MODULE 8

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF QUALIFICATIONS

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All organisations approved to develop qualifications within a NQF must comply with all the design specifications relevant to their responsibilities within the NQF. A detailed set of requirements is developed by the body responsible for the NQF nationally so that an appropriate approval process can be established for all qualifications within the NQF.

1. The Idea of Standard

Conceptualisations of the word 'standard' vary considerably according to the context in which it is used. For example, when purchasing an item of clothing (a pair of jeans) which comes in various styles, the term 'standard fit' might be used to imply something that is commonplace or unadorned with additional, optional features. Even within educational contexts, the word is used with different meanings. The complaint can be heard that educational 'standards are falling' when what is really implied is that educational attainment or achievement is falling. Alternatively, one might hear standards being referred to as a set of benchmarking criteria: the definition of a 'minimum standard' of attainment below which performances would be unacceptable.

In the context of education and training, this latter conceptualisation of the word standard is used in various instances: in general, standards are characterized by the fact that they are set by a certain authority and describe criteria which characterize either the average or the minimum performance, tasks, outcomes, etc. expected. In relation to qualifications and certification processes, according to a Cedefop study concerning the development of qualification standards within Europe, these standards are considered to be norms and specifications applying to assessment, educational pathways or targeted occupations. The following types of standards can be distinguished:

(a) assessment standards: may specify the object of assessment and performance criteria. These are typically the standards used for the certification process;

(b) occupational standards: may specify the professional tasks and activities the holder of a qualification is supposed to be able to carry out, and the competences needed for that purpose. Occupational standards are often set through a dialogue with stakeholders in the economic world and reflect the needs of the labour market and of society more generally. They are often the basis for deriving the other two types of standards.

(c) educational standards: may define the expected outcomes of the learning process leading to the award of a qualification. These standards relate to education and training and are the basis for defining appropriate teaching and training methodologies and approaches.

Not all countries distinguish between these three types of standards or define them centrally (Cedefop, 2008). While in some cases, for example, only the educational standards are defined centrally and are used for certification, elsewhere the distinction is very clear. Further, in some countries the term used to refer to national standards may differ from the three categories above, as in those countries using the term National Curricula rather than standards. However in most cases even though different words are used the rationale behind these standards is:

■ that of the labour market requirements for a profession: **occupational standards**;

■ that of the educational programme and what the training programme is expected to deliver: **educational standards**;

■ that of the certification process and of assessment requirements and criteria: **assessment standards.**

The table below indicates how selected countries deal with standards.

Table 12: Examples from European Countries (Source CEDEFOP)

Country	Type of standards	Description
CZECH REPUBLIC	Currently: educational standards Future: Assessment standards	Currently assessment in IVET is based on educational standards (curriculum) and the assessment criteria are not standardised. In CVET there are no centrally set standards for the moment. With the introduction of the NQF, qualifications are undergoing reform and will be based on qualifications standards. Qualifications standards will be the basis for curricula and also for assessment standards (in the NQF). The latter will be progressively introduced as the basis for assessment.

Country	Type of standards	Description
GERMANY	Assessment standards (*Prüfungsanforderungen*)	These are defined together with educational and occupational standards and have the characteristics of legislation.
GREECE	Educational standards	Educational standards are used by the awarding body (theoretical part) and providers (practical part) to design assessment. However, their use for assessment is not regulated.
SPAIN	Educational standards (*módulos formatives*)	These standards define the education and training content, the competences to be achieved and the assessment criteria.
FINLAND	Educational standards	Assessment is based on the standards defined in curricula. Competence-based qualifications: assessment standard Competence-based qualifications contain the training and assessment standards.
FRANCE	Assessment standards (*référentiel de certiication*)	Assessment standards are defined as part of the qualification definition when registered in the national repertory of qualifications. For sectoral qualifications assessment is also based on assessment standards
IRELAND	Qualification standards (as defined in the award specifications)	Award specifications contain a description of learning outcomes and of assessment techniques.
ROMANIA	Qualification standards	These define the competence to be achieved and the performance criteria for assessment.
UK	Assessment standards	Based on occupational standards, all units within the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) contain assessment criteria.

