



norden

Nordiska ministerrådet

**MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE**

**IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**



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# FROM EQF TO NQFS

The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European eight level reference framework to ensure comparability of learning outcomes and qualifications. The European qualification framework has stimulated the development of national comprehensive frameworks that incorporate qualifications from different education and training sectors into a common structure. It is an essential stimulus to cross-border mobility and the promotion of lifelong learning.

# Implementation of National Qualification Frameworks

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The EQF has been a driver for increased transparency and system reforms. In the Nordic countries the EQF and its national implementation are in most cases communication tools and a means to increase the transparency of qualifications rather than as an enabling tool in system change. This is not the case for Iceland, however, where the introduction of ISQF has gone hand-in-hand with reforms of the education system. Still, the European instruments are well aligned to lifelong learning policies, which traditionally have played a prominent role in the Nordic countries, and the usage of learning outcomes was generally introduced in curriculum and in validation at an early stage. Even if learning outcomes were used prior to the implementation of the European tools, the recent reform of the upper secondary VET system in Denmark has shown that qualification frameworks play a role in policy making for example in discussions about permeability.

The process of introducing NQFs based on the EQF is now in different phases of implementation in the Nordic countries. All the Nordic countries started with implementation of national qualification frameworks in the context of higher education, a process which is now completed. The two countries that are furthest in the development and referencing of national qualifications frameworks are Iceland and Denmark. Their qualification frameworks have been adopted and the referencing reports have been published. Denmark completed the referencing process in 2011 and Iceland in 2013. Norway presented their referencing report to the EQF Advisory group in Brussels in June 2014. Finland and Sweden expect referencing to take place in 2015. In Iceland, the development of the ISQF was an integral part of a new legislation and corresponding curricula and it occurred in parallel to the revision of the Icelandic education system and the development of new curricula based on learning outcomes to create

a coherent lifelong learning system. In Denmark legislative changes have been made facilitating implementation process. There have been active discussions with relevant stakeholders in all the countries.

# Status On National Qualification Frameworks

TABLE  
01

	RESPONSIBLE NQF AUTHORITY AND EQF - CONTACT POINT(S)	INVOLVEMENT OF USERS	STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT	COMPREHENSIVENESS
<b>DK</b>	<p><b>Responsible authority:</b> The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture (inter-ministerial coordination group).</p> <p><b>Coordination Point:</b> The Danish Agency for Higher Education.</p>	National councils and committees working groups, seminars, hearings, participation in pilot projects and evaluation.	The Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning was adopted by the ministers in 2009. The NQF was referenced to the EQF in May 2011. The framework is now fully implemented and has reached an operational stage, supported by the EQF national coordination point established in 2010. The implementation was evaluated in 2013. The qualifications framework for higher education was adopted in 2006/2007 and the framework was self-certified to the EHEA (Bologna) Framework in 2009.	<p>The NQF covers all levels of formal education and training thus also integrating/building on the framework for higher education in the Danish education system and including all adult education and training programmes.</p> <p>As part of the evaluation of the implementation of the NQF, a mapping of non-formal qualifications was conducted in 2013 in order to further consider how qualifications outside the formal system, including international qualifications and certificates, can be aligned to the NQF in Denmark.</p>
<b>FI</b>	<p><b>Responsible authority:</b> Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.</p> <p><b>Coordination Point:</b> The Finnish National Board of Education.</p>	National Committee was formed in 2008-2009. Public written consultations took place in 2009 and 2010.	A first proposal was presented in 2009, and a revised proposal in 2010. It was resubmitted to parliament after slight changes in May 2012. The referencing of the EQF and the self-certification to the European Higher Education Area will be one process.	Intended to open up towards competences acquired outside the formal qualification system.
<b>IS</b>	<p><b>Responsible authority:</b> The Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science &amp; Culture.</p> <p><b>Coordination point:</b> The Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science &amp; Culture.</p>	<p>Working groups established to support the process with a broad participation of relevant stakeholders in 2008. Public consultation took place in spring 2013.</p> <p>Pilot schools have been working on rewriting curricula and study paths connected to learning outcomes and qualification frameworks since 2008.</p>	<p>First four levels of the ISQF were published in the National Curriculum Guidelines for upper secondary schools in May 2011. Combined frameworks were introduced in the reference report of the ISQF to the EQF and presented in December 2013.</p> <p>With the new Higher Education Act of 2006, the system of higher education was adapted to the Bologna process, including an obligatory Diploma Supplement, introduction of the ECTS-system as well as an Icelandic National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (ISQFHE). The qualifications framework for HE was formally adopted in 2007 and revised in 2010.</p>	<p>The ISQF covers mainly all formal education from upper secondary school to HE, even though it exists in two separate parts. Outstanding issues relate to the incorporation of learning taking place outside the formal education system, and to adult learning. A working group was established to present suggestions on how that would be done.</p> <p>In a regulation from 2011 and guidelines on curriculum in adult education from 2013 adult education is supposed to be quality assured and linked to EQF.</p>

