REPORT

REFERENCING THE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Qualifications Frameworks in the UK

CONTENTS

3 UK Overview

18 Qualifications can Cross Boundaries leaflet

20 England and Northern Ireland Report

58 Scotland Report

106 Wales Report

INTRODUCTION

This report is the single, comprehensive report setting out how the qualifications frameworks in the United Kingdom are referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The report establishes the referencing to the EQF, in accordance with the Criteria and Procedures agreed by the EQF Advisory Group, of three frameworks that accommodate a wide range of qualifications in the UK countries: the Qualifications and Credit Framework (England and Northern Ireland), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. It also explains how other qualifications frameworks in the UK relate to EQF: these are the National Qualifications Framework, The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland.

Three National Coordination Points were appointed to undertake the task of referencing the qualifications frameworks in the UK to the EQF. In addition, a UK EQF Coordination Group was established to provide a forum for the three National Coordination Points, together with other key stakeholders, to share information on the process of completing the referencing and to work together to provide a coherent approach to the adoption of the EQF across the UK.

The UK Government on behalf of the Devolved Administrations (Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government) is submitting this report to the European Commission.

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1

1 UK Overview 3
1.1 Background 3
1.2 Education, training and qualifications in the United Kingdom 3
1.3 Qualifications frameworks in the United Kingdom 5

2 Referencing UK qualifications frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework 8
2.1 General policy approach 8
2.2 Structures 8
2.3 The referencing process 9

3 Synthesis of Final Reports from the UK National Coordination Points 12

4 Conclusions 17

5 Appendix to UK Overview – Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries 18
A rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

Country Reports

A England and Northern Ireland 20
Report on referencing the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

B Scotland 58
Final Report on the referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

C Wales 106
Referencing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales to the European Qualifications Framework: Wales National Coordination Point Report

1 UK OVERVIEW

1.1 BACKGROUND

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) is an overarching qualifications framework, a 'meta-framework', designed to serve as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It was developed in response to requests from Member States of the European Union, the social partners and other stakeholders for a common reference tool to increase the transparency of qualifications. The principal aims of the EQF are to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

The EQF is a framework of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF is intended to encompass all levels of qualifications acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training.

The EQF was formally adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008, following a development and consultation process that commenced in 2004.

With the formal adoption of the EQF, a process of implementation was begun in early 2008. The European Parliament and Council has recommended that member states:

- relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualifications levels to the EQF levels; and
- adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

This Report is concerned with the first element of implementation in the United Kingdom: the referencing of the qualifications frameworks in the UK to the EQF.

In order to assist member states with implementation of the EQF, the European Commission has established an EQF Advisory Group, composed of representatives of member states and involving the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate. The aim of the EQF Advisory Group is to ensure that there is overall coherence in, and transparency of, the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF. For this purpose, the Advisory Group has developed and published a set of ten criteria and procedures for referencing national frameworks to the EQF. The process of referencing UK qualifications frameworks to the EQF has been undertaken in line with these criteria and procedures.

1.2 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The responsibility for education and training in the UK lies with the governing bodies for the four administrations in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The education, training and qualifications systems are broadly similar in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; however Scotland has always had distinct systems.

Primary and Secondary Education

More than 90% of students in the UK attend publicly-funded state schools. Approximately 8.5 million children attend one of the 30,000 schools in England and Wales; in Scotland, 830,000 children attend about 5,000 schools, including pre-schools and other special education schools; and Northern Ireland sends

350,000 children to 1,300 state schools. Primary schools usually include both girls and boys as pupils. Secondary schools may be either single-sex or co-educational.

National Curriculum and qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

By law, all children between ages 5 and 16 must receive a full-time education. England and Wales introduced a National Curriculum in 1992 and state schools are required to adhere to it until students reach age 16. However, independent schools are not obliged to do so. National Curriculum core subjects are: English, mathematics and science; Welsh is a core subject in Welsh-speaking schools. National Curriculum foundation subjects are design and technology; information and communication technology; history; geography; modern foreign languages; music; art and design; physical education; religious education; and citizenship.

In Northern Ireland a statutory curriculum was introduced from 1990. Subsequent revision of the Northern Ireland curriculum has reduced the specified content and placed a greater emphasis on the development of skills. The current curriculum for 14–16 years is made of a small statutory core with schools having flexibility to introduce accredited qualifications that meet the needs, aspirations and abilities of all their pupils. The curriculum also includes the Irish language in Irish-speaking schools.

There has been extensive national testing of school pupils in primary and secondary schools; recently the intensity of testing has been reduced, particularly in Wales and Northern Ireland.

After five years of secondary education, students take examinations in a range of subjects at the level of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The GCSE is a single-subject examination set and marked by independent examination boards. Students usually take about ten (there is no upper or lower limit) GCSE examinations in different subjects, including mathematics and English language.

After taking GCSEs, students may leave secondary schooling; alternatively, they may choose to continue through further education, or they may take a higher level of secondary school examinations known as AS-Levels after an additional year of study. Following two years of study, students may take A-Level (short for Advanced Level) examinations, which are required for university entrance in the UK.

Scotland

Scotland does not have a national curriculum but it does have curriculum guidelines. After seven years of primary education and four years of compulsory secondary education, students aged 15 to 16 often take Standard Grade, Access and Intermediate 1 and 2 National Qualifications. Highers and Advanced Highers are also National Qualifications which are recognised throughout the UK as the qualification Scottish students use for entry to higher education.

Scotland is currently undergoing a major curriculum reform, known as ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ (CfE), which aims to achieve transformation in education in Scotland by providing a more flexible and coherent curriculum and qualifications system from 3 to 18. The curriculum includes the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated and includes the ‘four capacities’ of being a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.

Under the CfE reforms, new qualifications entitled National 4 and National 5 will replace Standard Grade and Intermediate 1 and 2 from 2013-14. Higher, Advanced Higher and Access qualifications will be retained but will be revised

in line with the principles and purposes of CfE from 2014-16. New qualifications will also be introduced in Numeracy and Literacy at SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5.

Post-secondary and Higher Education in the UK

Approximately 2 million students are currently enrolled in the UK higher education system; about one third of young people go on to higher education at age 18 (with almost half of students in Scotland), and an increasing number of "mature" students are studying either full-time or part-time for university degrees. Higher education is a current policy priority for the government, with a target set to attract 50% of 18- to 30-year-olds to higher education by 2010.

Vocational education

The UK, in the main, has a labour market which is not strongly regulated or organised on occupational lines. While most of the higher level professions require relevant qualifications before a person can practise them, this does not apply, other than exceptionally, in the rest of the labour market. Managers, technicians, skilled craft workers, as well as those in administrative and service occupations seldom need a particular certificate to enter their occupations. If selection takes place on the basis of qualifications at all, it is geared to general levels of qualifications attained during initial education rather than to particular occupational qualifications which form an integral or necessary part of induction into that occupation. This means that there is nothing automatic in the UK about taking vocational qualifications for most of the population, and the idea that one might undertake significant vocational education and training when first starting work, or while changing occupations later in life, without gaining a formal certificate, is a perfectly common one in the UK.

Qualifications in the United Kingdom

The concept of qualifications in the UK is a rather particular one. In some European countries the term is used to denote a complete set of skills acquired during a phase of education or training (achievement), referring to the instruction and whole experience of that phase as well as to the certificate that results. In the UK, though, the term is generally used rather more narrowly to refer to a certificate attesting to learning or validated attainment.

It is worth noting that whilst the UK has a firmly established set of qualifications frameworks described in this document, there is training provision which is not part of these frameworks and is certificated by companies, charities and independent training agencies.

1.3 QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Five qualifications frameworks are in use among the four parts of the United Kingdom. They are:

A the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF);

B the National Qualifications Framework (NQF);

C the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) including the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS);

D the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW); and

E the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).

Together, these frameworks accommodate the majority of qualifications in use in the various sectors of education, training and lifelong learning in the UK.

Within England and Northern Ireland there are currently three qualifications frameworks: QCF, NQF and FHEQ.

The CQFW in Wales is a comprehensive framework that incorporates the QCF, NQF and FHEQ within it, as well as having a further strand for qualifications related to lifelong learning achievements.

All of these frameworks are comparable.

In Scotland the SCQF is a comprehensive framework covering all qualifications including those made by higher education institutions.

A short explanatory document, *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries*[1], attached in appendix 1, gives a graphic comparison of the levels of the various UK frameworks, as well as those of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It represents an easily-accessible 'rough guide' to the relationship between the main stages of education/employment and qualifications levels in the UK and Ireland.

The Qualifications and Credit Framework

The QCF was formally introduced in 2008. As it formed a major strand of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme, the initial focus of QCF has been on vocational and related qualifications. However, it has been developed so that it is capable of including all qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland other than higher education qualifications (which are covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications). The QCF also forms part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.

The QCF is designed as an inclusive and flexible regulated framework of units and qualifications that is capable of recognising the widest possible range of quality assured learner achievements. The framework comprises eight levels and an Entry level that is further sub-divided into three sub-levels. It introduces a standard currency for achievement in the form of a framework of levels based on learning outcomes, as well as a system of credit. The QCF, therefore, as well as being the national framework for qualifications (other than higher education qualifications) in England and Northern Ireland, has a wider application as a unit-based credit framework.

The National Qualifications Framework

The NQF has been until recently the framework for general and vocational qualifications in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. By 2010, it is expected that all vocational qualifications will be accredited to the QCF, and by that point the QCF will have replaced the NQF for vocational qualifications. General educational qualifications – principally the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level (A Levels) – will continue to be located in the NQF until a decision is made whether or not to move them into the QCF. The NQF uses the same system of levels (Entry 1-3 and levels 1-8) as the QCF.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

In Scotland, the SCQF was introduced in its current form in 2001 as an integrative framework to cover all qualifications including those awarded by higher education institutions. The framework contains twelve levels, the first three of which are broadly comparable with the Entry levels in the QCF and CQFW. It makes full use of learning outcomes, units and credits across all types of qualifications and learning programmes. Higher Education qualifications in Scotland are accommodated in the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS), which is

integrated into the SCQF and has been verified as compatible with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the 'Bologna Framework').[2]

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales

The CQFW in Wales is a comprehensive framework that incorporates the QCF/NQF and FHEQ within it. The CQFW is composed of three "pillars", or component frameworks. Two of these components – the QCF and the FHEQ – are shared with England and Northern Ireland and the third – Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) - is distinctive to CQFW. QALL is designed to bring all learning in Wales, which is not already included in the other two pillars, into the Framework. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales is described as having 9 levels (Entry plus 8) where Entry level is itself sub-divided into 3 sub-levels: Entry 3, Entry 2 and Entry 1.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

The FHEQ[3] is a five-level framework for higher education qualifications and is based on the concept that qualifications are awarded for the demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes. The five levels of the FHEQ, designated 4-8, are differentiated by a series of generic qualification descriptors that summarise the knowledge, understanding and the types of abilities that holders of qualifications at each level are likely to have. The FHEQ has been verified as compatible with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the 'Bologna Framework').[4]

[1]See http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/ 2366.aspx

[2]Verification of the compatibility of the framework for qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), 2006 available at; http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/fheq/scqf/scottishworkinggroup.asp

[3]See The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf

[4]Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), available at; http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/selfcertification09/FHEQSelfCert.pdf

2 REFERENCING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE UK TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

2.1 GENERAL POLICY APPROACH

Taking account of the differing roles and functions of the qualifications frameworks in the UK and of the authorities responsible for them, it is considered appropriate that the Frameworks be referenced to the European meta-frameworks – the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and\or the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA, or EHEA, also known as the 'Bologna Framework') – in a differentiated but coherent way:

- QCF, CQFW and SCQF are referenced directly to the EQF by a process described in this document;
- NQF, as an out-going structure, is not directly referenced to EQF; however, the NQF levels are entirely comparable with the QCF levels, so that the referencing of QCF to EQF can be understood as a parallel referencing of NQF; and
- FHEQ and FQHEIS have been verified as compatible with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

The correlation between FQ-EHEA cycles and levels 5-8 in EQF has been defined in the Recommendation that introduced EQF in 2008. The EQF Referencing Criteria and Procedures state that FQ-EHEA referencing processes already completed should be taken into account in establishing referencing to EQF.[5] However, it should be noted that higher education qualifications in Scotland are integrated into SCQF via the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland and are thus also included in the direct referencing to the EQF across all documents.

2.2 STRUCTURES

In introducing the EQF, the European Parliament and Council recommended that Member States each designate a National Coordination Point (NCP) to take responsibility for relating national qualifications systems to the EQF. In the UK, because several qualifications frameworks operate in a complex structure, it was decided that three NCPs should be designated, for England/Northern Ireland, for Wales and for Scotland respectively. The arrangements for National Coordination Points in the UK can be outlined as follows:

England and Northern Ireland

A National Coordination Point was set up as the official body responsible for referencing the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the EQF, led jointly by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England) and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)[6] and overseen by a committee (the ENI EQF Referencing Group) representing key stakeholders from across the education, training and skills sector and including international framework experts.

Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government was designated as the National Coordination Point to assist in overseeing the process of referencing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales to the EQF, with a broad-based membership reflecting the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, and including international framework experts.

Scotland

The Scottish Government, in agreement with SCQF partners, designated the SCQF

Partnership as the National Coordination Point for Scotland. In order to oversee the referencing process, the SCQF-EQF Steering Group was established to provide advice and guidance to the Partnership (reporting through the Quality Committee of the Partnership Board) on all key activities relating to the referencing exercise. The Steering Group represented all key stakeholder groups and included international framework experts.

Coordination of EQF referencing across the UK countries

A UK EQF Coordination Group was established by the NCPs in conjunction with other key stakeholders to provide a forum for the three National Coordination Points to work together to provide a coherent approach to implementation of the EQF across the UK and to communicate with the EQF Advisory Group and the European Commission.

There was also a single neutral representative nominated and agreed by the three NCPs to be their spokesperson on the EQF Advisory Group at the European Commission.

All three NCPs have:

- shared referencing approaches and technical information;
- used international experts;
- shared draft consultation documents;
- developed a joint communication strategy to ensure stakeholder responses;
- shared the responses to their own consultations and carefully considered any implications of this for current and future alignment between their Frameworks;
- developed an agreed structure for their individual reports to support understanding by those in other countries; and
- developed a UK overview to accompany the country reports to the European Commission.

2.3 THE REFERENCING PROCESS

All three National Coordination Points followed similar processes in establishing the relationships between their respective frameworks and the EQF. In each case, initial research was undertaken, exploring the issues involved in referencing the respective frameworks to the EQF and establishing a baseline referencing as the basis of a consultation process. In Scotland and in Wales, this initial research was commissioned from independent consultants and the Welsh preparation included an analysis of quality assurance arrangements associated with each pillar in the CQFW. All three NCPs produced reports following these initial studies:

- *Linking the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) levels to the European Qualifications Framework*[7]
- *Report on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*[8]
- *Report on the Referencing of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).*[9]

Consultation

The reports on the initial referencing exercises were widely disseminated, along with consultation documents, and a variety of consultative activities were undertaken. In each case, the consultation phase of the referencing process provided opportunities to raise awareness about the EQF, to debate and challenge aspects of the proposed alignments and to identify issues for the UK frameworks arising out of the EQF referencing. The consultations brought into focus a range of issues that concerned stakeholders in the

referencing of the UK frameworks to the EQF; it also enabled the NCPs to identify adjustments that were required in the initial baseline referencing proposed in the NCP reports and establish definitive alignments as the basis of final referencing reports for each framework.

Issues identified in the consultations

The consultation phase of the referencing process undertaken by the UK NCPs revealed that stakeholders have a number of significant concerns about the referencing process specifically and about the introduction of EQF generally. Some of the issues raised were addressed by the NCPs in the course of finalising the referencing, or will be the subject of further action as EQF comes into use; others will be referred to the EQF Advisory Group to be addressed at the European level:

Issues for the NCPs

- It is clear that knowledge of the EQF is variable among stakeholders and there were many instances of misunderstandings about the purpose and functioning of the EQF. There were consistent calls for more and better communication of the EQF and its relationship to national qualifications frameworks.
- There are concerns about the possible effect of the EQF on existing relationships between established frameworks: the EQF should not destabilise such relationships and arrangements.
- Because most of the qualifications frameworks in the UK have more levels than EQF, it is inherently impossible to achieve precise level-to-level referencing in all cases.

Issues to be addressed at the European level

- Arrangements already exist in some business sectors for recognition of learning and its transferability and these arrangements have developed in harmony with the qualifications frameworks in the UK. There are concerns about the potential development or expansion of sectoral frameworks without reference to the national frameworks, if these sectoral structures can be directly linked to the EQF: the policies and criteria established for the EQF suggest that the European Commission will support international sectoral organisations in using EQF, but do not clarify how this situation is expected to develop.
- All of the UK frameworks contain levels designed to recognise learning achievements that are below the level normally represented by vocational, pre-vocational or general educational qualifications. These are QCF Entry 1 and Entry 2, CQFW Entry 1 and Entry 2 and SCQF levels 1 and 2. These levels are considered to be crucial to the lifelong learning focus of the UK frameworks. They have particular significance for supporting learners who have basic skills or lack confidence; there is also substantial evidence that providing recognition for achievements at these levels is an encouragement to learners to take further steps on the qualifications ladder. The fact that EQF levels do not accommodate these levels in UK frameworks was a matter of great concern and was widely raised as an issue in the consultation. There were strong recommendations that this issue should be brought to the attention of the EQF Advisory Group and that this gap in the EQF structure should be addressed when the EQF is reviewed in 2013.

- It was noted that arrangements for quality assurance of processes for referencing frameworks to the EQF or to other national frameworks are still under development. Furthermore, there is as yet no standardisation of methodologies for framework-to-framework referencing; the criteria and procedures for referencing to the EQF provide only the most basic guidelines with regard to the technical process of establishing levels correspondences. As it is universally acknowledged that the successful implementation of EQF will depend on its capacity to build and maintain mutual trust, there is an urgent need to develop appropriate arrangements for ensuring consistency and reliability in the referencing process.
- To support the consistent introduction and implementation of the EQF, there is a perceived need to have EQF experts in each country operating in roles analogous to those of the Bologna experts.

Exploring the correspondences between levels in the UK frameworks and in EQF

A core element in each of the initial reports prepared by the NCPs for consultation was a proposed correspondence between the levels in the respective UK frameworks and the EQF levels. In each case, the correspondence was based on a thorough technical analysis of the two frameworks, comparing them as to purpose, structure, understandings of the nature and classification of learning outcomes, and approach to the definition and description of levels.

For all three UK frameworks, the strong indication from this initial study was that most UK levels correspond closely to EQF levels, so that a level-to-level referencing can be confidently asserted. A few instances of less straightforward matching were identified and the issues involved were set out for consideration. These issues related to the first two levels in each of the UK frameworks; the referencing of Level 4 in QCF and CQFW; and the need to reference four SCQF levels (7, 8, 9 and 10) to two EQF levels (5 and 6).

Following the consultations, all of these issues were resolved and the Final Reports of the National Coordination Points set out definitively the current correspondences between UK levels and EQF levels.

[5]A country which has completed the referencing process within the context of the EHEA has the choice of not repeating it for the relevant levels of the EQF. Aiming for one national referencing process covering both the EQF and the EHEA would not only help to avoid double work but also – most importantly – avoid confusion among individuals and employers – the main users of qualifications' (Section 2.3 – EQF and the European Higher Education Area).

[6]At the time of formation of the NCP, CCEA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications (except National Vocational Qualifications – NVQs) in Northern Ireland, while QCA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications in England and NVQs in Northern Ireland. The Education Act 1997 and the Education (NI) Order 1998 established QCA and CCEA as competent bodies (www.statutelaw.gov.uk/home.aspx). During the life of the project QCA split into Ofqual, responsible for regulation, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, responsible for research and development. Ofqual will take responsibility for the regulation of all qualifications in England and all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland and will be accountable directly to parliament and to the Northern Ireland Assembly rather than to government ministers. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland will be responsible for regulating non-vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

[7]http://www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/regulation/eqf/referencing_QCF_to_EQF.pdf ; and http://www.qcda.gov.uk/25208.aspx

[8]http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/LatestNews/SCQFtoEQFReportNowAvailable.aspx.

[9]http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/publications/reports/?lang=en

3 SYNTHESIS OF FINAL REPORTS FROM THE NATIONAL COORDINATION POINTS

Following the initial referencing studies and the consultations with stakeholders, each National Coordination Point prepared and published a final referencing report. These reports set out the purpose of the referencing process, the structures, roles and responsibilities of the NCPs and the steps undertaken in establishing the relationships between their respective frameworks and the EQF. Each report addresses the ten criteria for referencing to the EQF; the responses indicate that the UK frameworks comply strongly with all of the criteria.

CRITERION 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

In introducing the EQF, the European Parliament and Council recommended that Member States each designate a National Coordination Point (NCP) to take responsibility for relating national qualifications systems to the EQF. In the UK, because several qualifications frameworks operate in a complex structure, it was decided that three NCPs should be designated, for England / Northern Ireland, for Wales and for Scotland respectively. The legal competence, roles and responsibilities of the NCPs and other key stakeholders are comprehensively set out in the final referencing reports.

The three NCPs together with key stakeholders have jointly established a UK EQF Coordination Group to provide a forum for the three National Coordination Points to work together to provide a coherent approach to implementation of the EQF across the UK and to communicate with the EQF Advisory Group and the European Commission. They have collaborated to produce this single report summarising the position for the UK as a whole.

CRITERION 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

This key criterion is addressed in all three final referencing reports from the UK National Coordination Points. The approach adopted in all three cases was to begin with an initial referencing study, comparing each UK framework and the EQF with regard to their purpose and structure, understandings of the nature and classification of learning outcomes, and approach to the definition and description of levels. The results of the initial studies were rigorously analysed and commented on by a wide range of stakeholders in subsequent consultations implemented by each of the NCPs. Further evidence on levels correspondences was available from referencing already undertaken, including:

- the work done on comparing the various qualifications frameworks in the UK and in Ireland, the results of which were published as *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries*;[10] and
- the two exercises undertaken to establish the compatibility of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), and the FHEQ in Scotland, to the cycles of the EHEA framework[11].

The NCPs have considered all of these factors and in their final reports they set out definitive correspondences between the levels of the UK frameworks and the EQF levels. These correspondences are assembled and synthesised here to provide a composite referencing of the levels of all of the UK frameworks to the EQF levels:

A There is insufficient evidence to support referencing SCQF level 1, QCF level Entry 1 and CQFW level Entry 1 to the EQF levels.

B While SCQF level 2 can be referenced to EQF level 1 in some domains, but not in others, QCF level Entry 2 and CQFW level Entry 2 do not map well to any EQF level. The overall conclusion is that these levels in the UK frameworks should not be referenced to the EQF.

C SCQF level 3, QCF level Entry 3 and CQFW level Entry 3 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 1.

D SCQF level 4, QCF level 1 and CQFW level 1 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 2.

E SCQF level 5, QCF level 2 and CQFW level 2 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 3.

F SCQF level 6, QCF level 3 and CQFW level 3 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 4.

G The referencing of SCQF level 7, QCF level 4 and CQFW level 4 all presented some difficulty, as the descriptors for these UK levels could feasibly be aligned with either level 4 or level 5 in the EQF. Taking into account the results of the consultations and also considering other established alignments, the decision of the three NCPs is that these UK levels should be referenced to EQF level 5.

H SCQF level 8, QCF level 5 and CQFW level 5 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 5.

I While SCQF level 9 is intended to be more demanding than EQF level 5, it does not reference fully to EQF level 6 in terms of the language of the descriptors. The decision of the Scottish NCP is that SCQF level 9 should be referenced to EQF level 6 on the basis of the alignment of both SCQF level 9 and EQF level 6 with the FQEHEA first cycle and by taking account of the overall intentions of the SCQF level.

J SCQF level 10, QCF level 6 and CQFW level 6 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 6.

K SCQF level 11, QCF level 7 and CQFW level 7 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 7.

L SCQF level 12, QCF level 8 and CQFW level 8 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 8.

It should be noted that higher education qualifications in Scotland are integrated into SCQF and are thus included as part of the level descriptor referencing to EQF set out here. However, these qualifications are also referenced separately to the EHEA cycles through the compatibility already verified between the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland and the EHEA framework. These two referencings are fully compatible.

The totality of the referencing of the levels in the UK frameworks to EQF can be illustrated in the following table overleaf:

FIGURE 1 LEVELS CORRESPONDENCES ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE UK QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

EQF	QCF	CQFW	SCQF	EHEA (Bologna)
8	8	8	12	3rd Cycle
7	7	7	11	2nd Cycle
6	6	6	10/9	1st Cycle
5	5/4	5/4	8/7	Short Cycle
4	3	3	6	
3	2	2	5	
2	1	1	4	
1	E3	E3	3	
	E2	E2	2	
	E1	E1	1	

CRITERION 3

The national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

In the referencing reports of the NCPs it is explained in detail how each of the UK frameworks meets this criterion completely. The UK has a history of using learning outcomes. All three UK qualifications frameworks feature structures of levels defined in terms of learning outcomes.

With the introduction of the QCF, it is now the case that all of the UK frameworks included in this referencing exercise are explicitly based on learning outcomes and credits. In many cases these are assembled through rules of combination to fulfil the outcome for a qualification. Achievement of units and qualifications is recognised by the award of credit with the transfer of that credit being dependent on the rules governing each of the frameworks.

The outcomes-based nature of UK qualifications and the built-in arrangements for credit accumulation that characterise the UK frameworks ensure that the qualifications systems in UK are inherently suitable for the validation of achievements in non-formal or informal learning. In addition, each framework has published policies and procedures and support materials for users in relation to the recognition of prior learning.

CRITERION 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent

Each of the UK frameworks has developed a comprehensive matrix of policies and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications and for the validation or ratification of bodies as competent to award qualifications or propose the inclusion of qualifications in the framework. These arrangements are outlined in the referencing reports of the NCPs, which also refer to the handbooks and manuals in which the operational arrangements for each framework are described.

CRITERION 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation)

Qualifications frameworks have been in use in the UK for many years and there is a deep and widespread understanding among the wider community of users of the frameworks that quality assurance is a vital factor in the reliability of the system. Comprehensive and sophisticated arrangements for quality assurance have been developed and are constantly reviewed and improved.

Each of the UK qualifications frameworks sets out clear requirements for quality assurance as part of their infrastructures. These arrangements are outlined in the referencing reports of the NCPs. The reports also address how the quality assurance arrangements are in accord with each of the nine Common Principles for Quality Assurance. In this regard, both SCQF and CQFW commissioned additional studies that concluded definitively that the Scottish and Welsh quality assurance practices are in line with all of the Common Principles.

CRITERION 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies

Each of the referencing reports of the NCPs explicitly states that its partners and key stakeholders, including those responsible for the quality assurance systems for education and training in the relevant framework, are in agreement with the referencing processes and its outcomes.

CRITERION 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts

Each of the UK National Coordination Points includes two international experts in the membership of its board or committee or steering group and these are identified in the referencing reports.

CRITERION 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria

The National Coordination Points (NCPs), which are the competent national bodies in this matter, have issued and published reports setting out the referencing of the UK frameworks to the EQF. The NCPs are:

England and Northern Ireland

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England) and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland), operating jointly.

Scotland

The SCQF Partnership, designated by the Scottish Government.

Wales

CQFW, designated by the Welsh Assembly Government.

A UK EQF Coordination Group was established to provide a forum for the three National

Coordination Points to work together to provide a coherent approach to implementation of the EQF across the UK and to produce this single report summarising the position for the UK as a whole. It is the single, comprehensive report, agreed by the National Coordination Points, setting out the referencing of the UK qualifications frameworks to the EQF and summarising the supporting evidence for this referencing. It addresses each of the ten criteria and procedures for referencing agreed by the EQF Advisory Group.

