THE ROLE OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS IN PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

FIRST DRAFT OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYNTHESIS REPORT

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Chapter 1

Using qualifications systems to advantage:
Scope and structure of the international synthesis report

In 2001, the Education Committee launched an activity on the Role of National Qualification Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning. Twenty three countries became directly involved. The activity began with a meeting of national representatives and experts in early 2001 at the OECD in Paris. The activity has sought to identify processes and mechanisms through which national qualifications systems can influence the motivation and opportunities to learn. The key question for the activity is: how can the qualifications system be shaped to provide the greatest incentive to learn? The objective is to inform decision makers about possible policy actions based on the national qualifications systems that can promote lifelong learning for all. In Section 1.1 the rationale for the activity is described. In Section 1.2 the focus of the activity is clarified. In Section 1.3 the process of how the activity was carried out is explained. The structure of this international synthesis report is described in Section 1.4.

1.1. Rationale for the activity

1. Modern societies offer a broad range of benefits to their people. They can be direct benefits from participating in the labour market (social status, wage and other social benefit), or they can be wider benefits from living in community and sharing public goods. There is increasing attention devoted to these global benefits of living in a modern society and consequently there is also a growing concern that these benefits may not yet be secured for all. Many policy actions are therefore targeted at guaranteeing these benefits to citizens. Better lifelong learning practices are one way, among many others, to achieve these benefits.

2. Many authors have stressed the role of lifelong learning as a powerful tool to achieve these benefits. They are very often linked with the acquisition of skills that can be used in a variety of contexts, at work, at home and in the community (European Commission, 2001; IJLE, 2004; NCVER, 2003a). From the employers’ point of view, these skills are considered relevant across all systems and cultures to bring productivity and competitiveness (Béduwé and Planas, 2003; Brown et al., 2003; NCVER, 2003b; Ottersten, 2004). They are associated with the need to cope with globalisation and the emergence of the knowledge economy that requires a continuous upgrading of skills as the focus production has shifts from the production of tangible goods to the production of abstract goods. This need to maintain the volume and raise the level of skills supply is at the core of the justification for raised investment in human capital and lifelong learning. From an individual point of view (but still regarding the labour market), these skills bring employability and, among other things, better wage and more rewarding career opportunities. The former is a key component for (re)entering the labour market in many countries because unemployment rates remain uncomfortably high, especially for young people. There is also an abundant literature about the many ways to acquire the necessary skills to cope with today’s requirements in a more or less formal manner, and very often at the work place (Evans et al., 2002; Feinstein et al., 2004; Guile and Griffiths, 2001).
3. In trying to move from rhetoric to reality in providing lifelong learning opportunities for all, some governments and stakeholders have come to a point where national qualifications systems are viewed as a tool for promoting lifelong learning. The OECD activity leading this report hopes to shed light on national qualifications systems as such a tool and considers the extent to which they influence the volume, distribution, quality and efficiency of lifelong learning. The outcomes are intended to be practical and inform decision makers about possible policy actions based on the national qualifications systems that can promote lifelong learning for all. Among the overall benefits of this study, there is possibility the fact that an agenda has just been set.

4. Therefore, lifelong learning for all has become a widely shared policy objective within OECD countries and beyond (OECD, 2001). It is seen as a necessary condition for individual success in the labour market and social well-being as well as a basis for democracy and citizenship. It is also believed that the competitiveness of national economies depend heavily on the capacity of societies to encourage and to facilitate lifelong learning. Since certain groups of the population are experiencing difficulties in undertaking learning activities, especially among the adult population (OECD, 2003a and 2005), policy responses have been adopted to help develop lifelong learning activities and/or improve the skills and competencies of the population.

1.2. Focus of this activity

5. The activity is based on the fact that national qualifications systems have a role to play in delivering lifelong learning. It is not just about national qualifications systems and nor is it about lifelong learning: it is dealing with the ground between the two and specifically the impact of the former on the latter. In order to establish potential links between these two important dimensions of modern societies, it has proven necessary to review the huge amount of information about national qualifications systems and about lifelong learning but the focus of the activity remains on the link between the two. This link is identified as mechanisms\(^1\).

6. The report identifies several kinds of policy responses that are based on planned or current actions for countries. Different ways of optimising policy responses have been identified by using the concept of mechanisms. Each mechanism has been identified through the analysis of the ways the behaviour of key stakeholders might be changed. These mechanisms are instruments for improving lifelong learning and are underpinned by a theoretical framework and country evidence. It is possible to review each policy response in terms of the use it makes of mechanisms. It is one of the strengths of this report that it defines a mechanism as a complex, but manageable, concept that is made of two parts, which may interact one with the other: mechanisms can be based on a tangible structural change and/or a more ephemeral change in conditions of the environment of the national qualifications system.

7. The potential value of the report is to shed light on the way of operationalising policy responses through mechanisms and to analyse the way mechanisms interact with each other and work in strategic combination. In other words, this report not only provides policy makers with description and analysis of tools, but it provides the manual to use them in the most effective way within the country context. It is of special interest to policy makers to discover whether it is possible to change a national qualifications system and bring about improvements in lifelong learning. This is the central issue of the activity. A second issue is to what extent countries have already explicitly attempted this and whether these attempts have been successful. A third issue surrounds the influence of the context in which any linking mechanism between national qualifications system reform and lifelong learning outcome. The national economic, social, cultural and political context for the national qualifications system may have a strong influence.

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\(^1\) This is a central idea that is developed fully in Chapter 2.
Related to this, there is a fourth issue about what is possible in terms of policy actions and the likely success of these actions.

8. The national qualifications system is only one influence on lifelong learning and other influences are not considered here. In terms of lifelong learning, the activity does not restrict itself to only improvement in quantity, such as increase participation of adults. It also includes improvements to quality, such as optimising returns to learners, to distribution, such as involvement of groups that are traditionally excluded and to efficiency. In terms of national qualifications system, the activity defines its scope as all arrangements leading to the recognition of learning; this includes non-formal and informal learning. Whilst current national qualifications system structures form the backbone of the study, proposals for future national qualifications system reforms and the pressures that are likely to bring about these reforms are also included in the study.

9. In summary, the prime objective of this report is to provide insight into policy decisions that will facilitate improvements to lifelong learning through reform of national qualifications systems. The themes involved in this report are broad in the sense that lifelong learning is huge in scope and national qualifications systems are invariably large and complex. However, the intersection between these two themes – and the specific focus on changes to national qualifications systems – creates a smaller, important and under-researched area of study.

1.3. An interactive and comparative process involving many countries and international organisations

10. The activity was organised in a way that guarantees the robustness of the findings, especially from a comparative point of view. First of all, it was launched after a round of consultations with country delegates and experts at an early stage of the process. This led to a proposal with detailed proposals for national and international work to be conducted.

11. At the national level, countries were invited to write a national report according to a set of Guidelines (OECD, 2002a) and fifteen countries delivered a country background report2 based on responses to these guidelines. The national reports were then discussed with representatives from the country and authorised as a valid description of the qualifications system and its effects. The country background reports are not primarily intended to form the basis for comparisons as they mainly describe and analyse issues from a domestic point of view. Nevertheless, they represent a wealth of data and information and, since this activity did not include independent review visits or external evaluation, they have provided the primary source of data for the analysis and the preparation of this International Synthesis Report. They are the basis for the empirical work, together with an extensive use of available quantitative data and the published literature in the fields under study. Countries were asked to consider four components in preparing their national report.

12. For the first component, countries were asked to describe their qualifications system in broad terms, in particular through a description of the arrangements for the recognition of formal learning and non-formal and informal learning. These arrangements include those that link qualifications through credit systems and through qualifications frameworks, and the governance arrangements for qualifications systems. For the second component, countries were asked to provide summary information on the impact of qualifications systems that is revealed through reviews or evaluations, or other information and data that is readily available. This included available information on the benefits gained through the recognition of learning through qualifications. The third component was based on a review the major changes in

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2 Australia, Belgium (French Community), Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and United Kingdom.
qualifications systems or key elements of systems introduced in countries over the past decade. These changes were in response to a range of educational, economic and social pressures and in this component countries were asked to identify and describe the pressures that have led to these changes. They were also asked to describe the major initiatives in their qualifications system, and to concentrate upon a small number of key initiatives or reforms that were designed to enhance learning through such objectives as increased levels of participation in formal learning or improved outcomes. The fourth and last component was a means of examining the inter-relationship between qualifications and learning more directly. For this component, countries were asked to examine and analyse the direct experiences of providers and learners of the impact of qualifications systems upon learning. It was proposed that this examination should be at the level of practice and use – that is learning programmes in a variety of settings.

13. In addition to preparing their Background Report, countries were also invited to identify the main issues for examination by international Thematic Groups. Three key themes were identified by countries and therefore three thematic groups were set up. The rationale for organising international thematic groups was twofold. Firstly, it was seen as an interesting possibility to have a comparative approach, in addition to the descriptive country-centred approach adopted for the preparation of the country background reports. Secondly, it was also an opportunity to focus on some of the main themes of interest to the participating countries. They operated by gathering qualitative data through consultations with the participants about their respective countries and by using a template (OECD, 2002b) to facilitate comparative analysis. Twenty countries contributed to one or more of the thematic groups. The three corresponding thematic reports are viewed as part of the knowledge base gathered for the activity and have been used to prepare the International Synthesis Report. These three reports are included, in an abstract form, in Appendix A.

14. The first Thematic Group addressed the development and use of ‘Qualifications frameworks’ as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems. Beyond the issue of definitions – some key terms such as “qualifications system” and “qualifications framework” are clearly spelled out – the first report deals with the rationale for introducing a qualifications framework. Some drivers for change, some benefits and the conditions for the introduction of a framework are also described. The benefits are analysed according to whether they are general benefits or whether qualifications frameworks specifically benefit lifelong learning. The general benefits have to do with: qualifications systems and provision; career development, guidance and employment placement, information and orientation including occupational mobility; international and trans-national dimension; and regulation, legislation and institutional arrangements. The benefits to lifelong learning are at the heart of the overall activity. The first report summarises the possible impacts: to promote a culture of lifelong learning; to allow for the integration of lifelong learning provision into a coherent system; to enable non-standard forms of access; to enable further development of basic skills; to relate and compare qualifications to each other; to focus learning on both individual and company needs; to minimise learning time and reduce costs; and to provide clarity and simplicity about competencies held by individuals.

15. The report of the second Thematic Group addressed standards and quality assurance in qualifications with special reference to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Here again, some terms are defined and the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning is clarified. The second report also addresses the main reasons countries are interested in the deliberations of the

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3 Country Background Reports were coded with the QSR NUD.IST software (Non Numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing, Searching and Theorising), which is a flexible tool and inclusive in nature. The framework used for the coding derives directly from the structure proposed in the guidelines (OECD, 2002a). It is therefore based on the four components, clearly spelled out by sub-themes to ease the coding process (Annex 3). The purpose of the coding is to allow thematic analysis of the country reports without having to read and code information in the fifteen reports linearly.