2. Quality Assurance of Qualifications

Life cycle of a qualification

Identification of needs

Qualifications consist of the combination of relevant training components (units, modules, semesters...) derived from the National Occupational Standards (when they are available) or from a reliable job descriptions. NOS or job descriptions provide the competences (performance criteria in the case of NOS) which need to be developed for a person to be deemed competent. Occupational standards are developed by industry experts. They provide a way of deciding whether or not a staff is performing a function in the organisation to a standard that employers expect. The performance criteria need to be translated into learning outcomes for a training purpose (e.g.in India Curriculum Packages, see box below). Learning outcomes are later developed by awarding bodies, assessors or trainers. Qualifications are based on the achievement of learning outcomes which specify the knowledge, skills and understanding required at a specific level, as the result of a process of learning.

"**Curriculum packages:** the competency-based curriculum packages would consist of syllabus, student manual, trainers guide, training manual, trainer qualifications, assessment and testing guidelines and multi-media package and e-material. This will be developed for each NSQF level and when relevant for specific qualification packs (QPs identified by the SSCs. This may be done by such agencies as Ministries/Departments, Sector Skills Council and Regulatory bodies may designate or any other body in accordance with the NSQF.NSQF curricula should be modular, allowing for skill accumulation and facilitating exit and entry. Curricula design will also be aligned to a credit framework that reflects credit earned and competency acquired. Training of trainers would also be aligned to the NSQF." (NSQF Notification).

Qualification development

Qualifications are composed of learning blocks (components, units, modules) presented in a format that identifies the level, size and a precise description of the content of the qualification. If there is a credit system, they may be rules of combination of units or credit. Rules of combination specify the credits that need to be achieved, through the completion of particular units, for a qualification to be awarded. All NQF units/modules identify a credit value for the unit which specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a learner who has achieved the learning outcomes of the unit/modules. The Indian NSQF Notification specifies that the NSQF is a quality assurance framework, stating that "it facilitates the awarding of credit and supports credit transfer and progression routes within the Indian education and training system. It seeks to help everyone involved in education and training to make comparisons between qualifications offered in the country, and to understand how these relate to each other".

All NQF units/components must be capable of assessment and set a clear assessment standard for the unit. All NQF unit contain assessment criteria that specify the standard a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that the learning outcomes of that unit have been achieved. level: all units must be positioned at a single NQF level that is consistent with the level of achievement expressed in the learning outcomes of the unit. In a given qualification, not all units or learning blocks need be of the same level in the framework. The global (best-fitting) level can only be decided against a complete job description which covering all the NQF descriptors or against the learning outcomes of the training programme.

Qualifications are fit for purpose and ensure there are no features in the design of the qualification that could disadvantage any group of learners.

The qualification developer must build evidence of the need for this qualification. This evidence may be gathered in answering the following questions:

What evidence is there that the qualification is needed?

- the purpose of the qualification - eg designed to get people into work, a qualification intended for people already in work, a qualification to allow people to add new skills based on technological change.

- The starting point for the creation of the qualification – eg request from sectoral stakeholders, evidence of a gap in the framework, link with government policy, evidence of an emerging need.

- Research and consultation – eg occupational mapping, stakeholder views, support from relevant stakeholders.

process (es) by which the qualification/QP/NOS was validated nclude information about the organisations which participated in the validation, the feedback they offered and the steps taken to address issues raised by the validation.

What is the estimated uptake of this qualification and what is the basis of this estimate?

Which employers will use the qualification and why? Who is expected take the qualification?

What investigations were carried out to test the likely uptake of the qualification and what steps were taken to ensure that the investigations truly reflected this market and provided robust estimates of uptake?

What steps were taken to ensure that the qualification(s) does/do not duplicate already existing or planned qualifications in the NSQF?

Allocation to the framework

NQF qualification file (that is the set of information which will allow the levelling of the qualification and its allocation to the framework) must usually specify:

- the qualification's objective, which lead to a benefit for learners.

- the qualification title which present in a standard format the level, size in notional hours and a description of its content.

