



FINAL REPORT

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK
FROM A STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci

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Content: Ligia Deca, Bruno Carapinha, Anthony F. Camilleri, AUGENT, SVIZ, USI, EON, Frederick DeDecker, Colin Tueck, Bernardette Farrell, Vladimir Tkalec.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

In your hands lies the final publication of ESU's Towards a European Qualifications Framework Project. This project, which has been running for the last 18 months, was intended to bring stakeholders from around Europe together for national and trans-national discussions on the implementation of the EQF and their role in any such implementations. The projects' approach was unique as it showed that the main stakeholders in education: student unions, school student unions, staff unions, higher education institutions and employers have a view on qualifications frameworks and can, but do not always, play a pivotal role in their implementation. ESU has been working on the project together with the following partners: the Ghent University Association (AuGENT), the Norwegian School Student Union (EON), the Slovenian Teachers' Trade Union (SVIZ), the Irish National Union of Students (USI), the German Employers' Union (BDA). In addition, FZS, the German national union of students, also aided ESU in implementing the project during its' final stages.

In April 2008, ESU organized the Validation Conference in Lake Bled, Slovenia, that furthered the debate regarding the stakeholders' involvement in the development of National Qualifications Frameworks aligned with European Qualifications Framework. One of the clear messages that came across in the conference debates was that qualifications frameworks are interpreted differently across Europe and where different stakeholders have been involved a different qualification framework is developing. The involvement of stakehold-

ers in different countries furthermore depends on the context of the higher education system and political culture. In a country such as Slovenia, where there was much controversy about a new law on higher education leading to mass protests, the involvement was not the same as the relative calm in the higher education discussions in Flanders. The project has also allowed us the opportunity to observe how the development of the National Qualification Frameworks proceeds, when taking into account trans-national partnerships based on common projects, such as the one between Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

Like any reform, the successful development of national qualification frameworks is heavily influenced by the ownership felt by the actors in the implementation process. The natural fine-tuning mechanisms are easy to observe in day to day life, e.g. where student unions want to see more information about the linkages between different cycles, universities mostly want to present more transparency of the qualifications they offer. When these actors' needs or visions conflict, many different suggestions for the implementation process surface. The question that remains to be answered is how can these suggestions be used and valued in a development process that is usually carried out behind the closed doors of the "expert" meetings?

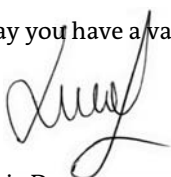


This publication aims at presenting not only the five national case studies regarding the experience of implementing national qualifications frameworks, but also at sharing the stakeholders' views regarding their harmonisation with the existing FQ-EHEA and EQF-LLL. I hope you will enjoy the insight it brings.

For their efforts, I would like to warmly thank all the project partners, who have made this project a reality. Also, a special thank you to Colin, Koen, Bruno and Anthony, for their commitment, valuable expertise and above all, patience. This publication would not have been a reality without your help.

May you have a valuable reading experience!

May you have a valuable reading experience!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ligia Deca', written in a cursive style.

Ligia Deca,
ESU Chairperson

2 THE EQF FROM A STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE VISION, AIM AND METHODOLOGY

Anthony F. Camilleri

The ESU stakeholder project aimed at facilitating mutual exchange of experiences between stakeholders from different countries in setting up a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), implementing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) by aligning their NQF to it and putting in place supporting instruments necessary to allow for the full success of the EQF. The project aimed at mutual co-operation between stakeholders, to allow them to learn from each other, discuss and exchange their different opinions and experiences.

Five key stakeholders from five different countries, which are at different stages in the implementation of the EQF and their respective NQF, were brought together to share their experiences. The exchange between these five stakeholders/countries was recorded and shared with other stakeholders in European countries so that they could increase their capacity to tackle the implementation of the EQF in their respective countries.

The project was run along a number of guiding questions, which served to focus the work in its various elements:

- What are the main challenges from the stakeholders' perspective in setting up a NQF?
- How do the stakeholders actively involve themselves in that process?
- What is the impact of an overarching NQF on the national qualification system?
- According to stakeholders, what specific benefits can be achieved by setting up an overarching NQF and aligning it to the EQF?

- Which are the most crucial supporting instruments from the stakeholders' perspective?
- How can stakeholders contribute to putting them in place?

Five stakeholders on national level (National Partners) were involved: A national higher education student union, an organisation of higher education institutions, a national employers' organisation, a national trade union and a national organisation of secondary school and VET students.

The 5 national stakeholders/countries cover the following three distinguishable stages of implementation/progress:

- An overarching NQF is in place, which is to be aligned to the EQF (IE)
- A Qualifications Framework is in place only for one specific sector, e.g. either higher education or VET (DE)
- No Qualifications Framework is in place at all (yet) (BE-fl, NO, SI)

The project's specific aims were:

- To provide stakeholders a forum (on a national level in the 5 involved countries) to exchange and discuss their experiences in relation with the EQF.
- To facilitate new partnerships between the involved stakeholders.
- To compare the experience made by stakeholders in the different countries and at different stages of implementation/progress

and to identify common issues, problems and solutions.

- To provide a wide range of stakeholders from further countries with the ability to learn from the experience made by the 5 national partners and to make use of that experience in their own national context.

2.1 THE PARTNERS

ESU—the European Students' Union is the officially recognised representation of students in higher education in Europe. ESU has been actively engaged in the work on Qualifications Frameworks in Europe, both concerning the QF for the European Higher Education Area as well as the EQF for LifeLong Learning. ESU strongly supports the creation of an overarching QF in Europe and has capacity built on this issue and related issues, such as the recognition of prior learning and credit systems, in the past. ESU served as the coordinator of the project

USI—the national union of students in Ireland is the officially legitimated representation of students in higher education in Ireland. USI has been dealing both with the Irish Qualifications Frameworks as well as with the discussions on emerging European Qualifications Frameworks in the past.

AuGENT—Associatie Universiteit Gent is the umbrella organisation of four higher education institutions in Flanders: Universiteit Gent, Hogeschool Gent, Arteveldehogeschool and Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen. Being an umbrella of a “classical university” and universities of applied sciences, the association naturally has a lot experience in the cooperation of different sectors and sub-sectors of the education system.

EON—Eleveorganisasjonen is the representation of students in secondary schools and VET in Norway. Being a representation of learners EON has been dealing with issues such as how to enable learners to smoothly progress across the traditional boundaries between the sectors of the education system.

SVIZ—the education, science and culture trade union of Slovenia. SVIZ has been dealing with all aspects of higher education in Slovenia and already established well developed links to other national stakeholders in Slovenia.

BDA—the confederation of employers' organisations in Germany. BDA is strongly involved in the debate on reforms of the higher education system in Germany. It has been actively involved in the setup of a national qualifications framework for higher education.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The project was divided into three phases, the results of which you can see in this publication:

1. Preparation
2. National Dialogues
3. Collection and Dissemination.

1. Preparation—Dec 2006—Jun 2007

Rationale: As a first step, a more detailed work plan was created by the Coordinator and the National Partners. Furthermore, the processes of National Dialogue were more clearly defined jointly by the project partners. This includes, for instance, an agreement on a set of guidelines for the National Dialogues. An Advisory Board was involved in this process to gather further valuable input into the project.

2. National Dialogues—Jun 2007 – Jan 2008

This is the key step of the project. The National Dialogues enabled stakeholders in each of the involved countries to exchange and discuss their views, opinions and experiences on the EQF and its implementation in their respective countries. This resulted in a documentation of the national situation and the stakeholder dialogue, which was then fed into the discussion on European level amongst the other project partners.

3. Collection and Dissemination—Jan 2008 – Jun 2008

The third phase has the purpose of bringing together the results of the 5 national dialogues, to identify similarities and differences between the participating countries and to disseminate and spread the results to the education community. The third phase included a closing conference held in Bled, Slovenia with the aim of discussing the results within a wider audience. It also includes this publication.

A further description of the project can be gained from the slides included in the Annexes

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bruno Carapinha

This publication outlines the major reflections and conclusions of the EQF project 'Towards a National Qualifications Framework', conducted by ESU from 2006 to 2008, and involving five partners from five different countries. The project aimed at exploring the debates and main challenges of implementing the European Qualifications Framework from a stakeholder perspective, designing a roadmap for tackling recurrent deficiencies or problematic areas that hinder a successful adoption and implementation of this framework in the national contexts. Since the EQF addresses all education sectors, the project included different stakeholders that would have an interest in this debate such as national unions of students (USI—the Union of Students in Ireland), business representatives (the German Employers Union—BDA), a national school students union (the Norwegian School Student Union—EON), a higher education network (the Ghent University Association—AuGENT) and a trade-union organization (the Slovenian teachers' trade union—SVIZ). In addition, FZS, the German national union of students, also aided ESU in implementing the project during its' final stages. These partners came from Slovenia, Germany, Ireland, Belgium and Norway, allowing also for a wide coverage of the geographic scope of this EU initiative.

The national experiences regarding the implementation of the EQF from the partners' point of view were also extremely diverse, ranging from five years of intensive debates and successful outcomes (a NQF in place

since 2004 and the FETAC system of further education and training qualifications that was introduced in the summer of 2006) to timid attempts of national consultation regarding a national qualifications framework under the auspice of mass protests regarding the new law on higher education.

The abovementioned partners were asked to engage in and promote the debate with other actors at the national level in two rounds of consultations and then report back to the project. All these debates provided the background for a conference held in Slovenia on 21-22 of April 2008, bringing together all the partners and drawing the main conclusions. The main objective of the project was to provide future processes of implementation (also in the countries involved) with some expertise and reflection about the true challenges in the creation of this new educational language. The outcomes of the debates held in the validation conference can be consulted in the Annexes part of this publication.

The European Qualifications Framework constitutes an important instrument in the transformation of the higher education sector in Europe and the promotion of an outcome-based education. Looking at competences and abilities when describing qualifications allows for a greater transparency and comparability between different education systems and opens the door to the mobility of students and workers in the area covered by the European Union. However, at the same time, the definition of broad descriptors for each level promotes to a certain extent the maintenance of sufficient diversity between the systems and within the systems.

By introducing in the same framework the different streams and sectors of the education and training systems operating in Europe, the EQF has the advantage of providing the basis for a debate on the relationship between different types of education and between qualifications in different levels of the EQF. A qualification is classified by terms of profile and level but it is also deconstructed in terms of learning outcomes, which forces education policymakers to reposition the knowledge achievement and the individuals not in terms of (legal or social) status of the institutions, levels, degrees or diplomas but in terms of skills, competences and attitudes. Ultimately, it means a depreciation of the mode and location of the learning and a valorization of the learning achieved. In other words, there is a shift from the analysis of the process to the analysis of the outcomes.

Quite evidently, this is very important when looking at the incipient lifelong learning systems in Europe and the reduced level of recognition of prior experience-based learning combined with the valorization of competences of workers and youngsters without a formal qualification. It forces the different education actors to rethink their own objectives and interrelation with other actors. The potential for flexibilisation of education progress is laying in the EQF main principles, but cannot be assured by a simple framework, which operates as a kind of articulation system between levels and sectors and translation device between national education systems.

It is still at the national level, where implementation methods and priorities are set, that the EQF comes to reality. And in doing so, the national authorities and the stakeholders involved share the ultimate responsibility and power for giving substance to what is, apart from the evident practical advantage, a very interesting theoretical hypothesis. Many countries in Europe are now starting their work regarding the implementation of a national qualifications framework that is aligned with the EQF (and in the case of the higher education sector with the Bologna framework). The late adoption of the EQF meant a greater delay in starting the work.

There are many different approaches to this implementation, reflecting the variable circumstances each country operates in. But a common denominator is the tendency of governments to move into rushed and merely formal implementations of national qualifications frameworks. A number of political commitments

at the European level and the pressure of the stakeholders themselves in these arenas motivate this attitude, aiming at presentation of results.

In order to truly operate as a transparency tool, the national qualifications frameworks have to be built in agreement and debate with the relevant stakeholders and with society at large. The main purpose of the reform is to enable learners, education providers and employers with a common language and understanding of what a qualification means and what is the learner able to do after the completion a period of study or the achievement of the knowledge foreseen in those levels and diplomas. The experience of the development of the Scottish and the Irish national frameworks show us clearly that such an undertaking and mind change takes time and quite often is marked by periods of moving forward and periods of holding still. However time consuming the implementation might be, it is essential for the future ownership or mere use of the national qualifications framework that the process is not rushed and/or only formally undertaken.

The national partners of this project report quite similarly the same type of concerns. On the one hand, it is quite clear that there is a need for further involvement of stakeholders. The stakeholder ownership over the national qualification framework facilitates its creation, understanding and adoption. It is therefore a precondition for the success of the undertaking, as it has been show by different experiences. As Sjur Bergan put it, »a framework will only work in practice if institutions, learners and employers know about it, approve of it, find it helpful and actually use it«.¹

The concept of stakeholder itself has still to change, as it should include all partners and groups which have a stake at the development of these educational reforms. For the case of the national qualifications frameworks in the higher education level, the partners concluded that school-students should also be involved and listen to as future users of the framework. However, the participants also recognized the need to empowerment and capacity building of the different stakeholders in this respect, as some do not possess the knowledge and/or financial capacity to engage in and influence the reform processes.

Finally, beyond the remits of the education policy-makers and stakeholders, society at large has to under-

¹ Sjur Bergan, *Qualification—Introduction to a concept* (2007), page 159.

stand the debates and the meaning of qualifications. Otherwise, there is a serious risk of the growth of a feeling of distrust and confusion regarding the work of education providers and the capacities of graduates and workers. The overall tendency to make this debate either too technical or carry it far away from the eyes of the public opinion is going on the opposite direction of the initial transparency objectives of setting up a framework for qualifications.

4 CASE STUDIES (NATIONAL REPORTS)

*»This is the key step of the project. The National Dialogue will enable stakeholders in each of the involved countries to exchange and discuss their views, opinions and experiences on the EQF and its implementation in their respective country. This will result in a documentation of the national situation and the stakeholder dialogue, which will then be fed into the discussion on European level amongst the other project partners.«
(Project Application)*

In the following pages, you can read the reports from the national dialogues which were held as part of the project. These national dialogues aim at bringing to-

gether all relevant stakeholders in each of the involved countries, in order for them to exchange experiences and discuss the implementation of the EQF and the creation of a NQF in their respective countries. Due to the fact that each country participating found itself at a different stage of implementation and all have their specific traditions, different key issues and concerns are outlined in each country report.

The National Dialogues were oriented along some guiding questions, in order to simplify comparison between them at a later stage. In addition to their function within this project, the National Dialogues also helped foster a culture of dialogue between different stakeholders in more general terms.

5 REPORT FROM THE 1ST ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

AUGENT-BE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

DESCRIPTION OF GHENT UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

Associations: a Flemish phenomenon

Associations are the result of several changes in higher education in Flanders. The decrees on the universities (1991) and the university colleges or ›hogescholen‹ (1994) shifted more autonomy and responsibility to the institutional level, introduced new concepts such as quality assessment and assigned new missions to the university colleges.

After signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the Flemish Minister of Education started a process to reform the Flemish higher education system. The Flemish Parliament adopted a new Higher Education Act on 4th April 2003. One result of this transformation process is the officially registered co-operation between a university and one or more university colleges, known as ›association‹. In Flanders, 5 associations were established.

One such association is Ghent University Association (AUGent), a non-profit collaboration consisting of Universiteit Gent, Hogeschool Gent, Arteveldehogeschool and Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen.

The goal of associations is to improve the co-operation between its members. Education and research are the main points of interest, but a fair amount of attention and effort goes to fields such as quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, student facilities, internationalisation and infrastructure.

Ghent University Association

The members of Ghent University Association join forces regarding education, research (including the development of the arts), services to society, infrastructure and student-related facilities.

- Established 29th April 2003
- Four members: Universiteit Gent, Hogeschool Gent, Arteveldehogeschool, Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen
- 55,000 students (28% of the total student population in Flanders)
- 9,000 members of staff
- 200 basic courses (Bachelors and Masters) and 160 postgraduates in all scientific and academic fields
- Services to society, applied and fundamental research in all relevant fields
- Campuses in Gent, Aalst, Brugge, Kortrijk and Oostende (provinces of East and West Flanders)

Mission and aims

Ghent University Association

- defines itself as a dynamic network aiming at top-quality results;
- offers a wide range of subjects within the open European area of higher education and in a context of life-long learning;
- develops a common research potential of international status and gives an impetus to the development and practice of the arts at a high level;

- enhances a functionally integrated range of activities linked to a strong and distinct local community;
- acts as an open-minded community of staff and students with optimum opportunities for all to develop their talents, based on respect for everyone's identity and sustainability.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The First Flemish Dialogue was held at the premises of the AUGent (Ghent University Association), »Het Pand«, Onderbergen 1, Gent on May 8th 2007. On this day, different stakeholders came together for a first reflection on EQF and its relation with NQF (albeit that in this particular case »national« has to be understood as »regional«, i.e. the Flemish Qualification Structure or *Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur, VKS*): and SQF. The Guiding Questions set up by the project partners in consultation with the Advisory Board of the EQF-project and translated into Dutch and aligned to the »Flemish« context, were used as a guide along the discussion.

The dialogue was prepared by the Senior Education Advisors of the AUGent, in consultation with the Flemish Ministry of Education (especially the civil servant responsible for the follow-up of the EQF and ECVET at Flemish level) and some members of the team of Flemish Bologna-experts.

The programme (included) consisted of a general introduction of the Leonardo da Vinci EQF-project »Towards an EQF—The stakeholders views and experiences«, followed by a more detailed discussion in the afternoon. The detailed discussion in the afternoon was held in two equally divided working groups. The first Flemish dialogue ended with a plenary meeting where a brief outcome of the discussion in the two working groups was presented as well as the follow-up of the project.

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS

At the Flemish Dialogue, stakeholders were present from:

- VDAB: Flemish Public Employment Service (Training organisation)
- UAB: University Association Brussels (Higher Education)
- AUHA: Association of University and University Colleges Antwerp (Higher Education)

- AKULEuven: K.U. Leuven Association (Higher Education)
- AUGent: Ghent University Association (Higher Education)
- AHOVO: Flemish Ministry of Education
- EPOS (Europese Programma's Onderwijs, Opleiding en Samenwerking): organisation responsible for the implementation and follow of European programmes for education and training)
- VLOR: Flemish council of Education (covering all education levels and areas)
- VLIR: Flemish council of universities
- VHLORA: Flemish council of university colleges
- NVAO: Dutch-Flemish accreditation organisation Pilot projects: representatives of a number of pilot projects in the framework of the Flemish Qualification Structure 2 Bologna-experts
- VOKA: Flemish Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- COC: Christian Educational Trade Union
- VSKO: Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education

The following stakeholders were invited, but could not participate:

- VBO: Belgian Business Union
- VVS: Flemish Student Organisation
- ACOD-onderwijs: Socialist Educational Trade Union
- VSOA: Liberal Educational Trade Union
- Flemish Umbrella Organisation of School-pupils
- Syntra: Flemish Agency for Business Training
- Umbrella Organisation of Autonomous Community Schools
- Umbrella Organisation of City and Municipality Schools
- Umbrella Organisation of Provincial Schools
- SERV: Socio-Economic Council of Flanders
- A representative of the minister of employment
- A representative of the minister of education and training

5.2 FAMILIARITY OF THE STAKEHOLDERS WITH EQF (AND NQF-SQF)

At the general meeting in the morning, all stakeholders introduced themselves and gave a brief answer to the following questions:

- How familiar is your organisation with EQF?
- What is your involvement with EQF?
- What is the priority given to EQF in your organisation?
- How do you promote EQF (or will you be promoting EQF in the future)?

The representatives of the Flemish Public Employment Organisation VDAB mentioned that VDAB is not directly involved in EQF so far, but the organisation is very familiar with VKS (Flemish Qualification Structure ≈ NQF) since VDAB took part in two pilot projects of VKS. The priority of EQF for VDAB is the change in the ›thinking process‹: a shift towards thinking in terms of competences and the link to the Flemish so-called ›Competence Agenda‹. VDAB foresees furthermore a shift in the way of certification. For the actors involved in the ›lower‹ levels of the EQF, it involves a ›quantum-leap‹ to describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (with the knowledge component as the most difficult one). The ›scaling-exercise‹ for these levels (i.e. to define the level) is certainly not a sinecure.

VDAB will in due time pass the information on EQF, NQF, ECVET, ECTS, ... on to all its internal departments.

Higher Education Institutions and umbrella organisations are familiar with EQF, but also with the QF EHEA. Both get quite a large priority from the top and intermediate level management but the average teachers are generally not very aware (although many of the principles are becoming familiar). The universities and university colleges are currently describing their qualifications in terms of learning outcomes and this is also incorporated in the quality assurance mechanisms more and more. For these institutions, this offers a positive perspective regarding the recognition of (foreign) degrees and it is also strongly linked to their APEL-policies (regarding the accreditation of prior experiential learning). It certainly offers a possibility for international profiling as well.

One Higher Education representative also reminded the discussions from the past re. the ISCED-levels, which should warn us that such systems can be abused or manipulated as well.

The communication of the EQF towards all levels of the management, education staff and administration and especially the proof of added value of the EQF is seen as a challenge

One of the representatives of the Flemish ministry of Education present was in charge of the pilot projects of the VKS and organised the Flemish consultations about APEL-procedures and ECVET.

Another Ministry-representative has been actively involved in the process of the Dublin descriptors and the construction of the QF for EHEA. One of the challenges from his point of view is to restrict the tension between the EQF and the QF EHEA. It is not possible nor tenable to work with two qualification frameworks: to complement the systems is therefore necessary. He also mentions that one terminology is a prime condition in order to carry out any further actions. Even at this point, confusion of terminology remains: e.g. the concept of ›qualification‹ is sometimes seen as merely a ›degree‹ and sometimes broader.

The Flemish ministry also supported the activities of the so-called ›Bologna-experts‹, who have been supporting three disciplines (social work, music and medicine) in describing the learning outcomes of their qualifications. The incorporation of the ›LO-philosophy‹ into ECTS was felt to be still a point of attention. They are also responsible for information and dissemination. Future plans include the stocktaking exercise for other disciplines, the link with recognition and a guide on joint degrees. The higher education sector is also following with much interest the evolutions re. the creation of so-called ›subdegrees‹ (level 5), which at this moment have not as such been installed in Flanders. This was especially linked to the **social dimension** of the EQF and the ›salmon effect‹ of such a system, allowing for individual growth.