4 Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.
second thematic group: elaboration of the policy opportunity and challenges. In terms of opportunity, there is the possible contribution to the quality, quantity and distribution of lifelong learning. There is also a set of issues in terms of linking individual human capital, which can be improved through learning, and the performance in the labour market such as employability and mobility. The policy challenges, such as the difficulty to gain acceptance in the labour market, are also spelled out. The second report also contains examples of current practices in several fields: legislation and policy; linkage with the formal education and training system; ways of decentralising the initiatives; the social partnerships; quality assurance; definition of target groups; and demand for recognition systems. The barriers to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning are addressed from two points of view: the individual motivation and the structures of the recognition systems. Looking to the future, propositions are made to help remove these barriers and to facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. They are provided according to three lines of action: principles for recognition systems; addressing individual barriers; and the developing recognition system. Finally, the second report provides some conclusions and opens up the debate by providing recommendations in seven domains: the purpose of a recognition system; the context; the establishment of national standards; the quality assurance; the targeting of user groups; the enhancement of the awareness and access; and the removal of existing disincentives.

16. The report of the third Thematic Group addressed the issue of co-operation of different institutions and stakeholders of the qualifications systems; and in particular the roles of partners in the development of occupational standards and vocational qualifications as well as when changes are introduced into a qualifications systems system. The report therefore comprises two chapters and some conclusions. The first chapter addresses the methodologies and development processes for developing qualifications and standards. It then deals with an “essential but problematic” aspect of the vocational qualifications: the description of the content of work. Chapter 1 then describes the potential biases in approaches to observation, spelling out some methodologies of observation. It then focuses on the development of qualification, a complex process from a socio-political point of view. Chapter 1 finishes with a short analysis of the notion of “representation” in qualifications systems. The second chapter, on changes in qualifications systems regimes, focuses on the drivers, goals and foci of initiatives for change and on the structures of participation and new forms of co-operation. The latter deals with key questions such as: who decides who should be involved? What is their relative power? What are their aims, aspirations and/or intentions in participating in the regulation and governance of the qualifications? How well equipped are they to participate in the development process? What access do they have to the content of work in order to make judgements and assertions? What forms of support are available to specific groups in respect of participation? How tight are the structural arrangements and what are the rules within the discussions that take place? The conclusion discusses the potential significance of the changes that have occurred in the past few years in countries qualification development processes.

17. Overall, the OECD activity that has led to this synthesis report examined the impact of different qualification policies on lifelong learning. It has helped countries to share know-how and policy experience gained from recent reforms and adjustments of qualifications systems. In order to do so, it has been organised to make the comparative work as robust as possible. In addition to the fact-finding approach adopted for the country background reports, the work of the thematic groups focussed on particular aspects of the relationship between qualifications and lifelong learning and other international meetings of national representatives and experts were held to monitor the progress of the activity. As a consequence, it has been able to promote talk amongst country delegates, international organisation representatives and experts to moderate written material and initiate ideas. Together with the published literature and the OECD expert seminars, this contributed to shaping the structure and content of the international synthesis report.
1.4. Structure of the International Synthesis Report

18. The structure of the International Synthesis Report aims at addressing, in logical sequence, the key issues of the activity and to report on the most relevant findings that might inform policy action.

19. Chapter 2 provides definitions and sets the conceptual scene. It presents all the definitions of the main concepts that emerged during the activity and were a common understanding of meaning was considered crucial to the success of the activity. These definitions are now sufficiently robust to become the adopted definitions for further work in this field. It would useful to continue using these terms in a consistent manner over time but it is clear that the concepts behind these definitions are organic and that the definitions cannot be carved in stone once for all. Chapter 2 also attempts to provide a conceptual basis for the ways of linking national qualifications systems and lifelong learning through potential mechanisms. It is therefore important to establish theoretical base before turning to evidence. The rest of this report is based on empirical work, using the country background reports, the thematic groups’ work and/or the data gathered during the activity.

20. Chapter 3 is a state-of-the-art summary of the situation in the countries regarding the recent trends and developments in national qualifications systems. With this chapter, it becomes obvious that there is a growing awareness, among the decision makers in many OECD countries that national qualifications systems can be a policy tool. Chapter 3 focuses the common policy responses to the need to improve lifelong learning through qualifications systems. After a brief reference to pressure for change, empirical evidence is used to draw out a range of policy responses. Some basic information about qualifications systems and more extensive references to the involvement of stakeholders are provided. There is also reference to higher education, adult learning and the wide scope of lifelong learning as well as the speed of reforms/developments and who initiates them.

21. Chapter 4 is based on quantitative data. It aims at providing quantified ways at mapping out the possible relationships between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning. It attempts to take account of groups at risk and the diversity of the needs of individuals. Two types of data are used. First, aggregated or macro variables describe, at the country level, the situation in terms of lifelong learning activities such as level of educational attainment of the population or proportion of adults undertaking learning activities. A typology of qualifications systems that could be related to lifelong learning data is also used. Second, micro data at the individual level is also used to supplement the macro data and provide a better sense of the possible relationship between undertaking learning for obtaining a qualification and lifelong learning. Whenever possible, limitations of current data used for this purpose are made explicit and therefore an agenda for improved data collection is proposed.

22. Chapter 5 extracts stakeholder evidence from country background reports and combines it with published information to create a bank of evidence to identify incentives and barriers to learning for qualification. This evidence is synthesised into a series of mechanisms based on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2. No attempt is made to consider operationalising the mechanisms, which is treated in Chapter 6 and 7.

23. Chapter 6 shows how mechanisms can be clustered under the policy responses identified in Chapter 3. It takes each of the policy responses and consider which mechanisms are likely help achieve the aim of the policy response and which are likely to be counter productive. Despite the name “mechanism” with it implication of engineering, this chapter makes it clear that it is not possible to be certain of the outcome of the application of a mechanism. Nevertheless, this chapter indicates the confidence one can have in the likely success of the mechanism. Case studies are included for the full list of mechanisms.
24. Chapter 7 targets the policy makers and focuses on the practical issues of making mechanisms a useful part of policy making. It begins by considering policy-making issues in the area of qualifications systems. It includes concrete examples of positive and negative applications of mechanisms. It deals in particular with country contextual issues and the conditions that directly affect the effectiveness of mechanisms. The international synthesis report therefore concludes with an evaluation of the strategic value of the concept of mechanisms and their concrete operations.

25. There is a section highlighting the rationale for the activity, presenting the main findings and proposing possible policy recommendations. It is published at the beginning of this international synthesis report and also as a separate document, in electronic format, for easy dissemination.

References


Chapter 2

Common language, common meaning:
Assumptions, definition and concepts

The core ideas in this study are complex and many words and phrases are used to communicate them. In this chapter an attempt is made to capture the richness of discussions of these key ideas in meetings of country experts and experts from international organisations\(^5\). In addition to describing the range of understanding the chapter represents a position statement on the best consensus that could be achieved in understanding of the meaning of key terms and ideas. In Section 2.1 the main ideas in the activity are discussed identified and their relationship one to another is explained. In Section 2.2 each of the key ideas are discussed and for each of them a firm definition identified that all participants have accepted as the best consensual position. In Section 2.3 the key idea of a mechanism is amplified further and clearly defined in terms of meaning, structure and potential application.

2.1. Assumptions and evidence

26. The first assumption underpinning the OECD report is that there is some kind of linkage between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning and these links or mechanisms may be used to inform policy responses intended to improve lifelong learning. The assumption is based on experience of the role of qualifications as both a motivator for people to learn and as an obstacle for some people in getting their learning recognised. Success in gaining recognition can lead to financial rewards as well as enhanced self-esteem and improved life chances. In some countries entry to the labour market is regulated by qualification requirements. Some people fear failing to make the required standard and resist participation for that reason. Others may lack basic skills and be unable to express their skills through a particular means of assessment. Some people belong to social groups that are supportive of the qualifications system and encourage participation, other groups can be characterised by their unwillingness to engage in formal recognition processes. There are costs involved in qualification and these may inhibit some people from participation and have little effect on other people who are financially more secure. All these factors suggest that a qualifications system can incentivise and disincentivise participation in learning through mechanisms. The full range of influential factors (and mechanisms) is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Country context matters

27. There is an important second assumption: that there is an optimum position in any qualifications system where it yields high levels of quality assured recognition of learning in a way that meets the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders without erecting unnecessary barriers to learning as a result of the recognition procedure. This optimum position will inevitably look and feel different in different country and regional contexts depending on the recognition systems in use. Because this optimum position

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\(^5\) The European Centre for the development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), The European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), The World Bank and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) have all participated in this activity.
varies across countries, it is not possible to identify a general best point of balance between all the competing factors in a qualifications system. In Chapter 7 countries are invited to investigate how mechanisms can help understand these competing factors.

28. It is therefore important to consider the nature of mechanisms in a wider context than qualifications systems and lifelong learning. It is usually the case that social constructs such as mechanisms are not independent of the social, economic and cultural conditions in which they exist. For example, the condition of the labour market with its demands regarding volume and structure of work translates into job opportunities and the necessity to acquire higher skills and possibly qualifications. Innovation and new technologies provide another example – technological development requires workforce skill development. Institutional regulations also account for demand for qualifications, for example the prerequisite condition in some countries to undertake vocational training in order to be entitled to unemployment benefits. The degree of compression of the wage structure and the general rate of labour turnover influence the possible returns of training for employers and in turn opportunities for individuals to train. Together with basic cultural values these factors influence anticipated costs and benefits of training. These effects would differ between various groups of the population in a country. Each country’s identity is bound up in these social, economic and cultural factors. It is therefore necessary to involve a third assumption that a mechanism will work in different ways in different countries and therefore there can be no general message that a particular mechanism will work for all situations.

Evidence base is weak

29. Published literature focussing specifically on the interaction of qualifications systems and lifelong learning is rare. Within the vast literature on lifelong learning the notion of qualifications is implicitly embodied in discussion of learning and delivering learning programmes. Sometimes, in relation to accrediting prior learning, ‘qualification’ is referred to by use of words such as educational achievement, outcomes or competences. The lifelong learning literature that does make implicit or explicit reference to qualifications often points out that poor achievement in terms of recognition of learning in compulsory schooling has a powerful negative influence on motivation to participate in learning later in life.

30. Care is needed in interpreting a weak literature that links lifelong learning and qualifications as the latter are taken as a proxy for education and training (Keating, 2002). Literature on national targets for lifelong learning participation often refers to proportions of the population reaching certain levels of qualification. The report from Thematic Group 3 (Appendix A) underlines this point and explains that qualifications are commonly understood to condition learning.

31. A European Commission report on quality indicators for lifelong learning (EC, 2002) found that it was not possible to define a general indicator covering qualification (referred to as accreditation and certification) because it would not incorporate significant aspects of learning outside the formal qualifications system. In evaluating lifelong learning internationally, qualifications levels are invariably and explicitly linked to phases of education and benchmarked to ISCED 97; once again this shows a strong link with participation in programmes rather than defining outcomes of learning programmes through qualifications.

