NQF-IN:

"Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks"

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

and

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY OF PREPARING COUNTRY REPORTS

FOREWORD

The NQF-IN team is pleased to present the *Proposed Methodology of Preparing Country Reports*, the first output of our project, for consultation by external experts and stakeholders. We would like to collect the opinions and comments regarding this material from a broad range of stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks in Europe as well as other countries.

The NQF-IN project is about developing organisational and financial models for the inclusion of non-formal sector qualifications in NQFs. It corresponds with policy learning initiatives aimed at providing evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing lifelong learning and VET policies. The NQF-IN project is collecting the experiences of seven European countries that are at different stages of NQF implementation, namely: Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Scotland, but we are also aiming to analyse solutions implemented in Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (countries of silent partners of our project).

The presented material is divided into two parts. The first introductory part describes the aim of the NQF-IN project and provides the context of our work. The second part presents the proposed methodology of preparing country reports.

We also invite you to visit the project website at http://www.nqf-in.eu/.

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1 Information about the NQF-IN project

1.1 General context of the work on the NQF-IN project

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are important policy instruments to promote mobility and lifelong learning at the national as well as the European level. The NQF can play a decisive role not only to improve the transparency of a national qualifications system, but also as a policy reform driver to increase the quality and accessibility of qualifications and, as a result, participation in lifelong learning (LLL).

However, in order to be a policy reform driver, the NQF has to be open to the various types of qualifications awarded in different educational sectors, those outside of the traditional, formal school-based system.[1] At the same, it is agreed in Europe that qualifications referenced to NQFs, and as a result to the EQF, must be quality assured. It is the obligation of each EU member state to design and apply quality assurance principles in this process. Therefore, countries seeking to implement NQFs and open them to the non-formal education sector have to design relevant institutional arrangements for a quality assurance system. Another important issue related to developing comprehensive NQFs that include different types of qualifications is financing. Including a large number of qualifications awarded outside the formal education sector in the NQF, which have to be quality assured, usually requires substantial financial outlays, either by the state and/or the qualifications awarding bodies. So the financial aspects of "opening" the NQF to qualifications awarded outside the formal education sector have to be thoroughly considered.

The inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in the NQF and designing a quality assurance system for this process are new and complex tasks for many EU countries (Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO, 2015). In many of them, this process is still in an early phase and a number of issues remain to be solved. The process of designing systemic solutions for including qualifications awarded in the non-formal education sector in NQFs can be supported by learning from international experience (Chakroun 2010) and policy instrument choice theories (Van Gossum, Arts, Verheyen, 2010). These two types of analyses can expand knowledge about potential policy choices and help decision makers to find the most appropriate solutions. They can also provide necessary knowledge to key stakeholders – employers, trade unions, VET providers and others – to increase the level and efficiency of their commitment to the NQF implementation process. In this context, two types of analyses are particularly important:

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[1] In this document, we use the terms "non-formal education sector qualifications", "non-school qualifications" and "qualifications awarded in the non-formal system of education" as synonymous. See section 2 on the basic concepts and terms used in this document.

1) Analyses to provide knowledge about the **solutions applied in different countries** to include different types qualifications in the NQF. What is the context and rationale of implementing particular policy instruments, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of these solutions? What are the institutional and organisational arrangements (i.e. which institutions are responsible for particular systemic tasks) and what are the costs of the functioning of particular elements of the system?

2) Analyses to provide **model systemic solutions** of including qualifications in the NQF **(theoretical models of including qualifications in an NQF)**.[2]

1.2   The problems solved by the project

We believe that the issues related to including qualifications awarded in the non-formal sector of education in the NQF, as well as the organisational and financial aspects of this process, require more in-depth treatment than is currently available.

In particular, a detailed analysis of the possible models of NQF implementation and opening it to the non-formal education sector has yet to be produced. There are no detailed descriptions of country cases, and even if they do exist, they are written on a general level, which is not sufficiently useful at the implementation stage. Publications and policy documents very rarely refer to the financial issues of this process. It is widely recognized by member states and the European Commission that "NQF implementation is not just a technical, but also it is a political process" (Cedefop 2014). Thus in times of financial austerity, the cost of implementing new policy instruments is often the soundest argument of whether to implement it or not.

To substantiate our line of argument in preparing this material, the following reviews were conducted:

- review of EU funded projects (LLP, LdV, Erasmus+, Cedefop),
- review of the reports produced by Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO, OECD, ILO, EC reports and materials,
- literature review of publications referring to the NQF in peer reviewed journals.

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[2] By analogy, if decision makers want to introduce a new design of unemployment benefits, they would want to know the "model solutions" (which solutions are available in general): how long should unemployment benefits be paid, whether they should be paid at a constant rate or maybe they should increase or decrease in time, should they be related to a person's income, the national average wage or paid at a fix rate, what is the rationale for each solution, its strengths and weaknesses depending on the national policy goals, and costs.