This report will be made available on the web sites of each of the NCP organisations.

CRITERION 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports

The UK National Coordination Points consent to the information contained in this report being added to the EQF platform and portal so that it can be accessed widely in accordance with the agreed position.

CRITERION 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level

The issue of having reference to EQF levels on certificates and diplomas and on Europass documents is complex, requiring the direct operational involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. The position in relation to England, Northern Ireland and Scotland is that this matter has yet to be agreed and will form a later stage of the work of implementing the EQF.

WAG will ensure that all institutions and relevant organisations are aware of the expectation for new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities to contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level. However, given the complex nature, different approaches will be agreed and implemented by each of the constituted parts of the CQFW framework.

[10]This publication is available in three versions; see

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/publications/guidance/?lang=en
www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/regulation/eqf/rough_guide.pdf
http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/LatestNews/UpdatedQualificationsCanCrossBoundariesLeaflet.aspx

[11]Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), 2008, and Verification of the compatibility of the framework for qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), 2006.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The UK referencing process establishes a clear and demonstrable link between the levels in the UK qualifications frameworks and the level descriptors of EQF, as follows:

EQF	QCF	CQFW	SCQF	EHEA (Bologna)
8	8	8	12	3rd Cycle
7	7	7	11	2nd Cycle
6	6	6	10/9	1st Cycle
5	5/4	5/4	8/7	Short Cycle
4	3	3	6	
3	2	2	5	
2	1	1	4	
1	E3	E3	3	
	E2	E2	2	
	E1	E1	1	

The referencing process has also demonstrated:

- that the UK qualifications frameworks, and the qualifications they contain, are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes, and linked to credit systems and arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- that there are transparent policies and procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the UK frameworks;
- that strong and reliable quality assurance systems underpin the UK qualifications frameworks; that the relevant quality assurance bodies have been consulted on the referencing process and have stated their agreement to it; and
- that international experts have participated in the UK referencing process, in each of the National Coordination Points.

This report, which has been agreed by the competent national bodies, is the single, comprehensive report setting out the referencing of the UK qualifications frameworks to the EQF. It addresses each of the ten criteria and procedures agreed by the EQF Advisory Group. The report also notes a number of issues and concerns pertaining to the implementation of EQF, which were raised by stakeholders in the course of the consultation undertaken by the National Coordination Points. These issues were recorded in the report in order to inform future policy discussions both at the national and European levels.

The report will be published on the websites of each of the UK National Coordination Points:

England and Northern Ireland (QCDA and CCEA)
www.qcda.gov.uk/25208.aspx and www.rewardlearning.org.uk/regulation/eqf/referencing_QCF_to_EQF.pdf

Scotland (SCQF)
www.scqf.org.uk

Wales (CQFW)
www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/?lang=en

How to use this leaflet:

This leaflet provides information that allows you to look at the ways qualifications are organised in Ireland and the UK. On one side of the table you will find the main stages of education or employment - you can find where you are in these stages. The next column shows the qualifications framework for your country. To the right of this you can see the nearest levels and similar kinds of qualifications that are used in the other countries. This makes it possible to draw broad comparisons between qualifications and their levels, rather than direct equivalences, for each country.

Qualifications are different in different countries. However, they are remarkably similar in what they tell someone about the person who has achieved them, for example that he or she is ready for a college/higher education course, or for a first skilled job. There are some clear stages people move through in education, training and work that are common to most countries. Primary education is followed by secondary education and initial entry into employment and/or further and higher education or training. Some people move on to more skilled employment. Some choose to go into higher education and many take part in specialist training in their work place. People graduating from a higher education institution may enter employment and those who complete professional or postgraduate education may also enter employment.

The table gives an indication of how you can compare qualifications across national boundaries. Examples of major qualifications at each level are provided. For more detail of the qualifications in another country, you will need to consult the website given at the head of each column. All these frameworks of qualifications change from time to time and you need to check these websites for the latest versions. Entry requirements for jobs and courses often vary within a country. This means you will need to check specific requirements with the employer or institution for the job or course that you are interested in.

This leaflet is designed to give some information to help you begin this process, for example, by telling you what your qualification or qualifications you are interested in studying, are broadly comparable to in other countries.

Thinking of working or studying in Ireland or the UK? You may be interested in the answer to one or more of these questions.

- What do they call the qualification which matches mine most closely?
- Will my qualification get me into college or a job?
- Will I get some recognition for the qualifications I have?
- What kind of job or course can I apply for with my current qualification?

Recruiting people with Irish qualifications in the UK or people with UK qualifications in Ireland? You may be interested in the answer to these questions.

- How do I know what a qualification from another country means in terms of level?
- Which national qualification should I compare this qualification to?
- Where can I find more detailed information about the content and level of qualifications?

This leaflet helps you explore these questions.

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Gloucester GL1 1UB
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Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
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Fax: + 353 (0) 1 887 1595
E-mail: info@nqai.ie

Qualifications can cross boundaries

– a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

Main stages of education / employment	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework www.scqf.org.uk		Qualifications and Credit Framework/National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland* www.ofqual.gov.uk		Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales www.cqfw.net		National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland www.nfq.ie		Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/fheq	
	LEVEL		LEVEL		LEVEL		LEVEL		LEVEL	
Professional or postgraduate education, research or employment	12	Professional Development Awards, Doctoral Degrees	8	Vocational Qualifications Level 8	8	Doctoral Degrees	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate	8	Doctoral Degrees
	11	SVQ Level 5, Professional Development Awards, Postgraduate Diplomas, Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Certificates,	7	Fellowships, NVQ Level 5, Vocational Qualifications Level 7	7	Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Certificates	9	Master's Degree, Post-graduate Diploma	7	Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Certificates
Higher education Advanced skills training	10	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Professional Development Awards, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	6	Vocational Qualifications Level 6	6	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Bachelor's Degrees, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma	6	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Bachelor's Degrees, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates
Entry to professional graduate employment	9	Bachelor's/Ordinary Degrees, Professional Development Awards, SVQ Level 4, Graduate Diplomas,Graduate Certificates					7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree		
	8	Higher National Diplomas, SVQ Level 4, Professional Development Awards, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)	5	NVQ Level 4, Higher National Diplomas, (HND), Higher National Certificates (HNC), Vocational Qualifications Level 5	5	Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND)			5	Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND)
Specialised education and training	7	Professional Development Awards, Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE) SVQ Level 3, Advanced Highers,	4	Vocational Qualifications Level 4	4	Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)	6	Advanced Certificate, Higher Certificate	4	Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)
Qualified/Skilled worker Entry to higher education Completion of secondary education	6	Highers, SVQ Level 3, Professional Development Awards, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Level, Advanced Diplomas	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Level, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Advanced	5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate		
Progression to skilled employment. Continuation of secondary education.	5	Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ 2, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, GCSEs at grade A*–C, ESOL skills for life, Higher Diplomas, functional skills Level 2 (English, mathematics & ICT)	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Intermediate, GCSEs grade A*–C	4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate		
Secondary education Initial entry into employment or further education	4	Intermediate 1, General Standard Grade, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) 1, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	1	NVQ Level 1, Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D–G, ESOL skills for life, Foundation Diplomas, functional skills Level 1 (English, mathematics & ICT)	1	NVQ Level 1, Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D–G, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Foundation	3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate		
	3	Access 3, Foundation Standard Grades, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	Entry Level	Entry Level Certificates (sub levels 1–3), ESOL skills for life, functional skills Entry Level (English, mathematics & ICT)	Entry Level	Entry Level Certificate (sub levels 1–3)	2	Level 2 Certificate		
	2	Access 2, National Progression Awards, National Certificates								
Qualifications can be taken at any age in order to continue or return to education or training	1	Access 1					1	Level 1 Certificate		

* The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) will eventually replace the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The table gives an indication of how you can compare qualifications across national boundaries. Examples of major qualifications at each level are provided. For more detail of the qualifications in another country, you will need to consult the website given at the head of each column.

This leaflet is designed to give some information to help you begin this process, for example, by telling you what your qualification, or qualifications you are interested in studying, are broadly comparable to in other countries.

Qualifications can cross boundaries
– a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland. July 2009.

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

Rewarding Learning

REPORT ON REFERENCING THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

CONTENTS

Preface 21

Membership of the England and Northern Ireland National Coordination Point Group 21

Summary 22

1 Introduction and background 23

1.1 Introduction 23

1.2 The European Qualifications Framework 23

1.3 The Qualifications and Credit Framework 24

1.4 The QCF in the context of other UK qualifications frameworks 28

1.5 The QCF in the context of UK qualifications, education and training 29

2 The referencing and consultation process 30

2.1 The National Coordination Point 30

2.2 The referencing process 30

2.3 The consultation 31

2.4 The NCP's response to the consultation 32

2.5 Matters for the EQF Advisory Group 34

3 Criteria for the referencing process 34

4 Quality assurance 38

4.1 Quality assurance in the QCF 38

4.2 Meeting the EQF Common Principles 39

5 Conclusions 42

6 References and Web Links 43

7 Appendix 1 44

Appendix 2 46

Appendix 3 53

PREFACE TO THE ENGLAND AND NI REPORT

The England and Northern Ireland National Coordination Point (ENI NCP) is delighted to have taken part in this work on the referencing of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The EQF strengthens our links with Europe and helps us to understand the relationship between our national frameworks and the qualification systems and frameworks of other countries. The report explains the process we went through and the criteria we used to understand the relationship of the QCF to the EQF. It also specifies our conclusions – the final referencing of QCF levels to EQF levels.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), who together operate as the executive for the NCP, would like to acknowledge the valuable input from members of the England and Northern Ireland group throughout the process. QCA and CCEA would also like to thank all those who took part in the consultation for their support.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND NATIONAL COORDINATION POINT GROUP

- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (joint NCP lead)
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (joint NCP lead)
- Department for Children, Schools and Families
- Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
- Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
- Edexcel
- Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Guild HE (observer status)
- International framework experts
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Northern Regional College (Northern Ireland)
- Ofqual
- Open College Network Northern Ireland
- Quality Assurance Agency (observer status)
- Sector Skills Council network representative
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills
- Universities UK (observer status)
- UKNARIC

SUMMARY

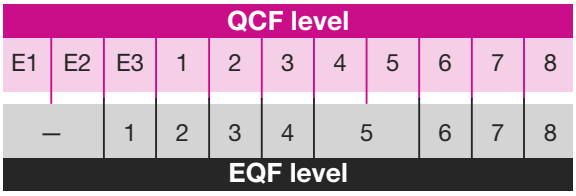
In 2007 the UK Government signed up to the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF), along with the principle of referencing national qualifications systems to it by 2010. In 2008/9 three exercises were carried out to reference the UK qualifications frameworks to the EQF in accordance with the criteria and procedures developed by the EQF Advisory Group. This report describes the official referencing of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to the EQF in England and Northern Ireland.

The QCF was introduced in 2008 with the intention that it will include all qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland other than higher education qualifications, which are covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and the qualified status granted by professional bodies. It introduces a standard currency for achievement in the form of a framework of levels based on learning outcomes, as well as a system of credit and principles for recognising previous certificated and uncertificated learning. The QCF has nine levels, with the first (Entry) level subdivided into Entry 1–3. Entry 1 represents the most basic level of achievement, and level 8 the most advanced.

A National Coordination Point (NCP) was set up as the official body responsible for referencing the QCF to the EQF, led jointly by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland) with membership from across the education, training and skills sector. During the summer and autumn of 2008 the NCP carried out an exercise to map the levels of the QCF to the eight levels of the EQF by reference to each framework's level descriptors.

The results of this exercise were published and drawn to the attention of key stakeholders in the sector, following which an open consultation was carried out. After consideration of the consultation responses, the NCP agreed the following relationship for referencing the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the European Qualifications Framework:

FIGURE 1 FINAL REFERENCING OF THE QCF TO THE EQF



The NCP executive notes that the EQF does not include a level or levels corresponding to QCF Entry 1 and 2, which are recognised as important in supporting learners who have low levels of basic skills or lack confidence. It therefore encourages the EQF Advisory Group to consider how achievement at these levels might be recognised in the EQF.

The EQF has a set of common principles for quality assurance which national qualification systems are expected to follow. The NCP executive has assessed the quality assurance policies and procedures used in England and Northern Ireland and confirms that they conform to these principles.

This report has been endorsed by the competent national bodies in England and Northern Ireland. The European Commission has been informed that the referencing process has been completed and a link to the report was provided. The UK report, comprising the reports from England and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, will be formally submitted to the European Commission.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2007 the United Kingdom Government signed up to a recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of the European Union on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (the EQF). The recommendation proposes that member states:

- relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, in particular by referencing their qualification levels to the levels of the EQF in a transparent manner; and
- adopt measures so that by 2012 all new qualification certificates, diplomas and "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

This report addresses the first point above in relation to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in England and Northern Ireland. As will be explained in section 1.4 the United Kingdom has several qualifications frameworks, and the process described here is one of three which references these frameworks to the EQF. Separate reports refer to the referencing to the EQF of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). The purpose of these exercises is to reference national qualifications frameworks to the EQF: it is not intended that the national frameworks themselves should be changed to produce closer or otherwise different alignments as a result.

The European Commission proposed that each member state set up a National Coordination Point (NCP) as the means of relating their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework. The NCP is the Commission's first point of contact with member states on issues related to referencing to the EQF. The exercise described here has been led jointly by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) as the executive bodies of the NCP for England and Northern Ireland. The NCP's executive is overseen by a committee of stakeholders from across the education and training sector in England and Northern Ireland (the 'ENI Group'). The composition and remit of the ENI Group is given in Appendix 1.

1.2 THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The development of the EQF started in 2000 with European-led discussions on the need for greater transparency of national qualifications systems. This work accelerated from 2004 with the drafting by QCA of a set of European reference levels. Following a development process drawing on expertise from all EU member states, a draft framework was extensively consulted on during 2005 and the finalised framework adopted formally in April 2008. The EQF is described and specified in the document European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (2008), published by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities and available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08_en.pdf

The EQF is designed as a common European reference system to link different countries' qualifications systems and frameworks together: effectively to function as a translation device making qualifications more readable

across national boundaries. The aim of the framework is to benefit learners and workers wishing to move between countries as well as employers and educational institutions attempting to compare the level of qualifications from different national systems. The EQF is designed to be used by the bodies responsible for national qualification systems and frameworks relating their systems to the EQF, rather than mapping individual qualifications directly to it.

The EQF is designed to cover all levels of qualification. The framework has eight reference levels based on a learning outcomes approach (the level of knowledge, skill and competence required) rather than on the type and length of learning experience. In principle each level should be attainable by a variety of education and career paths.

The NCP has agreed that the definitions contained in the EQF document are applicable to England and Northern Ireland.

1.3 THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK

The Qualifications and Credit Framework was formally introduced in 2008 following a two year trial period. The QCF formed a major strand of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme, so its initial focus has been on vocational and related qualifications. It is intended that it will include all qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland other than higher education qualifications (which are covered by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications) and the qualified status granted by professional bodies.[1] The QCF also forms part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, which is managed by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS).

The relationship of the QCF to the other UK frameworks and to the broader UK education and qualifications landscape is outlined in sections 1.4 and 1.5.

The QCF is designed as an inclusive and flexible regulated framework of units and qualifications that is capable of recognising the widest possible range of quality assured learner achievements. It introduces a standard currency for achievement in the form of a framework of levels based on learning outcomes, as well as a system of credit. In addition to being the national framework for qualifications (other than higher education qualifications) in England and Northern Ireland, the QCF therefore has a wider application as a unit-based credit framework. The essential design principles of the QCF are:

- a system of levels, based on learning outcomes. The QCF contains nine levels: an Entry level (subdivided into Entry 1, 2 and 3) for achievements below those normally associated with general educational and vocational qualifications, plus numerical levels 1 to 8. Level descriptors define the complexity of learning or achievement required at each level. Entry 1 is the most basic in terms of the outcomes required, and level 8 the most advanced. The levels of the QCF are summarised below and the full descriptors provided in Appendix 3;

[1]In the UK there is no statutory obligation for qualifications to be included in the national frameworks. However the frameworks will include most qualifications that are offered through publicly-funded education and training. General educational qualifications (principally the General Certificate of Secondary Education and the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level) will continue to be located in the NQF until a decision is made whether or not to move them into the QCF.

FIGURE 2 THE LEVELS OF THE QCF

Entry level	Entry 1 recognises progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge or understanding that relate to the immediate environment. Achievement at Entry 2 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance. Achievement at Entry 3 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts, with appropriate guidance where needed.
Level 1	Achievement at level 1 reflects the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills and procedures to complete routine tasks. It includes responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance.
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.

FIGURE 2 THE LEVELS OF THE QCF CONTINUED

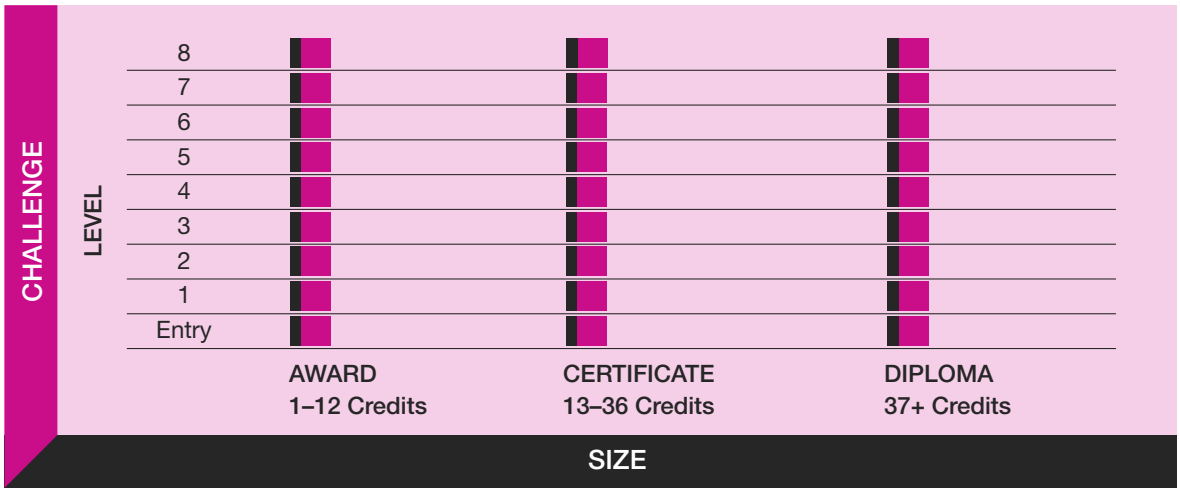
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly-defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.
Level 6	Achievement at level 6 reflects the ability to refine and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address complex problems that have limited definition. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are able to underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.
Level 7	Achievement at level 7 reflects the ability to reformulate and use relevant understanding, methodologies and approaches to address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives, and how they affect their area of study or work.
Level 8	Achievement at level 8 reflects the ability to develop original understanding and extend an area of knowledge or professional practice. It reflects the ability to address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors through initiating, designing and undertaking research, development or strategic activities. It involves the exercise of broad autonomy, judgement and leadership in sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge or for creating substantial professional or organisational change. It also reflects a critical understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.

[2]At the time of formation of the NCP, CCEA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications (except National Vocational Qualifications – NVQs) in Northern Ireland, while QCA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications in England and NVQs in Northern Ireland. The Education Act 1997 and the Education (NI) Order 1998 established QCA and CCEA as competent bodies (www.statutelaw.gov.uk/home.aspx). During the life of the project QCA split into Ofqual, responsible for regulation, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, responsible for research and development. Ofqual will take responsibility for the regulation of all qualifications in England and all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland and will be accountable directly to parliament and to the Northern Ireland Assembly rather than to government ministers. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland will be responsible for regulating non-vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

- a system of units and credit. One credit is based on 10 hours of learning (consistent with UK credit accumulation and transfer practice), regardless of where or how the learning takes place. All units in the QCF have a unique unit title, learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria, a credit value and a level;
- principles for assembling qualifications from units. All QCF qualifications must be based on units in the QCF, with rules of combination being applied to specify which units must be achieved for each qualification;
- principles for recognising prior certificated and non-certificated (that is, informal and non-formal) learning;
- a standard system of qualification titles. Titles consist of the qualification's level, a designation (Award, Certificate or Diploma) relating to its credit size (see Figure 3), and the subject or occupational area that the qualification covers;
- separation of design/awarding and regulatory functions. The qualifications regulators (Ofqual in England, CCEA in Northern Ireland and DCELLS in Wales[2]) are responsible for recognising organisations for particular functions in the QCF. Organisations may be recognised to develop units; to award qualifications; or to combine either or both of these functions with developing the rules of combination that define qualifications; and
- a system of quality assurance that applies the same standards of operation and comparability to all units and qualifications within the QCF (see Section 4).

FIGURE 3

LEVEL AND CREDIT IN THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK



Full details of the QCF and the associated regulatory arrangements are provided in the Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework, available from:
www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_regulations.asp or www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx

1.4
THE QCF IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER UK QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

A England and Northern Ireland

Within England and Northern Ireland there are currently three qualifications frameworks: the QCF; the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). The levels of the three frameworks are comparable with each other. The rough guide on page 19 shows the relationships between the levels of these frameworks and the frameworks used in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

All vocational and Entry level qualifications currently in the NQF are expected to have moved into the QCF by the end of 2010. General educational qualifications (principally the General Certificate of Secondary Education and the General Certificate of Education at advanced level) will continue to be located in the NQF until a decision is made whether or not to move them into the QCF. The NQF uses the same system of levels (Entry 1–3 and levels 1–8) as the QCF, with levels being applied to full qualifications rather than to units.

The FHEQ (see *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;* www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf) is a five-level framework for higher education qualifications and is based on the concept that qualifications are awarded for the demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes. The levels, designated 4–8, are comparable to levels 4–8 of the QCF although a different approach is used to specify them. The five levels of the FHEQ are differentiated by a series of generic qualification descriptors that summarise the knowledge, understanding and the types of abilities that holders of qualifications at each level are likely to have. The FHEQ has been successfully verified as compatible with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (*see Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), available at;* www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/selfcertification09/FHEQSelfCert.pdf).

B Relationships with frameworks in Wales and Scotland

In Scotland the SCQF was introduced in its current form in 2001 as a comprehensive framework to cover all qualifications including those made by higher education institutions. The framework contains 12 levels including three Access levels (broadly comparable with the Entry levels in the QCF).

The CQFW in Wales is a similarly comprehensive framework that incorporates the QCF/NQF and FHEQ within it, as well as having a further strand for achievements not currently included in any of these frameworks. The levels of the CQFW are compatible with those of the QCF.

A short explanatory document, *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries —* (www.qcda.gov.uk/22197.aspx), gives graphic comparisons of the levels of the various UK frameworks and those of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). It represents an easily accessible “rough guide” to the relationship between qualification levels in the UK and Ireland.

1.5 THE QCF IN THE CONTEXT OF UK QUALIFICATIONS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The following is a brief description of the education and training system in England and Northern Ireland geared to indicating how the QCF levels relate to key stages and forms of education.

A Education to age 16

The general education route, followed by the majority of learners in schools until the age of 16, leads to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) which is normally taken in several subjects. GCSEs are examined and graded, with the higher grades regarded as equivalent to level 2 and lower grades level 1. In England alternative routes are available pre-16 leading to vocationally related diplomas at levels 1 and 2 or a variety of qualifications in the Foundation Learning Tier (Entry level and level 1). Depending on the availability of suitable provision, learners who are capable of doing so are able to progress to level 3 qualifications pre-16.

B Education and training at ages 16–18

Around half of 16-year-olds progress to courses leading to the General Certificate of Education at advanced level (GCE A level) at level 3, which acts as the main route into higher education. Other mainstream options from age 16 include vocationally related diplomas in schools and colleges (in England), pre-vocational and vocational courses in colleges, apprenticeships, and other certificated work-based training. These routes may lead to qualifications at any level between Entry 1 and level 3, sometimes with direct progression to vocational and professional qualifications at higher levels or access to higher education.

C Education and training beyond age 18

Higher education qualifications in England and Northern Ireland are delivered and awarded by a range of higher education institutions under degree awarding powers granted by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament. The major higher education qualifications awarded in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are described in the FHEQ document.

Outside of higher education there is a large and diverse range of vocational programmes in England and Northern Ireland that are designed to prepare people for careers and jobs, provide specific skills and ongoing development for people in work, and support career progression. These programmes typically lead to qualifications in the QCF.

Qualifying for many higher-level occupations across the UK involves gaining qualified status through professional membership or regulatory bodies. This is outside the scope of the QCF as it normally takes the form of a membership designation or a chartered or accredited title rather than a certificate or diploma; however, many professions use qualifications within the QCF or from higher education as part of their routes towards qualified status.

Non-vocational programmes for adults, for instance in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages, may lead to qualifications at Entry level or levels 1, 2 and 3. Programmes designed specifically to provide access to higher education are at level 3.

2 THE REFERENCING AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 THE NATIONAL COORDINATION POINT

The National Coordination Point (NCP) for England and Northern Ireland is one of three NCPs in the UK, the others relating to Wales and Scotland. A UK EQF Coordination Group was established in November 2007 to provide a forum for the three NCPs (a) to work together to provide a coherent approach to implementation of the EQF across the UK and (b) to produce a single report summarising the position for the UK as a whole.

The role of the NCP is to:

- reference levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework levels;
- promote and apply the European principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework;
- ensure that the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- provide guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through the national qualifications system; and
- ensure the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

The NCP's executive is provided jointly by QCA and CCEA. Its work is overseen by a committee representing key stakeholders from across the education and training sector in England and Northern Ireland (the 'ENI Group'). The remit and composition of the ENI Group is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 THE REFERENCING PROCESS

Commencing in July 2008, an exercise was undertaken to reference the QCF levels against those of the EQF. The approach taken was initially limited to comparing the level descriptors of the two frameworks and coming to an informed and neutral view of how the levels relate to each other. The referencing was carried out at three levels:

- Descriptor level: comparing the descriptor (that is, the overall set of statements describing the level) for the QCF holistically with the corresponding set of statements in the EQF, identifying a 'best fit' at an outline level. This was carried out by putting printed versions of the two frameworks side by side and identifying the best-fit EQF level for each QCF level, and noting whether the match was good or partial. Of the three primary methods used this is potentially the most valid, but because the reading across is done at a broad-brush level it will also have the greatest subjectivity of interpretation;
- Domain level: comparing each of the QCF domains (knowledge and understanding, application and action, and autonomy and accountability) with the corresponding EQF domains (knowledge, skill and competence) at each level. Because of the different coverage of the EQF domains vis-à-vis those in the QCF, the method used was to compare each QCF domain with the relevant statements from the one or two domains from the EQF that related to it: so for instance QCF "knowledge and understanding" was related

to EQF "knowledge," as well as to EQF "skills" in the sense of cognitive skills; and

- Indicator level: The QCF level descriptors are made up of a series of bullet-point statements (indicators). Each indicator in the QCF was compared with the relevant level statements in the EQF, and a match identified for that specific indicator. This method was initially difficult to apply universally as some of the QCF indicators need to be read in context to maintain their sense of level. A modified approach was used that involved focusing on each individual indicator but also referring back to the context in which it appears. This produced more consistent results and can be viewed as refining the outcomes from methods 1 and 2.

Supplementary tests were also carried out, (a) through referencing a small sample of qualifications to both frameworks and (b) to examine the relative positioning of levels in the EQF and QCF where both had been mapped to third-party frameworks. Further details of methods and findings are provided in Linking the Qualifications and Credit Framework levels to the European Qualifications Framework (2008), available at www.qcda.gov.uk/25213.aspx or www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/regulation/eqf/eqf_qcg_report.pdf.