32. This weak research base underlines the potential value of the OECD activity for countries insofar that it has created a wealth of information about the links between qualification and recognition systems (as opposed to learning delivery systems) on lifelong learning.
2.2. The route toward agreed definitions of the concepts

33. At the heart of this report are some central concepts, notably, on the side of qualifications systems:
   − Qualification.
   − Qualifications system.
   − Qualifications framework.
   − Competence.
   − Credit.
   − The relationship between assessment, validation, accreditation and qualification.
   − Standard.

and, on the lifelong learning side:
   − Lifelong learning.
   − Recognition of learning.
   − Formal learning.
   − Non-formal learning.
   − Informal learning.

34. In the earliest phases of the activity these terms were defined, usually through the work of the 3 Thematic Groups that included members from many countries. However as the activity developed and more people worked with these terms different interpretations of meaning came to the surface. Attempts to reconcile the views of participants have produced an evolution of the definitions as the different meanings have been accommodated. In this paper an account is given of the evolution of each of the central concepts and the current definition that is also presented. Existing OECD, EU and CEDEFOP (2003) definitions have been used as the basis for these definitions wherever possible.

35. The process of refining definitions is important so that the spoken and written words carry the meaning for others that the speaker or writer intends. Clarifying meaning goes beyond simply facilitating communication. It helps to bring together the perspectives of different groups to focus strongly on the issues involved in the activity. Consequently, this paper is written to help develop common meanings for common words and phrases as well as to heighten awareness of different perspectives.

Qualification

36. The OECD Guidelines for Countries document stated that a qualification is: A unit of outcome of learning and its recognition. It goes on to say: recognition encompasses both the processes and requirements for issuing a qualification to an individual, and the actual qualification and the benefits that it carries for the individual and the users of the qualification. Thematic Group 1 took this broad definition and attempted to produce a form of words that formed a more precise common understanding.

A qualification is formal certification, issued by an official agency, in recognition that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes or competencies to the standard specified for the qualification title, usually a type of certificate, diploma or degree. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through workplace experience and/or a program of study. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training.

37. Further debate then transformed this definition so that it might incorporate a wider range of achievement. The current definition is therefore:
A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual has learned knowledge and skills to specified standards. The standard of learning is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through a program of study and/or work place experience. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade.

38. There is still some debate over this definition, for example does it adequately cover the notion of level of demand of work that characterises ‘qualification’ in some countries? The CEDEFOP definition covers this work-based interpretation well:

A qualification is an official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement that recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination; and/or the requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within an occupation.

39. The definition agreed by the participants in the OECD activity is generally in line with those of international organisations although there may be some reconciliation required with the more extensive definition of a qualification produced by the International Labour Organisation that has three parts:

- The requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within, an occupation.
- The education and training experience and attainments that an individual has.
- An official record of achievement, which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination.

40. Later in this section a simplified version of the definition accepted by participants is also offered.

Qualification is a formal outcome of an accreditation or validation process. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training.

Qualifications system

41. In a conceptual paper, Behringer and Coles (2003) propose a deconstruction of a qualifications system into components and sub-components (Annex 2.1). This deconstruction is based on the Guidelines for the activity (OECD, 2002a) that stated that a qualifications system should consist of two elements:

First it includes the arrangements for the ‘recognition of learning’. Second, it includes the arrangements that link different qualifications and link qualifications and destinations. These are the arrangements that make it a ‘system’. These arrangements will typically include qualifications entry rules and systems, credit systems, qualifications pathways and progression routes, and qualifications and standards frameworks.

42. These arrangements determine the performance of the system. The combination of these arrangements affect adapting to learning pathways, accessibility, efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness, transparency.

43. Thematic Group 1 resolved several dimensions of qualifications systems into the following statement.

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country’s activity that result in the delivery or recognition of learning. These systems include institutional arrangements, quality assurance
processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link the labour market to education and training. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

44. Since this statement was produced there have been debates amongst participants about reference to policy on regulating, managing or governing qualifications and this is thought by some to be another essential ingredient of a qualifications system. Thus the definition used in this report is:

*Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.*

**Qualifications framework**

45. It seems there is for some countries a significant difference between a qualifications framework and a framework of qualifications. The former is often being considered more diverse and ephemeral than the latter, which is often encapsulated in a diagram of some sort. In this report this distinction is not maintained and either term covers a concept that is concerned with a means of organising and relating qualifications to each other and to reference points external to specific qualifications, such as national benchmarks for training levels. The much more serious issue is the confusion that is possible between a qualifications framework and a qualifications system (as defined above). Thematic Group 1 decided to tackle this problem through defining what each of these entities is not.

- Qualifications systems do not describe the range of qualifications, the relationships between qualifications or progression routes for individuals.

- Qualifications frameworks do not describe the social and cultural origin of qualifications, the national or regional policy for qualifications, funding and assessment in awarding processes, institutional arrangements, learning arrangements or regulatory arrangements.

46. The need for two definitions (one for systems and one for frameworks) becomes necessary when, within a country, several frameworks exist as part of the system. Recently South Africa’s Qualifications Framework has broken down into three linked frameworks. This arrangement has been termed a ‘framework system’. This shows how complex terminology and meaning can become.

47. The International Labour Organisation identifies confusion of definitions when it states:

> An NQF is essentially a framework that classifies and resisters qualifications, according to a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria for levels of learning/skills obtained.

A national qualifications framework needs to be distinguished from a national qualifications system which broadly encompasses the combination of all qualifications available in the country and the institutions, processes and mechanisms which support the provision of qualifications. An NQF should not be regarded, however, simply as a matrix that indicates how different qualifications relate to each other. An NQF is defined also by distinctive ways

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6 Private communication with International Labour Organisation.
of developing, organising and providing qualifications. In an NQF, qualifications consist of a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria that are classified at different levels. Qualifications are provided on the basis of obtaining competencies (or expected learning outcomes) stipulated by these standards. This means that gaining a qualification is no longer associated with “what goes into the learning” whether it is a specific learning time, place, or instructions of particular education or training institutions.

48. A qualifications framework was first defined in the activity when Thematic Group 1 began its work. The minutes of its first meeting show broad agreement for the following definition.

A framework of qualifications is a communication about what qualifications are available, what they mean and the relationship between them. Frameworks may be linked to regulatory structures. They are concerned with levels, equivalences and recognition.

49. Using all of these views we can write a definition as:

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

Competence

50. Chapter 5 involves the analysis of evidence related to the labour market and the supply of qualifications. It is quite common for literature in this area to define what is learned during qualification as knowledge, skills and competencies implying competencies are something quite distinct from knowledge and skills. Considerable work has been done to clarify the meaning of competence, especially when the word is used in connection with work. The OECD study 7 DeSeCo reviewed the meaning of the concept of competence and developed categorisation of the range of competences. Using the report of this project and examining published literature from France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the following composite definition is offered.

Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area; iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.

Credit

51. The term credit occurs in most country background reports and requires some elaboration. Credit is usually associated with determining the value of a specific amount of learning, usually a unit of assessed learning or a module in a learning programme. In this sense the word credit is sometimes synonymous with certificate, for example ‘a certificate of credit is issued’. Sometimes this credit is deemed portable and can be included in a different setting to the one in which it was gained or awarded. Credit transfer is used to describe this process and it is worth noting that credit can move to another qualification and count for more or less than its original value depending on the relative size of the destination qualification.

52. Sometimes credit is allowed to accumulate until it reaches or exceeds a value required for the award of a qualification. Credit accumulation is used in many flexible learning programmes.

53. Finally because credit systems can become complicated sometimes the processes involved in valuing credit, transferring credit and accumulating credit are governed by rules in a credit framework.

54. Combining these ideas we have:

Credit describes the value of an amount of learning. It can be transferred to a qualification other than the one in which it was gained. Credit can allowed to accumulate to predetermined levels for the award of a qualification. The processes involved in valuing credit, transferring credit and accumulating credit are governed by rules in a credit framework.

The relationship between assessment, validation, qualification and certification

55. During the discussions of the outcomes of the activity it was necessary to clarify the relationship between the key components of the qualification process. The confusion between the meaning of qualification as a status of being qualified and the ownership of a certificate of qualification was the source of difference in understanding. In an attempt to root the meaning of qualification and certification in commonly understood terms the following sequence of ideas was produced.

Learning is assessed against standards or criteria by an expert, or a group of experts, who follow established procedures.
Achievement in learning is validated when assessment of learning is approved or confirmed by relevant legislative and professional authorities by having met predetermined criteria and that a standard assessment procedure was followed.
Qualification is a formal outcome of an accreditation or validation process. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training.
A certificate is official document that records qualification and validation of learning.

Standard

56. A term that arises in many discussions of qualification and learning for qualification is standard. It seems to be a key term for establishing confidence in qualifications systems and in learning provision. There are at least three ways in which it is used. Firstly, in the widest interpretation it implies benchmarks or expectations of learning that have been established with stakeholders. In this sense the standards can be related to content (learning outcomes) or the process of verifying these (quality assurance procedures). Thus the term might be used to refer to the standard of qualification. In this meaning standards convey a sense of consistency and relevance that is commonly understood by users. But this wide definition is sometimes too wide for some users of the word. A second meaning of the word ‘standard’ to be associated with specific criteria governing content of learning programmes. Standards here refer only to the level of
learning outcomes involved and the word gives a sense of reaching a required (predetermined) standard (a person has a good standard of chemistry knowledge). Clearly this meaning implies that many standards or levels exist depending on contextual factors such as local workplace expectations. A third meaning of the word mean something different and the word standard is associated with a procedure which is commonly accepted as replicable every time it is carried out. Clearly there is no variation due to context here. In this report the fullest meaning is used unless otherwise stated.

Standards are benchmarks or expectations of learning that have been established with stakeholders and include all factors that influence the consistency and relevance of qualifications

Learning

57. CEDEFOP has used the following definition of learning.

A cumulative process whereby individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and competences.

58. Participants in the OECD activity have not made suggestions for improving this definition.

Lifelong learning

59. The OECD has adopted a ‘cradle-to-grave’ concept of lifelong learning. However in analysing literature on lifelong learning most writers ignore the learning in the years of compulsory education presumably because in these early years the learner is left with little choice about whether to choose to learn or not. In effect lifelong learning is regarded by these writers as that which occurs after compulsory secondary schooling or from the beginning of a vocational education and training programme and is possibly better identified as adult learning. The OECD’s ‘cradle to grave’ approach is distinct from this post-compulsory approach and allows for the fact that compulsory education can have a profound effect on participation in learning later in life. The Guidelines state that:

Learning includes the outcomes of the recognition processes of education and training in the form of qualifications and grades, and learning gained through the non-formal and informal settings of the home, the workplace and society at large. For the purpose of this activity, learning outcomes should include the individual’s propensity and capacity to undertake further learning. Learning also is measured as the quality of the learning and how it is distributed across populations.

