Irish Presidency Conference
Comhdháil Uachtaránacht na hÉireann

Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks
Dearbhú Cáilíochta i gCreatáí Cáilíochtaí

Dublin Castle 12-13 March 2013
Caisleán Bhaile Átha Cliath 12-13 Márta 2013
Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks

Dearbhú Cáilíochta i gCreataí Cáilíochtaí
Welcome from the Irish Presidency

The provision of high quality education and training for all of Europe’s citizens is essential if Europe is to tackle its unemployment crisis, strengthen its economic growth and create sustainable jobs.

The Irish Presidency is therefore focusing on how access to education and training can be expanded to Europe’s citizens and on ensuring its quality and relevance for European society and the 21st century labour market.

Ireland has been an active supporter of the development and implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, which first moved to the centre of the European agenda during the last Irish Presidency in 2004. During that Presidency, and in subsequent events and activities, Ireland has emphasised the importance of bringing together the different sectors of education and training. In particular vocational education and training system must work closely with the higher education system if our citizens are to get the skills they need for new jobs.

I welcome you to Dublin for this conference about how European partners can learn from each other about quality in qualifications.

Ruairí Quinn T.D.
Minister for Education and Skills

Both qualifications frameworks and quality assurance arrangements at European and national levels are set up to support and realise efficient, high quality education and training processes that provide relevant skills for personal development and society, including the labour market as well as facilitating mobility in the single European labour market.

The main aim of the conference is to explore how qualifications frameworks and quality assurance arrangements can best work together at national and European levels in order to achieve the overall goals of reforming education.

This is the first major event organised by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) since its establishment in November 2012. QQI has taken over responsibility for Ireland’s National Framework of Qualifications and the external quality assurance of all higher education and vocational education and training. We are delighted to be welcoming over 150 guests from across Europe who will hear contributions from experts from many European countries, as well as Canada, Morocco and Hong Kong.

Padraig Walsh PhD
Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Ireland
### Day 1 - 12 March 2013

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<td>Reactions: Mike Coles, Curriculum and Qualifications Development Expert, UK; Kevin Marshall, Microsoft; Thomas Mayr, European Association of Craft Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, (UEAPME)</td>
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<td>Reactions: Külli All, Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia; Patrick Werquin, Qualifications Policy Expert, France; Christine Wihak, Thompson Rivers University, Canada; Michel Feutrie, European Civil Society Platform for Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL)</td>
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<td><strong>Bryan Maguire, Head of Qualifications Services, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)</strong></td>
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<td>Padraig Walsh, CEO, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, (QQI): Challenges identified, resulting in challenges for workshop groups to resolve (based on overnight analysis of work in Day 1)</td>
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<td>Reactions: Eva Cheng, Qualifications Framework Secretariat, Hong Kong; Mohamed Slassi Sennou, General Confederation of Moroccan Business, Morocco; Karine Harutyunyan, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Armenia; Allan Bruun Pedersen, Agency for Universities and Internationalisation, Denmark</td>
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<td>Participants in five parallel workshops will discuss how the issues raised at the conference can be addressed, in their countries and at European level, to support the integrated implementation of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance</td>
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<td>Chairs: Sjur Bergan, Head, Education Department, Council of Europe; Sophie Weisswange, Principal Administrator/VET Policy Adult Learning Unit B.3, DGEAC; Mike Coles, Curriculum and Qualifications Development Expert; Ana Carla Pereira, Head of Unit A.3, DGEAC, Skills and Qualifications Strategies, Multilingualism Policy, European Commission; Tony Donohoe, Head of Education, Social and Innovation Policy, Irish Business and Employers Confederation</td>
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<td>12.45 – 13.00</td>
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<td>Ana Carla Pereira, Head of Unit A.3, DGEAC, Skills and Qualifications Strategies, Multilingualism Policy, European Commission</td>
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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline and raise for consideration some key issues concerning the relationship and interaction between two of the principal instruments now utilised to support the development of European education and training: namely, formal systems of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. Both instruments have been at the heart of a series of European policy initiatives, some dating back to the 1990s, that have been designed to effect a strong lifelong learning culture within European education and training, that not only seeks to create rich, diverse and on-going learning opportunities for the individual citizen; but which does so in a way that prepares citizens for work in an increasingly knowledge-based and skills-dependent labour market, and that helps to deliver jobs and growth for Europe in the context of rapidly changing and highly competitive global economic environment. Indeed, as Europe endeavours to overcome the lingering effects of the financial crisis of 2007-8, and establish a sound and sustainable basis for economic recovery, the demands and expectations being placed on education and training – and, as a consequence, on the reforming tools and instruments underpinning them – are intensifying. This is particularly evident in the European Commission’s recent communication Rethinking Education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes. The message in the document is stark and urgent: Europe will only resume growth by producing highly skilled workers who can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship. And this growth, in turn, will be dependent on a renewed effort on the part of Member States to transform their national education and training systems, which – in part at least – is to be achieved by a more coherent utilisation of the existing transparency tools, including quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks.

It is in this context that this paper is presented. Written to underpin the Irish Presidency conference Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks, the paper seeks, in particular, to examine how qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems can be harnessed, and made to work in tandem, so the overall goals of reforming education and training, whether at national or European level, can be realised.

1 This text is the responsibility of the author and the opinions expressed do not bind any of the institutions supporting the conference

2 For the main policy initiatives and outputs since 2000 in education and training see http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/policy-framework_en.htm

The paper has been constructed around four themes, which will provide a basis for invited reactions and participant discussions during the conference. The four themes are:

- Integrating Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks to improve education and training systems
- Using Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks to improve the labour market relevance of qualifications
- Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks in facilitating the Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning
- Promoting confidence in Europe's qualifications on a global scale

A final report will emerge from the conference based on the discussions that this paper generates. The report will summarise reactions to the issues raised and highlight positive proposals for advancing reforms at national and European level.

2. Theme 1: Integrating quality assurance and qualifications frameworks to improve education and training systems

The widespread introduction of qualifications frameworks, and the growth and development of increasingly sophisticated quality assurance systems in European education and training, have received their impetus over the past decade from the broad policies and strategies initiated by the European Union (e.g., Lisbon 2000, ET 2010 work programme, ET 2020); and from the key modernisation processes associated with the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process) and European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (the Copenhagen Process). In addition, the European Agenda for Adult Learning has also formulated a number of priorities to improve the quality and efficiency of the very disparate adult learning sector that are in line with the above strategies." While these policies and initiatives have developed from different sources, there have been significant overlaps throughout, both in terms of the ideas and aspirations that have informed them, and the recurring participation of some key stakeholders. Thus, although they do not share identical origins, the quality assurance and qualifications frameworks movements do share significant common features and objectives; and it is these common features and objectives that provide a basis for their deeper integration in support of education and training reform, including in relation to the provision of the right skills for employability.

Transparency and the building of mutual trust

One such common feature is a shared commitment to transparency, and the building of mutual trust, between national education and training systems. The earliest moves towards European cooperation in the area of quality assurance were, in part, a reflection of the desire of member states – subsequently embedded in the Bologna Process – to increase student mobility through the Erasmus exchange programmes. Only through transparent engagement, and developing a shared understanding of the quality systems of different countries, and by working together to enhance them, would national governments be convinced that the courses studied by their students in other countries were of sufficient quality, to gain the same level of recognition as courses studied in the national system. A similar concern also animated European cooperation in the quality assurance of VET. From its formal initiation in 2002, the Copenhagen Process has sought to promote *inter alia* cooperation in quality assurance*, with a view to building mutual trust, transparency and recognition of qualifications for the purposes of increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning*. To this day, this objective remains a core aim of the European Quality Assurance

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Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET), and of the EQAVET network of quality practitioners who are endeavouring to implement it.7

Turning to qualifications frameworks, we again encounter the same concerns with issues of transparency and trust between national systems of education and training, and the same desire to foster mobility.8 In the 2005 background report underpinning the establishment of the QF-EHEA, for example, it is significant that the words ‘trust’ and ‘mobility’ both occurred a total of 25 times each, while the word ‘transparency’ appeared 50 times.9 In a similar fashion, the word ‘transparency’ or ‘transparent’ appears 12 times in the 2008 Recommendation establishing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a document that also reminds us that the EQF was founded on the principles of ‘transparency and mutual trust’, and was designed to facilitate ‘further cooperation’ between Member states ‘to increase transparency and to promote mobility and lifelong learning’.10

There is little doubt, that the systematisation of quality assurance in European education and training, and the widespread introduction of qualifications frameworks, are built upon common foundations. Both are rooted in a common model of European co-operation, the open method of co-ordination, which relies on ‘soft law’ mechanisms such as peer to peer learning, and the shared use of good practice guidelines and indicators, to bring about change. Both are committed to common agendas in areas such as lifelong learning, skills provision and the employability of learners. Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks are natural partners; their deeper integration should not only be possible, but capable of delivering improvement throughout education and training.

