary to the above – shows that most NQFs now embrace elements of reform, going beyond a limited transparency and communication function. While the launching of NQFs may have been low-key in many countries, their introduction signals a shift in perspective, with a possible long-term impact on policies as well as practices:

- The introduction of comprehensive NQFs, covering all levels and types of qualification, allows for a focus on relationships between institutions and sectors and a stronger focus on lifelong and life-wide learning. This is in line with the objectives set for most NQFs, which aim at improving the links and bridges between levels and types of qualification. Eliminating dead-ends and promoting vertical and horizontal progression is considered a key task for most of the new frameworks. For example in some countries the overarching NQF enhanced and facilitated the discussion between different stakeholders on access, admission and recognition of qualifications at NQF levels linked to EQF level 5. This has already translated into policy decisions on introduction of new qualifications in some countries, for example initial VET qualifications at NQF level 5 in Estonia.
- The role of NQFs in promoting and systematically implementing a shift to learning outcomes allows for more learner-centred approaches influencing teaching, training and assessment methods, as evidence from some case studies has shown (CEDEFOP, *2015b, 2015c*).
- Comprehensive NQFs can provide a platform for dialogue and cooperation, for stakeholders within education and training as well as between the labour market and the education and training sector. As evidence shows, the development of overarching frameworks has triggered dialogue across sectors and has encouraged

cooperation between them in many European countries. The examples of Croatia, Estonia, Malta, Montenegro and Romania show that this cross-sectoral cooperation is increasingly being institutionalized.

None of these impacts will follow automatically from the introduction of a NQF. Without long-term implementation strategies, supporting policies and strong commitment from all involved stakeholders, frameworks may end up as bureaucratic exercises without any practical impact. CEDEFOP's 2015 analysis of European NQF identifies eight areas where a real impact can now be identified.

CONDITIONS AND IMPACT AREAS

a) *Learning outcomes*
European NQFs are mainly connected through their emphasis on learning outcomes. Recent research on the shift to learning outcomes (CEDEFOP, 2015b) shows that this principle has been broadly accepted among European policy-makers, and that the NQFs have contributed to this shift. This research, building on similar work carried out in 2007 and 2008 (CEDEFOP, 2009), demonstrates that the introduction of NQFs is the most important factor influencing policies in this area. While the approach was previously taken forward in a fragmented way in separate institutions and subsystems, evidence shows that the emergence of comprehensive frameworks has made it possible to a certain degree to approach the shift to learning outcomes in a more systematic and to some extent more consistent way. In countries such as Belgium, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Poland we can observe that the introduction of frameworks has led to the identification of areas where learning outcomes have not previously been applied or where these have been used in an inconsistent way even within one education sector. The Norwegian NQF pointed to the lack of learning outcomes based descriptions and standards for advanced vocational training (*Fagskole*), resulting in work to remedy this weakness.

b) *The impact of NQFs – stakeholder involvement*
The new generation of European NQFs has helped to bring together stakeholders from different subsystems in education who did not commonly cooperate or speak to each other, and stakeholders from education and employment. Evidence shows that a broad range of stakeholders from different sectors in education and the labour market have been involved in the development of frameworks and countries. Most participants signal that they want to continue and if possible institutionalize these processes. A key question now is whether this initial success can be turned into a permanent feature of the frameworks. While the initial development stage has been limited in time and scope, the long-term implementation of a framework will require a different and stronger commitment, especially by engaging stakeholders from the labour market.

c) *The impact of NQFs – institutional reform*
NQFs are contributing directly to institutional reform in some countries. Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Romania exemplify this through their decisions to merge existing and multiple qualification bodies into one body covering different types and levels of qualifications. Some other countries also have plans to merge qualifications authorities or to establish new institutions (there is a proposal for a national qualifications council in Sweden). This shows that comprehensive NQFs can trigger institutional reform, even in cases where their main role is perceived as promoting transparency. It is no coincidence that Ireland, following more than a decade of framework development, has now opted for one coherent quality and qualifications authority. The merging of the four previously existing bodies seems to reflect the structure and principles of the comprehensive NQF, and will also aid further development and implementation of the framework and strengthen the quality assurance underpinning qualifications.

d) *The impact of NQFs – the bridging of institutions and subsystems*
Several countries see the NQF as a tool for strengthening the links between education and training subsystems. This is considered to be essential for improving the permeability and for reducing barriers to progression in education, training and learning. As previously stated, the new generation of European NQFs overwhelmingly consists of comprehensive frameworks, addressing all types and levels of qualification. This means that they and their descriptors have to reflect a huge diversity of purposes, institutions, traditions and cultures. One of the fundamental challenges faced by comprehensive frameworks, Young and Allais state (2009, 2011), is to take into account the epistemological differences in knowledge and learning that exist in different parts of the education and training system.

e) *The impact of NQFs – developing and renewing qualifications*
The introduction of comprehensive NQFs adds value by creating an overview. The introduction of learning outcomes based levels, and the placing of

qualifications according to these, makes it possible to identify gaps in the existing provision of qualifications. CEDEFOP's 2014 study shows that EQF level 5 (and the relevant NQF levels) has been used as a platform for the development of new qualifications. This is exemplified by the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and the United Kingdom. The new qualifications might in some cases be initial vocational qualifications, as is the case in Estonia. In other cases, as is currently being discussed in the Czech Republic, they might be HE qualifications. Lithuania exemplifies a country where there are currently no qualifications linked to this level (although there had been qualifications of this level awarded in vocational colleges until 2004). The demand for qualifications at this level has now been documented, and both the VET and the higher education sector are considering responses. Initial VET schools are seeking to revise some of their courses and to upgrade them to level 5. Colleges of higher vocational education, meanwhile, seek to introduce short study cycle programmes and to link these qualifications to level 5.

f) *The impact of NQFs – opening up to the private and non-formal sector*

The majority of the new NQFs have limited their coverage to formal qualifications awarded by national authorities or independent bodies accredited by these authorities. This means that frameworks predominantly cover initial qualifications offered by public education and training institutions. While there are exceptions to this general picture, most NQFs fail to cover qualifications resulting from training and learning taking place in the non-formal and private sector. This is problematic as important qualifications linked to continuing and further education and training are left out of the picture. Since 2011/12, attention has increasingly been paid to this potential weakness in the scope of frameworks. Some countries, including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, have started working on procedures for including non-formal and private sector qualifications and certificates.

g) *The impact of NQFs – recognition of qualifications*

The effect of qualifications frameworks on the mobility of learners and workers is still uncertain (European Commission and GHK, 2013). This reflects the facts that full implementation has yet to be achieved and that the referencing to the EQF has yet to be finalized. However, evidence gathered by a study on the potential role of qualifications framework in supporting mobility of worker and learners (DEEWR and DG EAC, 2011) shows that there are great expectations that qualifications frameworks will support mobility though better recognition of qualifications. NQFs provide an import link to detailed information on qualifications; notably on learning outcomes but also on workload and the type of qualification. These are all essential elements required for recognition of qualifications. The potential role to be played by qualifications frameworks in this context is expressed in the new (2013) subsidiary text to the Lisbon recognition convention. This text underlines that frameworks should be used systematically as a source of information supporting decisions on recognition.

h) *The impact of NQFs – validation of non-formal and informal learning*

The 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning sees the link to NQFs as important for the further implementation of validation arrangements across Europe. Overall, NQFs and validation are bound together through their shared emphasis on learning outcomes. The 2012 recommendation states that for validation 'the same or equivalent (learning outcomes based) standards to those used in formal education' should be used. NQFs thus provide a common reference point for learning acquired inside as well as outside formal education and training. The 2014 update of the European Inventory on validation (European Commission, CEDEFOP and ICF International, 2014) confirms the priority given to the linking of frameworks and validation arrangements.

NQFs AS AGENTS OF CHANGE – THE NEED FOR A MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDING

As indicated above, the majority of European NQFs were originally seen as tools for increasing transparency of qualifications and for better describing and promoting the existing system. This modest ambition contrasts with the approach chosen by some of the earlier NQFs. Several of them took on extensive regulatory and reform functions. With reference to Raffe (*2009b*), NQFs can be placed on a continuum stretching from communication to transformational frameworks (*Table 1.1*).

[7] See Subsidiarity text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, 'Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications', www.cicic.ca/docs/lisboa/Recommendation_on_the_use_of_qualifications_frameworks_in_the_recognition_of_foreign_qualifications.pdf

During the last few years, as implementation of frameworks has progressed, some NQFs have taken on a reforming role somewhere in between these two extremes. NQFs starting with a limited communication mandate can in several cases be seen to extend and deepen their roles and functions, starting to act as agents for change in particular political and institutional contexts. On the other end of the continuum we can observe that the English QCF is about to lose some of its regulatory functions, placing it closer to other European NQFs. These adjustments show that qualification frameworks are dynamic tools, and their functions and objectives may shift as they develop in line with short-term as well as long-term policy agendas. What is clear, however, is that it is far too simplistic to categorize European NQFs as either communication or transformation frameworks. To be able to understand the impact of NQFs we need to distinguish between the different policy areas and (education) sectors where they are working.

In some areas, for example related to the shift to learning outcomes, some frameworks have already become important agents of change and can thus be seen to take on a reform role. In other areas, for example related to the formal recognition of qualifications, frameworks take on a more limited communication role and are only to a limited extent triggering reform. These different roles are illustrated in *Tables 1.2 and 1.3*.

These two tables demonstrate that it makes little sense to categorize NQFs as either communication or transformation (or reform) frameworks. What becomes clear is that frameworks can combine communication and transformation functions and roles in different ways, reflecting the particular national situation and context. This flexibility, which has become more apparent as frameworks mature and become operational, opens up the opportunity for more targeted strategies where NQFs are used as reform tools in particular areas and as communication tools in other areas and sectors. This targeted strategy, however, requires frameworks to be firmly embedded in the national political and institutional setting. In cases where frameworks are taken forward as isolated initiatives, outside the regulatory systems and their day-to-day running, their ability to make a difference is seriously reduced.

CONCLUSION

CEDEFOP's evidence, based on its monitoring of European NQF developments since 2009, shows that the majority of comprehensive NQFs can be described as 'loose' frameworks with limited regulatory functions. While it seems clear that this looseness provides flexibility and allows frameworks to embrace a broad range of qualifications, institutions and make an impact in some areas, it is a question for the future whether comprehensive NQFs will receive regulatory functions in particular areas. Currently, most comprehensive frameworks are comprised of sub-frameworks that are regulated by sectoral laws and bylaws. The alignment of legal sectoral frameworks with emerging comprehensive NQFs will be crucial for making them better able to operate as integrated and permanent features of the national education, training and employment systems. Most frameworks have now been formally adopted, and developments in the coming years will demonstrate the extent to which they will become truly integrated into education, training and employment policies.

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Table 1.1: The functions of NQFs

COMMUNICATION	TRANSFORMATION
Starts from existing education and training system	Starts from a vision of the future ET system
Incremental change	Reform and transformation
Tool for change	Driver of change
'Bottom-up'	'Top-down'
Voluntary	Statutory / Regulatory
Providers have central role	Providers included among stakeholders
Loose	Tight

Source: adapted from Raffe (2009b).

Table 1.2: The reform (transformative) role of NQFs in relation to the shift to learning outcomes

NQFs AND THE REFORMING / TRANSFORMATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES	
STARTS FROM THE FUTURE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM	In many European countries the NQF has been a driver in introducing learning outcomes, setting a target for the future
REFORM AND TRANSFORMATION	The shift to learning outcomes can, over the long term, have deep implications for the way qualifications are defined and described, the way assessment takes place and the way labour market stakeholders are involved in the review and renewal of education and training
DRIVER OF CHANGE	Research (CEDEFOP, 2009, 2015b) demonstrates that NQFs have been a main driver in introducing learning outcomes on a more systematic basis across Europe
REGULATORY	In a number of countries the learning outcomes approach, as a part of the NQF approach, is now legally established and represents a requirement to providers
PROVIDERS INCLUDED AMONG STAKEHOLDERS	A key factor in implementing learning outcomes is broad participation allowing for dialogue between different stakeholders
TIGHT	This is not necessarily the case as the implementation of learning outcomes requires flexibility and to some extent decentralized decisions and interpretations

Source: Jens Bjornavold and Slava Pevec Grm, ETF

Table 1.3: The communication role and processes of NQFs in relation to formal recognition of qualifications

THE COMMUNICATION ROLE OF NQFs IN RELATION TO FORMAL RECOGNITION OF EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	
STARTS FROM PRESENT ET SYSTEM	NQFs can support the existing arrangements for recognition at international, national and institutional level by providing transparency and improved documentation on qualifications.
INCREMENTAL CHANGE	NQFs can facilitate recognition on a longer-term basis by strengthening mutual trust and thus removing obstacles to recognition. This can only happen on an incremental basis and over time.
TOOL FOR CHANGE	NQFs stand out as one tool among several supporting and facilitating recognition.
'BOTTOM-UP'	As important decisions on recognition will be taken at the level of local institutions, the impact of NQFs depend on their ability to strengthen transparency among end-users.
VOLUNTARY	As tools for communication, NQFs need to be trusted as high-quality information sources to be used and to play a role.
PROVIDERS HAVE CENTRAL ROLE	Providers play a key role in recognition decisions for further learning and will therefore play a key role in the application of NQFs for this purpose.
LOOSE	The loose character of the frameworks makes it possible to give priority to transparency issues across sectors.

Source: Jens Bjornavold and Slava Pevec Grm, ETF

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CHAPTER 2: LINKS BETWEEN NQFs AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is gaining importance across the globe. The economic crisis has caused a wave of displacement (dislocation) of workers who need to redirect their educational and work careers. The skills they have acquired in a specific sector might not be visible or acknowledged in other sectors where they might be useful. The knowledge and skills of individuals therefore needs to be identified, recognized and utilized in a more efficient manner. This recognition of skills can be better achieved through the use of learning outcomes based national qualification frameworks (NQFs). Their emphasis on achievements rather than pathways is important in opening up qualifications to non-formal and informal learning, and in providing comparability between programmes of non-formal and formal learning. A systematic approach to learning outcomes promoted through NQFs influencing standards, curricula and assessment, as well as teaching and learning forms, fits well into the ambition of validation.

'In their most basic sense NQFs can be understood as classifiers specifying the relationship – horizontally and vertically – between different qualifications' (Bjornåvold and Coles, 2010). The qualification framework acts as a 'lighthouse' or beacon that permits individuals to understand their competences within a system of qualifications. By linking validation to NQFs, it is possible to place competences and knowledge acquired outside the formal system into an agreed (formalized) reference framework that can be understood by different sectors of the economy and society at large. NQFs are becoming important tools for educational reforms across the globe (CEDEFOP, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Singh and Duvekot, 2013; UNESCO-UIL, 2014, 2015) and in many cases, these reforms include arrangements for validation.

While the link between NQFs and validation is gaining momentum, it is necessary to understand in what way these links are actually being developed and what are the main challenges in the implementation of those links. The present chapter brings together expertise from UNESCO-UIL and CEDEFOP in order to explore the links between validation and NQFs from a global perspective. Both organizations are well recognized in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The chapter draws on the latest evidence collected through the UNESCO-UIL's Global Observatory of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) (UNESCO-UIL, 2014) and the 2014 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, CEDEFOP and ICFI, 2014a, 2014b). Both constitute unique and rich sources of information on validation across the globe.

WHAT IS VALIDATION?

