Study on international sectoral qualifications, frameworks and related initiatives

EQF Advisory Group – 14-16 June 2016
### Overview of research questions

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<td>What are the different types of initiatives related to international sectoral qualifications and how common across countries are they?</td>
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<td>What are the problems and challenges of these initiatives and what potential solutions can be identified?</td>
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<td>What are the implications of the state of play of international sectoral qualifications for the EQF? What are the possibilities for linking this type of initiatives to the EQF?</td>
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Scope

- **All initiatives**: single qualifications, suites/sequences of qualifications, standards, qualifications frameworks, competence frameworks

- **Sectoral**: in a broad sense – i.e. related to a sector, profession or group of professions (not only looking at designated sectoral bodies)

- **International**: recognised/used in several countries
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| Desk research (Completed) | • Identify a list of organisations relevant for this assignment  
• Carry out a rapid review of their websites to identify which ones guide relevant initiatives  
• For selected initiatives collect information on their characteristics in combination with interviews. | 800 organisations  
Websites of 426 reviewed rapidly  
71 reviewed in depth |
| Survey of organisations (Completed) | • Get a preliminary view on different types of initiatives and their key features,  
• Confirm which of the organisations identified through desk research were in charge of relevant initiatives;  
• Gather first views on the interest for linking with the EQF; and  
• Identify which of the organisations with relevant initiatives are willing to take part in in-depth interviews. | 165 responses  
81 organisations answered they managed ISQs and related initiatives |
| Questionnaire to EQF NCPs (Completed) | • collect information about the extent to which NQFs were open to international sectoral qualifications and relevant initiatives;  
whether they were contacted by international sectoral organisations. | 30 NCPs answered |
| In-depth interviews (Completed) | • collect information about all aspects of the study | 71 organisations in charge of relevant initiatives  
81 initiatives |
| Expert workshop (23 June) | • discuss findings and provide additional insights about analysis | 10 organisations interviewed |
What are the different types of initiatives? How common are they?

- At least 254 organisations are in charge of one or several initiatives
- The vast majority of these initiatives are single qualifications or suites of qualifications, or standards
- Only a small part are qualifications frameworks or competence frameworks (the latter also act as standards)
- None of the initiatives fits the definition of qualifications system
- Broad range of sectors are covered
Examples

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<th>International sectoral:</th>
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| Single qualification    | • the European Building Expert offered by AEEBC - Association of European Building & Construction Experts  
|                        | • the European First Aid Certificate developed by the European Committee for First Aid Education |
| Suite or family of qualifications | • the qualifications offered by the Association Montessori Internationale: Courses for Montessori Teachers and assistants (6 qualifications)  
|                        | • the certificates and qualifications offered by the International Society of Arboriculture (6 qualifications) |
| Standard                | • the European Chainsaw Certificates: Common qualification standards for chainsaw users throughout Europe were developed by the EFESC-European Forestry and Environmental Skills Council  
|                        | • the European Qualification Standard for employees in the insurance industry: developed by Eficert-European Financial Certification Organisation |
| Qualifications framework | • European Sectorial Qualification's Framework for Coast Guarding;  
|                        | • Frontex Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding  
|                        | • Humanitarian action qualifications framework |
| Competence framework    | • European e-competence framework |
## Main types

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<th>Purpose</th>
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<td><strong>ISQs/ suites of ISQs/ standards</strong></td>
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<td>• Certify achievement of LO (no equivalent national qualifications)</td>
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<td>• Improve comparability of education/training/skills in a profession</td>
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<td>• Set common minimum standards – harmonise</td>
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<td>• New career path - professionalisation (no national qualifications)</td>
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<td><strong>IS competence frameworks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Basis to define ISQs</td>
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<td>• Basis to define national qualifications (serves as standard but less</td>
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<td>detailed)</td>
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<td>• Transparency tool – compare qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IS qualifications framework</strong></td>
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<td>• Act as basis to define qualifications at national level (identify</td>
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<td>gaps)</td>
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<td>• Work together with a certification system</td>
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<td>• Professionalisation of the sector → recognition in fields with lack</td>
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<tr>
<td>of formal qualifications</td>
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icfi.com | Passion. Expertise. Results.  7
How mature are these initiatives?