The representative of the VLOR (Education Council) has been actively involved with an advisory role in the EQF-, VKS- and ECVET-discussions and as participant in one of the projects of the VKS. As for secondary vocational education the final competences incorporated in the VKS could create possibilities.

In reflection to the pilot project (in textiles) he participated in, the following points of attention are mentioned:

- It is important that all stakeholders participate and work together (education—sector—social partners) in such a sectoral approach

- There is a lack of clear information and terminology (confusion between VKS and education structures)
- They succeeded in describing the competences for the so-called »Professional Proficiency Titles« (i.e. a kind of qualification granted on the basis of experience and expertise (= informal and non-formal learning) rather than on the basis of formal learning)
- Defining the credits was very difficult and the added value for the »lower« levels was disputed.

The other participants in the VKS-pilot projects (dental hygiene, business studies, hairdressers & youth work) added useful comments as well, e.g.

- **Further (methodological) research** is necessary, especially re. »scaling« the qualifications
- A **database** including all qualifications seems a necessity.
- A common (between education and the sectors) **terminological basis** is necessary.
- The link to qualifications clarifies the **aims** of (otherwise sometimes rather »blur«) training programmes
- The **motives** have to be clear (otherwise one risks ending up with a very technical and not so »social« approach).

The representative of the Accreditation Agency NVAO stressed the importance of EQF in the accreditation processes, especially as regards the obligation for **international/European benchmarking**. NVAO especially focuses on **output** indicators (such as learning outcomes), since these facilitate international comparison. Hence they stress this output-approach very much in their external communication (with the institutions).

The educational umbrella organisation VSKO-representative wants to stress the importance of the mutual **relationship** between the different **levels** on one hand and between **structural and pedagogical aspects** on the other hand. We also have to be aware of the enormous impact of the this string of changes that is currently taking place. Therefore the **added value** has to be continuously stressed in the external communication.

5.3 CONTEXT AND INVOLVEMENT STAKEHOLDERS

INTRODUCTION

The Commission Staff Working Document »Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning« was the basis for a large European consultation, included in Flanders. There the »field« was consulted at the end of 2005 by means of a questionnaire with 14 topics. This resulted in a synthesis (prepared by the consultancy agency CESOR and the Free University of Brussels) sent to the European Commission (to be found also on http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/results/benl_nl.pdf).

Since the EQF-LLL has to be linked not only to sectoral frameworks but also to national frameworks, Flanders started the development of a »Flemish Qualification Structure« (VKS). A first »discussion note« regarding this topic was published on October 12, 2006. According to the minister of education, mr. Frank Vandenbroucke this is launched *»not only to link up with the European Qualifications Framework, but also and primarily to relaunch the debate in Flanders on important aspects of the qualifications system and eventually redesign and reform these«* (speech of the minister at an EQF-information day, March 14, 2006).

During Winter-Spring 2007, the field has been consulted again about the concrete Flemish proposals for an NQF and a number of pilot projects have been financed (in different sectors) to test the applicability of the proposed Flemish Qualification Structure.

DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

In general, participants noted a strange ambiguity with on one the hand more **»qualification-possibilities«**, but at the same time on the other hand stricter educational **structures**. Is there enough goodwill to leave structures behind and merely focus on qualifications?

The current discussion in Flanders on the so-called »higher vocational education« (*hoger beroeps onderwijs*), i.e. the structural embedding of »sub-degrees« or »tertiary short cycle degrees« (EQF-level 5) illustrates this very well, especially whether this needs to be situated in a secondary or higher education structure. This led some participants to question how the distinction between e.g. level 4 and 5 will be made clear or (more general) whether there is an equal interval between all levels. They also warned for the danger of creating a

kind of »waterfall«-system, where learners failing to get a qualification at one level, fall back to a lower level. Another danger could be that **only »longer«** educational or training courses would be included in the QF and not the short programmes.

Especially the participants with experience in some pilot-projects stressed the fact that very little attention seems to be devoted to the »lower« levels (because there is less experience and expertise available at these levels since training and education at these levels are often less structured).

Certainly if one immediately links a certain **value** to the different levels (with 1 being very low and 8 very high), this linear thinking jeopardizes the whole idea behind qualification frameworks.

Some participants stressed that it is a pity that the European **»key competences«** have not been incorporated in the EQF-LLL and the proposal for a Flemish QS. This would certainly be beneficial to give an important place to informal and non-formal learning and enhance the value of APEL-procedures in the qualifications frameworks. It would also allow certain competences e.g. creativity to be stressed more

The latter also necessarily requires a link to formal learning: it seems impossible to allow for the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning if a formal learning path has not been described. However:

- 1 not all formal learning paths have been described in terms of competences yet;
- 2 it is also possible that for certain degree programmes, the learning outcomes are not all-encompassing and that hence some competences (that one has acquired through non-formal or informal learning) are not part of these learning outcomes of a formal learning pathway;
- 3 not all qualifications are linked to formal learning pathways (e.g. when there is no professional profile)

Another drawback that was brought to attention, is the fact that oneself (the sectors) has to describe the qualifications. There is uncertainty on how the validation of such a process will take place (e.g. what will be the role of the so-called National Centres?; how will quality assurance mechanisms be adapted to the qualifications rationale? etc.)

A ministry representative stressed that, for reasons of transparency mainly, it would not be wise to completely abandon thinking in terms of educational and

training **systems** and replace it by merely qualifications. Thinking in terms of qualifications implies a change of mentality anyhow; hence some structural anchors can be beneficial. On the other hand, this does not mean that the freedom of education should be jeopardized, some new initiatives should remain possible.

At another point in the discussion it remained clear however that one will have to set aside the so-called **»degree-fetishism«** in order for any QF to be successful.

5.4 IMPACT OF EQF AND »VKS«

INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned, the ministerial discussion note *»De Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur—Een eenduidige ordening van kwalificaties«* (The Flemish Qualification Structure—a univocal arrangement of qualifications) was made public on October 12, 2006 together with a consultation.

The pilot projects (in dental hygiene—business studies—hairdressers—youth work—constructing—textiles) are currently testing the feasibility and possibilities for implementation of this VKS, including the formulation of level descriptors. A similar project, coordinated by the Bologna promoters, ran for higher education in the course of 2006 for medicine, social work and music.

It can hence be expected that the introduction of a qualifications framework will not only have structural implications (e.g. for Flanders the introduction of educational programmes at level 5), but also implications regarding the content (e.g. other, more specific or more generic learning outcomes).

DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

A key issue raised at the beginning of the discussion on the impact of the introduction of QF's, is what the relationship will be like between the educational and professional sectors in **the creation of SQF's**. At this moment, there seem to be only few SQF's in place. Most existing frameworks also seem to be mere (and often very general) **»function description«** (sometimes based on professional requirements, including e.g. number of hours), rather than a description of the learning outcomes in terms of competences. Where learning outcomes have been described, these are sometimes quite vague and difficult to assess; the latter being a crucial element in the learning outcomes-approach.

Because for regulated professions², professional organisations are very much involved in the regulating process, a good description of a qualification in terms of LO's requires a strong link between these organisations and educational and training institutions, not only at the local or national level, but also on a European level. This is even more the case for some very »protective« professions, e.g. architecture, magistrature etc.

A warning was formulated however that for some well organised and »strong« sectors (e.g. engineering) setting up a decent sectoral framework (in conjunction with the educational and training side) is far more feasible than for less-organised sectors (e.g. bakers). This was somehow even linked to a plea to work with a different approach for the lower (4) and higher levels of the framework. Reasons given for this by participants include that generic competences, including the »key«-competences and language competences, play a more prominent role in the lower than in the higher levels and that in higher levels formal learning plays a much more important role than in the lower levels and will hence be pressurised by QF's.

For educational programmes with **no direct link to a profession** (the example of linguistics was often referred to) this is less clear. There was a strong plea however, that this should certainly remain possible: not all qualifications have to be directly linked to a profession; although »social relevance« (i.e. having a certain added value in society in the broad sense of the word) to some extent is necessary. This is also linked to a certain focus on more **generic competences**, with greater possibilities for transfer.

These more generic competences should also be included in the learning outcomes of profession-oriented qualifications, because learning should remain broader than just a mere profession-orientation and include an overall personal growth component. In this, education and training institutions play a crucial role, especially in the guidance of learners. A strong and well-developed system of student and especially »learning

path« guidance (starting early in the study career), can also diminish the large failure rate in (higher) education and training in Flanders, linked to the infamous »waterfall«-system (where students aim for a higher level and upon failure feel forced to take a »step back« to a lower level).

Concerning the existence of a European and national frameworks, it would be interesting to try and describe the **specific advantages** of a Flemish Qualifications Framework compared to the (already existing) overall framework and the sectoral frameworks.

It was also made clear that the frameworks should remain a certain **flexibility**, to adapt to changes in society. This is another argument to include generic and also »research«-competences in the schemes, because these are especially relevant in a quickly changing society. Hence, one should avoid starting too much from the current situation.

One remark focused on the fact that even when a qualification framework is set up jointly, employers will still want to **assess** (potential) employees apart from their qualification (linked to individual potential, although aspects e.g. autonomy, accountability/responsibility and context should be important elements in the determination of the qualification level).

A point of attention there is that for financial (pecuniary) reasons, employers would be inclined to judge the level of qualification lower than in reality (and the educational sector higher?).

Although for some participants (mainly from the VET-sector), the QF's should be limited in **scope**, others stress that it needs a broad approach, including on the structural level, because the civil effects of these systems should not be underestimated.

The issue was also raised whether the QF's should make use of a sort of overall **database** or whether it will remain a kind of virtual umbrella system. Opinions varied; but it seemed clear that the establishment of national database should remain the choice of the member-states.

To summarize it could be stressed again that it is important that educational and training organisations and the professional organisations **collaborate jointly** in the creation of (especially but not exclusively sectoral) frameworks. Their complementarity is certainly an advantage, e.g. the description of the knowledge component of the learning outcomes is traditionally easier for educational and training organisations than it is for professional organisations. The cooperation also avoids that a purely educational or purely professional jargon

² It is important to point out that in Belgium, regulated professions are the responsibility of the federal government, whereas education and training belong to the competences of the communities (Flemish/Dutch-speaking; French-speaking and German-speaking). It hence has to assured that there remains a direct link between the entrance to a profession and a given qualification. One of the means of doing so is to ensure that these qualifications are included in the so called (federal) »crossroads database«, in which all relevant data regarding these issues are linked. This however needs to be done at the Flemish (and not the federal level).

is used. In that way QF's become a kind of »**communication-instrument**« and allow for »social competences« to be included as well.

Participants also stressed the relevance of **pilot projects** in the field, and urge the authorities to foresee enough financial support for these, also in the future.

5.5 ANTICIPATED BENEFITS AND RISKS; STAKEHOLDERS' POSITIONS

INTRODUCTION

During the preparation of the National Dialogue it was decided to change the approach to this issue and to work with a SWOT-analysis (analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of frameworks rather than focus merely on benefits and risks.

DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

For most participants, the **strong points and opportunities are quite obvious**, hence they focused mainly on the weaknesses and threats.

On the other hand, participants stressed that we should be grateful about this positive evolution in general and not focus too much on the negative aspects

Weaknesses

- »Level« implies a kind of judgement. An alternative would be to talk about »domains«, which is more neutral.
- It was felt (also by the NVAO-representative, who added that the accreditation agencies take this point very seriously and will monitor this further in the future) that we do not have enough guarantees about the current quality assurance mechanisms in the different member states. It seems also not clear how the different NQF's will be linked to the EQF-LLL and who will monitor this.
- The relationship EQF-LLL and QF-EHAE has only unilaterally been established, which means e.g. that all bachelor qualifications should automatically be in level 6 whereas not all qualifications of level 6 can be bachelors. The footnotes (marked with a number of asterisks) in the table (annex 2 of the framework) are insufficient to ensure a bilateral relationship. Participants doubted if the level descriptors in the EQF-LLL are well enough in

accordance with the descriptors used in the QF-EHAE (broadly: the Dublin descriptors).

- Linking the length of study (number of credits) to a qualification
- The EQF might not lead to an emancipatory effect in the lower levels, which is especially necessary for the so-called bottleneck-professions

Threats

- The EQF could become a threat for formal learning
- The stakeholder do not want this instrument to become too political
- Is there no danger for certain degree courses not leading to a specific profession, to be left out of a database system to be set up?

5.6 QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND CREDITS

INTRODUCTION

An important underlying aspect of qualification frameworks are credits. For higher education, ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), introduced almost 20 years ago, is evolving into an accumulating system more and more, with potential for lifelong learning.

Next to this, the European Credit for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was launched in 2006; often referred to (by the European Commission) as the underlying credit system for the EQF-LLL.

DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

There was a strong plea from all participants for a **unified credit system** underlying qualification frameworks, which should also lead to an administrative simplification. This system has to take learning outcomes as the focal point as well. In an output-oriented system, also credits should be based on output-criteria rather than on input-criteria, as is the case in ECTS (study load is a clear input element). However, among participants (also from outside higher education) there was a much stronger belief and trust in ECTS than in ECVET. In higher education, there is certainly no wish to abandon ECTS. Some non-higher education participants argued that if ECTS were to be used, alterations will certainly be necessary together with a better established methodology.

A future credit system will probably focus more on accumulation than on transfer, although this last element remains an inherent aspect. A good quality insurance system has to ensure this.

Another element debated was how the division of qualifications in terms of **units** would be conceived and whether this would not lead to numerous »partial qualifications« (with limited civil effects).

5.7 SUPPORTING AND RELATED INSTRUMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Next to the underlying credits, a number of ideas about supporting instruments are related to qualification frameworks are currently being launched. This includes new ideas such as »National Reference Centres« (next to or connected to the existing ENIC/NARIC-centres) or the inclusion of existing EUROPASS-instruments (e.g. Certificate and Diploma Supplement, language passport, European CV etc.).

Also, a number of principles are currently put into practice at European and Flemish level, e.g. procedures for the accreditation of prior experiential learning, the »ervaringsbewijs« (*proof of experience*), track guidance systems (as well regarding education and training as for workers and unemployed) etc.

The introduction of qualification frameworks will have a possible impact on the existing quality assurance systems and practice in professional recognition.

DISCUSSION AT THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

The first points raised here are focusing mainly on **quality issues**. Some participants for instance are not sure that the APEL-systems (for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) in place meet the same quality criteria for all levels in the qualifications frameworks. A possible solution suggested for this was to have a general APEL-policy in Flanders and to set up a uniform Flemish APEL-system and uniform mechanisms.

National centres should primarily be responsible for the meta-quality assurance of the whole system and overlook e.g. who and how the assessment of qualifications is organised.

One participant doubts the **relevance of instruments**, e.g. the Language Passport, in which the students have to make self-judgements.

The importance of well-functioning guidance systems (as some education and training providers already have in place) was linked to this issue.

5.8 REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST FLEMISH DIALOGUE

GENERAL IMPRESSION

Although no official evaluation was held, the feedback from participants was generally positive:

- All participants contributed in a very **open atmosphere**;
- Individual participants expressed their **appreciation** for the organisation, especially regarding the good preparation, the interactivity, the facilities offered etc.;
- The **mixture of participants** was much appreciated, although higher education was overrepresented;
- It was felt a pity that neither the students organisation VVS was present (apparently due to a mistake in dates) nor a representative of a pupils' or other **learners' organisation**; this gives food for thought: do they attach enough or the same value to EQF as other organisations? Do they realize they are a very important stakeholder in this process?
- There were some comments about the **timing**, viz. related to the fact that a lot of the questions related to still »unofficial« documents;
- The participants involved in the **pilot projects** could contribute from practice which was definitely an added value; at the same time they expressed gratitude for having been given the opportunity to share their experiences;
- The **process** and **outcomes** are **relevant**, both for the stakeholders involved as on the project level; as well for the European as for the Flemish level.

Follow-up & suggestions

- Hold an **official evaluation** after following national dialogues (perhaps even standardised for all project partners in the different countries?);

- Try to involve more participants from **outside higher education** and especially »users' organisations«;
- Make the most recent documents **available** to participants and try to **time** meetings in accordance with progress on the political level.

INTEREST IN QF

In general, participants showed a great interest in the issues discussed during the meeting. Although not all participants were equally knowledgeable on the different topics, the discussions kept interactive and lively and there was enough time for clarification when necessary.

It was however obvious that the more »technical« issues, e.g. the link to credits and other instruments created a less participative debate, since for some participants the detailed ins and outs of these aspects were lacking. Also some aspects of the EQF such as National Centres are still too vague to be discussed at this point.

An overall positive attitude to qualifications frameworks could be observed, although there were enough critical remarks and suggestions to ensure that it is a topic that needs the necessary attention not only from the stakeholders but also at the decision-making, political level.

CONTACTS AND COOPERATION

During coffee-breaks, lunch and reception networking opportunities were ample and eagerly used. Especially the contacts between participants in pilot projects and others were very beneficial as well as these between participants from different sectors. It is too early to report on the possible effects of this networking in the long term, but it is already clear that many participants are eagerly looking forward to the rest of the project and the national and international meetings that are to follow.

MORE THOUGHTS

During a very interesting and useful preparatory meeting at the Flemish Ministry of education with a civil servant involved in qualifications frameworks, a certain tension was felt between their work and the process of this project. This is also partially due to an internal tension between the EQF-LLL (and VKS) and the QF for EHEA (and the work of the Bologna-experts) on the other hand.

One specific issue related to the name of the meeting, which should certainly not remind of »consultation«, since this process has to be interpreted as being officially finished.

This interaction, however, was felt as very fruitful in the preparation of the first national dialogue and during the meeting the input of the representatives of the Ministry of Education was very important and beneficial.

6 REPORT FROM THE 2ND ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS AUGENT—BE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The »Flemish Dialogue« in the framework of the project »Towards an EQF—the stakeholders' views and experiences« was held on May 8th 2007. On this day, different stakeholders came together for an in-depth reflection on EQF and its relation with the National Qualifications Framework (albeit that in this particular case »national« has to be understood as »regional«, i.e. the Flemish Qualification Structure or Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur, VKS) and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks. The Guiding Questions set up by the project partners in consultation with the Advisory Board of the EQF-project and translated into Dutch and aligned to the »Flemish« context, were used as a guide for the discussion.

The dialogue was prepared by the Senior Education Advisors of the AUGent, in consultation with the Flemish Ministry of Education (especially the civil servant responsible for the follow-up of EQF and ECVET at Flemish level) and some members of the team of Flemish Bologna-experts.

The programme consisted of a general introduction of the project, followed by a detailed discussion in the afternoon. The detailed discussion in the afternoon was held in two equally divided working groups. The first Flemish dialogue ended with a plenary meeting where a brief outcome of the discussion in the two working groups was presented as well as the follow-up of the project.

Because this dialogue was felt to be quite successful in the number and variety of participants, the outcomes and network-opportunities offered, it was agreed within the project not to organise another »Flemish Dia-

logue« but to organise some in-depth interviews with a number of stakeholders (selected so as to ensure a good variety between stakeholders) in stead.

A document with some topics for debate was prepared by the senior education advisors of Ghent University Association to structure the 1,5—2 hours interviews. In this document the main issues from these parleys are summed up, together with some suggestions for follow-up.

In a first part, an update on some important issues is included as they were presented by the civil servant of the Flemish Ministry of Education, responsible for the follow-up of EQF and ECVET. From the interviews it is clear that not many stakeholders were aware of the current state of affairs, understandable because much of it is work in progress. Hence some issues touched upon hereafter are less accurate than others.

6.2 CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

In the discussion with the civil servant of the Flemish Ministry of Education, responsible for the follow-up of EQF and ECVET, the current state of affairs was highlighted.

At the beginning of 2008, the »Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning« was ready for official publication (foreseen for February). The Dutch translation is also ready.

As a result of this recommendation, two important organs will be created:

- 1 A European Advisory Group, responsible for the European coherence and to support transparency. This committee will also set up a European web-platform as a kind of portal to the different national databases with information on the national qualification frameworks/systems (including possibilities for explanation and registration).
- 2 National Coordination Points that will act as a kind of clearing house on the national level.

In an annex to the recommendation, joint principles of quality assurance have been included.

The big challenge is now to keep the momentum so that the implementation on the national levels is done smoothly. In order to keep the attention going, the European Commission plans a large launching event before Summer 2008 (in Brussels) with national activities to follow in due time.

In Flanders, a first proposal for a Flemish Qualification Structure (»Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur«, VKS in short) was launched in October 2006. The framework is currently being revised on the basis of the outcomes of a number of pilot projects and the official feedback received from the different advisory committees. There is also internal consultation taking place within the Flemish administration and with the other communities in Belgium as well as on the federal level. It is clear from these consultations that different methodologies to describe qualifications are being used. This means that special attention will be needed for those professions that are either by law or through professional organisations »regulated« at a national level.

Since a qualifications system also needs a good underpinning credit system, it is important that progress has been made on the creation of such a system. In this respect the evolutions on ECVET are very important as well as the overture made between this credit system for vocational education and training and ECTS, the system widely used in higher education.

There is clearly a tension between a system that is on the one hand uniform but can at the other hand cater for diversity. It was already clear that a qualification would be made up of a certain set of units, where these units represent a cluster of competences. It seems however important that now the principle is agreed on that there is a difference between relative and absolute value of credits for units: the first one representing a certain percentage as compared to the total of the qualification;

the second one offering the possibility to link to the effort necessary for a learner to acquire the learning outcomes of the unit (and these would then be called credit points). In order to be in line with ECTS, ECVET would also aim for 60 credits/year.

6.3 TOPICS DISCUSSED DURING INTERVIEWS WITH SELECTED STAKEHOLDERS IN FLANDERS

Apart from the civil servant of the Flemish Ministry of Education, responsible for the follow-up of EQF and ECVET a random but mixed selection of stakeholders was chosen for the in total 4 other in-depth interviews:

A representative of »Steunpunt Jeugd«, the coordination unit for youth policy in Flanders

Two staff members of VOKA, the Flemish businesses network (in a joint interview)

Three stakeholders from Higher Education Institutions (in a joint interview): a representative from a large University in Flanders and two representatives from a University College.