60. An issue that often arises in discussion is the richness of the lifelong learning concept and in particular that it covers institutionalised learning, work related learning and forms of learning for leisure. The notion that lifelong learning is essentially an individualist concept carries great weight with participants. In the concept paper (Behringer and Coles, 2003) produced to support the activity the definition used is as follows.

Learning activity that is undertaken throughout life and improves knowledge, skills and competencies within personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspectives. Thus the whole spectrum of learning, formal, non-formal and informal is included as are active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and professional, vocational and employment related aspects.
61. From the viewpoint of the OECD activity, which is specifically about qualifications systems, it is clear that this wide definition will need to be restricted to when qualifications systems have an impact on individuals and this normally will be the case at the commencement of vocational learning or at the end of compulsory schooling. The Behringer and Coles definition is considered more helpful than the current broad CEDEFOP definition:

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

62. Similarly the International Labour Organisation definition is very broad:

Lifelong learning encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications.

63. It may be of interest that CEDEFOP also defined life-wide learning:

Learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social and/or professional) and at any stage.

Recognition of learning

64. In European literature recognition seems to be a broad term that often seems to be used interchangeably with the term validation. Both terms seem to include the recording of achievements in learning and the progress made by individuals. For some users it also includes the processes leading to the issue of a qualification. Recognition of learning aims to make visible an individual’s knowledge and skills so that they can use the credit gained by recognition to benefit financially or in terms of status or self-esteem. In some countries the term validation specifically refers to legal processes that permit to an individual to obtain a certificate (for instance a vocational diploma) linked to an individual’s skills, knowledge and know-how. In other countries validation is referred to as a means of making visible a person’s skills and competencies without requiring predetermined knowledge targets to have been achieved. Recognition is also a component of the pedagogical process in adult education and an important instrument in work on recruiting and motivation participants to study. In Scotland recognition is seen as a process of linking knowledge, skills and competencies hover learned to criteria in a national benchmark and this is firmly distinguished from accreditation by means of defining the latter as containing a formal assessment process that includes elements of quality assurance.

65. CEDEFOP defines the recognition (of competences) as either (a) Formal recognition which is the process of granting official status to competences, either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences; and/or (b) social recognition: through acknowledgment of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders. This leads us to the accepted definition:

Recognition of learning is the process of recording of achievements of individuals arising from any kind of learning in any environment; the process aims to make visible an individual’s knowledge and skills so that they can combine and build on learning achieved and be rewarded for it.

Formal learning

66. This kind of learning is usually associated with an institution of learning such as a school or an employer offering formal training. An agency that manages an assessment process may also be involved.
The learning results from an instruction programme. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective. Thus we have a definition:

*Formal learning can be achieved when a learner decides to follow a programme of instruction in an educational institution, adult training centre or in the workplace. Formal learning is generally recognised in a qualification or a certificate.*

**Non-formal learning**

67. Like formal learning, non-formal learning is considered to be achieved when an individual follows an organised programme of learning in an educational institution or in the workplace. This kind of learning is sometimes embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning can be structured is intentional from the learner’s point of view.

68. Many countries explicitly acknowledge a difference between non-formal learning and informal learning. Where this distinction is made there is a general agreement that non-formal learning takes intentionally, often in an educational or labour setting, but does not lead to formal qualifications. In Sweden formal learning is undertaken within the formal education system and non-formal learning is organised alongside formal learning by private providers. Non-formal learning can be very strongly connected to formal education systems and other organised education. The following CEDEFOP definition covers these points.

*Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.*

69. Thus we have an agreed definition:

*Non-formal learning arises when an individual follows a learning programme but it is not usually evaluated and does not lead to certification. However it can be structured by the learning institution and is intentional from the learner’s point of view.*

**Informal learning**

70. Informal learning is achieved outside of organised education or training provision. It is often referred to as ‘experience’ or ‘unintentional learning’ that occurs throughout life without the learner necessarily being aware of the knowledge or skill that they have gained. This type of learning is seen as a ‘side-effect’ of life. Informal learning is also referred to as experiential learning. It is suggested that the CEDEFOP definition is the most useful.

*Informal learning results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective. It does not usually lead to certification.*

**2.3. Effects on lifelong learning**

71. What are the possible effects of a qualifications system on lifelong learning? It is possible to classify the possible effects of a qualifications system on lifelong learning as being related to the:

– Supply of learning opportunities.
- Demand for such opportunities.
- Equity of access to learning.
- Efficiency of lifelong learning processes.

72. By considering each of these influences in turn it is possible to exemplify these influences (Figure 2.1).

73. Having identified how lifelong learning might be enhanced by qualifications systems, it is useful to explore what components of qualifications systems are responsible for this influence. Behringer and Coles (OECD, 2003) identified a range of components of qualifications systems and suggested how they might interact with lifelong learning. For example they considered the possible effects of accreditation processes for qualifications and concluded for example that cost would be a factor influencing individuals take up of learning and therefore an efficient accreditation process would be a positive influence. Similarly if an accreditation process raises the quality of assessment and evaluation then this might encourage take up of accredited learning programmes. Another component of qualifications systems was the credit transfer. Here it was concluded that increased flexibility of learning periods, flexibility of content of programmes, the opportunity to gain partial certification and the spreading of the time and therefore the cost of gaining a full qualification were all likely to impinge positively on lifelong learning. By considering the influences it is possible to anticipate the kind of features of qualifications systems that might influence the behaviour of different stakeholders (Table 2.1).

### Table 2.1. An example of the influence of a feature of a qualifications system on stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible mechanism</th>
<th>Possible effects on individuals</th>
<th>Possible effects on employers</th>
<th>Possible effects on providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase portability of qualifications</td>
<td>Positive (qualifications could be used in another workplace/country)</td>
<td>Negative (Risk of trained staff leaving the firm)</td>
<td>Positive (increased size of market, economies of scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive (flexibility in recruitment and deploying labour)</td>
<td>Negative (complexity of entry requirements to programmes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

74. The relationship between qualifications systems and lifelong learning is complex. The report aims to shed light on the linking mechanisms in qualifications systems in order to make the relationship more transparent to decision makers who are seeking ways of optimising lifelong learning.
2.4. The meaning and structure of mechanisms and policy responses

75. Having explained the main concepts involved in the activity and explained the origin of definitions of key terms it is useful to focus more sharply on the idea of a mechanism. So far a mechanism is defined here as a means of changing an aspect of a qualifications system so that lifelong learning is enhanced in some way. An example of a potential mechanism might be breaking up qualifications into units of assessment. By doing this it might be easier for learners with limited time or money to begin a programme of study for qualification by working on one or two units. The learners may have found the cost of a full qualification prohibitive and thus the change might lead to more learning for qualification.

76. During the course of the OECD activity, the nature of a mechanism has evolved and is currently conceived as being made up of two parts that may interact one with the other. Firstly it can be considered as a tangible structural change if it is possible to identify a change in the infrastructure of the qualifications system, for example, adding or removing a new qualification. Secondly a mechanism can be a more
ephemeral change in conditions if the environment of the qualifications system such as improving funding for a specific route to a qualification. It is possible to each of these two dimensions to act independently but it is also possible for them to act together. One might reinforce the other or one might counteract the effects of the other, for example the potentially increased access to qualifications created by unitisation of qualifications might be reduced by increased costs brought about by the change. As a consequence, a mechanism is a sum of the effects of structural change and change in conditions and this sum might be nil. When structural changes and changes in condition exist then the combination of structural change and changes in condition become the mechanism for linking a qualifications system with lifelong learning. Thus we define a mechanism as:

\[ \text{a structural change in a qualifications system and/or a change in the environmental conditions of a qualifications system that results in a change in the extent, quality, distribution and efficiency of lifelong learning.} \]

77. We can show this conceptualisation of a mechanism in diagrammatic form (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2. The form of a mechanism**

78. This understanding of a mechanism is next used in Chapter 5 where a comprehensive analysis of empirical and theoretical evidence related to the ways the behaviours of the main stakeholders could be changed is used to identify 20 mechanisms. In Chapters 6 and 7 these 20 mechanisms are used to optimise the operation of the policy responses made by countries in order to enhance lifelong learning. Nine policy responses are identified in the next chapter. The term policy response is defined as:

\[ \text{A formal national policy statement covering the intention to develop major parts of the qualifications system in order to bring about improved lifelong learning.} \]

79. All of the above definitions have been important in clarifying the understanding of participants in the activity and need to be used by readers to appreciate the nature of the study.
References


**Annex 2.1**

**Components of a qualifications system**

The table below gives a list of components and sub-components on how best to describe a qualifications system. The way the components and sub-components are combined and used in the countries explains, to some extent, how well the qualifications system is working. The performance of a qualifications system can be judged by such things as: adapting to learning pathways, accessibility, efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness, transparency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Potential sub-component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong> of application of the qualifications system</td>
<td>Breadth (international, national, regional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sector/industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective agreements or agreements by professional organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong> of the qualifications system</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National agency or agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awarding body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No clear control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extra-national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accreditation</strong> processes for qualifications</td>
<td>Status of institutions involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extent of public information about process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conditions for award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process for recognising prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control of accreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supply and demand considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Framework</strong> within the qualifications system</td>
<td>Horizontal and vertical relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equivalencies (general/vocational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial education/training only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regulated or part of a regulatory function</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Descriptors** present in qualifications | Requirement  
Optional  
Qualification types  
Purpose (general, vocational)  
Content  
Assessment  
Levels  
Learning arrangements  
Prior attainment  
Types of assessment  
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning  
Links to qualifications frameworks |
|---|---|
| **Access** to qualifications for individuals | Entry points  
Entry requirements  
Preparatory courses  
Recognition of prior learning |
| **Progression** for individuals | Linkages between pathways, qualification types  
Routes and pathways explicit  
Transferability, equivalence of standards  
No routes |
| **Stability** of the qualifications system | Permanent, fixed term, mixed |
| **Awarding** processes | Process of assessment (formal, informal)  
Recognition of prior learning  
Extent of assessment in qualifications (flexible, minimum, maximum, modal size)  
Types of certificates  
Level of regulation  
Awarding institutions (type and number)  
Participation of social partners in awarding process |
| Is there a **credit** system? | Accreditation of learning elsewhere  
Extent of unitisation/modularisation  
Rules of combination of units/modules  
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning/exemptions possible  
Partial certification |
| **International** reference points | ISCED  
Trans-national (Regional) frameworks e.g. EU-levels frameworks  
Linkage to ISCO  
Portability |
Chapter 3

Making national qualifications systems deliver more: Economic, social and personal benefits and policy responses in terms of national qualifications systems

This chapter aims to draw together recent policy responses to the lifelong learning agenda that involve national qualifications systems. Countries completing background reports for the OECD activity *The role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning* were asked to describe the major pressures for changes and innovations, including those from different stakeholder groups, relating to their qualifications system over the past decade. These pressures include those on the education and training system specifically as well as the underlying social and economic demands such as the needs of different social groups, the needs of industry and pressures arising from international mobility of labour and work. Countries were also asked to describe the major reforms and innovations in qualifications and qualifications systems that have been undertaken in their country over the past decade, and to describe any anticipated changes in the qualifications system. Alongside the pressures and reforms country experts were asked to identify the major constraints upon reforms and innovations. This chapter is a synopsis of the answers to these requests for information – it draws mainly on background reports submitted by 15 countries (Chapter 1). There is no attempt in this chapter to analyse in depth the links between qualifications systems and lifelong learning, this relationship is examined in Chapter 5, and here the focus is entirely on qualifications systems. Nor is there any attempt to report a comparative analysis between countries, rather the paper attempts to give an overview of the ways countries perceive policy development related to qualifications systems. Hopefully by taking this wide policy view, the paper sets the scene for more detailed work on mechanisms that link qualifications systems and lifelong learning. Policy responses to lifelong learning that relate to qualifications systems are identified and elaborated in Section 3.2. This follows on from a brief exploration of the pressures countries feel to develop qualifications systems (Section 3.1). Some issues related to policy development in the area of qualifications systems are examined in Section 3.3. There is also a major annex associated with this chapter (Annex 3.1) – it provides a concise synopsis of the qualifications system and reform programme in each of the countries that provided background information.