The findings indicated that QCF Entry 1 and Entry 2 did not map to any of the EQF levels. The descriptors of QCF Entry 3 demonstrated a good match to EQF level 1, and those of QCF levels 1–3 matched to EQF levels 2–4 respectively. The descriptors for QCF level 4 exceeded those of EQF level 4, but without matching to EQF level 5. From QCF level 5 upwards the QCF levels showed a good correspondence with their numerically equivalent EQF levels.

The referencing of QCF level 4 was potentially problematic as, on the basis of the descriptors alone, it exhibited a better match with EQF level 4 rather than EQF level 5. This would suggest referencing both QCF levels 3 and 4 to EQF level 4, when customarily QCF/NQF level 3 represents the upper end of secondary and further education with qualifications above that level being within or parallel to higher education. However it was decided to proceed to consultation on the basis of the relationship supported by the level descriptors rather than that suggested by the workings of the qualification system.

2.3 THE CONSULTATION

Prior to the consultation period a broad range of stakeholders were approached to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation. This involved presentations at events, targeted emails about the consultation, articles in stakeholder newsletters and bulletins, and a dedicated section on QCA and CCEA's websites. The stakeholders who were contacted included but were not limited to:

- awarding organisations (that is, organisations responsible for the assessment, validation and certification of qualifications);
- professional bodies;
- learning providers;
- employer-led sector skills bodies;
- the organisations responsible for the various UK and Irish qualifications frameworks; and
- subscribers to the QCF e-newsletter.

The referencing report was placed on the QCA and CCEA websites along with a set of consultation questions in the form of an online questionnaire.

The consultation period ran from November 2008 to February 2009. A total of 46 formal responses to the consultation questions were received, 44 via the online questionnaire and two in the form of a letter submitted to a member of the NCP steering group. The responses came from across the sector, including awarding and professional bodies, employer-led sector skills bodies, learning providers, trade unions, government and private-sector organisations, and consultants involved in other EQF-related projects.

The great majority (91 per cent) of respondents thought that the referencing was clear. A majority (66 per cent) agreed with the proposed relationship. Disagreement related to four main points:

A The referencing of QCF level 4 to EQF level 4

This was the most widely challenged recommendation, with a significant majority of respondents who commented on it suggesting that QCF 4 should be mapped to EQF 5. Particular concerns were raised about blurring the distinction between the completion of senior secondary education (QCF level 3) and the initial stages of higher education, and some respondents also indicated that there was a large difference in the level of vocational qualifications between QCF levels 3 and 4.

B A concern to ensure consistency between the referencing of frameworks across the UK and Ireland

Where specific discrepancies were noted relating to the QCF these were principally concerned with QCF level 4: comments suggested that some qualifications in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland would be referenced to EQF level 5, while the same or equivalent qualifications in England and Northern Ireland would be matched to EQF level 4.

C The lack of a direct numerical relationship (that is, 1–1, 2–2, 3–3) at the lower levels of the framework

The main concerns centred on the confusion that this might cause and an expectation that the levels should be directly equivalent. No evidence was offered that the relationship was either incorrect in terms of the level descriptors or resulted in equivalent qualifications being given a different EQF level via different national (UK and external) frameworks.

D The absence of an EQF level corresponding to QCF Entry level (or Entry 1 and 2)

Some respondents commented that this could undermine access and exclude learners from the qualification system if achievements at these levels were not recognised across Europe. Finally, examination of the consultation responses indicated some misunderstandings of the purpose and functioning of the EQF, indicating a need for clearer communication.

2.4 THE NCP'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

Following the consultation the England and Northern Ireland Group considered the implications of different courses of action in response to the points raised, including their implications for relationships between the various UK and Irish frameworks. Following their deliberations the NCP decided the following:

A To confirm the correspondence of QCF Entry 3 and levels 1, 2 and 3 with EQF levels 1–4 respectively.

The initial referencing exercise demonstrated conclusively that the descriptors of these QCF levels mapped to the EQF at one level above. Referring to key qualifications at the relevant QCF levels indicates that this is also consistent

with interpretations in the other UK frameworks, in the Republic of Ireland, and where evidence is available, internationally.

B To adjust the referencing of QCF level 4 to EQF level 5

Following consideration of a wider range of factors than those that had been taken into account in the original mapping exercise, the Group decided to adjust the referencing of QCF level 4 to EQF level 5. The consultation responses had indicated that there would be significant negative implications from referencing QCF 4 to EQF 4, primarily concerning consistency between national systems within and beyond the UK; the appropriate valuing of learners' achievements in relation to employment and progression; and the confusion that would result from having a single EQF level spanning a major boundary in the UK qualification system. The main evidence considered in taking these responses into account was:

- The level descriptors, which suggest that while QCF level 4 is pitched at a slightly higher level than EQF level 4, it is still closer to EQF level 4 than to EQF level 5;
- The actual relationships between qualifications at QCF levels 3, 4 and 5. This suggests that there is a stronger differentiation, perceived and actual, between achievements at QCF levels 3 and 4 than there is between those at QCF levels 4 and 5;
- Relationships with the other frameworks in the UK and with the Irish NFQ. Achieving consistency of referencing between the QCF, the SCQF, the CQFW and the NFQ points to QCF level 4 being referenced to EQF level 5. This referencing is also consistent with the relationship between the FHEQ and the framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area; and
- The level of typical qualifications positioned at level 4 in the QCF, which are closer to EQF level 5 than to EQF level 4.

Detailed consideration of both the technical argument based on a comparison of descriptors and the weight of evidence from current UK understandings of qualifications at these levels points clearly to QCF levels 4 and 5 being referenced to EQF level 5.

C To confirm the referencing of QCF levels 5–8 to EQF levels 5–8

The direct referencing of QCF and EQF levels 5–8 was fully supported by both the initial referencing exercise and the consultation. It is consistent with the referencing of the other UK frameworks and the Irish NFQ to the EQF, and with the relationship between the FHEQ and the framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

D To approve the relationship between the levels of the QCF and those of the EQF as follows:

FIGURE 4 FINAL REFERENCING OF THE QCF TO THE EQF

QCF level										
E1	E2	E3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
–		1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8
EQF level										

E To establish arrangements for a UK-wide communications programme and develop web-based information for users from outside the UK.

2.5 MATTERS FOR THE EQF ADVISORY GROUP

The NCP noted the lack of an appropriate level in the EQF to which QCF Entry 1 and Entry 2 could be referenced, and also noted the potential for negative effects on inclusivity, access and progression.

QCF Entry 1 and Entry 2 provide opportunities for learners to have achievements recognised that are below the level normally represented by vocational, pre-vocational or general educational qualifications. Entry 1 is described as recognising "progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge, or understanding that relate to the immediate environment", while Entry 2 "reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance". These levels have particular significance for supporting learners who have low levels of basic skills or lack confidence. There is also a substantial body of evidence showing that providing recognition for achievements at Entry level encourages learners to take further steps on the qualifications ladder.

Since this is a matter outside the scope of the current referencing exercise, the EQF Advisory Group is encouraged to consider how achievement at these levels might be recognised across Europe.

3 CRITERIA FOR THE REFERENCING PROCESS

CRITERION 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities

QCA and CCEA jointly form the executive of the designated National Coordination Point (NCP) for England and Northern Ireland, with responsibility for managing the referencing of the QCF to the EQF. These bodies are the competent authorities for regulating qualifications in England and Northern Ireland.[3]

QCA is a non-departmental public body accountable to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. It develops the school curriculum and its assessment, supports the development of vocational learning, regulates awarding bodies and accredits and monitors qualifications in schools and in post-16 education and training. It supports the development of occupational standards by Sector Skills Councils, is responsible for national curriculum tests, and supports awarding bodies on the delivery of examinations.

CCEA is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. Its functions include advising the government on the school curriculum, ensuring that the qualifications and examinations offered by awarding bodies in Northern Ireland are of an appropriate quality and standard, and specifying qualifications relating to the school curriculum.

The ENI Group which oversees the work of the NCP executive represents key stakeholders across education and employment in England and Northern Ireland. The remit and composition of the Group is provided in Appendix 1.

CRITERION 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework

The mapping and national consultation process described in Chapter 2 of this report has produced clear and justifiable referencing between the levels of the QCF and those of the EQF as presented below and in the conclusions to this document. This referencing is also consistent with the established relationships between the qualifications frameworks in the UK and between them and the NFQ in Ireland. The relationship between the levels of the two frameworks will be publicised in documentation and on the websites of the qualifications regulators in England and Northern Ireland.

FIGURE 5 FINAL REFERENCING OF THE QCF TO THE EQF

QCF level										
E1	E2	E3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
—		1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8
EQF level										

CRITERION 3

The national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems

The UK has a history of using learning outcomes that goes back to the mid-1980s, and it is now standard practice for qualifications to be specified in terms of what learners need to be able to demonstrate in order to achieve them. The QCF is explicitly based on a system of units, specified in terms of learning outcomes, that are assembled into qualifications through rules of combination. Achievement of single or multiple units is recognised by the award of credit. Learners who achieve credits are entitled to have them recognised towards any qualification that includes the relevant units within its rules of combination.

The QCF supports the recognition of previous learning from certificated and non-certificated sources where learners can show that they have met the learning outcomes within the unit(s) that they are seeking. The principles underpinning this are explained in the document Claiming credit: guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (available from www.qcda.gov.uk/20515.aspx).

CRITERION 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent

As described in section 1.3 the QCF has clear requirements for the specification and titling of qualifications that makes clear their position in the framework. Procedures for the recognition of organisations to operate in the QCF and for

[3]At the time of formation of the NCP, CCEA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications (except National Vocational Qualifications – NVQs) in Northern Ireland, while QCA was the regulatory authority for all qualifications in England and NVQs in Northern Ireland. During the life of the project QCA split into Ofqual, responsible for regulation, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, responsible for research and development. Ofqual will take responsibility for the regulation of all qualifications in England and all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland and will be accountable directly to parliament and to the Northern Ireland Assembly rather than to government ministers. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland will be responsible for regulating non-vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

the accreditation of qualifications into the QCF are publicly available on the qualifications regulators' websites. These procedures include ensuring that:

- the QCF level descriptors are consistently and correctly applied;
- units and qualifications are assigned a credit value indicating their size;
- units relating to occupational activities are approved by the relevant Sector Skills Council in line with their sector qualifications strategy; and
- titling of units and qualifications and the way in which units are assembled into qualifications via rules of combination are consistent with the QCF regulations.

The detailed requirements for units and qualifications in the QCF are described in the Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (available at www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx).

CRITERION 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in Annex 3 of the Recommendation)

Annex 3 of the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008) sets out nine principles for quality assurance in the implementation of the EQF (the 'Common Principles').

The quality assurance systems associated with the award of units and qualifications in England and Northern Ireland sit within the wider regulatory framework of the QCF, as described in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* and summarised in Appendix 2. The quality assurance systems for the QCF are consistent with the Common Principles, as set out in Chapter 4 of this report.

CRITERION 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies

The relevant quality assurance bodies are CCEA[4] in Northern Ireland and Ofqual (formerly part of QCA) in England. Both bodies are represented on the NCP, and formally endorse the referencing process and its outcomes as described in this report. On behalf of awarding organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators the report is endorsed by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), which is also represented on the NCP.

CRITERION 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts

The following international experts were members of the ENI Group and played an active role in the workings of the Group and in the referencing process:

- Slava Pevec

  NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, SLOVENIA

- Francisca Arbizu Echávarri

  NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF QUALIFICATIONS (INCUAL), SPAIN

[4]At the time of writing this report CCEA was responsible for the regulation of all qualifications in Northern Ireland, except National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Ofqual will take over regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland in 2010

CRITERION 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria

As the executive for the NCP for England and Northern Ireland, QCA and CCEA have produced and made public this report which:

- certifies the referencing of the QCF with the EQF;
- sets out and provides links to the evidence to support the referencing;
- details the key stages of the exercise; and
- addresses separately each of the 10 referencing criteria.

The report is accessible from the QCDA and CCEA websites.

CRITERION 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports

We consent to the information contained in this report being added to the EQF platform and portal so that it can be accessed widely in accordance with the agreed position.

CRITERION 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level

This will form a later stage of the work. Certificates for qualifications in the QCF currently state the QCF level and the credit value of the relevant qualification.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE

The following sections outline the approach to quality assurance within the QCF and how it complies with the EQF Common Principles. Further details on the quality assurance processes for the QCF are provided in the Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (the 'Regulatory Arrangements'), available at www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/regulation/qcf_regulations/regulatory_arrangements_qcf_28_08_08.pdf or www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx. A summary of the quality assurance processes for the QCF and the NQF is provided in Appendix 2.

4.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE QCF

Outside of higher education, which works to a separate set of principles and quality assurance processes, the qualification system in England and Northern Ireland is essentially an open market in which a wide range of qualifications are made available to learners, subject to national quality assurance arrangements. Within this system the principal actors are:

- Centres, meaning educational institutions, training organisations, employers and other bodies that provide learning and assessment opportunities leading to recognised qualifications;
- Awarding organisations, meaning bodies that award credit and qualifications, set assessment requirements, monitor assessments and issue certificates; and
- The qualifications regulators (Ofqual for England and CCEA for Northern Ireland), who act to ensure that national expectations for standards of learning and assessment are met and that the operations of awarding organisations are of consistently good quality.

The principal roles of the qualifications regulators are to:

- establish and uphold criteria for units and qualifications within the QCF;
- establish regulatory arrangements that specify clear requirements and rigorous and appropriate quality standards for awarding organisations and for organisations recognised to submit units to the framework;
- recognise these organisations and monitor their systems and standards;
- accredit qualifications within the QCF; and
- keep users informed about units and qualifications in the QCF, publish a definitive record of all recognised units and accredited qualifications in the framework, and report publicly on the QCF and on the organisations that operate within it.

Awarding organisations must have sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational and administrative processes to provide qualifications to the standards required for the QCF. They are also required to have procedures in place to monitor their compliance with the regulatory arrangements, to review their operations with a view to continuous improvement, and make available the outcomes of their reviews to the qualifications regulators. The roles of awarding organisations are to:

- approve and monitor centres to provide units and qualifications to the standards required for the QCF;
- ensure assessment is carried out in a way that is fair, valid, reliable and conforms to the requirements of the QCF;
- ensure equality of access to units, qualifications and assessment;
- award credit and qualifications to learners who have met the unit and qualification requirements;

- maintain records of learner achievements and report on the achievement of units and qualifications;
- collect and retain data as required by the qualifications regulators; and
- maintain and implement appeals procedures and procedures for dealing with malpractice.

Individual centres must have sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational and administrative processes to support and assess learners to the standards required for the QCF. They are responsible for internal quality assurance and must make their systems, processes and practices available for inspection and review by the awarding organisation. Centres must:

- assess units and qualifications in a way that is consistent with the awarding organisation's requirements (and therefore with those of the QCF);
- undertake internal quality assurance of assessments; and
- have processes in place for the recognition of prior learning from certificated and non-certificated sources, as appropriate for the units and qualifications that they offer.

In addition to the quality assurance provided through the qualifications regulatory systems, education and training providers who receive public funding are also subject to monitoring by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in Northern Ireland. These bodies carry out periodic inspections of providers to agreed national standards concerned with the overall governance and operation of the institution, the standards of teaching, learning, assessment and learner support, and the performance of learners.

4.2 MEETING THE EQF COMMON PRINCIPLES

There are nine common principles (CP) for quality assurance described in the EQF document. The following briefly describes how they are applied within the QCF.

CP 1: Quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the EQF

Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts of the QCF as outlined in the Regulatory Arrangements. These include the roles of the qualifications regulators, the requirements for operating as an awarding organisation, and the requirements for centres recognised by awarding organisations. They also cover the requirements for units and qualifications within the QCF.

CP 2: Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions

All centres that offer units and qualifications within the QCF are required to have in place internal systems of quality assurance in order to ensure consistent assessment practices and compliance with awarding organisations' requirements. These requirements apply regardless of the nature of the centre or whether or not it is publicly funded.

CP 3: Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies

All centres that offer units and qualifications within the QCF are required to undergo an initial approval process followed by regular monitoring by the awarding organisation whose units or

qualifications they offer. Approval processes include evaluation of the centre's capacity to offer and resource the units or qualifications sustainably, their proposed methods of operation, and their quality assurance systems. Ongoing monitoring checks the satisfactory operation of these methods and systems and monitors assessment practice at the centre. The qualifications regulators can also carry out monitoring visits to centres as part of their ongoing monitoring of awarding organisations.

In addition all publicly funded education and training providers outside of higher education are subject to periodic monitoring by Ofsted or ETI as described in section 4.1.

CP 4: External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review

Awarding organisations are subject to initial approval processes and ongoing monitoring by the qualifications regulators. The performance of CCEA in respect of non-vocational qualifications is reviewed by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, while its performance regarding vocational qualifications is monitored by the Department for Employment and Learning. The performance of Ofqual will be reviewed by Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

CP 5: Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes

Quality assurance processes operated by the qualifications regulators, awarding organisations and centres are designed to monitor the assessment of units and qualifications and the achievement of learners along with associated processes including centres' ability to support learners to achieve the units or qualifications for which they are registered. The monitoring carried out by the inspectorates is broader in nature as described in section 4.1.

CP 6: Quality assurance systems should include the following elements:

A Clear and measurable objectives and standards

Objectives and standards are set at an overall level in the Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF. Within these requirements awarding organisations produce their own objectives and standards that centres are required to meet.

B Guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement

The qualifications regulators provide guidelines for implementation within the Regulatory Arrangements and associated documentation. Awarding organisations are expected to produce their own guidelines for centres and for undertaking centre recognition and monitoring activities. All agencies include stakeholder involvement or consultation in developing their guidance.

C Appropriate resources

The qualifications regulators are resourced by the Government to perform their functions as public bodies. Awarding organisations are resourced through the revenue that they generate from their operations; the process of recognition to operate within the QCF includes an assessment of their ability to perform their functions on a sustainable basis.

D Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review

The qualifications regulators carry out evaluation and monitoring of awarding organisations according to their published guidelines. Awarding organisations are required to carry out self-review and reporting, and their reports are monitored by the qualifications

regulators as part of the external review process (further guidance is provided in the document Awarding body self-assessment: guidance for evaluating and improving performance). Awarding organisations must similarly publish their methods for reviewing centres which will include building on centres' own review and quality assurance processes.

E Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement

Qualifications regulators and awarding organisations use both formal and informal feedback procedures to evaluate their quality processes and standards. Monitoring visits by the qualifications regulators may result in conditions for improvement being imposed on awarding organisations; progress towards these are reviewed regularly until the qualifications regulators agree they have been met.

F Widely accessible evaluation results.

Reports of monitoring and evaluation are made available at www.ofqual.gov.uk/10.aspx. These include any conditions imposed as a result of monitoring visits.

CP 7: Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis

Quality assurance systems and processes within the QCF are coordinated at regulator level across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Work is currently in progress to develop a common set of regulatory principles for use across the UK.

CP 8: Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community

The development of quality assurance processes by the qualifications regulators involves input from awarding organisations and centres, as well as from other interested parties such as employer-led sector skills bodies, professional bodies and national education and training organisations. The implementation of processes requires effective working relationships between centres, awarding organisations and the qualifications regulators.

CP 9: Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning

The qualifications regulators publish the results of evaluations on their websites, make these available for research purposes, and engage in research activities themselves. Awarding organisations may also make their evaluations available publicly or distribute them to their recognised centres.

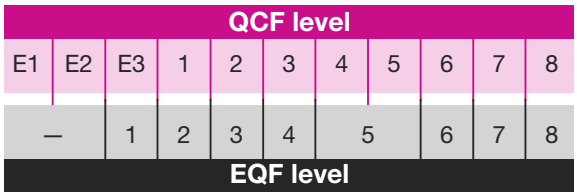
5 CONCLUSIONS

The NCP for England and Northern Ireland, in consultation with key bodies representing education and training interests and with the agreement of the competent national authorities, has agreed the following relationship for referencing the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the European Qualifications Framework.

This report confirms that the 10 criteria and procedures developed by the EQF Advisory Group for referencing national frameworks to the EQF have been complied with, and also indicates that the quality assurance arrangements for the QCF accord with the common principles for the EQF.

The report has been endorsed by the competent national bodies in England and Northern Ireland, and will be placed on the QCDA and CCEA websites. The European Commission will be informed that the referencing process has been completed and a link to the report will be provided.

FIGURE 6 **FINAL REFERENCING OF THE QCF TO THE EQF**



6 REFERENCES AND WEB LINKS

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning 2008

OFFICE FOR OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08_en.pdf

QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework August 2008

OFQUAL, WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT, CCEA

www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx

www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_regulations.asp

Claiming credit: guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework 2008

OFQUAL, WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT, CCEA

www.qcda.gov.uk/20515.aspx

www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_support.asp

Awarding body self-assessment: guidance for evaluating and improving performance 2006

QCA, CCEA, WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT, SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

EQF–QCF REFERENCING CONSULTATION REPORT

Linking the Qualifications and Credit Framework levels to the European Qualifications Framework October 2008

S. LESTER / QCA & CCEA

http://www.qcda.gov.uk/20243.aspx

www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/regulation/eqf/eqf_qcg_report.pdf

HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland August 2008

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf

Verification of the compatibility of the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA): Report of the FHEQ Self-certification Advisory Group November 2008

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/selfcertification09/FHEQSelfCert.pdf

OTHER UK AND IRISH FRAMEWORKS

Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries: a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland July 2009

QAA, SCQF, CCEA, OFQUAL, CQFW, NQAI

www.ofqual.gov.uk/2366.aspx

Referencing of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) June 2008

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

www.nqai.ie/documents/EQFReferencingReportfinalJune2009.pdf

7 APPENDIX 1

Terms of reference and membership of the England and Northern Ireland European Qualifications Framework Referencing Group

PURPOSE

The role of the referencing group is to provide direction to the work to ensure that it realises the following objectives:

- reference levels of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)/Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to the European Qualifications Framework levels;
- promote and apply the European principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework;
- ensure that the methodology used to refer NQF/QCF levels to the European Qualifications Framework is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- provide guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through the national qualifications system; and
- encourage the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

BROAD AREAS OF REMIT

A Referencing levels of qualifications in the frameworks to the EQF levels

The group will:

- discuss and agree on the methodology to be used to reference the NQF/QCF levels to the EQF levels;
- keep under review progress on the process of referencing NQF/QCF levels to EQF levels;
- oversee the formal consultation process on the outcomes of the referencing process; and
- agree on the content and distribution of a publication on the confirmed level-to-level referencing.

B Quality assurance (QA) procedures

The group will:

- define the task of writing the digest of the QA procedures in use in England and Northern Ireland for the NQF/QCF;
- review progress of the preparation of the digest. This digest will need to be compatible with the European principles for Quality Assurance (HE and VET); and
- ensure international involvement in creating and endorsing the digest.

C Making the referencing process transparent

The group will:

- promote its work and ensure that key stakeholders are aware of its purpose and include information about the referencing and quality assurance exercises in their corporate communications;
- advise on EQF specific website development;
- advise on the production of a multilingual leaflet; and
- advise on responses to queries of the NQF/QCF linkage by other Member States.

D EQF level of main qualifications

The group will:

- ensure that for each of the main national qualifications the EQF level is made clear;
- consult and agree with the regulatory bodies and awarding bodies the prominence to be given to the EQF levels on the certificates for qualifications; and
- promote and advise on the review of existing regulatory and awarding body guidance documents for possible update with EQF information.

E Informing and contributing to other related UK and European EQF groups

The group will:

- feed back information on the work of the group to the UK EQF coordinating group and to the European EQF implementation group via the UK representative.

F General

The group will:

- advise on risks and other associated issues; and
- provide the mechanism for collaborative working between all member organisations.

MEMBERSHIP

- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (joint NCP lead)
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (joint NCP lead)
- Department for Children, Schools and Families
- Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
- Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
- Edexcel
- Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Guild HE (observer status)
- International framework experts
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- Northern Regional College (Northern Ireland)
- Ofqual
- Open College Network Northern Ireland
- Quality Assurance Agency (observer status)
- Sector Skills Council network representative
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills
- Universities UK (observer status)
- UKNARIC

APPENDIX 2

Summary of quality assurance arrangements

This appendix is reproduced from the Quality Assurance Digest for the QCF and NQF, which repeats some of the information contained in the main body of the report.

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance is central to the education, training and qualifications system in England and Northern Ireland. Official bodies operate in both countries to regulate quality via both the provision of education and training and through the specification and assessment of qualifications, with their main goals being protection of the learner and maintenance of consistent and adequate standards. Quality assurance takes place at all levels of the system, within an approach that concentrates effort towards the areas of greatest risk. Sanctions and notices to improve are applied when organisations fail to operate adequate quality assurance systems or maintain standards.

National qualification frameworks are a major tool in the regulation and quality assurance of education and training, as they enable processes and standards to be brought to bear at the point where learners are signed off as having achieved specified learning outcomes. This document sets out the broad principles for quality assurance in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

England, Wales and Northern Ireland have had a National Qualifications Framework since the early 1990s. The framework was revised and expanded in 2004 to include a wider range of qualifications and to improve correspondence with the separate Framework of Qualifications for Higher Education (FHEQ). The QCF was introduced in 2008 as a more comprehensive framework incorporating a unit- and credit-based approach, with the intention that it will include all qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland other than higher education qualifications and the qualified status granted by professional bodies. The QCF formed a major strand of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme launched in 2005, so its initial focus has been on vocational and related qualifications; all vocational and Entry level qualifications currently in the NQF are expected to have moved into the QCF by the end of 2010. General educational qualifications (principally the General Certificate of Secondary Education and the General Certificate of Education at advanced level) will continue to be located in the NQF until a decision is made to move them into the QCF. The two frameworks will therefore exist in parallel for the immediate future.

This document focuses on the QCF, and explains any differences that apply to the NQF. Higher education operates through a system of independent institutions that have degree awarding powers granted by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament, and are subject to quality assurance arrangements led by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The quality assurance arrangements for higher education are outside the scope of this document.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The qualification system in England and Northern Ireland is essentially an open market in which a wide range of qualifications are made available to learners. The majority of qualifications, including those taken through publicly funded education and training, are

located in the national qualifications frameworks where they are subject to formal quality assurance arrangements. To manage standards and control risk the qualifications regulators (CCEA in Northern Ireland and Ofqual in England) assure the quality of qualifications, examinations and assessments. This is to ensure that:

- the qualifications market is fit for purpose;
- qualifications are fair, robust and fit for purpose;
- the standards of qualifications and assessments are maintained;
- public confidence in the qualifications system is sustained; and
- the interests of learners are upheld.

Three qualifications frameworks currently operate in England and Northern Ireland. As described above the QCF is in the process of replacing the NQF as the framework for qualifications outside of higher education. Higher education qualifications are contained in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). All three frameworks are shared with Wales, where they form components of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. The design principles of the QCF and NQF are outlined below.

The Qualifications and Credit Framework

The essential design principles of the QCF are:

- a system of quality assurance that applies the same standards of operation and comparability to all units and qualifications within the QCF;
- a system of levels, based on level descriptors that define the complexity of learning or achievement required at each level; Entry 1 is the most basic in terms of the outcomes required, and level 8 the most advanced;
- a system of units and credit;. all units within the QCF have a unique unit title, learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria, a credit value and a level;
- principles for assembling qualifications from units; all QCF qualifications must be based on units in the QCF, with rules of combination being applied to specify which units must be achieved for each qualification;
- principles for recognising prior certificated and non-certificated learning;
- a standard system of qualification titles; titles consist of the qualification's level, a designation (Award, Certificate or Diploma) relating to its credit size, and a title that reflects the content that the qualification covers; and
- separation of design/awarding and regulatory functions; the qualifications regulators are responsible for recognising organisations for particular functions in the QCF and organisations may be recognised to develop units; to award qualifications; or to combine either or both of these functions with developing the rules of combination that define qualifications.