In Europe, the EU Recommendation of 2012 on validation of non-formal and informal learning defines validation as 'a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard'. According to UNESCO-UIL, 'validation is the confirmation by an officially approved body that learning outcomes or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed against reference points or standards through pre-defined assessment methodologies' (UNESCO-UIL, 2012). The Recommendation of 2012 makes it clear that validation includes four distinct phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (European Union, 2012). UNESCO-UIL approaches validation alongside recognition and accreditation. Recognition refers to 'a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences' (UNESCO-UIL, 2012). As with the European Union, UNESCO sees accreditation in terms of 'evaluation of the quality of an institution or a programme by an officially approved body', but UNESCO also emphasizes the fact that accreditation of a programme implies the award of qualifications, credit units or exemptions (ibid.). Accreditation normally applies to an institution or programme. The terms 'recognition' and 'validation' are used in relation to individual learners.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning cuts across several policy areas and disciplines. This means that the concept is used in different ways and that several terms are used similarly. Thus while in the European

Commission the phrase 'validation of non-formal and informal learning' (VNFIL) is used, UNESCO uses the phrase 'recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning'. Each of these phrases emphasizes specific aspects of the validation process, although all approaches have in common some sort of process of verification by an authorized body that certain learning outcomes have been acquired. These differences in definition are more of form than substance, since the four stages of validation referred to in the Recommendation of 2012 include most of the aspects that the UNESCO definition entails. CEDEFOP, like UNESCO, approaches validation in an integrated way, connecting it to the labour market as well as using it in relation to formal education. In addition, both organizations have highlighted the multidimensional purposes of validation: as a means to enter the formal qualifications and enter the formal education and training system, and as a means to make existing competences and learning visible. Both perspectives imply an integrative approach with the potential to draw together the various sectors (education, work and society) and purposes of personal, social, and economic development as well as separate, but linked, processes of formative and summative assessment.

This chapter focuses specifically on the concept of validation as the process that permits the confirmation by an authoritative body of learning outcomes acquired in a non-formal or informal learning process. It might be helpful to describe briefly the definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning. According to the UNESCO Guidelines on RVA (UNESCO-UIL, 2012):

- Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, is recognized by relevant national authorities, and leads to diplomas and qualifications. Formal learning is structured according to educational arrangements such as curricula, qualifications and teaching-learning requirements.
- Non-formal learning is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but it is more flexible. It usually takes place in community-based settings, the workplace and through the activities of civil society organizations. Through the recognition, validation and accreditation process, non-formal learning can also lead to qualifications and other forms of recognition.
- Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through the interests and activities of individuals. Through the recognition, validation and accreditation process, competences gained in informal learning can be made visible, and can contribute to qualifications and other forms of recognition. In some cases, the term 'experiential learning' is used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience.

The Council of the European Union, too defines formal, non-formal and informal in a similar way (Council of the European Union, 2004).

THE LINKS BETWEEN VALIDATION AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

VALIDATION IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Initiatives on validation of non-formal and informal learning are normally integrated into lifelong learning polices. Singh and Duvekot (2013) look at the lifelong learning approach at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level the lifelong learning approach calls for a more flexible and integrated system, as can be seen through the development of NQFs that respond to the growing need to recognize learning and knowledge that has been achieved outside the formal education sectors (see also Villalba, 2009). At the micro level recognition practices serve as bottom-up strategies that support individuals by providing the basis for goal-directed development and career planning involving tailor-made learning and ongoing documentation of their professional and personal development (see e.g. Rubenson, 2001).

The lifelong learning approach is not just about raising levels of qualifications in society, but also about widening the participation of those people previously excluded from learning opportunities (Singh and Duvekot, 2013). To this end, validation practices are seen as key to achieving reintegration into learning. In low-income and emerging economies lifelong learning is strongly connected to non-formal education rather than to formal education. Lifelong learning policies are in place to assist workers and minority groups working for low wages in small enterprises. In these contexts RVA has a great potential yet to be tapped. Already, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is regarded as a particularly important element of NQFs in several low-income and emerging economies, as a means of redressing past inequalities in the provision of access to formal education, training and employment opportunities (Singh, forthcoming).

In Jordan, Afghanistan, Syria and Namibia, alternative options for meeting the learning needs of people of different ages and backgrounds are made possible through the establishment of equivalencies, recognition of prior learning and skills-gap training (Singh, forthcoming). In Europe, most validation policy strategies are also framed within lifelong learning policies, although in several countries validation of non-formal and informal learning took place prior to the inclusion of lifelong learning policies. In Europe too, validation practices are in many cases targeted to individuals at risk of exclusion, or people excluded from education. In Portugal, for example, the New Opportunities Governmental Action Plan 2005–2010 was targeted at individuals with few or no qualifications. According to CNE (2011: 138), the number of adults enrolled at Centros de Novas Oportunidades (New Opportunities Centres) between 2000 and 2010 was around 1,316,955, or about 19 per cent of the workforce! These individuals were aiming to get a basic or a secondary certificate of education through validation of their non-formal and informal learning (Oliveira, 2014).

However, validation is not only about assessing and granting qualifications to people without any previous qualifications or with only low-level qualifications. In France there is particular interest in obtaining post-secondary qualifications for career purposes. Competency-based training and occupational standards schemes, such as the Estonian Professional Qualifications Scheme under Kutsekoda, and the Turkish national vocational qualifications system under VQA, have been introduced to provide a way of showing that people meet labour market requirements, when there is lack of confidence in the value of existing qualifications.

Singh and Duvekot (2013) indicate in their review of several strategies that legislative reforms and recognition policies raise the profile of validation of non-formal and informal learning, attract attention from private stakeholders, and facilitate linkages between qualification frameworks more generally. The 2014 validation inventory shows an increase from 2010 in the number of countries that have established a validation strategy (European Commission, CEDEFOP and ICFI, 2014b). This might be partly a result of the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning which called on EU member states to put in place validation arrangements by 2018 (CEDEFOP, 2014; Villalba et al., 2014). CEDEFOP (2015) also shows that for several countries the political process of developing validation arrangements is integrated into the process of developing NQFs, and further, into the process of referencing to the EQF. In some cases the NQF is seen as an opportunity to coordinate existing and to some extent fragmented arrangements, like in Austria or Italy, while in other countries it is an opportunity to start practically from scratch, such as in Greece or Croatia.

However, for several countries a prerequisite to establish procedures for validation is whether NQFs cover qualifications whose standards, curricula and assessment criteria are defined in terms of learning outcomes. An NQF without this deeper impact will face problems in facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning. The next section looks into how explicit learning outcome based standards accommodate non-formal and informal learning.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS

NQFs can thus provide the common reference standard for competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings. If validation is truly to become an alternative route to qualifications, the qualifications acquired through validation and those acquired by attending formal education should be based on the same or equivalent standards. Should they not depend on equal standards, this would undermine validation practices and create the problem of type A and type B certificates with a different 'currency' associated with them.

In order for validation to be based on equivalent standards, it is necessary that qualifications are described in

terms of learning outcomes. These means that it is what the individual knows and is able to do at the end of the learning process that counts. However, in many instances, qualifications are based on a combination of outcome-based standards (such as learning outcomes) and input-based standards (such as hours of training). This poses difficulties in establishing validation arrangements that will apply in these different contexts. Outcome based qualifications that are structured in units or modules and credit schemes can moreover facilitate the partial recognition of individuals who are not fully qualified, and support further training.

Singh and Duvekot (2013) have differentiated five categories of approaches used to establish the reference standards for validation. They categorize countries according to their main approach to standards, although in reality, within the same country, different approaches might be used depending on the sector in question. They maintain that recognition of learning outcomes and competences can be based on:

- standards defined in the comprehensive NQFs
- education and training curricula that can be directly linked to a nationally established qualification, not organized into a framework
- competence frameworks specific to work (occupational standards)
- NQFs specific to the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector
- standards for non-formal basic education for adults and young people.

Given the diverse contexts in different countries, this categorization is a mix of NQF types (comprehensive or TVET) and standard types (education and training standards, occupational standards or curricula). It does not pretend to create discrete categories; rather, it identifies elements which interact within an overall qualifications system. A comprehensive framework can contain both occupational and educational standards, and a framework can also link validation practices to curricula, as can be seen in several countries.

A majority of the countries in Europe, the 2014 inventory shows, relate validation practices to NQFs. There were twenty countries, compared with twelve in 2010, that had explicit links between validation arrangements and the acquisition of formal qualifications covered in their NQFs. In the remaining EU countries, the link between NQF and validation is being discussed. In France, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is directly linked to formal qualifications, as validation of acquired experience (VAE) specifically aims at the award of an official formal qualification (certification). The National Qualifications Directory or RNCP, which was established by law in 2002 and integrates the national repository of skills descriptions (ROME), is the basis for the French NQF (Duchemin, 2014). However, in some countries the NQFs do not cover all educational levels but only some specific qualifications, such as in the Czech Republic where the NQF is focused on TVET.

The Academic Credit Bank System in the Republic of Korea is an example of the second category: it identifies individual learning outcomes and competences based on education and training curricula that can be directly linked to a nationally established qualification. This 'bank' allows a citizen to receive accreditation for all learning outcomes, whether based on formal, non-formal or informal learning experiences. However, the Republic of Korea is developing a Korean skills framework in order to make the accreditation easier. In a similar way, several EU countries that are developing NQFs, such as Sweden, have possibilities for validation directly linked to existing formal qualifications.

There are also several countries in which the reference standards will relate to competence frameworks specific to work (occupational standards). In Mexico, for example, the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER) has developed and is responsible for a National System of Competence Standards (NSCS). CONOCER labour competence certificates are equivalent to full or partial formal programmes, at technical and/or professional levels of the national education system. Similarly, in Malta, the current development of a Sector Skills Committee and Sector Skills Units will be a significant step in relation to establishing validation processes in relation to occupational standards (Sanderson, 2014).

For the fourth category, Namibia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, and Trinidad and Tobago have either developed or are in the process of developing an NQF in the TVET sector. Given that the harmonization of education and training qualifications has still not been achieved and many of these countries, particularly in Africa, have yet to transcend the colonial legacy in their educational systems, adopting a pragmatic stance with respect to the focus on skills development and NQFs can be a useful strategy. Furthermore, as Allais (2010) points out, national

vocational qualification frameworks (NVQFs) are less contentious, given their focus on outcomes and competence-based training, than are frameworks that try to embody the disciplinary and content-driven approaches of general and university education programmes. National vocational qualifications are not associated with a particular provider, facilitating wider recognition than thousands of provider-based qualifications in general and higher education.

Several low-income countries and emerging economies experience the absence of an NQF as a limiting factor in developing competence frameworks for measuring learner progression. They are persuading education providers to recognize learning outcomes in the context of non-formal education while developing equivalency frameworks aligned to the formal education system, to assess non-formal education at the basic level (Singh and Duvekot, 2013). Afghanistan, Bhutan, Syria and Jordan are some examples of this.

The great advantage of NQFs is that they provide a reference point for non-formally and informally acquired competences that otherwise would remain difficult to anchor into an existing, recognized information system. However, this can be achieved not by NQFs as such but by the extent to which NQFs contain and act as a beacon for learning outcomes based standards, curricula and assessment criteria as well as teaching and training forms. If the learning outcomes are only found at the level of the NQF, its impact on validation might be limited. It is also important that stakeholders understand and buy into the issue of validation. The next section explores stakeholder involvement in validation of non-formal and informal learning.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The 2012 EU Recommendation asks Member States to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the development of validation arrangements and that coordination among them is promoted. The UNESCO guidelines also call for 'ensuring all stake-holders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities' (UNESCO-UIL, 2012). UNESCO-UIL highlights four models of implementation and coordination of the links between validation and NQFs: (1) systems of shared responsibility, (2) NQFs coordinating validation, (3) shared systems dominated by industry-based processes, and (4) systems driven by stakeholders from the adult learning sector. These models are not exclusive of each other.

In the first model, which is typical for Europe, the tendency is to divide recognition procedures between levels of state authority, private stakeholders, community organizations and agencies of civil society in accordance with laws, regulations and guidelines. In the second model, NQFs directly and explicitly coordinate recognition and validation. Australia, New Zealand, Namibia, South Africa and Mauritius have all subsumed RVA within legislation regulating NQF and their regulatory bodies. In Finland, arriving at a broad consensus on RVA at the level of policy development has been critical, particularly with respect to the incorporation of RVA into the NQF. Several working groups for different qualification levels have worked to promote this approach. In New Zealand, the standards for qualifications in relevant schools and in tertiary education dominate the discourse on recognition and validation. (See also Singh, forthcoming.)

In the third model, it is industry that is the driving force in a shared system. Although promoted and regulated by government, the National System of Competency Standards (NSCS) in Mexico is driven by employers and workers. In Australia, validation is offered by registered training organizations (RTOs) and state training authorities in accordance with the standards laid out in the Australian Quality Training Framework. The RTOs are also responsible for assessments that lead to qualifications (DEEWR, 2008). Validation processes for workers are tailored to their needs and to the needs of the enterprises, and while partnerships with educational institutions are not excluded from these validation processes, they are not central to them. Nevertheless, the Australian government takes the lead role in ensuring that the system of recognition functions reliably and transparently.

In the fourth model, community adult educators and umbrella organizations including adult education associations are involved in validation and more recently in finding an anchor in the NQF.

The 2014 inventory shows that in most European countries the responsibility on validation is shared across ministries, or national authorities, making validation in most instances a transversal issue. The issue of validation, however, remains driven by public organizations in charge of formal education, mainly related to VET. Public employment services and adult education are also important drivers of validation arrangements in some European countries. Coordination with the private sector and with

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil organizations is still limited in the majority of countries. This does not mean that private and civil-sector organizations are not involved on validation practices. In several countries, employers and trade unions play an important role in terms of policy and practice. In Spain, the private sector (including trade unions and business organizations) takes part in the development of legislation through representation in the General Council for VET, the body that acts as an advisor for the development of legislation. Private-sector bodies are also responsible for providing guidance to individuals regarding the validation calls and the process. In addition, although in Spain validation is mainly led by public administration, trade unions and business organizations can request official announcements (calls for application) for validation for particular sectoral needs.

The establishment of NQFs can serve as a catalyst for the determination of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. It can also constitute a forum for discussion by different stakeholders of concerns related to the different nature of the learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings. Mexico has identified joint effort and consensus among employers, workers, educators and government officials as the single most important factor for the success of RVA in workforce development. New Zealand highlights how industry training bodies, registered training organizations and government can work together with learning institutions to promote RVA constructively. Other good examples of shared responsibility between stakeholders come from the Netherlands, where a quality code for applying RVA to an NQF is governed by the Ministry of Education and the social partners (Singh and Duvekot, 2013).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

In addition to providing a reference point and a forum for the engagement of relevant stakeholders, NQFs can constitute an extra source for quality assurance of validation processes. The inclusion of non-formally acquired qualifications into the NQF requires that these qualifications follow the same or similar processes to ensure quality. Several countries in Europe have made it mandatory that there be an explanation how any qualification that is included in the NQF can be acquired through non-formal or informal means. In Europe, this has meant that validation systems normally lack a specific quality assurance mechanism, but rely on the existing quality assurance of the formal system. There is often an element of trust in existing qualifications in Europe that has been developed through collective agreements between stakeholders from the world of work and the world of education.

In other parts of the world, however, this might not be the case. In the United States of America, there is a proposal to create a national competence-based framework for US post-secondary education that will include certificate-level workforce education and training. The purpose is to ensure that credits acquired by currently non-credit-bearing workforce education and training, achieved in part or full through RVA, are of the same quality and have the same standing as qualifications achieved as a consequence of formal education and training (Ganzglass et al., 2011). In other countries, the issuance of guidelines serves as a quality assurance mechanism. In South Africa, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has issued guidelines for the implementation of recognition and validation. The quality of assessment with the NQF relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency (SAQA, 2012).

In many low and middle-income countries governments plan to promote quality assurance by creating synergies between formal and non-formal education. Philippines incorporates the non-formal basic education programme into the Philippines Qualifications Framework by creating synergies between formal and non-formal education. One of the aims of the Thai NQF is to serve as a reference to the learner/worker in the workplace or other learning settings. Individuals obtaining certificates through these programmes will have the same rights and qualifications as those who obtain certification in the formal schooling system. Under the Mauritian Qualifications Authority (MQA) Act 2001, training providers have to seek accreditation for their programmes prior to delivery. Accreditation of programmes enables the MQA to set benchmarks for quality management arrangements in education and training for the TVET sector (see Singh, forthcoming).