3.1. Reasons for developing lifelong learning

80. There are major benefits to be gained for countries that are able to improve the quantity, quality, equitable distribution and efficiency of lifelong learning. Many of these stem from improved economic performance based on better volumes and levels of skills supply to the labour market and the consequential gains in innovation, speed of development of products and efficiency of work practices. There are also major social benefits in terms of improved sense of citizenship and greater levels of community involvement. Individuals can benefit from improved education services, leading healthier lives and gaining a sense of creativity, responsiveness self-worth and fulfilment. Together the economic and social benefits
can support cultural development and reduce the costs of maintaining services for the economically and socially excluded sections of communities.

81. A national qualifications system is a broad concept and includes all aspects of a country’s activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes and skills recognition and other mechanisms that link the labour market to education and training. In some countries, the system is managed centrally and has the appearance of a well-structured arrangement of interacting elements, in others it is rather less integrated and coherent but can still be regarded as a system. A qualifications framework can feature in a national qualifications system. This understanding of the nature of a qualifications system is important since it sets the scope of the reports from countries on their pressures, reforms and constraints on which the analysis in the remainder of this paper is based.

82. The information in the country background reports is concerned with attempts to enhance lifelong learning and in particular how qualifications systems can be used to deliver better lifelong learning. The potential benefits are valued so highly that countries have made policy responses designed to make lifelong learning a reality. These policy responses are identified in this chapter and used later (Chapter 7) to examine how, together with mechanisms, policy learning can be made available across country boundaries whilst remaining sensitive to political, social and cultural conditions in countries.

3.1. Qualifications systems: drivers for change

83. Qualifications systems are evolving. There is a significant level of change in many countries and it is useful to identify the pressures that are driving this process. The pressures that are driving the changes in qualifications systems are diverse and, as one might expect, each country report provides a particular mix that differs from country to country. This section provides a description of the major pressures countries have identified (in their background reports) that are putting pressure on their qualifications systems. It is not meant to be a comprehensive identification of all factors driving for change. The main categories used are only an attempt to classify these pressures according to the evidence in the background reports. The evidence suggests that the pressures for policy action can be categorised into seven types.

Pressures de develop the economy

84. Many countries reported economic pressures for reform of the national qualifications system and that these are becoming stronger as countries aim to strengthen the link between the education system and employment. Countries point to the discrepancy between job training and qualifications as a key factor leading to the need to develop qualifications frameworks and skill standards. Economic pressures are reported as pressures to respond to international or global economic trends or to local or national economic needs, such as the need to be responsive to innovation and the development of enterprises, to develop human capital and to respond to skills shortages.

85. In many countries raising the value of human capital is seen as crucial to development and progress. Where governments have concentrated on human capital development it has mainly been for economic purposes, and they have taken qualifications as a proxy measure of volume and quality of education and training. Qualifications systems are believed to have potential for improving the link between education and work, for establishing new pathways from education into employment and for reducing barriers to learning, for example by using new forms of assessment.

86. Innovation in production has implications for training and this, in turn, has implications for qualifications systems. Economic needs are perceived to drive innovation in production. Results from
research programmes show that innovation often takes place via continuous learning by people and that forms of learning in the workplace are changing, for example that there is effort to organise learning on the job and utilise self-directed learning. Consequently learning structures in the workplace are becoming more complex. For example, the focus is no longer solely on acquisition of knowledge but has widened to include new values, new codes of behaviour and the remodelling of past experience. This has resulted in expansion of training provision and greater use of more diverse recognition systems through qualifications.

87. Some countries emphasise assessment of vocational ability, recognised in qualification, as important for employment stability, improved remuneration, and quick and efficient recruitment. Recognition of vocational ability is also expected to reduce risks related to employment, on both the employer's and the employee's side, by preventing mismatches engendered through poor information on workers’ skills. Some countries report that rapid economic growth has produced skills shortages and this has exerted pressure to develop the qualifications system by creating more efficient and faster response to changes and emerging needs in the labour market.

88. There is pressure from enterprises for development spanning the full range of levels of qualifications. In many countries there are actions to overcome basic skills weaknesses (e.g. communication, numeracy, problem solving ability) as these are believed to crucial in the majority of jobs. Without this response it is feared that the low skilled can be excluded from the labour market or forced into early retirement. On the other hand there is interest in some countries in higher-level competencies being achieved through greater participation in higher education and competency-based training and assessment as an alternative pathway to higher education. The qualifications system is under pressure to respond equally well to this range of qualification development.

89. Promotion of greater mobility of workers and learners creates pressure on national qualifications systems. Firms’ drive for greater flexibility has injected precariousness in jobs. There is a tendency towards shorter job tenures in the face of more volatile product markets and shorter product cycles. Career jobs are diminishing and individuals are now experiencing more frequent changes in jobs over the working life. Another pressure on qualifications systems arises from the expectation that they should deliver international recognition of skills including the recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning that has been achieved in other countries.

Comparative pressures

90. In addition to the economic and labour market issues in the previous section, some other pressures from international competition are now identified. These are diverse and range from the interpretation of performance data to making sure that qualifications achieved by different learning routes are genuinely comparable.

91. Several countries cited relative ranking in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) studies as a key driver of current policy reform (OECD, 2001b). Before this survey, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) had already shown important discrepancies in adult literacy performance among OECD countries (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000). The Programme for International Student Assessment is concerned with the older school population and pressure for change is targeted at managers in institutions, teachers and young learners. Such reforms can have effects on the wider system, including qualifications, by for example introducing new kinds of assessments and learning programmes.

92. Among the European Union countries, there is a commitment to increase mobility of workers and learners across country boundaries. This requires transparency in qualifications system and encourages
countries to build education and qualification structures that are consistent with other countries in the Union.

93. Finally, at a more detailed level and within a country qualifications system, there is interest in maintaining parity between different recognition systems that lead to the same certificate; for example, where a system of recognition of prior learning is in place. The same situation exists where different qualifications, with different assessment regimes, are deemed by their place in a national framework to be at the same level.

**Demographic pressures**

94. In many countries, low population growth coupled with increased demand for high skills has focused attention on potential skill shortages. Inevitably, older people need to be provided with learning opportunities. Qualifications systems have to provide recognition for skills learned at any stage in life. This demographic shift has an impact on needs for (re)training of older people, retirement schemes, pension funding and family life.

95. Several countries highlight the challenges qualifications systems face as a result of immigration flows. These pressures include the need to relate qualifications gained in other countries to the national system and the need to recognise learning that has not been previously recognised through qualifications.

**Social and cultural pressures**

96. The social and cultural issues are not divorced from the economic, demographic and immigration issues noted above. At the same time, it is generally known that people engage in learning for both economic reasons, to improve employment prospects, for example, and also for personal development and social reasons – social status, better citizenship, and so on. These pressures also include a perception of the need to broaden current provision of education to include such aspects as values, behaviour and citizenship and pressure to offer learners more choice and more flexible ways of gaining credit for their learning – the need to recognise informal and non-formal learning also falls into this category. All of these aspects have implications for qualifications systems.

97. There is pressure for more flexible vocational education and training systems for people in disadvantaged situations as a mean of improving social inclusion through education.

98. Opportunities for training later in life depend heavily on the qualifications with which one enters the labour force, and learning opportunities open to the unemployed, employees of small firms and the disadvantaged groups in society are far fewer than for the employees of the larger firms. The disparities are also reflected in the large earnings gaps between those with and without post secondary education, which, furthermore, widen over the lifetime. The qualifications system has to provide more opportunities to engage individuals to reach minimum level of learning and qualification that is deemed satisfactory for effective functioning in modern knowledge societies. Completion of upper secondary qualifications is a widely accepted benchmark.

**Pressures from learners**

99. Many countries identify strong pressures from learners to make qualifications systems transparent. They all highlight the need for making visible the possible progression routes in the qualifications systems. It is likely that this especially important in countries where wage bargaining is liked to qualifications.
In the search for coherence and harmonisation some countries describe pressure to rationalise their national qualifications system to create a more balanced view of all of the options available and reduce any differences in the ways academic and vocational qualifications are viewed. The countries sense a pressure to present a coherent system and in particular to respond to arguments for stronger linkage between secondary education, higher education and vocational education and training. In the search for coherence and harmonisation some countries describe pressure to rationalise their qualifications systems to create a more balanced view of all of the options available and reduce any differences in the ways academic and vocational qualifications are viewed.

**Pressure from technological change**

Technological innovation and the global spread of communications technologies are creating a pressure for countries to be using the most up-to-date production methods. There is a move towards leaner production systems and the potential for rising unemployment rates. This brings with it a growing need for enhanced training and retraining in the use of new technologies; qualifications systems need to adapt to allow the recognition of new knowledge and skills related to the use of new technologies. Skills shortages in the information and communication technology area are frequently reported. Qualifications systems themselves must optimise their own working practice through the use of new technologies.

Technological change has encouraged the growth of international qualifications. The latter raises important issues of recognition, benchmarking, evaluation, quality assurance and jurisdiction. This involves a two way set of pressures, with qualifications from other countries establishing a presence in countries, and with the potential for countries to export qualifications. This is thought to be a major issue for the future and it links strongly with the comparative pressures discussed above.

**Demand-led pressures**

The main pressures reported by the participating countries are all essentially demand-led. This is a theme that runs through all six types of pressure outlined above, for example a clear need is expressed by countries for a qualifications system to be more user-oriented in their structure, management and functioning, for example they attest the knowledge and skills that recruiters seek and that the needs of individuals are met. The pressure to develop learning opportunities means that, in some countries, providers have been required to differentiate course offerings in response to more selective demand, for example by creating qualifications delivered through general education and vocational education and providing programmes in new cross-disciplinary or more specialised fields.