Although the decision to initiate the development of qualifications frameworks at the national level is not generally made by quality assurance bodies – it has been the preserve of the different ministries responsible for education and training – and although a range of different bodies, including some quality assurance agencies, have assumed responsibility for their technical construction, it has generally been considered, implicitly if not explicitly, that quality assurance bodies have an important role to play in the on-going implementation of qualifications frameworks. Certainly, this assumption is to be found in the policies underpinning the QF-EHEA and the EQF, the overarching European qualifications frameworks that have driven the development of NQFs in Europe since 2005.

QF-EHEA Self-certification and EQF Referencing: a key interface between quality assurance and qualifications frameworks

The QF-EHEA and EQF were designed to serve as translation devices or reference points between the different levels of NQFs across Europe, and to facilitate qualifications recognition and mobility across national borders. To enable this, national authorities establish a relationship between the NQF levels and the levels of EQF, or the cycle descriptors of QF-EHEA, according to agreed criteria and procedures. Critically, both processes – ‘referencing’ in the case of EQF and ‘verification’ or ‘self-certification of compatibility’ in the case of QF-EHEA – formally acknowledge the centrality of quality assurance in education and training, and the importance of formally linking NQFs to the existing quality processes within those systems. To this end, both sets of criteria and procedures strengthen the link by stipulating that quality assurance systems should be cognisant of the NQFs, and formally ‘refer’ to them. Both also provide for the involvement of external quality assurance bodies in the self-certification processes.11 In effect, they imply that NQFs cannot function in any meaningful way, unless they are underpinned by systematic and transparent systems of quality assurance. Once they are underpinned by quality systems, NQFs themselves become tools to publicly guarantee quality and act as ‘gateways’ to or ‘registers of’.

8 It is worth noting that the concept of qualifications frameworks had its origins in developments in Anglophone countries in the 1980s and 1990s, notably the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The original policy objectives varied from country to country but trust and transparency figured in these early debates also.
9 Available at: http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf
approved, quality assured qualifications. The relationship between qualifications frameworks and formal quality assurance systems is further strengthened when we consider the role that learning outcomes play in both arenas.

Learning Outcomes, Qualifications Frameworks and Quality Assurance

It is almost a truism to say that the absorption and application of the concept of learning outcomes is the most recognisable feature of the recent Europe-wide growth in qualifications frameworks. The notion of what a qualification now represents has been fundamentally reoriented in this process – the EQF Recommendation, for example, defines a qualification as the ‘formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards’. The architecture of qualification frameworks (level descriptors, individual qualifications descriptors etc.), at the national and European levels, are also invariably constructed as generic or specific statements of learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence).

And yet learning outcomes are not the preserve of qualifications frameworks alone. The use of learning outcomes to define the expectations of learners and workers predates the recent growth in European NQFs by many years; In the context of the development of the Bologna Process, it is noteworthy that it was a group of quality assurance agencies, known collectively as the Joint Quality Initiative, who undertook much of the groundwork in specifying learning outcomes for higher education qualifications. The group’s key output, the so-called ‘Dublin Descriptors’ – generic learning outcomes descriptors for Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral Qualifications – would eventually become the centrepiece of the QF-EHEA. In tandem with this work, quality assurance agencies also played a key role, through the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education’s (ENQA) development of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which provided for the development, publication and assessment of explicit intended learning outcomes, as a key element of the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions. Since the adoption of the ESG and QF-EHEA some countries, including for example, Denmark and Sweden, have introduced formal implementation systems for their higher education qualification frameworks, in which national quality assurance agencies play a central role in evaluating and assessing the outcomes of study programmes. Reflecting a growing awareness of the increasing role of quality agencies as key contributors to NQF implementation, ENQA has also taken the step of organising a number of seminars on the theme of qualifications frameworks and their relationship to quality assurance.

The recognition of the critical role of quality assurance in the implementation of NQFs is also acknowledged outside higher education. The common principles of quality assurance for higher education and VET set out in the third annex to the EQF Recommendation, envisages the same approach to implementation being applied in the context of the comprehensive, lifelong learning NQFs aligned to EQF. They stipulate inter alia that quality assurance ‘should include context, input, process and output.

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12 These points are well made in Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF - European Qualifications Framework Series Note 3 (2nd edn., forthcoming 2013).


15 Available at http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf; the references are to standards 1.2 and 1.3.


18 On the ENQA workshops generally see Blomqvist et al, Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks: Exchanging Good Practice, passim.
dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes. These principles, in turn, have been endorsed by the Recommendation on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET), which states that EQAVET should ‘support the implementation of the EQF, in particular the quality of the certification of learning outcomes’. Progress in implementing these principles and recommendations has been recorded; however, it is generally acknowledged that the EU tools are still at an early stage of implementation within national VET systems. Nevertheless, in some countries the use of learning outcomes in VET dates back to the 1980s. Stimulated by the EQF Referencing process, it has also been reported that learning outcomes-based qualifications frameworks are becoming key reference points for the development and renewal of VET qualifications across Europe, while the EQAVET co-operation processes are also achieving success in improving the transparency and, most importantly, the comprehensibility of national quality assurance systems in VET. The synergies between qualifications frameworks and quality assurance are becoming clearer and deepening. As NQFs are developed and operationalized across Europe and establish a greater focus on the use of learning outcomes, quality assurance systems are increasingly moving towards ensuring that intended learning outcomes have been assessed and met when qualifications are being awarded. It is in this space, in particular, that the integration of the two domains naturally occurs. It is here, inevitably, that the two domains can combine to improve education and training.

Conclusions and issues for discussion

It is evident, that qualifications frameworks and formal quality assurance systems are now inextricably-linked in European education and training, and that the principal agents for quality assurance in national systems – whether in relation to higher education, VET or general education, have an important role to play in advancing the implementation of learning outcomes-based qualifications frameworks. This conclusion, however, is complex. The national authorities and bodies responsible for the quality assurance of different parts of the national education and training systems across Europe are heterogeneous entities. The extent to which they are willing, or able, to engage with the issue of framework implementation is very much dependent on their status and scope, and the different responsibilities and authority they exercise in the national context, as well as on their own particular sets of priorities. The complexity of the European system is neatly encapsulated in the forthcoming revision to the EQF Note 3 on EQF Referencing, which has classified the diversity of European quality bodies under six headings, namely:

- government ministries
- qualifications bodies, particularly those that oversee the national qualifications system or the major sub-systems (general, vocational, higher education), or which assess learning, issue awards and certificates
- independent quality assurance bodies such as those that set standards for learning in general, vocational and higher education, or those that evaluate institutions
- bodies that set occupational, vocational and educational standards in a country or employment/education sector
- bodies that manage the development and implementation of NQFs, especially the NQFs that regulate standards in sectors and nationally
- bodies that disburse public funds to learning institutions and require compliance with quality criteria.

The impact that such diversity has on the framework implementation process is clearly visible, for example, in the nature of the participation of quality bodies in the QF-EHEA and EQF self-certification processes. A cursory

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review of the published Referencing\textsuperscript{22} and Self-certification\textsuperscript{23} Reports reveals that, in some instances, they have played a central, co-ordinating role in the process; in others, they have participated as members of the steering group or other committees established to oversee it; in yet others, they have been marginal figures, who have merely signed off on the final report at the end of the process.\textsuperscript{24} One might also hazard a guess, although it needs to be verified by further research, that their role in the quality assurance of learning outcomes, and the levelling of those learning outcomes for the purposes of including qualifications in NQFs, also lacks consistency both within and across national systems; while the EQF Referencing process itself has certainly thrown up inconsistencies across different countries in terms of the proposed alignment of key qualifications, like the higher education short-cycle award and the school leaving certificate, with the EQF levels.

In reality, then, the role of quality bodies as key contributors to the implementation of qualifications frameworks is still imprecise, and far from consistent, especially with regard to the approaches taken across the different sectors of education and training. It is an issue that needs to be considered and debated by policy makers as we move out of the ‘Referencing’ and ‘Verification’ phases of NQF implementation, and more clearly into the operational phase, particularly in a context where more and more demands are being made of NQFs in terms of delivering broader educational and training reforms. The reality is that it often falls to this diverse set of bodies to be the conduits through which developing policy and practice on qualifications frameworks, or on the use, assessment and certification of learning outcomes, are communicated to education and training providers, or to other bodies associated with curriculum development. Often, too, they are best placed to facilitate or co-ordinate engagement between labour market actors and education and training providers in these areas. They can also play a key role in identifying and supporting champions of reform in provider institutions, so that the reforms are internalised at the point at which education and training is delivered, and not seen to be imposed externally.