1.3   Aims of the project

The main aim of the NQF-IN project is to provide evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing policies on including qualification in NQFs. This will be done by:

1) providing systematised knowledge on the organisational and financial solutions applied in seven EU countries on including qualifications in their NQFs, with particular focus on qualifications awarded outside the formal education system

2) developing organisational and financial models for the inclusion of qualifications in NQFs.

We expect that better evidence-based support for decision makers and stakeholders will provide more impetus and greater efficiency in NQF implementation, while its opening to the non-formal education sector will result in better lifelong learning policies within EU countries and at the EU level.

1.4   Intellectual outputs

Nine intellectual outputs (IO) will be produced within the NQF-IN project:

- IO1: Methodology of preparing country reports.

  The basic concept and terms used in the reports will be defined. The format of the data and information will be defined and potential data sources indicated. The template of a country report is being designed: its structure, scope, list of problems to be addressed, approximate size of each main chapter.

- IO2 – IO8: Country reports of 7 EU countries in the NQF-IN partnership.

  Each country report will describe the systemic solutions used to include qualifications in the NQF with a particular focus on solutions regarding the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system.

- IO9: Organisational and financial models for including qualifications in NQFs.

  Each developed model will include a description of: (a) institutional arrangements – their pros and cons depending on the goals set for the NQF, and the broad institutional context, (b) cost intensity – how cost intensive are the systemic solutions envisaged by the model, (c) recommendations on its financing, (d) "conditions of success", i.e. which conditions must be met in order for a particular model to work effectively within the national qualifications system.

1.5   Target groups

There are three main beneficiary groups of the results of our project, among them are two direct beneficiaries and one indirect:

1) Policy-makers at the regional, national and EU levels in the area of VET, CVET, LLL, NQF, key stakeholders participating in designing systemic solutions for including non-formal education sector qualifications in the NQF (employer organisations, trade unions, organisations representing different economic sectors, training providers, awarding bodies, higher education). Additionally, experts from EU agencies can benefit from our project (European Commission, Cedefop, European Training Foundation).

2) Researchers, academicians and other groups involved in lifelong learning policies nationally and in Europe.

3) Adult learners will benefit from better VET and LLL policies. As per Eurostat (Adult Education Survey), 36.8% percent of adults (25-64) are in non-formal education and training in the EU-28 – a group of over 100 million persons, all of whom could indirectly benefit from the project.

We assume that our direct target groups possess general knowledge on qualifications systems. Therefore, our reports are intended to help them understand the specific solutions used in NQF-IN project countries and not to explain the concepts of qualifications systems "from the beginning".

1.6   Partners

There are seven members of the partnership:

- P1: Educational Research Institute (PL) – Leader of the partnership
- P2: Dublin Institute of Technology (IE)
- P3: University of Split (HK)
- P4: French Centre for Research on Qualifications (FR)
- P5: Educational Authority (HU)
- P6: Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (Scotland)
- P7: National Institute for Education, Education Counselling Centre and Centre for Continuing Education of Teachers (CZ)

and three "silent partner" organisations who will support the project by providing information on national qualifications systems and by reviewing project outcomes:

- P8: Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (DE)
- P9: Dutch Qualifications Framework National Coordination Point (NL)

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- P10: Luxembourg Ministry of National Education (LU).

2 Proposed methodology of preparing country reports

NQF-IN project partners will prepare country reports on the organisational and financial systemic solutions for including qualifications in the NQFs of their countries. We assume that each country report should refer to the same set of themes in a comparable way. For this reason, we have developed a methodology of preparing country reports consisting of:

- basic terms and concepts (section 2.1),
- structure of the country report (2.2),
- comments to the proposed structure of the country report (2.3)

2.1 Basic terms and concepts

This section provides the basic terms and concepts that will be used in the country reports. We aim to work on issues related to terms and definitions throughout the life time of the NQF-IN project.

1) How do we understand the term qualification

In the NQF-IN project we take the approach and definition of qualification from the EQF Recommendation 2008. 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[3]"

2) How do we understand non-formal (education) sector qualifications?

There are different approaches and terms used across Europe to define qualifications awarded outside the traditional school system (general, VET, HE). In the application for the NQF-IN project, we decided to use the term "non-formal sector qualifications" (after Cedefop 2014) to indicate that we want to focus our analysis on the inclusion in the NQF of qualifications awarded outside traditional formal education systems, i.e. those awarded in the non-formal sector of the education system. This is also the reason why we used this phrase in the project title. However, we are investigating the possibility of proposing another name for this group of qualifications.

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[3] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, pp. 1–7).

3) There is a substantial difference between the concepts: "non-formal education sector qualifications" and "validation of non-formal and informal learning" (VNFIL) and they should not be confused.