**3.2. Responses to pressures for changes in qualifications system**

It is perhaps not surprising that, when this diverse set of pressures is experienced, countries report that many reforms to qualifications systems are underway. These reforms are based on policies that aim to enhance lifelong learning. The term *policy response* is used to describe an intention, on behalf of countries, to develop major parts of the qualifications system in order to bring about improved lifelong learning. The nine areas of policy response elaborated later have emerged from the country background reports for the activity. Where it is helpful and instructive the country or countries of origin of these policy responses are given in the text. Where the policy response is more widespread this becomes cumbersome and is avoided. As stated previously, to make clear the origin of all policy responses an annex has been prepared (Annex 3.1) that includes a description of each country’s qualifications system and the major developments that are underway.

Before the policy responses are elaborated, it is important to look closely at the notion of lifelong learning since this is the goal of all of the policy responses identified here. The complex and rich concept
involves a reconfiguration of traditional views of learning, the recognition of learning and the management of the learning system. OECD (2004) has identified four distinguishing characteristics of lifelong learning policy (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Four distinguishing characteristics of lifelong learning policy

1. **A systemic view.** This is the most distinguishing feature of lifelong learning – current approaches to education policy are sector-specific. The lifelong learning framework views the demand for, and the supply of, learning opportunities, as part of a connected system covering the whole lifecycle and comprising all forms of formal and informal learning.

2. **Centrality of the learner.** This requires a shift of attention from a supply side focus, for example on formal institutional arrangements for learning, to the demand side of meeting learner needs.

3. **Motivation to learn** is an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life. It requires attention to developing the capacity for “learning to learn” through self-paced and self-directed learning.

4. **Multiple objectives of education policy.** The lifecycle view recognises the multiple goals of education – such as personal development, knowledge development, economic, social and cultural objectives – and that the priorities among these objectives may change over the course of an individual’s lifetime.

*Source: OECD (2004).*

106. These four features of the lifelong learning concept have important implications for key parameters of education and training policy for: its objectives; the structure of provision; the content, quality and relevance of provision; resource provision and management as well as the roles and responsibilities of different partners and stakeholders. Countries involved in the qualifications system activity accept that a more dynamic view of education and training is a necessary prerequisite if lifelong learning is to become a reality. They accept there is an argument for allowing scope for lifelong learning goals to shape the way the education and training system operates. Stronger linkages are needed between learning at different stages of life and between the formal and the informal structures; countries suggest more diverse settings for learning will be needed and different partnerships between funders, providers and qualification bodies will lead to more integrated provision. It is clear in that departures from the existing infrastructure of education and training are likely to be substantial.

107. Qualifications systems have a significant role to play in this more dynamic view of education and training. Many countries commented on how this could happen. Both Australia and Ireland reported the need to bring together qualifications issued by the schools, vocational education and training and higher education sectors into a single comprehensive system of titles and standards. Similarly the report from the Netherlands described the route to increased institutional linkage. Denmark made a strong statement about the advantage to be gained through linkage of vocational qualifications and those offered by higher education. In Switzerland there is strong pressure for close interaction of educational tracks so that changing tracks is easier. This drawing together of bodies offering qualifications could lead to an easier interchange between types of qualification and that this might suit an individual’s ambitions for progression.

108. Such a radically different view of how qualifications systems should be structured raises the issue of who controls the qualifications system in a country. Evidence in country reports suggests that governments see an increasingly important role for themselves. Diverse interests in the qualifications
systems might be seen as running counter to pressures for openness and transparency and these probably demand some kind of central control.

109. Countries have made attempts to reform education and training in order to bring about more and better lifelong learning. Some of these policy responses bear directly on qualifications systems and nine such policy responses are now considered in turn. The allocation of reforms to these nine categories on a best fit basis and the nine policy responses represent a robust categorisation of current qualifications systems reforms. However, some reforms inevitably fit more than one category. For example, reforms that enable access to higher education from vocational education and training programmes could be classified under policy response 4 (Facilitate open access to qualifications) or 6 (Make qualifications progressive).

Policy response 1 – Increase flexibility and responsiveness

110. A statement about ‘customisation’ or ‘increasing choice’ is the first and most general indication of a wish to create qualifications systems that are sufficiently flexible to make them responsive to the changing needs of the economy, the evolving needs of employment and the personal ambitions of individuals. The Australian report highlights the importance of the learner-centred view and suggests that the individual should drive change to qualifications systems if the latter are to be a more positive influence on lifelong learning. The diversity and individuality in lifestyle, ambitions, learning patterns and preferences in terms of assessment methods suggests that qualifications systems will need to be increasingly responsive and therefore optimally flexible. It follows that mechanisms that promote this learner-centred flexibility are likely to be effective.

111. In Portugal the development of the recognition, validation and certification of competencies leads to the definition of individualised education and training pathways in accordance with each particular situation. Switzerland is opening up its education systems to the demands of its individuals. Denmark also has a system that increasingly individualises the learning and qualifications system for adults by offering flexible learning pathways, advice and guidance and developing individual learning programmes on the basis of counselling sessions and assessment of prior learning. In Ireland, the introduction of a national framework of qualifications is the central concept in a comprehensive reform of the qualifications system, designed to make the system more responsive to learners’ needs.

112. In contrast to this approach many countries construct qualifications in terms of pathways, routes or tracks. These systems can imply rigidity in the qualifications system that is clearly at odds with the notion of flexibility. However the track system has its advantages and the tension between individualised programmes and tracks is one reason why so many countries are introducing flexibility in the form of easy ways to change track or of keeping options open that might otherwise be closed for people on certain tracks. The classic case is retaining access to higher education for people following a vocational track in upper secondary education. Another response to this tension is the introduction of qualifications frameworks – these make explicit any linkage between different qualification types. By showing the relationships between qualifications and where tracks can intersect the more flexible are the various routes through the qualifications system. Several countries have developed qualifications frameworks and several others are considering the option (Appendix A).

113. Looking at country reforms more deeply we see a significant trend towards modularisation of education and training programmes and the introduction of units of assessment into qualifications. The intention is that programmes can developed that are tailor-made to meet the needs of employment or those of individuals and so they can also be more efficient in the use of time and other resources. There has been a steady trend towards modularisation over the last ten years, the full range of secondary and tertiary programmes, including adult learning have embraced the idea. However the modularisation programme does not deliver sufficient transferable credit for individuals and insufficient or unreliable information for
employees to make decisions about recruitment and training needs. Hence many countries are looking at ways of introducing credit transfer processes into the qualifications systems. These systems are considered to deliver flexibility to programme design, assessment and qualifications.

114. There have been attempts to increase the flexibility of national qualifications systems by managing carefully the ways public funds are dispersed to support the national qualifications system. In some countries the funding has been more strongly associated with the demand side in order to drive providers to be more responsive to the market for training. In the United Kingdom, Denmark and New Zealand the drive for a student-centred system involves changing the way learning and qualification is funded. Institutions receive public funding that is linked to the individual and passed to the providing institution when they register or enrol for a programme and when they are successful in qualification. In this way provider institutions are encouraged to attend to the needs of learners. There are examples of flexibility being created by the use of public subsidy to initiate a fresh institutional response to the qualification market and in some countries new infrastructures have been created to allow more diverse sources of evidence of competence to be accommodated within the formal qualifications system.

115. Maintaining high currency for qualifications will depend on the ways recruiters value them. Evidence suggests that there is a balance to be struck between the sensitivity to the needs of local stakeholders and the wider national needs. The interests of the learner are likely to be better served where it is possible to identify widely held perceptions of quality and high returns in a qualification. Such perceptions develop over time as quality assurance processes ensure consistency in application of approved procedures. However the report from the Netherlands points out the tensions between maintaining national standards for qualifications and allowing local diversity in qualifications systems. The question arises about how far flexibility and diversity can be allowed to take hold before damage to other aspects of qualifications systems, such as transparency, may reduce opportunities for lifelong learning. There is also a question of increased costs being associated with more diverse qualification provision.

Box 3.2. Foundation degrees in the United Kingdom

Foundation degrees (FDs) were launched as an intermediate work-related higher education qualification in September 2001. They were set by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with a multi-sector approach. The foundation degrees address the skills gap at the associate professional and higher technician level. The business sector is involved in order to give people the intermediate technical and professional skills that are in demand from employers. The foundation degrees are in fact designed, supported, and reviewed by businesses to make sure that the degrees meet their needs. The higher and further education sector is involved to ensure this qualification meets the students’ current and future needs.

Foundation degrees contribute to widening participation in higher education by reducing the barriers to learning. They intend to offer flexible ways of learning as well as to recognise relevant prior learning and experience. The foundation degrees are set at the intermediate level between the certificate and the honours level and, by definition, it will take two years in full-time compared to a longer period of time for a higher qualification. The foundation degrees aim at enhancing flexibility by including application of skills in the workplace, credit accumulation and transfer, etc. To facilitate accessibility, there are no set entry requirements and the university or college offering the course will decide on the eligibility based on not only prior educational qualifications but also appropriate working experience, which is considered as more relevant for the degrees. Upon completion, the degrees aim at ensuring routes to embark on a career change or to progress to a higher-level qualification.

Various attempts are being made to increase its visibility and value of the foundation degrees. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) are hosting a comprehensive database of foundation degree courses to promote an easy access to information and facilitate application process. To raise the profile of or give value to the foundation degree, it is proposed that people with foundation degrees have the right to use the letters ‘FDA’ (for arts
based subjects) or ‘FDSc’ (for science based subjects) after their names.

The Government White Paper ‘The Future of Higher Education’ (2003) lays an emphasis on the expansion of the foundation degrees as a way to expand higher education to meet the needs of students as well as employers.


116. One of the implications of a more learner centred approach is the need for governments and managing agencies to know how the qualifications system is changing in response to need. Monitoring systems may be an important way in which decision makers can secure the information they need to inform changes geared to greater flexibility. Ireland has already embraced the need for monitoring; included in its report a range of information about the individual learner view of qualification-based programmes. In Greek second chance schools there is systematic monitoring of student performance to identify gaps in learning at an individual level so that programmes can be adjusted to take account of this information.

117. All of this evidence suggests that a greater emphasis on flexibility in the qualifications system, within the constraints of maintaining a cost effective, quality assured national system, is a policy response that can lead to enhanced lifelong learning.

Box 3.3. Vocational Education and Training Spanish Qualifications Framework

Unitisation and modularisation have been, since the ends of eighties, two of the principles applied in the construction of qualification programmes in specific initial vocational training programmes (in the initiation and in the medium, secondary+2, and higher, Bac+2, grades, amounting to diplomas) as well as in continuing training (occupational training addressed to unemployed and employed workers amounting to certificates).

These two principles confirm the elaboration, now in process, of the National Catalogue of Occupational Qualifications (NCOQ) with its associated Integrated Catalogue of Modular Training, as basic components of the Spanish vocational education and training Qualifications Framework, which plays, as basic instrument, the role of institutional axis of the National Qualifications and Vocational Training System.

