



THE SCQF: LIFELONG LEARNING EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENTS EXPLAINED

Europe has a number of initiatives which encourage member states to recognise the value of learning and skills of the member states. This leaflet is primarily for SCQF Credit Rating Bodies and others that recognise learning in Scotland. It provides a brief explanation of the European dimension in relation to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and signposts to further information.

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council for European Union at the beginning of 2008. As a common reference framework the EQF supports lifelong learning and mobility as it facilitates the recognition of learning by acting as a translation device, aiding the understanding of qualifications and education systems across the different Member States.

The EQF has eight levels, enabling national qualifications to be compared with each other and those of other countries.

The EQF helps to:

- promote lifelong learning;
- make qualifications across Europe easier to understand;
- clarify the training systems across Europe; and
- encourage the integration of the European labour market.

The SCQF is referenced to the EQF and the following table illustrates the comparable levels:

SCQF	EQF
12	8
11	7
10	6
9	6
8	5
7	5
6	4
5	3
4	2
3	1
2	Not referenced
1	Not referenced

In Scotland work has been ongoing to implement and promote a better understanding of the EQF. Along with other National Co-ordination Points across the UK activities have been carried out using European funding to:

- implement a comprehensive communications strategy;
- produce an EQF digest with a commentary on the UK referencing report in light of referencing reports from other countries;
- work closely with sectors (by supplying information and answering questions) and promote the recognition of prior learning in relation to the EQF; and
- facilitate technical exchanges between key EU Member States.

Further information on the EQF is available at <http://ec.Europa.eu/eqf>.

More information on the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF and information on the UK projects linked to the EQF can be found on the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk.

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across Europe and other collaborating European countries. ECTS credits are awarded on the basis of 60 ECTS credits for one academic year.

ECTS enables the transfer of credit from one institution to another, promoting greater student mobility. Therefore, if you have students who are studying part of their course in Europe, or planning to do so, their SCQF Credit Points need to be converted to ECTS, or conversely ECTS needs to be converted to SCQF Credit Points. This is done by either multiplying or dividing by two. To convert ECTS to SCQF Credit Points multiply the number of ECTS credits by two and to convert SCQF Credit Points to ECTS divide the number of SCQF Credit Points by two.

The ECTS Users' Guide, available on the European Commission website, provides guidelines for the implementation of ECTS. Visit <http://www.europa.eu>.

EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) allows for the accumulation and transfer of credits gained through the recognition of learning outcomes in vocational education and training (VET) across Europe. ECVET has been developed to facilitate the recognition of achievements in vocational education and training, in formal, informal and non-formal learning. Although ECVET is underpinned by European legislation, participation is voluntary and national protocols are respected.

The aim of ECVET is to facilitate the mobility of the workforce across Europe, giving individuals more control over their learning experiences. It does this by facilitating the mobility of VET students by enabling the accumulation of credits from different training providers in different countries. Credits are validated by each awarding institution and recognised by the awarding body of the final qualification. It has been tested in pilot projects across the European Union with the intention of extending its application gradually to a wider range of VET qualifications, either existing or new, as part of the Education and Training 2020 initiative.

The SCQF Partnership was appointed by the Scottish Government as the National Contact Point (NCP) for ECVET in Scotland to provide information and guidance to parties involved in the implementation of ECVET. The NCPs across the UK submitted to the European Commission for some funds to appoint ECVET experts and 8 have now been appointed. Two of these are in Scotland. Their role over the course of 2012-2013 will be to develop guidance to help awarding bodies and training providers engaging with ECVET activities to understand how ECVET can be linked to SCQF credit points.

The NCP for Scotland is part of a wider network of contact points in the UK, the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA).

Further information on ECVET is available at <http://ecvet-team.eu>. More information about ECVET activities in Scotland will appear in the European section of the SCQF website.

THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA), developed through the Bologna Process, was launched in March 2010 with the Budapest-Vienna Declaration. Since the inception of the Bologna Process in 1999 the main objective is to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. The next decade will be aimed at consolidating the EHEA through a process of intense internal and external communication.