In terms of delivering tangible improvements to education and training, it is vital that the co-operation that has underpinned the development of quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks in Europe hitherto should not only continue, but should be increased. New areas should be explored to ensure closer integration and more co-ordinated and effective actions across education and training systems. One key area that might be examined in this continuing co-operation is the manner in which qualification frameworks and quality assurance systems are institutionalised across the different subsystems of education and training within national systems, and whether the existing models are effective in terms of delivering national and European objectives. What are the current models of best practice, and how well are they equipped to deliver whole system change and reform envisaged in \textit{Rethinking Education}? In a similar vein, the manner of the engagement between qualifications and quality assurance bodies at the national and European levels might also be given further consideration, to explore how the synergies that have developed in the context of NQF development, EQF Referencing and QF-EHEA Self-certification may be further developed. Finally, there is the critical issue of how partner stakeholders may be engaged to fully participate in this process of reform, whether these are education and training providers, labour market actors or other social partners. Future co-operative activities in the quality assurance and qualifications domains might not only usefully explore what the best models are for such engagement, but also endeavour to explore it in the context of meeting the new challenges identified for education and training in the Commission’s communication. The following questions are posed as a means of prompting an initial discussion on this topic.

\textsuperscript{22} Available at http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm

\textsuperscript{23} Available at http://www.enic-naric.net/

\textsuperscript{24} This is an area worthy of further analysis; in the meantime, the issue is best approached through Bryan Maguire’s suggestive analysis of agency involvement in the QF-EHEA self-certification process in Blomqvist et al, \textit{Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks: Exchanging Good Practice}, pp. 9-12.
Theme 1 Questions – Integrating quality assurance and qualifications frameworks to improve education and training systems

- How do NQFs affect the balance between accountability and enhancement that lie at the heart of quality assurance activities?
- What in your view are the main QA methods that promote NQF implementation – e.g. standard setting, certification, inspection regimes, institutional review, programme approval and monitoring, validation - and how do we assess their effectiveness?

- What can the VET and HE sectors learn from each other both in relation to quality assurance practice generally and its role in the implementation of NQFs?
- Should quality co-ordinating bodies at the European level, i.e. ENQA and EQAVET, work more closely together in the interests of promoting consistent implementation of learning outcomes-based NQFs and improving education and training? Should they also work more closely with the QF-EHEA and EQF co-ordinating bodies (EQF Advisory Group, BFUG and ENIC-NARIC) in the same pursuit?

3. Theme 2: Using quality assurance to promote the labour market relevance of qualifications

‘Rethinking Education’: an inevitable outcome of existing reforms?

In its recent communication Rethinking Education the European Commission issued a clarion call to national education and training systems to increase the scope and pace of the current reform agenda, with a particular emphasis on delivering high quality skills in support of growth and employment, and fostering greater collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, including the labour market actors. The Commission highlighted, in particular, that efforts need to be concentrated on developing transversal skills, especially entrepreneurial skills, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) -related skills and language skills, all of which are to be grounded on the achievement of foundation or basic skills by all. To implement this broad and challenging reform agenda, Member states have been invited to promote excellence in VET: to improve the performance of student groups at high risk of exiting school early and with low skills, and reduce the number of low-skilled adults; to scale-up the use of ICT-supported learning and access to high quality Open Educational Resources and to revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions. In calling for this ‘rethinking’ of education and training, the Commission has re-emphasised the importance of the learning outcomes approach as a driver of change and the roles of the European tools for qualifications, credits and quality assurance in facilitating the mobility of a skilled labour force. It has also suggested that there is a need for the ‘fundamental shift’ to learning outcomes to ‘percolate’ more fully into teaching and assessment and that the European tools would be more effective if there was more ‘coherence’ between them.25

It is arguable that the Commission’s communication, though undoubtedly urgent in tone, does not represent any fundamental or radical policy departure in relation to qualifications frameworks and quality assurance. Rather, it represents a call for a swifter and deeper follow-through on reforms, particularly in relation to the provision of the right skills for employability, that have already been initiated and which are already embedded conceptually in existing qualifications and quality assurance policy.

The EQF, for example, has always been considered as a tool that would contribute to meeting the requirements of supply and demand in, access to and integration of the European labour market.26 The need to better prepare higher education students for the labour market has also been one of the driving forces behind the Bologna Process,

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26 See, for example, the references to the ‘labour market’ in the EQF Recommendation: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=oj:c:2008:111:0001:0007:en:pdf
and the QF-EHEA which grew out of it. In terms of quality assurance, the EHEA’s Standards and Guidelines covering the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes (Standard 1.2), recommend that these processes should provide for ‘regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations,’ while the EQA VET proposes as a quality indicator ‘mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market’ (no. 9), and identified the purpose of three other indicators (nos. 3, 5, 6) as the improvement of ‘the responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market’.

Given the pre-existence of this conceptual base, what practical measures can a coherent and integrated quality assurance and qualifications system, spanning general education, VET and higher education, put in place to ensure that qualifications are responsive to labour market needs? In the first instance, the quality assurance and qualifications authorities can promote the use by providers of education and training of high quality labour market information, from European sources such as CEDEFOP and the EU Skills Panorama and analogous national sources, in the design of qualifications, and then examine how it is applied in practice. They can also test whether qualifications actually reflect the intended learning outcomes and ensure that the specified learning outcomes are those that are needed to match labour market requirements, whether these relate to specialist skills needed for particular sectors, or more basic and transversal skills. They can also work towards including in NQFs, on the basis of agreed quality criteria, those ‘sectoral’ and ‘international’ qualifications that originate outside the public education and training system and which are provided by private providers and companies, NGOs and international organisations to address particular labour market needs.

While all of the above actions are worth pursuing, they are far from complete solutions to a problem that is intrinsically more complex than is generally acknowledged, and which requires interventions from all the actors involved if real progress is to be made in improving the labour market relevance of qualifications. One of the most difficult aspects of the problem is defining the roles and responsibilities of the different players. In some VET systems, the role of social partners, like employers, in the design of qualifications is well developed, notably in Germany, and they thus play a key role in ensuring the labour market relevance of the qualifications. In other national systems, however, the involvement of employers is less well-developed and organised, even in a VET context, and there can be a great difficulty in articulating clearly the qualifications needs of the labour market, a situation that can sometimes lead to frustration on the part of employers, and a tendency to engage in a negative rhetoric against education and training providers for failing to deliver what they require. In a similar vein, the capacity of employers to develop and maintain occupational standards varies across Member states, so that providers of education and training or qualifications bodies sometimes have to take on the dual role of mobilising the ‘demand side’, and delivering on the ‘supply side’, when it comes to developing relevant qualifications for the labour market. The question can also be asked concerning what employers can and should contribute to the education and training of youth, particularly in terms of providing assistance and support in developing their maturity for work and their overall employability.

27 See the background report to the QF-EHEA, pp. 24-6, 111, 161-2, 184.
29 For the EU Skills Panorama see http://euskillspanorama. ec.europa.eu/
The quality assurance systems, and the processes used for implementing NQFs, can play a useful part in helping to bridge the gap in understanding, that sometimes exists between the labour market actors and education and training providers. The participation of employers, in different quality assurance activities – for example in the design of programmes and their assessment strategies, in course approvals, and institutional reviews etc., are useful ways of achieving this. National or regional surveys of employers’ views on education and training are also helpful.33 Combining the roles of co-ordinator between the labour market and education, while at the same time being the quality assurer of the outcomes of education and training is a demanding brief, requiring a great level of expertise, sophistication and some conviction on the part of the bodies that would take it on. Nevertheless, if education and training is to be rethought and remodelled along the lines envisaged in the Commission’s communication, expert, sophisticated and convincing quality assurance and qualifications bodies will be essential players in such a process. They will need to have the capacity to master the diverse range of instruments and communication tools that are being developed to support the linking of qualifications to the labour market, including the language of learning outcomes, and an ability to communicate them in a persuasive manner. They will also need to possess the diplomatic skills necessary to moderate expectations when these are exaggerated or cannot be delivered, particularly in an environment where some researchers question or doubt some of the fundamental ideas on which education and training reform is currently founded.34 The following questions are posed as a means of prompting discussion on the role of qualification frameworks and quality assurance in promoting and improving the labour market relevance of qualifications.

Theme 2 Questions – Using quality assurance to promote/improve the labour market relevance of qualifications

- Are the reforms envisaged in Rethinking Education, particularly in relation to the provision of the right skills for employability, sufficiently embedded conceptually in existing European qualifications and quality assurance policy or are further concepts and structures required?
- What roles can national qualifications and quality assurance bodies play in coordinating engagement between labour market actors and education and training providers?
- How can the social partners contribute to the QA of education and training and the implementation of NQFs?

