

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

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Conference Statement

- This statement emerged from discussions of a meeting of 150 international experts where each of these topics was discussed. A more detailed post-conference report will be published.

Vision

If qualifications frameworks are to achieve their full potential to support individuals' lifelong learning and mobility, mutual trust and understanding is essential. Discussions to date on qualifications frameworks and related reforms have tended to take place separately amongst stakeholders of different parts of the education and training system. For qualifications frameworks to realise their full potential, there is a need for greater cohesion. To achieve this, opportunities should be harnessed to bring together the communities involved in national qualifications frameworks (for vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE) or lifelong learning), sectoral qualifications and recognition. Ultimately, we are all trying to achieve the same objectives, but in different ways: we want individuals to have their learning recognised and be able to move with that learning between education and training sectors and between countries. The multiplicity of ways we are going about this, both at a European and a national level, whilst in itself desirable, requires effective communication and measures to address any difficulties and confusions that arise.

Two Meta- frameworks

- Coherence between the two meta-frameworks should be ensured at national level, including through coordinated self-certifications. Individual states and the relevant authorities have a prerogative to decide the manner of implementing the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area ('Bologna Framework') and associated reforms and European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL). It is imperative, however, if frameworks are to have any effect, that national frameworks meet national challenges for the development of education and training systems.

Recognition and Mobility

- Real recognition and mobility need to be achieved in order to deliver benefits to individual citizens. Frameworks offer potential to enhance the possibilities for recognition and mobility. We acknowledge that this is a difficult task given the diversity of the education and training systems involved. Nevertheless, there is significant potential in enabling recognition services / bodies to make greater use of qualifications frameworks to support the recognition of qualifications, and in using the experience of recognition practitioners to inform the design and implementation of frameworks.

Professional Directives

- The 2012 review of European Directive 2005/36/EC gives a timely opportunity for an update, in line with recent competence-based developments in education and qualifications systems, to clarify the interplay between the Directive and European meta-frameworks.

Sectoral Qualifications and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks

- The level of understanding that exists within and between sectors adds value to overall cohesiveness at national and European level. The relationship of sectoral qualifications to national qualifications frameworks and the two meta-frameworks needs to be clarified in order to realise lifelong learning and to facilitate permeability between vocational education & training (VET) and higher education (HE). Further clarity should be sought on appropriate ways to achieve such recognition through national and meta-frameworks.

Global perspective

- Mobility and recognition of learning are global issues and European developments are contributing to work in this area. Further consideration of how to articulate European developments with global developments is required since, if successful, this can genuinely provide enhanced mobility and recognition. Robust quality assurance, firmly based on learning outcomes, is key to success in this area. Examples of activities in this area include the Ireland-Australia project which explores formal alignment between the Irish National Framework of Qualifications and the Australian Qualifications Framework, and the completed project to explore the compatibility of qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand.

<http://www.nqai.ie/QualificationsFrameworksConference2010.html>