   VNFIL refers to the process where an authorised body confirms that an individual has achieved learning outcomes in order to attain a qualification,[4] whereas the term "non-formal education sector qualifications" refers to the types of qualifications functioning outside the school education system. Non-formal sector qualifications might be awarded also through a VNFIL procedure.

4) How do we understand "inclusion of qualifications in the NQF"?

   Inclusion is a process leading to the assignment of an NQF level to a qualification. We want to analyse the organisational and financial systemic solutions for the qualifications inclusion process. However, the methodology of assigning a level to qualifications (i.e. methods of comparing learning outcomes with level descriptors) per se is not the subject of our project.

5) Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF versus inclusion in the qualifications register.

   Usually, "inclusion of qualifications" refers to the process of inclusion in a register of qualifications. Within this project, we would like to investigate whether all countries have a qualifications register "behind" the NQF and how these registers operate.

6) Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF versus inclusion in the national qualifications system.

   In some systems (e.g. Poland), these two processes are synonymous; however, in other countries, they may differ. In such cases, the NQF-IN project will focus on inclusion in the NQF, but not in the NQS as such.

7) Different procedures of inclusion for different types of qualifications.

   Usually the process of inclusion differs between formal school qualifications (general, VET, HE) and non-formal education qualifications. In some qualifications systems, more types of qualifications are distinguished and each type of qualification follows a different procedure. Within the NQF-IN project, we would like to carry out a detailed investigation on the different types of qualifications which might be included in the NQF and the procedures that are followed, with a particular focus on the qualifications being awarded in the non-formal sector of education.

8) Defining generic types of qualifications.

   For the purpose of providing common understanding and supporting discussion on the different solutions of inclusion of qualifications in the NQF, generic definitions of types of qualifications need to be developed. These terms are not to compete with national terminology, but are to serve as a point of reference for discussions at the European level when comparing the solutions

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[4] The Council of the European Union, Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1–5).

adopted in different countries. In material "Defining types of qualifications", we show that there is a large variety of approaches to naming different types of qualification functioning in national qualifications systems and qualifications that might be included in the NQF. There is no agreed common understanding or definitions of these terms.

The NQF-IN project can contribute to the European discussion by providing information on the terminology used in several EU countries and by providing recommendations on how to classify and name different qualifications at the generic, meta-European level.

Having analysed the solutions adopted in the NQF-IN partner countries, we propose that the main criterion to distinguish different types of qualifications is the legal basis upon which qualifications in national qualifications systems function.

If the process of awarding a qualification is regulated by legal acts, then this qualification will fall into the category of *state regulated qualifications*. Other qualifications also exist, whose awarding process is not regulated by legal acts. These qualifications are usually awarded according to the principle of "the freedom of economic activities". These qualifications would fall into the category of *non-state regulated qualifications*.

Within the category of s*tate regulated qualifications* we propose to distinguish *state regulated qualifications awarded in the education system* and *state regulated qualifications awarded outside the education system*.

As a result, we propose to distinguish three generic types of qualifications:

(A) State regulated qualifications awarded in the education system

Qualifications awarded in the formal, state supervised education system either by public or private providers. The key characteristic of this type of qualification is that their functioning is governed by education laws.

(B) State regulated qualifications awarded outside the education system

Qualifications which are regulated by legal acts or directly by ministries or government agencies but are not qualifications awarded in the formal education (school) system.

(C) Non-state regulated qualifications

Qualifications whose functioning is not regulated by legal acts. These qualifications are usually awarded according to the principle of "the freedom of economic activities".

In material titled "Defining types of qualifications", we explain our approach on naming the different types of qualifications in more detail.

2.2 Proposed structure of the country report

Table 1. Proposed structure of the country report

Title of the country report:

"Including of non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF in [*name of the country*]"

> *Foreword*
> *Abbreviations and acronyms*
> *Preparation of the reports*
> *Basic terms*

Chapter 1. Historical context

Chapter 2. National qualifications framework– basic premises

Chapter 3. Institutional setting

Chapter 4. Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

Chapter 5. Procedures of the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF

Chapter 6. Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF

Chapter 7. Costs of including qualifications in the NQF

Chapter 8. Current debates on further NQF developments

Annexes [optional]:

Annex 1. List of legal acts (and relevant brief summary) referred to in the country report
Annex 2. Forms used in the procedure of including qualifications in the NQF

2.3 Comments to the proposed structure of the country report

Foreword

The foreword to each country report should have a common "core" in which the reader is informed that the country report is the result of an international project which aims to provide evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing policies on including non-formal education sector qualifications in NQFs.

Each country report can also serve national needs, and if so, this should be indicated in the foreword.

Abbreviations and acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in the country report.

Preparation of the report

This part should present how the country report was prepared, i.e. who worked on the report, with whom it was consulted, which institutions provided contributions (and what kind), when it was prepared, the approach(es) adopted by the authors in collecting data and the sources used.