33 See, for example, the recent pilot survey of Irish employers’ views on Irish higher education outcomes at www.hea.ie/files/files/National%20Employer%27s%20Survey%20%28Pilot%29%20Report.pdf.

34 For suggestive analyses that the ‘knowledge driven economy’ has failed to materialise in the manner predicted, and that strategic Human Resource management has failed to maximise human capital and productivity see Keep, Youth Transitions, pp. 2-4; for an appraisal of the limitations of learning outcomes in VET see Tim Oates, ‘Why ‘outcomes’ aren’t enough – qualifications policy should not be the only game in town’, paper presented at SKOPE conference on the future of Vocation Qualifications, 7 February 2013.

4. Theme 3: Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks in facilitating the validation of non-formal and informal learning

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good practice. As a result, a strong and still growing consensus has emerged which has been given formal expression in the recent Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning on the importance of making visible the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals acquire through their life and work experiences. The validation of this experiential learning can contribute significantly to:

- enhancing employability and mobility, by promoting better transferability of skills between companies and sectors across the EU
- increasing motivation for lifelong learning (especially for the socio-economically disadvantaged and low-qualified)
- improving the functioning of the labour market by facilitating a better match between skills and labour demand and
- enhancing competitiveness and economic growth by addressing skills shortages in growing sectors.

Validating non-formal or informal learning is a complex process which, if it succeeds systemically, requires significant inputs from a broad range of stakeholders, both at the national and European level. Those who have been classified as key stakeholders in validation include employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations. The contributions of these different entities to emerging validation processes will be many and various, but will relate in the main to one or more of the four key elements that have been identified in the Council Recommendation as constituting the essential arrangements for validation, namely:

- **Identification** of an individual’s learning outcomes gained through non-formal or informal learning
- **Documentation** of an individual’s learning outcomes gained through non-formal or informal learning
- **Assessment** of an individual’s learning outcomes gained through non-formal or informal learning
- **Certification** of the results of the assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes gained through non-formal or informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits, leading to a qualification.

Qualifications Frameworks and the quality assurance systems of education and training, as developed within the existing European cooperation processes, are generally considered to strengthen trust towards validation processes, giving them credibility and providing them with an established, respected and stable organising principle. Building on the already strong connection between validation and qualifications frameworks, as set out in the EQF Recommendation, the Council Recommendation on validation restated the principle that validation arrangements should be linked to NQFs referenced to EQF. The learning outcomes approach and defined national qualifications levels can provide a supporting methodology and reference points for the validation of skills and competences. In addition, it has acknowledged the connection of validation with efforts, under the Bologna Process (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué 2009), to deepen lifelong learning through the establishment of ‘basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes ... through formal, non-formal, or informal learning paths’. Finally, it has affirmed that validation arrangements should be underpinned by transparent quality assurance measures ‘in line with existing quality assurance frameworks ... that support reliable, valid and credible assessment tools’.39

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Overall, it is not the case that qualifications frameworks and quality assurance structures may or can contribute to the advancement of validation. Rather, the entire enterprise, as it has been conceived and developed over the past decade, is entirely dependent on their mobilisation, if the assessment of learning outcomes acquired through validation is to be trusted within and across national boundaries, and the qualifications awarded on foot of this certification are to achieve the same level of recognition and currency, as those achieved through formal processes of learning.

How, then, can such mobilisation take place? At a European level, the EQF advisory group has been formally identified as an agent in co-ordinating follow-up on the Recommendation on validation, and has been asked to involve relevant youth organisations and representatives of the voluntary sector in its activities. As suggested above, however, it is also arguable that this kind of engagement should also be extended to encompass a deeper and more sustained engagement between the EQF Advisory Group, the QF-EHEA authorities and the quality assurance co-ordinating bodies, ENQA and EQAVET. This is not suggested simply for administrative tidy-mindedness or to establish another European network. Rather, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been placed firmly in a space that is jointly occupied by quality assurance professionals and qualifications specialists from across VET and higher education. Validation presents many significant challenges, and the solutions to these are more likely to be found by drawing on the combined experience and expertise of the qualifications and quality assurance communities across VET and higher education, operating in the tradition of European co-operation. Moreover, such an approach would provide a template for co-operation at the national level, especially in those countries where sectoral fragmentation may be impeding progress on validation, and the implementation of NQFs more generally.

Many of the validation issues that need to be examined and addressed by policy makers in the upcoming period have been raised in various guises in different European fora over the last number of years, including in Peer Learning Activities associated with the implementation of EQF. However, there are new, emerging issues that might also be considered in this area including the validation of the learning that is now being acquired by learners through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other digital open education resources. There is also the persistent issue of the recognition of those ‘non-formal,’ 'sectoral' and ‘private qualifications’, that exist outside the public education and training system, and which potentially could be addressed either by direct inclusion in NQFs, or through validation processes. The following, far from exhaustive, list of questions is designed to invoke discussion during the conference, in light of the renewed and more urgent commitment to implementing validation arrangements across Europe by 2018.

**Theme 3 Questions: Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks in facilitating the validation of non-formal and informal learning**

- **Could the European level actors such as the EQF Advisory group, the BFUG working group, and European QA groups, identify, while making allowance for national specificities, the optimal approaches to documenting, identifying, assessing and certifying learning outcomes in validation? Or is this an unrealistic ambition?**

- **What are the risks and barriers to opening up NQFs to validation of non-formal and informal learning?**

- **Does validation of non-formal and informal learning transfer from VET to HE? Are there ways in which QA can promote such transfer?**

- **Are national or centralised public quality assurance and qualifications bodies too closely-linked to the formal education and training systems, and does this diminish their capacity to operate validation systems in a sufficiently flexible manner?**

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40 See, for example, the Summary Report on the PLA, 15-16 November 2010, Västerås, Sweden, available at http://ksll.net/documents/Report%20V%C3%A4ster%C3%A5s%20PLA.pdf
5. Theme 4: Promoting confidence in Europe’s qualifications on a global scale

The impact of European co-operation in the areas of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks has not just been felt within and across the national education and training systems in Europe. The European model of reform in these domains has sparked an interest among a large number of countries internationally in engaging with the European Union and its member states, and with the members of the European Higher Education Area, with a view to strengthening education and training policy dialogues, enhancing mutual co-operation, furthering the recognition of qualifications, and learning about Europe’s transnational architecture for quality assurance and qualifications. Europe is also committed to being open internationally, with a view to achieving the same objectives of enhanced co-operation and deeper policy dialogues, and on foot of its reformed qualifications and quality assurance systems, better and more widespread recognition of European qualifications globally, and the promotion of European education and training as a world class destination for international learners.

This increased European engagement with the international education and training community is evident in a range of different processes and activities, spanning VET and higher education. The European Union is heavily involved in international engagements across the entire spectrum of education and training. 41 Of particular note in the VET sphere is the work of the European Training Foundation in assisting partner countries develop – in the EU Enlargement Area, in the neighbouring areas and in Central Asia – their vocational education and training policies in a lifelong learning context, using the approaches to qualifications and quality assurance now in place in Europe. 42 In the field of higher education, there has been considerable international interest in many aspects of the Bologna Process. The TUNING Educational Structures in Europe project, for example, which commenced in 2000 as a project to link the political objectives of the Bologna Process to European higher education institutions, has developed into a process concerned with the design, development, implementation, evaluation and enhancement of the quality of first, second and third cycle degree programmes and has now extended its reach internationally. There are Tuning developments in Latin America, the Sand Africa. 43 In addition, formal engagement between the member countries of the EHEA and their international partners now takes place (since 2009) in the context of the Bologna Policy Forum, which is ‘focused on creating and connecting national, regional and global higher education spaces’. 44

Europe’s approach to transnational qualifications frameworks has been particularly influential globally. The EQF and QF–EHEA are generally viewed as effective and successful models of good practice in this area. Some countries, including New Zealand and Australia, have engaged on a bilateral basis with a member state with a view to establishing an informal referencing of their own qualifications frameworks to the European frameworks. 45 In addition, and in varying degrees, the EQF and QF–EHEA have also stimulated or influenced discussions on the development of regional qualifications frameworks in Africa, Asia and

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42 For which see www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/home

43 On which see http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/


45 On the Ireland-Australia Qualifications project see http://www.nqai.ie/documents/Irel-Auspublishedreport.pdf ; on the compatibility of qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand see www.nqai.ie/TheCompatibilityofQualificationsinIrelandandNewZealand.html
the Middle East. These global qualification framework developments, in which Europe has been at centre stage, have raised not only the prospect of cooperation and communication between different regions of the world via a system of connected transnational frameworks, but also the possibility, as set out in the recent recommendations of the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training, the ‘Shanghai Consensus’, of developing ‘a set of world reference levels, to facilitate the international comparison and recognition of TVET qualifications’.