In short, there appear to be two ways of providing quality assurance in this context. In the first case non-formal qualifications are brought into the framework and they are submitted to a common quality assurance regime. In the second case, quality assurance focuses on improving quality assurance procedures themselves, namely through processes of accreditation of non-formal programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of developing validation and recognition arrangements can be closely interlinked with the

process of developing NQFs. The NQF can provide the necessary reference point to make visible non-formal and informally acquired competences. However, this requires that qualifications are expressed in terms of learning outcomes which act as a beacon for learning outcomes-based standards, curricula and assessment criteria, as well as teaching and learning forms; and that the requirements for obtaining them are not attached to a particular set of input-based standards (such as the duration or place of delivery of a course). In addition, in order for it to be feasible for qualifications to be acquired through non-formal and informal learning, the assessment systems need to remain flexible in order to accept less traditional students.

The NQF process also provides an excellent opportunity for creating a forum for discussion of how to integrate and understand the role of knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal system. Validation seems to remain an issue attached to public educational authorities in Europe. In low and middle-income countries, validation is related to the TVET subframework, particularly because of the focus on competency-based training and occupational standards. Providing skills to meet the labour market and developing a productive economy are important issues in these countries. This tendency also seems to be increasing in Europe, where public employment services, NGOs and employers are becoming more and more interested in the issue. Coordination among stakeholders, and especially among different sectors, still remains limited, however. Much more effort needs to be made to create coherent, integrated validation systems and avoid fragmentation. In this process the NQF can provide a stepping stone.

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CHAPTER 3: NQF LINKS WITH INFORMAL SECTOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

The informal sector makes the bulk of the worlds' working population. The informal economy involves earning a livelihood in branches of the economy, which are normally outside the protection of the state and offer virtually no security. It is estimated that around 500 million people in the world live and work in the informal sector (Ishengoma and Kappel 2007). Informal sector wage employment is less than self-employment, which accounts for 70 per cent of informal sector jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 60 per cent in countries in other regions. According to an OECD report (2009), during the 1990s the share of informal sector employment in total non-agricultural employment was 57 per cent in Latin America, about 70 per cent in South and South-East Asia, and 43 per cent in North Africa. In the transition countries (Central European and former Soviet Union countries) 24 per cent of the labour force works in the informal sector (OECD, 2009).

Several arguments have been put forward for reassessing informal sector employment. According to Fields (2005) the competitive labour market hypothesis suggests that informal sector employment is likely to continue to be important. It can even offer better working conditions than does some formal employment, and because of the lack of good formal sector jobs, it is sometimes chosen voluntarily by some workers. The syndrome of jobless growth in the formal segments of the economy leaves countries with little choice but to make efforts to raise the potential of the informal economy. Sodhi (2014) highlights the importance of providing training to the workers in the informal sector. Wallenborn (2010) sees this importance in relation to the role of skills development in sustainable development and the need to adapt appropriate technologies; he also notes that those countries with emerging industries and modern craft sectors require a kind of human capital and vocational skills that cannot be obtained solely through formal education, but also calls for hands-on non-formal and informal learning.

Hart (1973), the International Labour Organization (ILO) (1972) and King (1996) draw attention to the issue of the heterogeneity of the people living and working in the informal sector. The ILO's definition of the informal economy comprises three categories: (i) small or micro-enterprises, (ii) household-based activities carried out by family members, and (iii) independent service activities including domestic helpers, cleaners, street vendors, shoe-shiners and so on (ILO, 1998, p. 168). The informal sector is also sometimes divided into the 'lower' and the 'upper' end (Krishna, 2005), with the lower end involved in subsistence activities and in low-productivity work, and the upper end consisting of a small but growing number of more dynamic productive informal micro-enterprises and entrepreneurs linked to larger markets, and utilizing 'modern' technology, for example in internet cafés or mobile phone call-centres. Different definitions of the informal sector are used in different countries. In India, informal sector enterprises are considered to be a subset of the unorganized sector 'comprising in addition to the unincorporated proprietary and partnership enterprises … enterprises run by cooperative societies, trust, private and limited companies' (National Accounts Statistics, NAS Sharma and Chitkara nd).

While only a small percentage of informal-sector workers have received formal training (2.5 per cent of the informal sector workers in India: see NCEUS, 2005) employment-relevant competences are an important concept in the informal sector (Overwien, 1997). These include both the acquisition of technical skills and abilities that apply on the level of the individual enterprise and are related in varying ways to the production process in an enterprise, and the acquisition of organization, small-entrepreneurial and social competences that are external to the production process in an enterprise. For waged workers in the informal sector, frequently manual and technical skills and the ability to make contact and communicate with others are sufficient. In the case of entrepreneurs a broader package of skills is required (Overwien, 1997). Burckhardt (1997) divides social competences into two spheres: 'inwards, directed towards individual personality', and 'outwards, directed towards [the] other'. Together with approaches to the promotion and improvement of learning at work, learning within the social environment, which is useful in the work process, should be also be given added emphasis (Sodhi, 2014).

Policy-makers are now much more aware that the supply of training outside the formal economy can be the

main pathway for skills acquisition and utilization. They are aware of the scale of such training, compared with formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and are attracted by the sheer size of the youth population that is involved in acquiring skills in this part of the private sector (King, 2011, p. 123). Concepts of further education and training need to be developed that take account of informal learning, recognize competences that have already been acquired, and encompass social and labour market integration (Overwien, 2011). Workers who have learned skills in these ways need to be certified and brought into the mainstream of jobs, and any training endeavour has to integrate them fully in the formal regulated system of qualifications.

Evidence from the country case studies of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-UIL) for the first edition of the global inventory of national qualifications frameworks (UNESCO-UIL, 2014) and the UIL Observatory of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Non-formal and Informal Learning (UNESCO-UIL, 2015) show that NQFs based on learning outcomes, competencies and credits provide an opportunity for the certification of human resources in various domains of the informal sector, including the agricultural sector.

NQFs based on learning outcomes can be used to structure programmes and training pathways leading to the acquisition of qualifications in a more flexible manner, and to improve the general conditions of lifelong learning. The learning outcomes approach means that NQFs are capable of providing easier recognition of learning outcomes and competencies achieved by informal sectors in various environments, in formal, non-formal or informal learning contexts.

Similarly, recognition and validation of competences and learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning assists in rendering visible the knowledge, skills and competences acquired within the informal sector, based on identification and evaluation of such knowledge, skills and competences. In this way, the aim is to enable better integration into the labour market or into further education and training. While NQFs facilitate recognition of prior learning (RPL), the success of NQFs will depend on the integration of learning outcomes from informal sectors into the framework, so that the prior learning can be mapped against outcomes-based qualifications. The processes of prior learning are complementary to every qualifications system that aims to promote an approach to lifelong learning.

The informal sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) cannot be ignored. Rather, the informal sector with its productive skills has potential which needs to be made visible. The creativity and the competences of individuals could be utilized for social development, in both urban and rural areas. Thus, it is important for the individual and equally for society and the economy to identify and document available competences that have not been formally recognized. Apart from having an intrinsic value for the individual, recognition and validation could encourage them to obtain further qualifications. The learning that is recognized could be transferable (to the formal sector), especially at the interfaces between the informal sector and the formal economy. RPL could reduce the amount of time taken to obtain certification, so that individuals need to spend less time away from the workplace. By formally recognizing workers' skills, recognition could be a means for gaining opportunities for further learning a nd for enhancing employability and labour mobility.

For the micro-enterprises in the informal sector, a better recognition of workers' skills could be a way to overcome skills shortages and match skills demand with supply. It could also provide an opportunity to improve the overall skill level and work performance of an industry operating in the informal sector. The nation could have a better-certified skilled workforce, an empowered population, mobile and multi-skilled people which could attract investors to the micro-enterprise sector in the global village. The skill level and educational attainment of the workforce help to determine their productivity and income level, and contribute to their adaptability in a changing environment. Recognition is also important for addressing the problem of individuals who leave school early. Recognition through certification could be granted even to those who exit prematurely from the secondary school cycle.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER

The objectives of this chapter are therefore to examine commonalities and differences in formalizing approaches and solutions linking NQFs to informal sector skills development in different national contexts, especially in low and middle-income and emerging economies. The areas taken into account include:

- a regulated system of learning outcomes based qualifications
- opportunities for the recognition, validation and accreditation of outcomes from non-formal and informal learning
- support given by competent bodies with the involvement of the private sector
- incorporating existing informal sector skills initiatives into the NQF
- building bridges between the informal and formal sectors.

The chapter also arrives at key recommendations that take into account other drivers and levers which need to be put in place to make sustainable informal sector skills development and recognition happen.

A REGULATED SYSTEM OF LEARNING OUTCOMES BASED QUALIFICATIONS

Policy-makers in several countries with a large informal sector are becoming increasingly aware of the insufficient recognition of existing skills and informal learning, which prevents labour mobility. Governments recognize that these shortcomings lead to a serious wastage of skills in the economy. As a result in many countries the NQF has been specifically designed to address some of these challenges in informal sector skills development.

In Gambia, for example, the Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF) aims first and foremost to target young people, employees, the self-employed and people working in the informal sector, as well as the long-term unemployed and illiterate people, from both urban and rural districts. GSQF will be a tool to help these target groups to graduate from public and private training providers and industry in as many occupations as possible with GSQF qualifications, and contribute to the economy of the country.

In India, where NCEUS estimated that in 2005 there were 395 million workers out of a workforce of 423 million belonging to the informal sector (NCEUS, 2009), the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) aims to develop training programmes that lead to qualifications for people in the informal sector. India's NSQF supports RPL processes. These processes help clarify the meaning of the qualifications and make visible the learning outcomes and competences that are necessary in order to achieve the qualifications. Given the low levels of general education in the population, the NSQF has organized RPL at the entry levels leading into levels 1 to 10 of the qualifications framework (Mehrotra, forthcoming).

In the Philippines, according to the National Statistics Office (NSO), around 2.8 million Filipinos, roughly 7 per cent of the population, are unemployed, while 8.5 million or 22.7 per cent of the working population are underemployed. The Philippine Qualifications Framework aims to address these problems, which are largely the result of a mismatch between the jobs on offer and the skills possessed by the workforce. Often people are underemployed in the sense that there is not enough paid work for them, rather than that they are doing work that does not make full use of their skills and abilities. In Uganda, the most important subsectors of the labour market are the informal economy and the agricultural sector. Some 70 per cent of the Ugandan workforce continues to work in agriculture. Employment in the non-agricultural informal sector (comprising mainly micro-enterprises, own-account workers and unpaid family workers) accounts for 18 per cent of total employment and 58 per cent of non-agricultural employment.

In Mexico, the recognition of labour competences for workforce development and employability is closely associated with the National System of Competency Standards (NSCS), which has been developed by the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER) and under which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is organized, regulated and implemented (García-Bullé, 2013).

In Bangladesh, where major government line ministries have now accepted the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (BTVQF) as a model for future development of qualifications, two prevocational levels have been established that cater to the underprivileged and low-educated groups in society who have not completed eight years of schooling.

In India the priorities of the government with the NSQF are to make qualifications uniform and comparable and do away with the differences in course content and entry

requirement, duration of vocational courses across institutions and states or union territories (UTs). This should make it easier to develop competencies that are useful in either waged or self-employment. A case in point is the 'certificate' course in plumbing (sometimes described as sanitary hardware fitting), which is offered in different places with a variety of durations and entry requirements (Mehrotra, 2015).

The NSQF will ensure a uniform system of skill standards set by employers so that its workforce gets quality VET opportunities that respond to the sector's wide-ranging and changing skill needs. More than 90 per cent of the labour force is employed in the 'unorganized sector': that is, in jobs which do not offer social security and the other benefits associated with employment in the 'organized sector'. India's Twelfth Five-Year Plan projects that about 25 million new entrants will join the labour force in the next five years (India Planning Commission, 2013, p. 140).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF OUTCOMES FROM NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There is growing attention being paid to the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in the informal sector to promote decent employment and social equality. The lack of formal qualifications and certification makes workers vulnerable. They earn lower wages, their productivity is low, they are exploited by their employers, and they are often disadvantaged in gaining access to formal education.

An important area in the link between NQF and informal sector skills development is the approaches to the validation and accreditation of learning outcomes and competences. A study in six African countries – Ghana, Mauritius, Seychelles, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa – in preparation for the ADEA Triennale in 2012 highlighted the role of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning as a means of facilitating participation of informal sector workers in formal education and training, and promoting their employability and mobility (Steenekamp and Singh, 2012). There is also direct evidence from this and other studies (Singh and Duvekot, 2013) of the growing appreciation of the role that the NQF plays as an enabler for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In Mauritius, the significant proportion of the labour force who built their careers through apprenticeships without having undergone any academic or formal training are catered for under the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQF) through mechanisms for RPL.

In Uganda, the Business, Technical and Vocational Training (BTVET) Act of 2008 makes provision for the assessment of prior learning (APL) against the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF). Learners from training centres who have acquired skills in the informal economy will have the chance to rejoin the formal system. In order to meet the needs of informal sector learners, occupational qualifications programmes on the UVQF are characterized by competence-based education and training (CBET) and flexible learning modules delivered in the form of assessment and training packages (ATPs).

In Ghana, validation of informal and non-formal learning is a key component of the NQF. As a first step, the lowest two levels of qualification, Proficiency I and II, recognize competences obtained via traditional informal apprenticeships, an important means of training in Ghana.

In Bangladesh a project on RPL has been undertaken with the ILO (Arthur, 2009). Currently about 80 per cent of new formal apprentices are enrolled for a National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) qualification with the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB); 90,000 informal apprentices are also registered for a qualification. These are people who have been assessed as competent in one or more standard units (making up a full qualification) through an RPL process, and who have the option in future to complete a full qualification (ILO, 2013). In Bangladesh, barriers are being removed for informal-sector skilled workers who want to migrate overseas, or who want to move back to Bangladesh and have the skills they gained overseas recognized. A number of host countries now recognize NTVQF qualifications. The processes of workplace learning, recognition of learning and certification can be repeated in several cycles until after some years the skilled worker is able to move into a supervisory role. This 'ladderization' system will be based on modularized competency-based training within the NTVQF.

In Hong Kong the major purpose of setting up an RPL mechanism under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) is to enable workers of various backgrounds to receive formal recognition of the knowledge,

skills and experience they have already acquired. However, many employers and trade unions take the view that if workers have no intention to pursue further education, there is no need to implement RPL. Whether or not to implement RPL and how quickly to implement it are matters to be determined solely by the industries concerned. If industrial training advisory committees (ITACs) think that the implementation of RPL will do their industries more harm than good, they may opt not to implement it, or to hold discussions before proceeding with the implementation.

In Gambia, the GSQF benefits people in the informal sector. RPL is used for unemployed people seeking recognition for past work or achievement, either for entry into courses or for career development purposes; people who wish to 'upgrade' an existing qualification into a GSQ (for instance, by combining a previous certificate with work experience); people who have left a programme before completion, and who wish to count that learning towards another award; and people with overseas qualifications who wish to gain a GSQ or credit towards one.

In the eighteen years since the creation of the South African Qualifications Framework (SAQF), RPL has become a reality for over 500,000 people who have either gone through or are currently engaged in an RPL process. One of the main target groups is workers who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed, who may have worked for many years but were prevented from gaining qualifications because of restrictive past policies. The greatest number of RPL candidates fall between NQF levels 2 and 4, and do not, in the main, possess a school-leaving certificate.

In Sri Lanka RPL is defined as the process whereby competencies acquired through industry practice or previous training are recognized, allowing them to be put towards a certificate or credits. RPL is an important instrument for promoting NVQF-aligned certification, particularly in occupations for which demand is high. So far, the largest number of certificates issued through RPL has been awarded to beauticians, hairdressers and bakers. RPL is also especially important for people who want to work or study in other countries. There is no difference between certifications resulting from accredited courses and those achieved through RPL. However, the award of a full qualification through RPL is limited to NVQF level 4.