# Status On National Qualification Frameworks

TABLE  
01

	RESPONSIBLE NQF AUTHORITY AND EQF - CONTACT POINT(S)	INVOLVEMENT OF USERS	STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT	COMPREHENSIVENESS
<b>NO</b>	<p><b>Responsible authority:</b> The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.</p> <p><b>Coordination point:</b> Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).</p>	<p>Social partners and relevant organisations and stakeholders have been widely involved in the process through working groups and consultations.</p>	<p>National qualifications framework for lifelong learning adopted in December 2011. The NQF was referenced to the EQF on June 6th, 2014. Legislative regulations awaiting.</p> <p>The Norwegian qualifications framework for higher education to the QF-EHEA, adopted in March 2009, is integrated in the NQF.</p>	<p>The NOF covers all levels in the formal education and training system. A committee has been nominated to look at how non-formal qualifications/competences can be included in the NQF. The result of this work is to be presented in a report by the end of 2014.</p>
<b>SE</b>	<p><b>Responsible authority:</b> The Ministry of Education and Research has the overall responsibility for the NQF.</p> <p><b>Coordination point:</b> The Agency for Higher Vocational Education.</p>	<p>A proposal for a national qualifications framework is currently out on hearing. A broad group of stakeholders have been invited to give their view on the proposal until 17th of October 2014.</p>	<p>A formal decision expected in the beginning of 2015 in the form of an Ordinance. Reports on the referencing of the SEQF to the EQF are planned to be presented to the EQF Advisory Group during spring 2015. The self-certification to the European higher Education area was submitted in 2011.</p>	<p>The national qualifications framework will be open for applications from providers of non-formal education in a second step.</p>

# Characteristics of the Nordic Qualification Frameworks

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Two of the Nordic countries, Iceland and Norway, have opted for a seven level framework. In Denmark Sweden and Finland the national frameworks include eight levels like the EQF. All the Nordic countries are influenced by the descriptors of the EQF, but they have at the same time chosen to broaden and partly re-profile the descriptors taking into account national circumstances. Finland is the only Nordic country that has expanded its framework to include five dimensions, which have been combined in one descriptor.

All the Nordic countries acknowledge in their descriptors that knowledge can both be practical and theoretical. Iceland explicitly states that knowledge is acquired in a range of contexts that are socially mediated, and both Denmark and Norway refer to complexity in knowledge constructs. The focus on manual and cognitive skills has been expanded, also taking into account key competences. One or several key competences are descriptors in all the frameworks.