Basic terms

Definitions of the most important terms used in the country report.

Chapter 1. Historical context

Why did the country decide to work on the NQF? When was the legislation adopted or what are the plans for its adoption? What was the goal of introducing the NQF? Refer to your Referencing Reports so as not to repeat the information available there.

Chapter 2. National qualifications framework– basic premises

This chapter should provide information about basic premises of the NQF and qualifications system. What is the character of the NQF - reformative or informative? What is the architecture of the NQF? What are the basic characteristics of level descriptors? Please include any other relevant information regarding the basic premises of the NQF and qualifications system that may help a reader understand better the next chapters of the report. Refer to your Referencing Reports so as not to repeat the information available there.

Chapter 3. Institutional setting

Which institutions are responsible for managing the NQF? What is their role? Which institutions are responsible for the inclusion of qualifications (both formal education and non-formal

education qualifications) in the NQF? Does a register of qualifications exist? Is the register of qualifications linked to the NQF? Which institutions can submit qualifications to the NQF?

Chapter 4. Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

Which types of qualifications can be included in the national qualifications framework?

Is there a classification of qualifications in the national qualifications system (e.g. formal qualifications / non-formal qualifications, full / partial, major / minor qualifications) included the NQF? What are the criteria to distinguish different types of qualifications? What was the rationale to adopt a particular approach?

Are there any legal arrangements regarding the type of qualifications that can be included in the NQF? Are there any important qualifications that might not be included in the NQF?

What was the rationale for adopting particular solutions with regard to the types of qualifications included in the NQF?

Do the non-formal sector qualifications included in the NQF „become part of" the public domain? Can other institutions apply to be awarding bodies for the non-formal sector qualifications included in the NQF? If yes, how is this process organised? Who is the "owner" of the qualification?

What is the rationale for adopting particular solutions?

Please refer to the situation described below:

Qualification X was included in the NQF upon the request of a branch/sectorial organisation operating in region Y. After a year, another branch/sectorial institution would like to become an awarding body for qualification X. Is it possible for this institution to become an awarding body? If yes, under which conditions? Who makes the relevant decisions?

Is it possible to have very similar qualifications in the registry? How are two similar qualifications distinguished?

Are the learning outcomes and training programmes visible to persons and institutions external to the awarding body?

Chapter 5. Procedure of the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF

Do different types of qualifications follow different procedures of inclusion? If yes, each procedure should be described (step by step) and shown on a diagram. It would be valuable for this chapter to include a description of the inclusion of formal school qualifications in the NQF.

Is the process of including different types of qualifications obligatory or is it voluntary? What are the requirements/conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to submit a qualification to the NQF? How is the process of assigning levels to qualifications organised, i.e. who is involved in the process of assigning levels?

What was the rationale for adopting particular solutions and procedures of including qualifications in the NQF?

Presentation of "submission forms": An institution applying to have a qualification included in the NQF (registry) usually must complete some type of documentation and submit it to the competent body. Presenting these forms (i.e. as an annex to the country report) would be very helpful to the target groups of the project.

It would also be helpful to describe procedures by using examples of "actual" qualifications (qualifications that are awarded in the national qualifications system). If possible, the report should also describe rejected cases (applications of qualifications which were not approved for inclusion in the NQF) and the reasons for rejecting these applications.

Chapter 6. Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF

Who is responsible (which institutions) for the quality assurance of qualifications that are included in the NQF? Does this depend on the type of qualification? What is the quality assurance process for different types of qualifications?

Quality assurance for qualifications awarded in the education system should be described shortly, referring to already published reports: Eurydice, Cedefop/Refernet and Referencing Reports.

Which aspects of the quality of non-school qualifications are monitored (relevance of the learning outcomes, quality of the validation of competences, quality of teaching, adequacy of resources, etc.)? What are the activities and procedures for the quality assurance of non-school qualifications? How often are the qualifications reviewed, on what basis? Who is responsible for initiating the review process?

Chapter 7. Costs of including non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF

Who pays for what? What is the rationale for the adopted solutions related to the financing of the process of inclusion? Which acts/regulations govern the costs imposed on the actors within the qualifications system?

Does the submitting body pay for the inclusion of the qualification? Why is this so, why is this not so?

What are the costs related to the quality assurance process? Who is responsible for covering these costs?

Chapter 8. Current debate on further NQF developments

This part will present the current national discussions on the further development of the NQF with a focus on the inclusion of non-formal sector qualifications. If possible, the opinions of different groups of stakeholders and institutions should be presented.

Annexes (to the country report) [optional]

Annex 1. List of the legal acts referred to in country report (and relevant brief summary)
Annex 2. Forms used in the procedure of including qualifications in the NQF

—— **End of country report**——