The QCF is regulated through the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008)*, published by the qualifications regulators.

The National Qualifications Framework

The NQF follows the same system of levels as the QCF, but it does not require qualifications to be unit-based, to have credit values, or use standard titles. Qualifications must be approved (accredited) by the qualifications regulators for admission to the NQF, and they are subject to a similar system of quality assurance as the QCF. The NQF is regulated through the Statutory

Regulation of External Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), published by the qualifications regulators.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELATION TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance in the QCF and NQF takes place through a network of bodies with distinct functions, as follows:

The qualifications regulators

The qualifications regulators are the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) for England and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. In Wales the qualifications regulator is the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). The qualifications regulators work closely together to safeguard the public interest in the standards of qualifications in the QCF and NQF.

The principal roles of the qualifications regulators are to:

- establish and uphold criteria for units and qualifications recognised within the frameworks;
- establish regulatory arrangements that specify clear requirements and rigorous and appropriate quality standards for awarding organisations and for organisations approved to submit units to the framework (the roles of these organisations are described later in this section);
- approve these organisations and monitor their systems and standards;
- accredit qualifications within the frameworks; and
- keep users informed about units and accredited qualifications in the frameworks, publish a definitive record of all units and qualifications in the frameworks, and report publicly on the frameworks and on the organisations that operate within it.

Proposed new qualifications need to be submitted to the qualifications regulators by an awarding organisation. The qualifications regulators check that the content and assessments in the new qualifications meet the appropriate national criteria. Vocational qualifications are also subject to approval by the appropriate sector skills council before they are accredited.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)

Sectors Skills Councils are independent, employer-led, UK–wide organisations that have the remit of building a skills system that is driven by employer demand. There are currently 25 SSCs in the UK. In relation to the qualifications frameworks their principal roles are to ensure that vocational qualifications meet industry needs and are based on standards approved by employers, through:

- working with employers to identify future skills needs and developing sector qualifications strategies to meet them;
- developing the industry-led occupational standards that underpin vocational units and qualifications; and
- approving qualifications related to their occupational areas in line with their sector qualifications strategies.

Awarding organisations

An awarding organisation is an organisation recognised by the qualifications regulators for the purpose of developing qualifications and awarding qualifications and credits for learner

achievements. An awarding organisation must gain recognised status from the qualifications regulators before it can propose qualifications for accreditation into the QCF or NQF, or award qualifications within the frameworks. There are currently (summer 2009) over 140 awarding organisations recognised to award qualifications within the QCF, NQF or both. Each awarding organisation varies in size, scope, mode of operation and in the range of qualifications it awards; there is no minimum size for an awarding organisation provided it is able to meet its commitments to learners and fulfil its requirements in relation to the QCF or NQF.

The principal roles of awarding organisations are to:

- approve and monitor centres to provide units and qualifications to the standards required for the frameworks;
- ensure assessment is carried out in a way that is fair, valid, reliable and conforms to the requirements of the frameworks;
- ensure equality of access to units, qualifications and assessment;
- in the QCF, award credit and qualifications to learners who have met the unit and qualification requirements;
- maintain records of learner achievements and report on the achievement of units and qualifications;
- collect and retain data as required by the qualifications regulators; and
- maintain and implement appeals procedures and procedures for dealing with malpractice.

Unit submitters

Within the QCF the regulators may recognise organisations that do not wish to become awarding organisations, but who wish to develop and submit units to the unit databank. These organisations may in addition be recognised to design the rules of combination that specify qualifications, which can then be submitted by awarding organisations for accreditation within the QCF.

Centres

A "centre" is an organisation – such as a school, college, training provider, adult education centre, offender learning unit or an employer – that is recognised by an awarding organisation to provide learner support and assessment for a qualification or range of qualifications. Centres choose which awarding organisation(s) to work with, and they can be recognised by more than one awarding organisation.

Individual centres must have sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational and administrative processes to support and assess learners to the standards required. They are responsible for internal quality assurance and must make their systems, processes and practices available for inspection and review by the awarding organisation. Centres must:

- assess units and qualifications in a way that is consistent with the assessment organisation's requirements (and therefore with those required within the frameworks);
- undertake internal quality assurance of assessments; and
- for the QCF, have processes in place for the recognition of prior learning from certificated and non-certificated sources, as appropriate for the units and qualifications that they offer.

QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The information in this section is illustrated by Figure 7: Lifecycle of a qualification

Recognition requirements to operate within the frameworks

Awarding organisations and unit submitters must be recognised by the qualifications regulators before they can submit units and qualifications into the frameworks or start awarding qualifications within the frameworks. Recognition involves meeting requirements in several areas including having sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational and administrative processes to develop and/or award qualifications to the standards required, having procedures in place to monitor compliance with the regulatory arrangements, and having robust procedures for centre recognition, managing enquiries and appeals and dealing with malpractice.

A strong emphasis is placed on using recognition as a regulatory tool to initiate and support quality assurance. Positioning quality assurance at the level of the organisation allows the qualifications regulators to adopt a risk-based approach in quality assuring qualifications and units, because of the initial confidence they have in the quality of the organisation itself.

Accreditation and unit submission

After an awarding organisation or unit submitter has been recognised, they can submit qualifications for accreditation into the NQF or units and qualifications into the QCF. Each qualification is ascribed to a level and accredited in line with the criteria for the relevant framework.

Quality assurance at the level of the qualification and unit is risk-based. The level of scrutiny given to qualifications in qualification development and accreditation will depend on the risks associated with that qualification. Some qualifications like GCEs and GCSEs are given extensive development support by QCDA, DCELLS and CCEA; in addition, at the point of final submission for accreditation, a report on the quality of these qualifications is provided to the qualifications regulators.

Units submitted into the QCF unit databank must meet the design specifications outlined in the regulatory arrangements for the QCF. All units include the following five features:

- unit title: all units must have a unit title that is clear, concise and reflects the content of the unit;
- learning outcomes: all units must contain learning outcomes that set out what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as a result of the learning process;
- assessment criteria: all units must contain assessment criteria that specify the standard a learner is expected t o meet to demonstrate that the learning outcomes of the unit have been achieved;
- level: all units must be positioned at a single QCF level that is consistent with the level of achievement expressed in the learning outcomes of the unit; and
- credit value: all units must identify a credit value which specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a learner who has achieved the learning outcomes of the unit.

Qualifications submitted into the QCF or NCF must have a detailed rationale of the need for the qualification, the support of relevant agencies (such as SSCs), and a clearly defined title, level and structure. In the QCF

qualifications must include a set of rules of combination that specify the units from the QCF databank contained within them. Accreditation will also ensure that the qualification submitted reflects the framework level that is claimed for it.

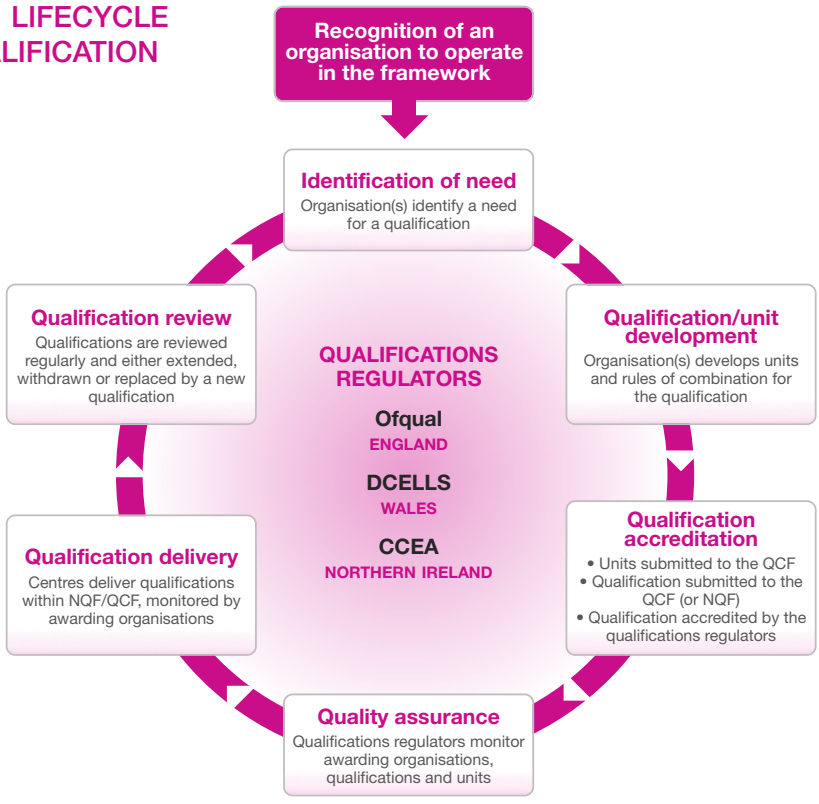
Monitoring and codes of practice

All awarding organisations within the frameworks are subject to monitoring by the qualifications regulators and asked to complete periodic self assessments. Monitoring focuses on whether the awarding organisation or unit submitter continues to meet the regulatory requirements under which it has been recognised, including how it uses relevant systems, procedures and resources to ensure that assessment methods produce consistent, valid, fair and transparent results over time and between assessment locations.

The frequency and focus of awarding organisation monitoring is determined on the basis of risk. Areas identified for improvement as a result of monitoring will be outlined as accreditation conditions and will be monitored in an action plan for the awarding organisation. When these requirements have been complied with they will be signed off by the qualifications regulators.

For high-risk qualifications, monitoring is also conducted at a qualification level. Some major qualification types are subject to codes of practice or operating rules that outline in greater detail how qualifications should be delivered with reference to areas such as assessment, awarding and grading. These codes of practice or operating rules are used to direct the qualifications regulator in monitoring to ensure that qualifications continue to meet the required quality standards.

FIGURE 7 LIFECYCLE OF A QUALIFICATION



REGULATORY AND GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

QCF regulations: *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework.* August 2008. Ofqual, Welsh Assembly Government, CCEA.

www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx

www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_regulations.asp

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NQF regulations: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.* 2004. QCA, ACCAC, CCEA.

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Claiming credit: guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework. 2008. Ofqual, Welsh Assembly Government, CCEA.

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www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/regulation/reform_of_vocational_qualifications/qcf_support.asp

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Awarding body self-assessment: guidance for evaluating and improving performance. 2006. QCA, CCEA, Welsh Assembly Government, Scottish Qualifications Authority.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This appendix provides an overview of quality assurance arrangements relating to the QCF and the NQF: the intention is to keep the document short and readable rather than describe procedures in detail. Further details can be found in the regulatory documents referred to below. Any comments on this document should be sent to info@qcda.gov.uk.

INITIALS AND ACRONYMS

QACCAC	Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (now DCELLS)
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
FHEQ	Framework of Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
Ofqual	Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (now QCDA and Ofqual)
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SSC	Sector Skills Council

APPENDIX 3

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Entry Level	Entry 1 recognises progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge or understanding that relate to the immediate environment.			
	Achievement at Entry 2 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance. Achievement at Entry 3 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts, with appropriate guidance where needed.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out simple, familiar activities. Know the steps needed to complete simple activities. Use knowledge or understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts. Know and understand the steps needed to complete structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts.	Carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities. Follow instructions or use rehearsed steps to complete tasks and activities. Carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts. Be aware of the consequences of actions for self and others.	With appropriate guidance begin to take some responsibility for the outcomes of simple activities. Actively participate in simple and familiar activities. With appropriate guidance take responsibility for the outcomes of structured activities. Actively participate in activities in familiar contexts.
Level 1	Achievement at level 1 reflects the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills and procedures to complete routine tasks. It includes responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance.	Use knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined, routine tasks. Be aware of information relevant to the area of study or work.	Complete well-defined routine tasks. Use relevant skills and procedures. Select and use relevant information. Identify whether actions have been effective.	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance as needed.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.	Use understanding of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. Interpret relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the types of information that are relevant to the area of study or work.	Complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems. Select and use relevant skills and procedures . Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions. Identify how effective actions have been.	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures. Exercise autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine. Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work. Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine. Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures. Use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review how effective methods and actions have been.	Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including, where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use practical, theoretical or technical understanding to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the nature and approximate scope of the area of study or work. Have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Address problems that are complex and non-routine while normally fairly well defined Identify, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Initiate and use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results.	Take responsibility for courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad but generally well-defined parameters.
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Use practical, theoretical or technological understanding to find ways forward in broadly defined, complex contexts. Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas. Be aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work. Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Address broadly defined, complex problems. Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Use relevant research or development to inform actions. Evaluate actions, methods and results.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad parameters.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 6	Achievement at level 6 reflects the ability to refine and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address complex problems that have limited definition. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are able to underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.	Refine and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and ideas. Understand the context in which the area of study or work is located. Be aware of current developments in the area of study or work. Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.	Address problems that have limited definition and involve many interacting factors. Determine, refine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Use and, where appropriate, design relevant research and development to inform actions. Evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are capable of underpinning substantial changes or developments. Initiate and lead tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others. Exercise broad autonomy and judgement.
Level 7	Achievement at level 7 reflects the ability to reformulate and use relevant understanding, methodologies and approaches to address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement.	Reformulate and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce modified conceptions. Understand the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located.	Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. Determine and use appropriate methodologies and approaches. Design and undertake research, development or strategic activities to inform the area of work or study, or produce organisational or professional change.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial changes or developments. Exercise broad autonomy and judgement across a significant area of work or study.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 7 CONTINUED	It also reflects an understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives, and how they affect their area of study or work.	Understand current developments in the area of study or work. Understand different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work.	Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications.	Initiate and lead complex tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others.
Level 8	Achievement at level 8 reflects the ability to develop original understanding and extend an area of knowledge or professional practice. It reflects the ability to address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors through initiating, designing and undertaking research, development or strategic activities. It involves the exercise of broad autonomy, judgement and leadership in sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge or for creating substantial professional or organisational change. It also reflects a critical understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.	Develop original practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts that lack definition and where there are many complex, interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce new knowledge and theories. Understand and reconceptualise the wider contexts in which the field of knowledge or work is located. Extend a field of knowledge or work by contributing original knowledge and thinking. Exercise critical understanding of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.	Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors. Formulate and use appropriate methodologies and approaches. Initiate, design and undertake research, development or strategic activities that extend the field of work or knowledge or result in significant organisational or professional change. Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications for the field of work or knowledge and its wider context.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that have a significant impact on a field of work or knowledge, or result in substantial organisational or professional change. Exercise broad autonomy, judgement and leadership as a leading practitioner or scholar sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge, or for substantial organisational or professional change. Take responsibility for the advancement of professional practice.

FINAL REPORT ON THE REFERENCING OF THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

CONTENTS

Preface 59

Executive Summary 60

1 Introduction 64
1.1 Background and benefits of the European Qualifications Framework 64
1.2 Purpose/aims of referencing the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework to the EQF 64
1.3 The SCQF 64
1.4 Relationships between frameworks across the UK and Ireland 66
Referencing to the EQF 66
Other related activity 67

2 Key Steps in the Referencing Process 68
2.1 The referencing process 68
2.2 Structures 68
2.3 Communication and the consultation process 68
Communicating with partners and stakeholders 68
The consultation process 69
Summary of main issues and comments 69
Matters arising from the consultation 70
2.4 Criteria for referencing 71
2.5 Response to the referencing criteria 79
Cross-referencing of SCQF, FQEHEA and EQF 79
Conclusions on the referencing 80

3 Quality Assurance Digest 81
3.1 Strategic and operational responsibilities of the Partnership 81
3.2 Key agencies with quality assurance responsibilities relating to the SCQF 82
Partners 82
Stakeholders 82
3.3 The structure of quality assurance activity in relation to the SCQF 84
3.4 Response to the quality assurance criteria 84
EQF Common Principles 84
Meeting the EQF Common Principles 84

Glossary 87

4 Conclusions 88

5 References 88

6 Appendix 1 89
The SCQF

Appendix 2 91
The SCQF–EQF Steering Group

Appendix 3 92
The Level Descriptors

PREFACE TO THE SCOTLAND REPORT

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership is delighted to introduce this report on the referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

It is extremely important to us as an organisation to participate in activities which strengthen our relationships with our European and international partners and which, as a result, may bring benefits to Scotland and its learners, employers, employees and institutions. Referencing the levels of the SCQF to the levels of the EQF can help us to understand the relationships between our national framework and other national qualifications systems and frameworks across Europe. It can, for example, help us to compare individual qualifications from different countries and education and training systems, broadening the recognition and status of learning and helping learners and workers to move both into and out of Scotland.

This report provides details of the activities which we have engaged in to make the relationship between the SCQF and the EQF clearer. It specifies the outcome of these activities – how the twelve levels of the SCQF reference against the eight levels of the EQF.

But this is just one part of the work we have undertaken; this report also outlines the steps which led to the referencing and who was involved as we took each step. It was of the utmost importance to us to engage with our partners and stakeholders to ensure that their views, concerns and advice were taken into account. It was also essential that we included international experts in our referencing activities. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated for the time and support they so kindly offered throughout the referencing process.

Finally, this report is, of course, only a 'snapshot' – it shows where we are currently in terms of referencing the SCQF to the EQF. As the SCQF continues to develop and to include more and more Scottish qualifications and programmes of learning, we and our partners and stakeholders will keep our own systems under review including our referencing activities. We will continue to meet with colleagues both in the rest of the UK and in Europe and will link with them as we do this.

We hope that you find the report helpful.

THE SCQF PARTNERSHIP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is intended to help the recognition of the wide range of learning that takes place across European countries. It is a framework of eight reference levels, described in terms of learning outcomes, and covers the levels of most qualifications acquired in general, vocational and academic education and training.

The EQF was formally adopted at the beginning of 2008. The European Parliament and Council has recommended:

- 2010 as the target date for member states to show how their national qualification systems relate to the EQF; and
- 2012 for countries to ensure that individual qualification certificates contain a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been in place since 2001 and is a well-known and frequently-used means of describing the level and credit (size) of learning in Scotland. The main purpose of the SCQF is to make the Scottish system of qualifications, and the way in which they relate to each other, easier to understand and use. It is intended to:

- support lifelong learning;
- clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and programmes of learning at whatever level;
- show learners and others possible routes for progression and credit transfer;
- show the general level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualification; and
- enable credit links to be made between qualifications or learning programmes so as to assist learners to build on previous successes.

Any learning in Scotland at any level, provided that it is outcome-based and subject to quality assured assessment, is capable of being included in the single unified structure of the SCQF. A diagram, showing the SCQF and the levels of the mainstream Scottish qualification types, is given in Appendix 1.

Showing the relationship between the SCQF and the EQF will help to:

- promote lifelong learning and equal opportunities;
- benefit learners by making it easier for their qualifications to be understood no matter where in Europe they seek to learn or work;
- benefit employers, social partners and education and training systems in Scotland and across Europe; and
- encourage the further integration of the European labour market.

The referencing process

The SCQF Partnership is the body responsible for coordinating work on referencing the SCQF to the EQF. In 2008 it commissioned an independent referencing exercise to examine the SCQF and the EQF and to establish how the respective levels of the two frameworks compare. At the same time the SCQF Partnership also established the SCQF-EQF Steering Group to provide advice and guidance on all key activities relating to the referencing exercise. The membership of the group comprised representatives from Scotland, the rest of the UK and international experts on frameworks from Europe.

The referencing exercise confirmed that SCQF levels can be referenced to EQF levels in terms of aims, descriptors and contents as shown in the table below.

FIGURE 1 REFERENCING OF SCQF TO EQF

SCQF	EQF
12	8
11	7
10	6
9	
8	5
7	
6	4
5	3
4	2
3	1
2	
1	

In summary the referencing report noted that:

A There are no grounds for referencing SCQF level 1 to the EQF.

B SCQF level 2 can be referenced to EQF level 1 only in some domains.

This partial matching was not typical of other levels. Considering the intention of the SCQF level and the extent to which referencing is not possible, it is agreed that SCQF level 2 should not be referenced to the EQF.

C SCQF levels 3-6 can be confidently referenced to EQF levels 1-4.

D For SCQF level 7, it is difficult to employ 'best fit' on the basis of an analysis of the descriptors alone.

However, it is agreed that SCQF level 7 should be referenced to EQF level 5.

E SCQF level 8 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 5.

F While SCQF level 9 is intended to be more demanding than EQF level 5, it may not reference fully to EQF level 6 in terms of the language of the descriptors.

It is agreed, however, that SCQF level 9 should be referenced to EQF level 6.

G SCQF level 10 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 6.

H SCQF levels 11 and 12 can be confidently referenced to EQF levels 7 and 8.

Consulting on the referencing exercise

The SCQF-EQF Steering Group oversaw the development of a consultation on the outcome of the referencing exercise. This was sent to over 250 representatives of SCQF partner and stakeholder organisations across a range of sectors.

In all 48 responses to the consultation were received (approximately 20% of those approached). Responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with:

- the methodology and findings of the report, believing them to be robust and reliable; and
- the recommendations of the report, accepting them as appropriate.

Respondents also made further comments which will help to direct work beyond the initial cross-referencing exercise. These include concerns that:

- it was not possible to reference SCQF levels 1 and 2 to the EQF - stakeholders felt that recognition of achievement at any level by any individual is an essential component of the SCQF ethos;
- the smooth progression from one qualification type to another in the SCQF is not always carried over into the EQF – this means that some well-known Scottish qualifications which are at different levels in the SCQF reference to the same level in the EQF; and
- the absence of an agreed methodology for referencing national frameworks to the EQF might call the validity and reliability of the EQF referencing exercise across Europe into question.

Respondents also stressed the need to:

- concentrate initially on aligning the SCQF with other frameworks within the UK and to complete this exercise before finalising the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF; and
- develop effective guidance and information both for stakeholders in Scotland and users in Europe so that there is a clear understanding about what the EQF is, and is not, along with how it can best be used.

Reports on the referencing exercise and on the outcome of the consultation are available on the SCQF website at **www.scqf.org.uk**

As a result of the consultation responses the SCQF Partnership agreed the referencing proposals.

Quality assurance

The body with ultimate responsibility for the Framework is the SCQF Partnership which works closely with all its partners and stakeholders to ensure that the Framework meets the nine EQF Common Principles which establish the quality assurance requirements for Frameworks and the bodies that are responsible for them.

In order to confirm that it and its partners were in line with the Common Principles, the SCQF Partnership commissioned, in 2009, a comprehensive investigation into quality assurance issues as they touched upon the SCQF. The investigation revealed that, whilst quality assurance processes in and related to the SCQF are complex, they are also pervasive throughout the Scottish education and training system and are rigorous. The analysis is represented in grid form in Figure 2, opposite.

FIGURE 2 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SCQF – THE MAIN LEVELS AND AGENCIES

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THESE AGENCIES IS AVAILABLE AT SECTION 3.2

Level	Agencies & Roles					
Strategic Level	The Scottish Ministers		SCQF Partnership		The SFC	
1 Policy-making	✓		✓			
Strategic decision-making	✓		✓		✓	
Governance	(✓)		✓			
Approval of bodies to credit-rate			✓			
Implementation Level	HEIs	QAA	SQA	CFEs	HMIE	SQA Accred
2 qualification/programme development	✓		✓	✓		
validation/approval	✓	(✓)	✓		(✓)	✓
credit rating	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	(✓)	✓
3 approval/accreditation of awarding bodies	(✓)[1]					✓
4 approval and/or audit of assessment centres	(✓)[1]	✓✓	✓		✓	(✓)[2]
5 assessment	✓		✓	✓		
quality assurance of assessment	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	(✓)	(✓)[2]
awarding qualifications	✓	(✓)	✓			(✓)[2]

KEY ✓ direct role
(✓) indirect role as part of an overarching quality assurance process

NOTES (✓) 1 HEIs can accredit other institutions to deliver part or all of a course leading to an award made by the HEI
(✓) 2 through awarding bodies accredited by SQA Accreditation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND BENEFITS OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is intended to help the recognition of the wide range of learning that takes place across European countries. It can help individual learners, employers and education and training providers compare the levels of different qualifications from different countries and education and training systems. This common understanding helps to increase the status of both the learning itself and the qualifications completed.

The EQF is a framework of eight reference levels, described in terms of learning outcomes, and covers the levels of most qualifications acquired in general, vocational and academic education and training.

The EQF was formally adopted at the beginning of 2008 after five years of work. The European Parliament and Council has recommended:

- 2010 as the target date for member states to show how their national qualification systems relate to the EQF; and
- 2012 for countries to ensure that individual qualification certificates contain a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

In order to assist member states to meet the first of these targets, the European Commission has established the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group. This is composed of representatives of member states and involves the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate.

The aim of the EQF Advisory group is to ensure that there is overall coherence in, and transparency of, the process of relating qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework.

1.2 PURPOSE/AIMS OF REFERENCING THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK TO THE EQF

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been in place since 2001 and is a well-known and frequently-used means of describing the level and credit (size) of learning in Scotland. It provides us with a strong evidence base on which to move forward to referencing to the EQF. We believe that showing the relationship between our national qualifications systems in Scotland and the EQF will help to:

- promote lifelong learning and equal opportunities;
- benefit learners by making it easier for their qualifications to be understood, no matter where in Europe they seek to learn or work;
- benefit employers, social partners and education and training systems in Scotland and across Europe; and
- encourage the further integration of the European labour market.

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQF Partnership), along with its partners and stakeholders, to relate the EQF to the SCQF in time for the 2010 target date.

1.3 THE SCQF

The SCQF was formally launched in 2001. It was developed between 1998 and 2001 by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Universities Scotland, with the support of the Education and Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Departments of the Scottish Executive and the

Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA).

The timing of this work meant that the designers were able to bring together the notions of level and credit of the existing SCOTCAT (Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer) framework, which had been operational across higher education in Scotland since 1992, and the new framework of levels for National units, courses and group awards developed by the Higher Still initiative which carried out a major reform of general and vocational qualifications offered in schools and colleges between 1994 and 2000. The development was also informed by:

- the SVQ framework;
- the emerging national qualifications framework for higher education being developed by QAA; and
- information and definitions relating to existing school qualifications.

The main purpose of the SCQF is to make the Scottish system of qualifications, and the way in which they relate to each other, easier to understand and use. It is intended to:

- support lifelong learning;
- clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and programmes of learning at whatever level;
- show learners and others possible routes for progression and credit transfer;
- show the general level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualification; and
- enable credit links to be made between qualifications or learning programmes so as to assist learners to build on previous successes.

These aims flow out of an emphasis on access to learning and progression by learners in reforms of the previous twenty-five years which accelerated in the 1990s. Unlike most other National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs), the SCQF was intended to consolidate, and improve on the results of, a quarter century of change in general, vocational and higher education, not to be the basis for fundamental qualifications reform. This emphasis is unusual among NQFs around the world, which tend to have a legislative basis and a regulatory function.

For this reason, the SCQF was constructed from existing definitions of qualifications and levels, rather than creating new levels and new categories of qualification. This is important when considering the SCQF levels and their meaning. By 2000, when a consultation on the SCQF took place, all the main Scottish qualifications were either outcome-based or in the process of becoming so. The characteristics of learning which they represented were well established in at least broad outcome terms. So in developing the SCQF, the 12 levels were initially based around mainstream and well-known qualifications and the known and tested links between them. The level descriptors were developed after that. This, again, was not typical of NQF development at that time, where the starting point was often the levels and the level descriptors which provided the basis for defining or redefining the qualifications.