SECTORAL APPROACHES TO THE RECOGNITION OF OUTCOMES OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

There has been an increase in the number of sectoral approaches to the recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. In India's agrarian informal sector the Agriculture Skill Council of India and systems set up by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) have gathered master trainers and assessors together to form a panel, and trained them in supporting quality measures in the system. Certification is being linked with various financial support incentives to increase the acceptability of certified professionals in industry. To begin with certification at the lower levels is being emphasized. Emphasizing community or entrepreneurial-based routes rather than employer-based routes via NSQF certification has also been proposed (Salooja et al., 2015).

In the construction sector, which is the largest sector in India's unorganized economy and third biggest employer after agriculture and manufacturing, employing about 44 million workers and contributing 6.67 per cent of GDP, about 86 per cent of workers have marginal skills or no skills, and as a result the productivity level is low. The sector skills councils (SSCs) are currently in the processing of defining and classifying skills standards for the common trades such as mason, welder and carpenter, based on industry and client requirements. According to Saxena (2015), it makes more sense to the use the term 'mapping of prior competences' rather than 'recognition of prior learning', as RPL is about learning while MPC is about competence – which means performance. The main aim of MPC is to relate the worker's skill to a sector standard which is universally acceptable in the industry.

The sectoral approach to informal sector skills development is also reflected through the GSQF, which is adapted to the Gambian context where only half the workforce is literate. The Framework caters for this informal sector workforce in three ways. First, the foundation level acts as a stepping stone into entry-level occupational qualifications for early school leavers, adults and trainees with a non-formal training background. Second, unit standards, particularly at levels 1 to 3, are assessed through practical demonstrations rather than written assignments. And finally, skills standards include key skills such as numeracy, literacy, English communication and ICT skills, practical occupational and business skills, and life skills. These skills are considered critical for eradicating poverty and promoting economic growth in Gambia.

SUPPORT GIVEN BY COMPETENT BODIES WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In several low-income and emerging economies informal sector skills development is benefiting from the increasing role played by industry and industry associations at the national level in bringing about necessary awareness on the importance of skill development and implementing the various strategies for skill development under NQF.
In several countries, SSCs are now driving skills development in the informal economy. In India, the private sector, led by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), established in 2009, has a mandate to skill 150 million people by 2022 in twenty high growth sectors identified by the Government of India. The NSDC is an umbrella body coordinating the SSCs, which are developing qualification packs (QPs) for different job roles. These contain national occupation standards (NOSs) or competency standards. In India, a paradigm shift from input-based education to learning outcome oriented education is taking place. One of the initiatives under the NSQF is to develop outcome-oriented curricula and courseware with the involvement of professionals from industry and curriculum development experts.

In the public sector, training can be expanded through strengthening non-formal schemes that are already in existence at the local level. These schemes will succeed only when courses promote learners' motivation and take initiatives to make explicit the benefits of learning (Marsick et al., 1999). Local associations of informal sector workers could create a database of existing skills by undertaking skill mapping and assessing training needs on the basis of existing as well as potential industrial and employment trends.

INCORPORATING EXISTING INFORMAL SECTOR SKILLS INITIATIVES INTO THE NQF

In Pakistan the NQF is designed to accommodate all kinds of TVET, whether formal, non-formal or informal, and from both public and private providers. This is because Pakistan has an array of national and local training institutions and providers offering several short-term (three- month to one-year) courses, for which the entry requirement is a Class 8 pass. However, to incorporate these diverse learning initiatives into the NQF/TVET will be a challenge. One way of addressing this challenge is the accreditation of training providers.

Bangladesh is showing the way to accommodate and accredit training providers. Competency-based courses are registered with the BTEB. Approximately 50 per cent of training providers are registered with the BTEB and are delivering recognized competency-based training and assessment. Recently the BTEB also accepted a competency-based qualification for the training of trainers. As a result, industry-based trainers for the first time outnumber TVET institution-based trainers. The BTEB is also implementing the Skills Quality Assurance System, and reports to the NSDC twice yearly. Private training providers who wish to issue nationally recognized qualifications under the NTVQF must be registered and accredited under the new Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System (ILO, 2013).

In India the NSQF levels are linked to various skills development initiatives such as Modular Employable Skills (MES). This competency-based training pathway under the Skill Development Initiative (SDI) of the Ministry of Labour and Employment has been designed for training workers and master craftspeople to upgrade their skills and adapt to new technological changes. MES offers many elements which are appropriate to the development of training for the informal sector. Workers are trained in formal institutions, or informally trained workers can take up a certification examination. There is a proposal by the Directorate General of Employment and Training (Directorate General of Education and Training (DGE&T)) to offer facilities for workers to go through a 'finishing school' before taking such an examination. Under MES, recognition and validation activities that recognize prior learning and existing skills, and customize further learning, are a direct bridge between formal and informal learning because the module descriptors are included in the NSQF (DGE&T, 2008).

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE EXISTING TRADITIONAL APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

Country case studies of NQFs show that countries are making attempts to formalize the apprenticeship model of training practised in the informal sector. While the apprenticeship model is an important system of knowledge transfer, there are several criticisms levelled at the traditional apprenticeship system. These include gender bias, screening out of the poorest households, perpetuation of traditional technologies, and lack of standards for quality assurance (Ahadzie, 2009). Examples from a seven-country survey conducted by the Agence Française de

Developpement (Walter and Filipiak, 2007) highlight the structuring of established practices of informal apprenticeship through the progressive introduction of interaction between practice and theory. Cameroon's Intersectoral Craftworkers Association (Interprofessionel des Artisans – GIPA) is currently structuring on-the-job training into progressive modules, which entail regular assessments and lead to a level of vocational qualification. Benin is converting the traditional apprenticeship system into a regulated dual training system (leading to a vocational skills certificate and occupational skills certificate). As Walter and Filipiak (2007) point out, these changes retain the best aspects of learning while doing, while at the same time progressively incorporating a cognitive dimension of better understanding and improving what is learned by doing.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN THE INFORMAL AND FORMAL SECTOR

Several country studies show that laws and ordinances have been introduced to increase permeability of the education and training systems in conjunction with the establishment of NQFs. In Mexico, the conception and development of Agreement 286 of the Ministry of Education (issued on 30 October 2000) (and associated Agreements) is designed to give workers and learners access to all levels of the education system by offering an alternative pathway to that provided by the formal system. In accordance with Agreement 286 CONOCER promotes the development of certifiable standards for recognizing the competences of employers and workers, accredits the assessment and certifications unit standards, and issues official 'labour competence certificates'. This Act also allows equivalences of competence certificates with credits of formal education programmes at the vocational and professional levels (García-Bullé, 2013).

In Ethiopia, strengthening progression pathways between non-formal post-primary education and the TVET qualifications framework is one of the key objectives of the Ethiopian NQF. The Federal Ministry of Education developed the Non-formal TVET Implementation Framework to facilitate this. In Kenya, progression pathways from primary to higher education in the TVET sector are being promoted through the TVET Curriculum Development Framework (TCDF), which was established in 2010 according to Kenya Qualifications Framework (KQF) occupational standards. This is helping to link youth polytechnics (YP) and vocational and industrial training (VIT) qualifications to formal TVET provision. In Nepal a fundamental problem is the lack of permeability between education and training. Fifty per cent of Nepalese children do not complete primary school. However, now attempts are being made under to link primary school to the TVET certifications framework.

NOT FORGETTING THE QUALITY OF FORMAL EDUCATION FOR INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS

King (2011) points to studies that show that the low prior levels of education and low quality of formal education of poor segments negatively impact on their access to and acquisition of technical and vocational skills, as well as productivity and higher incomes. In a similar vein, Adams (2011) shows that TVET pays off to a higher extent when graduates are placed in jobs that can use their skills. For disadvantaged persons TVET is more effective when it builds on good-quality basic education. In Thailand, the vocational certificate curriculum (equivalent to lower secondary education in the formal school system) and the non-formal occupational certificate curriculum are helping learners to complete secondary school by combining academic and vocational education and at the same time serving the interests of various groups of people. In India too, the necessary convergence between school education and the skill development schemes run by the various institutions and departments under different ministries is helping to bring about a radical change in skill training, assessment and certification.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The overarching recommendation for informal sector skills development is that it should take a lifelong learning perspective. This means setting up effective mechanisms for assessing all types of learning, such as top-down learning outcomes based NQFs and competency frameworks as well as bottom-up mechanisms for recognition, validation and accreditation of learning outcomes and competences.

Emphasizing the importance of qualifications for both competitiveness and poverty reduction: The enlarged view of informal sector skills development should also emphasize the social dimensions of skills development. The fundamental question to ask is how qualifications can contribute to both poverty reduction and economic competitiveness, in addition to fulfilling educational tasks and objectives simultaneously (Wallenborn, 2007).

Improving the quality of training: To break the cycle of disadvantage, the poor in the informal sector need to access quality training and receive official certification for training received and completed. Financing of provision should link to efficiency, attainment of minimum training standards, and outputs, and offer incentives for performing well. Financing should not only focus on technical content, but adopt a holistic approach which includes post-training support and follow-up programmes (King, 2011).

Recognizing the limitations of conventional training programmes: Usually workers in the informal sector need different pedagogical techniques which reflect what the trainees can handle. For example, the trainers must be actual practitioners, possibly from the same socio-economic context as the trainees. They have to train in the local language, the ratio of trainees to trainers cannot be as high as in the formal sector, and training has to be conducted through hands-on demonstrations.

Building a dynamic enabling environment: The productive use of education and skills in the workplace depends on there being a dynamic or enabling environment.. In order to create decent employment in specific productive subsectors it is necessary to strengthen linkages between the informal economy and the larger market systems to transfer technologies, ensure access to credit and markets, and facilitate the dissemination of information. Equally important are linkages to the local economy (markets, infrastructures, job opportunities and /or increasing self-employment opportunities) (Wallenborn, 2007).

Monitoring quality indicators of TVET for the outcomes of informal sector skills development: Evaluation criteria for design, planning, implementation and the delivery of training need to be measured in socio-economic terms, for example higher productivity levels, bigger markets and new employment opportunities. Tracer studies can show whether training and skills development for the informal sector is producing better business perspectives. The overall indictors must be related first to a better socio-economic performance and second to the improvement of individual characteristics (Wallenborn, 2010).

The outcomes-based approach to informal sector skills development should ensure that the employability created is manifested in measurable and tangible waged or self-employment of trainees. An online national register of skilled persons and their current employment is needed at the national level. This would provide a national database to employers and other stakeholders, and facilitate a transparent monitoring system.

Developing an understanding of the benefits and operational aspects of NQFs amongst the various stakeholders implementing the skill development programmes: A clear understanding of what an NQF is (for example, it is a bridging device between different sectors or levels of education and training) and what it does (for example, it is a quality assurance mechanism which can also lead to greater transparency in the education and training sector) would help encourage the greater participation of people and effective implementation of skill development programmes under NQFs.

CONCLUSION

NQFs in themselves do not make informal sector skills development and recognition a reality. However, the evidence shows that in terms of both national policy and institutional developments, developing NQFs means that the issue of informal skills development is much more visible and transparent.

There is clear added value in linking NQFs to informal sector skills development. Often the benefits are implicit. Training centres, schools, local government and regions all undergo a process of change. Curricula and training plans are formalized. There is an opportunity to reflect in a new way on the value and attractiveness of education and training for the informal sector. There is new stimulus for public-private partnerships. Linking informal sector skills development to NQF and recognition and certification is not merely a technical integration but rather emphasizes the importance of flexible approaches that facilitate lifelong learning and career paths for individuals, and permeability at the system level.

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CHAPTER 4: NQFs AND REFORMING QUALIFICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The European Training Foundation's (ETF) contribution to the first edition of the Global Inventory (CEDEFOP et al., 2013) examined how its partner countries, which are all transition economies, were developing, implementing and using their national qualification frameworks (NQFs). We concluded that all the countries concerned were developing NQFs as reform tools, to produce more labour market relevant and lifelong learning (LLL) qualifications, based on learning outcomes. Progress in implementation was variable across the countries, naturally – implementation is always more difficult than design – but NQFs were accepted by all countries as key elements in a modernized LLL education and training system. At the same time, we found that no two NQFs are the same, in spite of similarities of design and many shared aims. National context and so the solutions adopted are –¬ and indeed must be – specific to the country.

An NQF – and critically its outcomes basis – implies major reform of a qualifications system and its environment: that is, the qualifications themselves, schools and provision, curricula, assessment, quality assurance systems and governance, for example. And so in this chapter we look in more depth than we did in the first edition at what qualifications frameworks are for – that is, producing better qualifications.

Since 2013 most of ETF's partner countries have moved on from designing an NQF to begin implementation. Most have now legislated for their NQFs. Others have developed implementation plans and begun piloting. Another group are in the vanguard and have established dedicated authorities or agencies, or designated government departments to lead change, and have begun to populate their frameworks with new outcomes-based qualifications. These are significant advances, albeit as we said change is uneven across countries, and within countries is often patchy.

This chapter identifies reform processes under way in the countries with which ETF works on vocational education and training (VET) qualifications system reform. We look at how countries are defining, developing and using qualifications, and analyse the anatomy of a qualifications system. Specifically, we look at whether those new or reformed qualifications are defined by learning outcomes; at the use of occupational standards as the platform for qualifications design and development; at NQF-driven quality assurance systems and measures; at how governments are engaging with their social partners, again within the environment created by NQFs; at institutional roles; and at the early impacts on curricula and assessment.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS, FRAMEWORKS OF QUALIFICATIONS

In ETF partner countries, frameworks and qualifications reforms, or new qualifications, are inextricably linked: no partner country is reforming its qualifications to produce new outcomes-based qualifications without using an NQF as the principal tool to effect this change.

Countries are not doing so unthinkingly. They see that qualifications frameworks, in particular overarching and comprehensive frameworks (that is, those covering all types and levels of qualification), offer two things they need. First, they are based on learning outcomes so they are oriented to LLL. Second, frameworks are identifiable entry points to a national system, and so make international comparison easier. Let us look at why these two characteristics offer such appeal.

It is worth reiterating here the origin of this drive to NQFs. ETF partner countries have their reform needs, are exposed to influences beyond the European Union and might have come to NQFs in any case. But they would not have done so in such a brief timespan and developed the models of NQF that they have, without the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Across the countries ETF works with, the EQF remains the inspiration for domestic NQFs. Its impact on those countries has been surprisingly rapid and far-reaching. Following the adoption by the European Union of the Recommendation to establish an EQF in 2008, most ETF partner countries have emulated EU countries by developing an NQF for LLL. The EQF is the technical model – without exception – for the twenty-six of the ETF's thirty partner countries that are developing and implementing an NQF. All are inspired by, or indeed in some cases based on, the EQF's level structure and learning

outcomes descriptors. Its definitions and concepts remain the starting point for ETF partner countries, and any discussion or text on NQFs implicitly looks to the EQF. Most critically, reform of the national qualifications system is invariably driven by the EQF-based NQF.

Additionally, the EQF has become a reference to which partner countries wish to relate their qualifications systems or frameworks. This influence, both technical and policy/political, is an example of what we often call the EQF's external dimension. Among EU tools and policies in VET, or education and training more broadly, the EQF is by far the most influential.

WHY QUALIFICATIONS MATTER

Almost all ETF partner countries are reforming their qualifications. These reforms are part of wider VET system reform, but qualifications are a priority in ETF's partner countries to a greater extent than most other VET issues. Better qualifications are necessary because in a world of change and mobility, learners and workers need a trusted way of demonstrating their competence to perform a job.

Qualifications establish the all-important links between the world of work and the world of education; they create a common language which is understood between employers and schools.

Of course what employers want is skilled staff, so they are mainly interested in competences. But the labour market cannot function if employers have to carry out analyses in order to identify competencies whenever they recruit new staff. Qualifications can signal that a person possesses certain knowledge and skills. Therefore, employers have to make use of socially recognized and nationally approved and recognized qualifications. These are, or should be, based on outcomes – and they should be competence-based.