# Descriptors

**TABLE  
02**

	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCE		
<b>DK</b>	Type of knowledge (about theory or practice or a subject or field of profession). Complexity of Knowledge Understanding (situate knowledge in a context).	Types of skills: practical, cognitive, creative or communicative. Complexity of problem solving Communication.	Space for action. Type of work-study related context. Degree of unpredictability of these contexts. Cooperation and responsibility. Learning.		
<b>FI</b>	Knowledge.	Work methods and applications.	Responsibility Management Entrepreneurship.	Evaluation.	Key skills for life-long learning.
<b>IS</b>	Collection of facts, principles theories and methods. Theoretical and practical. Knowledge is acquired by watching, reading, listening, discussing or through other modes. Knowledge is analysed by discussing, comparing categorising. Knowledge is communicated through various forms of expression.	Cognitive and practical. Involves the ability to apply methods and practices. Skills involve analysis by choosing methods, and the organisation of procedures. Skill is communicated by applying working methods, tools, and other forms of expression.	Involves broad-mindedness and the ability to use knowledge and skills. Competence is based on responsibility, broad-mindedness, creativity, moral values, tolerance and the students' appreciation of own abilities. Competence involves learners' analysis of own knowledge and skills through comparison, finding connections, simplifying, drawing conclusions, reflecting, reasoning. Analytical competence involves critical thinking and professional criticism. Communication competence involves various forms of expression where cognitive, artistic, and practical knowledge and skills are interrelated with the moral and social values of an individual.		
<b>NO</b>	An understanding of theories, facts, principles, procedures in subject areas and/or occupations.	The ability to utilise knowledge to solve problems or tasks (cognitive, practical, creative and communication skills).	The ability to utilise knowledge and skills in an independent manner in different situations.		
<b>SE</b>	Experience-based or theoretical.	Perform tasks and solve problems.	Ability to take responsibility, evaluate, and to act autonomously.		

*Source: National reports on NQF*

In all the descriptor frameworks learning is explicitly or implicitly included as part of the competence descriptors and closely linked to the ability to act in a reflected manner and as part of being a lifelong learner. In the Finnish and the Swedish framework the term "evaluation" is used to denote that all learners are expected to reflect critically on their own knowledge, skills and competences, and on how these can be improved. In the Norwegian and in the Danish framework these competences are explicitly mentioned, as they are critical foundations for lifelong learning.

# VALIDATION

Non-formal and informal learning play a prominent role in Nordic lifelong learning policies. In some of the Nordic countries it has in fact been possible for an individual to have his/her competences validated prior to EU's initiatives in the field. There are similarities, but also differences in the Nordic approaches to validation.

In general, validation is more integrated in vocational education and training than in higher education in the Nordic countries. In higher education validation is mostly used as a way of access, whereas validation in vocational education and training is used by adults as an accelerated pathway to qualification. There are differences between the countries in the extent to which there is a legislative framework in place and in the ways in which validation is used, what it is called, and how much it is used and by whom.

## Developments in the Nordic countries

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Lifelong learning strategies have developed over time in the Nordic countries, and they have informed developments in validation policies and practices. In European studies, Finland, Norway and Denmark are recognised for their comprehensive validation frameworks, which have developed over a long period of time.

There is also a strong cooperation on lifelong learning between the Nordic countries; there is a Nordic expert network in validation<sup>1</sup>, and a recent quality handbook on validation<sup>2</sup> produced with support from the Nordic programme Nordplus.

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1. <http://www.nordvux.net/page/id/573/title/validering>

2. <http://www.viauc.dk/projekter/NVR/aktiviteter/Sider/NordplusprojektII.aspx>

## Policy frameworks

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The systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Sweden are under development. In April 2014 the Swedish Government initiated an inquiry on how the systems can be strengthened.

The Swedish Education Act (Skollagen 2010) states the intention to undertake validation in all parts of adult education, and the possibility for validation is regulated in the Swedish Ordinance for Adult Education. Specific sector models for validation are used in government initiatives aimed to spur employability, coordinated by the Swedish Public Employment Service. The efforts to establish common processes and methods for validation initiated by the Swedish National Commission on Validation are now coordinated and supported by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

In Iceland validation has developed considerably in a relatively short period, aligned to the general thrust of recent education reforms. Validation does not yet cover all sectors, but there are plans to gradually expand the system over the next few years. The legislative framework is in place both at the general and vocational upper secondary levels and in adult education, providing an individual entitlement to validation of non-formal and informal learning providing access, shortening programme duration and providing opportunities to acquire a certificate.