From the side of the »employees« (trade unions), a representative of the Catholic Education Union (COC).

Many stakeholders reported that since the first »Flemish« Dialogue in May, it has been very quiet regarding evolutions in EQF and more specifically the NQF, »Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur (VKS)«. All stakeholders interviewed expressed their concern about the process of development of the VKS. In Flanders, the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for setting up the VKS in cooperation with the Flemish Ministry responsible for Work and the Flemish Ministry responsible for Culture, Youth and Sport. Stakeholders regret that in the first phase of this procedure, the preparatory phase, there is no consultation of »external« (=non-ministerial) stakeholders. After the preparatory phase (still going on), there will be a consultation with the external stakeholders, in order to fully set up and – in a later stage – implement the VKS. All stakeholders expressed their hope that the consultation will be done thoroughly, in due time and with enough time to consult all parties involved.

At this moment, the Ministry of Education and Training has also published a paper on the implementation of the so-called »HBO« (Higher Professional Education) in Flanders, because up to now education and training

leading to level 5 of the EQF is not clearly outlined. The HBO-paper is the initial impetus given to this discussion. The concern expressed by the stakeholders is that the HBO-discussion can not finish when the EQF-VKS is not in place yet.

The representative of the »youth sector«, presenting in this stakeholder selection the sector of non-formal learning, made it very clear that for this group of stakeholders, the expectations re. the implementation of a European and National QF are very high.

It opens the debate very clearly of how non-formal learning can link to formal learning, a necessity for a QF to become effective. The debate in these sectors has hence been opened very strongly in the last years (2006-2007).

On one hand this implies that some key issues be solved:

- the strong adherence of the dominant European credit system (ECTS) to the notion of time has to be abandoned. Setting up a QF necessitates a link to a credit system, but if this credit system has to be all-encompassing (hence including formal AND non-formal learning) it can not be merely based on a notional number of hours. Recent evolutions in ECVET point into this direction and also ECTS seems to be changing likewise.
- all existing learning pathways in sectors such as culture, youth, sports,... but probably also work-based learning have to be »formalised« as well, i.e. their learning outcomes have to be described in terms of competences and have to meet certain standards/norms (which can be checked). It is however important that it should not lead to the creation of new norms, but that existing norms are being standardised and that this facilitates the transferability of qualifications. Until the rise of attention for QF it was a taboo to try and formalise certain learning activities of many organisations outside »formal education«.
- the accreditation/recognition of prior learning and learning experiences have to be »formative« (offering for instance exemption in formal learning) and not merely or predominantly »summative« (meaning: immediately offering entrance to the labour market, as is often the case now).

On the other hand the whole debate on QF's (and related issues e.g. credits, APEL etc.) has a number of very interesting and important side-effects:

- It has started the debate on assessment (of individuals) and QA-mechanisms (of »providers«) in the sectors involved in non-formal learning. Especially the assessment of attitudes is an important point of attention: everybody agrees these are important, but because it's difficult to assess them along different levels, they are not used in the EQF to discriminate between levels.
- Because of more contacts in various contexts related to the preparation, testing and (planned) implementation of QF's (and related issues e.g. credits, APEL etc) the links between the sectors of formal and non-formal learning has been made easier and relationships are more equal.
- Because of similar reasons, non-formal learning organisations are also more and more invited to participate in different projects on QF's (and related issues e.g. credits, APEL etc) and policy discussions. In that respect, these organisations plea to mutually (i.e. different actors involved in non-formal and formal training/education/...) consider policy strategies. The eventual goals have to be defined jointly.

On account of these side-effects it is felt to be crucial that the whole evolution is not kept limited to certain sectors. Hence the creation of SQF's could jeopardize these important side effects: it would restrict the scope of the QF and limit the effects of its implementation (because of the lack of transferability and therefore restricted application).

Having stressed all advantages of QF's for organisations mainly involved in non-formal learning, it should however not be forgotten that aligning their »training activities« to such a framework should remain a voluntary step for these organisations (albeit best taken by many involved at the same time). Some fear that the implementation of a national QF might lead to an obligation. It must be clear that one should but enter such a system if the internal quality assurance mechanisms (= self regulation) are in place and if there is enough room for the »formative« (rather than the mere summative) possibilities of the frameworks.

The main issue at stake for partners from sectors such as youth, culture and sports is that the creation of QF's (with APEL-, credit- and other related systems alike) should lead to a larger proportion of the target groups getting involved in »learning«. They should have the opportunity to work on their personal development not merely for the sake of it but also because it is planned and leading to concrete, pre-decided aims.

Other interesting elements mentioned were:

- The importance of the OECD-study on APEL in Flanders that has recently been published;
- The fact that in the process of implementing QF's one has to be conscious of the fact that the dominant role (because of a longer and broader tradition in many of the concepts at stake) of (higher) education in the debate makes it difficult for other actors to be equally involved;
- Because many aspects still need to be »discovered« or »invented«, the real in-depth research phase has not yet started. The preparatory process is quite long and there is a concrete risk that in the end many stakeholders will have lost interest. At the same time some sectors would not want to get involved in QF's because of the long process, its complexity etc.
- There is a need to discuss about the use of the large variety of instruments e.g. Diploma/Certificate Supplement, Europass, Youth Pass, European Volunteers Portfolio etc:
 - Is the wheel not always reinvented?
 - Can European instruments easily replace existing (and successful) national instruments?
 - Do we always need strict formats for all instruments or can agreement on some content elements be sufficient?

The Flemish plans for instance to create a so-called »Leerboekje« (Learning booklet), in which all (non- and informal) learning experiences are made available, are also developed on a European level. It should however be clear that all these instruments should focus on the description of »learning outcomes«. The fact that generic descriptors, to be used as a kind of common standards, are lacking for the »lower« levels (1 to 4) of the QF's is an important point of attention in order to be able to enhance transparency, of course the ultimate aim of these

instruments. The European key competences could offer a possible starting point for this (as apparently has been the case in Malta, where these have been included in the national framework).

- Other issues that were brought to our attention by the employers' organisation were the following:
- It has to be clear that for the employers' organisation, EQF/VKS/APEL etc. are very important and even core issues (very much related to social issues as well), but that employers themselves are not much aware (although potentially interested). The discussions focus too much on content rather than on levels, which it should be about.
- the discussion on level 5 qualifications (new in Flanders) seems further advanced than the discussion on the Flemish QF, but at the same time it is somewhat jeopardizing the chances of a Flemish Qualification Structure. We have to avoid that the implementation of this new level is starting too much from the existing formal reality rather than offering new possibilities.
- QF's offer a unique chance to get things more transparent but they should not be abused, i.e. merely using frameworks to »scale« already existing qualifications as results of formal learning pathways. This means that in- and non-formal learning have to be given a clear place in the whole framework and hence they need to become formalised to some extent. This could e.g. be done by creating sorts of »precedents«-lists, in which in- and non-formal learning that has been assessed against a formally acknowledged set of competences can be listed. For VOKA it is clear that the authorities has to take on the role of clearing house in this whole process:
 - Set up systems for the accreditation of prior learning experience (APEL)
 - Perform independent level-assessments of education and training programmes (against the criteria of the QF's), regardless of the existing (implicit) levelling
 - Organise the quality assurance
 - Invest in it

Only this can enhance mutual knowledge about and trust and understanding between the worlds of education, training and others. Also, only governmental (financial) support can assure that the system will become well-established. At that moment, the role of the authorities could be diminished and the individuals or organisations could take on financial and other responsibilities.

If Flanders wants to become a knowledge economy, the inclusion of all learning in the QF is necessary.

All social partners agree that QF should not be limited to formal learning and therefore it is not only a case of education and training organisations: is a complete new approach and not an add-on to an existing system (= formal learning). Probably education & training need to become more oriented to the labour market and at the same time employers need to become more oriented to learning. This however should not mean that educational programmes which are labour-market oriented could not offer a broad education (i.e. including generic competences). The different stakeholders have to look at it as a joined challenge: they have to work together and not against one another.

As for higher education: the fact that (financial) interest in research is growing, should not mean that the attention devoted to education should diminish. On the contrary, the social partners strongly believe that good education is the only guarantee for good research and continuous innovation.

There is a need to set up a generic system of »competence management«, based on the use of »competence portfolio's«, not immediately linked to »certification« (whereas now about 55% of all employees in Flanders are employed on the basis of a direct link between their »degree« and the function (+ remuneration), e.g. employees in the public service or the service sector in general. Such a system could be based on the experience in the use of the various European instruments (e.g. DS/CS, Europass etc.) but it should be very open and not restricted.

A supporting credit system can only be fully created when the QF's are in place.

- Re. the implementation of SQF's: some sectors are working on it, mainly in an international perspective (e.g. IT) but generally in Flanders the so-called »professional competence profiles« that are being created by the Socio-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) will not consider levels; the levelling needs to

be done by authorities. The authorities really need to take the role of clearing house.

- Regional initiatives (e.g. »Regional Technology Centres«), including different stakeholders seem to be very successful for instance in focusing on APEL at different levels
- Counselling and »track-guidance« are still marginal phenomena (except for HR- and some large companies in some sectors). In general, companies do not (yet) feel the need as being urgent enough.
- A crucial challenge is to keep the stamina: there is a risk for either going too slow or too fast. Both can lead to different stakeholders pulling out. Such a challenge calls for visionary leadership, which is quite scarce for the moment.

At the Higher Education Institutions, it is clear that not all teaching and administrative levels are aware of EQF and VKS. The reason for this unawareness is that it is hard to explain EQF and VKS at this time, when the VKS is not in place yet. As soon as the whole picture (EQF-VKS-SQF) is known, consultation rounds and information sessions will be organised. At this point, too many questions are asked and too few answers are known. However, people who do get acquainted with EQF as a concept, react very positive and see a lot of potential in it.

The Union COC has informed their party, a.o. by a publication in their monthly magazine »Brandpunt«. Reactions were also positive towards the »concept« of EQF but a lot of questions were raised, merely towards the pressure of work that comes along with the EQF.

Concerns expressed by the representatives from the Higher Education Institutions were:

- What with the difference between a profession-oriented bachelor and an academic bachelor? Will this distinction still be possible and maintained in the VKS?
- Will the link between the secondary schools and the University (colleges) be taken up successfully by the Higher Professional Education (HBO)? At this moment there are too many questions about this that are not answered, and cannot be answered yet. This vision was shared by the representative of the Catholic Education Union COC.

- It is assumed that HBO will be level 5 but this implies a qualitative ›brush up‹ of the profession-oriented bachelors towards level 6. Now it is taken for granted that pba's are level 6 but this is a dangerous assumption. This concern can also be seen as a challenge.
- the changes towards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning are welcomed but are –at this moment- not realised under the influence of EQF. The role of EQF is in this aspect ›marginal‹ but this will hopefully change when EQF and VKS are implemented. This vision was shared by the representative of the Catholic Education Union COC.
- The concept of mobility that is stimulated with EQF is being hartly welcomed, but the International Relations Offices need the VKS first in order to set the perspective of mobility in place.
- Awareness for the risk of ›sameness‹. Will we all be obliged to think the same?
- There will be need for a good description of the levels and a good explanation of the supporting/related instruments of EQF. The ›shop-floor‹ is running behind. Assessment within a company is still highly ranked over the diploma supplement, vacancy's and job descriptions often use obsolete jargon etc... This concern was shared by the representative of the Catholic Education Union COC.
- The supporting/related instruments must be kept as simple as possible and must be linked to each other, the EQF and VKS.

Specific concerns expressed by the representative of the Catholic Education Union COC include:

- The impact on the everyday life must be taken into account in the discussion.
- The concept of mobility that is stimulated with EQF is seen as a great advantage of EQF.
- EQF has implications towards the legal position of employees: if the modular system will be introduced, the work schedule will become more irregular and therefore the pressure of work will increase. This aspect can be treated successfully if a financial stimulus is foreseen by the government when implementing EQF.
- The concept of ›Learning outcomes‹ is not yet integrated in the elementary schools. There-

fore, a great effort is asked from teachers at elementary level in order to get acquainted with this. This also increases the pressure of work.

- The levels of EQF must mesh with the final competences at elementary and secondary school level. This implies also that EQF will have an impact on the diplomas for elementary and secondary education. Pilot projects to estimate the impact are recommended.
- Attention must be drawn to the fact that education also has a ›cultural‹ aspect: in one country an electrician e.g. is valued higher than a dentist. This can have an impact on the national QF-levels and can make it difficult to compare levels.
- Awareness must also be drawn towards the ›translation‹ of a NQF level towards an EQF level: a bad translation or a misinterpretation can cause a lot of troubles, especially towards the mobility-aspect.

6.4 SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO GET ON WITH THE PROJECT?

Stakeholders involved point out that this is a unique project in e.g. its combination of stakeholders and broad scope. For many of them, it offered an opportunity to discuss common issues with representatives from organisations they otherwise do not get in contact with.

Hence they expressed the wish to try to continue the ongoing debate, preferably in conjunction with the governmental organisations responsible for QF's in a sort of ›Think Tank‹. We need to keep a positive aura around these topics.

6.5 CONTACT

The interviews were prepared, conducted and followed-up by the senior education advisors of Ghent University Association

Ghent University Association

Frederik De Decker, senior education advisor
 Frederik.DeDecker@AUGent.be
 Tel. +32 9 264 82 65

Nathalie Depoorter, senior education advisor
 Nathalie.Depoorter@AUGent.be
 Tel.: +32 9 264 82 60

7 REPORT FROM THE 1ST ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

SVIZ-SI

7.1 INTRODUCTION

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT PARTNER (ORGANISATION, MEMBERSHIP, ...)

SVIZ—ESTUS (EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE TRADE UNION OF SLOVENIA)

ESTUS was founded in 1990 and it counts now almost 40,000 members. It is the largest independent trade union in the whole Slovene public sector.

ESTUS is an independent, democratic and non-party organization joined by the employees in education, training, science and culture on a voluntary basis in order to:

- express and implement their interests in an organized way,
- safeguard their economic and social position,
- protect the employees' rights,
- enforce the role and the importance of education, culture and science as fundamental carriers of successful future of our country,
- influence the policy set-up in education, science and culture.

ESTUS signs and supervises the implementation of:

- the General Collective Agreement on Public Sector,
- the Collective Agreement on Education,
- the Collective Agreement on Research.
- the Collective Agreement on Culture.

ESTUS

- participates in the following parliamentary committees: Committee of Culture, Schooling, Sports and Science and Committee of Health, Labour, Family and Social Welfare Policy;
- has been the foundation member of the Educational International (EI) since 1993;
- cooperates with ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee of Education), with ILO and Unesco.

In 2006 ESTUS was the foundation member of KSJS (Confederation of Slovene Public Sector Trade Unions with almost 73.000 members)

GENERAL INFORMATION ON ORGANISATION OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

The first National Dialogue within the framework of this project took place on May 28, 2007 at ESTUS headquarters at Oražnova 3 in Ljubljana. The meeting was planned for May 10th but had to be postponed due to the absences of many of our stakeholders. The representatives of numerous social partners gathered with the purpose of exchanging viewpoints and experiences we had with the EQF (European Qualifications Framework) and its connection to the NQF (National Qualifications Framework).

The questionnaire, designed on the basis of the translation of the project guiding questions, was sent to all the participants of the meeting together with an invitation and served as a preparation for the meeting and as a possibility of acquisition of opposing positions re-

garding specific questions. The purpose of the meeting was to acquire as much information as possible regarding the current state of EQF and NQF in Slovenia and to get an approximate idea of the stakeholders' position concerning the questions from the above-mentioned fields.

Some of the participants submitted their filled out questionnaires before the meeting and some afterwards.

The meeting was divided into 4 parts. In the first part Borut Weber, the coordinator for Slovenia, talked briefly about the European Commission project within the Leonardo da Vinci framework—Eqf project »Towards and EQF—The stakeholders views and experiences.«

In the second part Mrs. Slava Pevec Grm, the representative of CPI (National Institute for Vocational Education and Training) talked about the current projects in the field of vocational education and training in Slovenia as well as in Europe.

She presented some historical events which happened between the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration and the 2007 Ministry Conference of Higher Education.

Mrs. Pevec actively participated as the representative of the Republic of Slovenia at the EC initiative to encourage the introduction of EQF and NQF in the EU member states. Currently these documents, together with the recommendations, are subject to parliamentary procedure and are to be adopted in October 2007.

She also participated in the making of the report on the results of National Discussion on European Qualifications Framework, which was harmonized on February 2, 2006 by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Labour, Family and Social affairs. According to the information we received from Mrs. Slava Pevec Grm the jurisdiction is now in the hands of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, which is making all the necessary arrangements for the introduction of NQF in Slovenia.

She also emphasised the difference between NQF and NSQ (National System of Qualifications) where NQF is to be considered in a narrower sense—it is the framework which prescribes the systems to be used and the connection and transition between them.

EQF is a meta-framework designed to be used as a translation tool to help us harmonize Slovenia with the rest of the EU member states. NQF is designed primarily to meet the national needs and only later for harmonization with the EQF.

In the third part of the meeting the representative of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS), Mrs. Tanja Damjan, talked about KLASIUS (classification system of education and training), about its purpose, origin and application.

KLASIUS is only one of formal frameworks and is, due to its allocation for the statistical purposes, not completely harmonized with the needs of NQF, but it does represent a basis for this, as it contains classifications according to different level and enables classification according to formal and informal education.

In the fourth and final part of the meeting, the representatives of the stakeholders shared their opinions concerning the issue at hand and exchanged viewpoints regarding some of the key issues of the project.

The meeting lasted from 12 pm until 3 pm.

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS/ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN NATIONAL DIALOGUE

SSU: Slovene Student Union (Higher education, member of ESIB/ESU)

UM: University of Maribor (Higher Education—University representative)

UP: Primorska University (Higher Education—Faculty representatives)

GZS: Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (Employers organisation)

DOS: School Student union of Slovenia (Secondary School Education)

KSJS: Confederation of Slovene Public Sector Trade Unions

PI: Educational Research Institute (Research)

CPI: National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (formed by Government)

SORS: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia

There were 11 representatives present at the meeting; two from UP (University of Primorska) and two from CPI (National Institute for Vocational Education and Training). Some government and National commission of higher education quality representatives were invited but could not participate at the first meeting.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS/INITIATIVES (AT NATIONAL OR REGIONAL LEVEL) REGARDING QFS (IF APPLICABLE)

Taking into account the current situation in Slovenia, and the fact that the minister was faced with in-

dignation and an organized protest meeting of several stakeholders when the draft of the new Law on Higher Education was proposed, a much more intense cooperation has recently been observed among the stakeholders.

Engineering Academy of Slovenia, Conference of Research Institutes of Slovenia, Independent Trade Union of Workers at the University of Ljubljana, Chancellor's Conference of Slovenia, Trade Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovenia, ESTUS (Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia) and SSU (Slovenia Student Union) are the stakeholders (partners in Higher Education and Research) that signed a declaration which states that the draft proposal of the united Law on High Education and Research and Development Activity, proposed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, is conceptually incorrect, legally unfinished, constitutionally disputable and not a suitable/proper foundation for managing the field of science and high education and cannot be the basis for a sensible debate.

At this time different stakeholders organized several meetings to discuss the issue of high education to which we were invited.

7.2 STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (COMPATIBLE TO EU PROPOSAL):

We have some standards but no frameworks.

SPECIFIC SECTORS (E.G. HE OR VET)

We have law and standards basic in HE and VET but no frameworks.

COMPETENT AUTHORITIES OVERSEEING IMPLEMENTATION

Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology

FAMILIARITY OF STAKEHOLDERS WITH THE IDEA AND CONCEPT OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Our stakeholders are more familiar with EQF than with NQF because Slovenia has not introduced NQF yet.

They are all ready to actively participate in the process of planning and developing of the NQF under the condition of being involved and having their say in the process and not by only being asked their opinion once a solution has already been decided on. In this case, similarly as in the case of determining the levels according to the Bologna Declaration, they cannot be expected to take any responsibility.

7.3 THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE—OVERVIEW

MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT (PEOPLE INVOLVED)

The project is managed by two people (Borut Werber and Sandi Modrijan) and by two experts who are also representatives of Trade unions Vladimir Tkalec and CPI—Slava Pevec Grm. There is also some technical staff involved in organizing and distributing materials. We took one person to translate the text to Slovene. We also took consultation with our ESTUS secretary Branimir Štrukelj.

LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS/ORGANISATIONS INVITED/ INVOLVED

Trade unions and CPI (government service).

DESCRIPTION OF MEETINGS HELD (DATES, FORMAT, PARTICIPANTS, ...)

Daily correspondence by e-mail between Modrijan and Werber.

31.1.2007 (first translation of Guidelines for National Dialogues, Sandi Modrijan, Borut Werber)

12.3.2007 (date and place agreement and first draft of participations list; Branimir Štrukelj, Sandi Modrijan, Borut Werber)

20.4.2007 (finishing list of participants –Tkalec -Werber)

25.5.2007 (preparing of dialog agenda—Tkalec—Werber)

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS FROM THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

All the participants stress the importance of such meetings and projects. Some of them were invited for the first time to the dialog with such range of social partners. Some of them are not well acquainted with

EQF and NQF and see these projects as an opportunity of getting and sharing information in this field.

7.4 OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Related to the guiding questions, by different categories:

- a Context and stakeholder involvement
- b Impact of the EQF and NQFs
- c Anticipated benefits and risks; stakeholders' positions
- d Qualifications frameworks and credits
- e Supporting and related instruments

SITUATION IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia there are different systems which are not the same and are not connected to one another. These are:

- educational system (secondary vocational education and training based on national vocational standards/national system for vocational standards)
- official educational system of general and higher education
- National vocational qualifications based on formal, informal and occasional education and
- educational training in companies which is not connected with none of the systems

CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The first National Dialogue on EQF and NQF took place at the end of 2005 and at the beginning of 2006. The representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Education and Sport, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social affairs and the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training issued a joint report on February 2, 2006. Stakeholders were not included in the making of this report but were given the opportunity to express their positions/views through a website.

The Law on Higher Education adopted 8 levels on the basis of KLASIUS and adapted the old and the new educational programmes so that they fit into the framework of these new levels. Some stakeholders oppose this because they say that certain groups of people who graduated in accordance with the old educational pro-

grammes are allotted into lower levels according to the new programmes.