Yet, as interesting as these global framework developments are, they also present some serious challenges. In Europe, NQF development and implementation is grounded upon democratic principles that promote the involvement of a large range of stakeholders in these processes, including employer and employee representatives and other social partners. Likewise, autonomous qualifications and quality assurance bodies are responsible for the construction and implementation of NQFs, while the NQFs themselves are constructs that are intended at all times to reflect the values and serve the broad interests of the communities in which they are rooted. The EHEA in particular relies on the contribution of autonomous higher education institutions. Independent student representatives are key contributors to the operation of quality assurance systems. These aspects of the European experience, which may be taken for granted in the European context, are of particular relevance for emerging democracies engaged in the development of NQFs. However, they may not be easily translatable or transferable to such countries, due to the absence of comparable institutional infrastructures, or the prevalence of political cultures that have yet to reach the level of maturity that will allow for extensive stakeholder engagement in education and training processes, including in relation to NQF development. It is inevitable that questions will arise as to whether the NQFs that emanate in such circumstances will create sufficient levels of trust in Europe and elsewhere or whether, and how, such deficiencies can be remedied over time. Furthermore, there will also be questions as to whether such NQFs will undermine the credibility of the regional frameworks to which they are affiliated, or the future prospects of developing transnational framework connections or global levels.

The already successful establishment in Europe of a transnational architecture for mutual understanding of quality assurance and qualifications is an advantage not enjoyed by most other regions and ostensibly, should mean that Europe is well placed to benefit from future global developments in these arenas. That said, the benefits that might accrue from Europe’s internal reforms – increasing the attractiveness of Europe for educational exports and enhancing international perceptions of the calibre of European labour force – will not follow automatically from the mere existence of the new qualifications and quality assurance structures. As already argued, it is the real world implementation of learning outcomes based frameworks, frameworks that contribute to and demonstrate the acquisition by learners of the high quality skills envisaged in Rethinking Education, that will really count. Although valuable, it will not be through the marketing of the ‘tools’ of European education and training reform, whether these be qualifications frameworks, credit systems and quality assurance arrangements, that European education and training will prosper in the global competitive economy. These tools must make a real impact and deliver real internal change, in a way that will not only generate global confidence in the skills and competences that exist in Europe, also ensuring that the tools themselves are tested to the full, in terms of meeting the expectations of the European labour market and wider society. Only having succeeded in this, will Europe be in a position to engage positively and effectively in the global dialogue on quality assurance.
assurance and qualifications frameworks. Only then will Europe be able to contribute authoritatively and creatively to addressing the complex issues, especially around diversity and consistency, that will arise as the tools and instruments of educational reform are applied in a global context.

For policy-makers, qualifications authorities and quality assurance agencies, absorbed by the daily work of implementing qualifications and quality assurance reform at the national level, it can be difficult to focus on large, sometimes abstract, discussions on the global dimensions of education and training reform. The following questions are posed as a means of stimulating reflection and discussion on this topic ahead of the conference.

**Theme 4 Questions: Promoting confidence in Europe's qualifications on a global scale**

- *Has the implementation of quality assurance arrangements and qualifications frameworks generated more confidence internationally in the skills available in European countries? If so, what particular factors have contributed to this?*

- *Is the emerging European area for skills and qualifications, heralded in Rethinking Education, being delivered in a way that promotes global recognition and mobility?*

- *How should Europe respond to the global developments in qualifications frameworks and quality assurance? Should it insist on a consistent approach or recognise the inevitability of diversity? Do you think that global levels are a good idea?*

- *How can countries external to the EU/EEA or EHEA signal their affinity with EQF and QF-EHEA? Does formal alignment of an external NQF to an EQF-referenced European NQF, or to a European NQF self-certified as compatible to the QF-EHEA, establish a de facto alignment between the international NQF and EQF or QF-EHEA?*

- *How relevant is the European experience in terms of supporting NQF developments in emergent democracies?*
Külli All

Külli All is working as an adviser on lifelong learning at the vocational and adult education department, at Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, for 10 years. She has experience in teaching in VET and HE institutions, organising and managing work-related training.

Her responsibility is counselling ministry in the issues of development of Estonian qualification system. These tasks include providing policy advice, analysis and technical support for the development and implementation of the Estonian Qualification Framework, development of the vocational teachers’ and trainers’ profession, coordinating vocational and adult education activities in relationship with labour market and social policies, supporting LO based curricula development in the field of vocational training.

She has been involved in development and implementation of EQF and ECVET since 2005.

Jens Bjornavold

Jens Bjornavold has been working with European education and training issues for the last 16 years. Starting as a Norwegian seconded expert to the European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in Thessaloniki in 1996, he has been permanently employed by the EU since 1999, holding posts both in Cedefop and the European Commission. He is currently the Brussels representative of Cedefop, located to the European Commission, the Education and Culture directorate general.

Bjornavold has been involved in developing the EU lifelong learning strategy, the Copenhagen process in vocational education and training, the Europass and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). He is currently supporting the European Commission in developing a Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as contributing to the work on a European terminology on skills, competences and occupations (ESCO). Bjornavold has also coordinated and carried out numerous research projects, notably on the changing roles of qualifications and the recognition of prior learning.

Sjur Bergan

Sjur Bergan is Head of the Council of Europe’s Education Department. From an initial focus on higher education policy, he has gradually expanded his focus to various areas of education policy. He is a member of the Bologna Follow Up Group and Board and co-chairs a new EHEA working group on structural reforms. He chaired the EHEA Working Group on qualifications frameworks 2007 – 12. He is series editor of the Council of Europe Higher Education Series, the author of Qualifications: Introduction to a Concept and Not by Bread Alone as well as of numerous articles on various aspects of education policies. His latest publication is Reimagining Democratic Societies, co-edited with Hilligje van’t Land and Ira Harkavy.
Lucien Bollaert

Lucien Bollaert (1952) is member of the board of NVAO since 2009. Since 2012 he is member of the board of the European Consortium for Accreditation. He holds a Ma of Arts in philology from Ghent University. He worked as lecturer of English, director of a study programme, international officer, quality assurance manager, education & research officer and acting vice-chancellor of the University College of West Flanders. When the college associated with Ghent University in 2002 he became chairman of the experts’ commission on quality assurance (QA), member of the commission on education and member of the general assembly of that Association.

On Flemish level he used to be member of the steering group on QA of the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA) and member of various consultative workgroups of this council and the Flemish Education Council on quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, learning outcomes, competence-based learning, education policy and the preparation of Flemish decrees on higher education. He was Flemish Bologna expert dealing with quality assurance, quality culture and learning outcomes for 5 years.

He was member of the E4 group, working out the European Standards and Guidelines on QA (ESG) and setting up the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), whose register committee he has been vice-chair of since then. He was also founder-member of the steering committee of the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) for 6 years. The European Commission asked him to be member of the first experts’ groups on the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF).

Allan Bruun Pedersen

Allan Bruun Pedersen - Senior Adviser at the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation

Quality coordinator in the Danish NARIC-office for recognition of foreign qualifications, President of the ENIC-Bureau, the Council of Europe and UNESCO’s network of recognition offices. Responsible for the Danish NCP for the EQF. Have worked with qualifications frameworks since 2005 and is member of the Danish coordination committee for the NQF, which is responsible for designing and constructing the Danish NQF. Member of the Danish self-certification group and the group responsible for referencing the Danish framework to the EQF. Member of the joint European Commission - Council of Europe Working Group on synergies between qualifications frameworks and recognition for further learning purposes.
Eva Cheng

Dr Eva Cheng obtained her undergraduate degree from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and MEd and PhD from the University of Alberta, Canada. Upon graduation, she worked in the universities in Canada and Hong Kong from 1990 to 2005. In 2006, she joined the then Education and Manpower Bureau (now restructured as the Education Bureau) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the development of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. She has then joined the Qualifications Framework Secretariat upon its inception in June 2009.

Gordon Clark

Gordon Clark Chairperson of Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Before returning to Ireland in November 2010, Mr Clark was responsible for 11 years, as a manager in the European Commission for the development of the EU’s lifelong learning policy, including particularly the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). He was also responsible for the EU’s overall framework for cooperation in education and training. This included chairing key EU level advisory and coordination committees in the field of qualifications and education and also membership of the boards of EU vocational training agencies. The earlier part of Mr Clark’s career was in accountancy and financial management, initially in the private sector before joining the EU’s audit and budgetary services.

Mike Coles

Mike Coles worked in the chemical industry and was a chemistry teacher before becoming involved curriculum and qualifications development in the UK. His doctoral research into various aspects of qualifications and vocational education led to involvement in European developments and his work on zones of trust contributed to the European Qualifications Framework. He remains involved in supporting the EQF implementation and represents the UK on the EQF Advisory Group. His main research interests are qualifications systems, frameworks and the broadening of validation procedures to recognise learning gained outside formal learning settings. Mike is the main author of many books on qualifications systems including the OECD's Qualifications systems: bridges to lifelong learning and Cedefop's Changing Qualifications - an international review of policies and practice.