Development of the level descriptors followed the consultation in 2000 on the framework and its adoption. Whilst those developing the SCQF made some use of both draft and operational level descriptors from different parts of the UK, the main sources for the creation of level descriptors were as follows:

- summary and extended grade-related criteria for Standard Grade courses;
- grade descriptions for revised Higher Grade courses;
- the core skills framework;

- specifications for National Units at Access 2 and 3;
- specifications for National Courses at Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher;
- Advanced Higher;
- early work by QAA on SCOTCAT levels;
- the first round of subject benchmark statements produced by QAA and work across UK to develop explicit meanings of 'graduateness';
- work in Scotland and in the rest of the UK to develop qualification descriptors for the main higher education qualifications; and
- SVQ level descriptions.

The preparation of the draft level descriptors used an approach based on the characteristic outcomes associated with each of the mainstream qualification types. These characteristic outcomes were used to create the five domains and descriptors at the levels of the qualifications concerned. The domains are:

- knowledge and understanding — mainly subject-based;
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding);
- generic cognitive skills, e.g. evaluation, critical analysis;
- communication, numeracy and IT skills; and
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

These were then extended to all levels through a process of gradation based on comparison of the requirements of the different qualification levels. The result was the five domains of the SCQF descriptors, each providing a progression through all levels except level 1, for which there were no clear source qualifications at the time.

The level descriptors and the five domains are given in Annex 3.

Given this background, the SCQF can be seen to be an integrating framework or a meta-framework, created by bringing together three previously developed frameworks – namely, the frameworks for:

- National and Higher National Qualifications – the Units, Courses and Group Awards awarded by the SQA under the overall direction of the Scottish Government;
- qualifications of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland which was developed by the QAA in collaboration with Universities Scotland (the representative body of Scotland's HEIs); and
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications - workplace qualifications based on National Occupational Standards developed by government-sponsored Sector Skills Councils and accredited by SQA Accreditation.

Any learning in Scotland at any level, provided that it is outcome-based and subject to quality assured assessment, is capable of being included in the single unified structure of the SCQF. A diagram, showing the SCQF and the levels of the mainstream Scottish qualification types, is given in Appendix 1.

1.4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FRAMEWORKS ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND

Referencing to the EQF

The European Parliament and Council recommended that Member States each designate a National Coordination Point (NCP) to work with other relevant national authorities to support and guide the work to relate national

qualifications systems to the EQF. In the United Kingdom there are three NCPs to recognise the fact that there are different National Qualification Frameworks in different countries of the UK. The National Qualifications Authority for Ireland (NQAI) is the NCP for the Republic of Ireland which has close working relationships with the UK on NQF matters.

The Scottish Government, in agreement with SCQF partners, designated the SCQF Partnership as the NCP for Scotland. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) are jointly designated as the NCP for England and Northern Ireland. The Welsh Assembly Government has responsibility for the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (which includes higher level learning, general, vocational education and training and quality assured lifelong learning) and is the NCP for Wales.

Whilst each NCP moved forward to put in place its own arrangements for referencing against the EQF, there was also full agreement that they also needed to work together to co-ordinate activities, share best practice and provide clear communication. This would particularly be the case for those organisations such as Sector Skills Councils and Awarding Bodies which worked across the UK. The UK EQF Co-ordinating Group was therefore established early in the process to help co-ordinate and track progress. In the latter stages the Group was also expanded to include the NQAI.

Through the UK Co-ordinating Group, all NCPs:

- shared referencing approaches and technical information;
- used international experts;
- shared draft consultation documents;
- developed a joint communication strategy to ensure stakeholder responses;
- shared the responses to their own consultations and carefully considered any implications of these for current and future alignment between their Frameworks;
- developed an agreed structure for their individual reports to support understanding by those in other countries; and
- developed a UK cover report to accompany the country reports to the European Commission.

Other related activity

The countries of the UK collaborated with the Republic of Ireland to produce a document in May 2005 called *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries – a Rough Guide to Comparing Qualifications in the UK and Ireland*. As a result of some NQF changes during 2008, this document was updated and republished online in April 2009. This is available at **www.scqf.org.uk**

This work was not about referencing the level descriptors of each NQF, but rather about comparing the stages of education and employment in each country to show where and when the average learner moves within the system. This has provided a very useful document with a use beyond employers only and, as such, this document was also considered during the actual referencing work. The outcome of each NCP's referencing to the EQF is in close agreement with the Rough Guide and we will give consideration to including the EQF in a future version of this document to assist with wider dissemination of the outcomes of referencing.

2 KEY STEPS IN THE REFERENCING PROCESS

2.1 THE REFERENCING PROCESS

The referencing process comprised the following:

- considering the SCQF level descriptors and comparing them to the EQF level descriptors;
- developing an approach that allowed a match to be made between specific SCQF and EQF levels;
- developing a communications strategy about this matching exercise;
- consulting widely amongst stakeholders on the outcome of the matching exercise; and
- agreeing the final levels by which the SCQF would be matched to the EQF, taking the consultation responses into account.

2.2 STRUCTURES

As noted in section 1.4 above, the SCQF Partnership is the NCP for Scotland. The SCQF Partnership is directed and supported in its work by a number of committees, one of which is the Quality Committee. Early on in 2008 the Quality Committee commissioned an independent consultant to undertake an exercise to examine the SCQF and the EQF and to establish how the respective levels of the two frameworks compared. At the same time the Quality Committee also established the SCQF-EQF Steering Group to provide it with advice and guidance on all key activities relating to the referencing exercise.

The membership of the group comprised an independent Chair, representatives from Scotland and the rest of the UK, all of whom have significant experience of lifelong learning and expertise in frameworks, and two international experts in frameworks.

The Terms of Reference for the SCQF-EQF Steering Group are given, along with its membership, in Annex 2. The Steering Group met for the first time in July 2008. One of its first tasks was to consider and discuss in detail the outcome of the independent referencing exercise which was provided in the *Report on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*. This can be found at www.scqf.org.uk

The Steering Group considered the report and discussed the approach and the issues it raised in detail. It approved the methodology and findings of the report as a basis for consulting with stakeholders on how the SCQF relates to the EQF.

2.3 COMMUNICATION AND THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Communicating with partners and stakeholders

The SCQF-EQF Steering Group developed and implemented a communication strategy for:

- raising awareness about the EQF, the referencing exercise and the resultant consultation - from August and September 2008;
- encouraging participation in the consultation – from September to November 2008;
- informing partners, stakeholders and those responsible for the frameworks in other parts of the UK about responses to the consultation – from February to March 2009; and
- publicising agreed alignments for use by partners and stakeholders - from April 2009 onwards (in the event, this element of the strategy was deferred to August 2009).

The consultation process

The consultation document was sent to over 250 representatives of SCQF partner and stakeholder organisations across a range of sectors. The consultation was also provided on the SCQF Partnership's website. Recipients were invited to comment on the methodology, findings and recommendations of the Report on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The consultation ran from September to November 2008. Those approached to participate in the consultation included but were not limited to:

- Awarding Bodies;
- Professional Bodies;
- Scotland's 43 Colleges;
- Scottish Government agencies;
- Scotland's 20 HEIs;
- Sector Skills Councils; and
- UK Framework agencies.

In all 48 responses to the consultation were received (approximately 20% of those approached).

The responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the methodology, findings and recommendations of the report.

- **89% of respondents believed the methodology to be clear and robust;**
- **91% of respondents believed the findings to be valid and reliable; and**
- **89% of respondents agreed with the recommendations.**

In addition —

- **61% of respondents identified issues for their sector; and**
- **49% of respondents wished to make further comment.**

SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES AND COMMENTS

Many respondents emphasised the perceived strengths of the SCQF. It is important to note, therefore, that neither the referencing exercise nor the issues and comments summarised here will impact in any way on the integrity of the SCQF.

Many of the issues and comments raised by respondents helpfully pointed the way beyond the work of the initial cross-referencing exercise. These include comments relating to cross-UK work, to implementation issues and to work which will have to be undertaken on the EQF. Issues and comments can be grouped into the following five main categories:

A inclusion, relating to a lack of recognition in the EQF of achievements at a level or levels which equate to SCQF levels 1 and 2.

B lack of level to level referencing, relating to issues arising from two SCQF levels referencing to a single EQF level.

C standardisation of methodology, relating to the lack of an agreed methodology for referencing national frameworks or systems to the EQF.

D relationships between frameworks, relating to existing relationships between established Frameworks.

E communication/level descriptors, relating to (i) advice and guidance to users and (ii) reflection on the SCQF descriptors as a consequence of the referencing exercise.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CONSULTATION

Inclusion

The issue of inclusion presents the most difficulties for Scotland since it does not allow SCQF levels 1 and 2 to be referenced to the EQF in its present format. This had been raised as a concern during the development of the EQF. The outcome of consultation on the referencing exercise shows that SCQF Partnership's stakeholders still find it to be problematic.

The SCQF is a lifelong learning framework that allows individuals' achievements to be recognised, whatever their level of learning and at whatever stage of their lives. There is a concern in Scotland, that the absence of a link to the EQF at these two levels could be unnecessarily disadvantageous to a specific group of learners in that it could be perceived as a barrier to further progression.

At the time of the original discussions on the SCQF Scotland had few qualifications at SCQF level 1 and therefore had not been able to develop a full level descriptor for it. However, there is now a greater number of qualifications at this level and a revised level descriptor for SCQF level 1 has recently been developed. This has been published in the revised SCQF Handbook.

Lack of level to level referencing

As a developed and populated framework, the SCQF already accommodates the full range of Scottish qualifications and shows how each relates to the other in a progression from level 1 to level 12. However, this smooth progression from one qualification type to another and the delineation between them in the SCQF is not always able to be carried over into the EQF.

For example, the Ordinary Degree and the Honours Degree are at different levels within the SCQF but are encompassed within one level in the EQF. This is also the case with the Higher National Certificate and the Higher National Diploma. Referencing relationships and the rationale for these will need to be clearly explained to users.

Standardisation of methodology

There is no agreed methodology for referencing national frameworks or systems to the EQF. There may be value in sharing best practice as it emerges from early referencing work. In addition, seeking the involvement of international experts and using a transparent process should help to disperse concerns about the validity and reliability of the referencing exercise across Europe.

Relationships between frameworks

The SCQF is a credit and qualifications framework, allowing learners to build up credit on the basis of informal as well as formal learning. There is a need to make sure that, in the course of any referencing exercise, this valuable aspect of the SCQF is not lost.

Stakeholders see real value in referencing the SCQF to the EQF. At the same time, however, they stress that the referencing exercise between the SCQF and other frameworks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should not be lost sight of. The initial focus must, therefore, be on clarifying the alignment of the UK frameworks. Doing this will provide the Partnership with a solid foundation on which to build the work to reference the SCQF to the EQF.

Communication/level descriptors

There are numerous advantages to having a Europe-wide methodology for describing learning and for supporting articulation within countries and across boundaries. However, there is a need to ensure that learners, employers and all other relevant stakeholders

understand that the EQF is a very broad construct and that there is a need to explain clearly what assumptions can be drawn from referencing and when it would be necessary to dig deeper into an NQF to find the answers on specific qualifications.

The *Report on Responses to Consultation on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*, which provides more information on the consultation exercise, is available on the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk

2.4 CRITERIA FOR REFERENCING

The EQF Advisory Group has developed 10 criteria and procedures for referencing national frameworks to the EQF. These criteria are designed to ensure overall coherence and transparency in the referencing process. National bodies are required to demonstrate the way in which they meet these criteria.

We have considered the criteria and the way that they are met by the referencing process in Scotland.

CRITERION 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities

The National Coordination Point for Scotland

As noted above, Scottish Government agreed with the SCQF Partnership that the NCP for Scotland would be the SCQF Partnership – the body set up in 2006 to:

- maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF;
- promote and develop the SCQF as a way of supporting lifelong learning; and
- develop and maintain relationships with frameworks in the rest of the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

Governance

The members of the Partnership are: the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC)[1], the QAA Scotland, the SQA, Scottish Government, and Universities Scotland. A senior representative of each member body is a Director on the SCQF Board of Management, which governs the SCQF Partnership's activities. The Board also has one independent Director, who is the Chair of the SCQF Partnership.

The SCQF Partnership's status as a company limited by guarantee places it under a number of legal obligations, set by the Companies Act. The Partnership must, for example, follow good practice in relation to governance. 'Good practice' in this context includes clear and credible company decision-making processes and the timely provision of good quality information about the Partnership's work and about the SCQF.

The constitution of a company limited by guarantee takes the form of a Memorandum and Articles of Association (M&AA) which set out the objects of the company and the powers which the company may exercise to meet these objects. The M&AA requires the SCQF Partnership to:

- promote the wider adoption and use of the SCQF as a tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland;
- maintain the quality and integrity of the Framework and ensure that there is a common understanding of credit values and levels amongst users; and
- take the steps necessary to ensure that the work of the SCQF Partnership is effective - including maintaining linkages with the EQF and other national frameworks.

The M&AA also requires the Directors of the company to ensure that appropriate lines of communication are maintained between the company and other stakeholders and with any advisory structures associated with the SCQF. They must also take due account of any strategies, policies or recommendations emerging from these advisory structures.

The SCQF Partnership is a registered charity. This means that its M&AA must be acceptable to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). In essence it must meet the 'charity test' which requires that its purposes match with one or more of a defined series of purposes and that it intends to provide public benefit.

Charitable status also means that the SCQF Partnership has a duty to be demonstrably transparent and accountable to donors, beneficiaries and the public. It must provide the OSCR with:

- an annual financial return;
- an annual monitoring return; and
- its annual report and accounts.

The OSCR uses these returns to monitor the performance and probity of registered charities.

SCQF – EQF advisory structures

The SCQF Partnership Board established the SCQF Partnership Quality Committee to provide it with recommendations on all issues concerning the maintenance and quality assurance of the Framework and its relationship to other Frameworks. The Quality Committee comprises experts in quality assurance from a number of educational environments and its Chair is nominated by the Board.

The Quality Committee established and oversaw the activities of the short-life SCQF–EQF Steering Group, the constitution of which is given in section 2.2. This group of experts had a remit to provide the Quality Committee with advice and guidance on all key activities relating to the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF. The Quality Committee used this advice and guidance in developing its own recommendation on the outcome of the referencing exercise to the SCQF Partnership Board. The Quality Committee Chair was also a member of the Steering Group.

The terms of reference and membership of the SCQF Board and Quality Committee are available on the SCQF website at: www.scqf.org.uk

CRITERION 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework

The SQQF Partnership commissioned an independent consultant to consider the issues around the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF and to report on these. The Report on the

[1]Now part of the umbrella organisation, *Scotland's Colleges*

Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) provides evidence of a clear and demonstrable link between the SCQF level descriptors and the EQF level descriptors. A wide range of stakeholders contributed to the subsequent national consultation on the methodology and findings of the report. The report and the results of the consultation informed the SCQF Quality Committee's recommendation and the SCQF Board's final decision on the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF. The report is available at: www.scqf.org.uk

Referencing methodology

The methodology which was developed for the project started with developing an initial model of comparison based on a broad comparison of the two frameworks. It went on to establish the nature of the progression between levels in the two frameworks and test the initial model by making detailed comparisons of the level descriptors in a number of ways and then bringing the findings together.

Each of the two frameworks has a number of levels and each level has a descriptor which is made up of typical outcomes at that level. The descriptors are set out in different ways, but are broadly similar – each concerned with knowledge, skills and other kinds of competence associated with working and learning. However as the work progressed, issues arose from:

- differences in the origins and aims of the two frameworks;
- differences of conceptualisation and language between the frameworks;
- issues about the completeness of descriptors in representing progression in the frameworks; and
- referencing – where straightforward SCQF level to EQF level was not possible.

The ways in which the SCQF, the EQF and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA) – to which both the SCQF and the EQF are related - were developed was investigated. From this the ways in which the different levels of these frameworks might compare, given their origins and intentions were explored and the initial comparison was developed and used to guide a series of comparative exercises.

In the course of this work, a number of factors common to both frameworks emerged. These are knowledge, intellectual skills, practical skills, tasks/activities and contexts, problem-solving, autonomy and managing work. These made it easier to manage the comparisons and were used to structure the detailed work which took the form of factor-by-factor and level-by-level comparisons of the descriptors of the two frameworks. Then a comparison of the frameworks was carried out using information about the levels, their intentions and contents, drawn from SCQF and EQF documents, but additional to the descriptors.

Conclusion on the level-to-level referencing between the SCQF and EQF

Based on the methodology outlined above, the conclusion of the investigation is that, using the principle of 'best fit', SCQF levels can be referenced to EQF levels in terms of aims, descriptors and contents as shown in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3 REFERENCING OF SCQF TO EQF

SCQF	EQF
12	8
11	7
10	6
9	
8	5
7	
6	4
5	3
4	2
3	1
2	
1	

It should be noted that in the SCQF referencing exercise, the term best fit was taken to mean: (i) that each level in the framework should only be matched to one level on the EQF, and (ii) that indirect evidence of a match was acceptable – for example evidence that the demands of the SCQF level were greater than EQF level 3 and less than EQF level 5 could be taken as evidence of a match to EQF level 4 even if there was little or no direct evidence.

A more detailed summary of the findings of the referencing exercise is given in section 2.5 of this report.

CRITERION 3

The national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems

The SCQF and learning outcomes

The SCQF was created by bringing together, into a single unified framework, all Scottish mainstream qualifications, namely: the qualifications of HEIs; SQA National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications; and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). Learning outcomes have been used across all these sectors of Scottish education and training in the design of qualifications and learning programmes for some considerable time, starting from the 1980s – in fact, any qualification or learning programme which is in the SCQF must be supported by a clear set of learning outcomes.

The SCQF is an outcomes-based structure that helps make explicit the nature, level and volume (credit) of learning outcomes. The SCQF employs 12 levels with associated level descriptors (level 2 – 12)[2], which are themselves regarded as broad generic levels of outcome. The levels and the descriptors are designed as a national set of reference points for use by all providers and all stakeholders and against which the outcomes of any learning that has been, or can be, subject to valid, reliable, and quality-assured assessment can be located. They are designed to help programme designers and the writers of unit specifications look at the range of skills that might be covered at a particular level, select appropriate headings and peg the learning outcomes accordingly.

The SCQF links to external reference points (benchmarks statements, levels, programme specifications, and qualification descriptors) that in turn link to learning outcomes. Learning outcomes therefore have direct links to standards, national mechanisms for quality assurance and the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment.

[2] At the time of the original discussions on the SCQF, Scotland had few qualifications at SCQF level 1 and therefore had not been able to develop a level descriptor for it. However, there are now qualifications at SCQF level 1 and a level descriptor has recently been developed and published.

Learning outcomes form the basis of the two measures which the SCQF uses to describe qualifications and learning programmes:

- the level of the outcomes – comprising a statement of the degree of complexity in a given set of learning outcomes; and
- the volume of outcomes, described in terms of the number of credit points which show how much learning has been undertaken.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

It is possible in some cases to recognise uncertificated prior learning by matching it to the outcomes of existing qualifications. Here, the SCQF level descriptors and credit points can provide a guide. In general, this prior learning will need to be shown to have been (or to have been capable of being) assessed in a valid, reliable and quality assured manner.

Recognition of Prior learning (RPL)

The *SCQF Handbook* provides users with RPL Guidelines which:

- provide guidance to learning providers across all post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland on managing the process of recognising the prior informal learning of learners within the context of the SCQF;
- provide a set of core principles and key features that will enable users of the SCQF to have confidence that there is consistency in approaches to recognising prior informal learning; and
- support the practice of recognising prior learning as part of the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland.

The RPL Guidelines focus on managing the process of recognising prior informal learning of the learner. They are not prescriptive, but are intended to encourage a range of approaches to RPL across the sectors to take into account the needs and goals of different learner groups and to provide formal recognition of prior learning where this has been subject to valid, reliable quality assured assessment.

The Guidelines are consistent with the SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines, the QAA Guidelines for the Accreditation of Prior Learning for Higher Education and with European developments in RPL. The RPL Guidelines have, however, been under review during the current year and a revised version has been published in the revised SCQF Handbook. The revision takes account of current thinking in relation to RPL along with the experiences of users of RPL.

The SCQF Partnership is currently engaged in a range of projects which support RPL, including the development of an RPL Toolkit.

CRITERION 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent

SCQF level descriptors

The SCQF level descriptors flesh out the levels of the Framework. They can be used at any stage in the design, development and validation of programmes, courses or units. The intention is for them to be used by programme designers and the writers of unit specifications as a guide to locate the level of learning outcomes, but not to prescribe the content, range, and so on. They are not intended to be the sole reference source either.

The level descriptors are designed to allow broad comparisons to be made between the outcomes of any learning that has been, or can be, subject to valid, reliable, and quality-assured assessment. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level, but aim to provide a useful reference point.

Level 1 recognises learning development and achievement that ranges from participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks, with varying degrees of support, while level 12 contains outcomes associated with doctoral studies. Each level of the SCQF from two to 12 has a *level descriptor* which sets out the characteristic general outcomes of the level under five broad headings or domains:

- knowledge and understanding — mainly subject based;
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding);
- generic cognitive skills, eg evaluation, critical analysis;
- communication, numeracy and IT skills; and
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Each of the 12 SCQF levels can be the location of one or more qualifications. The smallest free-standing qualifications (such as SQA units) and components of larger qualifications (such as university modules) are allocated to a single level. Larger qualifications are allocated a final or exit level, but will often be composed of components at a number of different levels. For example, an individual who completes an SQA Scottish Group Award will normally have completed units at two levels, while a holder of an Honours Degree will normally have completed units or modules at four levels.

SCQF credit rating

The purpose of the SCQF is to provide a national framework for all learning, provided it meets certain requirements. Any qualification or learning programme can be credit rated in the SCQF provided it:

- has at least a notional 10 hours of learning time;
- is supported by a clear set of learning outcomes; and
- is subject to valid, reliable and quality assured assessment of learner achievement.

In the SCQF the term credit rating is used to describe the dual process of allocating a qualification or programme of learning to a level within the SCQF and of giving it a credit value which reflects its size. Credit rating is a process of professional judgement leading to a statement on the level and volume (credit) of the learning outcomes of a qualification or learning programme.

Credit rating for SCQF can only be carried out by bodies which have been approved to do so. These include Scottish HEIs, the SQA, Colleges of Further and Higher Education (CFHEs) and, from 2009, other bodies such as, for example, specified awarding bodies and professional bodies.

The SCQF has developed Credit Rating Guidelines, which are set out in the SCQF Handbook. These provide a core set of principles which are designed to ensure a shared confidence amongst users of the SCQF, including learners themselves, that:

- there are rigorous processes to ensure that the stated levels and volume of outcomes accurately reflect the intended purpose and aims of the learning experience being credit-rated;

- there are rigorous, secure and appropriate arrangements for assessing learner achievement against those learning outcomes both within and across credit rating bodies; and
- the credit rating is based on sound evidence supported by peer judgement.

The focus of these guidelines is exclusively on procedures for ascribing an SCQF level and SCQF credit points to defined learning outcomes. Their concern is with the learning outcomes, not the learning itself. They provide an approach to the measurement of the result of learning wherever, whenever, and however it has been achieved.

The current edition of the SCQF Handbook can be accessed at: www.scqf.org.uk

All credit rating bodies are required to establish credit rating processes which are in accordance both with the Credit Rating Guidelines in the SCQF Handbook and with their own quality assurance arrangements. These processes must be explicit, reliable and valid and available for scrutiny by an appropriate external quality assurance mechanism, for example by an external auditing body.

CRITERION 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in Appendix 3 of the Recommendation)

The SCQF is an integrating Framework for lifelong learning which includes all mainstream Scottish qualifications by bringing together three constituent Frameworks, each of which have their own quality assurance procedures operated by different agencies:

- the qualifications of HEIs, which are quality assured by the QAA Scotland;
- the qualifications of the SQA, which are quality assured by SQA Awarding Body; and
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), and other qualifications which are quality assured by SQA Accreditation.

A quality assurance digest, providing an overview of these different agencies and the different QA procedures which underpin the SCQF and its three constituent Frameworks is given in section 3 of this report.

It should also be noted that in November 2008, following a review earlier in the year, the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) confirmed that QAA was fully compliant in 14 of the 16 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and substantially compliant in the remaining two. The full ENQA review report can be accessed at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/ENQA/ENQAReviewReport.pdf

CRITERION 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies

This final report, which certifies the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF as required in Criterion 8 below, is also an explicit statement that the SCQF partners, including those responsible for the quality assurance systems for education and training in the Framework, are in agreement with the referencing processes and its outcomes. What is more, as is demonstrated under Criterion 1 of this document, the SCQF–

EQF advisory structures ensured a full and high level of involvement of all relevant quality assurance bodies at all stages which preceded the final decision on the referencing exercise.

CRITERION 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts

The SCQF–EQF Steering Group, which, as noted in Criterion 1, provided advice and guidance to the SCQF Partnership on matters relating to the referencing process, included two international experts - Eva Gonczi of the Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Study and Jim Murray of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

CRITERION 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria

As the designated NCP for Scotland, the SCQF Partnership has produced and made public the Report on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which:

- certifies the referencing of the SCQF with the EQF;
- sets out the evidence to support the referencing;
- details the key stages of the exercise; and
- addresses separately each of the ten referencing criteria.

The report can be accessed at: www.scqf.org.uk

CRITERION 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports

We consent to the information contained in this report being added to the EQF platform and portal so that it can be accessed widely in accordance with the agreed position.

CRITERION 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level

Many Scottish certificates and supplements already refer directly to relevant SCQF levels and credits. However, not all do so. The means by which certificates and supplements in Scotland will make reference to the EQF levels are currently being discussed. The SCQF Partnership intends to consult formally on this in the course of 2009-2010 and will be in a position to respond fully on how Scotland will meet this criterion in time for the 2012 implementation date.

2.5 RESPONSE TO THE REFERENCING CRITERIA

Cross-referencing of SCQF, FQEHEA and EQF

The outcome of a matching between the eight-level EQF and any national qualifications framework (NQF) with more than eight levels is likely to be one where some single levels of the NQF can be referenced to single levels of the EQF and some pairs or larger groups of levels in the NQF can be shown to reference to single levels in the EQF.

FIGURE 4 CROSS-REFERENCING LEVELS

EITHER:

NQF	EQF
NQF Level A →	EQF Level A

OR:

NQF	EQF
NQF Level X →	EQF Level Z
NQF Level Y →	

The fact that the levels 5-8 of the EQF are already aligned with the four levels of the FQEHEA is going to be very important for all countries carrying out comparability exercises, as it marks a step from pre-higher to higher education outcomes and descriptors in the EQF regardless of whether the orientation of the learning is general, vocational or technical.

In the SCQF the same step can be seen between levels 6 and 7, meaning that the upper six levels of the SCQF should reference to the upper four levels of the EQF. Extrapolating from the findings of the Scottish Working Group for the Verification of Compatibility of the Framework for Qualifications of HEIs in Scotland with the FQEHEA, published by QAA in 2006, it would appear that the outcomes of the referencing exercise at and above level 7 of the SCQF should be relatively straightforward, with SCQF levels 7 and 8 referencing to EQF level 5, SCQF levels 9 and 10 referencing to EQF level 6, and SCQF levels 11 and 12 referencing to EQF levels 7 and 8 respectively.

A similar step exists in most frameworks in relation to vocational and workplace qualifications. It tends to mark a generic move from supervisory to managerial skills on the one hand and from the competences of skilled, qualified or experienced workers to those of technicians, specialists and para-professionals on the other. This step is usually between the same levels as that referred to above, and this is the case with the SCQF, with the step coming between levels 6 and 7 (the pre higher and higher education outcomes respectively).