# Key features of validation in the Nordic countries

TABLE  
03

	LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK	LINKS TO QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK/ QUALIFICATIONS	VALIDATION ARRANGEMENTS AND TARGET GROUPS	METHODS
<b>DK</b>	<p>Key legislation on validation of prior learning in adult education and training in place with Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007<sup>3</sup>. The legislation for VET (2003) includes individual competence assessments as basis for personal education plans. Since 2007, access to short-cycle and medium-cycle higher education through validation. Validation is free of charge up to upper secondary level. Funding is embedded in the taximeter system.</p>	<p>Most qualification in the Danish qualification framework are linked to different validation arrangements providing access, shortening programme duration, or granting certificates. In VET and adult education and training it is possible to award a full qualification with identical standards as qualifications obtained through formal education. In HE in practice it is not possible to award a full qualification, but there are no limits to the number of credits that can be achieved through validation. The certification is identical whether credits are gained through validation or formal learning.</p>	<p>Assessment is undertaken by education providers according to area and level of assessment. There are no formal requirements regarding an assessor's formal skills in validation. A training module has been developed, but it is not compulsory. Target group is low skilled.</p>	<p>Portfolio is widely used by individuals to document their competences. A general tool was developed by Danish Technological Institute in close cooperation with the social partners and the Ministry of Education. <a href="http://www.minkompetence-mappe.dk">www.minkompetence-mappe.dk</a></p>
<b>FI</b>	<p>There are separate laws for each educational sector. There are no dead ends in the system. The competence-based framework in continuing vocational adult education has been in place since the 90s. Procedures are embedded in the formal education system, most cases free for the applicant.</p>	<p>Validation is strongly linked to credit systems and modularised qualifications. CBQs are modular, but credits do not apply. IVET uses credits. It is planned to have ECVET-compatible competence points implemented in 2015. HEIs have used credit system compatible with the ECTS since 2005 and the degrees are somewhat modular. The certification is identical whether credits are gained through validation or formal learning.</p>	<p>Mandatory assessor training (Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications). In HEIs there are no mandatory qualifications for the professionals. There are training courses and seminars and networks available for the validation practitioners in HEIs. In most cases teachers/training staff undertake validation.</p>	<p>In VET the competences are demonstrated in a real work environment (e.g. at one's own job or on-the-job-learning). In HEIs different methods are being used, incl. portfolios, interviews and tests. Documented evidence is utilised widely in all sectors.</p>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=25349> Source National Inventory update Validation 201

# Key features of validation in the Nordic countries

TABLE  
03

	LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK	LINKS TO QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK/ QUALIFICATIONS	VALIDATION ARRANGEMENTS AND TARGET GROUPS	METHODS
<b>IS</b>	2008 law for upper secondary level. 2010 law for adult learning - basis for an individual's entitlement to validation towards credits/units at upper secondary level. A regulation for validation has been in place since 2011.	The legislation makes it possible to link the adult education to the ISQF. The process of identifying the non-formal qualifications and linking them to the framework is ongoing. Quality assurance will be demanded and a curriculum database is in development.	The upper secondary schools are according to law responsible for validation. ETSC centrally makes contracts with accredited lifelong learning (LLL) centres around the country for the execution of projects based on funding from the Education and Training Fund, which, since 2011 is allocated specifically for the target group through the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.	The ETSC plays a central role in developing consistent methodology and quality assurance, including training of assessors. Pilot projects are being used to gradually refine methodologies.
<b>NO</b>	Since 2000, legislation in place for different parts of the education and training system. This covers all levels of education and training. For post-secondary, VET validation introduced in regulations in August 2013.	The Education Act permits candidates to achieve a partial qualification at any level through validation.	<p>The new guidelines include recommendations on competence development for guidance practitioners, assessors or other practitioners.</p> <p>There are no mandatory qualifications for the professionals.</p> <p>Target group is adults seeking access to education and training on the basis of non-formal and informal learning.</p>	National guidelines in place for validation in lower and upper secondary education and training. A guide for validation in 2013 for access to post-secondary non-university vocational and for recognition of parts of higher education.
<b>SE</b>	Possibility of validation is regulated in Education Act (2010) and the Ordinance for adult education. Government inquiry in 2014 on further development and strengthening of validation systems.	A qualification framework is not yet in place. Each formal education level has its own unit-based credit system. Validation can result in both partial and full qualifications in adult education, but in higher education there is no possibility for a full qualification. For an award of a full or partial qualification the same standards are used as in the formal education system.	Variety of actors responsible for separate parts of validation, such as teachers and career and guidance counsellors in adult education and the Public Employment Service. Validation of vocational competences is performed in cooperation with sector organisations. Newly arrived immigrants are a specific target group for validation at the Public Employment Service.	Methods and criteria described in in the national guidelines (Kompetenskartläggning).