On the basis of a writ on EQF issued by ETUCE the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions of Slovenia (KSJS) discussed the formal proposal for EQF in October 2006 and adopted certain positions, including some that deal with the establishment of the national qualifications framework. Therefore, it was a trade union and not the employers that answered the writ—the union supports the EQF, insists on the establishment of the NQF and demands that the stakeholders be included in the preparative arrangements for the NQF. It also very critical in finds current activities of the ministry with regard to NQF to be insufficient and without a trace of any kind of dialogue, in spite of the fact that the classification instrument KLASIUS is also used by the government for defining wage levels in collective agreements in Slovenia.

ECTS in Slovenia is used in institutions where the new educational programmes are already under way and harmonized with the Bologna Declaration.

Slovenia also implements EUROPASS and issues Europass Diploma Supplement and is also legally regulated.

In February 2007 the government appointed the new representatives of the Council for Higher Education of Republic of Slovenia—NQF falls within the Council's competence. No later than a year after the establishment of the Council the Commission for Quality of Higher Education has to be established as well.

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST NATIONAL DIALOGUE

General evaluation of the meeting

All the participants were pleased to have the opportunity of being a part of the NQF and EQF making process. For some this was their first participation on the national level. A vast majority of those present at the meeting were more familiar with the topic of EQF than NQF and see this project as an opportunity for gathering and exchanging information on this unfamiliar topic.

Results of the first National Dialogue

In your opinion, what are the main challenges in establishing the national qualifications framework?

The positions of stakeholders differ with respect to this issue therefore we thought it would be best to just enumerate them:

- cooperation all the key/relevant stakeholders in the process of harmonization
- cooperation with the European experts on qualifications framework
- determining the educational levels, use of learning outcomes and competences
- connection with the quality assurance system
- funding of the project
- implementation of national evaluation system and acknowledgement of informal and occasional learning
- preparative arrangements for the tool which will enable us to classify individuals and their knowledge, their skills and competences according to levels without regard to the way in which they acquired them
- how to establish mutual trust and quality assurance mechanisms for recognition and acknowledgment or preliminary learning
- to define purpose and aims of NQF on the national level

In contrast to the representatives of CPI (National Institute for vocational education and training) and some representatives from the field of quality (e.g. National Commission for quality), who had previously been included in projects by the government, the rest of the stakeholders had never participated in planning and designing the discussion on NQF. They were able to indirectly contribute by publishing their opinions and position on a website if they were even informed that such a website existed. In the meantime the majority of stakeholders organized their own discussions about the subject (students, trade unions, universities).

Stakeholders believe that it is government's responsibility to introduce NQF and EQF while the implementation of the two frameworks falls into the hands of institutions such as CPI (National Institute for Vocational Education and Training), Council for Higher Education, RIC (National Examination Centre), SORS (Statistical Office of RS) and other professional organizations. Representatives of employers, trade unions, universities, students, and non-governmental organizations are considered to be key/relevant stakeholders.

The influence of EQF on NQF

NQF is still under discussion in Slovenia, therefore, EQF does not have any influence on it yet. NQF is seen as qualifications framework adapted to circumstances/

conditions and needs in Slovenia. EQF is seen as a meta-framework used as a translator.

Advantages and disadvantages shareholders see in NQF

Advantages:

- transparency
- flexibility, transfer
- easier and increased mobility
- making different educational routes possible
- acknowledgement of informal education
- to facilitate access to different educational programmes and advancement opportunities with regard to higher qualifications
- same criteria for transition and advancement and for evaluation/assessment of learning outcomes
- acknowledgement of preliminary knowledge
- lifelong learning
- greater quality of education and training
- possibility of transfer and accumulation of credits
- systematic arranging of all classifications in the same way and under the same conditions
- a guarantee for quality and applicability of acquired knowledge on Slovene as well as European labour markets.

Disadvantages:

- poorly defined purpose and aim of the new framework
- undefined competence of NQF
- exclusion of stakeholders and professionals/experts in the process of designing and implementing of NQF
- unsuitable harmonization process of the old and new educational levels
- there is danger of describing the current state only, without any flexibility and application
- limitation in the development of new qualification
- not enough time for harmonization
- not well-thought out NQF, not fitted for real life situations

- irregularities due to the use of inappropriate tools (KLASIUS and other classifications)
- issues not being thoroughly dealt with/or being superficially dealt with—issues that require an in depth involvement and cooperation of European experts/professionals
- NQF is a mere document of no use to anyone
- Educational institutions are responseless
- Low quality
- Narrow vocational areas
- Inadequate/poor parallel systems (quality, assessment/evaluation, recognition)
- ostensible consensus with non-implementation as result
- getting lost in petty details
- ineffective because of desire for the best possible adaptation to EQF
- European system for quality control in education
- system for verification and recognition/acknowledgement of informal education
- system for identification, assessment/evaluation of preliminary knowledge
- system for assessment of knowledge, competences and other skills
- system for teacher training
- system for informing stakeholders and other interested parties about the usefulness of the framework
- establishment and cultivation of mutual trust
- methods of guidance and counselling

Qualifications framework and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System)

ECTS in Slovenia is formally-legally and practically implemented in higher education programmes. It is used by all higher education institutions where the Bologna curriculum has been implemented and the new educational programmes are carried out.

Opinions on having a unified ECTS or ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) system differ. Student organization believes that it is unnecessary to implement two separate systems as it will increase the differences and cause more trouble with the introduction of NQF. Trade Union representatives believe just the opposite—they think it would be best to use ECVET. However, they all think that uniform system should be used—but not necessarily immediately. It is possible to have two systems to begin with but later only the more appropriate one should.

Support mechanisms and related instruments used to support NQF

- connection of NQF with an external quality assurance system
- recognition of education, also non-formal one
- correct use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement
- guiding and informing all potential user groups
- vocational guidance
- systems of vocational orientation
- European credit system in vocational education

7.5 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

HAS THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE BEEN CONSTRUCTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE IN GENERAL?

The first National Dialogue made it possible for us to gather valuable information about the current state of affairs in Slovenia and the experiences and positions of the stakeholders. Due to the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to either learn something new about the issues at hand or were given a chance to speak and hear what others had to say.

IS THERE INTEREST IN THE ISSUE OF QF BY STAKEHOLDERS?

Yes, the interest is there and can be seen in the desire for active involvement in the process of planning and developing NQF as well as in the desire for participation in this project. The stakeholders concluded that the public does not find NQF very important and the reason for that can be found in the fact that the public has not been well-informed and is not aware of the advantages of NQF, especially to those citizens who wish to acquire knowledge and education in a non-conventional way. All the participants agree that NQF is indispensable and are in favour of its introduction. They are also unanimous in belief that EQF is a good opportunity for comparability of educational levels, competences and knowledge between Slovenia and other European countries.

HAS IT CREATED NEW CONTACTS OR COOPERATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS?

Yes, it has given the stakeholders an opportunity to meet in person and to establish contacts with other participants and made cooperation in similar project possible.

To successfully continue the project we need to define the aim and the purpose of NQF for Slovenia. We need to determine common definitions for individual expressions and it would be best if we did that in a form of a dictionary or a glossary.

We need to inform all stakeholders about the importance and the advantages of NQFR and by doing so increase their active participation. For example, if the employers knew that NQF indirectly influences the increase in wages they would approach the process with a lot more initiative and action.

8 REPORT FROM THE 2ND ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

SVIZ—SI

The second National Dialogue meeting of stakeholders within the »EQF Stakeholders Project« was organized on November 9, 2007 at the headquarters of ESTUS (EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE TRADE UNION OF SLOVENIA) in Ljubljana. The meeting began at 1 p.m. and finished at 3 p.m. The focus of this meeting were the notes/minutes from the meeting of the coordinators of the project, which took place in Dublin, Ireland in June 2007 as well as the reports from the national dialogues of stakeholders in Belgium and Norway.

The representatives of various stakeholders gathered to discuss and study the progress in Slovenia with regard to the introduction of EQF (European Qualifications Framework) and its connection to the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) as well as to study the reports of the positive and negative experience the other countries included in the project had with the introduction of NQF and EQF. The results of the meeting are the recommendations for the introduction of NQF in Slovenia.

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS/ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE SECOND NATIONAL DIALOGUE:

Attendees of the Second National Dialogue Meeting:

Bojana Sever (CPI—National Institute for Vocational Education and Training),

Maja Godina Marin (University of Maribor),

Klemen Širok (Primorska University)

Vladimir Tkalec (KSJS—Confederation of Slovene Public Sector Trade Unions),

Vanja Perovšek and Andrej Božič (ŠOS—Slovene Student Union),

Dejan Hozjan (PEI—The Educational Research Institute),
Sandi Modrijan, coordinator,
Borut Werber, coordinator.

Other people attending the first National Dialogue meeting had also been invited to join the second dialogue but were unable to do so due to some previously arranged engagements and had excused themselves.

The dialogue was divided into three parts. Borut Werber, the project coordinator for Slovenia, opened the dialogue by summarizing the information on the course of European Commission project within the Leonardo da Vinci—EQF project framework—Towards an EQF—The stakeholders views and experiences« and also mentioning the essential information from other participating countries in this project (for more detailed information please check the dialogue handouts). Those present agreed that Slovenia had not published any new documents on the above mentioned project between the two dialogues (the first one took place on May 10, 2007). Borut Werber also told the participants that during his last meeting with Slovenia's new Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology the minister, Mrs. Mojca Kucler Dolinar, agreed in principle to participate in the expected concluding conference of the project group in spring 2008 in Slovenia.

The second part of the dialogue the participants were invited to report on any eventual changes, with regard to the project, for the area they are in charge of.

Bojana Sever, the representative for the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, gave a report on the current actions in which their Institute

is involved and are connected with the introduction of the NQF. She said that the government is in the process of establishing a group which will be responsible for the EQ and NQ frameworks together with the rest of the stakeholders involved. The ministries involved in this establishment are as follows: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. In Slovenia the introduction of EQF and NQF is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. An Info-Point is also to be established and should serve the governmental group as a support during the introduction of EQF and NQF. It will function as an operative coordinator. The date of establishment has not yet been determined.

Vanja Perovšek, the representative of the Slovene Student Union, asked for their representative to be included in the above-mentioned group as they had had bad experience with the adoption of the Law on Higher Education where they hadn't been invited as participants. Mrs. Bojana Sever assured her that all the stakeholders' representatives from this area will be invited to join the group.

The participants agreed that there was a substantial difference between the participation in a discussion once the draft proposal of any law had already been drawn up and the discussion while drawing up a law.

Slava Pevec Grm from the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training was sent to a meeting in Brussels as Slovenia's representative. At the meeting they will discuss necessary procedures for the implementation. The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training will draw up a proposal in the form of an action diagram, similarly to the way it was done in Ireland. The funds for this will be allocated from the European projects and structural funds. The funding has also been in the budget. The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training has already done a trial description of several specialization programmes.

There hasn't been any change in quality in the higher education. What we do have are the theoretical bases but we do not yet have the instruments nor the people to carry out the implementation.

What is important is that there is a desire for change and not that change comes as a result of an EU order or a directive. The Irish adopted the NQF on their own initiative after they had been preparing the procedure for several years. During the discussion numerous questions came up regarding the readiness of our univer-

sities in comparison with the foreign ones which have substantially less autonomy and whether the universities can come to an agreement regarding the mutual recognition of the completed curricular obligations.

Slovenia is faced with another problem, namely, we pay more attention to the so-called ›learning incomes‹ and not so much to the ›learning outcomes‹—this means, we care more about what we are going to teach instead of being concerned with what students have learned and will learn. A very important question we need to ask ourselves is who is going to assess this and with what kind of instruments. There is also a difference between the evaluation of pedagogical work according to hours and the ECTS.

The participants agreed that the Bologna Process in Slovenia has already been implemented but only on paper—in reality we are faced with a completely different picture. The pedagogical work is valued the same as it was in the past—by the hours. The same is true for the pedagogical process—it is being carried out exactly in the same manner as in the past, the only exception is the amount of hours reserved for lessons and practice. Professors are not available to students and do not work individually with the students, nor is this recognized as one of their work obligations.

8.1 THE TRADE UNION

Our classification system is organized according to the Klasius system—8 levels. This means classification of workers into wage/pay classes and not according to their educational level. The European parliament adopted descriptions of 219 vocational classifications from 19 different programmes. Slovenia should conform to these descriptions and should start with the work immediately. The Confederation of Slovene Public Sector Trade Unions has so far been the only one to deal with this issue. Other unions do not seem to find it important.

There is a possibility that only institutions will be included in this project. The representative of the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training informed the participants that other foreign experts will also be included.

The third and final part of the dialogue consisted of bringing forward some further recommendations based on the available information gathered so far from other countries and from Slovenia's own experience with the EQF and NQF. These recommendations were made for

a more successful introduction of the NQF and its approaching the EQF.

Our proposal/recommendations for a successful introduction of NQF are:

- aims and purpose for the introduction of NQF need to be established; NQF terminology needs to be explained,
- thoroughly study the state and solutions in Slovenia and countries similar to it,
- activate state interest for the introduction of NQF by informing the public,
- appoint the responsible project holder (for the time being it is the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs) and the person in charge,
- the implementation of the Bologna Process is needed not only on paper but in practice as well,
- material, technical and expert support needs to be ensured—by means of funding and providing human resources (the expected Info-Point),
- budget, structural, EU and other purpose funds need to be ensured (project registration—experts needed),
- deadlines need to be determined and introduction plans need to be prepared (action diagrams),
- introduction of NQF is a project which demands years of preparation (experience of other countries),
- literal or complete copying of EQF onto NQF could result in uselessness of NQF,
- experts from different fields need to be included as well as experts from countries similar to Slovenia which have already introduced the NQF,
- according to the experience of other countries it is necessary to include the stakeholders, the executors and the interested public and to determine their roles,

- The NQF has to be conformed to Slovenia's needs and not vice versa (for Slovenia's needs to be conformed to those of EQF),
- NQF should take into consideration currently used standards in the area of vocational education,
- NQF should be based on learning achievements and competences,
- NQF levels should be formed based on Slovenia's need and should not be a literal copy of the EQF or the Klasius system which is the basis for classification into wage/pay classes (Ireland has got 12 levels),
- universities and faculties as well as other providers/executors of education must come to a mutual agreement on acknowledgement of comparable qualifications,
- the comparison of study programmes, examinations and trainings is only possible if these are evaluated according to the same criteria,
- we need to ensure that qualifications which do not belong to the formal education—and fall under the lifelong learning process—are also acknowledged/recognized,
- NQF must not allow transitions without vocational qualifications,
- if needed, it should be allowed for the NQF to individually accommodate the needs of higher education, the needs of vocational training and the needs of secondary education (as in New Zealand),
- it does not seem sensible for NQF to include all the specifics, some may remain outside the NQF,
- prevent the formation of gray zones (loop-holes) by introducing flexible programmes.

These recommendations have been supplemented by means of correspondence. The results will be presented at the international conference this spring in Slovenia.

9 UNION OF STUDENTS IN IRELAND REPORT EQF STAKEHOLDER PROJECT

9.1 INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF THE UNION OF STUDENT IN IRELAND (USI)

Foundation

USI was established in 1959 following a number of colleges' dissatisfaction with its predecessor, The Irish Students Association. The move to a Union type organisation was linked to the social movement of the 50's and early 60's which opposed mass emigration, and believed that young people had a role to play in the education system and in society in general. USI opened membership to non-university students and after a short period of twin operations the ISA disbanded in 1961.

Principles

Of the basic principles and objectives, USI's constitutional cornerstones put the main emphasis on the education and welfare interests of students:

- »An education & training system open to all«
- »An education & training system that ... truly serves the people of Ireland«
- »The right of students to a decent standard of living«

Early Development

The sixties saw a wave of demonstrations against Vietnam organised in local colleges as well as massive student agitation on education, culminating in the spring of 1969 with mass sit-ins in UCD and other colleges. USI meanwhile had been recognised by the Department of Education as the national body for students. USI's achievements in the period around 1970 included the establishment of the Higher Education Grants Scheme

and gaining student representation on the college boards of TCD (April 1969) and UCD. In 1972 the National Union of Students (UK) and USI negotiated a protocol to jointly organise students in Northern Ireland, given the particular problems of the area. Whilst the 70's saw a period of steady growth in student numbers and finance, the structure of education remained the same.

USI had many successes at a local level and oversaw a large increase in the availability of grant aid, but the high cost of fees and continuing low level of grants meant that the access to third level remained difficult for young people from low income families.

1980s

By 1985, USI had gained a commitment that grants would be tagged to the CPI index. In addition USI had gained a seat on the National Council for Educational Awards. The 80s saw a number of key achievements for USI. Most notable was the abolition of tuition fees for undergraduate students. This was the result of years of campaigning and lobbying work. USI also gained representation on the Higher Education Authority and also won tax incentives for the provision of student accommodation.

1990s

The early nineties also saw USI leading the fight for Abortion Information. Although the union lost the case brought against Stephen Grogan (president of USI 89-90) by

SPUC, USI nevertheless won the battle for the introduction of abortion information in Ireland. In 1999 after a year of internal crisis USI undertook a Strategic

Review and since then USI has regained its profile as the national voice of students. That same year USI began to organise students in PLCs and colleges of Further Education in the South for the first time.

2000s

In April 2000 the abolition of tuition fees for student nurses studying for a degree was won, swiftly followed by the introduction of the top-up grant for students from lower income families. The USI Drugs Survey 2002 was also referred to in the Annual National Report for Ireland produced by the Health Research Board, which was submitted to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in Lisbon. USI's campaigning regarding the proposed re-introduction of tuition fees led to the Government to climb down completely. This led to them guaranteeing no introduction of tuition fees, a €42 million investment in third-level grants and disadvantaged access. The past year saw the establishment of an HEA committee to review the spending of capitation fee revenue and the introduction of a third-level Ombudsman for colleges and students as a result of persistent lobbying by USI.

9.2 NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

»In 1999, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act was passed in Ireland. The purpose of the Act was to put the learner at the centre of education and training in Ireland by supporting and recognising lifelong learning. The Act focused on issues such as the establishment of consistent standards in education and training, the promotion of quality, increasing access, transfer and progression opportunities and being able to recognise and compare qualifications gained both in Ireland and abroad. In order to address these important issues, the Act proposed the development of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence, i.e., what a person knows, can do and understands at a given level.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is an agency of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It has responsibility for developing and maintaining the NFQ.

It is also responsible for promoting and facilitating greater access to education and training and progression from one qualification to another, through the NFQ.

The NFQ was launched in October 2003 and the process of implementing it has moved quickly. Qualifications leading to awards in the NFQ have been in place throughout higher education and training since the autumn of 2004. The FETAC system of further education and training qualifications was introduced in the summer of 2006.

The »fan diagram« helps to illustrate the levels on the NFQ, the awarding bodies and the major types of qualifications that are included in the new system of qualifications (e.g. Junior Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Honours Bachelor Degree etc.).

In terms of the nature and structure of the NFQ, the following points are worth noting:

- the ten NFQ levels capture all learning, from the very initial stages to the most advanced
- qualifications achieved in school (SEC), further education and training (FETAC) and higher education and training (HETAC, the DIT, the Universities) are all included
- the NFQ currently has 16 large or »major« awards (as seen in the outer part of the diagram below). Apart from these major awards the NFQ also includes hundreds of other qualifications awarded for smaller learning achievements. These are known as »minor«, »special purpose« and »supplemental« qualifications
- Each level on the NFQ is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence
- each qualification that is included in the NFQ is quality assured
- every provider delivering programmes that lead to qualifications in the NFQ is quality assured.«³

3 National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2006. »Qualifications Matter: An Introduction to the National Framework of Qualifications.« http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/public_resources/documents/public_awareness.pdf Accessed 18/04/2008

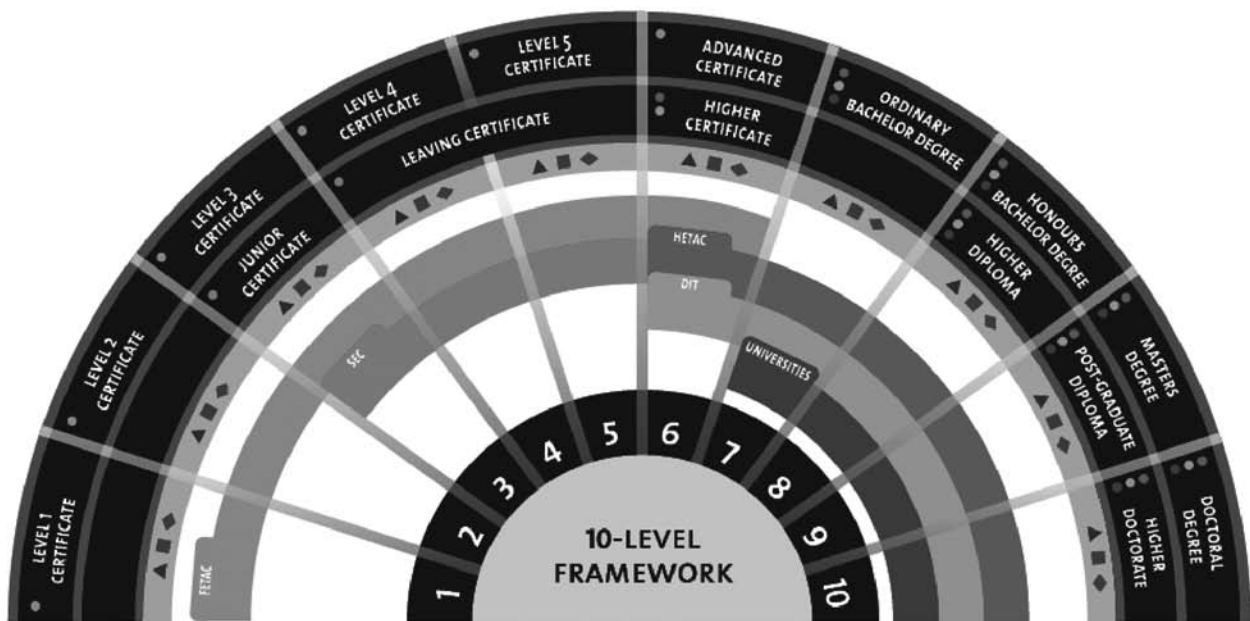


Fig 1: The Irish National Qualifications Framework

9.3 NATIONAL DIALOGUE

MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT

The Irish national dialogue was managed by the Union of Students in Ireland. In particular the Education Officer developed the project in Ireland and prepared for the national dialogue forums. The guiding questions for the national dialogue were prepared in advance by the project partners. Mary Scally from DIT Students/ Union independently facilitated the national dialogue forums. **Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú and Dr Jim Murray from the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) presented on the National Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework respectively prior to each national dialogue.**

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS

In preparation for the national dialogue forums a list of national stakeholder representative groups covering the full spectrum of life long learning was drawn up.