- any other qualification which a Learner must have completed before taking the qualification,

- any prior knowledge, skills or understanding which the Learner is required to have before taking the qualification,

- units which a Learner must have completed before the qualification will be awarded and any optional routes,

- any other requirements which a Learner must have satisfied before the Learner will be assessed or before the qualification will be awarded,

- the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of the qualification (giving a clear indication of their coverage and depth),

- the method of any assessment and any associated requirements relating to it,

- the criteria against which Learners' levels of attainment will be measured (such as assessment criteria or exemplars),

- any specimen assessment materials, and

- any specified levels of attainment in the NQF. Accreditation will also ensure that the qualification submitted reflects the framework level that is claimed for it.

The main purpose of the qualification file is the levelling of the qualification. Qualifications in the NSQF should be trusted by learners and employers. A lot of this trust will relate to assessment. On the one hand, employers will want to be sure that holders of a qualification have been tested to show that they can carry out the outcomes described to the standards set in the qualification; and on the other hand, learners will want to be sure that the assessment is fair and that the same pass/fail judgements are made for all candidates. This will have to be in line with the national policy& guidelines.

The assessment strategy is the main instrument of proof of levelling. An assessment strategy should ensure that the assessments used for the qualification are appropriate for the aims and outcomes of the qualification. This is especially important in relation to vocational qualifications which are designed to develop competence in learners. The strategy should ensure that the assessment instruments which are used generate sufficient evidence for all the assessable outcomes of the qualification – these may include practical outcomes, knowledge and understanding, the ability to integrate skills and knowledge, and the capacity to adapt to circumstances. The strategy should include opportunities for assessments which cover/integrate different outcomes and ensure that the amount of assessment to be undertaken is manageable. The cen-

tral issue is about the degree of flexibility in the assessment of the qualification and how the arrangements for gathering and evaluating evidence of previously gained competence will ensure that holders of the qualification can demonstrate the outcomes in the qualification.

Arrangements relating to the quality assurance of assessment include:

- how will it be ensured that assessment judgements are always made on valid and sufficient evidence?

- what steps are taken to ensure that assessment judgements are consistent from assessor to assessor?

- how will problems of unreliable or unfair assessment, misconduct by assessors, or other kinds of malfeasance be dealt with?

- Do providers understand the standards in the qualification – capacity-building work, support materials, etc.

Table 13: Summary of the German qualification file

Name of the qualification			
Documents and source texts used			
Proposed level allocation			
Area of competences	Categories/subcategories	Level	Justification/ explanation s
Professional competence	Knowledge (depth and breadth)		
	Skills (instrumental and systemic skills, judgement)		
Personal competence	Social competence (team4eadership skills, involvement and communication)		
	Autonomy (autonomous responsibility/responsibility, reflectiveness, learning competence)		
Difficulties in allocation			

Draft Approval Criteria in India

The qualification has been created by an authorised body.

The qualification must:

- meet a genuine economic or social need

- contain well-founded standards based on appropriate research and/or consultation

- be awarded using quality assurance arrangements which guarantees the validity and reliability of the training and assessment

- match to a level of the qualification framework and meets the other requirements of the Framework

3 stage Approval Processes in INDIA (draft)

1. **Preparation and submission*** of Qualification File by submitting body

2. **Evaluation and recommendation:** NSDA case officer and experts prepares report for NSQC, recommending approval, approval with conditions or rejection of the submission.

3. **Decision and registration:** NSQC accepts, amends or rejects NSDA recommendation. Approved submissions are entered in the NSQF Register and promulgated.

   * ...or re-submission - in response to specific conditions set by NSQC, after a fixed period, or at the submitting body's request..

Figure 23: The qualification file (draft)
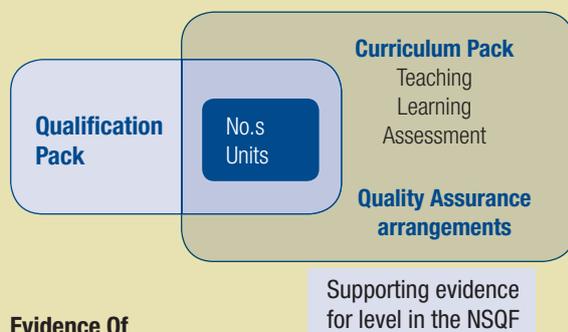
Evidence Of
- industry engagement
- horizontal and vertical mobility
- international comparability