Scotland has engaged fully with the Bologna process from the outset. Specific achievements and examples of Scottish engagement since 1999 include:

- Scotland has consistently scored well in the Bologna Stocktaking process (a periodic reporting of how far each country has progressed in implementing the “Bologna Reforms”)
- In work led by QAA Scotland, we became one of the first two countries to self certify their HE Qualifications Framework against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
- Enhancement Led Institutional Review led by QAA Scotland has placed greater emphasis on international dimensions in curricula, the experience of international students studying in Scottish HE and the involvement of international reviewers for external review
- Bologna seminars on learning outcomes were held in Edinburgh in both 2004 and 2008. The British Council and Higher Education Academy hosted a further seminar in Dundee in January 2009 and QAA Scotland led on a recognition of prior learning event in Brussels in February 2010
- Five Scottish-based “Bologna Experts” are part of the UK team of fourteen for the next two years (2012-13) - including three academics and a student
- NUS Scotland are promoting greater mobility of Scottish students and integration of international students in Scotland through a three-year project “Students Without Borders”

The Scottish Bologna Stakeholders Group which comprises representatives of interested education stakeholders meets regularly to discuss the Scottish approach, share best practice and plan for the future. Members of this group take part in Bologna Working Groups and Networks on Qualifications Frameworks, Recognition Data Collection, Student Support and promotion of the EHEA worldwide.

More information on the EHEA can be found at <http://www.ehea.info>.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) brings together the EU Member States, the Social Partners and the European Commission to develop and improve quality assurance in European VET systems within the context of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework by:

- assisting the Member States in developing effective approaches to support the implementation of the Reference Framework;
- developing a culture of quality, to be embedded at European level and other levels with the help of the Quality Assurance National Reference Points and other Network members;
- supporting the Member States and the European Commission in the monitoring and implementation of the Reference Framework within the context of the Education and Training 2020 Strategy; and
- supporting the quality assurance dimension of work in EQF and ECVET.

EQAVET aims to increase the transparency, market relevance, consistency and transferability of vocational education and training qualifications across Europe. EQAVET is compatible with the main quality models. It includes a quality assurance and improvement cycle based on quality criteria and indicative descriptors and addresses both VET systems and VET providers.

As a generalisation, there are two main approaches to EQAVET implementation:

- implement a QA system based on EQAVET
- relate existing QA systems to EQAVET

In Scotland and the rest of the UK implementation will be via the latter approach. Scotland completed a self evaluation against the criteria during 2011 and identified that it met almost all criteria very well. The exceptions were in data capture related to learner destination and this gap is being discussed. Scotland will also reconsider an action plan in relation to EQAVET implementation once the full outcome of the Post-16 Review is known.

More information is available at <http://www.eqavet.eu>.

EUROPEAN NETWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Established in 2000, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was transformed into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, however the acronym ENQA still remains.

ENQA is a membership organisation with the following aims:

- to represent its members at European level and internationally, especially in political decision making processes and in co-operation with stakeholder organisations;
- to function as a think tank for developing further quality assurance processes and systems in the EHEA; and
- to function as a communication platform for sharing and disseminating information and expertise in quality assurance among members and towards stakeholders.

To achieve these objectives ENQA disseminates information on experience and good practice through a number of means: conferences, workshops, seminars and projects.

QAA is a full member of ENQA and has taken a leading role in international developments, standards and quality. QAA has been through ENQA's accreditation process and meets ENQA's standards and guidelines for national quality assurance agencies.

More information on ENQA can be found at www.enqa.eu.

EUROPEAN SKILLS, COMPETENCES, QUALIFICATIONS AND OCCUPATIONS

The European Commission is co-ordinating, in collaboration with stakeholders, a multilingual taxonomy of skills, competences and occupations called the European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO). The aim is to develop a common language between education and training and the world of work. It will be a key enabler in creating an open, flexible and adaptable labour market for the EU, one of the building blocks of New Skills for New Jobs and Europe 2020. ESCO will be structured around three pillars:

- Occupations
- Skills/competences
- Qualifications

This work is being taken forward by the EU Directorate General for Employment through the Heads of Public Employment Services Network (HoPES). The taxonomy for ESCO will be developed in a way that complements and builds upon existing classifications, including the UK's National Occupational Standards.

ESCO will improve information exchange and facilitate co-operation between education/training and employment service providers, between public and private employment services and between public employment services of different countries.

Work on ESCO is still in the developmental stage. Partners from the worlds of education, training and work must be able not only to link their existing classifications to ESCO, but also to create new classifications around enriched tools and applications that reflect the latest market developments and provide more and better options for matching, up-skilling and exchange of information and co-operation.

It is expected that a first usable outcome from ESCO will become available in 2012 and will be continuously updated in line with market developments and the corresponding demand for new skills. It will be made available free of charge to all interested institutions and operators in the labour market and within the education and training sector.

More information on ESCO can be found at <http://ec.europa.eu/social>.

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