Tony Donohoe

Tony Donohoe is head of social, education and innovation policy in the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). Following a career in business journalism, Tony has worked with the Confederation for over 25 years in a number of roles including publications editor and head of research and information services. He took up his current position in 2006. He is a member of the National Economic and Social Council, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Business Europe Social Affairs Committee and the board of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). He has also served on the boards of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Equality Authority. IBEC is the national voice of Irish business and employers, and is the umbrella body for Ireland’s leading business sector groups and associations. It also provides a wide range of services to over 7,000 member businesses.
Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija

Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija is a professor of physics at the University of Split. Besides teaching and research in physics, from an initial focus on higher education he has gradually expanded his focus to various areas of education policy. He represents Croatia in the EQF Advisory Group and National Correspondents for the QF-EHEA. He is a vice chair of the ESCO Cross-sectoral Reference Group. Since 2006 he is a president of the Management Board of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education, and as expert he has been leading the NQF development and implementation in Croatia. His fields of expertise and practical experience in education range from higher education, lifelong learning, employability, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition of prior learning, and transfer of research and innovation. Prof. Dželalija is the author of more than 300 of scientific publications in physics and education.

Sean Feerick

Sean Feerick is the director of the EQAVET Secretariat based in Dublin. With a professional background in education and training he is a senior programme manager and policy analyst with many years’ experience of policy development and capacity building in national and European contexts.

His career has included work as a teacher, teacher trainer and manager of European and international cooperation and mobility programmes. Since 2001 he has worked in supporting European cooperation processes within the context of the follow-up of the Lisbon and Copenhagen Processes, particularly in the areas of teacher education, curriculum reform and transition from education and training to the world of work. Since 2008 he has had particular responsibility for the implementation of an enhanced programme of European cooperation relating to the development and implementation of the European quality assurance reference Framework for vocational education and training.

His other areas of interest include intercultural education, the responsiveness of education and training to societal and labour market needs, and facilitating the use of research results in policymaking contexts.
### Michel Feutrie

Michel Feutrie is currently Consultant in education and training policies. Until October 2011 he was Professor in Sociology of Education at the Université de Lille Sciences et Technologies and General Secretary of EUCIS-LLL. He was President of the European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) until November 2010.

From 1987 to 2007 he has served as Vice President of the University of Lille 1 in charge of continuing education and Director of the Continuing Education Service from 1986 to 2006. He has been appointed from 2002 to 2006 as Rapporteur Général of the « Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP) », the French Agency in charge of the French National Qualification Framework and of the national “Répertoire” (RNCP) registering all French qualifications.

He has published numerous articles and edited books in the field of university continuing education, lifelong learning issues and validation of non formal and informal learning.

His main current activities and contributions are shared between three fields:

- lifelong learning: mainly on the contribution of higher education
- validation of non formal learning: leader of numerous working groups, contributor to the regulations, pioneer in implementation in universities,
- national qualifications frameworks and development of methodologies in registration of qualifications.

### Seán Ó Foghlú

Seán Ó Foghlú has been the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills since his appointment in February 2012.

From 2008 until 2012 he was an Assistant Secretary General in the Department of Education and Skills. He had responsibility for the Planning and Building Unit in Tullamore from 2010 to 2012 and prior to that he had responsibility for school transport, social inclusion, payroll and pensions.

From 2001 to 2008 he led the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and was the Authority’s first chief executive. In this role he led the development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. He also participated in the development of the European Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area.
Karine Harutyunyan

Ms Karine Harutyunyan was appointed as Deputy Minister for Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia in November 2010 and is responsible for development programmes, reforms, international cooperation and external affairs. Ms Harutyunyan represents Armenia on the Bologna Follow-up Group. Armenia currently provides the secretariat for the Bologna Process and will host the next ministerial summit in Yerevan in 2015.

Prior to her appointment as deputy minister, she was the Director of the Centre for Education Projects, which is responsible for implementing education projects funded by international donors. In 1997 she established the Textbook Revolving Fund and still works as Director to the present day. Prior to that she has worked at Unicef as an Education Officer. Before joining the ministry, she worked at Yerevan State University as a researcher/lecturer in physics.

Dr Harutyunyan has provided consultancy in the education field in a number of countries. She graduated from Yerevan State University Department of Physics and has a PhD in physics. She also studied education management at Harvard and Sussex universities.

Pat Leahy

Pat Leahy is the deputy editor and the political editor of The Sunday Business Post. A frequent contributor to radio and television programmes on politics and current affairs, he is also a critically acclaimed author. He is a graduate in law from UCD and a former Reuters fellow at Oxford University.

Bryan Maguire

Dr. Bryan Maguire is Head of Qualifications Services at Quality and Qualifications Ireland. He was previously Director of Academic Affairs of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Dr. Maguire was Head of School of Creative Technologies at Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, where he had earlier been the founding Head of Department of Learning Sciences. Dr. Maguire holds a bachelor’s in psychology from University College, Dublin and a PhD from the University of California, San Francisco. He previously served as Lecturer in Psychology with University of Wales, Bangor and as Development Officer in the preparation of the National Framework of Qualifications with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. He has written and consulted extensively on qualifications frameworks in Ireland and throughout Europe. He is a member of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group and of the Bologna Working Group on Structural Reforms. Dr. Maguire has served as an expert on the self-certification of the national frameworks of Ireland, England & Wales, The Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders) and Portugal.
Thomas Mayr is Managing Director of IBW, a VET research and development institute in Vienna. IBW is affiliated to WKÖ, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, which in turn is a member of UEAPME, whom Thomas represents in the EQF Advisory Group. He is involved in Austrian and EU education and training policy. His main fields of interest are VET and Lifelong Learning. In Austria he is a member of the NOF steering group and of the National Platform on Lifelong Learning. He is also a board member of AQ Austria, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation for higher education. At European level he is a member of UEAPME’s training board and of the Advisory Council on Vocational Training (ACVT). Thomas holds degrees from the Vienna University of Economics and Business and from the College of Europe in Bruges.

Kevin Marshall is a Head of Education, Microsoft Ireland. He represents Industry Body Employers Confederation (IBEC) on the teaching Council, the NCCA and other committees. He was Chair of IBEC’s Education committee and represents IBEC, 2004-2008. Furthermore, he is a member of the Governing Body of Marion Institute of Education. He is also visiting research fellow at the Centre for Research in Information Technology (CRITE) located at Trinity College Dublin. He is Vice-Chair of the CEN Workshop. Prior to working in Ireland, Kevin worked in Boston Public Schools in the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation and was responsible for the School-to-Work transition. He has a BA in Psychology from University College Dublin, a MSc in Industrial Psychology from the University of Hull and a PhD from Boston College.

Mohamed Slassi Sennou PhD, MSC, MBA, began his career in 1984 in applied science research. Since 1990, he has successively led several companies in the fields of energy, information technology and telecommunications. Since 2006 he has been Vice-President then President of the VET Committee of the General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco (Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc www.cgem.ma). As such, he represents Employers of Morocco in the national bodies in charge of Education and Training.

Dr Jim Murray is a historian by training. He has worked as an archivist in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (1990-5), and in university administration in Dublin City University (1995-2003). He has also worked in the areas of quality assurance and qualifications recognition with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2003-11). In November 2011, he took up the role of Director of Academic Affairs at Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI), the representative body of Ireland’s 13 institutes of technology.
Xavier Prats Monné

Xavier Prats Monné is the Deputy Director-General for Education at the European Commission, and the European Commission representative at the Governing Board of the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT). Key areas of responsibility include: the modernisation of EU education and training systems; the education aspects of the Europe2020 strategy; EU mobility and cooperation programmes in the field of education (Erasmus, Leonardo, Comenius, Grundtvig); cooperation with international organisations and non-EU countries in education and training.

Previous roles include: Director for Employment Policy; Director of the European Social Fund; Deputy Chief of Staff; Vice-President for International Relations; Advisor to the Commissioner for Regional Policy. A native of Spain, Xavier completed his secondary education in Rome, and holds degrees in Social Anthropology from the Central University of Madrid, Spain; in Development from the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies; and in European Affairs from the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. He is fluent in Spanish, English, French, Italian, and Catalan.

Ana Carla Pereira

Ana Carla Pereira is Head of Unit for “Skills and qualifications strategies; multilingualism policy” in Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission. She is responsible for developing the EU skills strategy, including the implementation of EU tools for recognition and transparency of qualifications such as the European Qualifications Framework, the EU Skills Panorama or the Skills Passport. Her activities have also a particular focus on the development transversal skills such as entrepreneurial initiative, digital skills and language skills. Since the beginning 2013 she is also responsible for EU multilingualism policy. Prior to this, she has worked more than ten years in the implementation of European Employment strategy and several years in the private sector as business consultant specialised in human performance. She has an academic background in economics and European studies. She is Portuguese mother tongue and fluent in English, French and Italian.