A third step may be noted between competences which are a requisite for entry to employment and those which are requirements of semi-skilled or skilled work. In the SCQF this comes between levels 3 and 4 (the level at which the first qualifications based directly on National Occupational Standards are to be found. In the EQF, level 1 is concerned with basic skills and simple tasks applied and carried out under direct supervision, while the first instance of the application of knowledge in a field of work comes at level 2. Also at that level are the first instances of the application of knowledge and skills in carrying out work.

It is recognised that the first two levels of the SCQF are based on outcomes appropriate to learning by individuals requiring varying degrees of support and it is clear from the background papers to EQF development and from discussions with some of those involved in the development, that the EQF is not intended to function in that capacity.[3]

[3]See the discussion in section 2.3 for the concerns that have been expressed on this matter by the Partnership's stakeholders

On this basis we can estimate that the first two levels of the SCQF will not reference directly to the EQF and that the next four levels – levels 3 to 6 – will reference to the first four levels of the EQF.

Conclusions on the referencing

In summary our conclusions are that, using the 'best fit' principle, SCQF levels can be referenced to EQF levels in terms of aims, descriptors and contents as follows:

A There are no grounds for referencing SCQF level 1 to the EQF.

B SCQF level 2 can be referenced to EQF level 1 in some domains, but not in others. This partial matching was not typical of other levels and it was not possible to use a range-finding approach or to use indicative information to establish 'best fit'. Considering the intention of the SCQF level and the extent to which referencing is not possible, it is agreed that SCQF level 2 should not be referenced to the EQF.

C SCQF levels 3-6 can be confidently referenced to EQF levels 1-4.

D For SCQF level 7 it is difficult to employ 'best fit' on the basis of an analysis of the descriptors alone. However, it is agreed that SCQF level 7 should be referenced to EQF level 5 on the basis of external factors, notably the alignment of both SCQF level 7 and EQF level 5 with the FQEHEA short cycle and a reference to the intentions of the SCQF level.

E SCQF level 8 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 5.

F While SCQF level 9 is intended to be more demanding than EQF level 5, it may not reference fully to EQF level 6 in terms of the language of the descriptors. It is agreed, however, that SCQF level 9 should be referenced to EQF level 6 on the basis of the alignment of both SCQF level 9 and EQF level 6 with the FQEHEA first cycle and by taking account of the intentions of the SCQF level.

G SCQF level 10 can be confidently referenced to EQF level 6.

H SCQF levels 11 and 12 can be confidently referenced to EQF levels 7 and 8.

Table 2 shows this summary in diagrammatic form.

FIGURE 5 REFERENCING OF SCQF TO EQF

SCQF	EQF	FQEHEA
12	8	3rd cycle
11	7	2nd cycle
10	6	1st cycle
9		
8	5	short cycle
7		
6	4	
5	3	
4	2	
3	1	
2		
1		

3 QUALITY ASSURANCE DIGEST

3.1 STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The body with ultimate responsibility for the overall Framework is the SCQF Partnership. The quality of the Framework relates closely to the strategic decision-making of this body and is influenced by policy-making by Scottish Ministers. Within the overall Framework individual partners have their own quality assurance systems but have agreed to work to a common set of principles concerning credit.

Responsibilities for quality are more diverse and are operated across the partnership and by the partners in a range of different ways. From the perspective of the SCQF, there may be said to be five crucial areas for quality assurance:

- the process by which qualifications and other assessed learning programmes are brought into the Framework – the process known in the SCQF as credit rating;
- the qualifications and other assessed learning programmes which are 'in' or 'part of' the framework and the means by which a judgement is reached on this aspect of quality – a process usually (but not exclusively) performed by organisations known as awarding bodies;
- awarding bodies and the processes by which they are recognised in relation to the SCQF;
- the bodies which deliver and assess Scottish qualifications and programmes, along with the bodies' processes and practice – these bodies are sometimes referred to as centres and may be established or approved to carry out their functions by statute, by government agencies or by awarding bodies; and
- assessment and the awards made to learners – usually following processes which are shared and interlinked between awarding bodies and their centres.

Quality assurance of and relating to maintaining the integrity of the SCQF is examined at five levels:

1 policy-making, strategic decision-making and governance (including the approval of new bodies to bring qualifications into the SCQF by credit rating).
2 qualification/programme development, validation/approval and credit rating.
3 approval/accreditation of awarding bodies.
4 approval and/or audit of centres to deliver and assess qualifications/programmes – carried out by awarding bodies.
5 assessment, the quality assurance of assessment and awarding qualifications.

Whilst the SCQF Partnership has a strategic responsibility for the quality of the SCQF, it has limited responsibilities at implementation level. This means that the clear institutional structure represented in the SCQF Partnership does not always match with the implementation levels in a straightforward and comprehensive way. This is because:

- the status of the different Framework Partnership organisations, or the bodies they represent, varies considerably in relation to quality assurance;
- two stakeholder bodies, additional to the Framework Partners, have key roles in quality assurance; and
- new credit rating bodies are being approved from 2009 onwards.

The SCQF Partnership works with existing and new partners as well as stakeholder bodies to ensure that the quality assurance supporting the SCQF is rigorous and that its separate aspects link and take account of each other wherever this is appropriate.

3.2
KEY AGENCIES WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE RESPONSIBILITIES RELATING TO THE SCQF

PARTNERS

Scottish Ministers have a direct responsibility for aspects of policy and strategy and an indirect responsibility for the quality of a number of agencies including the SCQF Partnership.

The SCQF Partnership has responsibility for the quality of the Framework and, through its partners, maintains close links with existing credit rating bodies and those organisations which support and quality assure these bodies. It is responsible for approving and monitoring all new credit rating bodies.

QAA Scotland provides safeguards and public assurance on the quality and standards of higher education and has responsibility for carrying out enhancement-led institutional reviews on the quality of programmes and programme delivery in HEIs. It also maintains a national "Academic Infrastructure" of reference points for the quality and standards of HEI provision; the HE qualifications framework; subject benchmark statements and the code of practice.

SQA is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Government Schools Directorate. It is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. SQA Accreditation is a distinct, autonomous arm of the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

HEIs (represented by Universities Scotland) are autonomous institutions which award their own Degrees and other qualifications. There are 20 HEIs in Scotland. Making use of the QAA maintained Code of Practice, subject benchmarks and the HE qualifications framework they are responsible for the quality of a range of processes: programme design and maintenance, credit rating of their own provision, credit rating of the provision of other organisations (if they choose to offer that service), assessment of learners, and making awards to successful learners. They do this through internal evaluation processes in which individuals external to the institution often have a formal role. All aspects of their work are subject to regular review by QAA Scotland.

CFEs (represented by Association of Scottish Colleges). There are 43 CFEs in Scotland. They deliver and assess qualifications and programmes of learning and have responsibility for the quality of these processes. They are also responsible for the quality of any qualifications and programmes which they develop, credit rate and validate. They may credit rate the provision of other organisations and are responsible for the quality of that service. All aspects of their work are subject to regular review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE).

STAKEHOLDERS

Two other bodies, which are not partners of the SCQF Partnership but which have key quality assurance roles in the relation to the SCQF, are the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and HMIE.

The SFC is the body that distributes funding for teaching and learning, research and other activities in HEIs and CFEs. The SFC has a duty to ensure provision of learning and teaching in Scotland's colleges and universities is quality assured and that there are sector-wide processes of continuous quality enhancement. This duty creates a link between the funding of provision in these sectors and

quality assurance. To achieve this it has taken steps to ensure that processes of continuous quality enhancement are being operated in all publicly-funded further and higher education institutions.

The SFC works on the principle that HEIs and CFEs are responsible for managing the quality of their learning provision and undertaking self-evaluation and review, and that this should be demonstrated, among other things, through periodic external review. To this end, SFC commissions QAA Scotland and HMIE to carry out external reviews of HEIs and CFEs respectively and to support quality enhancement across their respective sectors.

HMIE is an executive agency of the Scottish Government and as such operates independently and impartially whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standards of its work. HMIE undertakes the review of CFEs on behalf of the SFC. HMIE is also responsible for inspection of education and children's services.

FIGURE 6 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SCQF – THE MAIN LEVELS AND AGENCIES

Further information on these agencies is available at section 3.2

Level	Agencies & Roles					
Strategic Level	The Scottish Ministers		SCQF Partnership		The SFC	
1 Policy-making	✓		✓			
Strategic decision-making	✓		✓		✓	
Governance	(✓)		✓			
Approval of bodies to credit-rate			✓			
Implementation Level	HEIs	QAA	SQA	CFEs	HMIE	SQA Accred
2 qualification/programme development	✓		✓	✓		
validation/approval	✓	(✓)	✓		(✓)	✓
credit rating	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	(✓)	✓
3 approval/accreditation of awarding bodies	(✓)[1]					✓
4 approval and/or audit of assessment centres	(✓)[1]	✓✓	✓		✓	(✓)[2]
5 assessment	✓		✓	✓		
quality assurance of assessment	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	(✓)	(✓)[2]
awarding qualifications	✓	(✓)	✓			(✓)[2]

KEY ✓ direct role
(✓) indirect role as part of an overarching quality assurance process

NOTES (✓) 1 HEIs can accredit other institutions to deliver part or all of a course leading to an award made by the HEI
(✓) 2 through awarding bodies accredited by SQA Accreditation

3.3
THE STRUCTURE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITY IN RELATION TO THE SCQF

Whilst the above analysis shows that quality assurance processes in and related to the SCQF are complex, it also demonstrates that they are pervasive throughout the Scottish education and training system and are rigorous. The analysis is represented in grid form in Figure 6, opposite.

3.4
RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA

EQF Common Principles

There are nine EQF Common Principles which establish the quality assurance requirements for NQFs and the bodies that are responsible for them.

In order to confirm that it and its partners were in line with the Common Principles, the SCQF Partnership commissioned in 2009 a comprehensive investigation into quality assurance issues as they touched upon the SCQF.

Meeting the EQF Common Principles

The SCQF Partnership plays a strategic role in SCQF development and implementation and it is possible to link a number of aspects of its establishment and work to the EQF Common Principles. Some of these aspects, such as a specially-constituted Quality Committee and the means by which the SCQF Partnership works formally with stakeholders relate directly to the SCQF. Others, such as the consequences of being a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, have a less direct (or provide more of an underpinning) function in terms of assurance of quality. All potential links are included in the comprehensive analysis.

As noted in the section on stakeholders, above, the SCQF Partnership has the unique role of approving bodies to bring qualifications into the SCQF by credit rating. The Partnership also monitors the performance of such bodies in respect of credit rating. The quality assurance responsibilities of these bodies will either mirror those of HEIs or of SQA as shown in Table 2 above. If they award their own qualifications (as many professional bodies do), then they will mirror HEIs; if they are awarding bodies, working through approved centres, then they will mirror SQA. A crucial condition which potential credit rating bodies must meet is that they themselves are subject to some form of external scrutiny.

Similarly, the SFC – which supports and promotes the SCQF, through its work with FECs – occupies a strategic role which clearly underpins, but does not always relate directly to the Framework.

The work of the two bodies which undertake external quality assurance activities under contract from the SFC, QAA Scotland and HMIE, bears more directly on the SCQF. Both make some provision for the quality of the credit rating process, although this is not a specific focus of their work. Much of their work, however, can be related relatively straightforwardly to the EQF Common Principles.

SQA occupies what may be a unique position in a national system of education and training. However, all the different roles of SQA, established by law, can be related to the EQF Common Principles.

The roles of HEIs and CFEs are also complex and they contribute to many levels of quality assurance related to the SCQF. Some of these relate straightforwardly to the EQF Common Principles, others are less easy to cross-reference.

CP1

Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts and levels of the SCQF

Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts and levels of the SCQF. They do this either directly, from the governance of the SCQF Partnership and the quality assurance principles of the SCQF or, more indirectly, through the quality assurance policies, systems and procedures of partner and stakeholder bodies which have responsibility for qualifications. The basis of quality assurance varies in kind, from legal requirements to agreed guidelines, and applies at all levels from strategic planning to certification of successful learners.

CP2

Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions

Internal quality assurance is carried out by all bodies which offer qualifications or assessed learning programmes included in the SCQF. It is integral to the operations of the wide range of education and training institutions which offer these qualifications and assessed programmes, including all publicly funded HEIs and CFEs, together with schools, training providers, enterprises and voluntary organisations which operate as approved centres of SQA and other awarding bodies which are approved to credit-rate.

CP3

Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies

External quality assurance is operated by a number of agencies, notably the SFC, QAA Scotland, HMIE, SQA in its role as an awarding body, SQA Accreditation and awarding bodies accredited by SQA Accreditation. These quality assurance arrangements include regular evaluation of education and training institutions, their programmes and their quality assurance systems by these agencies and/or others. HEIs are subject to review by QAA Scotland every four years, while CFEs are reviewed by HMIE every four years. SQA (in both its roles) reviews centres as required, which may be annually. The SCQF Partnership is responsible for monitoring the performance of newly-approved credit rating bodies.

CP4

External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance are subject to regular review

All external monitoring bodies are themselves subject to review of different kinds. QAA Scotland and HMIE, for example, carry out their work on the basis of renewable service level agreements with SFC. In addition, QAA is subject to periodic review as a full member of ENQA, and SQA is subject to audit by the Scottish Government.

CP5

Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes

It is difficult to separate quality assurance related directly to the SCQF from wider quality assurance activities that all the quality assurance bodies, noted in section 3.2 above perform. The quality assurance provided jointly and separately by both the partners in the SCQF and the SCQF Partnership focuses on outcomes, since all of the qualifications in the

SCQF are outcomes-based. It also covers evaluations of aspects of context, input and process. Section 3.2 above provides more information on the individual quality assurance arrangements of the SCQF Partnership, its partners and stakeholders and shows how they operate rigorously together.

CP6

Quality assurance systems should include the following elements:

A clear and measurable objectives and standards

The requirements on the agencies mean that they work to clear and measurable objectives and standards. These mainly apply to planning and reporting, but also include the management of quality assurance processes. Those bodies responsible for approving the quality assurance systems of others, define and publish the standards against which compliance is expected.

B guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement

The key agencies all work to, and publish, comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of quality assurance. All the agencies include systematic stakeholder involvement at policy and implementation levels in shaping their work.

C appropriate resources

All the quality assurance bodies and agencies described in 3.2 above receive funding from the Scottish Government (although this might also be supplemented by other sources of funding such as income generating work). Government funding is based on judgements about the needs and effectiveness of the quality assurance body or agency concerned. Arrangements for the review of HEIs, CFEs and other providers are linked to there being appropriate resources to ensure that qualifications are delivered and assessed properly.

D consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review

At all levels and in all sectors of the SCQF, quality assurance arrangements combine and inter-relate internal processes, self-assessment and external review. Each of the quality assurance agencies has an identifiable and characteristic approach to external institutional review and systems for ensuring that this is understood and systematically applied.

E feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement

Each of the quality assurance agencies uses both formal and informal feedback procedures to evaluate the quality processes it uses and judge their effectiveness. All of the agencies make regular adjustments and improvements to their arrangements in the light of feedback.

F widely accessible evaluation results

Most of the quality assurance agencies involved in activities which can be related to the SCQF publish reports of their activities. Audit Scotland , the SCQF Partnership, QAA Scotland, HMIE and SQA Accreditation all publish reports of institutional reviews and generic and/or evaluative reviews of aspects of the provision, delivery and/or assessment for which they are directly or indirectly responsible. SQA publishes a range of statistics about its processes and its provision.

CP7

Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis

There is continuing discussion within the SCQF Partnership at different levels, with partners and stakeholders, and with colleagues in other

parts of the UK and Europe to encourage and bring about appropriate forms of convergence and articulation between quality approaches. Specific projects to further this end have been undertaken both in Scotland and further afield in the rest of the UK and Europe.

CP8

Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within all sectors and across the SCQF

The Partnership explicitly recognises that processes and the quality assurance of these processes will vary from sector to sector. It establishes common principles for the implementation of the Framework and encourages collaboration between sectors and convergence where appropriate.

There is also considerable cross-sector collaboration and involvement of the partners and stakeholders in events such as validations, approvals, reviews and SCQF credit rating approval.

CP9

Quality assurance orientations at National level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning

All the key agencies take steps to ensure that the outcomes of their work can provide good practice models, case studies and reference points for evaluation and peer learning.

GLOSSARY

ASC *Association of Scottish Colleges*

CFHEs *Colleges of Further and Higher Education*

CP *EQF Common Principle*

CQFW *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*

ENQA *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

EQF *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*

EQF Advisory Group *European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group*

FQEHEA *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*

HEI *Higher Education Institutions*

HMIE *Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education*

HNC *Higher National Certificate*

HND *Higher National Diploma*

M&AA *Memorandum and Articles of Association*

NCP *National Coordination Point*

NQF *National Qualifications Framework*

OSCR *Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator*

QA *Quality Assurance*

QAA *Quality Assurance Agency*

QAA Scotland *Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland*

QCF *Qualifications and Credit Framework*

RPL *Recognition of Prior informal or experiential Learning*

SACCA *Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access*

SCOTCAT *Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer*

SCQF *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*

SCQFP *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, also sometimes referred to as the SCQF Partnership or, simply, the Partnership*

SFC *Scottish Funding Council*

SQA *Scottish Qualifications Authority*

SVQs *Scottish Vocational Qualifications*

4 CONCLUSIONS

The investigation, detailed above, provides clear evidence that the quality assurance for SCQF operations and for the SCQF Partnership is rigorous and effective and that the Partnership meets the requirements of the Common Principles.

The Report on the Compatibility of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Part 2 Quality Assurance contains further information on the way in which the SCQF Partnership meets the Common Principles can be accessed on the SCQF Partnership's website at **www.scqf.org.uk**

5 REFERENCES

Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Report of the Panel Appointed to Undertake a Review of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK) for the Purposes of Full Membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Final Report, 2008

QAA, SCQF Partnership, CCEA, Ofqual, CQFW, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries – a Rough Guide to Comparing Qualifications in the UK and Ireland, 2009

SCQF Partnership

Report on the Compatibility of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Part 2 Quality Assurance, 2009

SCQF Partnership

Report on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), 2008

SCQF Partnership

Report on Responses to Consultation on the Referencing of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), 2008

6 APPENDIX 1

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12				DOCTORAL DEGREE	
11				INTEGRATED MASTERS DEGREE MASTERS DEGREE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10				HONOURS DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
9			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD	BACHELORS / ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ4
8		HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA		DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION	
7	CREDIT POINTS ADVANCED HIGHER 32 SCOTTISH BACCALAUREATE 104	HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE		CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER 24				
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 24 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE 24				SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 24 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE 24	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARD		SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 18 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE 24				
2	ACCESS 2 18				
1	ACCESS 1				

SCQF – EQF STEERING GROUP: REFERENCING SCQF TO EQF – TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

The remit of the SCQF Referencing Group: Referencing SCQF – EQF is to make recommendations to the SCQF Quality Committee on all key activities relating to the referencing of the SCQF to the EQF.

Specifically, the remit of the Steering Group is to:

- agree and oversee the consultation process;
- consider the impact/implications of the referencing work on the relationship to the QCF and CQFW and vice versa and recommend how to progress and come to an agreed reference;
- keep abreast of other UK developments relating to EQF referencing;
- endorse and/or amend the QA Digest and the final report resulting from the National Consultation;
- oversee the analysis and evaluation of the consultation outputs in order to inform recommendations to SCQF Quality Committee; and
- consider the implications of the recommendation on certification against EQF by 2012 and provide advice and guidance to the SCQFP.

Through the above activities the Steering Group will make recommendations to the SCQF Quality Committee in support of the SCQF Partnership's commitment to implement as appropriate the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union's Recommendation that Member States:

- reference levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF levels;
- promote and apply the European principles for QA in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- ensure all methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- provide guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system; and
- ensure the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

In carrying out its functions, the Steering Group will be mindful of the need to avoid duplication of other relevant initiatives, such as those related to the Bologna Process in higher education.

APPENDIX 2

THE SCQF – EQF STEERING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Organisation	Representation
Independent Chair	Carole Wilkinson
Alliance of Sector Skills Councils – Scotland	Jim Brown
Association of Scotland's Colleges	Dugald Craig
International framework expert – Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Study	Eva Gonczi
International framework expert – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	Jim Murray
NARIC	Chris Lyons
NUS	Morgane Artacho Liam Burns
Quality Assurance Agency	Gillian Mackintosh
SCQF Partnership	Aileen Ponton
SCQF Partnership	Margaret Cameron
SCQF Quality Committee Representative	Alex MacLennan
Scottish Government	Lynn Forsyth John Provan
Scottish Qualifications Authority	Lynn Tully Sarah Breslin
Scottish Union Learning/STUC	Harry Cunningham
UK Commission for Employment and Skills	Paul Burnand
Universities Scotland	Gerard Madill Simin Abraham

Secretariat	Representation
SCQF Partnership	Mike Hewett

APPENDIX 3

THE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

SCQF LEVEL 1 *Access 1 is an example of a qualification at this level*

Level Descriptor for SCQF Level 1
SCQF Level 1 recognises learning development and achievement that ranges from participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks, with varying degrees of support.

SCQF LEVEL 2 *Access 2 is an example of a qualification at this level*

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject/discipline.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Relate knowledge to a few simple everyday contexts with prompting. Use a few very simple skills. Carry out, with guidance, a few familiar tasks. Use under supervision basic tools and materials.
Generic cognitive skills	Use rehearsed stages for solving problems. Operate in personal and/or everyday contexts. Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of action.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use very simple skills with assistance, for example: • Produce and respond to a limited range of very simple written and oral communication in familiar/routine contexts; • Carry out a limited range of very simple tasks to process data and access information; • Use a limited range of very simple and familiar numerical and graphical data in familiar and everyday contexts.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Work alone or with others on simple routine, familiar tasks under frequent and directive supervision. Identify, given simple criteria, some successes and/or failures of the work.

SCQF LEVEL 3

Access 3, Foundation Standard Grade are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Basic knowledge in a subject/discipline; • Simple facts and ideas associated with a subject/discipline.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Relate knowledge with some prompting to personal and/or everyday contexts. Use a few basic, routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks. Complete pre-planned tasks. Use, with guidance, basic tools and materials safely and effectively.
Generic cognitive skills	Identify, with some prompting, a process to deal with a situation or issue. Operate in familiar contexts using given criteria. Take account of some identified consequences of action.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use simple skills, for example: • Produce and respond to simple written and oral communication in familiar, routine contexts; • Carry out simple tasks to process data and access information; • Use simple numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Work alone or with others on simple tasks under frequent supervision. Participate in the setting of goals, timelines etc. Participate in the review of completed work and the identification of ways of improving practices and processes. Identify, given simple criteria, own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work.

SCQF LEVEL 4

Intermediate 1, General Standard Grade, SVQ 1 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Basic knowledge in a subject/discipline which is mainly factual; • Some simple facts and ideas about and associated with a subject/discipline; • Knowledge of basic processes, materials and terminology.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Relate knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts. Use a few skills to complete straightforward tasks with some non-routine elements. Select and use, with guidance, appropriate tools and materials safely and effectively.
Generic cognitive skills	Use, with guidance, given stages of a problem solving approach to deal with a situation or issue. Operate in straightforward contexts. Identify and/or take account of some of the consequences of action/inaction.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use straightforward skills – for example: • Produce and respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts; • Use the most straightforward features of familiar applications to process and obtain information; • Use straightforward numerical and graphical data in straightforward and familiar contexts.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Work alone or with others on straightforward tasks. Contribute to the setting of goals, timelines, etc. Contribute to the review of completed work and offer suggestions for improving practices and processes. Identify own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work.

SCQF LEVEL 5

Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ 2 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Basic knowledge in a subject/discipline which is mainly factual but has some theoretical component; • A range of simple facts and ideas about and associated with a subject/discipline; • Knowledge and understanding of basic processes, materials and terminology.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Relate ideas and knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts. Complete some routine and non-routine tasks using knowledge associated with a subject/discipline. Plan and organise both familiar and new tasks. Select appropriate tools and materials and use safely and effectively (e.g. without waste). Adjust tools where necessary, following safe practices.
Generic cognitive skills	Use a problem-solving approach to deal with a situation or issue that is straightforward in relation to a subject/discipline. Operate in a familiar context, but where there is a need to take account of or use additional information of different kinds, some of which will be theoretical or hypothetical. Use some abstract constructs – for example make generalisations and/or draw conclusions.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a range of routine skills – for example: • Produce and respond to detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts; • Use standard applications to process, obtain and combine information; • Use a range of numerical and graphical data in straightforward contexts that have some complex features.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Work alone or with others on tasks with minimum supervision. Agree goals and responsibilities for self and/or work team with manager/supervisor. Take leadership responsibility for some tasks. Show an awareness of others' roles, responsibilities and requirements in carrying out work and make a contribution to the evaluation and improvement of practices and processes.

SCQF LEVEL 6

Higher, SVQ 3 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Generalised knowledge of a subject/discipline; • Factual and theoretical knowledge; • A range of facts, ideas, properties, materials, terminology, practices, techniques about/associated with a subject/ discipline; • Relate the subject/discipline to a range of practical and/or everyday applications.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Apply knowledge and understanding in known, practical contexts. Use some of the basic, routine practices, techniques and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline in routine contexts which may have non-routine elements. Plan how skills will be used to address set situations and/or problems and adapt these as necessary.
Generic cognitive skills	Obtain, organise and use factual and theoretical information in problem solving. Make generalisations and predictions. Draw conclusions and suggest solutions.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a wide range of skills – for example: • Produce and respond to detailed and relatively complex written and oral communication in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts; • Select and use standard applications to process, obtain and combine information; • Use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts which may have non-routine elements.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Take responsibility for the carrying out of a range of activities where the overall goal is clear, under non-directive supervision. Take some supervisory responsibility for the work of others and lead established teams in the implementation of routine work. Manage limited resources within defined and supervised areas of work. Take account of roles and responsibilities related to the tasks being carried out and take a significant role in the evaluation of work and the improvement of practices and processes.

SCQF LEVEL 7

Cert HE, HNC, Advanced Higher, SVQ3 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • A broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general; • Knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles; • An awareness of the evolving/changing nature of knowledge and understanding; • An understanding of the difference between explanations based on evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation and of the importance of this difference.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts.
Generic cognitive skills	Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject/discipline. Use a range of approaches to address defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline – for example: • Convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form; • Use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts; • Use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data; • Use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination; • Use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level. Take supervision in less familiar areas of work. Take some managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure. Manage limited resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts. Take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.

SCQF LEVEL 8

Dip HE, HND, SVQ 4 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • A broad knowledge of the scope, defining features and main areas of a subject/discipline; • Detailed knowledge in some areas; • Understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and concepts; • Limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms; • An outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex. Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues. Adapt routine practices within accepted standards.
Generic cognitive skills	Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues that are within the common understandings of the subject/discipline. Use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues. Critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with a subject/discipline – for example: • Convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes; • Use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data; • Use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level. Take significant managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work. Manage resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts. Take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work in support of current professional practice, under guidance. Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes of practices, under guidance.

SCQF LEVEL 9

Bachelors Degree, SVQ4 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • A broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope, main areas and boundaries of a subject/ discipline; • A critical understanding of a selection of the principal theories, principles, concepts and terminology; • Knowledge that is detailed in some areas and/or knowledge of one or more specialisms that are informed by forefront developments.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use a selection of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use a few skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are specialised or advanced. Practise routine methods of enquiry and/or research. Practise in a range of professional level contexts that include a degree of unpredictability.
Generic cognitive skills	Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues. Identify and analyse routine professional problems and issues. Draw on a range of sources in making judgements.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline – for example: • Make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences; • Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work; • Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level. Take some responsibility for the work of and for a range of resources. Practise in ways that take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities. Work under guidance with qualified practitioners. Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices, seeking guidance where appropriate.