Qualification File

1. Short, headline information in a cover sheet

2. Additional detailed information where needed

3. Supporting evidence

Qualification delivery

Qualification specifications are important to allocate a level to the qualification, but the allocation of level is not a one-off process. If it is to be seen as a QA process, it must also take into account the delivery of the qualification in a training programme, which is also a source of information for levelling. In the public system, curricula are the product of regulations of educational programmes which set "educational objectives". It is important to note that educational objectives are not learning outcomes in the sense of a qualification framework. They primarily meet examination regulations, examinations, educational standards which are related to expected results of learning processes. But often, educational standards,

even if they are competence oriented, do not have the required level of abstraction which learning outcomes possess. Examinations measure outputs, because they are related to school subject and school year, rather than outcomes which are based on understanding and performance over time and on a suitable level of abstraction. So the delivery of the qualification should be considered as one source of information among others for confirming the level of qualification. The levelling of qualifications should be a **repeated process**. A solid documentation is needed is always need.

Qualification review

All awarding organisations within the frameworks are subject to monitoring by the qualifications regulators and asked to complete periodic self assessments. Monitoring focuses on whether the awarding organisation or qualification submitter continues to meet the regulatory requirements under which it has been recognised, including how it uses relevant systems, procedures and resources to ensure that assessment methods produce consistent, valid, fair and transparent results over time and between assessment locations. The frequency and focus of awarding organisation monitoring is determined on the basis of risk. Areas identified for improvement as a result of monitoring will be outlined as accreditation conditions and will be monitored in an action plan for the awarding organisation. When these requirements have been complied with they will be signed off by the qualifications regulators. For high-risk qualifications, monitoring is also conducted at a qualification level. Some major qualification types are subject to codes of practice or operating rules that outline in greater detail how qualifications should be delivered with reference to areas such as assessment, awarding and grading. These codes of practice or operating rules are used to direct the qualifications regulator in monitoring to ensure that qualifications continue to meet the required quality standards.

3. Registers of Qualifications

The Register is a searchable data base on qualifications understood as.

... a specification/statement of the **outcomes of learning** (knowledge, skills, etc)

... together with the **assessment** and **certification** arrangements

… which demonstrably meet the **requirements/ criteria** set by a validating body (NSQC)

… and have been formally **validated** by an authorised body (NSQC) as being appropriate for a stated purpose.

Registers typically include the following information:

- Title and type of the qualification
- Administrative codes, etc
- Level and credit value of the qualification
- Subject/Vocational area of the qualification
- Outcome statement(s)
- Status of the qualification (eg current, expiring or discontinued)
- Qualification review date
- Details on the qualification developer, provider(s), certificating body

Table 14: Countries with Qualification Registers

France	full vocational qualifications – detailed entries
Scotland	full qualifications in the SCQF (all sectors) – headline info + links to other databases
New Zealand	"all quality assured qualifications in NZ" – headline info
South Africa	searchable databases of qualifications and part-qualifications in the SAQF – very detailed specifications
Australia	- the official national public record of all AQF qualifications and qualification pathways, accrediting authorities, organisations authorised to issue AQF qualifications, and all AQF qualifications issued a portal with links to a number of authorised registers of issuing authorities (providers) and qualifications. .

Possible function of a Register:

- ensure that information about QF qualifications and authorised issuing organisations is publicly available
- ensure that a clear distinction is made between QF and non-QF qualifications
- ensure that any publicly available registers, databases and other information based on data derived from the QF Register, or purporting to be about QF qualifications and the organisations authorised to issue them, accurately represents the QF
- facilitate the comparison of QF qualifications and authorised issuing organisations to enable consum-

ers of QF qualifications to make informed choices, and

- ensure records of QF qualifications issued are kept.

Possible scope of the Register

The policy covers all education and training sectors that issue national qualifications and the responsibilities for the provision and management of registers of QF qualifications and the organisations that issue them.

The terminology used in the QF policies is not sector-specific. To support consistency of understanding and interpretation, definitions of the terminology are provided in a glossary.