Qualifications do not only help individuals to get their first job. For many changing jobs is a necessity, as is the need to stay up to date and change their occupation if necessary. Qualifications are needed which facilitate lifelong learning and recognition of the learning that has taken place after individuals leave the education system. Traditional vocational qualifications (that is, those based on inputs, often inseparable from the curricula offered in certain institutions) and those with no pathways forward cannot do that.

TRANSFORMED ECONOMIES, NEW QUALIFICATIONS

ETF partner countries are societies and economies in transition. They face the same challenges as all other countries in the world but with the added obstacles of recent dramatic, sometimes traumatic, change. Borders have gone up, or states been dissolved, and new countries have emerged. Countries have moved from (in most cases) state-dominated economies, characterized by big employers, to a much more complex picture of smaller enterprises, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign or international firms.

These changes have challenged VET systems greatly. Frequently the transition has stretched or broken the VET school-to-employer relationship. Countries have gone from mainly state-run VET systems supplying command economies with a predictable stream of VET graduates who would have achieved stable employment to a more complex economy with unpredictable job prospects and much more diverse VET provision.

VET has often contracted. It has also suffered by default as higher education in many countries has accelerated out of control, absorbing masses of young people, often pushed by their parents along the supposedly more prestigious academic path.

And new providers in VET are often not trusted. The same applies to some new qualifications. Countries, and in particular their learners and employers, face a bewildering array of schools and qualifications, which they do not understand.

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT QUALIFICATIONS

This chapter is about the qualifications themselves and how NQFs can contribute to their quality. But we need to say first what we are talking about. 'Qualification' means different things in different countries, or even within them. There is not actually a universal definition,

or understanding, of 'qualification'. Linguistic differences apart, how qualifications are perceived and defined varies. The term 'vocational' is also open to interpretation, and in practice has quite different usage and meaning across countries.

We want to be practical, so we assume for our purposes that all countries have qualifications, vocational and other, even if they do not conform fully to international definitions. But even these 'international' definitions vary. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) definition links qualifications to completion of a programme; by contrast the EQF definition defines a qualification as 'the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process, which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards'.[1]

In many parts of the world, governments, schools and employers now consider what a person has learned, rather than what they have been taught, to be more important. It is the EQF definition, or similarly oriented understandings, that is in the ascendant now in ETF partner countries. That said, many partner countries, while developing NQFs consciously designed on learning outcomes, have not yet redefined what a qualification means. Most have qualifications definitions which would not comply with the EQF one. In most cases, this is simply a practical matter. Reform is under way but not every part of the system will be reformed at the same time or systematically; change is in reality piecemeal. Revising or introducing legislation is universally a cumbersome process, so we should not be surprised if practice is ahead, especially where this is employer-led, as it is in for example Ukraine, where industry cannot wait.

Let us now look at some country examples. In Morocco, no definition is used nationally and in practice, until recently, no distinction was drawn between certification or completion of a programme. But Morocco has adopted an NQF (by agreement; legislation is pending) whose level descriptors are outcomes-based. Indeed, the country uses the *approche par competences* (APC) approach for design of VET programmes, based on the analysis of the work situation and occupational standards. Thanks to the APC, Morocco is gradually mainstreaming the learning outcomes approach in VET, a fundamental factor for implementation of the NQF.

Egypt considers a qualification to equal a certificate. A subdivision is used: qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Industry and Commerce are 'formal', while those issued by other ministries are 'informal'.

Serbia, meanwhile, plans to use an EQF-derived definition, appropriate to its NQF plans. Kosovo's definition is 'an official recognition of achievement that recognixes completion of a education or training or satisfactory performance in a test or examination'.[2] While this is close to ISCED's definition, inclusion in the country's NQF is conditional on the qualification itself beginning with learning outcomes. Azerbaijan and Turkey refer to acquisition of skills and competences and their recognition by authorized bodies, which approaches the EQF definition.

So the direction of travel is evident: countries worldwide are moving to outcomes definitions and building outcomes-based NQFs, a trend of which ETF partner countries are a part. As indicated earlier, EU instruments are central to shaping and channelling this policy and substantial change; as well as the EQF, *the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET), Europass, Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020), the Copenhagen Process and Bruges Communique all exercise their influence on countries' discussions and decisions. Learning outcomes are the conceptual common denominator of all these tools and policies.

What we see then, is that definitions are often out of date in their intention, and sometimes, where reform is more advanced, in their practice. Some countries are reordering the relationship of curricula to qualifications, so that qualifications are designed by learning outcomes and curricula are developed to facilitate achievement of these.

We should say a word here about vocational qualifications at higher levels. Countries vary in the levels at which their VET qualifications are available. In some cases a ceiling is indeed applied, so that such countries do

[1] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

[2] Law on National Qualifications 2008.

not, or do not yet, offer VET qualifications beyond the equivalent of EQF levels 4 and 5. In other cases, such as Turkey, or in the sectoral frameworks in Russia, VET qualifications are available at the upper levels. In others, the new NQF upper levels are equally open to VET qualifications but no qualifications in VET beyond levels 4 or 5 have yet been developed.

NEW TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS ARE EMERGING

NQFs are behind another key trend in the concept and implementation of new or revised qualifications. Traditionally, vocational qualifications and programmes in most partner countries were almost exclusively offered in initial or secondary school. Adults, those workers retraining, and those not in employment and seeking to re-enter the workplace, were not catered for.

But a more complex economy requires a wider range of qualification types to meet learner needs. Types are clusters or categories of qualifications, which share characteristics such as the subsystem they belong to (for example higher education (HE) or VET), their objectives, purpose, and the learner group they cater to. We can also think of types, in everyday language, as a way of indicating how qualifications can be like each other and how they can be different from each other in duration, profile, content and so on. When countries define types of qualifications, this is integrated in the NQF, so that qualifications inserted in the NQF are first defined by type.

Kosovo orders its framework in this way, and is currently redefining its types into six categories, to reflect the current availability of qualifications. Its range includes national vocational qualifications (NVQs), which must be derived from approved occupational standards, higher education qualifications, combined general and vocational qualifications, and so on. Its vocational training centres, run by its Ministry of Labour, offer courses for jobseekers that lead to qualifications.

Turkey offers a range of types, including NVQs issued by the Vocational Qualifications Authority, and the Vocational Associate Degree. Ukraine offers junior specialist and specialist-level diplomas. Russia offers retraining certificates for adults.

Economic change and globalization simply make lifelong learning a necessity to prepare people for modern employment. A variety of types of qualification is therefore one essential. Partner countries are paying more attention to this issue now, recognizing that clear definitions and categories aid the design of qualifications and establish the relationships and pathways between them.

UNIT-STRUCTURED QUALIFICATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY COMMON

The LLL paradigm has also encouraged a restructuring of qualifications, to build on the rethinking about learning outcomes which has been influencing partner countries for six or seven years. More countries now look to build their qualifications on units. Of course, when qualifications were indistinguishable from curricula, there were no unit-based qualifications.

Unitized qualifications can be offered to learners either in combinations or singly. We should not think of 'partial' qualifications, which implies something less than a full qualification. Instead, it is important to appreciate how units offer flexible options to learners. For example, comprehensive, unitized qualifications can be delivered via a regular, full programme in initial VET, while adult learners and those in retraining may prefer more readily manageable unit-by-unit learning, allowing for flexible and accessible assessment. In this way, units support a more adaptable workforce, and crucially are LLL in nature. Countries usually specify criteria for qualifications design, including units, in their NQF requirements or guidance.

Take-up of this approach varies across the area that ETF serves, so that in the Balkans, there is receptivity to units: Serbia and Kosovo are adopting unitized qualifications. The criteria set for the development of such units include demand in the labour market. But in the North African countries, qualifications are generally still 'solid' as the countries do not consider units as qualifications in their own right.

OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS – ENSURING LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE

Vocational qualifications should, to be properly vocational, be developed from identified labour market needs. In ETF partner countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, this often means re-establishing links with labour markets that have been broken during the transition and

upheaval of the past 25 years. Or, to be more accurate, it means building new links with today's greater diversity of enterprises and employers.

In the past, VET systems in these two regions would often (to simplify) funnel graduates directly to assigned employers in a heavily regulated labour market; or rather demand and supply were so strictly regulated that there was not much of a labour market. Training was curricula-driven and tended to be narrow and specialized, with little space for career planning or core skills. The transition to an open market ended many of these jobs and broke the VET–employer link. Curricula and qualifications have been slow to match these changes.

Three out of four of the ETF's partner countries now use occupational standards to develop vocational qualifications. Both DACUM (developing a curriculum) and functional analysis approaches are in use: for example Moldova, Serbia and Jordan use DACUM, while Russia, Ukraine and Egypt use functional analysis. The principal value of standards is in seeking to incorporate labour market needs.

A standard is a measurable indicator of achievement. An occupational standard is a document which specifies the performance requirements in an occupation, and so links qualifications to employment. Most partner countries have traditionally used education standards to define qualifications. Education standards are measures of quality of the education process and the outputs of an education system.

Occupational standards in ETF partner countries are often developed by sector skills councils (SSCs), chambers of commerce or international donors. In Turkey tripartite sector committees develop the standards, supporting the labour market relevance of the derived qualifications. Moldova has devised its occupational standards via its SSCs.

Countries Non-EU countries use occupational standards in different ways, of course, just as EU countries do. Turkey's NVQs are derived directly from occupational standards, so one standard leads to one qualification while information from several standards can be used to develop broader-based qualifications more suited to prepare secondary VET learners for several related occupations. Or units from occupational standards can be used to develop units of vocational qualifications for specific skills, especially in retraining.

While the spread of occupational standards is welcome, too often many remain outside national qualifications systems, so that donor-created or led standards remain unused by qualifications developers in the country. Indeed, some countries have scores of occupational standards but only a handful of approved qualifications, as bureaucratic bottlenecks prevent the validation of more standards. Countries might seek to harness standards to national qualifications more efficiently by streamlining the allowed development processes.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND GOVERNANCE

As countries undertake the move to LLL qualification systems, and outcomes-based NQFs, so the types of qualification, and the number of providers and qualification developers, increase.

This range of diverse qualifications, developed or offered by VET schools, HE, private providers and NGOs has created more of a market, meeting learner and employer need more broadly. This progress is to be welcomed. But there is also a more complex situation now, so that there is a need for proportionate regulation. New qualifications have appeared but are not always trusted or used. Countries are trying to ensure these qualifications have value, so this implies reforms to governance and quality assurance systems.

These processes are going on in ETF partner countries, and are driven by NQFs. NQFs set quality criteria for development of a qualification by providers; they set criteria for validation and for inclusion in the framework; and quality assurance requirements for assessment and the accreditation of providers. In governance, NQFs act as platforms for social dialogue. SSCs usually emerge as actors via the NQF.

In Georgia, ministries and authorities specify criteria for inclusion of qualifications in the framework and associated registers. These criteria include demand on the labour market, participation of labour market actors and a basis in occupational standards. Decisions on inclusion in the NQF are made by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. Kosovo applies similar criteria, and VET qualifications should be unit-based to enter the NQF.

There is also the question of how flexible or how tight regulation should be, which is determined by the balance

of powers or responsibilities between the stakeholders. In the European Union, CEDEFOP, in its 2009 study 'The relationship between quality assurance and VET certification in the EU member states', identified three broad models of quality assurance: prescriptive systems, which tightly define roles of the actors involved in development and delivery of qualifications and which are led by central government; cooperative approaches, which divide responsibilities using common guidelines; and self-regulated models, which allow actors to pursue their own paths. In ETF partner countries, given the presence now of many actors in qualifications development, tight regulation is necessary and should have a legal basis, so it is given the weight traditionally given to law in education and training.

Quality of course is also a matter of *who*. Qualifications are social constructs, whose value rests on broad social recognition and acceptance, in particular from employers. This is why engaging employers and trade unions via bodies such as SSCs is so important.

Many partner countries have or plan SSCs, which carry out a range of functions in VET, including informing development of occupational standards and new qualifications. SSCs are platforms for cooperation where social partners from the relevant sector, VET school representatives, experts and other stakeholders work together to channel labour market input to education and training. ETF's Eastern Partnership countries have been prominent in establishing SSCs: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Ukraine have all done so.

In some other countries, perhaps where the economy is less developed and social partners are less organized, the role played elsewhere by SSCs is taken up by chambers of commerce or individual social partners and companies. However, the more structured, established and long-term commitment of SSCs is preferable to a more ad-hoc involvement of social partner actors, who can be disadvantaged in discussions with ministries and experts.

One other observation concerns the intersection of quality assurance and governance. Some countries have established dedicated single authorities as executive bodies reporting to ministries, as opposed to an office within a ministry, to guide implementation of the framework. These new agencies can better regulate the proliferation we have spoken of, but there are wider benefits. A specialized agency staffed by qualifications experts enables a country to become expert, more self-reliant in this field, building its own capacities and less susceptible to donor or other external pressures.

ASSESSMENT IS DIVERSIFYING BUT SLOWLY

We have so far spoken of what makes a good qualification. But design, composition, governance and measures to ensure quality need to be accompanied by more diverse assessment and by changing learning practices if qualifications are to benefit individuals.

Assessment and certification link a qualification to an individual. Assessment is also the basis of employer trust in the qualification presented by the applicant, and so without credible assessment, qualifications will not benefit the holder.

To generalize, ETF partner countries in the past assessed learners against the content of the available curriculum. As everyone studied the same content, assessment mainly served to compare differences in knowledge and skills between learners. But the development of outcomes-based qualifications has implications for assessment, validation and certification. To be awarded a qualification based on learning outcomes, a learner needs to demonstrate competence against a relevant qualification standard.

Further, different types and different 'markets' of qualifications imply that we should not assess all learners in the same way. There are two issues here.

First, outcomes-based qualifications enable teaching and learning to be separated from summative assessment, allowing learners to be assessed differently according to their pathway. An increasing number of learners undertake adult education, retraining or learn at work to acquire the competences needed to be awarded a qualification, and these routes require different assessment methods and tools. They need to depart from the monopoly of the traditional final exam to encompass observation, stimulation, evaluation of 'real life' practice and so on.

Second, because these more varied assessment methods are now being used to assess for outcomes-based qualifications, more attention is being paid to assessment standards – including assessment criteria, procedures, guidelines and minimum requirements – in order to ensure the validity and reliability of assessments.

To ensure relevance of standards, it is important to define them with the input of professionals in the field. Social partners, beyond their role at the beginning of the qualifications process (that is, in development), are also important in assessment. Their involvement strengthens the quality and relevance of qualifications, thus boosting their appeal to learners. In Turkey, the industry sectors can become authorized certification bodies for standards-based qualifications via first, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accreditation, and then authorization by the vocational qualifications authority (VQA). The VQA then issues national certificates for these sector-led assessments.

Another trend is to more external assessment, as opposed to teacher assessment.Some partner countries have introduced recognition of prior learning (RPL) or validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). VNFIL supports reform of qualifications, increases the transparency of qualifications systems, supports outcomes-based qualifications and more varied assessment methods, and widens access to qualifications. It also offers scope to recognize the skills of returning migrants, who are numerically significant in most partner countries.

Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro all have RPL systems in their legislation, and some candidates are certified via RPL. Other partner countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, have piloted RPL in industrial sectors such as textiles. But aside from Turkey, the numbers of applicants remain small, and the range of qualifications for which validation is available is limited for the time being. In many cases, the lack of qualifications standards against which to assess and certify, and a continuing lack of infrastructure (for instance, an adequate number of trained assessors), remain barriers.

THE QUALIFICATIONS-TO-CURRICULA RELATIONSHIP IS CHANGING

We noted earlier the often inextricable link between qualifications and curricula in many countries in the neighbourhood of the European Union. Curricula were often very tightly prescribed and centralized, and narrowly specialized. And just as 'qualification' has different meanings, so has 'curriculum' in different countries. But for our purposes we understand it to mean the measures, interactions and experiences within an organized learning process.