SCQF LEVEL 10

Honours Degree is an example of a qualification at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Knowledge that covers and integrates most of the principal areas, features, boundaries, terminology and conventions of a subject/discipline; • A critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles; • Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, some of which is informed by or at the forefront of a subject/discipline; • Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the subject/discipline is developed, including a range of established techniques of enquiry or research methodologies.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use a range of the principal skills, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use a few skills, practices and/or materials which are specialised, advanced or at the forefront of a subject/discipline. Execute a defined project of research, development or investigation and identify and implement relevant outcomes. Practise in a range of professional level contexts which include a degree or unpredictability and/or specialism.
Generic cognitive skills	Critically identify, define, conceptualise and analyse complex / professional level problems and issues. Offer professional level insights, interpretations and solutions to problems and issues. Critically review and consolidate knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline. Demonstrate some originality and creativity in dealing with professional level issues. Make judgements where data/information is limited or comes from a range of sources.

Continued opposite

SCQF LEVEL 10 CONTINUED

Honours Degree is an example of a qualification at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline, for example: • Make formal presentations about specialised topics to informed audiences; • Communicate with professional level peers, senior colleagues and specialists; • Use a range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify refinements/improvements to software to increase effectiveness; • Interpret, use and evaluate a wide range of numerical and graphical data to set and achieve goals/targets.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise autonomy and initiative in professional/equivalent activities. Take significant responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources. Practise in ways which show a clear awareness of own and others' roles and responsibilities. Work effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners. Work with others to bring about change, development and/or new thinking. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues, in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices. Recognise the limits of these codes and seek guidance where appropriate.

SCQF LEVEL 11

PG Cert, PG Dip, MA, MSc, SVQ 5 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • Knowledge that covers and integrates most, if not all, of the main areas of a subject/discipline — including their features, boundaries, terminology and conventions; • A critical understanding of the principal theories, principles and concepts; • A critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, principles and concepts; • Extensive, detailed and critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at or informed by developments at the forefront; • Critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline and one or more specialisms.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials which are associated with a subject/discipline. Use a range of specialised skills, techniques, practices and/or materials which are at the forefront or informed by forefront developments. Apply a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry. Plan and execute a significant project of research, investigation or development. Demonstrate originality or creativity in the application of knowledge, understanding and/or practices. Practise in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional level contexts.
Generic cognitive skills	Apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to issues which are at the forefront or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline. Identify, conceptualise and define new and abstract problems and issues. Develop original and creative responses to problems and issues. Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline. Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in situations in the absence of complete or consistent data/ information.

Continued opposite

SCQF LEVEL 11 CONTINUED

PG Cert, PG Dip, MA, MSc, SVQ 5 are examples of qualifications at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline – for example: • Communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge/expertise; • Communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists; • Use a wide range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify new software or refinements/improvements to existing software to increase effectiveness; • Undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities. Take responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others. Take responsibility for a significant range of resources. Demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make an identifiable contribution to change and development. Practise in ways which draw on critical reflection on own and others' roles and responsibilities. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

SCQF LEVEL 12

Doctoral Degree is an example of a qualification at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: • A critical overview of a subject/discipline, including critical understanding of the principal theories, principles and concepts; • A critical, detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of one or more specialisms; • Knowledge and understanding that is generated through personal research or equivalent work that makes a significant contribution to the development of the subject/discipline.
Practice: applied knowledge and understanding	Use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use and enhance a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and materials at the forefront of one or more specialisms. Apply a range of standard and specialised research/equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry. Design and execute research, investigative or development projects to deal with new problems and issues. Demonstrate originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices. Practise in the context of new problems and circumstances.
Generic cognitive skills	Apply a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues. Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas, information and issues. Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues. Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.

Continued opposite

SCQF LEVEL 12 CONTINUED

Doctoral Degree is an example of a qualification at this level

Characteristics	The following descriptions are for guidance only — it is not expected that every point will be covered
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Use a significant range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline – for example: • Communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences and adapt communication to the context and purpose; • Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue and review with peers and experts in other specialisms; • Use a range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify software requirements to enhance work; • Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	Exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities. Take full responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others. Demonstrate leadership and/or originality in tackling and solving problems and issues. Work in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues. Make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

CREDIT & QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR WALES
CQFW FFRAMWAITH CREDYDAU A CHYMWYSTERAU CYMRU

REFERENCING REPORT: CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR WALES TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK WALES NATIONAL COORDINATION POINT REPORT

CONTENTS

Preface		107
Executive Summary		108
1	**European Qualifications Framework**	110
1.1	Background and Benefits	110
1.2	Implementation of the European Qualifications Framework	110
1.3	National Coordination Points	111
1.4	European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group	111
2	**The Credit & Qualifications Framework for Wales**	111
2.1	Background and Benefits	111
2.2	Relationship of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the European Qualifications Framework	114
2.3	Key steps in the Referencing	115
2.4	Consultation Process	116
3	**Criteria and Procedures for Referencing**	117
3.1	European Qualifications Framework Criteria and Procedures	117
3.2	Response to the referencing Criteria and Procedures	118
3.3	Response to the quality assurance Criteria and Procedure	124
4	**Conclusions**	130
5	**References**	130
6	**Appendices**	130
6.1	Terms of Reference	130
6.2	Level Descriptors	132

PREFACE TO THE WALES REPORT

The Welsh Assembly Government is delighted to introduce this report on the referencing of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

It is extremely important to us as an organisation to participate in activities which strengthen our relationships with our European and international partners and which, as a result, may bring benefits to Wales and its learners, employers, employees and institutions. Referencing the levels of the CQFW to the levels of the EQF can help us to understand the relationships between our national framework and other national qualifications systems and frameworks across Europe.

This report provides details of the activities which we have engaged in to make the relationship between the CQFW and the EQF clearer. It specifies the outcome of these activities – how the nine levels of the CQFW reference against the eight levels of the EQF.

This report also outlines the steps which led to the referencing and those involved and engaged to ensure that their views, concerns and advice were taken into account. International experts were included in our referencing activities.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated for the time and support they so kindly offered throughout the referencing process.

The report outlines where we are currently in terms of referencing the CQFW to the EQF. As the CQFW continues to develop and to include more and more qualifications and programmes of learning, we and our partners and stakeholders will keep our own systems under review including our referencing activities. We will continue to meet with colleagues both in the rest of the UK and in Europe and will link with them as we do this.

We hope that you find the report helpful.

The Welsh Assembly Government
Tŷ'r Afon
Bedwas
Wales
United Kingdom
CF83 8WT

14th September 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENERAL OVERVIEW

This document provides the final report of the Wales National Co-ordination Point on the outcomes of the referencing of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This has been a challenging process, however, in Wales there has been extensive work on articulation with other frameworks in the UK. This report builds on the work to date, advice and support from International experts, and other known analyses within the UK and has enabled a rigorous quality assurance process to be carried out.

The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an independent consultant to consider the issues around the referencing of the CQFW to the EQF and to report on these. The *Report on the Referencing of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* provides evidence of a clear and demonstrable link between the CQFW descriptors and the EQF level descriptors. A wide range of stakeholders contributed to the subsequent consultation on the methodology and findings of the report. It is clear that the process of articulation is not a precise science and importantly must not destabilise existing custom and practice.

CONSULTATION

The key outcomes arising from the consultation process have proved to be important in supporting the final recommendations of this report. The main issues raised were:

- Knowledge of the new framework was very low. This was not surprising given the recent endorsement of the European Qualifications Framework;
- Aligning different qualification frameworks and different level descriptors was a complex and challenging process;
- A number of industrial sectors across Europe have already established a recognition and transferability of learning and they were anxious that this new framework does not destabilise these arrangements;
- The European Qualifications Framework is as yet new and untried. However, as a principle, its implementation should not disrupt the functionality of the inter and intra framework relationships that already exist within the UK and Ireland;
- The alignment of the frameworks can be a technical and complex process and care needs to be given to appropriate communication to a wider audience; and
- Quality assurance arrangements in terms of the referencing of frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework and other national frameworks are still under development.

PROCESS OF REFERENCING

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales is described as having 9 levels (Entry plus 8) where Entry level is itself sub-divided into 3 sub-levels: Entry 3, Entry 2 and Entry 1. As a meta-framework it uses two sets of level descriptors known as England, Wales & Northern Ireland (EWNI) Generic Credit Level Descriptors (previously known as NICATS) for Higher Education and the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) descriptors for all other learning.

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales includes all qualifications and other assessed learning programmes available to

learners in Wales. These are placed in the CQFW using statements of learning outcomes, measures of complexity of outcome (level) and volume of learning (credit) which covers everything from single-credit units with a learning time of 10 hours, to full time Degree, Masters and Doctorate programmes.

A hierarchical range of five standardised conclusions was identified for mapping the frameworks and used for each element at each level. The results of the investigation were brought together and an overall proposal for the articulation of the CQFW and the EQF was developed for submission and inclusion into the UK EQF Overarching report.

The majority of the report conclusions are in the category "enough evidence for a match with a European Qualifications Framework level". The two exceptions are Entry 2 and level 4 where the overall evidence is weak. Since there are eight levels in the EQF to be compared with 9 levels in the CQFW (including entry), there must be at least one level at which the matching is not straightforward. The overall conclusions of the investigation are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

FINAL PROPOSED ARTICULATION OF THE CQFW AND THE EQF

CQFW Levels	EQF Levels
8	8
7	7
6	6
5	5
4	5
3	4
2	3
1	2
Entry 3	1
Entry 1 / Entry 2	—

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The investigation, detailed above, provides clear evidence the Quality Assurance for the CQFW operations is rigorous and effective and that the CQFW meets the requirements of the Common Principles.

The quality assurance process for each of the three pillars of learning in the CQFW is different but equally rigorous. The quality assurance process for all learning is objective and independent of any 'political' intervention. This report demonstrates that Quality Assured Lifelong Learning, (QALL) and General and Vocational Education and Training (GVET) have been shown to meet the common principles for Quality Assurance in the context of the European Qualifications Framework.

In partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications has already been shown to comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in its sector so no further analysis by this report is required.

CONCLUSION

The EQF has been a catalyst for action in countries in and outside member states and over 60 countries around the world are now developing National Qualifications Frameworks. The European Qualifications Framework is highly regarded but is not yet a proven tool. There are guidelines on how to articulate with the Framework, however there are currently no rules on how it should be used as a mechanism. There is a clear need for quality assurance, particularly in relation to those countries which are designing new National Qualifications Frameworks to articulate with the European Qualifications Framework.

1 EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

1.1 BACKGROUND AND BENEFITS

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has been shaped as a reference framework to promote transparency across existing European national and sectoral frameworks. The EQF was designed to be a reference framework to enable the comparison of national qualifications systems from different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to interpret and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. The EQF was adopted by the European Parliament and Council of Europe on 23rd April 2008.

The EQF encourages countries to relate their qualifications systems or frameworks to the EQF by 2010 and to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level. The core of the EQF is comprised of eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. Levels of national qualifications will be aligned to the EQF levels 1 to 8. The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications.

1.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the EQF for lifelong learning recommends that member states:

- use the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems and to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society, as well as the further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems;
- relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the EQF levels, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice;
- adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and 'Europass' documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level;
- use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the common European principles, paying particular attention to those citizens most likely to be subject to unemployment or insecure forms of employment, for whom such an approach could help increase participation in lifelong learning and access to the labour market;
- promote and apply the principles of quality assurance in education and training when relating higher education and vocational education and training qualifications within national qualifications systems to the EQF; and
- designate national coordination points linked to the particular structures and requirements of the Member States, in order to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the EQF with a view to promoting the quality and transparency of that relationship.

Full text of the recommendations is available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

1.3 NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION POINTS

The Recommendation advises that the tasks of the national coordination points (NCP) should include:

- referencing levels of qualifications within national qualifications systems to the EQF levels;
- ensuring that a transparent methodology is used to reference national qualifications levels to the EQF in order to facilitate comparisons between them on the one hand, and ensuring that the resulting decisions are published on the other;
- providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through national qualifications systems; and
- promoting the participation of all relevant stakeholders including, in accordance with national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

1.4 EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK ADVISORY GROUP

The Recommendation establishing the EQF contained reference to the Commissions intention to 'establish a EQF advisory group, composed of representatives of Member States and involving the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate, responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF'.

The EQF Advisory Group met for the first time in March 2008. Mike Coles of Qualification and Curriculum Authority and the 4 countries UK National Co-ordination Group represents Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland on this Group.

2 THE CREDIT & QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR WALES

2.1 BACKGROUND AND BENEFITS

The CQFW is a government-sponsored framework linked to national policy on lifelong learning, skills and economic development. The responsibility for the CQFW lies with the Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning and Improvement (QCLI) Group of the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) within the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). It is now operated in partnership by DCELLS and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

The CQFW is associated with five national goals:

- enabling people to develop and maintain essential skills;
- encouraging people to become lifelong learners;

- exploiting the knowledge in businesses and educational institutions;
- encouraging businesses and workers to gain new skills; and
- helping people within their communities to develop new skills.

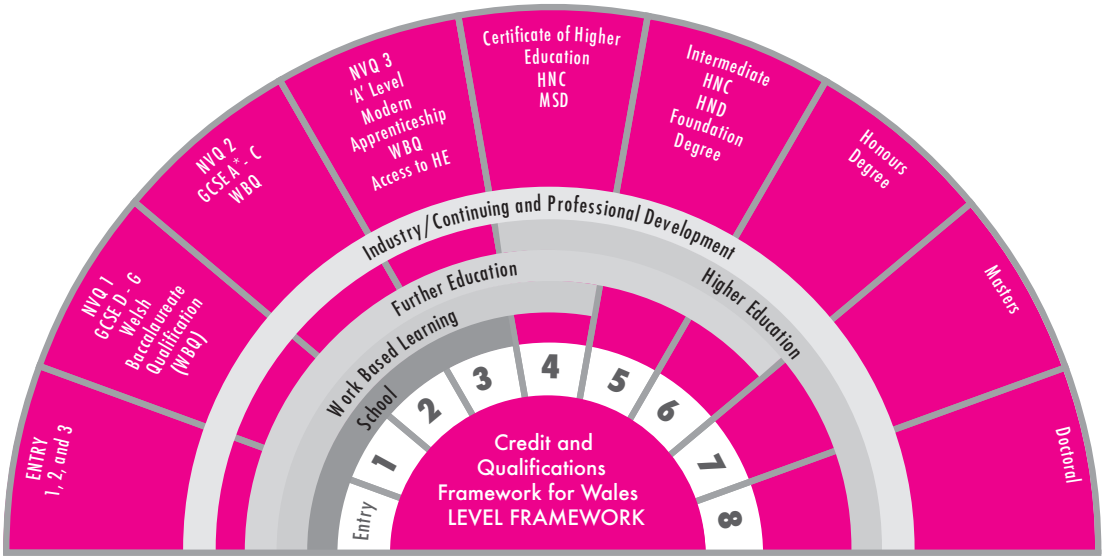
The CQFW is expected to improve access, flexibility and progression in learning, assessment and certification, through qualifications and learning that is credit-based. It is intended to increase the recognition of both certificated and experiential prior learning, workplace learning, other non-formal learning, and informal learning.

The CQFW includes all qualifications and other assessed learning programmes available to learners in Wales (Figure 2). These are placed in the framework using measures of complexity of outcome (level) and volume of learning (credit).

To be included in the framework, qualifications and other assessed learning programmes must also meet criteria that they offer the potential for progression.

In the CQFW all kinds of learning which meets the requirements of the frameworks can be included but the learning must be outcome-based, credit-rated, subject to quality-assured assessment and lead to formal recognition of some kind. This includes everything from single-credit units with learning time of 10 hours to complete, to large group awards taking the equivalent of three or four years of full time study.

FIGURE 2 CQFW LEARNING AND PROGRESSION ROUTES



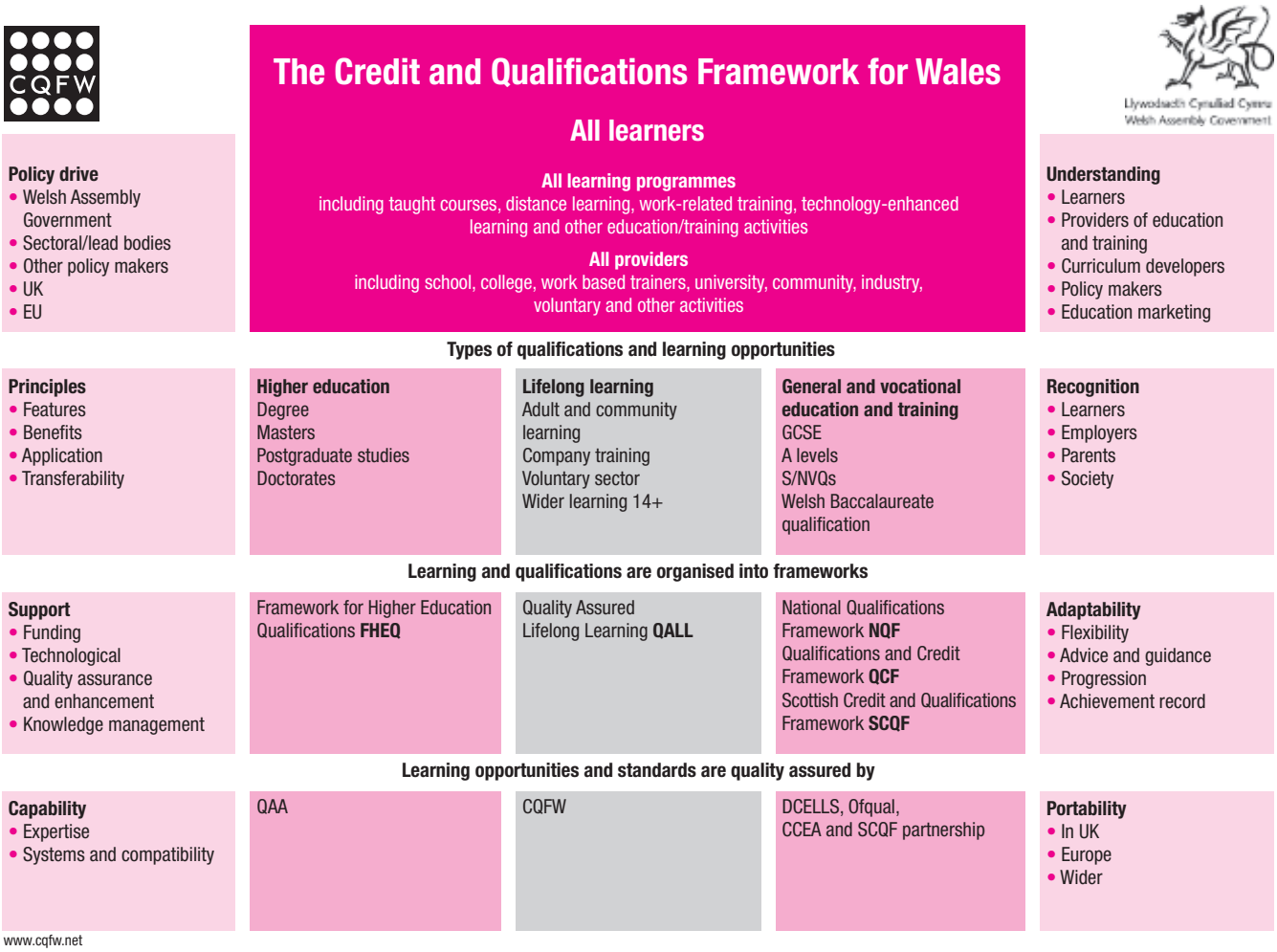
The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales was introduced in 2003 as a fully inclusive learning framework. The Levels capture all learning from the very initial stages (Entry) to the most advanced (Level 8). The Fan diagram illustrates the levels and examples of qualifications and learning provision that are included in it.

For further details contact the CQFW Secretariat:
Tel: 01443 663 663 Fax: 01443 663 653
E-mail: info@cqfw.net Visit: www.cqfw.net

The CQFW is composed of three "pillars", two of which are shared with England and Northern Ireland and the third of which is distinctive to the CQFW (Figure 3). The two shared frameworks are the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ EWNI). The third component framework is designed to bring all learning in Wales, that is not already included in the other two pillars, and which meets the criteria for inclusion, into the CQFW and is referred to as the Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) pillar.

CQFW has 9 levels (Entry plus 8) where Entry level is itself sub-divided into 3 sub-levels (E3, E2 and E1). The CQFW uses EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors and QCF level descriptors.

FIGURE 3 CQFW LEARNING PILLARS AND ASSOCIATE SUPPORT



2.2
RELATIONSHIP OF THE FHEQ AND THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental initiative that aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, which in turn is used to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. It currently has 46 participating countries and its business is conducted outside the formal decision-making framework of the European Union. Decision-making within the Process rests on the consent of all the participating countries.

The process was launched in 1999 when Ministers from 29 European countries, including the UK, met in Bologna and signed a declaration establishing what was necessary to create an EHEA by the end of the decade.

In discussing the relationship between the EQF and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA) the Bologna Process Coordination Group for Qualifications Frameworks in its report to the Bologna Follow Up Group noted "good cooperation has now been established between the FQEHEA and the EQF. There is nevertheless a need to clarify further the relationship between the EHEA-QF and the EQF. In particular, there is a need to promote dialogue between European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and European Credits in Vocational Education & Training (ECVET) to ensure interoperability."

In the UK, a Scoping Group was established to explore referencing of the Framework or Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ-EWNI) to the EQF.

The report on this work was submitted to the UK Higher Learning Policy Forum by the Quality Assurance Agency on 9th April 2009.

The Group supported the aims of the EQF and the goal of integrating Lifelong Learning across Europe. The desire to support UK participation in the European agenda had led Scotland and England, Wales and Northern Ireland to be early adopters of the Bologna process and to be amongst the first few countries to self-certify their HE frameworks against the FQ-EHEA. Self-certification of the FHEQ-EWNI and FHEQS against the FQ-EHEA has demonstrated commitment to the Bologna process.

For England, Wales and Northern Ireland the group was not aware of any additional benefits which might accrue to the HE sector, at present, by referencing the FHEQ-EWNI to the EQF beyond those which would be secured as a result of self-certification of the FHEQ against the FQ-EHEA. Nevertheless the Group recognises that there is a need to focus on monitoring the progress of the EQF and its associated activities and instruments.

The Group concluded that the FHEQ should not, at the present time, be referenced against the EQF. The Group recommends that the position should be reviewed again, at a later date, in the light of:

- analysis of the benefits realised by UK HE as a result of self-certification of FHEQ-EWNI against the FQ-EHEA;
- development of the EQF and a sound knowledge of the implications of its emerging policies, procedures and bureaucratic requirements;
- resolution of issues raised by the individual UK countries referencing against the EQF;

- evidence and experience of other countries participation in the FQ-EHEA self-certification process;
- information from the UK HE Europe Unit on participation by other countries in the Bologna process and the impact of other countries referencing to the EQF;
- continued monitoring and assessment of the wider global HE initiatives to which UK HE needs to respond; and
- monitoring of levels of interest expressed by Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Bodies in the EQF.

2.3
PROCESS FOR REFERENCING THE CREDIT & QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR WALES TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Welsh Assembly Government established the National Co-ordination Point – Membership and Terms of Reference (Annex A) to assist in overseeing the CQFW EQF referencing process.

The role of the CQFW EQF National Co-ordination Point is:

- Referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- Promoting and applying the principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- Ensuring the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and the resulting decisions are published;
- Assisting the Welsh Assembly Government in preparing the national referencing report, in accordance with the criteria and procedures developed an agreed by the EQF Advisory Group;
- Providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system; and
- Ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

The group was made up with membership representatives from the Federation of Awarding Bodies, Fforwm, Higher Education Wales (HEW), Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), National Union of Students Wales (NUS Wales), National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Health (NLIAH), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium (WHECC), and the Welsh Assembly Government. In addition two European Educational Experts were invited to joined the committee – Karen Jones of the Irish Universities Quality Board and Gerard Madill of the European Universities Association.

The CQFW – EQF NCP was established in September 2008.

- The first stage of the group's work was the appointment of an independent consultant to carry out a detailed technical comparison of reference levels of qualifications within the CQFW to the EQF;

- The report was completed and submitted to the 2nd CQFW – EQF NCP meeting in March 2009 and endorsed by the CQFW Common Accord Forum in April 2009 (Hart. J. 2009 for the full report of the CQFW against the Criteria and Principles of the EQF);
- The second stage was the commissioning of an independent consultant in April 2009 to complete the quality assurance digest (Lewis, A. 2009 for the full report of the Quality Assurance Digest of the CQFW under the Common Principles of the EQF). This report was completed for CQFW Common Accord Forum (CCAF) endorsement in July 2009;
- Both reports were sent out for consultation.
- The third stage was the appointment of International experts to review both reports – the CQFW / EQF referencing and the Quality Digest;
- At the 3rd meeting of the CQFW – EQF NCP in July 2009 the draft CQFW / EQF Referencing Report was circulated and submitted to the UK NCP;
- In September 2009, the final report was signed off by the Welsh Assembly Government for submission to the UK – EQF Co-ordination group. Advice was provided to the Minister for Education, Children and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Assembly Government; and
- The UK report will be submitted to the EQF Advisory Group in December 2009.

2.4 CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation document was sent to a selected range of CQFW partners and stakeholder organisations across a range of sectors. Recipients were invited to comment upon the recommendations, methodology and findings of the technical analysis report. The organisations consulted were members of the CQFW Common Accord Forum, the partnership of representative bodies. The main issues raised were:

- Knowledge of the new framework was very low. This was not surprising given the recent endorsement of the European Qualifications Framework;
- Aligning different qualification frameworks and different level descriptors was a complex and challenging process;
- A number of industrial sectors across Europe have already established recognition and transferability of learning and they were anxious that this new framework did not destabilise these arrangements;
- The European Qualifications Framework is as yet new and untried as a framework and as such should not destabilise the relationships of already established national frameworks such as the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales;
- The alignment of the frameworks can be a technical and complex process and care needs to be given to appropriate communication to a wider audience; and
- Quality arrangements in terms of the referencing of frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework and other national frameworks are still under development.

Feedback received was discussed and incorporated within the final report.

3 CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR REFERENCING THE CQFW TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

3.1 EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF) ADVISORY GROUPS' CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

To ensure that the referencing process is well understood and trusted by the participant countries the EQF Advisory Group agreed ten referencing criteria and procedures.

External consultants were appointed to produce an alignment report and quality digest as evidence against these criteria.

FIGURE 4 CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR REFERENCING NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS LEVELS TO THE EQF

	Referencing criteria and procedures
1	The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.
2	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.
3	The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.
4	The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.
5	The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).
6	The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.
7	The referencing process shall involve international experts.
8	The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.
9	The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.
10	Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

3.2
RESPONSES TO THE REFERENCING CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

CRITERION 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities

Within the United Kingdom, the Welsh Assembly Government has devolved legal responsibility for Education in Wales. The CQFW National Co-ordination Point (NCP) has been established by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Director of the Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group, has the role of Chief Regulator for Wales. The terms of reference for the NCP were clearly determined and published by the Welsh Assembly Government.

CRITERION 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework

The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an independent consultant to consider the issues around the referencing of the CQFW to the EQF and to report on these. The *Report on the Referencing of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* provides evidence of a clear and demonstrable link between the CQFW descriptors and the EQF level descriptors. A wide range of stakeholders contributed to the subsequent consultation on the methodology and findings of the report. The report and the results of the consultation informed the CQFW Common Accord and the Welsh Assembly Government's final decision on the referencing of the CQFW to the EQF. The report is available for download at: **www.cqfw.net**

Outline of Process

A thorough analysis of the level descriptors of the EQF was undertaken. Five key elements were identified as the comparisons with the EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors and QCF descriptors to optimise the results.

