European Qualifications Frameworks: Current State and Challenges Ahead

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Outline

- Why are there two European overarching frameworks?
- Current issues and challenges

Meta-framework characteristics

- **FQ-EHEA**
- Higher education
- May 2005
- Agreement between ministers
- 47 countries
- 3 cycles
- End-of-cycle descriptors + ECTS
- www.ehea.info

- **EQF-LLL**
- Lifelong learning
- April 2008
- Recommendation of Parliament & Council
- 33 countries
- 8 levels
- Level descriptors
- www.bit.ly/eqfportal

Purpose of EHEA framework

- International transparency
- International recognition
- International mobility
  - Assist in identifying points of articulation between national frameworks

Purpose of EQF-LLL

- To improve transparency, comparability and portability of citizen's qualifications to enhance international and national mobility

Learning outcomes

- Key conceptual development
- Descriptors of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skill and competences
- Described differently in the two frameworks
- Descriptors are compatible where they overlap (EQF 5-8)

Quality Assurance

- Both meta-frameworks emphasise quality assurance
- Bologna FW has the European Standards and Guidelines for HE
- EQF-LLL has ESG and EQAVET reference framework
- QA assurance of linking qualifications to NQF
- QA assurance of attainment of learning outcomes
- QA of the underlying provision of education and training

Linking frameworks
National => European

- Similar self-certification processes for both meta-frameworks
- Criteria for both are related
- 9 country/system reports under Bologna
  - Ireland, Scotland,England Wales and Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Germany, Finland, Malta
- 5 country reports under EQF
  - Ireland, United Kingdom, Malta, France, Denmark
- Many more reports in 2011 and 2012

Questions about qualifications frameworks

- Can meta-frameworks only yield their benefits when all or many countries have established NQFs?
- When do we know that a framework exists in practice?
- What value can be assigned to draft NQFs or adopted NQFs prior to verification/referencing to meta-frameworks?
- How can we be sure that the NQF implementation is progressing as planned? In short how is trust sustained?
- Can a framework be implemented if the concept of *learning outcome* is still contested? Can it be implemented meaningfully if the concept is *not* contested?
- Is self-certification a sufficiently robust mechanism for verification/referencing or do we require supra-national institutional involvement?

Questions about recognition

- How can NQFs be used by recognition authorities?
- What are the barriers to the use of qualifications frameworks in recognition?
- Is there tension between domestic use of NQFs as tools for reform and international use as tools for recognition?

Sectoral qualifications/frameworks

- Mutual understanding and trust often exists within economic and occupational sectors

- Desire to use the EQF to leverage this trust in support of mobility for labour market efficiency

Sectoral qualifications

- "Stateless" qualifications
- Especially found in information technology
- May be linked to specific multinational company
- "Hard" linkage (with verification process and monitoring) vs "soft" linkage (informational, self-ascribed)
- Linkage through one or more NQF vs linkage at European level

Questions about sectoral qualifications

- How is the recognition of international sectoral qualifications achieved?

- Can it be managed / tolerated by national systems? (In some countries, sectoral qualifications seen as a threat to the national system)

- What is the added value of recognizing sectoral qualifications through national and / or European meta-frameworks?

- Who should have authority to recognise sectoral frameworks at the European level?

Questions about QFs on the global stage

- If the New Zealand NQF has been linked to the Irish NQF and the Irish NQF has been referenced to the EQF, does that mean that the New Zealand NQF can be considered referenced to the EQF, at least informally, as a soft linkage?
- Will such second-hand linkages have any effect on recognition practice in Europe or in the non-European countries concerned?
- What further networking or agreements are desirable to develop articulation between NQFs inside and outside Europe?
- What potential exists, if any, to link the various meta-framework initiatives?