The National Catalogue of Occupational Qualifications constitutes the basic referent for the public-private training offers, with a normative role and an integrative aim, acting at the same time as national register of qualifications.

A procedure of regular updating is considered together with arrangements for the adaptation/adoptions of the vocational training offers not linked to NCOQ.

Source: Spanish background report.

Policy response 2 – Motivate young people to learn

118. The lifelong learning approach suggests a broader conception of foundation learning. It requires not just universal access to primary education but also improvements in young people’s motivation to learn and their capacity to learn independently. There is substantial research evidence that the early acquisition of qualifications leads higher level of participation in learning programmes later in life. Improving the motivation of young people to learn can involve the qualifications system. Country examples include: offering a wider range of vocational education programmes and opportunities to combine classroom
learning with learning in work settings, by encouraging co-operation with institutions outside the school and by introducing more learner centred pedagogies. Often these approaches would involve reforming aspects of the qualifications system, including at times developing new qualifications.

119. Most countries report reforms in this area that are aimed to raise the level of qualification of school leavers and to retain more young people in upper secondary education. There are several themes to these reforms:

- The issue of relevance of initial education to work and building valuable qualifications such as apprenticeship (for example, Slovenia and the United Kingdom). In 2001 Australian ministers endorsed a new Framework for Vocational Education in Schools and this signalled a broadening of the agenda for vocational education. In Belgium (French speaking) the dual system is being reformed to create better linkages between education and the labour market.

- A second theme is a reform of main school qualifications that extends beyond the definition of knowledge and skills to include the recognition of prior learning (Australia); recognising achievement across a whole programme rather than simply individual subject attainment (Ireland); the development of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement using ‘achievement standards’ developed for the school curriculum and unit standards from the national qualifications framework (New Zealand).

- Better progression routes for young people within qualifications and between qualifications is a theme in many countries. Examples include enabling the easier vertical and horizontal transfer from one educational level to another (Slovenia) and flexible dual trajectories combining learning and work (the Netherlands).

- The introduction of credit transfer arrangements and more open frameworks allows a range of learning outcomes to be recognised within the certificates (Australia, Korea). Credits gained in initial education and training can count towards qualifications acquired in life.

- Pedagogy has been examined in both the general and the vocationally oriented schools in Denmark to improve young people's study competence and thus strengthen the basis for more young people completing a higher education programme.

- Basic skills development in upper secondary schools has received attention in all countries.

- New school types have been developed in Greece with the establishment of Technical Vocational Schools (TEE) to provide technical and vocational knowledge and skills as well as an occupational awareness to facilitate young people's entry into the labour market.

120. Many of these themes involve choice for individual learners and this supports the notion of customisation discussed above. The weight of evidence for reform of upper secondary education suggests countries are confident that reforms to upper secondary education is necessary if they are to create a springboard to lifelong learning for many citizens.
Box 3.4. Aimhigher in the United Kingdom

Following the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (2003), the United Kingdom Government launched a unified national programme, Aimhigher, towards 'Widening Participation', building on the existing programme, the Excellence Challenge programme. The focus of the programme is on raising aspirations and attainment levels amongst young people in entering higher education. The specific attention is on young people traditionally under-represented in higher education, i.e. students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and disabled persons.

By building better links between schools, colleges and universities, the Aimhigher attempts to transfer knowledge/experience about university life to students who lack role models who can give them a first-hand view on it and the benefits of it. A pilot project was funded to encourage students to undertake paid, part-time work in schools or colleges, based on the existing work such as the 'Teacher Associate' Scheme run by the Teacher Training Agency. Within this scheme, students will be able to share their experiences with the young people and get paid for valuable work experience. And, this contributes to the young people to have contacts with university students who can show/tell them what it is like to go to university. The programme is keen on further partnerships, especially innovative approaches to partnerships, such as mentoring, workshops, taster courses, the involvement of parents, etc.

The Aimhigher website has been created to offer all the relevant information about the road into higher education. The portal project was initiated by the Department for Education and Skills (DiES), concretized by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and managed by Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO). It is designed to encourage prospective students by showing how going into higher education will open up more opportunities in their choice in the future. It provides comprehensive information such as careers and guidance, higher education institutions and courses, financial support and advice, and student life.


Policy response 3 – Link education and work

121. Reforms to vocational education and training dominate the reported programme of reform in many countries. There is a strong desire to see qualifications systems as a strong link between the education and training system and the labour market and the economy more generally. Countries are making efforts to strengthen this linkage through vocational qualifications and training. In some cases this has also blurred the boundaries between what is considered academic and vocational, especially at high levels. Many countries are reforming qualifications systems in order to produce a seamless transition across the theory-practice continuum and aiming to blend work practices with academic study at high levels. In some fast-developing fields there is an awareness that work based expert knowledge is nearer the cutting edge of developments than the content of teaching courses and research programmes in higher education institutions.

122. New institutions have been set up in some countries to foster links between education and training provision and the labour market. These agencies have a range of modes of action that include funding training, developing new programmes and qualifications, acting as a one-stop-shop for those needing guidance on education and training, broadening the range of educational institutions and bringing together the diverse interests of other government agencies. One mode of action that seems to be attractive to many countries is to lead qualifications to a more outcome-based structure, where the method of programme delivery matters less than the knowledge, skills and competences that learners can demonstrate. When qualifications become more outcome related there is an opportunity to engage employment interests in the qualification process, for example by defining key competences and by becoming actors in the process of validating learning gained through experience.
As is evident already there is a strong move to introduce more choice into upper secondary education programmes. The means by which choice is offered is often through the introduction of vocational programmes leading to vocational qualifications, either as separate routes or as units to accompany a traditional general education route. The latter point need emphasis because alternance schemes are appearing in addition to tried and tested apprenticeship or dual-system models. There are examples of these work-oriented programmes being strengthened either by modernisation of the content of programmes, extension of the range of subjects or sectors involved, improvements to the pedagogy and assessment or by increasing the funding for participants. Significantly, progression and easing entry to higher education is another aspect of improvement of apprenticeship schemes and the introduction of new vocational routes and qualifications in general education. This is considered important to countries aiming to strengthen these education-work links. Sometimes new forms of higher education programmes, better linked to practice, have been set up and in some countries new higher education institutions have been created.

Box 3.5. Introduction of a vocational graduate certificate and a vocational graduate diploma

In 1995 Australia introduced a system of competency-based vocational education and training spanning four certificate and two diploma qualifications, within a sector-comprehensive framework for all nationally-recognised qualifications known as the Australian Qualifications Framework. Subsequently, the system was further streamlined into Training Packages which describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace, expressed in sets of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications for recognising and assessing people’s skills in a particular industry or enterprise.

In terms of lifelong learning, one distinctive advantage of the competency-based vocational education and training qualifications is that they can be assessed wholly or partly on the basis of previous work experience or through additional structured training in the workplace itself. This means that employment is acknowledged as a site of learning able to be recognised through the national system of qualifications. These qualifications, in turn, give access to promotion or further education and training, including university qualifications. As an integral part of the Australian Qualifications Framework, national quality assurance measures implemented by government authorities protect the standards of training and assessment to ensure that, irrespective of the particular learning pathway – workplace, institution, life experience – the qualifications carry the same status under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The original suite of competency-based qualifications did not extend beyond sub-degree level. Degree level and above – bachelor degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas and higher degrees – has been the traditional province of higher education where standards for qualifications are set by the universities. However, as work-based learning and qualifications became well-established over the last decade, it was increasingly evident that there was an unmet need for competency-based qualifications at graduate levels for a large category of ‘lifelong learners’ such as suitably experienced mature aged workers with or without existing qualifications, or qualified and highly experienced trades people or higher education graduates wishing to acquire new high-level skills originating in the workplace or tailored to a workplace environment.

Although the original range of qualifications in the Australian Qualifications Framework did not offer this choice of pathway, the market need was being evidenced through some attempts to accredit higher education graduate certificates and diploma to industry competency specifications. This was raising quality assurance issues for the higher education awards on the one hand and, on the other hand, failing to meet needs for streamlining accreditation and delivery which were available through Training Packages, and failing to give transparency and appropriate status to expanded learner choice of a vocational education and training pathway at graduate levels.

To address these issues, and to ensure that the new vocational education and training qualifications were able to support pathways into higher degrees on an equal if different basis from their higher education counterparts, extensive consultations involving all stakeholders and government authorities were conducted through the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board and recommendations made to the national council of education and training Ministers for the addition of two new qualifications titles in the Australian Qualifications Framework: Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma.

Source: Australian background report.
Policy response 4 – Facilitate open access to qualifications

124. Countries see benefits in terms of lifelong learning from ensuring that individuals wishing to gain qualification can do so from a range of different starting points. For example France has made progress in ensuring that national qualifications have specified routes of access that are essentially inclusive in nature. Recognition of prior learning or of non-formal and informal learning is a high profile development in many countries. These processes involve offering formal recognition of qualification after an assessment of an individual's knowledge and skills gained through education, training, work and life experience. Recognition of prior learning is easier when learning programmes and qualifications are expressed in terms of outcomes. In many countries, there is a trend to express learning outcomes for qualifications.

125. Countries describe reforms aimed at producing qualifications that offer increased opportunities to learn to excluded groups. There are many different kinds of groups where involvement learning for qualification is seen as important; these include the unemployed, women, indigenous populations and recent flows of immigrants. It is in the context of this social inclusion that lifelong learning policies are often expressed. There are strong policy statements in country reports about the wider benefits of learning and qualification leading to stronger communities and to the need to make sure qualifications systems offer equitable access for all people. In several countries moving towards more outcome based models for qualifications is based on the belief that such systems allow fairer recruitment and smooth out some of the ways in which people of different social background are treated inequitably during recruitment processes.

126. It is clear from country background reports that gaining access to qualification programmes is often a second step for some individuals and groups – the first step is to join an informal or unaccredited learning programme. Greece is typical of many countries in establishing schemes aimed at disengaged youth and the setting up of special provision – special work related programmes (new technology schemes have worked well), work experience and special programmes in basic language skills for immigrant workers. Providing access to qualification-based courses from this kind of special provision is a key step in developing better lifelong learning.

127. Recognition of prior learning or of non-formal and informal learning is a high profile development in many countries. These processes involve offering formal recognition through qualification after an assessment of an individual's knowledge and skills gained through education, training, work and life experience. Providing a means of recognition of non-formal and informal learning has potential for enabling qualifications systems to enhance lifelong learning.

128. One of the areas where countries are attempting to improve access is in higher education. Regulation and legal measures have been introduced in several countries to ensure that people with unorthodox qualifications or unrecognised achievement can join higher education programmes, often through special introductory programmes. More common are measures that ensure that learners in initial education with vocational qualifications do not close off their right to enter higher education at some later stage in their life, for example the Swiss *Maturité Professionnelle*.