In the Irish context there is a greater diversity of representative groups at the higher levels of the framework. While every attempt was made to balance the input from all the stakeholder groups it was evident from attendance and contribution that the discussion was biased toward the Higher Education Sector.

Below is a list of the contributing stakeholders:

- Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)
- Further Education and Training Awards Council (FE-TAC)
- Higher Education Authority (HEA)
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
- Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI)
- Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)
- Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT)
- Union of Students in Ireland (USI)
- Union of Secondary School Students (USS)

Stakeholders invited that could not attend:

- Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
- Department of Education and Science (DES)
- Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
- Irish Business and Employers Federation (IBEC)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)
- Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- Teacher's Union of Ireland (TUI)

NATIONAL DIALOGUE METHODOLOGY

The Irish dialogue was predominantly based around two facilitated forums hosted by USI. All of the invited stakeholders were phoned and subsequently emailed with an invitation to the forum. Within the text of the email a call for individuals' submissions via email was made to facilitate extra input from stakeholders.

The program of each of the forums was begun by presentations from the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) to give context and frame discussion, by presenting an outline of the current developments of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications and the European Qualifications Framework. The national dialogue was divided into two sessions with the first on the 31st May 2007 and the second on the 12th of November 2007. The dialogues were based upon the questions devised by the project partners; however they were edited to fit the Irish context more appropriately. The questions were divided into two parts with each part delivered at each forum. Each national dialogue had a facilitator. At the first meeting where there were a large number of stakeholders they were divided into two groups. For both sessions each group appointed a Chairperson from among their number and a rapporteur was provided by USI. Both national dialogue forums were well attended however there was more representation from the Higher Education Sector.

OUTCOMES OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE

9.4 CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Forum 1: 31st May 2007

What is the level of awareness of stakeholders on the concept of qualifications frameworks, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and of the National Qualification Framework?

In which ways do different stakeholders tackle the issue of qualification frameworks internally? Which priority is assigned to this topic?

How is the NQF perceived by the wider public? Which responsibilities do stakeholders take up in informing their members and promoting the NQF amongst them?

The groups took the three questions for discussion together.

From a survey commissioned by the NQAI in 2003 there are some figures on awareness levels among learners and employers.

It was found that general public awareness of the NQF was quite low at just 18% or approximately 1 in 5 people. This awareness figure was higher among 'advantaged' socio economic groups.

Employer awareness also stood at about 1 in 5 with a concentration of awareness among Government employees with awareness of about 50%.

Most of those present felt that awareness of the NQF among the general public was increasing over time but was still quite low. It was felt that there was greater awareness among the Higher Education Community.

It was felt that the NQF was a difficult and complicated message to communicate to stakeholders generally but the fan graphic was perceived as helpful in simplifying the message.

It was expressed that there was perceived anomalies within the Irish system. Members of the group perceived that there was a difference in levels of awareness between the Institute of Technology sector and the University sector in higher education. It was felt that as full modularisation and credit systems had not been adopted fully in the University sector that there was less awareness and understanding. In contrast in the Institute of Technology sector it is 'core to operations'.

It was felt that including levels instead of higher education qualifications in the nationally advertised higher education allocation system (CAO)⁴ has raised awareness of the NQF among learners currently studying at a proposed EQF level 2 to 4. The President of the Secondary School Students/ Union (USS) felt that the two main awards that her members were concerned with, called the Leaving Certificate and the Junior Certificate, were not really associated with levels on the NQF. She felt that there was increased awareness where students had special needs and therefore might be using alternate ways into and to progress through the education system.

It was felt that we must be realistic about the timeframe for raising awareness as the NQF is still relatively new and will probably need more time before it becomes embedded in the public psyche.

One education representative felt that there was more awareness of the Bologna Framework in higher education than the EQF for LLL. It was also felt that

⁴ www.cao.ie

many higher education Institutions prefer to be associated with European Frameworks as opposed to the National Framework.

The groups summarised that awareness among stakeholders about the EQF was low while awareness of the NQF among stakeholders was healthy and developmentally advanced.

Most stakeholders felt that the NQAI had the main responsibility for promoting the NQF but conceded that there was a role for all the stakeholders in its promotion also.

The USI representatives expressed how they had tried to promote the NQF to local student representatives using free branded items displaying the «fan diagram».

It was generally agreed that stakeholders could do more to promote the NQF within their own stakeholder groups.

9.5 IMPACT OF THE EQF AND NQFS

WHICH ROLE DOES THE RECOGNITION OF INFORMAL/ NON-FORMAL LEARNING PLAY?

This area was perceived as an underdeveloped area at present.

In general it is seen as a positive development.

The groups felt that it opens up access to formal education.

It was felt that it was important that this type of learning be recognised

A challenge was identified and it was perceived that going forward there may be difficulties in auditing or assessing learning outcomes for some activities.

In theory it is all possible but in practice there may be some difficulties in the application.

WHAT ACTUAL CHANGES DO QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS CAUSE IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO DIFFERENT KINDS OF EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND PROGRESSION ROUTES BETWEEN THEM?

It was believed that frameworks promote access, transfer and progression.

Again it was felt that the «devil is in the detail» and the application poses challenges.

It was perceived that frameworks makes progression routes «cleaner» for learners and provides clarity.

It was also believed that a framework based on learning outcomes should provide confidence in the

education system and therefore build bridges between education sectors.

Solid quality assurance systems also foster trust between the providers allowing for easier access and progression for learners.

It was understood that frameworks provide a single point of reference for all and therefore create better understanding.

The belief of the group was that frameworks promote diversity within education and as a result broader society.

While in theory progress between levels can happen when the learning outcomes are achieved at the previous level, there is a growing problem of retention in Ireland, it was suggested that maybe we need to look at support for learners who might not be able to progress to the next level and whose confidence may be damaged if they fail.

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE NQF HAVE ON MOBILITY OF STUDENTS WITHIN THE COUNTRY, WITHIN EUROPE AND INTERNATIONALLY?

The NQF should in theory provide better mobility. However the bigger issue for mobility in the Irish context are language skills.

The groups also felt that the question might be premature if levels of Framework awareness are low in the rest of Europe.

There are issues around certain levels in the Irish NQF when it comes to aligning to the EQF. We have two degree levels at NQF levels 7 and 8. There is also the issue of NQF level 6 and how it straddles sectors.

Internationally there are other issues affecting mobility than the framework cannot resolve. For example the limited knowledge of English by many students is problematic when they come to Ireland to study. Also the different learning paradigm, for example in China, can raise issues that then affect learners when coming to study in the Irish system.

WHAT ACTUAL CHANGES DO QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS CAUSE IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS?

Some professional organisations want their learning recognised by aligning to the framework but others do not.

In Ireland many established organisations are recognised under legislation and have a legal responsibility

to regulate entry and practice within their profession and sometimes this requires separate programme validations for professional organisation recognition.

It was suggested by some members that many previously unrecognised or non traditional professions may want to align to the framework perhaps as a way of legitimisation, a political motive rather than an educational one.

It was perceived that there is a possibly dangerous trend emerging among the professions, to pitch at a higher level in the framework. This, if not treated with the necessary caution, could lead to level inflation.

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) hosted a conference about professional alignment in October 2006 with some interesting debate on the topic and this was very well attended by professional representatives.

9.6 ANTICIPATED BENEFITS AND RISKS: STAKEHOLDERS POSITIONS

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) approach was taken to gain insight into the stakeholder positions.

Strengths

- Effective impact and implementation of framework in Ireland.
- Promotion of mobility for learners.
- Promotion of access and progression to education.
- Huge and relevant agent for change.
- Student centred focus.
- The 'fan diagram' of the NQF aids understanding and simplifies message.

Weaknesses

- Full adoption of learning outcomes approach and credit system not completely finished, most notably in the University sector.
- Confusion about a number of frameworks (ex. Bologna & EQF for LLL) at the European level.
- Some stakeholders perceive there is a need to re-examine the levels of the Irish framework.
- Awareness of frameworks is limited, there are perceived blockages of information flow pertaining to frameworks within stakeholder groups.

- Linking of individual learner funding to levels, progression is sometimes more fluid than straight 'up' the NQF.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to link Institute funding to learner progression.
- Opportunity to reenergise the concept of life long learning.
- Opportunity to harmonise awards and limit duplications.
- The structure of the framework provides an opportunity to relate standards.
- Opportunity to include more employability characteristics in the framework.
- Opportunity to attract employers with a clear education framework.

Threats

- The aim toward the 'top' of the framework could be negative. Higher is not necessarily better.
- Can be seen as bureaucratic and therefore not useful.

9.7 QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND CREDITS

Forum 2: 12th November 2007

What are the stakeholders' views on implementation of European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) and European Credits transfer system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in Third Level education?

The discussion began with an outline of ECTS and ECVET. This was to ensure that the group were using the same point of reference.

It was agreed that credit systems were very useful in an academic context. It allowed higher education institutes to compare and contrast degrees within the college. The opinion was expressed that the credit system allowed more uniformity across the institutions. It was expressed that the credit system allows for clearer course outlines.

One member questioned if the system of credit was lowering the quality of degrees. This was debated within the group. It was agreed that the credit system does not lower the quality of degrees as long as the credit weight-

ing for each module is assessed in a clear and transparent manner.

It was agreed that students had some knowledge of what credit is. However, it is not clear if they have a deep understanding. A student expressed the opinion that students knew that modules were worth credit but that they did not see the bigger picture. Another student backed this up, students may know how many credits they must complete in a year but have little understanding of why. He also raised the point that it is only since modularisation that students have become aware of credit. An academic representative informed the group that credit had been involved in the construction of higher education courses for 10 to 15 years before modularisation and that people just did not associate the two until modularisation became widespread.

The issue of employers was discussed. It was agreed that employers have very little knowledge of credit systems and what they mean to an employer.

Employees were not examined for this question.

The issue of ECVET credit systems was then raised. The ECVET credit system applies to vocational or further education.

It was also agreed that this credit system was useful. It was agreed that in principle that the two systems were quite similar in the context of this discussion.

The USI expressed their position that only one credit system is necessary and a unifying system would facilitate easier progression in the context of lifelong learning.

WHAT ROLE DO CREDIT SYSTEMS PLAY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NQF BY STAKEHOLDERS' OPINIONS?

It was agreed by the entire group that credit systems were essential for the functioning of the NQF.

It allows better comparison between institutions. A student representative raised the issue of the credit system in the context of the EQF. He used the example of students who take one year abroad as part of their degree. There is an issue at the moment where if the student attends a Higher Education Institution in Europe that does not require students to take so much credit, then there can be problems.

Furthermore, there is the issue of students entering Ireland from European Universities when they may not have the necessary credits to do so. This problem is seen in University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD) in particular because they have a standard four year, 240 credit degree.

This raised an interesting point for the group. There are discrepancies between degrees in the Irish NQF so these may be amplified by an EQF.

It was agreed that credit systems were essential to the functioning of Irish education. However, the discrepancy between three and four year degrees may need to be clarified.

The USS said that credit was not a consideration when choosing what degree to complete.

It was agreed that in the context of the NQF the credit system is important but it needs more work.

WHICH POLICY DO STAKEHOLDERS TAKE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEMS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS?

It was agreed that all stakeholders had a positive policy towards the development of European credit systems. They felt that it would allow qualifications to be more comparable.

Higher Educational Institutions had a more developed policy due to the needs of international students transferring from other European Institutions.

Students had no real policy into the development of the ECTS. This carries on from the earlier point that many students only have a superficial acquaintance with the use of a credit system.

Employers do not, in the group's opinion, have a real interest in taking part in this debate. This does not imply that they should not. Employers need to understand credit systems in order to evaluate potential employees.

It was felt that employees, like students, do not take a stance on credit. They have their qualification and do not dwell on the number of credits it contains.

DO STAKEHOLDERS SEE A NEED IN TWO SYSTEMS OR THEY FIND IT MORE BENEFICIAL TO HAVE A UNIFIED SYSTEM OF CREDITS? WHAT IS THE STAKEHOLDERS' VISION ON HOW TO INTEGRATE DIFFERENT CREDIT SYSTEMS WITHIN A SINGLE OVERARCHING NQF AND EQF?

It was agreed that one system of credits would be easier to work with but the groups was conscious of the diversity within education at a European level particularly and felt there was room for more debate on the topic at a National and European level.

9.8 SUPPORTING AND RELATING INSTRUMENTS

HOW DO THE EUROPASS INSTRUMENTS AND THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT RELATE TO A NQF AND TO THE EQF? WHICH RELATION DO STAKEHOLDERS WANT?

The EUROPASS and the Diploma Supplement were well received by this group of stakeholders.

EUROPASS was discussed first. The EUROPASS was defined by the Chair to ensure that the group was clear on the topic. The pass is generally well received because it makes qualifications more accessible to employers. It covers all areas that the person with a qualification has studied.

The group then debated the issue of credit within the EUROPASS. Employers may read a EUROPASS and hire the candidate who has covered the most areas superficially, and not understand that the candidate who has done less area topics has covered them in more depth.

However, it was felt on the whole that this was a positive development.

The Diploma Supplement was equally well received. It is an excellent progression to making qualifications more accessible to employers and to make it easier to travel with.

The group then discussed the issue of translation. The EUROPASS and the Diploma Supplement are useless if the holder the qualification cannot have them translated into the local language. It was confirmed that national agencies will translate these for employees and employers. It was felt that it was particularly important for employees so that they would not be disadvantaged when applying for a job.

The main issue with both is that it does not tell you how good the qualification is. There is a quartile of how the holder of the qualification did in relation to their class but not how well respected their course or Institute is. It was discussed. It was agreed that this additional information would help employers to understand the level of the potential employee. However, the group realised that this would be impossible to achieve as the higher education institutions would not allow it.

It was agreed that there was limited awareness among the general public of the EUROPASS and the Diploma Supplement and this could undermine both instruments if not addressed.

HOW IS THE CONCEPT OF »NATIONAL CENTRES« PERCEIVED? HOW IS THEIR ROLE DEFINED AND WHAT IS THEIR RELATION TO THE ENIC/NARIC?

It was also felt that national agencies should not be replaced by one European agency to interpret how a qualification fits on to a framework. It was felt that local knowledge was needed to put the local qualification on to the country's national framework; this would then give a level on the European framework. The other main concern with one European Agency was the amount of time it would take to process applications as the European Union tends to be bureaucratic.

How is the relation of the EQF to the EU directives on professional recognition seen by the stakeholders, i.e. are there concerns about possible contradictions or are they regarded as smoothly cooperating?

The group had no real concerns with this area. They feel it is operating quite smoothly.

The question was raised about language competencies and cultural knowledge. The point was made that a doctor from another EU country is well trained and their qualifications should be recognised but employers also need to know that they can speak the local language.

The suggestion was made that a local competencies test could be set. This would allow potential employees to demonstrate their level of knowledge in the local mother tongue.

The suggestion was made that a wider programme could be implemented by employers similar to the one currently used in the Irish National Health Service for nurses who have been trained in other countries. This would give all foreign trained professional a number of weeks shadowing to ensure that they understand all local legislation, local language and local customs in their profession.

9.9 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The format the national dialogue took in Ireland was fit for purpose. However there was a bias of representation toward the Higher Education Sector. The reasons were twofold; firstly there are more representative bodies within the Higher Education Sector and secondly more of the higher education representative bodies attended on the day and participated in the process. There seemed to be a certain lack of interest among some stakeholders for this topic.

The involvement to the NQAI was both positive and negative. As always they were very helpful in the project

preparation stages and members of the NQAI Executive provided excellent presentations at the beginning of each forum. However the presence of the Executive at the forums while informative may have stifled some of the debate about the issues that challenge the NQF. Some of the stakeholders involved were concerned that any criticism of the NQF might be misinterpreted and

they would not want it to reflect negatively on the excellent work of the NQAI Executive.

The process was a positive experience for stakeholders on a number of levels and a relevant one also.

One positive outcome was the realisation among attending stakeholders that all stakeholders own the NQF and its promotion is a responsibility for us all.

9.10 APPENDIX: HYPOTHETICAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT BETWEEN IRISH NQF & EUROPEAN FRAMEWORKS.

Draft EQF levels	EHEA Framework (Bologna)	NFQ Levels	NFQ Major Award-types
1		1	Level 1 Certificate
		2	Level 2 Certificate
2		3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
3		4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
4		5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award); Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	First Cycle	7	Ordinary Bachelors Degree
		8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	Second Cycle	9	Masters Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	Third cycle	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate

10 REPORT FROM THE 1ST ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS

10.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The School-student Union of Norway was invited to participate in a project with several European partner organisations. These are AUGent—The student organisation of Holland, BDA—The German assembly of Employer organisations, SVIZ—Education, Science and culture trade union of Slovenia and UNI—The Irish student organisation. ESU—The European Students Union coordinate the projects. Our project aims at gathering the relevant national organisations' views upon EQF—European Qualifications Framework, and the Norwegian NQF—National Qualifications Framework. The work that the EU are exercising to create this framework, has the purpose of increasing mobility for students and employees in the European system, through creating a framework with a common use of terms and reference levels to qualifications. The EQF meta-framework will be the basis for the mobility. Levels from this system, will fit in the context of the national NQFs, and be used to evaluate the competence of students and employees within the European system. The work that we, along with our partner organisations are doing, will be the foundation of a report considering the needs and demands of the labour market, the businesses, educational institutions, students and employees regarding these systems.

10.2 STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION

To this date there are no qualification frameworks in effect in the Norwegian educational system. Currently a draft proposal for a national qualification framework

for higher education is on public consultation (April–November 2007).

The Norwegian Ministry of Education is planning to draft a proposal for a national qualification framework for the entire educational system and lifelong learning, though there this process is still in a early chapter of discussions. A reference group of all relevant stakeholders will be set up by January at latest to commence the work for real. A report proposing a system to link with EQF or a complete NQF is expected to be ready by the end of 2008.

Consciousness of qualification frameworks is still very limited, with only a few persons of each stakeholder having any knowledge of these systems and effects. Public consciousness on a broader basis as in newspapers and debates are not registered.

10.3 PROCESS OF NATIONAL 1ST ROUND OF DIALOGUES

The School-student Union of Norway have attempted to arrange a national dialogue-meeting about the project. However, it turned out to be difficult to get the relevant organizations to participate in this dialogue. The result was that only the Norwegian Department of Education and The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)⁵, were interested and available for dialogue. Meetings were executed with both of the above. A larger dialogue-meeting will be held at a later time in the process. The results of the provisional dialogues are presented below.

5 The largest labour union in Norway

Stakeholders invited to the first consultation round:

- The Norwegian Ministry of Education (also referred to as the department)
- The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
- The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)⁶

10.4 DIALOGUE WITH THE NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Norwegian government is interested in taking part in both development and participation in EQF and NQF, though there is no final decision on this yet.

However, Norway has started their work in creating a NQF very late in the process. The department looks wondrous upon the signals from the EU concerning that taking part in these systems are voluntary for the countries within the EU-system. From a Norwegian point of view, it will be quite impossible to not take part in a project like this one without giving up active participation in the European community. The introductions of these systems are regarded upon as the EU pressuring the European countries to launch new educational reforms. On the other hand the Ministry of Education consider *The Knowledge Promotion reform* which is under implementation qualified enough to fulfil the substantial demands of a future EQF/NQF-system. The Knowledge Promotion reform values learning outcomes, through the entire educational system. This makes it relatively easy to decide what kind of competence you get by completing the various levels of education, and therefore also implicating it in both the NQF and EFQ.

Norway has just begun developing the NQF with a workgroup in the department, however there is little progress and no decision on whether a NQF is even required as it appears to be possible to connect directly to the EQF. The main focus is in improving the ECVET-project, and creating a grading system for vocational training. For this purpose, pilot projects will be implemented. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) will be involved in these projects.

The department also looks upon the use of advanced terms that the EU use regarding this project unsuitable for the purpose. In the EQF-proposal knowledge, competence and skills are considered different qualities. In the Norwegian system, *competence* is generally considered

to be one overarching term, including both knowledge and skills. The department is planning to draw on Norwegian terms in their NQF to avoid the terminology of the EU Commission. In the development of a Norwegian NQF the department will first establish a superior framework, and define what falls into which of the eight European level categories.

It is important to create an uncomplicated system that will be simple for students, employees and employers to understand. The department claims that in order for this kind of system to work, the recipient country should evaluate the applicants' competence. The department considers it as important that the system focuses on the practical purpose of the system in its development, rather than a theoretical approach. The department wants to coordinate all parts of a competence framework in the Directorate of Education, opposing to the idea of independent national competence-centres.

10.5 DIALOGUE WITH THE NORWEGIAN CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (LO)

LO has a relaxed attitude towards the development of EQF and NQF. They are interested in taking part in the process, but express a great deal of scepticism and doubt as to how well functioning and significant this system might be. It becomes very clear that the EQF and NQF are a theoretical approach to increased European mobility. The challenges are first and foremost to adapt documentation of competence into inflexible units that don't appeal to the need of the businesses. Because there are only 8 superior levels in the system, LO are worried that it might become arbitrary what different kinds of competence might be placed in the levels, and that this can negatively affect the status of some education programmes. On the other hand, they are sceptical to a system with numerous models and units that are hard to difficult not only to navigate, but also to use for both users and recipients. Another challenge as LO regard upon it, is that the authorisation processes in Norway very often are a part of the vocational training programmes. In other countries, this is something one has to get in addition to an education, and a system with authorisations can be very difficult to take part in for foreign employees. In addition, LOs opinion is that European mobility is both healthy and important, but they are not interested in a simplified theoretical approach to qualification registration.