Since there are nine levels of the CQFW to be compared with eight EQF levels, there must be at least one level at which the matching is not straightforward. No assumptions were made about the likely results of the articulation.

A hierarchical range of five standardised conclusions relating to the strength of the evidence for a match with an EQF level descriptor was developed. These were:

- strong evidence and a good match;
- enough evidence for a match;
- some evidence, allowing a tentative match;
- the evidence relates to more than one EQF level; and
- insufficient evidence for any match with EQF descriptors.

The CQFW Meta-framework has adopted two sets of level descriptors – the EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education and the QCF level descriptors for all other learning. In comparing a CQFW level with the EQF, using either the EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors or the QCF descriptors, conclusions relating different elements to different EQF levels were reached. All comparisons were carried out from the bottom level up.

The comparisons were affected by the form and structure of the three sets of descriptors and specific terms in the descriptors and the way they are used.

The matching process was undertaken from the lowest levels of the frameworks to the highest levels. For every level, a match was sought for each of the following five key elements:

— **Knowledge**
this was interpreted to include, where appropriate, the content of understanding and awareness

— **Skills**
in the event, these were mainly intellectual skills, including, for example, the handling of information and research skills

— **Problems**
this was broadly interpreted to include, where helpful, the use of judgement to choose courses of action, methods, materials, etc

— **Complexity**
(of work/study)
this related mainly to descriptions of tasks, activities and contexts, but could be defined by inference from other statements in the level descriptors

— **Responsibility**
this was intended as a neutral term which could include all forms of accountability and autonomy, supervision and management.

FIGURE 5 COMBINED EWNI GENERIC CREDIT LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND QCF FINDINGS SUMMARY TABLE

CQFW	Entry 1 Entry 2	Entry 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors Equivalents	—	EQF 1	EQF 2	EQF 3	EQF 4	EQF 5	EQF 5	EQF 6	EQF 7	EQF 8
QCF Equivalents	EQF 1?	EQF 1	EQF 2	EQF 3	EQF 4	EQF 5?	EQF 5	EQF 6	EQF 7	EQF 8
Conclusion EQF Level	—	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8

Qualification Descriptors

The next stage of the work took the form of an analysis based on as many types of qualification in the CQFW as possible. Available generic descriptions or descriptors of qualifications in the CQFW were compared with the levels of the EQF as represented both by the level descriptors and by the official links between the EQF and the Dublin Descriptors used in the Bologna Process.
The process of comparing qualification descriptors and EQF level descriptors is subject to some of the difficulties encountered in comparing level descriptors, notably:

- differences in approach;
- conclusions are based on interpretation and inference; and
- there is some doubt as to whether what appear to be shared terms actually refer to the same outcomes.

In the process, direct level-to-level comparison is supplemented by three forms of indirect matching:

1 comparing a qualification with the EQF descriptors from the levels above and below the target level (this approach is also used in comparing descriptors);
2 showing that the level of a qualification comes above, below or between two levels which have previously been matched using direct evidence; and
3 using the relationship of the EQF level descriptors to the higher education Dublin Descriptors defined by the European Commission.

The overall results of the comparisons based on descriptions of types of qualification are shown below. The results of this investigation were brought together with all other known results of comparisons of the CQFW with the EQF for consideration and an overall proposal for the articulation of the CQFW and the EQF was developed.

FIGURE 6 FINDINGS FROM QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS SUMMARY TABLE

CQFW Level	Entry 2	Entry 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Conclusion EQF Level	1		2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8

CRITERION 3

The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems

The CQFW brings all recognised learning into a single unifying structure and embraces all credit-based learning recognised within:

- the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
- the National Qualifications Framework, the Qualifications and Credit Framework known as Regulated General and Vocational Education and Training; and
- Quality Assured Lifelong Learning that uniquely in Wales takes place outside the regulated frameworks but is recognised through CQFW quality assurance mechanisms.

The CQFW utilises three common principles:

- expression of achievement as learning outcomes;
- the demands made by that learning on the learner (level); and
- the volume of learning achievements (credit).

Together, these create a model that is able to embrace and underpin all types and styles of learning in all sectors of the education and training environment.

The CQFW Common Accord (CCA) is the foundation document of the Framework that formalises agreement on terminology, design specifications, principles and systems required to ensure that the currency of assigned and awarded credit is fully quality assured. Adherence to these principles enables the credit value of a unit or qualification to be recognised for awarding purposes, used as a comparator with other learning and facilitate recognition of achievement and progression

to the benefit of learners, providers, employers and other stakeholders.

The CCA was developed with the involvement of the regulatory authorities, Awarding Organisations, national and regional credit bodies and other organisations with an interest and expertise in credit matters throughout the UK. Its aims were to:

- enable credits to be recognised;
- enable credits to be used as a comparator; and
- facilitate the operation of credit and qualification systems and valued by learners, providers, employers, Awarding Organisations and others.

The CCA applies to CQFW Recognised Bodies who assign and/or award credit for any learning achievement. It applies to all credit assigned and/or awarded for achievement of learning outcomes in Wales.

The details of the expectation of the CCA is documented and published in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, Delivering the Promise Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009–2014, WAG 2009 – Chapter 2. **www.cqfw.net**

The Framework has been intensively and extensively tested in a wide range of learning and training environments where the principles have proven to be appropriate and robust.

Core components of the Framework are implemented according to agreed principles to ensure and maintain parity of recognition and esteem of awards and promote public understanding and progressive implementation.

The CQFW Common Accord Forum is the principal 'outward-facing' cross-sectoral committee of the CQFW. It is the policy forum through which to engage in dialogue and move forward the implementation plan through consensus and mutual understanding.

CRITERION 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent

There are three areas of learning recognised within the meta-framework of the CQFW: Higher Education, Regulated General and Vocational Education & Training and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning are underpinned by either the EWNI Generic Credit Level Descriptors or QCF level descriptors. All learning submitted to and/or recognised within the CQFW is through Recognised Bodies. The process for recognising bodies has three discrete approaches. The CQFW Common Accord Forum and the Recognition and Approvals Panel (RAP) have ratified these processes. This process of application for recognition and subsequent submission is detailed and published within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, Delivering the Promise Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009–2014, WAG 2009 – Chapter 3. **www.cqfw.net**

All pillars have a process of quality assurance from design to delivery of qualifications and learning programmes.

CRITERION 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer (s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation)

Refer to 3.3.

CRITERION 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies

The Welsh Assembly Government's final report which certifies the referencing of the CQFW to the EQF as required in Criterion 8 below explicitly states that its stakeholders and partners, including those responsible for the quality assurance systems for education and training in the Framework, are in agreement with the referencing processes and its outcomes. What is more, as demonstrated under Criterion 1 of this document, the CQFW–EQF advisory structures ensured a full and high level of involvement of all relevant quality assurance bodies at all stages which preceded the final decision on the referencing exercise.

The National Co-ordination Point for Wales represented the relevant quality assurance bodies and all were party to the final agreement of the referencing process.

CRITERION 7

The referencing process shall involve international experts

The CQFW–EQF National Co-ordination Point, which, as noted in Criterion 1, provided advice and guidance to the Welsh Assembly Government and CQFW on matters relating to the referencing process, included two international experts;

— **Karen Jones** – Reviews Manager, Irish Universities Quality Board

— **Gerard Madill** – Senior Programme Manager, European Universities Association

The international experts commented upon two draft reports and these comments, where critical, have been addressed in this final version of the report; along with extensive internal and external consultation commentary.

CQFW/EQF Alignment

"The report demonstrates that the quality processes relating to CQFW and specifically to the three 'Pillars' of the CQFW are indeed consistent with the requirements of the EQF.

Overall, the report is 'fit for purpose', in that it demonstrates, based on evidence, the broad consistency of the CQFW with the EQF by demonstrating clear and demonstrable links between the level descriptors for CQFW and those of EQF, that the qualifications of CQFW are based on learning outcomes and linked to credit and RPL arrangements and that the procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent (criteria 2, 3 & 4)."

Gerard Madill July 2009

"I am of the opinion that the referencing report provides sufficient evidence that the CQFW meets the requirements of the EQF Advisory Group's Criteria and Procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF by exemplifying:

- *a clear and demonstrable link between the CQFW levels and the level descriptors of the EQF (criteria 2)*
- *that CQFW qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and are linked to credit systems and arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (criteria 3)."*

Karen Jones July 2009

Quality Digest

"The Quality Digest is comprehensive in its coverage and perhaps for this reason, it does not work terribly well as a 'digest'. As an international observer it is essential that the Quality Digest is accessible and understandable to a variety of European audiences and perspectives."

Gerard Madill July 2009

"I am of the opinion that the Quality Digest provides sufficient evidence:
that the quality assurance systems that underpin the CQFW and its implementation are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (Criteria 5)."

Karen Jones July 2009

CRITERION 8

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria

As the designated NCP for Wales, the CQFW has produced and made available for consultation this report *Referencing Report: Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*. The report addresses each of the ten criteria and procedures and will form part of the overall UK report submitted to the EQF Advisory Group.

The report can be accessed at **www.cqfw.net**

CRITERION 9

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports

We consent to the information contained in this report being added to the EQF platform and portal so that it can be accessed widely in accordance with the agreed position.

CRITERION 10

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level

The issue of having reference to EQF levels on certificates and diplomas and on Europass documents is complex, requiring the direct operational involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. The position in relation to England, Northern Ireland and Scotland is that this matter has yet to be agreed and will form a later stage of the work of implementing the EQF.

WAG will ensure that all institutions and relevant organisations are aware of the expectation for new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities to contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level. However, given the complex nature, different approaches will be agreed and implemented by each of the constituted parts of the CQFW framework.

3.3
RESPONSES TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

CRITERION 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation)

The CQFW is a meta-framework which includes three pillars: Higher Education, Regulated General and Vocational Education and Training and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning. Each of these has its own quality assurance procedures operated by different agencies:

- **HE**
  learning opportunities and standards of provision within this pillar are quality assured by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA);
- **GVET**
  which is jointly quality assured by Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales, Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) in England and Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland; and
- **QALL**
  which is quality assured by Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales.

The report (Lewis, A. 2009) identifies the bodies responsible for quality assurance, establishes how it is undertaken and evidences the quality assurance frameworks or systems implemented within each pillar to ensure they are consistent with the European principles and guidelines.

Key experts in the field of quality assurance provided detailed contributions and have been closely involved in the production of the final digest of quality assurance report. Quality arrangements in, and related to, the CQFW have also been included as part of the report to highlight the complete range of quality assurance processes.

The standards and processes for quality assurance within the CQFW are undertaken through three main bodies namely: the CQFW Common Accord; the CQFW Recognitions and Approvals Process; and the CQFW National Co-ordination Point.

Within this report the quality assurance is examined at five levels for each of the areas of learning 'pillars' within the CQFW framework: Higher Education, Regulated General and Vocational Education and Training and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the academic standards and quality of their own degrees and other awards through a process of internal quality assurance. QAA carries out the external quality assurance and all elements of the Academic Infrastructure (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure) are regularly reviewed and revised to maintain their currency and fitness for purpose. In addition, the extensive Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education provides guidance on maintaining quality and standards for higher education providers.

QAA has already been shown to comply with the European Standards and Guidelines and so no further analysis by this report is required.

In November 2008, following a review earlier in the year, the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) confirmed that QAA was fully compliant in 14 of the 16 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and substantially compliant in the remaining two. The full ENQA review report can be accessed at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/ENQA/ENQAReviewReport.pdf

The process for the quality assurance of quality assured lifelong learning within the CQFW (QALL pillar) is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin the QALL pillar of the CQFW.

The QALL pillar within the CQFW has been shown to meet the common principles for Quality Assurance in the context of the European Qualifications Framework.

The Regulated General and Vocational Education and Training pillar of the CQFW contains the frameworks that are UK-wide. These are jointly regulated and quality assured in Wales by DCELLS in collaboration with Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) in England, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

They cover all levels of learning in secondary education, further education and work based vocational education. The Statutory Regulation of External Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2004 and the Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework 2008 set out the statutory requirements governing the two frameworks. The codes of practice or operating rules are used to direct the regulators in qualification monitoring activity to ensure that qualifications continue to meet the required quality standards.

The regulated GVET pillar within the CQFW has been shown to meet the common principles for Quality Assurance the context of the European Qualifications Framework.

The following table (Figure 7) summarises the findings of the report Lewis, A. 2009 in context of the Common Principles for Quality Assurance in the Context of the European Qualifications Framework.

FIGURE 7 CONSISTENCY OF CQFW WITH THE COMMON PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Principle	Consistency
EQF Principle 1 Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts and levels of the CQFW / EQF	Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts and levels of the CQFW. The basis of quality assurance varies in kind between the three pillars, from legal requirements to agreed guidelines but applies at all levels from strategic planning to certification of successful learners. The CQFW Common Accord sets out the agreed terminology, common principles and quality assurance arrangements for the CQFW ensuring that quality assurance underpins all its work. If AO (Awarding Organisations) is recognised by the qualification regulators for the QCF or the HEIs there is only a declaration as no additional evidence is required. The same applies for the HEIs as they are covered through the QAA. If an organisation wishes to become to become a Recognised Body in order to assign and/or award credit through the CQFW ensures that quality assurance procedures underpin their activity related to CQFW. This is demonstrated via the evidence produced for submission to become a Recognised Body and/or the declaration signed by the head of the organisation that they will: • Adhere to the principles of the CQFW Common Accord • Operate within the guidelines of the CQFW to assign and/or award credit and • Maintain systematic arrangements for ensuring quality, rigour and comparability in the application, use and provision of information on credit, as detailed in their submission. Any centre or delivery partner of a Recognised Body that is approved to deliver and assess its CQFW recognised units is required to complete a centre approval process. This is to ensure the centre undertakes internal quality assurance procedures and to externally quality assure those internal procedures and assessment decisions.
EQF Principle 2 Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions	Internal Quality Assurance is carried out by all bodies which offer units and/or qualifications included in the CQFW. It is integral to the operations of a wide range of education and training providers such as schools, colleges of Further Education and HEIs as well as voluntary organisations and employers which may operate as CQFW Recognised Bodies. As part of the process to become a CQFW Recognised Body to award credit, potential organisations must provide details of centre administration. Whilst delivery of its units/learning programmes by centres / learning providers is for the potential Recognised Body to arrange, an essential part of that arrangement is a centre approval process whereby a centre wishing to offer the organisation's CQFW recognised units is confirmed as being able to maintain the required quality and consistency of assessment for learning outcomes. This includes ensuring that the delivery partner implements a rigorous and high standard quality assurance process that is ongoing to support continuous improvement. Thus internal quality assurance will be carried out by all bodies which offer CQFW assigned/awarded units and this will be monitored as a minimum by the Recognised Organisation.

Principle	Consistency
EQF Principle 3 Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies	As part of the CQFW Recognised Body status such organisations are required to externally quality assure any education provider that delivers their CQFW recognised units to ensure that they are implementing a rigorous, high standard quality assurance system across the institution or organisation; that the quality of the assessment/awarding decisions are accurate and valid; and that the CQFW Common Accord is being applied. In Wales the role of HM Inspectorate is Estyn which carries out the external inspection of publicly funded schools and further education and work based learning providers. The QAA is contracted through HEFCW for assuring the quality and standards of the Higher Education provision in Wales.
EQF Principle 4 External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance are subject to regular review	External monitoring bodies are themselves subject to review of different kinds. Awarding Organisations are subject to DCELLS monitoring, QAA is subject to periodic review as a full member of ENQA. Estyn undertakes thematic work following remit letters from DCELLS who monitor activity and progress against targets set within the annual remit.
EQF Principle 5 Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes	The CQFW Recognition process and the centre approval process carried out by CQFW Recognised Bodies to approve centres/learning providers to deliver their CQFW recognised units/qualifications requires information to be submitted on the organisational structure. This ensures quality assurance is placed in context. Both recognition/approval processes also consider input i.e. staff expertise and the resources required to deliver; and key processes, as well as the output dimensions i.e. the review and evaluation of units and learner retention/achievement. The external quality assurance agencies: awarding organisations, QAA, Estyn and DCELLS consider context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes. The CQFW handbook provides detailed guidance on quality assurance requirements; awarding organisations, QAA, Estyn and DCELLS also provide guidance documents in the management and assurance of quality and standards. In addition the Welsh Assembly Government School Effectiveness Framework and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework for Post 16 learning in Wales provide guidance and support to learning providers to develop high quality learning environments and provision including the embedding of the necessary quality assurance processes.

Principle	Consistency
EQF Principle 6 Quality assurance systems should include the following elements: A clear and measurable objectives and standards; B guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement; C appropriate resources; D consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review; E feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement; F widely accessible evaluation results	**A** There are clear detailed criteria for the operation of CQFW through the CCA and criteria for the approval of recognised organisations to assign and/or award credit and for unit submission. Awarding organisations and external quality assurance bodies set clear and measurable objectives and standards required in order to maintain their approved or funded status. **B** The CQFW Handbook and implementation plan includes clear definitions of the essential elements of the Framework. The recognition process includes substantial guidance to organisations on the policies, procedures and structures required in order to be successful. Additionally the CQFW team offers guidance to and involves stakeholders in the development of the CQFW mainly through the CCAF. Key agencies: Awarding organisations, QAA and Estyn also work to, and issue, comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of quality assurance. All the agencies include systematic stakeholder involvement at policy and implementation levels in shaping their work. **C** The CQFW Recognition process and the approval process carried out by CQFW recognised bodies to approve centres/learning providers to deliver their CQFW - recognised units/qualifications requires information to be submitted on the resources to be made available to deliver and quality assure CQFW related activity. Post 16 providers that judged not to provide good quality learning provision may have funding for that provision removed by DCELLS. **D** Quality assurance arrangements for CQFW - recognised organisations and provision combine and inter-relate internal processes, self-assessment and external review. Each of the quality assurance agencies has an identifiable and characteristic approach to external institutional review and systems for ensuring that this is understood and systematically applied. QAA, Estyn and DCELLS quality assurance processes all begin with the providers self assessment report. **E** All quality assurance processes for provision recognised within the CQFW provision provide feedback and identify actions for improvement eg the recognition process, recognised organization centre approval and quality assurance processes and external reviews by QAA, Estyn and DCELLS offer formal feedback, recommendations and requirements to action plan for future development/improvement. **F** All quality assurance agencies involved in activities which can be related to CQFW publish reports of their activities. The QAA, and Estyn publish reports of institutional reviews and generic and/or evaluative reviews of aspects of the provision, delivery and/or assessment for which they are directly or indirectly responsible. DCELLS also publishes a range of information and data about learning provision in Wales.

Principle	Consistency
EQF Principle 7 Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis	The Welsh Assembly Government is ultimately responsible for the CQFW so national policy on matters such as lifelong learning and skills development are automatically taken into account in developing the framework. The CQFW Common Accord Forum facilitates access to wider expertise from across the regions of Wales through members' networks. The CQFW EQF National co-ordination point provides an international dimension across the 4 nations within the UK and across the wider European field. However the extensive range of quality assurance monitoring by external agencies on learning providers does result in debate around the need to articulate and converge some quality approaches and activities. Work is underway to look at ways of reducing the monitoring burden and involves DCELLS, Estyn, awarding organisations within QCF/CQFW and providers as to how this can best be achieved.
EQF Principle 8 Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community	The CQFW Common Accord Forum is constituted from and engages with a wide range of key partners and stakeholders representing all education and training types and levels in order to contribute to the ongoing development and implementation of the CQFW. Both internal self assessments carried out by learning providers and external reviews operated by for example QAA, Estyn and DCELLS take evidence and engage a wide range of stakeholders in the quality assurance processes. Collaboration and partnership working is a key theme within all education and training in Wales and this is reflected in CQFW activity including supporting partners to work together in developmental delivery activity, quality assurance at all levels and stages of work.
EQF Principle 9 Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning	All the key agencies take steps to ensure that the outcomes of their work can provide good practice models, case studies and reference points for evaluation and peer learning. These are made public via websites, the distribution of written reports and regional and national conferences and events. CQFW delivers a number of national and regional conferences and events. DCELLS run a quality and effectiveness network which meets three times a year and is provided free of charge to support the work of managers and practitioners involved in quality across the range of provision of post-14 learning, in schools, colleges, work-based learning and community learning. These networks are well established and give providers an opportunity to share good practice with one another, as well as receiving updates on policy developments and from experts in the education and training field. The School Effectiveness Framework and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework for Post 16 learning in Wales provide guidance and support to learning providers and as part of their programme include the sharing of good practice. Estyn delivers national conferences, and provides written reports and outcomes of evaluations/remit work highlighting case studies of good practice The Learning and Skills Observatory has been established to champion the development of education, learning and skills policy and decision making across Wales. The Observatory is the gateway to research and analysis on education, learning, skills and labour market information in Wales. It supports quality improvement by enabling the sharing of knowledge across communities of practice and providing a forum for contributing to policy analysis, discussion and debate.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The investigation, detailed above, provides clear evidence the Quality Assurance for the CQFW operations is rigorous and effective and that the CQFW meets the requirements of the Common Principles.

5 REFERENCES

Welsh Assembly Government

Report on the Compatibility of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Hart, J. 2009

Welsh Assembly Government

Quality Digest for Referencing the Credit and Qualification Framework Wales (CQFW) with the European Qualifications Framework EQF). Element 5: The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the European principles and guidelines. Lewis, A 2009

European Union

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning) European Union (2008)

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08_de.pdf

Welsh Assembly Government

CQFW Handbook
Welsh Assembly Government 2009

http://www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/handbook/;jsessionid=tndHJzBfN2QpRLjZl6L27cBcS2LC5Bndb1pGtNsnQ5th3RWq6cKv!-1868201774?lang=en

6 APPENDIX

6.1
TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP OF CQFW EQF NCP
THE CREDIT & QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR WALES EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION POINT

REMIT

The recommendation to establish the EQF specifies that Member States should designate national coordination points, linked to the particular structures and requirements of Member States, to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, to guide the relationship between the national qualifications system and the EQF, in order to promote the quality and transparency of that relationship.

The remit of the CQFW Referencing Group: Referencing CQFW – EQF is to make recommendations on all key activities relating to the referencing of the CQFW to the EQF.

Specifically, the remit is to:

- agree and oversee the consultation process;
- consider the impact/implications of the referencing work on the relationship to the QCF and SCQF and vice versa and recommend how to progress and come to an agreed reference;

- keep abreast of other UK developments relating to EQF referencing;
- endorse and/or amend the QA Digest and the final report resulting from the National Consultation;
- oversee the analysis and evaluation of the consultation outputs; and
- consider the implications of the recommendation on certification against EQF by 2012.

The four administrations have agreed that in the UK each framework would relate directly to the EQF and that there will therefore be a number of coordination points. It was also agreed that the four countries would collaborate as they carried out their duties as national coordination points. The UK EQF Coordination Group provides the forum for the national coordination points and the most relevant stakeholders to work together to provide a coherent approach across the UK.

Organisation	Representation
Welsh Assembly Government Head of Frameworks – Chair	Trevor Clark
Welsh Assembly Government Head of the Qualifications and Learning Group	David Kitchen
International Expert – European Universities Association & Bologna Co-ordination Group	Gerard Madill
International Expert – Irish Universities Quality Board	Karen Jones
Higher Education Funding Council Wales	Cliona O'Neill
Fforwm	Adrian Sheehan
CE OCN Wales and Chair of CQFW Common Accord Forum	Janet Barlow
Technology Alliance Wales, 14-19 Networks	Bob Cater
Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium – Chair and Swansea Metropolitan University	David Ashelby
Quality Assurance Agency, England, Wales & Northern Ireland	Dr. Jayne Mitchell
Care Council for Wales	Toni Leggett
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6.2

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Entry Level	Entry 1 recognises progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge or understanding that relate to the immediate environment.			
	Achievement at Entry 2 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance. Achievement at Entry 3 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts, with appropriate guidance where needed.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out simple, familiar activities. Know the steps needed to complete simple activities. Use knowledge or understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts. Know and understand the steps needed to complete structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts.	Carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities. Follow instructions or use rehearsed steps to complete tasks and activities. Carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts. Be aware of the consequences of actions for self and others.	With appropriate guidance begin to take some responsibility for the outcomes of simple activities. Actively participate in simple and familiar activities. With appropriate guidance take responsibility for the outcomes of structured activities. Actively participate in activities in familiar contexts.
Level 1	Achievement at level 1 reflects the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills and procedures to complete routine tasks. It includes responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance.	Use knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined, routine tasks. Be aware of information relevant to the area of study or work.	Complete well-defined routine tasks. Use relevant skills and procedures. Select and use relevant information. Identify whether actions have been effective.	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance as needed.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.	Use understanding of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. Interpret relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the types of information that are relevant to the area of study or work.	Complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems. Select and use relevant skills and procedures . Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions. Identify how effective actions have been.	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures. Exercise autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine. Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work. Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine. Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures. Use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review how effective methods and actions have been.	Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including, where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use practical, theoretical or technical understanding to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the nature and approximate scope of the area of study or work. Have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Address problems that are complex and non-routine while normally fairly well defined Identify, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Initiate and use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results.	Take responsibility for courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad but generally well-defined parameters.
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Use practical, theoretical or technological understanding to find ways forward in broadly defined, complex contexts. Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas. Be aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work. Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Address broadly defined, complex problems. Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Use relevant research or development to inform actions. Evaluate actions, methods and results.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others. Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad parameters.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 6	Achievement at level 6 reflects the ability to refine and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address complex problems that have limited definition. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are able to underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.	Refine and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and ideas. Understand the context in which the area of study or work is located. Be aware of current developments in the area of study or work. Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.	Address problems that have limited definition and involve many interacting factors. Determine, refine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Use and, where appropriate, design relevant research and development to inform actions. Evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are capable of underpinning substantial changes or developments. Initiate and lead tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others. Exercise broad autonomy and judgement.
Level 7	Achievement at level 7 reflects the ability to reformulate and use relevant understanding, methodologies and approaches to address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement.	Reformulate and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce modified conceptions. Understand the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located.	Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. Determine and use appropriate methodologies and approaches. Design and undertake research, development or strategic activities to inform the area of work or study, or produce organisational or professional change.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial changes or developments. Exercise broad autonomy and judgement across a significant area of work or study.

FIGURE 8 QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS CONTINUED

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 7 CONTINUED	It also reflects an understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives, and how they affect their area of study or work.	Understand current developments in the area of study or work. Understand different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work.	Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications.	Initiate and lead complex tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others.
Level 8	Achievement at level 8 reflects the ability to develop original understanding and extend an area of knowledge or professional practice. It reflects the ability to address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors through initiating, designing and undertaking research, development or strategic activities. It involves the exercise of broad autonomy, judgement and leadership in sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge or for creating substantial professional or organisational change. It also reflects a critical understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.	Develop original practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts that lack definition and where there are many complex, interacting factors. Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce new knowledge and theories. Understand and reconceptualise the wider contexts in which the field of knowledge or work is located. Extend a field of knowledge or work by contributing original knowledge and thinking. Exercise critical understanding of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.	Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors. Formulate and use appropriate methodologies and approaches. Initiate, design and undertake research, development or strategic activities that extend the field of work or knowledge or result in significant organisational or professional change. Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications for the field of work or knowledge and its wider context.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that have a significant impact on a field of work or knowledge, or result in substantial organisational or professional change. Exercise broad autonomy, judgement and leadership as a leading practitioner or scholar sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge, or for substantial organisational or professional change. Take responsibility for the advancement of professional practice.

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