



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



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

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**Berlin, 10 October 2013**



## 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?

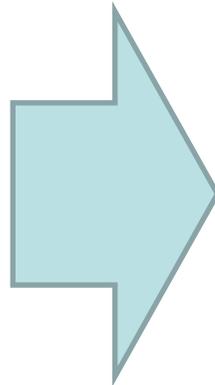
- Improves transparency – gives an overview over existing qualifications and how they are related
- Addresses needs in the labour market
- Promotes relevance and quality

## 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?



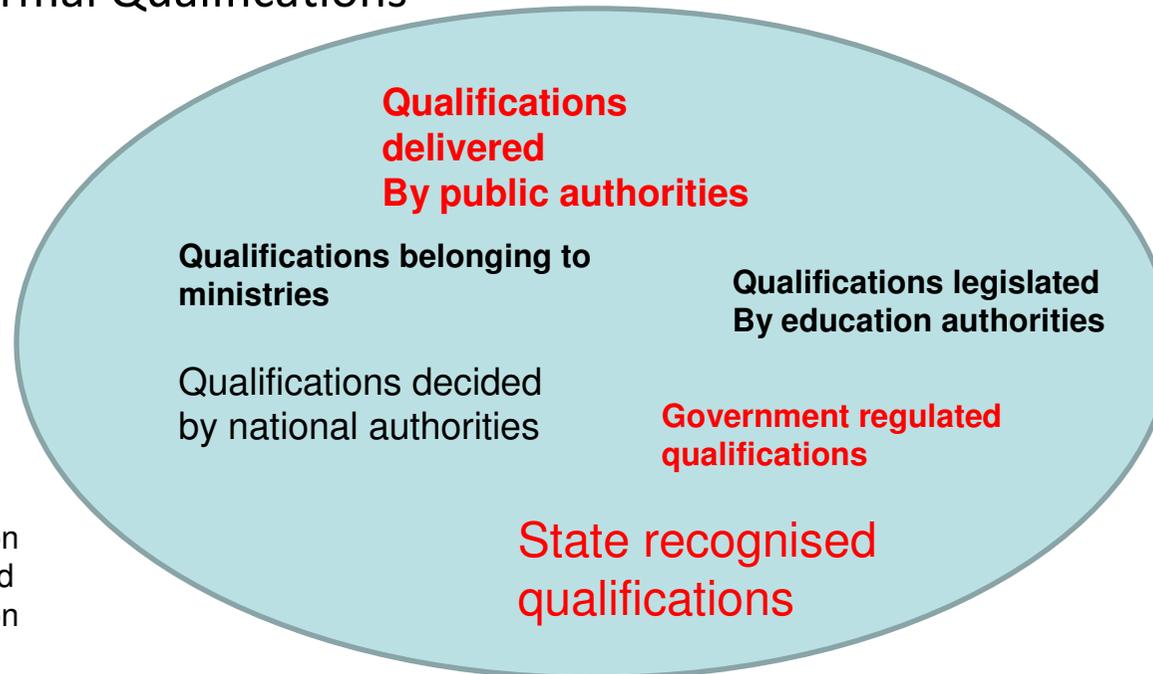
## Current scope of the NQFs

- 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'

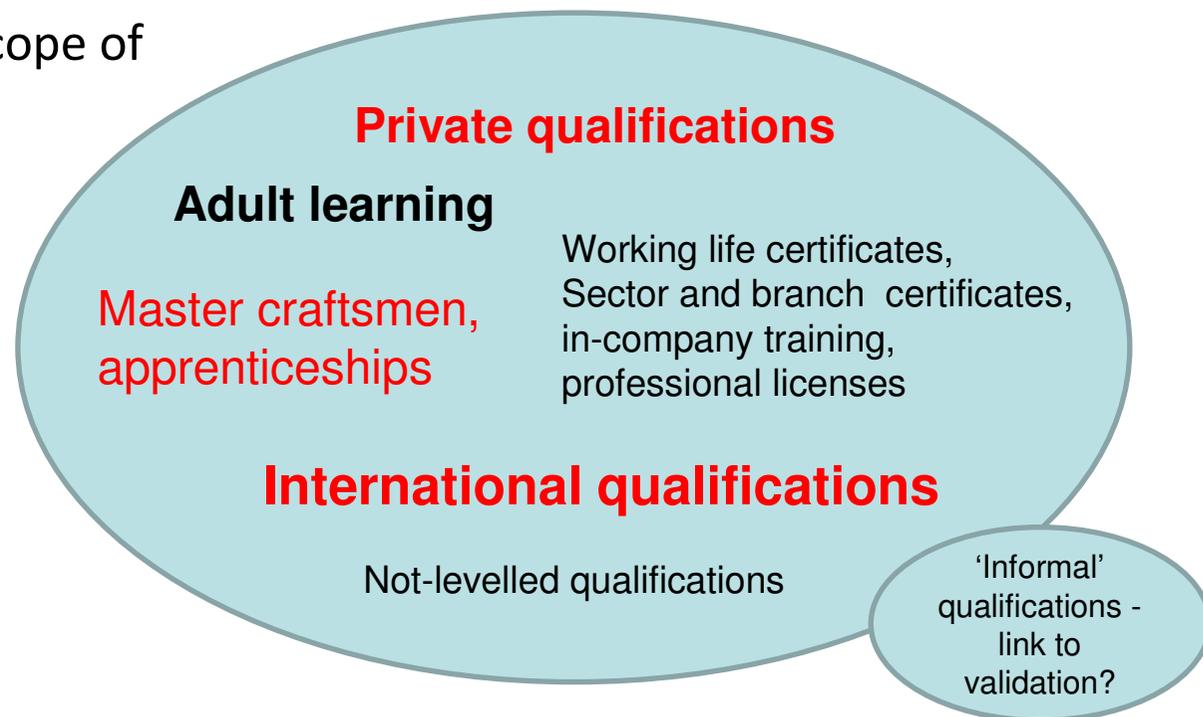
Of the 26 qualifications frameworks/systems – 11 describe themselves as covering (or aspiring to cover) all types of qualifications:





## 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*

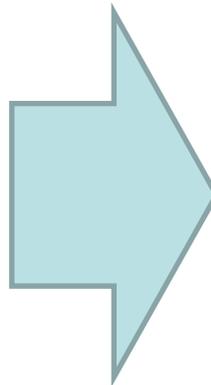
Separate or additional quality assurance criteria for inclusion of non-formal qualifications

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



# PLA, Sweden, March 2013

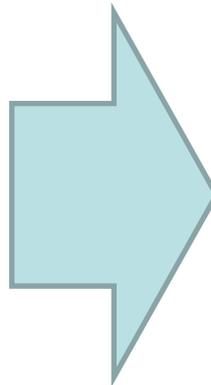
## Conclusions



- *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



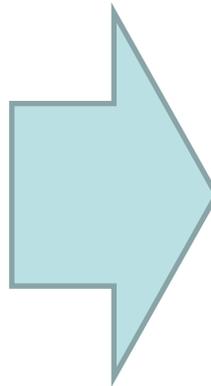
## Questions

- *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

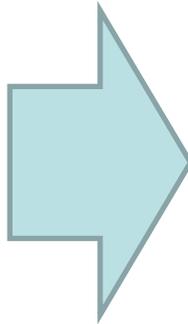


- *How strict requirements to awarding bodies?*
  - *Legal status*
  - *Permanence/renewal/update*
  - *Expertise*
  - *Internal quality assurance*
- *How strict requirements to learning outcomes?*
- *Should qualifications explicitly link to occupations and the labour market?*
- *Should qualifications 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