⁶ The largest employer organisation in Norway

11 FINAL REPORT FROM NATIONAL DIALOGUES IN NORWAY »TOWARDS AN EQF—THE STAKEHOLDERS’ VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES«

11.1 INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The School-student Union of Norway was invited to participate in a project with several European partner organisations. These are:

- AUGent, Ghent University Association
- BDA, The German assembly of Employer organisations
- SVIZ, Education, Science and culture trade union of Slovenia
- UNI, The Irish student organisation

ESU, The European Students Union coordinates the project.

Our project aims at gathering the relevant national organisations’ views upon EQF—European Qualifications Framework, and whether a Norwegian NQF—National Qualifications Framework should be set up. The work that the EU are exercising to create this framework, has the purpose of increasing mobility for students and employees in the European system, through creating a framework with a common use of terms and reference levels to qualifications. The EQF meta-framework will be the basis for the mobility. Levels from this system, will fit in the context of the national NQFs, and be used to evaluate the competence of students and employees within the European system. The work that we, along with our partner organisations are doing, will be the foundation of a report considering the needs and demands of the labour market, the businesses, educa-

tional institutions, students and employees regarding these systems.

THE SCHOOL STUDENT UNION OF NORWAY (EON)

The School Student Union of Norway was included as a project partner being a stakeholder of school students and vocational apprentices in secondary education and training. The organisation has about 360 schools as institutional members with 150 000 pupils represented through student councils. EON was established in 1999 after a merging of two preceding Norwegian school student unions. EON is an interest organisation independent of political parties and works for the common and individual interests of its members. Although being a relatively young organisation with a high turn over of officers and no employed secretariat, it has a number of political achievements and is consistently involved in public debate on general education. EON is involved in European education politics through its membership in OBESSU, and stakeholder involvement with the Ministry of Education in Norway on European issues.

ORGANISATION OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

EON arranged two national dialogue-meetings within the project frames, and three individual meetings with specific stakeholders. A list of questions in Norwegian based on the guiding questions was used as a framework for the discussions. Besides these meetings there have been a number of conferences and meetings organised independently which have been relevant for both dialogue and cooperation purposes.

The first dialogue meeting was carried out June 4th 2007 with broad invitations to different stakeholders. However, it turned out to be difficult to get the relevant organizations to participate in this dialogue. Some of the organisations wondered why they should participate as they already participated in the EQF-consultation in 2005, and couldn't grasp any progress made in between. The result was that only the Norwegian Ministry of Education and The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), were interested and available for dialogue. Meetings were executed with both of the above.

The second dialogue meeting was held in Oslo, December 3rd 2007 with better participation, though still in absence of key stakeholders from employer and labour unions. At this point we experienced a genuine interest of the project in regard to results from other project partners and international discussions.

To include more of the relevant stakeholders we asked a number of organisations if we could visit them for individual meetings in December or January. On January 17th we met NHO and had an hour long discussion with their expert on this topic.

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) organised a meeting on February 6th where all of their affiliates (21 national unions aligned to specific sectors) were invited. One and a half hour of the meeting was used on introducing EQF, our project and debating the topic. The rest of the meeting was used on a different agenda point.

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS/ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Through two dialogue meetings and individual meetings these organisations were invited to participate and contribute with their opinions:

Stakeholders involved in dialogues:

- The Norwegian Ministry of Education
- The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)
- The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)
- The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Fagforbundet)
- The Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions (Fellesforbundet)
- The Electrician and IT Workers' Union (El & IT)

- Norwegian Union of Postal and Communication Workers (Postkom)
- Norwegian Food and Allied Workers' Union (NNN)
- The Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS)
- Union of Education Norway (Utdanningsforbundet)
- The National Union of Students in Norway (NSU)
- Norwegian Association of Students (StL)
- Association of Norwegian Students Abroad (ANSA)
- The School Student Union of Norway (EON)

Stakeholders invited, though could not participate:

- The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDir)
- The Federation of Norwegian Commercial and Service Enterprises (HSH)
- The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)
- Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (VOX)
- The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL)

COOPERATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS/INITIATIVES IN NORWAY

In late October 2007 EON met the Ministry of education to coordinate our work within our two different Leonardo Da Vinci-projects. The Ministry of education is involved as a partner in a project with education and training ministries in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. The aim of their project is to exchange ideas and analysis relevant for national implementation of QF through five meetings and reports from Mars 2007 to April 2008.

There has also been a meeting with representatives of the Union of Education Norway (Utdanningsforbundet) in effort to exchange benefits from our Leonardo-project and a pilot-project testing the benefits of using EQF-NQF in three sectors. The project they were involved in was administrated by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The report from this pilot-project was published in December 2007. Through this project hair dressing, construction and health services were testing the benefits of a NQF. The report includes results that are very relevant to our project.

In early November the »EEA-special committee on education« held a meeting in preparation for a »EQF Implementation Preparatory Group« meeting. This meeting specifically discussed information from the EU-commission on implementation of EQF and the role of a European EQF-Advisory Body.

February 12th the Ministry of education held a »Conference on EQF—European launch and national follow-up« where a large number of relevant stakeholders were present. The conference was supposed to introduce EQF and open the discussion for a Norwegian implementation and follow-up. The Ministry of education has announced that a reference-group of relevant stakeholders will be set up within short time.

A reference group of stakeholders was set up to follow up the implementation of EQF in Norway, and had its first meeting in April. The group consist of about 20 different stakeholders from education and training, labour and employers organisations. The School Student Union of Norway is a member of the reference group. The mandate is from now forward to 2012.

11.2 STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS IN NORWAY

THE NORWEGIAN QUALIFICATION (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) SYSTEM

As a short introduction to the Norwegian »Qualification system« we can describe the system with primary, secondary and higher education and training. Besides this there is a number of formal and in-formal school and practical educations that will be relevant for a future qualification framework or connection to EQF. Norway participates in the Bologna-process and the Copenhagen-process, and has made a number of correlated adoptions in the qualification system in recent years.

A significant challenge with EQF-implementation is where to place educations and certificates that doesn't correspond to either secondary education or the Bologna framework for higher education (Bachelors, Masters and Ph.d). The most relevant formal and in-formal educations involved are these:

Tertiary vocational education (Fagskoler)

Tertiary vocational (Fagskoleutdanning) education is a non-university, shorter education of minimum half a year and maximum 2 years duration, which is based on upper secondary school education. It is primarily,

but not exclusively, an education for students with a VET-certificate (Vocational Education and Training).

The education is not research-based, but focuses on adapting to the needs of vocational/occupational labour market and employment and is not considered higher education. The programmes are by rule not provided by the higher education institutions, but by other educational bodies (public or private). All courses must be accredited by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).

Master craftsman certificate

Another vocational education is the master craftsman certificate, which is an available progression from craft- and journeyman's certificates. The master craftsman scheme is adapted to the demands facing leaders of craft enterprises. Approximately 700 new master craftsman certificates are awarded every year. The title of master craftsman is awarded in 65 different crafts. Training for this is organised in cooperation with the Adult Education Association (Folkeuniversitetet).

Adult Education Associations

An adult education association is a voluntary organisation consisting of two or more member organisations, and whose primary objective is to provide adult education courses. Adult education courses are offered in a wide variety of subjects, ranging from recreational courses to vocational courses and courses at university and college level. Twenty-two adult education associations receive state support to hold such courses. Annually, almost 700 000 adults participate in courses held by adult education associations, 240 000 adults participate in courses at the upper secondary level, whereas about 55 000 adults attend courses at university and college level.

Training for the Labour Market

The labour market authorities provide training for the labour market in co-operation with the education authorities. Courses give vocational qualifications and are provided by a number of different agencies including upper secondary schools; autonomous resource centres attached to the schools; study associations; and private companies. In 2001, around 32 000 people took part in such training. The courses are fully financed by the State.

Folk High Schools

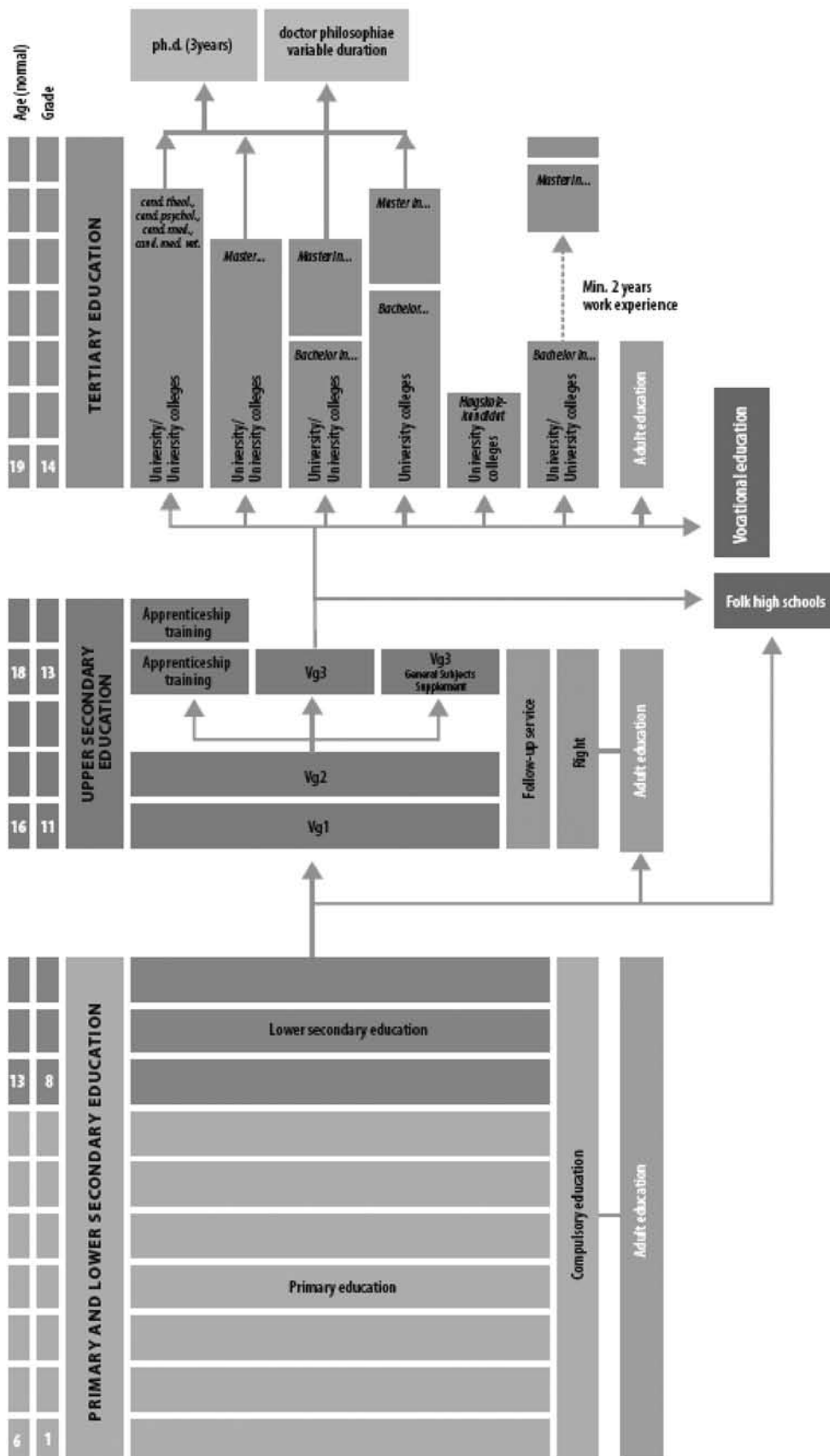
Folk high schools have approximately 7 000 places distributed between about 80 schools located throughout Norway. Most of them are boarding schools that are owned and run by several different types of groups and bodies, ranging from Christian organisations to local councils and independent foundations. Folk high schools provide general courses for young people and adults at one year duration, but there are no formal examinations.

Distance Education

The use of distance education is widespread in Norway. Traditionally this has consisted of correspondence courses, but a number of multimedia programmes are now offered. Each year, almost 40 000 students complete courses held by 14 authorised distance education institutions.

All of these formal and in-formal educations are somewhat relevant for an eventual qualification framework. A significant part of the debate between stakeholders in Norway has been on which qualifications from these educations should be recognised and given a level in a NQF, and at what level.

The Norwegian education system



STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

To this date there are no overarching qualification frameworks in effect in the Norwegian educational system.

A national qualification framework for higher education is under development matching the Bologna-process EHEA-framework. A draft proposal from the Ministry of education was sent for public consultation in April-November 2007.

The Ministry of education has initiated a process of on how Norway should relate our system to EQF. Though, whether it's necessary to construct an overarching national qualification framework, or if it's possible to attach existing levels of qualification systematically and directly EQF is not decided yet.

A reference group of stakeholders was set up to follow up the implementation of EQF in Norway. The group consist of about 20 different stakeholders from education and training, labour and employers organisations. The mandate for the reference group is forward to 2012.

The overall strategy from the Ministry of Education is to work out descriptors for vocational education and training first, and then relate the levels to EQF by June 2009. The holistic connection to EQF for all types and levels of qualifications will be considered later.

FAMILIARITY OF STAKEHOLDERS WITH THE IDEA AND CONCEPT OF QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

Experience from dialogues and meetings concerning EQF-NQF give us the impression that the some of the most relevant stakeholders (6-10 organisations) have a few individuals very familiar with the concept of qualifications frameworks, and participate directly in the development and policy making process. These organisations also answered the consultation in 2005.

At the same time many stakeholders know what qualifications frameworks are and functionality. Though are temporarily not really keeping up with the progress and participating in dialogues or policy making. Most of these organisations are short on human resources to follow up both national qualification and education politics and specific and perhaps more »peripheral« international politics.

There were also some stakeholders initiated to contribute to our project that didn't know of the EQF but had some experience with the framework for higher education.

However, the Ministry of education had participants from 27 different stakeholders at their »Conference on EQF—European launch and national follow-up« February 12th. If the involvement of a broad number of stakeholders continues we can expect better familiarity of qualification frameworks.

Nevertheless, within the organisations the consciousness of qualification frameworks has not reached to lower levels and among members. Public consciousness on a broader basis, as in media or debates is not registered at all.

11.3 OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Contemporary it appears that the enthusiasm for a national qualification framework among stakeholders in Norway is rather reserved. Although the ideas of mobility and lifelong learning in EQF are widely supported, none of the stakeholders involved in discussions with us think that EQF-NQF alone is an ideal tool to overcome challenges we have today.

For EQF-NQF to work in practice it is absolutely dependent on a demand for its function. One of these demands is the need of qualified labour power, which momentarily is very high in a range of sectors in Norway, most significantly health services, construction and engineering. Analysis of future needs in vocational education and training points out that we can expect ⁷:

- Demand of a larger work force
- Demand of higher qualifications in the work force
- Demand of more flexibility in vocational education and training
- Demand of more flexibility and employability in the work force
- Demand of higher quality and relevance in vocational education- and training
- Increased awareness of impacts environmental issues have on the expectations of the work force
- Demand of internationalization in vocational education and training

A critical question throughout this report is whether the stakeholders expect EQF-NQF solutions to meet these challenging demands.

⁷ Official Norwegian Report NOU 2008: 18 »Vocational education and training for the future«

OVERALL PERSPECTIVE ON MOBILITY IN EUROPE

Improving mobility between countries of workforce and in education is a vast topic, far from limited to recognition and translation of qualifications from a foreign system. The state of mobility in education and employment is highly unsatisfying. All stakeholders are interested in finding ideal solutions to the complications within mobility.

Concerning mobility of qualified workforce (this naturally also includes education and training) across European countries and from outside, there are a number of overreaching challenges. During the dialogues and work with this project we noticed that some of these issues concerns stakeholders significantly, and sometimes more than translation of qualification levels. Some of these are⁸:

- Language in work situation. A lot of occupations have an absolute requirement of being able to speak, read and write in Norwegian.
- Cultural and social knowledge and skills fit to Norwegian work places
- Rules and requirements of safety certification.
- Testing of qualifications on immigrants without certification on qualifications.
- Improve rules, routines and regulations to make it easier to employ immigration workers
- Improving flexible ways of training and certifying adults that are working at the same time.

During the spring 2008 there has been increased attention to mobility in education because the Ministry of Education is preparing a proposal for the parliament on internationalization of education. Some issues which are important to enhance mobility in education are:

- Improving the status of internationalization and recognition of learning outcome of student exchange and studying abroad. Support the development of a EU individual mobility program for school students
- More and better quality on information and guidance on student exchange and studying abroad

⁸ Some of these points are also outlined and elaborated in the report from the pilot project on testing the benefits of qualifications frameworks in vocational education and training, 2007

- Improving cooperation to education institutions in other countries
- Increasing grants and loans offered to students studying abroad

Demand for translating qualification levels between European countries

As EQF is primarily supposed to fulfil a function of a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, we found it important to ask stakeholders as to what extent they estimated this to be needed in Europe today. During the span of this project we have experienced that some of the stakeholders on a number of occasions have called for reports or studies from a European level mapping the specific need translation of qualification levels.

In our discussions with stakeholders we tried to make a clear distinction between the specific need for a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, without mixing it to the more general demand for promotion of mobility. However, while demands and challenges within mobility and qualifications are easy to identify, the more specific need for translation of qualification levels where more difficult to plot.

A CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Experience from dialogues and meetings concerning EQF-NQF give us the impression that the some of the most relevant stakeholders (6-10 organisations) have a few individual representatives very familiar with the concept of qualifications frameworks, and participate directly in the development and policy making process. These organisations also answered the consultation in 2005.

At the same time many stakeholders know what qualifications frameworks are and functionality. They are temporarily not really keeping up with the progress and participating in dialogues or policy making. Most of these organisations are short on human resources to follow up both national qualification and education politics and specific and perhaps more »peripheral« international politics.

There were also some stakeholders initiated to contribute to our project that didn't know of the EQF but had some experience with the framework for higher education.

The Ministry of Education had participants from 27 different stakeholders at their »Conference on EQF—European launch and national follow-up« February 12th. With the newly established reference group on the implementation of EQF, we can expect a continuous participation in the follow up from about 20 stakeholders.

Stakeholders report that they frequently meet frameworks (and most EU topics) in different contexts and meetings, and therefore qualification frameworks are well known by the representatives of teacher, students, employers and labour organisations. The most central organisations have used a lot of time and resources in the latter years in order to understand and take position towards qualification frameworks. Though, it appears that EQF is not a political priority among organisations, and It's not regularly debated internally in the organisations. In essence the knowledge and work with qualification frameworks are limited to a number of individual representatives of the organisations.

The consciousness of qualification frameworks has not reached to lower levels and among members of organisations and institutions. Public consciousness on a broader basis, as in media or debates is not registered at all.

As the EQF system and other proposals concerning education politics that are developed largely on a European level⁹, the involvement of stakeholders should not be limited to the national level. However, participation and influence on European education politics is very demanding and difficult to prioritise within NGO organisations.

Especially from a school student union point of view, EU processes are nearly inadmissible, concerning costs, contacts, information, formal representation, meeting points, etc. We also see that the Advisory board for the implementation of EQF has no stakeholders of school student or vocational apprentices, even though this group finally constitutes the users of the system in the end.

B IMPACTS OF THE EQF AND NQFS

1. There's agreement among stakeholders that an eventual Norwegian qualification system must be drawn on the existing structure and content. None of the organisations have taken initiative for radical changes in structure or content of the Norwegian edu-

⁹ Such as the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) and the Common Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (CQARF).

cation and training system in order to implement EQF. Curricula's in secondary schools and vocational training where reformed in 2006, and are now based on learning outcomes. There are no indications that the structure of secondary education is inconsistent with descriptors of EQF levels. The structure of higher education is largely consistent with the bologna framework model.

As earlier described the process of implementing EQF is approaching secondary and tertiary vocational education and training first. The Ministry of education and the Directorate for Education and Training have commenced work on elaborating general descriptors of qualifications within vocational education and training, and displace these at suggest appropriate levels to EQF.

In regards to which role the recognition of informal/non-formal learning should play implementing EQF, stakeholders in Norway agree that It's very important to incorporate this in the development of the implementation. Especially labour organisations point out that qualifications achieved through work experience must be enhanced in a potential NQF.

Even though the recommendation of EQF establishes that it should build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, leading also to the validation of learning outcomes acquired through experience, there is some lack of confidence that this will be promoted simply by implementing EQF. Assessment and recognition of informal/non-formal learning is complicated and specific to different types of qualifications, and not directly expected as an impact of EQF. Recognition and assessment of informal/non-formal learning can also be totally independent of qualifications frameworks, though with a qualifications framework the relation to other qualifications are easier to compare.

Some of the organisations were also very critical to the reservations of the EQF levels 6-8 for higher education degrees. They feared that this in practice will limit the possibility of advancing levels beyond »EQF 5« based on expertise and qualifications gained through work experience, thus discriminate vocational education and professions compared to academical paths.

Anticipations towards what qualifications frameworks cause in terms of access to different kinds of education programmes and progression routes between them are different among stakeholders. A potential national qualification framework or alignment to EQF should make access-points to education paths more clear. Especially entrance to universities and university colleges can be complicated when a vocational path is chosen. However, access to higher education in particu-

lar for students with a completed vocational education is also a topic under discussion at a national level in Norway irrespective of the implementation of EQF.

If an adequate level of NQF/EQF alone will grant access to higher education, it will have an impact as the recommendation claims that EQF will improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States. Each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths. However, as this idea is built on different principles and pedagogies than the system of today and there are no strong claim among the stakeholders that a specific EQF/NQF level (in practice 4 or 5) should automatically grant entrance to study at university/university collage level.

Concerning the co-existence of the EQF for LLL and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) there has been raised questions if they are really compatible with each other. Especially concerning tertiary vocational education (Fag-skoler, described in 2.1.) some stakeholders have been concern as to what level this type of education should be rated. In the Norwegian system these are defined as tertiary education, and fall under the short cycle level in the Bologna-process EHEA-framework. Some of the organisations find the levels of qualifications gained by these educations incompatible with EQF, as this position would equal to level 6 which is also expected to be the level of bachelor degrees in EQF.

C ANTICIPATED BENEFITS AND RISKS; STAKEHOLDERS' POSITIONS

General position

Through dialogue meetings and other meetings we have developed an impression that there are a lot of unanswered questions among the stakeholders as to how details of the European and Norwegian follow up of EQF will develop. The overall position of stakeholders is obviously dependent on the outcome of these unsettled issues. When debating benefits and risks a number of critical questions were raised, while points of clear and established benefits remained rather limited.

