EU Key Competences Framework Consultation
QQI Submission - May 2017

About QQI

QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) was established in 2012 as an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. QQI took over the functions of the following four bodies:

- Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)
- Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB)

Our mission is to:

- promote the enhancement of quality in Ireland's further and higher education and training, and quality assure providers;
- support and promote a qualifications system that benefits learners and other stakeholders.

It is our job to set standards for qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and to make sure the NFQ is understood by learners, employers and the general public. The NFQ makes it easier for people to compare and contrast qualifications. In turn, this can help people gain access to employment, and to education and training opportunities.

About the EU Key Competences Framework

The EU Key Competences Framework for Lifelong Learning was developed 2006, a period before establishment of QQI. However, the legacy agencies such as FETAC, HETAC and NQAI were involved in discussion and dissemination of it.

QQI held a consultation event in May 2017 on the review of the EU Key Competences Framework. Participants were from public agencies, providers of further and higher education and training, community and industry/sectoral groups. A summary of the feedback received is outlined below, other specific feedback has been submitted via the online questionnaire.

Agencies such as QQI have informed and interpreted the framework on others behalf e.g. in the development and implementation of policy. An example is the inclusion of award standards for key competences/transversal skills in the FET Common Award System at levels 1 to 6 in the NFQ, Learning can be certified within the NFQ as minor award or part of a major award. At higher education level the competences are generally embedded in programme modules and not certified separately.

Outside of QQI, awareness depends on the type of organisation and their activity. National agencies (e.g. Solas, NALA, NCCA) are aware of the framework. The key competences are applied or emphasised in different ways to, and by, different stakeholders. Examples include:

- Inclusion of key competence related award standards in the NFQ via QQI awards
- Work by National Council for Curriculum Assessment work on key skills in the junior cycle reform.
- The Solas Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019
- Newer developments include the network of Regional skills fora which will feed into greater awareness of technical and key competences at a regional level.

Strengths of the Key Competences framework:

- It is still relevant; it keeps transversal skills central and provides a point of reference to make the competences more visible and explicit
- It Is a useful tool in the promotion of lifelong learning e.g. useful as a validation mechanism for formal, non-formal and informal learning

Weaknesses of the framework:

- It can be seen as too general and needs to be mediated and interpreted for different groups. i.e. it is not a one size fits all
- Its language can be hard to understand for different stakeholders in terms of the detail included. Simplifying the language would help
- It is unclear whether should be a balance between competences and whether some are considered more important than others
- It challenges providers to combine these competences/skills with technical skills
- It could benefit from an implementation plan

General comments

Reconsider the **purpose** of the key competence framework, how it may be **used**, **applied** and **evidenced** e.g.

- Its relationship to other frameworks (EQF, national, sectoral, discipline specific) and how/whether they communicate or can be referenced
- Integration into the education system by national agencies, providers of education and training programmes, employers and sectoral groups
- Embedding in learning programmes (e.g. induction programmes, learning to learn, can be certified or uncertified)
- Embed in employer based induction programmes e.g. to help individuals learn how to navigate the workplace
- How an individual can develop, demonstrate, improve and evidence their competence

How the competences are packaged should be reviewed and updated. It may be necessary to vary their specificity. Some could benefit from being separated out and elaborated on. Environmental and financial competences are missing but are now more prominent than in 2006.

The framework should be relaunched and bolstered by evidence of good practice, tools and case studies on implementation and impacts at national as well as local level.

Challenges associated with the framework are:

- It should be **simpler to understand b**y different stakeholders (individuals, learners, education and training providers, business/industry) i.e. requires minimal de-coding
- It should be consistent across themes and sectors, across competences and across EU regions

Future developments associated with the framework:

- It can't stand alone; more supports and tools are needed from Commission level to individual state level taking into consideration that the subsidiarity principle prevails.
- It would benefit from an implementation plan which is linked to an evidence based system of tools, supports and possibly a reporting mechanism.

References

NCCA Key Skills reform in the Junior Cycle: http://ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Key_Skills/Key-Skills.html

NCCA: Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/PrinciplesThemes_ENG/Principles_ENG.pdf

Solas FET Strategy 2014-2019: http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FETStrategy2014-2019.pdf

QQI Infographics: Data on certified learning: http://infographics.qqi.ie/