Padraig Walsh

Dr. Padraig Walsh is Chief Executive of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). He holds degrees in Chemical and Biochemical Engineering from University College Dublin, Ireland (BE, PhD) and the University of Missouri, USA (MSc). He previously worked at Dublin City University as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Biotechnology and latterly served as the university’s first Director of Quality.

He currently serves on the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); the Steering Committee of the European University Association Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA IEP); the Scientific Advisory Board of the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAO), Switzerland; the Scotland Committe of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), United Kingdom; and the Council of Appeals of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), Portugal.
Sophie Weisswange

Sophie Weisswange is Policy officer – responsible for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training at the European Commission’s DG Education and Culture. Sophie Weisswange graduated from the ‘Institut d’Études Politiques’ of Strasbourg, the College of Europe in Bruges and holds a master in law from the Law University of Strasbourg.

Administrator in the European Commission since 1994, she worked for more than 10 years in the field of human resources and in particular as training manager. There she helped develop the implementation of the administrative reform in particular in the field of continuous training for Commission’s staff. As head of section in the central training unit, she drafted the training strategic framework for the Commission and participated to the selection and accreditation process of teachers and trainers. As manager of the training unit of the translation service, she participated in the introduction of the Common assessment Framework in the translation service.

Since 2008, she is responsible for the quality assurance of VET at European level and participated to the negotiations leading to the adoption of the EQAVET recommendation as well as to the setting up of the European governance in this area. She represents the Commission in the various instances of the EQAVET network.

Patrick Werquin

Patrick Werquin is currently Professor at CNAM (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers – French Tertiary Education and Research Institution), Paris, and international consultant based in Saint-Sulpice-sur-Lèze (he has been working for the AFD, dvv international, the European Commission, GIZ, LuxDev, UNESCO, Section for Literacy and Non-formal Education, and several national ministries and organisations). He is member of the Centre d’études sociologiques et politiques Raymon Aron, EHESS, Paris. He is also Associate Research Fellow with the Toulouse Business School, Toulouse, France.

He was senior economist with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Directorate for Education and CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) from 1999 to 2010. He was a researcher at the French Centre for Research on Education, Training and Employment (Céreq, 1992–99).

He has a PhD in Economics and taught Economics, Statistics and Econometrics at the Université de la Méditerranée (Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles, 1986–98) and at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS, 1986–1998). He taught Education at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2006–09), and has supervised PhD students in Canada, France and Morocco.

Patrick Werquin has been working and publishing on education and training policies, lifelong learning, technical and vocational education and training, national qualifications systems and frameworks, literacy, adult learning, low skilled individuals/workers, adult literacy, new competences and assessment of adult skills, school-to-work transition, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, credit transfer, statistical indicators for education and the labour market; in all OECD and countries as well as in many countries in Africa, Latin America, Europe and South East Asia.
Christine Wihak

Dr. Christine Wihak is the Director, PLAR at Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning and Director of the Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC). She was co-editor of the 2011 volume *Researching the Recognition of Prior Learning: International Perspectives*, and serves on the editorial board of the journal *Prior Learning Inside-Out*. Before joining TRU-OL, Dr. Wihak was an Assistant Professor in Workplace and Adult Learning at the University of Calgary. Dr. Wihak holds a PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta, a Masters of Psychology and a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration from Carleton University, and an Honours BA in Psychology from Queen’s. She was also a registered psychologist (Alberta), specializing in Occupational and Organizational Psychology.
Irish Presidency Conference 2004 Towards 2010: Common Themes and Approaches across Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in Europe

Conference Report (extract)

CONCLUDING REMARKS
Nikolaus van der Pas, Director General for Education and Culture, European Commission

In his closing remarks at the end of the conference, Nikolaus van der Pas said that there was a clear message from the conference that we must succeed in achieving the Lisbon goal of making Europe a world-class reference for education and training by 2010. To do this, we must make sense of diversity, seeing it not as a weakness, but as a strength. We must also accept each other’s systems, finding the bridges between them rather than maintaining barriers. He said he was very pleased to hear the positive messages from the workshops, and that he was taking a number of important conclusions away from the conference.

1. There is an urgent need for more co-operation and communication between the main actors in vocational education and training and higher education, in the context of Education and Training 2010.

Successful initiatives should be brought together from the Copenhagen and Bologna processes in order to promote mutual learning and greater compatibility. Networks can be further developed, and further steps can be taken to bring existing groups together to make more concrete links between higher education and vocational education and training.

The issue of stakeholder involvement in the Copenhagen process needs to be addressed. A better link must be established between policy and practitioners – this is important for the credibility of the process and for effective implementation at the national level.

There is an important role for Member States, who must take responsibility for implementation: some good initiatives have not yet been implemented at national level.

2. There is a need for a common platform for exchange and mutual learning about quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training.

We are not aiming for a single European system for quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training, but for the development of common methodologies and criteria. The creation of trust provides a sound basis for development in this area. Practical proposals would be

- to establish regular co-operation between networks of agencies for quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training at European level. Such co-operation could focus on the development of common methodologies and criteria;

- to organise peer review in which both sectors are represented.

3. The ultimate aim should be to have a single system of credit transfer and accumulation for lifelong learning.
This means that from the outset the mechanics of credit transfer (based on notional workload and the use of credit) need to be compatible across both higher education and vocational education and training. At the same time, the specific needs of each, for example in relation to reference levels and stakeholders, need to be addressed.

An important starting point would be to develop common principles for credit transfer, which are applicable to both higher education and vocational education and training. These principles are crucial in relation to ensuring compatibility between the systems, and in securing stakeholder acceptance.

4. **It is crucial to aim for a single qualifications framework for lifelong learning at European level.**

This is essential for the development of the European labour market. A comprehensive framework is of course more difficult to implement, but makes more sense in the long run from the learner’s point of view. In many countries stakeholders are calling for such a European framework of qualifications in order to mobilise and guide reform and the development of new national frameworks, while not imposing responsibilities on Member States. The development of a European framework of qualifications should draw on the experiences of those countries that already have national frameworks. In this way, developments at national and at European level can interact with each other.

The European framework of qualifications should at least provide the skeleton on which national frameworks can build. This means that we need agreement on reference levels as a first step. Agreement by the end of 2004 on common reference levels for vocational education and training, based on learning outcomes, is essential.

A specific working group, representing both higher education and vocational education and training within the Education and Training 2010 work programme, should be given the responsibility to develop a blueprint for the European qualifications framework as soon as possible.

5. **We need to focus more on the vocational aspects of higher education**

Since vocational education and training already plays an important role in the tertiary sector, the higher education/vocational education and training distinction is therefore not always valid, for example in relation to the development of qualifications and competences at sectoral level. A new focus on the vocational aspects of higher education is essential in order to make higher education more relevant to the European labour market.

This means that at higher education level a shift in perspective from providers to learning outcomes and competences is essential. The Tuning project has moved in this direction, as have a number of initiatives in vocational education and training: these experiences have to be brought together.

It is important to ensure the participation of social partners in the definition of learning outcomes at higher education level: traditionally these are determined by academics from an institutional perspective.

In summary, Nikolaus Van der Pas said he was confident that the time was right for Europe to start taking the next important steps forward, and that this conference had been important in agreeing a general direction for future development.

http://www.nqai.ie/docs/international/IrishPresidencyConference.pdf
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


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.

Citizen's summary ‘Rethinking Education’ Communication

WHAT’S THE ISSUE?
- The youth unemployment rate is approaching 23% across Europe and at the same time there are over 2 million vacancies that cannot be filled. We must ensure that education delivers the right skills for the labour market, to support young people to secure their economic future and enable businesses to grow and create new jobs.
- The challenge could not be tougher in the middle of widespread austerity measures and cuts in education budgets. Member states must not reduce budgets, but look to improve efficiency and achieve more at less cost.
- Urgent action is necessary to boost the supply of relevant skills and increase the chances of young people and adults of getting the right assets for their success in the labour market.

WHO WILL BENEFIT AND HOW?
- Young people will get the right skills to enter the labour market or create their own business.
- Adults will be able to access basic skills provision and increased in-work training.
- Businesses will benefit from an entrepreneurial workforce which has the right skills for the job.

