

National qualifications frameworks Lessons from international experience

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Methodology

- CINDA was asked by the Council of Rectors in Chile to review the development of NQF around the world
- Six experiences were selected for a closer analysis> The EHEA QF, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Spain and the United States
- We identified interesting lessons which are summarized in this presentation

¿What is a NQF?

- An instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels.
- It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes, whether learned in a classroom, on-the-job, or less formally

(Tuck, 2007)

Purposes of a NQF

1. Improving access to the qualifications system and progression within it
 - making the qualifications system easier to understand
 - making progression routes easier and clearer/ improving career mobility
 - increasing and improving credit transfer between qualifications
 - improving the recognition of prior learning
 - improving access to education and training opportunities

Purposes of a NQF

2. Establishing standards, achieving comparability and intra-national or international benchmarking

- rationalizing qualifications by removing duplication of provision
- ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived social and economic needs
- ensuring that education and training standards are defined and applied consistently
- ensuring that education and training providers meet certain quality standards
- securing international recognition for national qualifications

Lessons about the design and implementation of a NQF

1. The starting point must be a clear and explicit set of purposes for educational policy
 - Need for it to be aligned with the national goals for higher education
2. A NQF must be realistic and relatively simple
 - NQF are not the answer to all higher education problems, they are a policy instrument, which must be aligned with other policy instruments

Lessons ...

3. The instruments in place must be consistent with the stated goals

- Need to be aware of the implications of decisions
- Goals are not independent of the process needed to reach them

4. It is important to define clear links between different levels in a QF, but this does not necessarily mean one integrated QF

- Itineraries can be mapped in stages
- Integration may come later

Lessons ...

5. Development of a NQF is an expensive and long term project. It requires careful planning
 - Need to find answers for the main policy questions (purposes, scope, strategy, resources)
6. A NQF must be part of a wider policy strategy in order to be effective
 - A coherent range of policy instruments
 - A governing, executive, public agency, with clear leadership
 - Adequate funding
 - Support to HEI

Lessons ...

7. There are many technical aspects that must be taken into consideration (find the experts)

- Determining levels of learning and the relationship between them
- Designing level descriptors
- Measuring workloads for accumulation and credit transfer

8. QA is an essential element for NQF

- validation of qualifications and/or standards;
- accreditation and audit of education and training institutions;
- QA of assessment leading to the award of qualifications.

Lessons ...

9. The process must promote trust among all stakeholders
 - Need for a top-down approach (sound, strong leadership)
 - Need for a bottom up approach (effective consultation and participation for all relevant stakeholders, especially HEI)
10. Development of a common, technical language
 - Slow but necessary cultural process

Lessons ...

11. Need to learn from previous experiences, both successful and unsuccessful

- No need to re-invent the wheel
- Need to consult with experts
- Need to link with international experiences
- Useful to apply an incremental approach (hard to get it right the first time)

12. Need to develop a strong dissemination and communication strategy

- Building legitimacy
- Reducing mistrust



Two main issues

- Strong, clear public leadership, to define policy, set and keep deadlines, provide resources
- Significant communication and effective participation schemes, to make the QF responsive to actual HE needs, to legitimize decisions, to develop ownership

Never forget that for every complex problem
there is a simple solution ...

... and it is wrong!

- (H.L. Mencken)