

COVERAGE OF AN NQF IN SERBIA

Introduction

1. As discussed at the first meeting of the Group, it is important to be clear about the *coverage* of an NQF from the beginning. We cannot sensibly discuss the features of an NQF unless we know what fields of education and training it will cover. This paper discusses a range of alternatives, from the broadest to the narrowest, and identifies the critical issues which the Working Group needs to consider.

Option A – a wide framework

2. A wide framework would cover:

- secondary education whether general or vocational (qualifications are not issued in elementary education);
- viša škola;
- university education;
- state supported adult education and training (RTCs and NES);
- training undertaken privately (organized by firms or by individuals on their own account).

3. In one sense such a wide framework would be easy to apply. All that would be needed would be to agree a series of levels for the various categories of education (for example, in EQF terms, secondary education might be EQF levels 2-4, viša škola might be EQF level 5, and university education levels 6-8). A wide framework like this would obviously contain different jurisdictions within it – the University system would set rules for - and assure quality - its own qualifications. The MoES would, quite separately, control the qualifications in secondary education, and different arrangements again would apply to the other categories.

4. A number of countries present their education and training systems in these terms when explaining it to people from abroad, or to their own citizens, and it is useful to do so. However it leaves open the questions of:

- just what are the arrangements within each sub-system – are they satisfactory or not?
- just what are the equivalences between the different parts of the system – are qualifications in adult training, for example, which are assigned to level 3 considered to be the same as qualifications in the school system which are given the same level?
- what are the practical possibilities for individuals to proceed up the 'ladder' of levels. Does anyone who has, say, a level 3 in EQF terms (probably equivalent to a 3 year vocational diploma in Serbia) have a reasonable expectation to be able to enter a level 4 programme or not? If they do is this expectation limited to the sub-system in which they have gained their level 3?

These are the interesting and difficult questions which it will be important to answer. A wide framework, simply linked to a series of levels, will not answer them by itself.

5. It is suggested therefore, that we do not focus the work on a wide framework. It may, of course, be useful to present public information about qualifications in this general manner, but serious work on the common features of a Serbian qualifications system needs to take place within the various sub-systems. This is the case with the qualifications systems of most other countries, too.

Option B – a framework for secondary education

6. A more focussed approach would be to concentrate on a framework for secondary education. Serbia, in fact, already has a developed structure within its secondary education system, which has many of the features of an NQF, such as established levels of qualification, mechanisms for quality assurance, procedures for the issue of certificates *etc.** This kind of framework is commonly seen in Western Europe, for example in France where there is a structure of *baccalauréats* for academic, technical and vocational study.

7. Such a framework would allow formal equivalences across secondary education, and could be used to give common structures (for example on assessment or modules). By itself, though, it would not cover adult education whether formal or informal – certificates issued by private trainers, the NES or individual firms would not be included in the NQF. And the position of vocational education in the *viša škola* would be uncertain.

8. While it is true that many EU countries treat secondary education separately in terms of qualifications, and a number do not yet have a recognized structure for qualifications in adult education, it is certainly the case that many have moved to make available a recognized system of certificates for adults. In some cases (UK, Netherlands) the structure of adult qualifications is deliberately linked to the qualifications in the school system. In others (Sweden, Denmark) adult certificates effectively form a separate system, though some linkages are made. The pressure to develop recognized adult certificates comes from:

- restructuring of industry with a need for redundant workers and those with outdated skills to 're-qualify' ;
- the presence in the population of adults who have missed out on formal education, whether immigrants, refugees or those who have dropped out of initial schooling for social reasons;
- a desire to encourage the adult population to participate in education and training, and a belief that many will not be motivated to do so unless they have the prospect of gaining a recognized certificate;
- a desire to quality-assure the adult training market, using control of qualifications as a means of doing this.

It is suggested that all these factors are relevant to Serbia.

Option C – A framework covering all of VET

9. Under this option an NQF would aim to cover all of secondary (but not academic) VET, *viša škola*, adult training sponsored by the State, and adult training undertaken in firms and by private individuals. Of course it would be possible for people to take training which did not lead to certificates, but the aim would be for all individuals and firms to have access to a certificate if they chose to do so (and were prepared to meet the costs and the quality assurance requirements).

10. Such a framework has been the aim in a number of countries, though it is difficult to point to one where a wholly unified VET framework has been achieved. In particular the certification of informal learning, though possible in a number of countries, is not commonly undertaken, and – as we have seen – often rather different systems exist for initial training and adult VET, with different authorities responsible.

11. A further issue is the treatment of VET in universities. Undeniably much of university study is vocational in nature. To exclude it from a national VET framework seems wrong. It also gives the impression that the higher levels of VET are not achievable for those who start in the lower levels, thus placing a 'glass ceiling' on progression within VET. On the other hand it is

* It may be argued that these features are not necessarily the right ones, but there are the mechanisms to change them if Serbia so wishes.

difficult to find ways of combining the autonomy of universities with the industry and occupational standards which usually apply in VET.

Option D – a new model framework

12. So far we have been assuming that an NQF will cover existing areas of education and training, perhaps encouraging or requiring progressive changes in it, but initially at least accepting its practices. A different approach would be to set up a framework which was 'empty' to begin with, but which admitted qualifications only as they adopted its requirements. In this way no compromises on quality would be needed. All qualifications within the NQF would accord with well-designed and modern requirements.

13. Such a framework could be designed around the features of the pilot curricula in vocational schools. It would expand as more curricula were developed.

14. The dangers in this type of approach are that:

- if modernization efforts stopped or changed direction, the new framework would never become national, but rather be a small 'village' of reformed practice, complicating the understanding of everyone;
- even if it continued to grow there would be a long period where some older qualifications were outside the framework, while other newer ones were within it. This would result in 'two systems' over a long period, which would be confusing to all.

Recommendation

15. It is suggested that Option C should be the focus of work on a Serbian NQF. The intention should be to build a framework which is capable of covering all of VET. However, for the reasons mentioned the following features should be adopted:

- there should not be an initial attempt to include vocational education in the university sector, but links and progression to university will be an important concern;
- similarly links with academic secondary education through the *Matura* system should be retained;
- viša škola should be included;
- it may need to be accepted that the structure and methods of quality assurance for secondary VET and adult training will differ substantially, though they should be accommodated within the same overall framework;
- at this stage it should not be a priority to try to fit the results into the EQF. That stage should come later. The EQF is not designed to help people create an NQF, but rather to allow one NQF to be compared to another.