

Evidence from:

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The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) was established on 1 April 1994 and is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education in Northern Ireland.

CCEA's duties and functions are to:

- keep under review all aspects of the curriculum, examinations and assessment for grant aided schools and colleges of further education and to undertake statutory consultation on proposals relating to legislation;
- advise the DE on matters concerned with the curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications and accredit and approve qualifications;
- conduct and moderate examinations and assessments, ensuring that standards are recognised as equivalent to standards of examinations and assessments conducted by other bodies or authorities exercising similar functions in the United Kingdom;
- publish and disseminate information relating to the curriculum, assessment and examinations;
- develop and produce teaching support materials for use in schools; and
- carry out research and development.

CCEA also has a remit for the development of educational technology and the production of multimedia resources and is considered a leader in this field.

My primary expertise lies in EQF and ECVET. While I have some knowledge of other recognition tools, my primary involvement is in EQF and ECVET.

Implementation of EQF and ECVET is still at an early stage and as such, it is too early to report on the full impact of the initiatives. However, it is clear that the initiatives give rise to increased promotion and emphasis on cross-border recognition and mobility, which, in itself, has been useful. EQF has become a useful starting point and reference in dealing with case work with ECVET mobility practitioners. The development of an EQF Portal is also likely to have positive impacts on national agencies in facilitating reference and comparison of qualifications.

The EU VET initiatives aim to facilitate more informed comparability and recognition of qualifications and skills across the EU and ultimately to ensure and promote geographic mobility within the EU. The success of these EU recognition tools lies in the trust and understanding that is gradually built up of national education and training systems.

Adopting ECVET principles and tools encourages high quality mobility periods and best practice adherence. This best practice and recognition maximises the value of

mobility periods by ensuring appropriate recognition of any training or learning undertaken on the mobility period.

The EU VET recognition tools are interdependent and can only be implemented successfully if EU member states have adequate and trusted quality assurance measures embedded within their VET systems. EQAVET is a community of practice established to develop and improve quality assurance in European VET systems within the context of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF).

Within the UK, our benchmarking exercise to the EQARF QA indicators showed that we are in a good position in terms of meeting the indicators but there are some gaps highlighting the need for improvement in some areas.

All of the EU VET initiatives are voluntary and implemented in accordance with national legislation and practice. For example the EQF recommendation does not replace or define national qualifications systems; ECVET and EQARF can be used as a toolkit to refine or reform existing national systems, depending on national legislation and practice.

There is no case for increased prescription from the EU, and doing so would be counter-productive to the successful implementation of these initiatives. As such, the current approach of support and provision of best practice toolkits is the right one. The funding provided by the EU for implementation of the initiatives is also key to participation, as without funding, the extent of member state participation is unclear.

There is much work and costs attached to implementing the initiatives, but the Northern Ireland Executive is supportive of the initiatives and considers the implementation work to be largely appropriate. Nonetheless, there is some risk of mission creep where the EU Commission risks moving beyond support into the area of design and prescription. An example of this is the EU push for EQF level and emblem to appear on qualification certificates and Europass supplements. The UK's reaction to this requirement was to include EQF level on qualification databases and Awarding Organisations can include EQF level on their qualification certificates if they choose to do so. (The UK EQF NCPs plan to do further work in this area to ascertain AO application of this requirement). It is important that the EU maintains its role in coordination and support, and does not move into a role of prescription and design.

It is also important to recognise that in the implementation of initiatives member states will be at different starting positions. For example, referencing to the EQF required many Member States to develop national qualification frameworks to reference to the EQF. This process has delayed the EQF recommendation referencing timeline and the EQF influence may have unintended consequences for member states. There should be recognition of the need for flexibility in member state implementation.

This should also be extended to recognition of individual state circumstances in implementation. For example, in the UK, the presence of devolved administrations, with distinct systems and interests, can require more effort both in implementation

and in reporting under the initiatives. There is scope for reducing the reporting requirements involved in the initiatives and streamlining requests for information, which would reduce the workload on agencies without compromising the positive impacts of the initiatives.

Finally, there can be a tendency for new initiatives to be proposed before existing initiatives have been given time to have an impact or to be evaluated. Initiatives should be given the time to bed in and be evaluated before new initiatives are proposed. It is important to take time between implementation and review to allow for full assessment of impact of initiatives.