Some of the organisations stated straight that they most likely opposed the participation in EQF, and were not convinced that EQF and NQF will actually achieve its promises of mobility, lifelong learning and recognition of non formal learning.

Even though the organisations has identified a range of complications in regards to qualification frameworks, the overall conclusion is that Norway yet hasn't decided on whether we should set up a NQF. It's likely that a draft for qualification frameworks for vocational training will be written and developed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. Probably, most organisations await the result from this process before taking any formal stand towards qualifications frameworks.

All stakeholders point out that a successive implementation of qualification frameworks with the desired benefits is totally dependent on close cooperation and involvement of organisations and authorities from the education system and different work sectors.

Benefits and added value

From the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union:

»The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This will improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States.«

The overall goals of translation of qualifications, opening access points between levels in education and qualifications, and initiate a process of evaluating educations and occupations relative to others are shared by most stakeholders. However, when discussing benefits with stakeholders, we noticed that It's difficult to point out direct benefits from qualification frameworks. When agreeing to the goals of improving mobility and lifelong learning, It's not really a question of if qualification frameworks perhaps can contribute to this, but to analyse weather It's probable and how that qualification frameworks can achieve these goals. To describe this, the term »added value« of NQF was frequently used.

From the stakeholders points of view these where major benefits with the EQF concept and implementation of a NQF:

- Improved identification of foreign qualification levels on job seekers will benefit both labours and employers. If EQF function as a translation device for qualification levels as it suppose to, the information of qualification levels can be useful in situations of employment. Though, this is not a position that all stakeholders agree on fully, some of the or-

organisations thought that the given qualification level through EQF was rather unnecessary.

- Within some professions authorisation for specific work is based on a too weak evaluation of qualification levels for the employees. A system for more precise translation of qualification levels can help to solve this problem, though It's also important to bear in mind that evaluation of qualification levels are dependent on both level and content.
- It's positive to have a focus on learning outcomes. However, some organisations stated the use of learning outcomes in EQF shouldn't limit the independence to choose learning inputs, credits or other descriptors for qualifications in certain educations. Learning outcomes are already used for all curricula's in secondary and primary education and training.
- The process of making a NQF draft will illuminate some of the dead ends that are present in the Norwegian system, and open a discussion on how to improve access between different educations and informal and non-formal qualifications. Especially labour and employers organisations were interested in stronger recognition of work experience.
- A NQF can make it easier to understand the qualification system, and if access points are clarified it can help students and apprentices to visualize and build their careers.
- A successive qualification framework system will harmonise the national content of education and training less than pure standardisation.

Risks

- Labour, employer and students organisations expressed that they experienced EQF as an idea brewed on the top without cooperating with stakeholders and users at an early stage of the development.
- Misunderstandings and lack of information contribute to the complications. Even though there is obvious demand of explanations, little information directly from the Commission is available. There is not enough accessible and understandable information on qualification frameworks to participate in

the implementation. As a consequence the project is introduced from »top-down« only by those who have access to information. Without participations from organisations and eventually users of the system, the idea of implementing it in a functionally from is unrealistic. A bureaucratic system without consent from school student, students, workers and employers is unlikely to function.

- Both the employer organisations and labour unions expressed a lot of doubt on weather they expect the system of qualification frameworks to work at all in practice. Qualification frameworks risks being too complicated and risk serving irrelevant information to employers and workers.
- Countries with complicated structures and large variations of qualifications need the process of improving the transparency, comparability and portability, however the Norwegian education and training system is already palpable and the added value of implementing a complex and binding system is too modest.
- The concept within EQF and the rules of using it are not flexible enough for all type of situations determining a level of qualification. For instance, would it not be possible to be at two different levels in EQF even though one can obviously be at two different levels within an education program. EQFs limitation to 8 levels is also an odd problem if someone has surpassed the highest level in light of the life-long learning objectives.
- Qualifications frameworks as with one or more meta-frameworks as a translation device risk to contain too many chains changing the information of qualifications in the process to something incomparable for the receiver. The initial information on what level and content of qualifications someone tries to communicate is better brought by EU-ROPASS or other qualitative descriptions.
- Descriptors in qualifications frameworks are limited and inaccurate to specific qualifications. Employers will in any case need more information in order to evaluate a candidate, thus the purpose of EQF diminish.
- The concept and the meta-frameworks is not easy understandable. This is not improved by

the abstract and user-hostile language which used.

- The Ministry of Education find disadvantage in the lack of popularity EQF has.

D QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND CREDITS

In April 2008 the Commission sent the European Credit Transfer System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) proposal for recommendation to the European Parliament and Council. The Commission want to establish a point based system that will allow apprentices and other under vocational training to accumulate a number of points rewarding their learning outcome (e.g. 60 points correspond to the expected learning outcome of one year of training). ECVET suppose to promote mobility through comparability of qualifications and contribute to recognition of in-formal learning. The system should also be seen as a part of EQF. ECVET has some similarities with ECTS, which is the point based system used in higher education, though there are differences. According to the Commission, ECVET is based on learning outcomes and suppose not to define how long time the training takes or how it is done.

Based on four organisations answers to a public consultation carried out in Mars 2007 on the proposed ECVET from the EU-Commission we can draw out these opinions. The hearings were given by:

- The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)
- The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)
- Union of Education Norway (Utdanningsforbundet)
- The Federation of Norwegian Commercial and Service Enterprises (HSH)

Compared to the EQF process and public consultation in 2005, the stakeholders' involvement in developing ECVET is rather limited. Three out of four organisations answering the ECVET consultations complained on short deadline and too few organisations invited to give their opinions. From the answers given directly to the EU-Commission and published, there are no stakeholders representing school students or organisations representing vocational apprentices, which the system is actually aimed at.

ECVET is one of the Commissions answers on how to improve mobility of people under education and train-

ing and work force across European countries and from outside, which most agree that there is a large demand for. However, the organisations answering the consultation in 2007 failed to see a comprehensive justification of why a credit transfer system as outlined is the right tool to improve mobility. It was also pointed out that the consultation paper didn't explain why ECVET is a necessity to make qualification frameworks function.

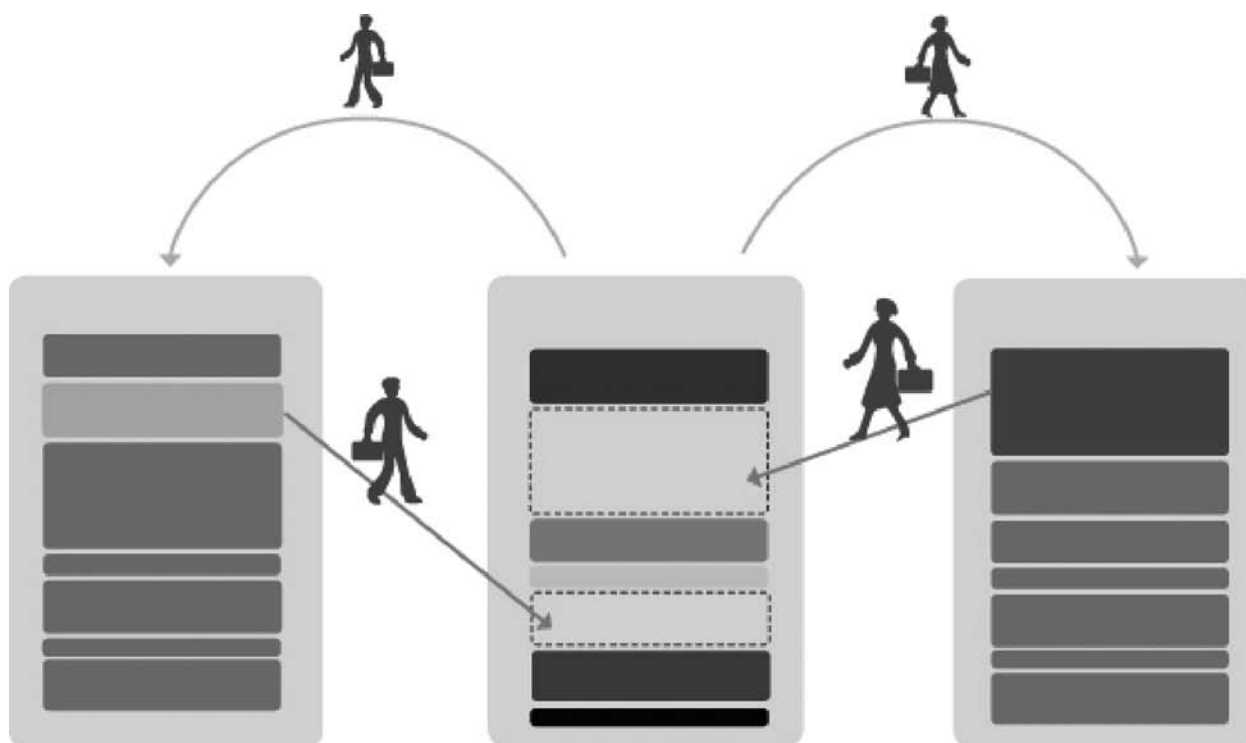
In addition qualification frameworks to the proposed ECVET ad to the risk of constructing a too complicated and bureaucratic system, which will be unattractive to use by school students, apprentices, workers and employers. The organisations answering the consultation where concerned that ECVET will be expensive, take too much time to develop and put into practice and demand too much competence to understand it, that the actual benefit of the system won't be worth the effort. Some proposed that the resources are better spent on developing existing tools for mobility such as the Plo-teus portal, EUROPASS and EQF.

On what visions stakeholders had on how to integrate different credit systems within a single overarching NQF and EQF? It was pointed out that credits based on in put such how much time to learn something (which ECVET risk to become) and the learning outcome based descriptors of EQF and NQFs is at conflict and not compatible. While EQF only define the level of learning outcomes relatively to other qualifications, the proposed ECVET will also define the length and indirectly also content of school and training programmes.

From a school student union view EQVET obviously has a weakness in being abstract and difficult to understand. The School Student Union of Norway fear that if ECVET is deployed into the system of EQF and NQFs, the complicated and bureaucratic process of assessment, translation and validation of qualifications will go too far. The proposed ECVET which is now under political process is unclear and largely unexplained. Furthermore its system of points for accumulation of units of learning outcome is far less flexible than EQF. It's also difficult to understand how credits suppose to reflect learning outcome and at the same time be set to a fixed time span of vocational schooling or training.

None of the dialogue meetings dealt with ECTS for higher education in sufficient depth to draw any conclusions in this report.

From the European Commission. ECVET, as an easy and understandable tool?



PARTICULAR POINTS OF VIEW FROM THE SCHOOL STUDENT UNION OF NORWAY

Within EON there have been debates on features of EQF and NQF on a number of meetings. EON participated in the public consultation on EQF in 2005 and made a clear list of recommendations to the Ministry of Education as to improvements of EQF. In February 2008 the »National board« (consisting of 19 leaders of EON-organisation in counties together with the central board, with representation of both general secondary schools and vocational students and apprentices) had a debate on what EON should demand for further development of EQF and a NQF in Norway. A number of demands towards the process of and the result of Norwegian participation in EQF were raised.

Access points to succeeding educations

National qualification frameworks in different countries should give a clear view of access to different levels and programs of education. Independent of which country a person has finished secondary education EQF and national education frameworks should perceive different education programs which are accessible. Practically, this can be achieved through assigning one of the EQF/NQF levels as an access level to higher education. This can promote more equal opportunities to be-

gin at higher education irrespective of where a student come from in Europe. Nevertheless, the value of completed secondary education should also be equal both for general studies and vocational training and rather evaluated based on the level of competence, skills and knowledge.

EQF and exchanges in secondary school

In 2008 a little more than a thousand Norwegian pupils were on exchange, and an equal number of Norwegians finish their entire secondary education in a different country. EON experience that the learning outcomes of studying abroad in secondary school aren't fully recognised, which unnecessary complicates the opportunity to do so. To have a semester or year approved, the pupils need to validate that they have completed subjects at equal level and content to the corresponding level in Norway¹⁰. These demands don't recognise the un-formal and informal competences that are a natural benefit of exchange years, such as intercultural learning, language skills and personal independence. If there could be a broader recognition of the benefits from studying abroad in Europe, it would probably be easier to do so. Nevertheless EQF descriptors for levels 2-4 are

¹⁰ These demands only account for general studies, and there is no system of accreditation for vocational schooling and training abroad.

not nearly specific enough for improving the recognition of qualifications learned during an exchange year.

Qualification frameworks as easy and understandable tools

From a user perspective on the system of qualification frameworks and related instruments, there is a major drawback that the systems and language used is not easy and understandable enough. The diction in EQF and in translations is far from everyday terminology for students, employers and workers. For example the descriptor of level 5 of competences in EQF is as follow:

»A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems«,

Which is rather difficult to relate precisely to what we would expect someone to master with a journeyman's certificate or general studies of secondary school. While along the goal is to make qualifications comparable across borders and languages, It's a risk that the language used in the meta-framework is too complicated and may easily be interdependent in different ways.

When it comes to the general appearance of qualification frameworks It's definitely a pedagogical problem in presenting an abstract system of levels and descriptors. Of course, if the languages used in descriptors for qualifications in NQFs are equally incomprehensible, the anticipated user of the system will effortlessly reject it.

12 ECTS + ECVET = RPL²

THE NEED FOR A RENEWED CREDIT SYSTEM TO SUPPORT THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Frederik De Decker
Senior Education Advisor
Ghent University Association

12.1 INTRODUCTION

One hundred and one years ago, Albert Einstein published his revolutionary formula $E=mc^2$, also known as the relativity theory. It is a very simple formula (an equation is always the easiest form of a formula), but at the same time the 5 characters in the formula became the symbol of very complex science.

Of course the equation in the title of this article not a highly scientific formula, albeit that for most people it might be just as un-understandable. It is there to grab attention—the real subject of the article is clearly hidden in the subtitle. But at the same time the link to relativity is made on purpose: after all, relativity for me is one of the core principles of qualifications frameworks. On the one hand, because frameworks are basically a set of relations: between levels, between systems etc. On the other hand, because its significance depends a lot on relative values or (even more so) the lack of them: the relative value of one *type* of learning vs. another; the relative value of one *level* of learning vs. another; the relative value of one *place* of learning vs. another etc. The aim of a qualifications framework is to make the existing relations explicit and to turn these relative values into absolute statements. It is the great strength of it, but at the same time also the weakness. Because, as is always the case in relationships, it needs mutual trust and understanding. And because in »learning«

few things are absolute. In this article, I will argue that a good relationship between credit systems, leaving absolute truths behind, is necessary in order for qualifications frameworks to become powerful instruments.

12.2 THE NEED FOR ONE CREDIT SYSTEM

A very clear example of this need for mutual trust and understanding is of course the obligatory »*co-habitation*« of formal, non-formal and informal learning in such a qualifications framework. This will have to work or the framework will not be. It is clear that formal learning (where in essence all learning is outcomes-focused and where this is made explicit) provides the standard. Hence, the recognition of non-formal (NFL) and informal learning (IFL) is a key success factor in the emergence of qualifications frameworks.

The Flemish Minister of Education has recently described his plans for a Flemish Qualification Structure¹¹. On p. 40, he launches the idea of one single Flemish agency in which different aspects of the recognition of acquired competences (closely linked to the concept of RPL, the recognition of prior learning) are brought together. But because this recognition will often be partial (i.e. relative to an overall—formal—qualification), there is a clear need for a system to express this »*relativity*«: a renewed credit system to support the recognition of prior NFL and IFL (that will necessarily have to be useful for both the transfer and accumulation of credits in a

¹¹ Vandenbroucke, F. »De Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur—een eenduidige ordening van kwalificaties voor levenslang leren en competentieontwikkeling« (herwerkte discussienota—mei 2008)

formal learning environment). In his proposal, the minister also points out, however, that at this moment we lack a European consensus and that it is therefore better to wait for this before including it in the Flemish Qualifications Structure (p. 25). Thus, we need a consensus.

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23 April 2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning states that it wants to »promote close links between the European qualifications framework and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training, in order to improve citizens' mobility and facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes«.

Higher education in Europe of course has such an existing European system for credit transfer and accumulation: ECTS. Having started as a mere transfer system alongside ERASMUS, it has gradually transformed itself into a system that also facilitates credit accumulation. ECTS-advocates argue that »it can be used for all types of programmes, whatever their mode of delivery, as well as for lifelong learning purposes. All types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal/work placements or research) can be described using ECTS and therefore ECTS encompasses diverse forms and types of education¹².«

ECTS has a number of key features: credits (of course) but also learning outcomes (fully in line with the current concepts in qualifications frameworks) and workload. The Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks defines workload as follows: »a quantitative measure of all learning activities that may feasibly be required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations)«.

The crucial question is therefore: how do you quantitatively measure non-formal and certainly informal learning activities? And even more important than the »how?« is the »why?«. Can we and do we really need to add time to these learning activities outside a formal setting? Even as more and more non-formal learning is being »formalised« (by means of important quality

¹² Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks: A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area; p. 44 http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

measures being taken¹³), informal learning will always remain far less tangible and hence untranslatable in quantitative terms.

But this does not have to be a problem, since the solution lies at hand. Another (still emerging) proposal, ECVET (European Credits for Vocational Education and Training) describes how credits (in this context called »points«, but what's in a name?) can be allocated to qualifications (and parts of qualifications, called »units of learning outcomes«) without necessarily (but: possibly!) referring to workload:

»In ECVET the allocation of points usually has two phases: ECVET points are allocated first to a qualification as a whole and then to its units. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and, on the basis of the convention the total number of points is assigned for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification.

[...]

The relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification, should be established according to the following criteria or to a combination thereof:

- *the relative importance of the learning outcomes which constitute the unit for labour market participation, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration;*
- *the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit;*
- *the effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.*

The relative weight of any given unit common to several qualifications, as expressed in ECVET points, may vary from one of these qualifications to another.¹⁴«

In the past I have already argued that such an approach (based on »relativity«!) can be also successfully

¹³ A good example of this, is the »Policy Paper on Non-Formal Education: a framework for indicating and assuring quality« (European Youth Forum, May 2008)

¹⁴ Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), 9 April 2008, p.22.

applied to higher education and thus formal learning¹⁵. The rationale of this is that an output-oriented approach is not reconcilable with an input-factor such as workload. Another weighting mechanism (outcomes-based) is also possible in higher education. Projects like »European methodology for accreditation of prior experiential learning in Lifelong Learning«¹⁶ have proved that it is possible to define the relative importance of a given set of learning outcomes (expressed in terms of competences) as compared to the total qualification, equally for higher education programmes.

The advantage of this approach as compared to the traditional ECTS-approach (with its strict workload-basis, a clear input-factor), is that such a system can more easily cater for the needs of non-formal and informal learning and by doing so facilitate the recognition of it in formal learning. Because, let's be fair, notwithstanding the intrinsic value of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. the empowerment of people, self-development etc.), the real value of NFL and IFL in a qualifications' logic, is of course solely linked to the degree to which these forms of learning can be recognised, which has to be understood as linked to a qualification (as the result of formal learning).

12.3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both in Flanders¹ (p. 3) and in Europe as a whole (cf. the Lisbon strategy) the political aim is clear: qualifications frameworks need to narrow the gap between the worlds of education/learning and labour/employment.

Paradoxically, this means that we need to have better recognition tools for non-formal and informal learning in order to increase the number of (formally) qualified citizens. We have argued that one crucial tool to reach this aim is a credit system that is not purely based on workload. There is a need for a system that takes the relative value of learning outcomes (also competences gained in NFL or IFL-settings) as the starting point, mainly because in many cases the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning will only be partial in relation to a given qualification. Such a system, which combines the experience and expertise of ECTS with

the overall-view on learning from ECVET, will perhaps offer the opportunity to raise the recognition of prior learning to the second power ... ECTS + ECVET = RPL², not only in Flanders, but surely also in the rest of Europe. I would therefore like to recommend a serene debate—hopefully ending in a long-lasting strong relationship (or even better: marriage)—on the possibilities to unite the strengths of both approaches (ECTS and ECVET) to come to one underpinning credit system for both European and national qualifications frameworks in order to offer equal opportunities to all learners in Europe, regardless of their learning contexts or other characteristics.

¹⁵ De Decker, Frederik: »Using competencies as the key to ECTS+« (Aug. – Oct. 2003), part of Working Paper 2.2 of »Tuning Educational Structures in Europe«.

¹⁶ A Socrates/Grundtvig-project (90642-CP-1-2001-1 UK-GRUNDTVIG-G1) co-ordinated by the University of Pitesti in Romania.

13 HOW TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION OF THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE EMPLOYERS IN THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING AND IMPLEMENTATING THE EUROPEAN AND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

Vladimir Tkalec
secretary-general, Confederation of Slovene trade unions in the public sector

13.1 ROLE

The stakeholders, the employers and the trade unions should be indispensable in the process of first developing and later on implementing the European Qualification Framework, and the National Qualification Framework on the national level. Both the employers and the trade unions have shown support for the preparation of the European Qualification Framework at the EU level as they believe it is the key element in reaching the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. Therefore the European Parliament has—in its recommendation report on preparative arrangements for the EQF—assigned an important role to the representatives of both trade unions and employers by giving them a place in the coordination and supervisory bodies of the European and National Qualification Frameworks.

The aim of improving the transparency of qualifications and the recognition and transferability of competences between countries and between different levels of education is surely in the interest of all the stakeholders. It is also in their interest to develop common principles of recognition, including the system of credit transferability at different levels of education as well as for vocational education and training. When the decision establishing a new Action programme for lifelong learning was signed the European stakeholders, and

later by Slovene stakeholders as well, all agreed that the introduction of the European qualification framework and, in Slovenia, the national qualification framework was one of the key elements of lifelong learning and a means for achieving greater mobility of workers as well as trainees and secondary school and university students.

Slovenia is in the process of altering the existing qualification system by introducing changes in vocational and professional education, higher education and adult education, which especially welcomes the introduction of the recognition and certification of non-formally and »casually« acquired qualifications.