# THE OBJECTIVES OF ECVET

ECVET is a tool to aid individuals in the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes on their way to achieving a qualification.

The development of ECVET began in 2002 and was a part of the the Copenhagen process. The Copenhagen Process defined joint political priorities regarding the future enhanced cooperation in VET, which was adopted in the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002 by the ministers of education of thirty-one European countries, the European Commission and the European social partners. One of the areas of cooperation proposed was the development of a credit system for VET, which was since adopted through a recommendation by the European Parliament and the Council in May 2009<sup>4</sup>.

## Learning outcomes not a new concept in the Nordic countries

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The Nordic countries have progressed in different ways to accommodate for ECVET, which reflects the different characteristics of the Nordic VET systems. In general the learning outcomes approach is not a new Nordic agenda, which is also a main factor explaining why the Nordic countries primarily see ECVET as a tool to promote transnational mobility. This is for example the case in Denmark. The Danish VET system has for many years and prior to ECVET been based on a learning outcomes approach. For now the decision is therefore to mainly use ECVET as a mobility tool, and not to implement ECVET in an already well-functioning learning-outcome-based system. As such ECVET is primarily used as a transparency tool for mobility and credit transfer, providing the opportunity to compare and document learners' achieved learning outcomes in Danish VET programmes versus foreign qualification programmes. A national guideline for using ECVET in VET colleges was developed in 2013.

4. <http://www.arqa-vet.at/eqavet/copenhagen-process//EN/>

# Aligning national arrangements with ECVET

## ECTS

The other Nordic countries are at different stages of implementation, reflecting national system characteristics. A wide engagement of stakeholders and piloting projects form part of the assessment and implementation framework.

In Norway, the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training has initiated a process to assess the impacts and to develop models for a possible implementation of ECVET. The deadline for reporting to the Ministry is the 1st December 2014.

In Sweden, the Swedish ECVET NCP has been focused in two areas: to analyse the ECVET-readiness of government-regulated VET qualifications to assess what types of changes are needed to accommodate for ECVET principles; and to engage stakeholders. In Sweden a credit points system is already in use, so part of the analysis also looks into finding a feasible way of converting a well-functioning national credit points system to ECVET points.

In Iceland a credit point system is already in use. According to the Education Act from 2008 one year of study amounts to 60 credit units as in ECVET. The implementation and rewriting of study paths, linking them to learning outcomes rather than study time, is in progress.

Finland has used a competence-based approach which dates back to the early 90s. According to plans, the use of ECVET points will begin with upper secondary qualifications. A steering group on the reform of the vocational qualification structure was also mandated to assess how ECVET can be implemented in the development of the national qualification structure. A proposal has been submitted to the Finnish Parliament regarding the necessary legislative changes. One of the proposals is to replace study weeks with competence points, so that competence points would be in place in August 2015.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the EU and other collaborating European countries. It is a tool that helps to design, describe, deliver and compare study programmes and award higher education qualifications. The use of ECTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes study programmes and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the recognition of qualifications both in terms of recognition of full degrees and in terms of credits transfer for study periods abroad. One of the major tasks has been to link learning outcome approaches in higher education with the use of ECTS. Currently a working group under the Bologna Secretariat is preparing a revised draft of the ECTS User's Guide with recommendations of linking ECTS and learning outcomes more closely together.