The upheavals of twenty-five years ago often broke traditional VET–employer links in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. One consequence was to confine 'training' to schools, with an inevitable balance towards theory over practice and perhaps too many general subjects, so diluting VET. VET has sometimes suffered a further relative decline as numbers of students increase in general education. Additionally, VET curricula often remain supply-driven, determined by available provision and equipment rather than labour market or learner need.

However, in recent years, a countervailing trend to link qualifications better to employment needs has been facilitated by outcomes approaches in qualifications and curricula, and the spread in use of occupational standards. Defining qualifications by outcomes, which must fit the NQF descriptors, enables authorities to develop curricula more geared to equipping learners with skills relevant to work. This system is more transparent, more flexible in the range of teaching and assessment it allows, and more responsive to changing employment needs.

We see moves to use qualifications as the starting point for learning. NQF level descriptors influence qualification type descriptors, which in turn inform individual qualifications, which have associated learning outcomes and assessment criteria. It is important that the learning outcomes originate from workplace competences, rather than the curriculum. Learning modules and curricula are then developed to support students in achieving the outcomes, rather than the curriculum driving the learning process. This also allows qualifications and curricula to be separated.

Moving to outcomes-based curricula is easier in continuing VET (CVET), as curricula can more readily draw on occupational standards than in initial VET (IVET), where schools need to offer younger learners a wider range of subjects in addition to more narrowly occupational skills.

That said, impacts of qualifications reforms and NQFs on teaching and learning appear, so far, to be weaker than in defining qualifications, designing an NQF, identifying the country's relevant stakeholders and initiating new quality assurance measures.

FINDINGS

Most partner countries now have some or most of the necessary elements of a modernized qualifications system in place. Many have passed legislation, developed

quality assurance systems to regulate the new system, and developed occupational standards. But in most cases NQFs remain empty of qualifications, and universally the urgent need is to populate these frameworks.

Occupational standards are used in most partner countries; indeed some countries produce significant numbers of such standards, thus providing potential relevance to qualifications. But many are generated by donors, who can produce them, to be picked up by employers, without regulation or final approval by the national government. Qualifications, by contrast, usually require heavier procedures, and so progress is slower. Development processes should allow for occupational standards to more readily be linked to qualifications. Qualifications need to mean something to learners and employers, to have recognition. Diversity of qualifications should not be a reason for a lack of transparency. Instead, qualifications should developed that are eligible for placing in the NQF, meeting its quality criteria. In this way, NQFs support development of a properly national qualifications system, in which qualifications have a national value or currency.

LLL characteristics are emerging. Some countries have developed a range of types to meet a wider spectrum of learner needs in new economies, while units are the basis of qualifications in some Balkan countries in particular.

NQFs are promoting quality assurance. Indeed, where criteria are set for qualifications development and validation, and for assessment, NQFs are invariably the instrument that sets these criteria. At the same time, quality assurance is still often thought of in terms of quality-assuring the provider – that is, accreditation – but alone this is not enough to guarantee the quality of individual qualifications. Quality assurance should also apply to approval of the qualification for inclusion in the NQF and to assessment.

Countries recognize the necessity of engaging with the labour market in developing qualifications, and in some cases supporting assessment. To date, some countries have systemized employer contributions via SSCs or similar bodies, but in others this engagement remains ad hoc.

Assessment methods have been slow to change, but introducing an NQF and outcomes-based qualifications means that assessment needs to be more varied, and based on agreed standards. RPL is being introduced in some countries, but the number of qualifications for which it is applicable is still limited. Learning outcomes approaches in qualifications are exercising an influence on curricula, reducing the traditional centralization to more locally adapted implementation among providers better linked to identified employment needs.

All these changes are usually slow and patchy, and are in their early stages. That said, there is no doubt about the direction of travel.

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CHAPTER 5: CHANGING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS REFORMS

This chapter explores the functions of legislation and other forms of regulation and the roles of institutions in qualifications systems. We look at the purposes and scope of legislation and regulation, and identify what institutions shape qualifications systems, what functions they have and what relationships they have with each other and with other actors in education and training. Most modern qualifications systems are now built around national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), so these issues are inextricably linked to the individual NQF's character, aims and functions.

To date, these legal and institutional aspects of NQFs have received perhaps less attention than other dimensions such as learning outcomes, quality assurance arrangements, the potential of NQFs to better link qualifications to the labour market, and international referencing. Therefore, it is time to examine this key area of NQFs and the implications for the arrangement of qualifications systems and wider education and training systems. While in the European Training Foundation (ETF) our remit is our thirty partner countries, other systems are covered here to illuminate diverse approaches we have identified. (ETF's partner countries are often also called transition countries: that is, they are reorienting their economies and changing from a centrally planned economy to a market economy.)

ETF partner countries are generally dissatisfied with their qualifications, which are usually out of date, inputs-based and lack value on the labour market. They seek to address these deficits by reform. A starting point is the legal act that regulates the NQF. These first acts often set the objectives, indicate the NQF levels and mention special institutions that may have a role in supporting the implementation of the NQF. Legislation in most transition countries is a necessity to initiate any system-wide reform.

While ETF's thirty partner countries have different histories and different demographic challenges, the great majority are introducing or implementing qualifications frameworks. We need to know whether the scope of the legislation varies, or conversely, if the ambitions set for NQFs, which are often similar (for instance, lifelong learning, introducing new quality assurance systems, labour market relevance, progression and recognition of prior learning (RPL)) result in similar legislation. What other factors influence the legislation and development of institutional roles?

PURPOSES OF NQFs, PURPOSES OF LAWS

David Raffe, who studied and compared NQFs, distinguished between communicating frameworks, transformational frameworks and reforming frameworks (Raffe, 2009). A communicating framework takes the existing system as its starting point, and aims to make it more transparent as a basis for rationalization, improving coherence and developing progression pathways. At the other end of the spectrum is the transformational framework, taking a proposed future education and training system as its starting point and defining the qualifications it would like to see in a transformed system, without explicit reference to existing provision.

Halfway between the communicating and the transformational frameworks is the reforming framework, combining some features of both other types. A reforming framework starts from the existing education and training system and its institutions, but then focuses on specific reform objectives – for example making sure all qualifications are developed from identified needs and quality is assured in a consistent manner. These reforming frameworks are part of wider education and training and/or labour market reforms, and tend to be regulated to try to drive change directly as well as to facilitate change agents.

According to Raffe's criteria, the early South African and New Zealand frameworks were transformational frameworks, the Irish framework a typical reforming framework and Scotland the archetype of the communications framework based on incremental steps agreed by its founding partners (Raffe, 2009).

Legislation becomes more important when qualification system reforms imply important changes to the status quo. Legislation can help a country to formally adopt the

framework and to create common legally binding principles for its implementation. Our analysis of early legislation in different countries shows that legislation is seldom comprehensive at the start, and where it tries to be comprehensive it can create difficulties in implementation if it imposes detailed arrangements that are not tested.

The legislation is a tool to support implementation, not a goal. The introduction of a qualifications framework implies that qualifications are coordinated and in many cases quality assured in order to increase trust. These common coordination and quality assurance functions can be enhanced by establishing new institutions to support the coordination between different stakeholders and to ensure common quality assurance principles. Trust in qualifications can be further strengthened by making qualifications more relevant for the labour market and formalizing the dialogue with the world of work.

Ultimately, the objectives of the qualification system reforms determine how influential and far-reaching in its impacts the NQF will be. When the objectives are reformist – for example, to actively promote lifelong learning, to open up closed systems under the control of individual providers and provider networks, to establish new mechanisms for RPL, to establish new principles for quality assuring qualifications, or to bring in labour market actors – then the power balance between stakeholders shifts, requiring a sharing of responsibilities and mutual agreement among established stakeholders and new actors.

STRIKING A BALANCE OF POWER

Stakeholders from the provider side will have to surrender some control over the content of qualifications and how they can be obtained, while stakeholders from the world of work gain influence. In order to be successful, qualification system reforms require that all stakeholders are mobilized and involved, and that they are aware of the objectives and take ownership of the necessary changes. A dialogue between stakeholders is a necessary precondition for successful reforms. It is unlikely, however, that all changes will happen voluntarily, be implemented through mutual agreement, and that all stakeholders will be equally motivated even if a win-win situation can be created for all, with the prospect of more people participating in learning. Legislation is often needed to create new conditions, stimulate new developments, and regulate roles and responsibilities, in particular in market-oriented or state-led skill formation systems (see below) where the governance of skills formation systems is not determined by social dialogue.

DEGREES OF REGULATION

Legal traditions certainly influence how qualifications are regulated. In the English-speaking world where common law has been built incrementally around individual cases, governments have been less inclined to legislate (prescribe) what qualifications should look like. In countries that have a civil code, the tradition of state regulation based on logical principles has facilitated the creation of ruling principles for qualifications rather than letting qualification systems evolve around individual cases (Merryman, 1985). In Central European countries such as Germany and Austria, where social partners play an important role in setting the conditions for qualifications, and the entitlements that can be obtained from holding a qualification, qualifications standards for the dual vocational education system are compulsory and have the power of law. Civil effect, the legal entitlements qualifications can provide once they are recognized as equivalent to existing ones, is an important issue for countries where qualifications are subject to government regulation.

FUNCTIONS OF QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications are not only important as formalized outcomes of education and training systems. In the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, qualifications were an integral part of the labour market regulatory systems, determining the jobs people were assigned to, as well as salaries, pensions and opportunities for career development and mobility. These regulated labour market functions of qualifications are again becoming an issue in current qualification system reforms, with the introduction of labour market specific qualifications to

certify competent workers. In Estonia more than 15 per cent of the labour force has already obtained professional qualifications based on occupational standards, after leaving the education system. In Turkey, certification of unqualified workers in more than 100 occupations is currently becoming compulsory.

SKILL FORMATION MODELS SHAPE THE RANGE OF QUALIFICATIONS

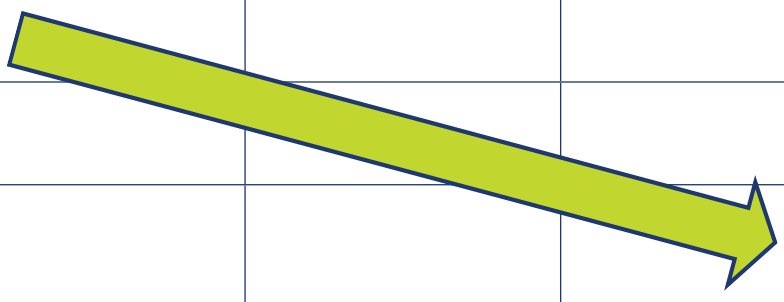
Qualifications systems are socially and historically developed constructs, and an integral part of national skill-formation systems. International literature (Geinert, 2010) on skill-formation systems in industrialized countries distinguishes between four models of skill-formation system. Collective skills formation with a leading role for social partners is predominant in Central and Northern Europe, where social partners agree on a restricted number of high-value qualifications that are formulated jointly. Market-based skill-formation models, present in the Anglo-Saxon world, give a leading role to actors in the market in defining qualifications; the state acts as the regulator of the market of relatively high numbers of qualification. State-regulated corporatist skills-formation models, where high-value qualifications are defined by providers in consultation with stakeholders from the world of work, are predominant in Mediterranean countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Turkey. Finally, there are state-regulated skills-formation systems in which stakeholders from the world of work do not play an important role yet. Examples of these can be found in Eastern and South Eastern Europe: for instance in Azerbaijan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such models can provide some insight in how existing institutional arrangements can have an influence on the institutional and legal setting of qualifications frameworks. However, they do not make these arrangements predictable.

These models were developed based on the predominant systems of vocational education in Europe, provided by predominantly public providers for young people. But under the influence of global developments and demographic changes lifelong learning systems are emerging, opening up the virtual state monopolies on qualifications. In other words there are more institutions, and a greater range of providers have emerged, such as professional bodies, municipalities, private companies, employment services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private schools and international providers, offering different kinds of qualification. This makes it more important to regulate qualifications that are offered by different bodies for different target groups, in order to reduce the proliferation of qualifications, and to protect the interests of citizens and employers by strengthening confidence in the value of qualifications.

State-regulated systems are gradually opening up to qualifications from the market, but they deal with them differently. The tripartite National Commission for Professional Certification (CNCP) in France has different

Table 5.1: Regulation and the qualifications markets

	SUPPLY OF QUALIFICATIONS		
BENEFICIARIES OF QUALIFICATIONS	Monopolistic offer	Oligopolistic offer	Competitive offer
One category of beneficiary			
Several categories of beneficiary			
All types of beneficiary (qualifications for lifelong learning)			



Source: M. Aribaud, ETF, 2013

approaches to including qualifications in the NQF register (RNCP). The publically provided qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and recognized universities have the right to be automatically included in the register (de droit). Other qualifications coming from the market are scrutinized to establish that they have been developed on the basis of identified needs, in cooperation with stakeholders from the world of work, and are not only obtainable through completing a study programme, but allow for the validation of non-formal learning.. These qualifications are classified as on demand (*sur demande*) from the market.

In preparing the Polish NQF, careful analysis has been made of 'non-formal' qualifications in the country; these could come into the NQF in order to recognize adult learning. These qualifications can be included in the NQF register at the same level as well-established qualifications obtained via formal education, if they fulfil certain quality requirements, but they cannot provide direct access to formal education at the next level, and are therefore considered 'partial qualifications'.

In the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, 'market qualifications' have been brought in line by linking them to occupational standards, but they are under the remit of the Ministry of Human Resources, while the Malaysian Qualifications Agency deals with quality-assuring qualifications and provision in the higher education and community college sector (ETF, 2012).

A major and increasingly important challenge and priority is integrating international qualifications. By nature, these often have their own logic and structures, their own quality assurance processes, and are issued by awarding bodies which are well recognized internationally and therefore difficult to bring into the fold of the national regulations. The qualifications framework in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is trying to deal with these qualifications by bringing them under a common quality assurance and recognition system. In the UAE, there is a very high number of foreign nationals who have foreign credentials. Moreover, many international providers based in other countries operate on the territory of the UAE. Gradually, both the foreign provision of qualifications in the country and the recognition of the international workforce are planned to be integrated in a more coherent and quality assured system (nqa.gov.ae).

In Europe, the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group is still developing a way of dealing consistently with international qualifications provided in different member states. These cases show that international regulation is still on the horizon, rather than imminent.

While analysing the institutional and legal arrangements another factor to consider is the stage that implementation of qualifications system reforms has reached. Arrangements are evolving over time. Reforms often start with a focus on the development and adaptation of structures and standards, in order to set common principles and populate the NQF. Roles normally change once a critical number of qualifications is reached, with the focus shifting to the coherent use of qualifications for learning, assessment and certification. At a later stage, attention turns to improving the intended impacts in terms of access, progression, career development, mobility and recognition.

SCOPE OF LEGISLATION: EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE

In practice legal arrangements can start from many angles, but they are often linked with making a specific body responsible for the implementation.

The first piece of legislation in England was the act to establish the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in 1986, although it took until 2000 before the NQF became a reality. The Education Act of 1989 in New Zealand defined the responsibilities of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. The NQF in South Africa started with the South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58, 1995), In France the Law on Social Modernization (2002) created the National Commission for Professional Certification under the authority of the ministry responsible for vocational education, which established the NQF through a national register (RNCP). In Montenegro, the Law on National Vocational Qualifications (2008) preceded the Law on the NQF in 2010; in Turkey a Law on the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) (5544/2006) was the start, although only in the Amendment Law on VQA of 2011 was there reference to developing the NQF. In Ukraine a government decree on the NQF (2011) started the legislative process, as it did in Armenia (2011), while in Croatia a Law on the Croatian Qualifications Framework was adopted (2013).

These first acts often set the objectives, indicate the NQF levels and mention special institutions that may have a role in supporting the implementation of the NQF.

Legislation is important in many countries as the official authorization to start implementation of the framework. However, what really counts are not these single acts, but how the NQF is starting to filter through in all relevant legislation. Without reference to the NQF in other legislation, its impact is limited.