Stakeholders (social partners) were involved in the work of the commissions responsible for the preparation of vocational standards in different fields, whilst the representatives of employers and trade unions joined professional councils responsible for the fields of general secondary education, vocational secondary and higher education and professional education. These councils were involved in adopting new and renewed programmes. Aside from a few minor exceptions the stakeholders in Slovenia did not respond to any of the proposals on the European qualification framework and there was even less response to the debate regarding the national qualifications framework, which has been underway behind closed doors. The universities and the employees in higher education opposed the Bologna reform in higher education whilst neither the broader public nor the stakeholders were involved in the debates.

13.2 OBSTACLES

Stakeholders, especially the unions, are currently dealing with the problem of a lack of experts in the field of education and training. Due to the very liberal »Act On Representativeness of Trade Unions«, the integrity of the trade union organization has begun to crumble and as a result many of the smaller unions are now negotiating strictly for higher salaries. A vast majority of Slovene trade unions cannot see their own interests in the process of establishing the qualifications framework because they focus only on the very narrow so called »guild interest«. Furthermore, representative trade unions and confederations (7), which are represented in the Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Slovenia, have neither the means nor enough qualified staff to properly analyse the proposals regarding the qualifications framework. Besides, the work of the Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Slovenia does not encompass vocational qualifications, the implementation of lifelong learning or the formal education and training. The Social agreement between the Government, employers and trade unions adopted in 2007 says nothing about the cooperation of the above-mentioned stakeholders in the implementation of the national qualifications framework.

Stakeholders, including the employers, do not hold an equal position with regard to their organising. Therefore, one of the organisations still has, by law, compulsory membership, whilst other organisations have to raise funds from voluntary membership. Chambers (employers' organisations), assign relatively small amounts of their funds to the questions of education, training, lifelong learning and qualification frameworks. The majority of collective agreements on salaries are still based on determining the wage groups solely on the basis of educational achievement, which has not been suitable for the changes that have occurred in the qualification structure.

Professional institutions and ministries still prevail in the area of qualification structure regulation and qualification framework establishment. It is they who suggest solutions which are then adopted without any further debate by the legislative or the executive branch of power. The majority of employees, smaller employers and the broader public are very poorly informed regarding the above mentioned problems and have no possibility at all to express their opinions or any possible concerns they may have.

13.3 MEASURES

For a greater involvement of stakeholders in the establishment of a national qualifications framework some changes in the national legislature would have to occur (assigning a new role to the chambers in the qualification system, equality of the chambers when it comes to voluntary membership, new laws on representative trade unions, a law on the Economic and Social Council). They would also have to change the basis for determining the wages in collective agreements (Collective Agreements Act) because they are outdated and do not take into consideration the changes that have taken place in the areas of education and training and they continue to ignore the role of lifelong learning (by doing so they ignore the new ways of achieving vocational and general competences). The rules regarding the operation of the Economic and Social Council should be updated and complemented—the council should pay more attention to the questions of the qualifications system. In accordance with the recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council Slovenia has to form a national body for the establishment of a qualifications framework, a body in which qualified stakeholders need to be included.

For a more active involvement of the stakeholders in the establishment and implementation of the national qualifications framework the government should allocate certain funds at a flat-rate, but the funds should cover the stakeholders' professional contributions, opinions and analysis. It should by no means cover any extra expenses of the, mostly, poorly qualified stakeholders' representatives in bodies which are responsible for bringing decisions regarding the qualification system. This is the way (with the exception of a very small circle of professional who pass on the European Commission recommendations and directives) by which Slovenia could include a greater number of experts into the process. It would also give more value to the real qualifications on the national level. The stakeholders would then be motivated to engage themselves in the process of establishment and implementation of the national qualifications framework, and be, consequently, responsible for creating quality jobs, a sensible career advancement for individuals, as well as a much greater social involvement of each and every inhabitant. It would achieve a much greater level of public trust and support for the just and transparent qualification system, whilst it would lower the number of alienated

employees and the general population concerned with the all-encompassing national and European bureaucratisation.

14 IMPLEMENTING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS— FURTHER CHALLENGES

By Colin Tück

The challenges ahead should be considered with regard both to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL). Although these two frameworks differ in their geographical scope (EU vs. Bologna) as well as in the sectors covered (lifelong learning vs. higher education), there is significant overlap and the two overarching frameworks make reference to each other.

The challenges addressed in this contribution are grouped in three big categories:

- 1 Making qualifications frameworks useful to their users
- 2 Ensuring reliability and trust
- 3 Reaching broad ownership and awareness

Certain challenges might well fit into two of the three or even all three categories. The categorisation should be understood as tentative and it mainly serves to illustrate the kind of challenges identified.

14.1 MAKING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS USEFUL TO THEIR USERS

When developing national qualifications frameworks that should later on articulate with the FQ-EHEA and EQF-LLL discussions should always recall that any framework should aim at benefiting its users: learners, education institutions/providers, quality assurance bodies, employees, employers and other stakeholders.

A qualifications framework needs to be easily understandable and accessible to all users and bureaucracy should be avoided. Users need to be able to identify in which ways they can benefit from a qualifications framework and how they can make use of it. The provision of appropriate information for users should be a key issue to be addressed in developing qualifications frameworks.

The Council of Europe has taken the lead to provide a central platform for information about the FQ-EHEA and respective national frameworks. For the EQF-LLL an Advisory Board has been established to coordinate further developments together with the European Commission. It will be a major challenge to align and coordinate the work done in the context of both frameworks in order to avoid confusion amongst users.

In order to promote qualifications frameworks as useful reference points helping to understand different qualifications from different countries and sectors, it is not sufficient to (formally) link all qualifications in an education system to a certain level in a national (or sectoral) qualifications framework. It is crucial that other instruments, such as the Diploma Supplement and the EUROPASS tools, include clear references to the place of a qualification in the national as well as the European frameworks.

The EQF-LLL has as one of its goals the enhancement of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This is an important aspect of the paradigm shift from input to outcome: *what* has been learned should be in the focus, not where and how it has been learned. A qualifications framework, however, can only support other tools and validation mechanisms that cater for

better recognition of non-formal and informal learning; it cannot replace them and will not in itself achieve this goal. Therefore due thought needs to be given to the development of such tools and mechanisms in conjunction with the implementation of a qualifications framework.

A major benefit attached to the establishment of qualifications frameworks is to build bridges between the education systems of different countries and between the different sub-sectors of education systems (such as higher education and vocational education and training). Learners should benefit from new learning paths allowing them to progress more smoothly from one country to another or, for instance, to enter a higher education programme with a vocational qualification more easily.

Again, qualifications frameworks, with their underlying outcome orientation, can be supportive while it is up to national authorities in charge of the educational sectors to make appropriate arrangements that allow learners to have their learning from different settings recognised and that prevent »dead ends« in the education system.

14.2 ENSURING RELIABILITY AND TRUST

The success of a qualifications framework depends on the link of individual qualifications to the framework being sound and reliable. Only if learners, education institutions/providers and employers can comfortably trust that the assigned place of a qualification in a framework is reasonable and neither overvalued nor undervalued the framework can serve as a meaningful reference point and translation device.

Quality assurance of education institutions/providers and programmes is vital to ensure the required reliability, it needs to verify the link of a qualification to a framework and demonstrate that this link is trustworthy.

Within Europe there are different approaches and traditions in quality assurance. In some countries, external quality assurance agencies (QAAs) have the responsibility to evaluate or accredit individual programmes at education institutions and providers, whereas in other countries this lies within the autonomy of education institutions and external QAAs only conduct an overall review of the institution as a whole and its internal mechanisms to assure and improve the quality of its programmes.

In the former case, external quality assurance should also consider the alignment of a qualification with (one or more) framework(s) and verify that a programme's learning outcomes fit the level or cycle it is linked to. In the latter case, QAAs should assist education institutions and providers in adjusting their internal mechanisms for quality assurance so that they can demonstrate appropriately how their qualifications match with the relevant qualifications framework(s). It will be a challenge in implementing qualifications frameworks at national levels to find a good way to integrate the new framework in existing quality assurance schemes.

In a similar way the linkage of a national or sectoral qualifications framework with one or both of the European overarching frameworks needs to be validated in a way that it can be trusted. Whereas the Bologna Process has already adopted a concept of self-certification of national qualifications frameworks, a comparable concept is still to be developed for the EQF-LLL. It is vital that such procedures are sound and reliable in order to reduce the risks of disputes and disagreements in practice if, for instance, a body from another country does not accept the linkage of a qualification to a framework due to a lack of trust. This may seriously hinder learners from seeking recognition or employment in other countries.

Last but not least, confusion needs to be avoided between different qualifications frameworks and overarching frameworks. The FQ-EHEA and the EQF-LLL both call upon national authorities to develop national frameworks that are then linked to the respective overarching European framework. Whereas some countries have already started to develop frameworks that will articulate with one of those, it should be discussed at national level whether two national frameworks are needed or whether one national qualifications framework, which then articulates with both the FQ-EHEA and the EQF-LLL, might be sufficient.

In any case it needs to be prevented that there is confusion or, even worse, contradiction between several frameworks at national level. This might be a quite challenging task, in particular where different sub-sectors of the education system were not used to communicate much with each other in the past.

Emerging sectoral qualifications frameworks pose a similar challenge. It needs to be ensured that those are not in contradiction to national frameworks and thus create unnecessary confusion amongst users and education institutions/providers.

14.3 REACHING BROAD OWNERSHIP AND AWARENESS

Qualifications frameworks need to build on broad ownership and support to be successful. This is surely an important lesson to learn from the ESU project. The involvement of all relevant stakeholders in developing and implementing qualifications frameworks supports their success in two ways:

Firstly, the involvement of stakeholders ensures a feeling of ownership of the framework amongst all important actors in the education system. If stakeholders are involved in setting a national qualifications framework up they are far more likely to become active supporters once the framework is in place and the framework can thus gain more legitimacy. As an example, it is difficult to imagine a framework integrating well with existing quality assurance practices without involving education institutions/providers and quality assurance bodies in its development.

Secondly, stakeholder organisations may play a crucial role in raising awareness about a qualifications

framework. Student unions, for instance, may take the responsibility to promote the framework amongst students, and employers' organisations might be the ones to demonstrate the framework's benefits to employers throughout the country, etc.

Although a broad stakeholder involvement might render the process of putting a qualifications framework in place longer or more complex it will pay off in the long run. The involvement of stakeholders should not be traded off for a quicker, but more superficial approach to developing and implementing a qualifications framework.

The »EQF Stakeholders« project has outlined many key challenges on the road ahead that have to be addressed at national and sectoral levels, as this is where the implementation takes place. The two adopted overarching European qualifications frameworks have set out the main goals and targets, but it will be up to those implementing qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral levels to address the numerous challenges and to realise the pursued aims in practice.

15 ANEXES

15.1 FINAL REPORT ON ›TOWARDS AN EQF—THE STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES‹ VALIDATION CONFERENCE

Bernardette Farrell

General Rapporteur of the Conference

On 21st and 22nd April, ESU organised the validation conference for its' pilot project on involving stakeholders in the European Qualifications' Framework. The project, which has been running for the last 18 months, was intended to bring stakeholders from around Europe together to have national and trans-national discussions on the implementation of the EQF, the design on harmonised NQF and their role in any such implementations. ESU has been working on the project together with the following partners:

AuGENT—the Ghent University Association
EON—the Norwegian School Student Union
SVIZ—the Slovenian Teachers' Trade Union
USI—the Irish National Union of Students
BDA—the German Employers' Union

In addition, FZS, the German national union of students, also aided ESU in implementing the project during its' final stages. During the course of the project, each partner held two dialogues in their respective countries, bringing together a wide base of stakeholders, to discuss the EQF, their impressions of it, and their perceived roles in implementing it. Following this, the Lake Bled conference was intended to bring together

these experiences, and draw some conclusions which might be applied at European level.

The opening address and welcome was given by Koen Geven, Chairperson of ESU and Tomaz Freljih, President of the Slovenian Students' Union. This was followed by a synopsis of the ESU coordinated EQF project which was delivered by Anthony Camilleri of ESU. Mr. Camilleri outlined the unique feature of project, which was the inclusion of many stakeholders from the inception of the project, through to its delivery and the freedom of the participating project partners and stakeholders to employ different methodologies in relation to the national dialogues. To conclude with, he outlined how in the near future a publication would be prepared from the project partner reports of the national dialogues and the conference report, also outlining different national experiences regarding various aspects of the implementation of EQF.

A presentation on ›Stakeholders Perspectives on Qualifications Frameworks‹ was given by Colin Tuck, the original project coordinator from ESU. He spoke clearly on the necessity of frameworks in making explicit the implicit, the shift toward learning outcomes in education and the creation of new learning paths that are facilitated by framework structures. He followed with a discussion on stakeholder involvement and the perceived benefits of frameworks for a variety of stakeholder groups were also discussed.

A number of workshops were scheduled on the conference program. The workshop facilitators provided much food for thought and stimulated interesting and lively debate among stakeholder representatives on a variety of framework related issues.

A workshop on ›Making the National Qualifications Framework Useful for Learners‹

was facilitated by Ligia Deca from ESU and based around a number of questions so as to frame the discussion of the participants. In response to the question; ›What are the practical aspects that make NQFs useful for learners?‹ the responses included: mobility (internationally and nationally, vertically and horizontally), employability, transparency, easier recognition of prior learning, progression and the comparability of qualifications. When analyzing the ways to achieve the above mentioned benefits, the participants concluded that dialogue and consultation, effective distribution of information, broadening of stakeholder groups, networking between stakeholder groups, the simplification of the language of qualification frameworks and quality assurance to assure accessibility and the need to integrate terminology into everyday speech were all ways of achieving the aims of the NQF and EQF. In response to the question: ›How Can Each Stakeholder Help in Making NQF Useful for Learners?‹ The participants concluded that we must take the time to explain the EQF concepts to all stakeholders and thus encourage a ›bottom up‹ approach through effective communication. It was also felt by the participants that stakeholders have responsibilities in communicating the existing debates in the area.

A workshop on ›Ethical Skills in Qualifications Frameworks‹ was facilitated by Bastian Baumann of the Magna Charta Observatory. Within the workshop there was an outline of the ethical dimensions of qualifications frameworks and the perceived lack of inclusion of ethics in the EQF. A lively debate followed on whether ›rights‹ and ›wrongs‹ should be included in the EQF; the group finally reached the conclusion that they are already inside the EQF. Also, it was thought that the frameworks should encourage the development of critical thinking in terms of building individual ethical attitudes.

A workshop on ›Non-formal Learning and the Qualifications Frameworks‹ was facilitated by Maarten Coertjens of the European Youth Forum. The groups worked on actual examples of non-formal learning in action. From discussion and debate of the examples the groups felt that some form of formal assessment was required if learning outcomes were to be identified correctly. The groups felt that strong quality assurance systems were necessary to create trust in this area. It was also felt that there is a need to be careful that we don't take the ›fun‹ out of non-formal learning.

On Monday the 21st conference participants were introduced to the concept of a ›Knowledge Cafe‹. Using this format the project partners presented on developments of the NQF and EQF in their respective countries in a relaxed environment where conference participants asked questions and discussion and debate developed from this.

One of the final pieces of the conference was the panel debate about ›Future Challenges in the Implementation of NQFs‹. This discussion was chaired by Klemen Miklavic. On the panel was the lead representative of each of the project partners alongside Koen Geven of ESU, Nina Gustafson Aberg of Educational International and Bjarke Rubow of OBESSU. Each member of the panel was given the opportunity to express briefly their own views on future challenges in relation to the NQF. Mr. Miklavic stimulated discussion through a number of questions to the panel.

To close the conference the forum facilitators were invited to synthesise the main thrust of discussion and the outcomes of the forums. The sense of stimulating ownership of the stakeholders that pervaded the conference was therefore continued.

The main themes that arose from the conference, as summarised by the general rapporteur Benardette Farrell (Union of Students in Ireland), were as following:

- **Stakeholder involvement, not only in the general processes of educational reform, but in particular in NQF and EQF development is imperative**

The partner reports showed without doubt, that the development of national frameworks in countries where stakeholders were involved, was more successful in terms of the level of ownership felt by stakeholders over the whole process, the applicability of the NQF to all areas of learning, especially those outside the formal (or traditional) ambit, and the overall adoption of the concept of qualification frameworks by the educational and business communities as a whole. It is obvious that NQF are useless without ownership of all stakeholders, as they represent the end ›users‹ of all the instruments included in such a framework.

- **There is a need to broaden our current concept of stakeholder groups**

The stakeholder principle is meant to embrace the concept that any group of people who have a stake in an educational process,

also deserve a say in such process proportionate to that stake. As qualification frameworks help to widen the borders of such educational process, especially in terms of the profile of participants in education, the need to redefine our conception of the traditional stakeholder groups is being increasingly felt. It was felt that especially school students have to be regarded as a very important stakeholder, as they will all have to use the NQF in the future.

- **Not all stakeholders are sufficiently empowered to contribute to the process**

Reasons for this were varied, with the many gripes being of financial or knowledge limitations. While claiming the need and right for representation, stakeholders also voiced the concern that the method of involvement must take into account the national organisational realities of the NGO sector, and adapt accordingly.

- **The limited awareness of both NQF and EQF is an area of concern for stakeholders**

It was felt that the language of educational reform and of frameworks in particular can be prohibitive for many stakeholders, as well as for the general public and therefore effective communication of the frameworks to all stakeholders needs to be addressed. It must also be noted that, primarily due to this reason not all stakeholders involved in the conference believe the benefits of the framework sufficient to encourage their support.

There are many challenges still to face in the development of frameworks but with the involvement of stakeholders and strong underpinning tools creating transparency and trust, strong integrated education frameworks may be a reality.



Towards a EQF— Exchanging the Stakeholders' views and experiences



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Project Aims

- To provide a forum for the exchange and discussion of experiences between 5 stakeholders from 5 countries
- To facilitate new partnerships between the involved partners and between stakeholders
- To identify common issues, problems and solutions within the 5 countries
- To let others learn from the experience of the 5



Project Partners

- National stakeholders:
 - AUGent – Gent University Association
 - BDA – Confederation of German Employers' Organisations
 - EON – School Students Organisation Norway
 - SVIZ – Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia
 - USI – Union of Students in Ireland



Advisory Board

- **Rationale:** To involve the European umbrella organisations of stakeholders
 - EUA—European University Association
 - EURASHE—European Associations of Higher Education Institutions
 - EI—Education International
 - ETUC—European Trade Union Confederation
 - OBESSU—Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions

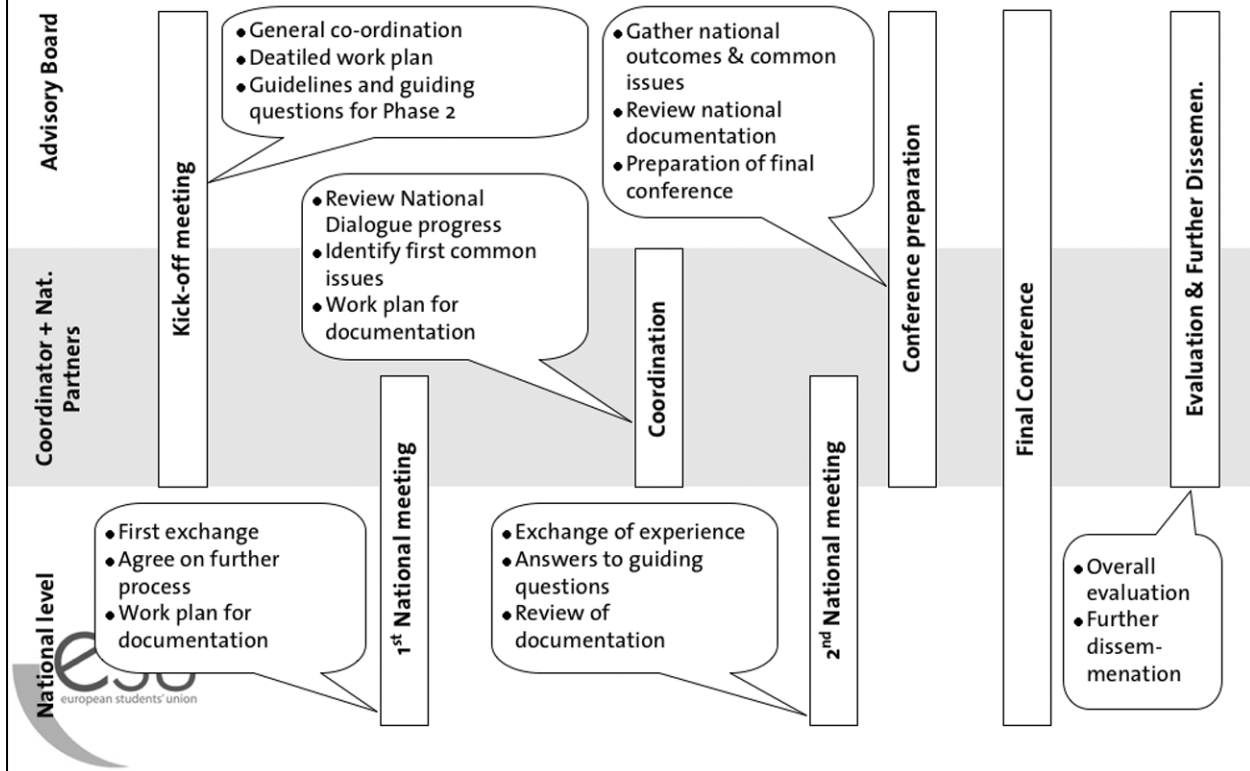


Working Method

- **Concept:**
 - 1st step: National dialogues in 5 countries
 - 2nd step: Merge experience and results of national dialogues
- **National dialogues:**
 - Organised by each National Stakeholder
 - Involvement of all stakeholders in the respective country: education institutions, trade unions, employers' organisations, students/learners



Meetings & Timeline



Planned Publications

- **Conference preparatory material**
 - 5 country cases
 - Participating organisations, conference particip.
 - Approx. 100 copies, English
- **Final project documentation (Booklet)**
 - Conference results, approx. April 2008
 - Addressing all stakeholders etc.
 - Approx. 750 copies, English



The Final Conference

- **Aim:**
 - To bring all partners and stakeholders from the five countries together
 - To present the project results to and discuss them with a wide range of stakeholders
- **Date:**
 - April 2008
- **Place:**
 - Bled, Slovenia



Outcomes

- **Picture of stakeholder situation**
- **Identification of confluences and divergences in national situations**
- **Examples of good or bad practice**
- **one overarching recommendation**



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