# The use of ECTS in higher education in the Nordic countries

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## EQAVET

ECTS is fully implemented in higher education in all the Nordic countries. In Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and Denmark there are structures in place whereby the workload is translated into credits as guidelines to the institutions. In Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland, higher education study programmes have been credit-based for decades. There are some variations between the countries in terms of the actual basis of calculation. In Norway, Iceland and in Sweden the number of credits per year for fulltime studies was changed to 60 to ensure ECTS compatibility. In Finland one year of studies is defined as 60 credits. Some of the Nordic countries indicate in their Bologna reporting that the European instruments have been a driver of a more learned centred pedagogy in higher education.

In June 2009 EU member states adopted a recommendation from the European Commission to establish a reference instrument to help to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. EQAVET is the result of this process.

Implementation of EQAVET varies across the Nordic countries due to system differences, but also influenced by pre-existing approaches to quality assurance.

Iceland has not participated in EQAVET work since 2007. Instead, Iceland has opted to make use of existing quality arrangements for upper secondary education and for continuing adult education and training. Sweden has from the outset been active in the working group that developed the recommendations for quality assurance for vocational education and training - EQAVET. All providers in the public education system must work with quality assurance, and EQAVET is one of such quality assurance frameworks. EQAVET plays a role as a tool used by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education when it is making a quality review of the work-based learning in Higher Vocational Education.

# Uptake of EQAVET

TABLE  
04

DK	FI	IS	NO	SE
Well-established existing quality system in line with the EQAVET framework and principles. Providers can choose concrete methods for quality assurance with national framework and legislation.	Finnish EQAVET approach to quality assurance has been implemented so that it builds on previous developments. The EQAVET framework was used in the preparation of the quality strategy for VET. It was developed by a working group chaired by the Ministry of Education with involvement of key stakeholders (e.g. VET providers, social partners, teachers and students). VET providers must have a quality assurance system in place by 2015. Many of the EQAVET indicators are used in Finland (some of them are included in performance based financing system).	All vocational education is in the upper secondary school where quality assurance in line with EQAVET is mandatory. It is up to providers to choose which framework they use.	A national quality assessment system is under development. EQAVET principles and indicators for quality assurance are integrated in the national system for quality assessment.	It is mandatory for providers to use quality assurance, but it is up to providers to choose which quality assurance framework they wish to apply. Agency for Higher Vocational Education makes use of EQAVET in quality review of work-based learning.

Denmark has also participated in EQAVET developments. Prior to EQAVET a comprehensive quality framework was in place at national and local levels, fully aligned to EQAVET principles. The 10 EQAVET indicators are almost fully applied in the Danish VET system.

Norway has been in a somewhat different situation, as the country is currently devising a framework for quality assessment in VET which makes use of the EQAVET framework. The primary objective of the national system is to improve quality of the learning outcomes for the learners. The QA system is used as a tool for improvement, control, planning and further development. The development process has involved the social partners in a reference group and in a steering committee for the project. The list of indicators provided in the EQAVET recommendations has been used as a toolbox for developing Norwegian indicators.

Also in Finland, the EQAVET framework has driven developments of the VET quality assurance system, which has undergone systematic developments since the 1990s. Early establishment of the Quality Assurance National Reference Point provided an impetus to developing an EQAVET-based Finnish approach to quality assurance in VET. VET providers are obliged by law to apply QA, but there is flexibility in terms of methodologies adopted. The implementation of the Quality Management Recommendation for VET<sup>5</sup> in Finland is part of the system level QA, and it is based on EQAVET.