- More than half of initiatives analysed in depth → over 1000 individual users (people who hold a qualification)

- 30 initiative (37% of initiative) → more than 5000 users

- The above concerns mostly ISQs, suites of ISQs and standards

- Data on users rarely available for ISQFs and ISCFs

- Around half of the initiatives are well established (over 10 years old)
  - Most frameworks are relatively new though
Types of organisations in charge

Type of organisations in charge of the initiatives (nbr of org)

- Membership based body that has national sectoral bodies and professional organisations as members: 29
- Membership based body that has individual professionals and companies as members: 20
- A private commercial entity for which delivering training and qualifications (certifications) is core...: 5
- Non-for profit entity: 5
- International institution such as the United Nations and sub-groups: 1
- International education centre: 1
- Other: 10
Governance and funding

- **Updating to ensure relevance:**
  - Most org. have such arrangements
  - Who does it: committees or expert groups
  - Regularity varies but often 2-3 years

- **Funding sources (nbr of org)**

  - assessment or certification fees
  - membership fees
  - EU funding
  - licensing or accreditation fees
  - course tuition fees
  - registration or administration fees
  - donations from individuals or companies
  - Other
Relationship with NQFs

- **Openness of NQFs (based on NCPs answers)**
  - 9 countries confirmed having procedures that enable linking ISQs to their NQFs (BG, BIH (under development), FR, LT (under development), NL, PT, SI, SK, UK-EWNI, UK-SC)
  - In Ireland such procedure on hold
  - Slovenia it is technically possible but no explicit procedure
  - No procedures for linking other initiatives than qualifications

- **Linkage with NQFs**
  - 25 initiatives analysed in depth are linked to an NQF
    - 11 directly (i.e. ISQs is in the NQF); and
    - 14 indirectly (the standard/competence framework is basis for national qualifications which are in an NQF)
Reasons for linking with the NQF

- Clarity on equivalency of ISQs with other qualifications in a country and thus enhance their standing in the national context;

- Improve opportunities for holders of ISQs in terms of progression in the education and training system or positions at the labour market;

- Improved recognition to increase demand for the ISQ and to encourage providers including programmes for achieving ISQ in their training offers;

- Enhanced recognition through inclusion in an NQF would also provide access to public funding for learners aiming at achieving the respective ISQ.

- Note: some organisations reference to NQF because interested in displaying EQF levels
Relationship with the EQF

- Interviewees had good level of awareness of the EQF

  ![Level of awareness of the EQF (nbr of interviewees)]

  - Good understanding: 38
  - Awareness: 23
  - Not aware of the EQF: 10

- Half of the initiatives already refer to the EQF

  ![Bar chart showing percentage of initiatives referring to EQF]

  - Informally refer to EQF: 14
  - Through NQF: 18
  - Both: 12
Reasons for linking with EQF/ wanting to link

- Various aspects of recognition:
  - Recognition of the profession
  - Recognition at EU level (beyond single countries)
  - Recognition outside EU
  - Recognition of the labour market
  - Recognition in education and training systems

- Transfer of qualifications and mobility of persons
Use of learning outcomes and quality assurance

- Learning outcomes are commonly used for ISQs and standards – basis for course objectives and assessment

- LO less commonly used for explicit level descriptors in frameworks BUT – learning outcomes of a qualification are nevertheless used to decide on which level a qualification should be placed

- Most organisation state they have explicit QA procedures BUT great variety in practice.
  - Some organisations had extensive systems in place, which included reviewing course content, inspecting provider premises and examining the experience and skills of teachers
  - Other organisations employed less detailed approaches.
Implications for the EQF

- There is ‘appetite’ for creating a link with the EQF among most organisations interviewed

- The basic principles underpinning EQF (use of learning outcomes and quality assurance) are present in most initiatives (though QA varies greatly)

- Many initiatives already display EQF levels – including informally (without a reference to an NQF)