The NQF decree in Ukraine only sets the general objectives and the ten-level framework. In 2012 however, this was followed by legislation referring to validation of non-formal and informal learning, which was developed further in 2013 and 2014. A first step to identifying the qualifications that are part of the NQF was made in 2014 with a Law on Higher Education. Current discussions on a new law on education (the previous law dates back to 1991) and a new law on vocational education should complete this identification process.

When it is included in important legal documents such as a new law on education that is extensively discussed in Parliament, the status of the NQF is raised. Apart from educational legislation the NQF can also affect labour laws. In Kazakhstan, the NQF has gained particular importance since it has been adopted as a tool in the Labour Code. Another indicator for the legal effects of the NQF can be the timeframe in which the legislation is reviewed and improved. In Kazakhstan and Georgia, the original Acts to adopt the NQFs are already under revision, even though only a short timeframe has passed from their initiation.

Secondary legislation for implementation can cover many different issues, including the confirmation and requirements for qualification types, occupational standards and subject area benchmarks. The formats of qualification standards (including the unit structure and size), the use of credits, validation of non-formal and informal learning, access and progression requirements, and quality assurance arrangements all come in addition to NQF levels to regulate qualifications and make them more comparable.

In the beginning of the NQF process in a country, the related tasks are often divided among existing institutions and stakeholders, building on voluntary contributions. In order to move from this voluntary approach to a professional approach, formal roles and responsibilities need to be identified, allocated and endorsed. One area that is particularly important in legislation is the institutional arrangements and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. Existing institutional capacities are often insufficient to put the ambitions of the national qualifications system reform policies into practice. This applies to the coordination processes, to ensuring coherence in approaches, and to quality-assuring assessment of qualifications, but most of all to lack of capacities to develop sufficient new occupational standards, qualifications and training programmes to influence delivery. These deficiencies can mean that NQFs remain empty promises. Dedicated institutions with competent staff can speed up implementation.

IDENTIFYING THE REQUIRED INSTITUTIONS

The NQF is a tool to bridge different types of providers of qualifications (for general education, initial and secondary vocational education and training (VET), higher education, professional development and other forms of adult learning). This means there is a need for coordination and facilitating cooperation between stakeholders. Active involvement and dialogue between stakeholders increases co-ownership of the proposed reforms, helping to translate policy objectives into measures on the ground.

There is also need for quality assurance when dealing with a reforming framework. This especially applies to the role of a regulator, which should ensure consistent design and use of qualifications, and in particular quality assurance of assessment processes to strengthen trust in the competences of holders of the qualifications.

Different institutions can steer the development of new and the review of existing qualifications.

Many countries have decided to develop sector skill councils (SSCs) to support the identification of sectoral skill needs, the development of occupational standards, developing and reviewing qualifications, the assessment of candidates, the identification of companies for work-based learning, funding arrangements and other aspects. *Table 5.2* gives an overview of some different types of SSC in operation.

A number of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (the Russian Federation, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) have established sectoral qualifications frameworks under their NQFs, to identify occupational standards and sector-specific qualifications. In Kazakhstan each of these sectoral frameworks is legally established under the coordination of the line ministry dealing with that sector.

This division of coordinating, quality assurance and developmental functions seems very logical. The coordinating

Table 5.2: Typology of sector skill councils (SSCs)

TYPOLOGY OF SECTORAL SKILL COUNCILS (SSCS)			
CLASSIFICATION	**SCOPE / NATURE**	**KEY CHARACTERISTICS / FEATURES & REMARKS**	**COUNTRY EXAMPLES**
TYPE OF COVERAGE	Focus on one economic sector	Sometimes a National VET council operates by covering all sectors at national or regional level.	CZ-RO-FI-DK-CA-UK
	Focus on more than one sector (transversal)	Some SSCs can operate under umbrella organizations (e.g. tripartite institutions / bodies).	FR-SP-BY-DK-UK
	Regional approaches	Ministerial departments / directions; agencies for VET quality; national qualification bodies/authorities, etc.	BY-UK-DK-FR-NL-RO
INSTITUTIONAL MANDATE	Professional bodies	Own resources / staff / expertise (full-time employees); legal status and permanent public and/or private funding (levy / payroll systems etc.).	UK-NL-CA
	Working Bodies	Represent different sectoral interest groups. Members are employed in represented organisations.	HR
PROFILE OF INITIATOR	State-Led / Driven	Policy dialogue/initiator is mainly led / funded by government or state organization or by employer organisations (or by both).	BY-KG-SG
	Employer-led		UK-IN
ROLE IN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS	Decision-making	The SSCs can be the final decision-makers, or can be limited to delivering advice / non-binding recommendations on skills policies to final decision-making actors.	RO
	Advisory role		HR
POLICY FUNCTIONS	Limited functions	Ensuring qualitative match between skills demand and VET supply	SK-FR
	Extended functions	In addition, members extend their advice / analysis to other policy areas / stakeholders (e.g. VET planning, quantitative skill gaps; skill programmes; education and business partnerships).	AU-BD-NL
LIFELONG POLICY COVERAGE	Initial VET (IVET)	SSCs can cover IVET, CVET or both. They can be sectoral in focus or transversally oriented, operating at national or regional levels	FR-PL-SK
	Continuing VET (CVET)		SP-SE-BY
	Both (IVET + CVET)		FI-EE-RO

Source: Nino Buić, & José Manuel Galvin Arribas, ETF, 2014

function is about bringing stakeholders together in a common platform to agree how to develop and implement the framework. It is therefore separate from a more technical 'controlling' quality assurance function of the different actors, ensuring that actors follow the rules of the game. The development of qualifications is a responsibility that is best delegated to those actors that have an interest in ensuring that these qualifications meet the identified needs of the future holders. Analysis of the formal functions of eighteen specially established institutions that play a role in implementing qualifications systems reform in a number of European Union member states and neighbouring transition countries[1] shows that these arrangements are more complex than just the three categories assumed above.

Most of the institutions analysed were established relatively recently. Eleven of the eighteen institutions were established after 2010, although three of these are building on the experience of similar agencies. Only three institutions were established before 2000 (during the late 1990s). The institutions concerned are either private initiatives (such as NARK, the National Agency for Qualifications Development of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs), established as tripartite institutions (such as MYK, the Vocational Qualifications Authority in Turkey) or governmental agencies (such as ANC the Romanian Qualifications Authority). Governmental executive agencies are in the majority.

Table 5.3 provides a comprehensive list of functions and task of these agencies. None of them carries out all the functions listed below, but seven agencies clearly deal with supporting the provision of education and training as well as managing the qualifications systems.

Specialized bodies to perform public duties which are between central government and the implementing institutions are often more susceptible to change than ministries. This is also true for qualifications agencies or authorities. All the institutions involved in the first qualifications frameworks have undergone significant changes; indeed with the exception of the SQA in Scotland, all of them have been restructured and often replaced by completely new organizations. In England NCVQ was replaced by QCA in 1997, which in turn was replaced by Ofqual in 2010. In Australia, the AQF Council was created in 2008 and abolished in 2014; in South Africa after a review of the NQF, three subframeworks were established under three quality councils; while in Ireland the national qualifications authority NQAI, and the awarding bodies FETEC and HETEC, merged into one organization, QQI.

[1] Albania (AK-AFPK), Belgium Flanders (AKOV), Croatia (ASOO), Georgia (NC EQE), Ireland (QQI), Kosovo (AKK-KS), England (Ofqual), Estonia (Kustekoda), Netherlands (SBB), Portugal (ANQEP), Russian Federation (NARK), Scotland (SCQF partnership, SQA), Slovenia (CPI), Turkey (MYK), France (CNCP), Romania (ANC),Ukraine (IPQ).

CONCLUSIONS

Many NQFs have a legal basis, and this applies in particular to reforming frameworks that are tools for wider education, training and/or labour market reforms. The degree of regulation is determined by historical, cultural and sociopolitical factors. Legislation is often required to start the NQF implementation, but legislation is a process done in different steps, and is bound to change during the implementation. It is recommended that countries start the legislative process with broad framework legislation, confirming the objectives, the levels of the NQF and general principles, but leave details to secondary legislation that can be more easily updated.

To support the implementation of the NQF, it is important to ensure that capacities are available to meet the ambitions of the NQF objectives. Many countries opt to establish specialized bodies. These can deal with the coordination between stakeholders, with regulating and quality-assuring qualifications and awarding bodies, and with the development of qualifications. In a number of cases, these institutions also support the provision of education and training. In reality, the functions and tasks of these institutions vary and are difficult to predict. The functions and structures of these supporting bodies alter over time, depending on the changing priorities for the implementation of the frameworks.

Apart from enabling legislation and specialized institutions to support the implementation of the qualifications frameworks, the dialogue between stakeholders remains one of the most important success factors for the implementation of frameworks. Where an active dialogue exists involving representatives from the world of work and from providers, co-ownership of proposed reforms and a shared vision can empower stakeholders to act without overly prescriptive guidance from the central level, reducing bureaucracy and strengthening impact on learners and in the labour market.

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Table 5.3: Functions and tasks of qualifications agencies and authorities

FUNCTION	TASKS
FURTHER NQF DEVELOPMENT	• Maintain NQF structures. • Prepare policy decisions. • Link NQF to occupations in the labour market.
FACILITATE COOPERATION & COORDINATION	• Formulate agreed positions. • Facilitate debate. • Address transversal competences. • Work with regional and sectoral bodies
IIDENTIFY NEEDS AND SET PRIORITIES	• Identify new occupations. • Organize development/review of occupational standards. • dentify qualifications on offer that could enter the NQF. • Address proliferation/overlaps of qualifications. • Invite stakeholders to develop specific standards /qualifications.
COMMUNICATE, INFORM & ADVOCATE	• NQF info dissemination at home and abroad, and via a website. • Use of common language. • Navigation tools.
INTERNATIONAL POSITIONING	• Align with QF EHEA and EQF. • Act as contact point (EQF, European Higher Education Area (EHEA), EUROPASS, ENIC/NARIC). • Compare international qualifications
MANAGE REGISTERS / DATABASES	• Manage NQF register of qualifications, units, occupational standards, awarding bodies, assessment centres, experts, graduates, educational programmes, training providers, training companies, teachers and trainers, students, issued certificates in order to authenticate.
ASSISTANCE, CAPACITY-BUILDING AND GUIDANCE	• Support SSCs/professional bodies/awarding bodies with standards and qualifications development. • Guidance for qualification types, for validation of non-formal and informal learning and for training programmes.
ENSURE AND ENHANCE QUALITY	• Accredit awarding bodies, standards, qualifications, learners. • Enhance coherence and relevance of qualifications. • Widen access and alternative pathways. • Enhance the quality of assessment / assessors / verifiers. • Enhance the quality of providers. • Monitor and evaluate different actors.
RESEARCH THE SYSTEM FUNCTIONING	• Assess the impact and effectiveness. • Gather systematic feedback.
SUPPORT TRAINING PROVIDERS	• Support internal quality assurance processes. • Development of curricula. • Support education and training provision. • Training of teachers and trainers.

Source: Arjen Deij, ETF, 2014

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CHAPTER 6: DEVELOPING WORLD REFERENCE LEVELS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world in which not only people and jobs, but also programmes and institutions, are increasingly internationally mobile. Qualified people are more mobile as they are increasingly able to cross borders in an expanding global context. Many jobs are also becoming more internationalized as world trade and production are increasingly structured around global value chains (GVCs) (OECD, 2012), and as transferable skills and competences are identified and agreed on at transnational, regional and even global levels. Educational institutions are also engaging in international partnerships, and increasingly using new information and communication technologies to provide alternative ways to deliver education services (WTO, 2010). As a direct response to this increased mobility of people and jobs, and to some extent also institutions and programmes, there is an increasing call for fair and valid recognition of learning at national, regional and international levels.

In 2012, UNESCO organised the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Shanghai to debate current trends and future drivers of the development of education and training. This global dialogue culminated in the Shanghai Consensus, which recommended, among other things, the development of international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes. This included the proposal that a set of world reference levels (WRLs) be considered to facilitate the international recognition of TVET qualifications.

THE PURPOSE AND ADDED VALUE OF THE WRLS

Several factors are pushing for the establishment of WRLs, including the need for international reference points that can be used by different organizations across the world for better recognizing qualifications. Qualifications have traditionally been deeply embedded in specific national social and economic contexts and institutional settings. While still very important, the specific national character of qualifications has been challenged by the internationalization and globalization of labour markets and the mobility of people (both learners and workers, including migrant workers) and jobs (including outsourcing and offshoring). This is gradually impacting on the way countries define, award and recognize qualifications. Qualifications today not only define the knowledge, skills and competences or any other kind of learning outcomes held by an individual, they also take the form of a currency signalling their value both nationally and internationally (Leney et al., 2009).

The cross-border provision of education and training, and the technological developments resulting in increased open and distance learning, and online learning, are also identified as important aspects of education and training's international landscape. International qualifications, as well as recognition of types of learning through open badges and other new approaches, further deepen the need for international reference points. Given the scale of the global movement of reforming qualifications frameworks, as illustrated in this inventory, international dialogue, cooperation and capacity-building in the field of the recognition of qualifications are increasingly necessary.

The purpose of the WRLs lies mainly in their potential to address these challenges and to fill gaps and provide an independent international reference point to which a level of learning can be compared (Keevy and Chakroun, forthcoming). In this context, a set of WRLs, *with the clear purpose to describe levels of learning achievements across different types of learning on a global level in order to promote the recognition of learning in a context where both people and jobs have become, and will continue to be, increasingly mobile*, is more needed than ever.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has started to fill this void in recent years, but it remains a European model embedded in EU governance structures, and as a direct consequence, is limited in its ability to embrace differences on an international level. A set of WRLs can potentially fulfil this purpose, and in a more balanced manner. The WRLs can act as generalizable indicators of levels of learning and a shared hierarchy that allows comparisons of any kind of learning or a common metric (Keevy and Chakroun, forthcoming).

There are numerous illustrations of the added value of the WRLs. To start with, they will provide a reference point for existing recognition methodologies, such as qualifications and qualification frameworks. The development of NQFs and regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) could benefit from internationally agreed reference points, including how progression within domains is defined. New sectoral frameworks also stand to gain from such reference points, as many of these frameworks are gaining international traction. As mentioned earlier, the internationalization of trade linked to the increased mobility of people and jobs, as well as programmes and institutions, will also be influenced by the development of WRLs.

The added value of WRLs can also be illustrated with their impact on the quality of multinational and international qualifications, many of which at present remain completely unregulated, and have the potential to devalue the entire qualifications system (CEDEFOP, 2012). The WRLs can become neutral and internationally agreed reference points, easily understood by the public and imbuing confidence in the system.

Another example is found in the area of credential evaluation, where common international reference points can be used to strengthen existing methodologies. This also applies to the shift toward learning outcomes and the need for a common language. More examples include the move towards representation, a concept that, though including qualifications, is not limited to them, but attempts to improve transparency by providing more information related to learning. It is gradually gaining traction, as is evident with the Europass CV and Skills Passport (see Bjornavold and Coles, 2010).

WRLs certainly also have the potential to advance the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL) by promoting a comprehensive coverage of all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. They could raise the profile of promising recognition practices among stakeholder groups, and highlight the inefficiencies caused by barriers to recognition. In sum, the WRLs should broadly aim at supporting the mobility of learners and workers, and their participation in labour markets and lifelong learning. They could facilitate equity in recognition by including quality assurance principles while addressing the challenges of inter-regional mobility.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE WRLS AND POSSIBLE COMPONENTS

The work on the WRLs is at an early stage. UNESCO adopted a four-staged incremental approach to respond to the Shanghai Consensus Recommendation: (1) a technical review of level descriptors at national and regional levels, (2) conceptual development of the WRLs, (3) broad consultation, and (4) a political process that will explore the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of defining and adopting WRLs (Chakroun, 2013).

The WRLs are expected to build on and complement the substantial work conducted so far at both national (NQFs) and regional level (RQFs).