5. [http://www.oph.fi/download/47655\\_quality\\_management\\_recommendation\\_for\\_vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/47655_quality_management_recommendation_for_vocational_education_and_training.pdf)

# QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG) have been formulated, within the Bologna process, by the European Association of Quality Assurance for Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European University Association (EUA), the European association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the European Student Union (ESU) They were approved in 2005 by the ministers within the Bologna process and concern standard and guidelines for:

- *Internal quality assurance within higher education institutions,*
- *External quality assurance of higher education and*
- *Quality assurance agencies.*

ENQA represents quality assurance agencies within the European higher Education Area (EHEA). For membership in ENQA a quality assurance agency has to comply with the ESG. Today ENQA has members from 23 countries within the EHEA, whereas 17 also are EU countries.

All the Nordic countries have comprehensive outcome-based quality assurance mechanisms in place supported by statistical monitoring arrangements measuring for example student completion rates and student flows through the system. The specific set-up varies among the countries.

In Norway the quality assurance Agency is NOKUT. It is a full member of ENQA, and was included in the EQAR register in the autumn of 2013. The same applies to Finland, where the responsible body for quality is the

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)<sup>6</sup>. FINHEEC has been assessed against the ENQA and EQAR membership criteria, and Finland is a full member of both. In Denmark the responsible bodies for quality assurance are EVA and the Danish Accreditation Institution. They have both been reviewed and are members of ENQA and both agencies are registered in the EQAR register of quality assurance agencies. EVA has additionally applied to be a member of EQAR. The Swedish Higher Education Authority has been a member since 2006, but is now a "full member under review" until September 2014. The authorities plan to apply for membership in a couple of years when the new system for external quality assurance is in place and when there has been some experience with the system<sup>7</sup>. Iceland is the only country where the quality assurance body, the Quality Board of Iceland, has not been evaluated against the ESG.

6. From May 2014 onwards Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

7. <http://english.uk-ambetet.se/qualityassurance/internationalcooperation.4.4.149f55713bbd917563800010256.html>

# MOBILITY

Since its economies are small and open, mobility is high on the Nordic agenda. Mutual recognition of qualifications is an ongoing policy priority. The Nordic countries have signed a number of agreements comprising vocational education, upper secondary general education and higher education. Nordic citizens can therefore take part of a study in any of the Nordic countries and have it fully recognised.

## Recognition of foreign qualifications

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There is an active Nordic network on recognition of foreign qualifications. The Nordic National Recognition Information Centres (NORRIC) is a network established by the five Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices. The NORRIC network cooperates and share practices on recognition of foreign credentials in the Nordic region. The institutional set-up for recognition of foreign qualifications varies between the Nordic countries.

In Norway, NOKUT is responsible for the recognition of higher education qualifications from abroad. This general recognition is primarily meant for the labour market. In addition, separate government agencies are responsible for the recognition of professions that are regulated by law. NOKUT is the NCP for the EU-directive on regulated professions. The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training has been commissioned to investigate models for recognition of foreign qualifications at an upper secondary level.

In Sweden, the Swedish Council for Higher Education is the responsible Agency for recognition of foreign qualifications.

The Finnish National Board of Education acts as the national ENIC/NARIC-centre. It also decides on the eligibility provided by foreign qualifications for civil service posts and many regulated professions. Field-specific authorities decide on granting professional practice rights for regulated professions. The Finnish National Board of Education also issues advisory statements on foreign vocational qualifications.

The NARIC/ENIC office at Iceland University is responsible for academic recognition. Professional recognition is handled by the various competent authorities under the direction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The NARIC/ENIC office does not make binding assessments; it merely provides guidance regarding recognition.

## Europass

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The Danish Agency for Higher Education has a comprehensive approach covering all qualification levels for employment purposes and for applicants seeking access to a Danish education programme.

In all the Nordic countries the education institutions have the responsibility and autonomy to make admission and credit transfer decisions for applicants with foreign qualifications.

