

European Qualification Framework (EQF) Implementation in the UK: 2016 Update

Implementation of the EQF is voluntary for each country but all EU member states have chosen to proceed. Each member state is asked to nominate a National Coordination Point for EQF implementation. In the UK, because several qualifications frameworks operate, the EQF National Coordination Points (NCPs) are:

England and Northern Ireland: [Ofqual](#) and [CCEA Regulation](#)
Scotland: [Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework Partnership](#)
Wales: [CollegesWales/ColegauCymru](#)

There are two main stages to implementation of the EQF. The first is to reference national qualification levels to EQF levels. The UK presented its report on [referencing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#), the [Qualifications and Credit Framework \(QCF\)](#) and the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) to the EQF in January 2010. It was one of the first reports to be accepted by the EQF Advisory Group.

Of the 39 countries involved with the EQF referencing, 31 have undertaken the referencing process and have endorsed referencing positions. Some of these have produced updates to their reports following developments in their qualifications systems. Most of the remaining countries are expected to have referenced by the end of 2017. The UK EQF NCPs aim to update the UK referencing report within the 2017 UK EQF work programme.

The second main stage to implementing the EQF is to ensure that stakeholders across the UK understand the EQF and are aware of its potential uses and benefits. To this end from 2010 the UK EQF NCPs (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) have collaborated in a programme of EQF implementation activities using EU grant money. Funding has been secured for the fifth year and the 2016 work programme has included projects under the themes of: the international sectoral qualifications (ISQs) situation in the UK; communications; and European liaison.

The international sectoral qualifications (ISQs) situation in the UK

The UK National Contact Points (NCPs) for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) commissioned research into the use of international qualifications in the UK in April 2016. The EQF Advisory Group has, in the last few years, been paying particular attention to the challenge of recognising “International” qualifications within both the EQF and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs).

In this context international qualifications are considered those which have currency within multiple jurisdictions. The currency for these qualifications typically comes not from their official status as recognised by governments, regulators and framework owners but recognition by employers and employer bodies within the relevant industry. The work of the EQF advisory group has therefore focussed on these International Sectoral Qualifications (ISQs).

As a result of this work, the UK EQF NCPs felt it was important to undertake research to better understand the ISQ situation in the UK.

It was agreed that the study would focus on five key economic sectors (administration and support services; health and social work; hospitality; ICT and science, production and engineering) and address the following three objectives:

1. To what extent ISQs are being used in the UK and whether or not this practice is growing?
2. Who offers these ISQs and why?
3. Would there be value in formal recognition of these qualifications on all the UK NQFs?

The results of this research can be accessed in the final report [here \(link to report\)](#) however some overarching findings were that:

- It was difficult to separate ISQs from National Qualifications Frameworks and adequately cover the 'non-state' qualifications; there is a commercial advantage of recognition on UK Frameworks as a quality stamp; 'exporters of qualifications not importers'
- The definition is confusing, not well recognised: many take it to include UK-created qualifications which are used in several countries or qualifications written for international audiences using UK standards
- ISQs appear, at this point of the research, to be more established in ICT, finance and engineering as seen in European studies. Inclusion of international competency frameworks or international sectoral qualifications frameworks may help expand this in other sectors, including those sectors outside of the 5 selected for this study
- Multinationals are likely to design and use ISQs but sometimes avoid engagement with national qualifications systems due to cost and time implications, and therefore don't recognise themselves as active participants in ISQs use and development.

General Communications

Our 2016 communications work for promotion of the EU VET tools built on our 2015 joint customised workshops in each of the UK countries for careers information advice and guidance (CIAG) advisors and managers in Education and Employment, showing the benefits and use of the tools and related portals for this audience as well as the links between the tools.