Based on the first consultations and preliminary work conducted (Chakroun, 2013; Keevy and Chakroun, forthcoming), there is an agreement that a set of WRLs and the process of their development need to be more than just technical structuring of levels. The work could start with a bottom-up-driven process where the networking of organizations and actors developing and implementing RQFs is used as a basis for developing a platform for dialogue and cooperation with a view to explore areas where WRLs can add value to these ongoing efforts. These efforts are, in most cases (see the chapters on RQFs in this inventory), driven by regional integration political agendas. The WRLs could encompass several components, including:

- a set of level descriptors
- international guidelines concerning quality assurance of certification
- guidelines and orientation resources.

SET OF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Given the diversity of country contexts, it is remarkable how much consensus exists around the world that the recognition of learning is increasingly being facilitated by the development and implementation of learning outcomes based qualifications frameworks within a broader lifelong learning perspective. Hierarchies of level descriptors, purposefully developed to allow for alignment of qualifications, form an important component of this international trend.

At present, qualifications frameworks exist in various different forms. These range from sectoral frameworks that function within a specific country or across countries, to NQFs which are probably the best known, to

Table 6.1: Levels and domains across a selection of transnational qualifications frameworks

EQF LEVEL DESCRIPTOR DOMAINS (8 LEVELS)		
KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCE**
Factual and / or theoretical	Cognitive; practical	Autonomy; responsibility

ASEAN LEVEL DESCRIPTOR DOMAINS (8 LEVELS, IN PROGRESS)		
KNOWLEDGE AND COMPREHENSION	**WORK COMPETENCES**	**RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
Facts and theories; skills used, such as practical and cognitive skills	Application of knowledge; application of skills	Degree of independence; capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for oneself and others

SADC LEVEL DESCRIPTOR DOMAINS (10 LEVELS)		
KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**AUTONOMY AND RESPONSIBILITY**
Factual and / or theoretical	Cognitive; practical	Activity under supervision; responsibility for outcomes of activity

VUSSC* TRANSNATIONAL QF LEVEL DESCRIPTOR DOMAINS (10 LEVELS)		
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	**SKILLS**	**WIDER PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES**
Range of knowledge; understanding	Use knowledge, understanding and skills	Responsibility; decision-making

CARICOM QF (8 LEVELS + 2 ACCESS)		
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	**LIFE SKILLS, APPLICATION AND PRACTICE**	**COMPETENCES**
Theoretical and / or factual; the ability to recall and present information	Abilities for adaptive positive behaviour; cognitive and practical	Communication, numeracy and ICTs; autonomy, accountability, working with others

Source: Keevy, J and Chakroun, B. Forthcoming. Levelling and Recognizing Learning Outcomes. The Use of Level Descriptors in the Twenty-First Century. Paris, UNESCO

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transnational qualifications frameworks (TQFs), which include RQFs. All types of qualifications framework use level descriptors based on learning outcomes, to define a set of hierarchical levels across a series of domains.

Three domains are found in the majority of level descriptors of qualifications frameworks, including sectoral, national and transnational examples. The first is *knowledge:* this is probably the best understood domain and is well articulated across the case studies presented in this inventory. The domain is primarily about the *ability* to *use knowledge and understanding*, and not the application of knowledge.

The second most widely used domain is *skills*. Similar to the knowledge domain, skills are about potential ability and not application: in this case, the *ability* to *apply knowledge in relation to a job or specific task*. This domain is also widely used and reasonably well understood, although some overlap with the knowledge domain is observed, and as a result, knowledge and skills are combined in some instances (as in the ASEAN RQF and the Pacific RQF (PRQF)).

The third domain, *competence*, is about the *application of knowledge and skills*. Of the three domains, competence is the broadest in that several subdomains are used. In this regard three main interrelated subdomains can be identified: applied competence (the application of knowledge and skills in a specific context, which includes foundational, practical and reflexive aspects), core/key competence (the sum of skills needed to live in a contemporary knowledge society: CEDEFOP, 2008), and affective competence (the application of knowledge and skills in relation to personal, behavioural and attitudinal dimensions). In this context, the notion of competence is interpreted in diverse manners across different traditions and contexts.

Even in cases where the knowledge, skills and competences domains are not explicit, elements of each can be recognized in the level descriptors. All three domains are based on learning outcomes, although the influence of the lifelong learning discourse and the move towards knowledge-based economies are more evident in the knowledge and skills domains. The competence domain shows remnants of the competency-based approach that was dominant in the twentieth-century TVET discourse. Drawing on the work of Keevy and Chakroun (forthcoming) and the present international inventory of NQFs developed by CEDEFOP, the European Training Foundation (ETF), UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-UIL), *Table 6.1* provides elements of comparison. For instance, NQFs and RQFs use variations of domains in their level descriptors: in a few instances (such as in the ASEAN RQF) the domains of knowledge and skills are collapsed into a single domain. In many cases (for example CARICOM) the competence domain contains subdomains or specializations that overlap with the knowledge and skills domains. Different variations of domains are found across recognition methodologies other than qualifications frameworks.

While there is still a long road to be taken to develop the WRLs, it is proposed that the WRLs be based on the domains given in *Table 6.2* (with subdomains) as a basis for the formulation of its level descriptors. The subdomains listed here could be simplified following some testing

Trust in qualifications plays a crucial role for people across the world. The certification process becomes particularly important in this context, and quality assurance mechanisms are essential to ensure that these processes effectively generate credibility and trust. The importance of quality assurance of certification is stressed in several NQFs and RQFs (such as the EQF, ASEAN RQF and PRQF) presented in this inventory. However, there is no common definition of the 'certification process' across the world.

The primary objective of the envisaged international guidelines concerning quality assurance of certification is to present to Member States and interested organizations a glossary of terms and a range of instruments, methods and tools they can work with to develop by themselves quality assurance of certification arrangements.

The guidelines will be designed as means to strengthen the comparability and transparency of quality assurance of certification approaches and methods across national boundaries. These objectives reflect the overall objective of giving value to qualifications acquired abroad. Essentially the guidelines should be seen as an evaluative tool for those involved with quality assurance of certification at national, regional and transnational levels. The level of prescriptiveness of the guidelines will depend on the form of the proposed WRLs. Their impact will rely mainly on their relevance and ability to add value at national or regional levels.

To advance the work on the international guidelines, UNESCO is commissioning in 2015 a global study on quality assurance arrangements that underpin the certification process, which will analyse and compare policies and mechanisms, identifying success factors and constraints, based on the review of existing evidence and on country and regional case studies. These findings will be used to develop the international guidelines.

GUIDELINES AND ORIENTATION RESOURCES

Around 140 countries are developing NQFs while at least six regions are engaged in developing RQFs. Mutual and peer learning and capacity-development should be encouraged and supported through initiatives, networks and countries. Substantial learning is already taking place through the UNESCO-UNEVOC

Table 6.2: Domains to be considered in the WRLs

DOMAIN	DEFINED AS	SUB-DOMAIN	DEFINED AS / COMMENTS
KNOWLEDGE	The ability to recall and present information	No explicit subdomains are proposed	The existing categorizations and forms of knowledge can be accommodated in the broad domain as is the current practice; this decision could be reviewed at a later stage.
SKILL	The ability to do in context	**FOUNDATION**	Skills which emphasize literacy and numeracy.
		TRANSFERABLE	The application of universal knowledge and skills across a range of social, work and geographical settings. This domain may at a later stage be further developed into a separate domain.
		TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL	The specific technical know-how to do jobs.
COMPETENCE	The application of knowledge and skills in context	**APPLIED COMPETENCE**	Includes foundational competence which focuses on intellectual/academic skills of knowledge; practical competence which focuses on the operational context; and reflexive competence which focuses on learner autonomy.
		AFFECTIVE COMPETENCE	Personal, behavioural and attitudes competences that include a specific focus on those competences that may be best assessed collectively.

Source: Keevy, J and Chakroun, B. Forthcoming. Levelling and Recognizing Learning Outcomes. The Use of Level Descriptors in the Twenty-First Century. Paris, UNESCO

e-forum and the ETF Qualifications Platform. It is very necessary, however, to scale up this learning and develop more appropriate guidelines and resources to be used for capacity-building, drawing on the experiences gained through regional processes (Europe, ASEAN, Caribbean and others) and the numerous existing initiatives. CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UNESCO-UIL can join forces to develop appropriate guidelines and resources. The UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre, in partnership with other similar institutions such as ILO Centre in Turin, will be able to use these guidelines and orientation resources to plan and organize these capacity-building initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Clearly there is still much to be done before a set of WRLs is in place and widely used. As mentioned earlier, UNESCO adopted a four-staged incremental approach which carefully considers the importance of political legitimacy and the credibility of such an international reference tool. There is also a need for building a broad agreement about how WRLs will add value to what is now offered by NQFs and RQFs. In this context, the issue is not so much the technical structuring of the WRL as the consultation, institutional and political processes underpinning them.

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CONCLUSIONS
GLOBAL PROGRESS IN NQF DEVELOPMENT SINCE 2013

We noted in our 2013 edition the worldwide surge in national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), which had reached more than 140 countries. This figure now exceeds 150. While only a handful of frameworks had been established before the millennium, the big expansion took place between 2008 and 2012. The United Nations lists 193 sovereign states, so NQF coverage extends to approximately three in four countries. The concentration is greatest in Europe, where only the continent's tiny surviving city-states or principalities remain outside the NQF network, with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) its hub. Most NQFs worldwide are comprehensive frameworks, covering all types and levels of qualification, while some are partial, covering only vocational education and training (VET) for example.

Regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) are the other main type of framework, and here too we see most regions of the world developing a metaframework to link the national frameworks.

Progress in developing and implementing NQFs since then has been variable across countries, unsurprisingly. Implementation is always more difficult than design, of course, but the speed of development of NQFs can also be influenced by specific national or regional circumstances which may not be confined to the NQFs themselves. These include wider political and economic factors such as ongoing upheaval in the Arab world.

But NQFs are now an established policy practice globally, and, in the countries cited here, they are now an integral part of their country's qualifications and wider education and training system.

Measuring progress is a rule of thumb business, but we can approximately define development stages thus: design and development; formal stages (such as legislation and formal adoption); the early operational phase; and then consolidation or advanced implementation. In the European Union, countries are divided among the formal, early operational and advanced stages, the biggest number being concentrated in the early operational stage. In the broader neighbourhood of the European Union, an area covered by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in this publication, most are in one of the design and development, formal or early operational stages.

Reaching the 'last' stage is not the end of the story. NQFs are never finished, and we know from the established first-generation NQFs in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland and other countries that the process, once mature, is cyclical, a pattern of establishment, implementation, review and modification then more implementation of the revised elements of the NQF.

We also believe that NQFs cannot simply be divided into either reforming or communicating categories. In many countries, especially transition or developing societies, the reform goal is explicit and uncontroversial, in any case. However some EU countries, for example, can be reluctant to acknowledge openly this aim. But our findings point to a more complex reality. While the EQF may, initially at least, have caused some countries in the European Union to set up NQFs primarily to link to the EQF, in practice even the NQFs in the pre-2004 EU countries *do* initiate reform, especially through introducing learning outcome approaches.

IMPACTS OF NQFs – DRILLING DOWN

Assessing progress inevitably begs the question of what impact NQFs have had. That the countries cited have in most cases progressed since 2013 has allowed us to look more deeply into changes effected by NQFs, to assess their impacts.

We have looked more broadly – at the level of a national education and training system – and narrowing the focus, at the more immediate area of qualifications and their surrounding infrastructure: for example, definitions of qualifications, links with occupational standards, quality assurance systems in qualifications and governance of qualifications systems.

The link between progress and impact in NQFs is learning outcomes. When we look at all the declared aims and functions of NQFs, their whole value – and by extension the weight behind any impact – hinges on learning outcomes.

NQFs imply outcomes across the system, via occupational standards and curricula. That said, countries describe outcomes for NQF levels and the qualifications within them differently, sometimes writing them broadly or indeed directly taking them from a RQF such as the EQF, or writing them in more detail and adding additional categories of descriptor to fit the national context.

In the countries covered here, NQFs and qualifications reforms are linked. In most cases the NQF is the principal tool, or system, to effect the reform. One effect of NQFs has been to generate a consensus on what the common elements and characteristics of a qualifications system should be. These include a basis in learning outcomes; some form of occupational analysis, such as occupational standards, to achieve labour market relevance; flexible paths and delivery, such as the use of units and recognition of prior learning (RPL); the separation of qualifications from curricula, with the former providing the starting point for system planning; engaging with stakeholders to improve relevance; and quality assurance mechanisms.

The EQF has accelerated development of NQFs in the European Union and its neighbourhood (which comprise together over fifty countries), as countries seek to compare and link their qualifications system to Europe, but it has also set the basic template from which all NQFs are designed. Rather like the bicycle, the basic design – usually with eight levels and three or more columns of descriptors – does not vary much. However, as we said in the first edition, this can be a deceptively simple understanding of NQFs. In practice, national contexts, needs and implementation arrangements do vary greatly.

Notwithstanding some scepticism about the impacts of NQFs, it is worth noting that no country has repealed or abolished its NQF. A few have drastically revised the arrangements for implementing their NQF, but none has abandoned an NQF altogether.

LOOKING TO 2017: NATIONAL TO REGIONAL TO GLOBAL: LINKING THE WORLD?

While most countries covered here have made starts in developing their NQFs, many have not moved on from discussions or blueprints. Where NQFs are legally adopted they often remain void of actual qualifications.

The key challenges are to reform curricula on an outcomes basis; to engage stakeholders (which too often remains patchy rather than systemized in sector skills councils); more varied and modernised assessment to take account of outcomes-based qualifications; and a wider application of quality assurance to apply to validation of qualifications and assurance of assessment.

In essence, it is a matter of integrating the NQF with the national qualifications system, and in turn using the NQF to influence the wider education and training system to provide lifelong learning in practice.

Emerging issues in many countries are to determine the place – whether they belong in an NQF or not, in substance – of international qualifications produced by companies such as Cisco and Microsoft, and sector-specific qualifications such as maritime and welding qualifications; and the opening of qualifications frameworks to accommodate non-formal qualifications on a national level, such as those from industry.

Nationally, NQFs structure and coordinate a qualifications system. Internationally, they provide an identifiable entry point to a qualifications system, and therefore a potential link to other countries' systems. While the EQF is arguably the most established of RQFs it is not the only such reference point. The regional equivalents in the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific and Africa are increasingly influential. RQFs greatly simplify linking between countries, acting as one common reference where the alternative might be a mass of confusing bilateral links.

At world level, governments, international institutions and other bodies, coordinated by UNESCO, are discussing how to build a global reference, the World Reference Levels. Given the international situation detailed in this publication, it does seems the next step, in one form or another, to have some type of world reference or framework.

Our global village seems to require this. We are a world on the move as never before, and qualified people are the most mobile, able more easily to cross borders. Jobs themselves are becoming internationalized as world trade and production become structured around global value chains, and as common transferable skills and competences are increasingly identified at regional and global level. Some education and training institutions are in the vanguard of this trend, offering training programmes via new communication technologies. There is a need to offer fair and valid recognition for qualifications gained in this way, at home, abroad and globally.

We are scanning the horizon now, but what might such an international system or framework look like? A necessary condition is a common conceptual basis, which can only rest on learning outcomes. World reference levels of learning outcomes would provide a neutral and independent reference point against which a level of learning can be assessed. They would support mobility, participation in the labour market and lifelong learning. They would need to be supported by agreed quality assurance principles, whose level of specificity will need to be deep enough to be meaningful at the level of an individual qualification, but broad enough to be globally shared. These all require agreements between (preferably) most governments in the world. At a technical level, expert bodies would need to devise guidance materials and co-operate in implementation through advisory bodies.

Our next edition, scheduled for 2017, will undoubtedly have more to report on these issues.

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United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Institute
for Lifelong Learning

ETF
Working together
Learning for life

CEDEFOP
European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training