As part of the 2020 strategy and in particular in light of persistent high unemployment, the Commission has stressed the importance of enabling learners and workers to clearly present their skills and qualification profiles, acquired either in formal, non-formal or informal settings. This serves to facilitate mobility and improve job and lifelong learning prospects. Established in 2005, Europass supports these goals. Europass is a portfolio of five different documents containing descriptions of the holder's learning achievements, official qualifications, work experience, and skills and competences acquired over time. Two Europass documents are self-declaration tools - the European Curriculum Vitae (CV) and the Europass Language Passport. Three are issued by education and training bodies - the Europass Diploma Supplement, the Europass Certificate Supplement and the Europass Mobility document. The Europass is a European success, and that holds true also for its use in the Nordic countries. Since 2014 there has been a marked increase in the use of Europass, as reflected in the statistics from EUROSTAT.

## Use of Europass in the Nordic countries 2005 to April 2014

TABLE  
05

USAGE	VISITS	ECVS ELPS COMPLETED ONLINE	EUROPASS COMPLETED ONLINE BY CITIZENS RESIDING IN THE COUNTRY	DOWNLOADS IN TOTAL
<b>DK</b>	207,545	22,138	64,263	154,956
<b>FI</b>	1,138,766	157,401	40,534	33,760
<b>IS</b>	54,404	14,802	20,113	99,886
<b>NO</b>	391,042	66,735	99,275	257,021
<b>SE</b>	527,580	98,137	140,299	250,700

Source: Cedefop

### Coordination of EUROPASS Activities

In Iceland, Denmark and Norway the coordination of Europass is handled by one body.

In Iceland, the Ministry of Education has delegated all the operations including communication activities concerned with Europass to the Icelandic Centre for Research – Rannis.

In Norway, the Norwegian Centre for International cooperation in Education (SIU) is the responsible agency. In 2011, the Norwegian Europass Certificate Supplement (ECS) was revised with new learning outcome descriptions for all 189 vocational certificates and a more user friendly web interface was implemented with a positive impact on usage. SIU has in the last years strengthened its cooperation with a broad range of mobility tools and actions to strengthen the implementation of the Europass framework in Norway. The use of Europass have experienced a positive development in the last years.

The Danish Agency for Higher Education is responsible for the implementation and development of Europass in Denmark. Qualification levels have been referenced to all Danish diploma supplements since 2012. The current revision of certificate supplements is expected to be finished in 2014 and all VET programmes will thus have clear references to the NQF and EQF levels.

There is a somewhat similar model in Finland. The Ministry of Education and Culture has designated the Finnish National Board of Education as Finland's National Europass Centre (NEC). The Finnish NEC cooperates with a range of partners to stimulate the use of Europass. As can be seen from the statistics, there has been quite a bit of interest in Europass in Finland.

In Sweden a consortium is responsible for the management of Europass, with different agencies being responsible for different parts of Europass documentation. The Swedish National Europass Centre (NEC) has been responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the different Europass documents and the issuing of Europass Mobility Document Supplements since 2012.

## LINKS TO EUROPEAN INSTRUMENTS

### **EQF:**

European Qualification Framework: - National referencing reports  
[www.ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/eqf/documentation_en.htm)

National Qualification frameworks- EHEA  
[www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=65](http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=65)

### **VALIDATION**

European Guidelines for validation:  
[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/4054\\_EN.PDF](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/4054_EN.PDF)

### **ECVET AND ECTS:**

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training:  
[www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/](http://www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/)

European Credit Transfer System:  
[www.ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm)

### **EQAVET, ENQA, EQAF:**

EQAVET: European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training:  
[www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx](http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx)

ENQA European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education:  
[www.enqa.eu/](http://www.enqa.eu/)

EQAF: European Quality Association Forum:  
[www.eurashe.eu/events/eqaf/](http://www.eurashe.eu/events/eqaf/)

### **RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS**

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Enic – Naric Network:  
[www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=g&d=about](http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=g&d=about)

### **EUROPASS**

Europass:  
[www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu)

Europass Statistics:  
[www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/resources/statistics](http://www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/resources/statistics)





**norden**

Nordiska ministerrådet