A UK communications group was established with representation from the UK EQF and ECVET NCPs, Euroguidance, the Erasmus+ national agency, the UK Europass centre, and the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) to develop and implement a joint communications strategy. The strategy included customised promotion of the tools to key target audiences (careers staff in education and employment; college admission staff, employers and awarding organisations) through tapping into relevant national and regional events in each UK country. A total of 13 regional events were targeted across England, Wales and Northern Ireland which included a workshop session or presentation to promote the use of the EU VET tools. These events ranged from regional Awarding Body forum meetings to CIAG regional conferences. Major UK events were also targeted to promote the tools including: the annual FAB conference; the UK NARIC conference; and the Erasmus+ conference.

The UK communications group also oversaw the development of a new, central, UK website for the EU VET initiatives. This was designed to be easily accessible to the key target audiences and tailored to help them (learners, workers, employers, colleges, universities and careers advisors) understand how skills and qualifications are recognised across Europe. Each page includes links to the databases and frameworks that are maintained by the

European collective. The website is jointly maintained by the EQF National Contact Points of Scotland (SCQF Partnership), Wales (CollegesWales) and Northern Ireland (CCEA Regulation) under the coordination of CollegesWales. The website can be accessed at www.skillsforeurope.uk

The 2015 UK EQF work programme included a piece of work with UK Awarding Organisations (AOs) on EQF visibility on qualification certificates. The final report concluded that few AOs are actively including EQF level on qualification certificates or other key documents. As part of our EQF 2016 communications work, the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), on our behalf, carried out a quick follow up survey with UK recognised AOs to see whether or not they are displaying EQF levels on qualification certificates and certificate supplements (if offered). The UK EQF NCPs wanted to get a totally accurate picture at this point and remind AOs that, with the UK exit from the EU, this is something they should now give serious consideration to. Of a total of 160 UK regulated awarding organisations, 116 responded, representing a response rate of 73%. Survey results showed that, despite promotion efforts by UK EQF NCPs with AOs during 2015 and 2016, the situation has not improved from the 2015 survey with few AOs displaying EQF level on either certificate supplements or learner qualification certificates. [The survey report can be accessed here.](#)

The 2016 communications work also promoted the participation of all relevant UK stakeholders and networks in the EU transparency tools with three meetings of the UK European Co-ordination Group for VET Initiatives. This group provides a co-ordination point for the implementation of the tools thus promoting understanding of the synergies between them.

European Liaison

The final strand of our 2016 work programme was European Liaison. This included UK EQF NCP attendance at five EQF Advisory Group meetings where main topics discussed have included: the ongoing EQF referencing and re referencing (31 countries will have referenced to the EQF by the end of 2016 with the remaining 8 by the end of 2017); the pilot project on the horizontal comparison of levelled qualifications; the New Skills Agenda for Europe; the validation of non- formal and informal learning; and peer learning activities (PLAs).

The UK EQF NCPs jointly hosted, with the Ireland EQF NCP and the European Commission, a PLA on school leaving qualifications giving direct access to first cycle degree courses and their place within NQFs (and hence the EQF) in June 2016. The event was very successful with much positive feedback from many of the 40 participants who attended from various European countries. [A report of the PLA can be accessed here.](#)

Further Information

[Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe Portal](http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en) ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en

UK Skills for Europe website www.skillsforeurope.uk

Downloads



[Report on Referencing the UK Qualifications Frameworks to the EQF](#)

1.71 MB - uploaded 18-02-2016



EQF Level Visibility on Qualifications Certificates

1.23 MB - uploaded 18-02-2016



EU tools for helping people work and study in other countries leaflet

4.56 MB - uploaded 18-02-2016



EU Initiatives supporting VET in the UK Report

1.8 MB - uploaded 18-02-2016

Reports below to be added – please bring these 3 recent reports to beginning of downloads section

International Sectoral Qualifications (ISQs) and their use in the UK

UK Awarding Organisation Survey: EQF Level Visibility on Qualification Certificates and Certificate Supplements

Summary report - Peer learning activity 'Upper secondary school leaving qualifications (SLQs) giving direct access to first cycle degree courses and their place in the EQF: The stories behind the numbers' 2 – 3 June 2016, Belfast, Northern Ireland