Awarding organisations and unit submitters must be recognised by the qualifications regulators before they can submit units/modules and qualifications into the frameworks or start awarding qualifications within the frameworks. Recognition involves meeting requirements in several areas including having sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational and administrative processes to develop and/or award qualifications to the standards required, having procedures in place to monitor compliance with the regulatory arrangements, and having robust procedures for centre recognition, managing enquiries and appeals and dealing with malpractice.

Box 14: NSQF Register

"To ensure that all learners have access to all the qualification registered and currently being provided by various training providers/institutions, a register of qualifications that are approved and available, shall be maintained and regularly updated. The NSQF Register will be the official national public record of all qualifications aligned to NSQF levels qualifications pathways and accrediting authorities.

The qualification Register will be made available on a web portal and regularly updated. Every institution offering an NSQF-aligned qualification will have to keep details of its training programmes updated on the portal."

Register policy

The Users – The principal users of the policy are the QF Council, accrediting authorities including self-accrediting organisations and issuing organisations that have responsibility for maintaining parts of the QF register.

The other users are those who utilise the QF register to gain information about QF qualifications and qualifica-

tion pathways, accrediting authorities and issuing organisations such as students and prospective students, graduates, employers, industry and professional bodies, licensing and regulatory bodies, migrants and migration advisors, qualifications developers, researchers, international education agencies and the general public.

Monitoring- The NSQC (Qualification Committee) and accrediting authorities in each education and training sector are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the use of this policy.

4. Skype Session:
Compares QA Systems between Scotland, England and Germany (Mike Cole)

ENGLAND

Main timeline

- 1994, NQF, 5 levels (based on NVQ descriptors and broadened across VET but not HE

- 2004, New NQF (current), 8 levels, based on broader descriptors, potential for HE to be included.

- 2008, QCF (current), 8 levels, new broader descriptors, extensive, credit system, potential for HE to be included, validation procedures

- 2010, QCF linked to the EQF

- Latest proposal, single QF, 8 levels, new descriptors across 2 domains, inclusive of all non HE regulated qualifications.

Allocation of qualifications

Mainstream qualifications formed the basis of the levels, awarding organisations make proposals for new qualifications to be added (and removed).

SCOTLAND

Main Timeline

- 1998, SCQF, 12 levels, based on partnership agreement

- 2010, SCQF linked to EQF

- 2012, level descriptors revised a little

- 2012, Credit rating opened up

Allocation of qualifications

- Mainstream qualifications formed the basis of the levels

- New qualifications being added through the credit rating process

- International qualifications added

- To be included on the SCQF a qualification or learning programme must be

  ✓ At least 10 notional learning hours

  ✓ Based on learning outcomes

  ✓ Formally assessed

  ✓ Internally and externally quality assured

GERMANY

Main timeline

- 2008, discussions on DQR begin

- 2009, DQR basic grid outlined

- 2011, main consultation period ends, DQR formulated

- Appointment of working groups for four occupational areas: metal/electrical, IT, retail, health (16-20 members each, representing all relevant stakeholders)

- 2012, final DQR launched and accepted

- 2013 DQR linked to EQF

Allocation of qualifications

- A clear allocation of a qualification based on primary sources often proved to be difficult and led to deviations of up to one NQF level.

- Subsidiary criteria were taken into account, such as access requirements, duration of learning, field of activity and position in company hierarchies, consensus across educational sectors. Learning outcomes, however, remained the decisive criterion for allocation.

- Analysis of legal regulations and ordinances, curricula and study plans

- Use of EU Guideline: Learning Outcomes http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/EQF_note4_en.pdf

- Proposal for allocations of selected qualifications on all levels (see form on next slide)

- Evaluation of the results and consultation by the DQR steering committees

FURTHER READINGS

- Use of EU Guidelines: Learning Outcomes http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/EQF_note4_en.pdf

- The relation between quality assurance and VET certification in EU MEMBER States, CEDEFOP 2008

- Cedefop (2008). *The dynamics of qualifications – the definition and renewal of occupational and educational standards* [draft interim report for Cedefop]. Cedefop (2009). Terminology of European education and training policy: a selection of 100 key terms [online]. Available from Internet: httphttp://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Glossary/GlossaryApp.csp [cited 16.2.2009].

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