



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



Opening up European NQFs to 'external qualifications' – issues and challenges

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Presentation refers to:

- Survey on the inclusion of 'external qualifications' into NQFs, January/February 2013
- Conclusions of peer learning activity, Sweden, March 2013
- Survey on the inclusion of 'international qualifications' into NQFs and the EQF, July 2013
- Discussions on 'international qualifications' in the EQF AG in June and September 2013



The opening up of NQFs

European NQFs are increasingly opening up to qualifications and certificates awarded outside the traditional formal education and training system, notably from

- Public sectors outside education and training (army, police, customs etc.)
- The private sector and linked to the labour market
- Non-governmental organisations
- International organisations and companies



Why open up?

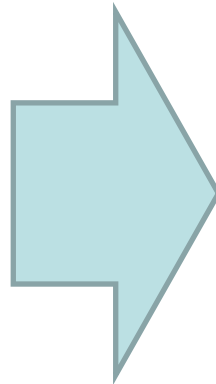
- Improves transparency – gives an overview over existing qualifications and how they are related
- Addresses needs in the labour market
- Promotes relevance and quality

Why is opening up difficult?

- Qualifications are currencies and need to be trusted – how to protect and strengthen this trust?
- ‘External qualifications’ differ in format and content – on what basis do we include/exclude?
- How tolerant are we to differences – what can we accept as equivalent?



Survey February 2013



- Responses from 26 countries
- The survey focussed on
 - What is covered by existing NQFs;
 - Which (types of) qualifications are currently outside the NQF;
 - Which qualifications, if any, will be included in the NQF;
 - Have procedures been put in place to include non-formal and private qualifications into the NQF;
 - Have quality criteria for the inclusion been outlined/agreed?



Current scope of the NQFs

- The majority of national qualifications frameworks are comprehensive covering general, vocational and higher education
- Many frameworks are at an early stage of implementation
 - Some still being designed or awaiting formal adoption
 - Some of the formally adopted frameworks are only gradually being filled with 'actual qualifications', illustrated by Austria, Belgium Flanders and Germany



Priority to formal qualifications

Of the 26 qualifications frameworks/systems covered by the survey – 15 are limited to ‘Formal Qualifications’



No common definition
of what is understood
by formal qualification



Opening up to 'external qualifications'

Of the 26 qualifications frameworks/systems – 11 describe themselves as covering (or aspiring to cover) all types of qualifications:

Will cover formal, non-formal and informal qualifications

Will cover formal and private qualifications

In addition to formal will also cover non-governmental regulated qualifications

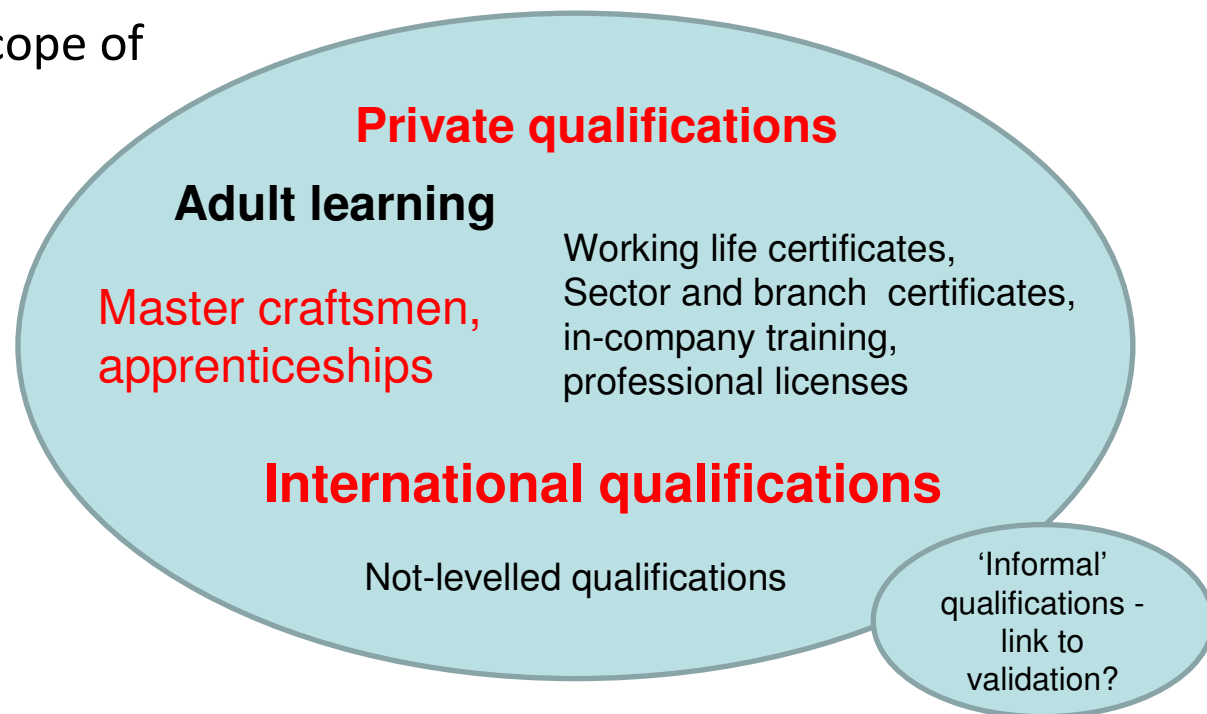
No type of qualifications excluded

Will cover all types of qualifications as long as they are quality assured



Qualifications types not covered by the NQFs

When asked to indicate qualification types currently outside the scope of NQFs, the following examples were given:





'External' qualifications to be included in the framework

A relatively small number of countries indicated concrete qualifications to be included on a short and medium term basis:





Procedures and criteria for inclusion

In place and operational

Belgium Flandern, Czech Republic (VET qualifications), France (professional qualifications), Ireland, The Netherlands (early operational stage) and the UK

Being investigated, developed and/or awaiting formal decision

Austria, Denmark, Germany, Malta, Norway, Sweden

Same procedures will be used for formal, non-formal and informal qualifications

Ireland, Portugal, UK



Quality assurance

Countries will use the same quality criteria for formal and non-formal qualifications

Belgium Flanders, Croatia, France, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia, UK

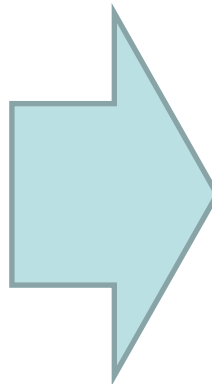
Separate or additional quality assurance criteria for inclusion of non-formal qualifications

Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden



PLA, Sweden, March 2013

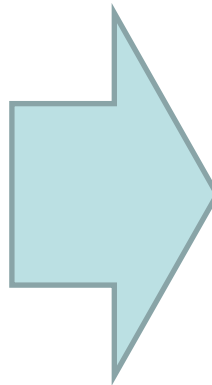
Conclusions



- *Inclusive frameworks must not endanger the overall quality of qualifications – clear criteria for inclusion are needed;*
- *Inclusive frameworks require a particular emphasis on learning outcomes.*
- *Diversity have to be respected, ‘external qualifications’ can offer an important alternative;*
- *Inclusive frameworks can give important impulses to the existing, formal system;*
- *Inclusive frameworks are about lifelong learning and can make visible learning opportunities and learning pathways;*



PLA, Sweden, March 2013



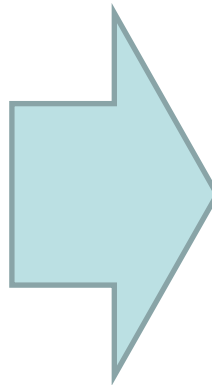
Questions

- *Two processes to be considered, for*
 - *accreditation/approval of the awarding body*
 - *approval of the qualification*
- *Similar or separate procedures for formal and 'external' qualifications?*
- *Which experts should accredit and assess awarding bodies and qualifications?*
- *Who can ensure the credibility of the process?*
- *For how long should awarding bodies and qualification be accredited/approved?*
- *Can simplicity of procedures be combined with quality and trust?*



PLA, Sweden, March 2013

Questions

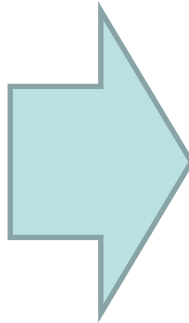


- *How strict requirements to awarding bodies?*
 - *Legal status*
 - *Permanence/renewal/update*
 - *Expertise*
 - *Internal quality assurance*
- *How strict requirements to learning outcomes?*
- *Should qualifications explicitly link to occupations and the labour market?*
- *Should qualifications be of a minimum size (learning time)?*
- *Should qualifications be possible to acquire through validation?*



International Qualifications

Survey carried out
July 2013, 26
responses



•International qualifications, a particular case

- Transparency
- Quality
- European/international coordination

•Survey confirms that International qualifications are becoming more important

•Survey demonstrates that the integration of these qualifications into NQFs – and the EQF – is problematic



The definition of international qualifications

No agreed definition exists

- A definition must reflect the distinction between international standards and international qualifications/certificates
- A definition must reflect the diversity of international qualifications, both as regards awarding bodies and geographical coverage
- One definition is not sufficient; the term international qualification must be related to (for example) 'Vendor qualifications', 'foreign qualifications'.



Are International qualifications included in NQFs?

- Mostly in the form of international standards underpinning (for example) maritime qualifications
- A limited number of qualifications linked to sectors and technologies, for example Welding, have been included in some NQFs
- 3-4 countries where certificates awarded by multinational companies (mainly ICT) have been included in NQFs

Have you been approached by international awarding bodies?

- 1/3 of the countries have been approached, mostly by ICT awarding bodies



Are International qualifications used outside the NQF?

Yes. Almost all countries identify international qualifications used outside the NQF. The main categories are:

- ICT
- The financial sector (banking, insurance, accountancy)
- Energy/green sector
- Project management
- Marketing
- Sports
- Languages
- Etc.



Why include International qualifications in NQFs?

- Legal requirements (for example linked to international standards)
- Labour market relevance
- Transparency of qualifications
- Recognition
- Could influence existing national qualifications in a positive way

Which are the challenges

- Lack of compatibility between national and international qualifications (size, structure)
- Uncertainty as regards their quality



Why include International qualifications in NQFs?

- Legal requirements
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Which are the challenges

- Lack of compatibility between national and international qualifications (size, structure)
- Uncertainty as regards their quality
- The lack of European coordination and the risk of inconsistent linking to the EQF



How to improve the coherence of relating international qualifications to NQFs and the EQF?

- Common definition(s) needed
- Common guidelines and procedures for inclusion of International qualifications to NQFs (and the EQF) are needed
- Need for systematic record keeping at national and European level
- Definitions, guidelines and records should support a voluntary coordination process where countries and stakeholders systematically exchange experiences
- The EQF AG to play a key role, supported by Commission and Cedefop