

European Qualifications Framework

Undoubtedly the European Qualifications Framework will impinge on educational activities in Scotland. However, given that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is well underway in development, and elements of it have been introduced e.g. the writing of descriptors in HEIs according to the Framework, many of the EQF principles and design rules already exist in Scotland. It is difficult to assess whether the EQF is following the SCQF or the reverse is true. What is apparent is that these, in many ways, are parallel developments with the major difference being semantics.

The Rationale of an EQF

Like the SCQF the EQF will help develop the concept of Lifelong Learning but will allow, in addition, transparency of the comparability of the level of qualifications across national boundaries. While the objectives and functions of the framework are clear in the consultation document, the introduction and application of the EQF will be spread probably over a period of several years.

The SCQF, in many ways, has been implemented in HEIs in Scotland more fully than in FECs. This is mainly because HEIs are responsible for writing courses and units and are now required to write these encompassing the principles of the SCQF. In FECs many courses are developed centrally/nationally and therefore the writing of courses and units is overseen at a national level. It is probable that any application of the EQF in Scotland will also be more directly related to HEI courses than FEC courses. The latter may be able to be compared using the EQF in a manner similar to that anticipated for the SCQF i.e. levelled and credit-rated nationally rather than institutionally.

It is intended that informal learning may also be credit-rated under the SCQF and again this features in the proposed EQF. The problem of implementation of the EQF will be broadly similar to that involved in introducing the SCQF. However, by the time the EQF is ready for implementation, most of the practicalities in introducing it may have been overcome via the full introduction of the SCQF.

The Reference Levels and Descriptors

Eight levels in the EQF, at first sight, make comparison with the 12 levels of the SCQF awkward. However, the lowest level of the EQF seems to be at about Level 3 or even level 4 of the SCQF. Use of the meta-framework would enable comparisons to be made, either by gathering several of the lower SCQF Levels together to compare with the lowest EQF Level or by matching the SCQF Levels to the meta-framework as per figure 1 of the Consultation Document.

The use of Core Elements seems to be a development along the lines of Learning Outcomes and Core Skills, concepts familiar in the Scottish education system. The EQF Learning Outcomes appear to have the Core Skills less discrete than they may be under the Scottish system. Learning Outcomes of the EQF include cognitive or knowledge outcomes, skills or practical outcomes and wider competences. The last-named seem to match generally the Scottish Core Skills. Again, the Common

Principles and Procedures of the EQF would appear to match basic principles and procedures present in the Scottish system for many years viz. Quality Assurance, Validation, Guidance and Key Competences.

Although the terminology may vary, the descriptors are very similar to those being employed by the SCQF. The lower levels may begin marginally higher than Level 1 of the SCQF, but on the whole the statements within the descriptors are similar between the two frameworks.

For anyone familiar with the SCQF the 'supporting and indicative information' on education, training and learning structures should be recognisable. Given that much of the SCQF is based on centrally devised syllabi e.g. from SQA and professional bodies or, alternatively, from each individual HEI's developments, the statement in each of the EQF's levels' 'indicative information' of how quality assurance is determined by 'regulatory bodies', 'expert review', and 'institutional procedural requirements', seems to indicate there is little variance between the two frameworks.

However, what is blurred to a certain extent in the EQF is whether it is a totally **progressive** framework, although the lack of total clarity can be attributable possibly to the wording used in the supplementary information.

National Qualifications Frameworks

With the recent HN Review, the more recent NQ review, and also the current National Lifelong Learning agenda, the principles of the EQF are already being established within the Scottish National Qualifications Framework. The timescale is until c2010 and it is difficult to see the EQF being implemented ahead of this date.

Sectoral Qualifications

The SCQF has already had the effect in Scotland that many units and qualifications have been credit-rated and levelled both in centrally devised awards and also in institutionally devised awards such as those of HEIs.. Thus, it is probable that the EQF will follow on from these developments rather than act as a catalyst. The development of knowledge, skills and competences in a systematic way is already taking place in Scotland. In Scotland stakeholders at all sectoral levels have been involved in development and dissemination to aid the implementation of the SCQF.

Basically, the accrediting bodies in Scotland are subscribers to the SCQF and are therefore linked into the framework via their qualifications. The Scottish Executive has supported the development and implementation programme and dissemination events have encouraged informal and non-formal education providers to participate.

Mutual Trust

If the EQF is introduced, after consultation, on an international level, and if the quality assurance of the accrediting bodies of the member states is robust and open to inspection by relevant organisations from other member states mutual trust should be

able to be built up. It may be the case that should participants in member states be found to be wanting, it may prove necessary to question the quality and validity of qualifications from the defaulting states.

If indeed the EQF is a progressive framework leading from simple tasks to Doctoral Level research, it could prove to be the underpinning reference point of lifelong learning.

Conclusion

The EQF appears to be continuing the work already underway in Scotland. So far it has taken four years for the SCQF to be partially implemented with much work still to be done. It is difficult to imagine that the EQF can be implemented over such a range of educational systems in a shorter period, although the timescale might be truncated slightly if countries have their own, compatible frameworks in place. However, for ease of migration educationally and for clarity and transparency of level and notional weight of learning the EQF will probably prove to be a useful tool.