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?
There are actions in three areas:

1. Delivering the right skills for employment:
   - Make sure that everyone has a foundation in basic skills
   - Stronger focus on developing transversal skills, especially entrepreneurial skills
   - Increase the level of work-based learning in vocational education and training

2. New ways of teaching and learning:
   - Easier recognition of skills and qualifications throughout Europe to enhance mobility and employment prospects
   - Embed the use of new technologies in the classroom to increase participation and access
   - Make sure that teachers have up-to-date training and are well-supported

3. New approaches to Funding and Partnerships:
   - Bring together partners who have a stake in the quality of the workforce
   - Target investment to education areas with the highest impact, e.g. early education
   - Open up national and EU level debates on how education should be funded in the future

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN BY THE EU?
European countries are facing similar challenges, despite differences at national level.

The EU can support countries to solve problems by:
- initiating debate
- pinpointing areas for reform
- helping countries learn from each other which policies work and which don’t
- targeting European funding on areas where it can really help
I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
of 20 December 2012
on the validation of non-formal and informal learning
(2012/C 398/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

(1) The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.

(2) At a time when the European Union is confronted with a serious economic crisis which has caused a surge in unemployment, especially among young people, and in the context of an ageing population, the validation of relevant knowledge, skills and competences has an even more valuable contribution to make in improving the functioning of the labour market, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.

(3) Employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, employment services, youth organisations youth workers, education and training providers, as well as civil society organisations are all key stakeholders with an important role to play in facilitating opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and any subsequent validation processes.

(4) The 'Europe 2020' strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth calls for the development of knowledge, skills and competences for achieving economic growth and employment. The accompanying flagship initiatives 'Youth on the Move' and the 'Agenda for new skills and jobs' emphasise the need for more flexible learning pathways that can improve entry into and progression in the labour market, facilitate transitions between the phases of work and learning and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

(5) The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020 (1)) noted that lifelong-learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts whether formal, non-formal or informal.

(6) The 'EU Strategy for Youth — Investing and Empowering: a renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities' of 2009 called for better recognition of skills acquired through non-formal education for young people and stressed the need for full use to be made of the range of tools established at EU level for the validation of knowledge, skills and competences for the recognition of qualifications. It was endorsed by Council Resolution of


In the Bruges Communiqué of December 2010, the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission declared that participating countries should start to develop, no later than 2015, national procedures for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, supported, as appropriate, by national qualifications frameworks.

The Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve on 28 and 29 April 2009 underlined that successful policies for lifelong learning should include basic principles and procedures for the recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes, while the Council conclusions of 28 November 2011 on the modernisation of higher education (9) called upon Member States to develop clear routes into higher education from vocational and other types of education, as well as mechanisms for recognising prior learning and experience gained outside formal education and training.

Council Resolution of 28 November 2011 on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (9) defined as one of its priority areas for the period 2012-14 the putting in place of fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting the use by adults of all ages and at all qualification levels, as well as by enterprises and other organisations.

The Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (10) and the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002 requested the development of a set of common principles regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 18 May 2004 promoted Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning containing up-to-date information on current validation practices in European countries has been published regularly since 2004, while European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning were published in 2009.

Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) (16) established Europass, a European portfolio which citizens can use to better communicate, record and present their competences and qualifications throughout Europe.

The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 18 May 2006 on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (14) invited the Member States to enable the identification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, with a view to their recognition on the labour market.

The Youthpass was created as a transparency tool for participants in projects funded by the 'Youth in Action' programme established by the European Parliament and the Council in Decision No 1719/2006/EC (13).


The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) established in 1989 within the framework of the Erasmus programme awards credits for formal learning based on learning outcomes and student workload, and also facilitates the award by higher education institutions of credits based on learning outcomes for non-formal and informal learning experiences.

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (17) stated that that Framework should support the implementation of the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, improving the interrelationship of education, training and employment, and building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

(19) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 (1) established a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) to be used for the transfer and accumulation of individuals’ learning outcomes achieved in formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal contexts.

(20) Consultations in the form of an online survey, discussions in relevant policy bodies, as well as a variety of peer learning activities involving the social partners indicate an overwhelming consensus on the importance of making visible the knowledge, skills and competences gained through life and work experience, and show broad support for a Union initiative to enhance validation policy and practice in the Member States.

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

1. THE MEMBER STATES SHOULD, WITH A VIEW TO OFFERING FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY: CAREERS AND FURTHER LEARNING, AND WITH DUE REGARD — AND TO MAKE USE OF THAT LEARNING FOR THEIR TRAINING — INCLUDING THROUGH MOBILITY EXPERIENCES THEY HAVE LEARNED OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION AND

2. include, as appropriate, the following elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:

   (a) have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, including, where applicable, through open educational resources;

   (b) obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences, without prejudice to other applicable Union law, in particular Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications (2).

Member States may prioritise certain areas and/or sectors within their validation arrangements in accordance with their needs;

3. apply, as appropriate, the following principles in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst taking into consideration national, regional and/or local, as well as sectoral needs and characteristics:

   (a) the validation arrangements are linked to national qualifications frameworks and are in line with the European Qualifications Framework;

   (b) information and guidance on the benefits of, and opportunities for validation, as well as on the relevant procedures, are available to individuals and organisations;

   (c) disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment, are particularly likely to benefit from the validation arrangements, since validation can increase their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour market;

   (d) individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment have the opportunity, in accordance with national legislation and specificities, to undergo a ‘skills audit’ aimed at identifying their knowledge, skills and competences within a reasonable period of time, ideally within six months of an identified need;

   (e) the validation of non-formal and informal learning is supported by appropriate guidance and counselling and is readily accessible;

   (f) transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks are in place that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools;

   (g) provision is made for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors;

   (h) qualifications or, where applicable, parts of qualifications obtained by means of the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes;

   (i) the use of Union transparency tools, such as the Europass framework and Youthpass, is promoted in order to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes;

(1) OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 11.
synergies exist between validation arrangements and credit systems applicable in the formal education and training system, such as ECTS and ECVET;

4. promote the involvement in the development and implementation of the elements and principles referred to in points 1 to 4 of all relevant stakeholders, such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.

To foster participation in this process:

(a) employers, youth organisations and civil society organisations should promote and facilitate the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired at work or in voluntary activities, using relevant Union transparency tools such as those developed under the Europass framework and Youthpass;

(b) education and training providers should facilitate access to formal education and training on the basis of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings and, if appropriate and possible, award exemptions and/or credits for relevant learning outcomes acquired in such settings;

5. promote coordination on validation arrangements between stakeholders in the education, training, employment and youth sectors, as well as between those in other relevant policy areas.

2. THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION SHOULD TAKE THE FOLLOWING MEASURES:

(a) follow up this Recommendation through the European Qualifications Framework advisory group set up under the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (1) (EQF) and involve, as appropriate, relevant youth organisations and representatives of the voluntary sector in subsequent EQF advisory group activities;

(b) report on the progress made following the adoption of this Recommendation in future Joint Reports by the Council and the Commission under the ‘ET 2020’ strategic framework and in future Joint European Union Youth Reports under the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field;

(c) support the implementation of this Recommendation by using the expertise of Union agencies, in particular Cedefop, and by reporting on the situation with regard to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the annual report on the development of National Qualification Frameworks.

3. THE COMMISSION SHOULD TAKE THE FOLLOWING MEASURES:

(a) support Member States and stakeholders by:
   — facilitating effective peer learning and exchanges of experience and good practice,
   — regularly reviewing the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, in full consultation with the Member States,
   — regularly reviewing the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, in cooperation with the Member States;

(b) before 2018, consider further developing, in consultation with the Member States, as specified in Decision No 2241/2004/EC, instruments under the Europass framework which facilitate the transparency across the Union of validated learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning experiences;

(c) ensure that, in cooperation with the Member States, the Lifelong Learning and ‘Youth in Action’ Programmes and, without prejudice to the negotiations on the next Multi-annual Financial Framework, the future European programme for education, training, youth and sport and the European Structural Funds, are used to support the implementation of this Recommendation;

(d) assess and evaluate, in cooperation with the Member States and after consulting the stakeholders concerned, the action taken in response to this Recommendation, and report to the Council by 31 December 2019 on the experience gained and implications for the future, including if necessary a possible review and revision of this Recommendation.

Done at Brussels, 20 December 2012.

For the Council
The President
E. FLOURENTZOU

ANNEX

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Recommendation, the following definitions shall apply:

(a) *formal learning* means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education;

(b) *non-formal learning* means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public;

(c) *informal learning* means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner’s perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);

(d) *open educational resources (OER)* means digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research; it includes learning content, software tools to develop, use and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences; OER also refers to accumulated digital assets that can be adjusted and which provide benefits without restricting the possibilities for others to enjoy them;

(e) *a skills audit* means a process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes;

(f) *a qualification* means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;

(g) *learning outcomes* means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences;

(h) *a national qualifications framework* means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;

(i) *validation* means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual’s experiences;
3. a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and
4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification;

(j) *recognition of prior learning* means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.