Policy response 5 – Diversify assessment processes

129. One of the themes in country background reports is the need to examine how the assessment process – often referred to as evaluation – associated with qualifications affects the willingness of learners to participate in learning. There are two main positions on this; some people are driven to engage in learning in order to gain qualification(s) and the rewards associated with qualification, others are fearful of failing to meet the requirements of qualification and are deterred from entering qualification-based learning programmes. These approaches are exemplified by Korea’s wish to diversify assessment methods to broaden engagement and the view of some in the United Kingdom that qualifications deter unemployed...
people. In Greece the use of written assessments is reported as a barrier to engagement in learning for some social groups. In Switzerland, the new Law for Professional Education states that the qualification procedures guarantee the equity of chances. Consequently, the related Ordinance foresees adequate procedures for specific groups (for instance for adults).

130. Assessment methods (and the administration and cost associated with them) are an important influence on the willingness of individuals to engage in learning for a qualification. By reviewing the procedures for assessment, quality assurance and certification it is possible that changes could lead to increased motivation to participate in qualification-based learning.

131. Learning takes many forms and takes place in many different settings, from formal courses in schools or colleges to various types of experience in families, communities and workplaces. All types of learning need to be recognised and made visible, according to their content, quality and outcomes rather than their location and form. Such recognition acts as a powerful psychological and economic incentive for participation in learning activities.

132. Evidence from across the range country background reports suggests that qualification as a gateway to employment is growing in importance. However there is a contrasting view in the research literature suggesting that employers are seeking to diversify the range of evidence used in recruitment and that whilst initial qualification retains its importance, for experienced workers some testimony of their experience is carrying more weight than previously [see Keating et al. (2004) for a recent survey of employers use of qualifications].

133. Outcome-based assessment systems are believed to offer advantages to learners; the Australian, Danish, Dutch and Korean reports make this clear. These systems make clear to learners the required assessed outcomes of their learning from the outset of a learning programme and may allay some of their fear of failure; they also offer a chance to focus on developing specific areas of weakness that might prevent qualification. In these ways they encourage more lifelong learning. A point touched on in the Dutch report and included in other reports concerns the need to support these new recognition systems by developing more widespread use of quality standards and outcomes than is currently the case. Many countries have qualifications that are based on completion of a learning programme as opposed to qualifications based on meeting specified outcomes in terms of competences. The argument that the use of outcomes is more equitable in terms of recognition acknowledges the inevitable restrictions to access to learning that apply when an individual has to be accepted for a learning programme, attend learning centres, complete a whole programme and undergo formal assessment. Outcome based methods of assessment also facilitate the recognition of prior learning and raise confidence in potential learners in seeking qualification. Many countries such as Korea and the Netherlands stress the importance of qualifications gained through assessment of an individual's knowledge and skills gained through education, training, work and life experience and that recognising non-formal and informal learning motivates people to seek more qualification and engage in lifelong learning.

134. The United Kingdom offers the view that it might be possible to differentiate between 'high stakes' and 'low stakes' qualifications in terms of requirements for quality assurance. They report argues that the administration and cost associated with assessment processes have weighed down those qualifications that rely on non-written assessment. The report concludes that rigorous quality assurance requirements are a proper feature of qualifications that open up scarce opportunities of work or education at higher levels for individuals. However, the report goes on to argue that much learning, particularly by adults, is not of this high stakes variety and does not, by itself, unlock opportunities in the labour market and educational progression.
Policy response 6 – Make qualifications progressive

135. Developing learning experiences throughout life is now a central concept across countries and there are many reforms that aim to shift the focus from a ‘once and for all’ initial education and training that happens early in an individual’s life, to one where the initial phase is one that forms the foundation for further learning and both inspires and requires individuals to seek further learning experiences and qualifications. Hence the concept of encouraging progression in learning programmes, skills acquisition and in the working hierarchy features strongly in the reform programmes of countries. Germany has adopted another method of achieving progressive learning, competence development and higher qualification. Additional qualifications build on the formal system and allow updating, recognition of specialisation and entry into specific work areas. These new qualifications open up access through recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the development of a credit system – in this way initial and continuing education and training will be linked through qualification.

136. Some countries (for example, Portugal, Belgium, Germany and Denmark) made reference to the benefits of a sequence of qualification development throughout the life of an individual and a move away from a system of once and for all qualification early in one’s career. The notion of portability of qualification from one context to another was thought to be attractive to many learners. Credit transfer systems were seen as a key part of the transition from one qualification to another and many countries have in place development programmes to achieve this goal, including school qualifications, vocational education and training and higher education. For example the Australian report described the development of credit transfer arrangements between Registered Training Organisations and schools as well as between Registered Training Organisations and universities involving efficient articulation of programmes and maximum credit transfer. Existing articulation between qualifications through transfer of credit was described as weak by many countries. Denmark is one of several countries that stress the potential power of credit systems to bring unification of different types of qualification and parity of esteem.

137. Access to further learning is tightly bound to initial education achievements. People with poor records in school generally do not make use of progression through learning as those that achieve well. Hence we see a strong focus in reforms of development of ways of creating a second chance to get school qualifications or basic educational knowledge and skills. Systems for allowing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning are under development to create a sense of ‘opening doors’ instead of barriers for those who have not achieved to their potential in early life. Similarly there is an expansion of adult learning in many countries.

138. A key factor in ensuring qualifications systems perform optimally in supporting lifelong learning is the issue of making transitions from one part of the education system to another as straightforward as possible. Evidence suggests that this involves many devices such as:

− Encouraging transfer from non-accredited learning to having learning recognised through qualification.

− Recognising informal and non-formal learning.

− Recognising learning by means of credit transfer of learning already recognised in an existing qualification or programme to a new qualification.

− Linking one qualification with a second one in a way (content and assessment processes) that make progression to the second one a natural step.

− Showing equivalences between qualifications through level frameworks.
139. In countries where there is a qualifications framework (for example, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom) it is explicit that the key purpose of the framework is to facilitate learning progression by clarification of relationships between different qualification types.

*Policy response 7 – Make the qualifications system transparent*

140. Country reports suggest that overlapping and competing qualifications, instability in the system, multiple agency interests lead to complex and confusing literature and communication about the benefits of qualifications. A transparent system from a learner’s perspective implies stability, unity, breadth of qualifications on offer and above all quality assurance. Countries report that a broad consensus seems to exist both about the need for more transparency of the structure of qualifications systems and many countries report the development of frameworks (for example, Scotland and New Zealand) or the establishment of a single institution to bring about this transparency (for example Ireland and Portugal).

141. There has been investment in making qualifications systems clear to users. The rationale for this investment is often directly associated with increasing lifelong learning and in other cases is linked more indirectly through such goals as increasing the mobility of individuals and thus the skills supply to the labour market, increasing efficiency of the qualifications system, developing better quality assurance processes and encouraging greater involvement of key stakeholders in the qualifications system.

142. Country background reports identify large benefit arising from a qualifications system with clear links between qualifications that are classified in simple transparent ways and are supported by guidance and counselling systems that are easy to access and follow through. The development of unified qualifications systems, where the qualifications based in different sectors relate to one another with minimum (necessary) overlap is the purpose of many reforms.

143. In countries that have a qualifications framework\(^8\), the coverage of qualifications is often partial because the whole qualifications system is complex and not easy to describe in a clear framework. Many countries have implemented reforms to bring about a coherent framework and others have policy discussions that signal intent to develop a framework. Where reforms are taking place there is sometimes an obvious consensus building approach to framework development where inclusion of all qualifications is seen as necessary and involvement of all stakeholders in shaping the framework. In other countries a more top down, reformist agenda is obvious and the qualifications framework is seen a tool to rationalise, modernise and simplify the qualifications system. Of course these are extreme positions and most countries are some way from each of these positions but the two positions give an idea of the ways qualifications frameworks are seen as a powerful tool for reform. In some countries the development of a framework takes the form of an official register of qualifications – a classification of qualifications. These registers are also reforms designed to bring coherence to the range qualifications on offer in a country.

144. There are several references to reforms aimed at using information technologies to create new, accessible and effective guidance processes for people wishing to use qualifications. These new systems depend to some extent on the success of other reforms such as the development of unified qualifications systems, qualifications frameworks and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It is therefore quite common to see reforms of guidance systems as part of a wider set of qualifications reforms.

145. Transparent qualifications systems are also reported to require more systematic monitoring of the take up, use and perceived value of qualifications. In Switzerland, a prospective study, mandated by the “Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education” (*Conférence Suisse des directeurs cantonaux de l'éducation*).

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\(^8\) OECD (2004c) has explored the purposes, policies and likely benefits of frameworks in detail. See Appendix A for a summary.
l'instruction publique) led to the construction of 6 possible scenarios for the future development of the whole education system in order to promote lifelong learning. It is intended to launch a public debate on these scenarios.

Policy response 8 – Review funding and increase efficiency

146. Almost all countries commented on the influence of cost of qualification(s) on learners, governments and on employers. Evidence was provided showing costs to be a strong deterrent to participation by individual learners in some circumstances. Evidence was also provided about where limits to funding were holding back training provision. Most adult and community education courses in Australia are non-accredited and few lead to the award of a qualification; providers have been reluctant to introduce award based qualifications for cost reasons and because the formal assessment requirements (which are expensive) might act as deterrents to learners who lack confidence and have had poor experiences of formal learning. In Germany, the cost of continuing education and training is believed to have a considerable bearing on the decision to participate. New Zealand reports that an increasing portion of the cost of post-compulsory education has been borne by individuals. In the United Kingdom and the Netherlands steps are being taken to reduce the financial barriers to individuals through the introduction of entitlements for free or subsidised learning for a wide range of courses. In Denmark study support schemes have existed for many years including direct financial support for learners engaging in vocational education and training and publicly funded CVT, the support also extends to employers providing training.

147. Costs are raised as a barrier in terms of employer provided training. In Japan and Korea the lack of investment in evaluation systems by private bodies is raising the question of whether public/private investment might be used to promote new methods and engage more learners. Inter-sector cooperation, where training and evaluation systems could be made more practical and flexible, is being investigated.

148. Maintaining high currency for qualifications will depend on the ways recruiters value them. Evidence suggests that there is a balance to be struck between the sensitivity to the needs of local stakeholders and the wider national needs. The interests of the learner are likely to be better served where it is possible to identify widely held perceptions of quality and high returns in a qualification. Such perceptions develop over time as quality assurance processes ensure consistency in application of approved procedures. The report from the Netherlands points out the tensions between maintaining national standards for qualifications and allowing local diversity. The question arises about how far flexibility and diversity can be allowed to take hold before damage to other aspects of qualifications systems, such as transparency, may reduce opportunities for lifelong learning. There is also a question of increased costs being associated with more diverse provision. Clearly cost of qualification will be a disincentive for some learners.

149. There are also qualifications infrastructure costs. New Zealand has reported the costs to set up and maintain the national qualifications framework (a broad, inclusive, credit based framework).

150. Recognition of non-formal learning can cut learning costs by reducing study duration and increase economic returns. Such recognition requires standards and learning outcomes to be defined, against which such learning can be assessed and agreement on assessment techniques, recognition methods and portability of credits. These developments require the active commitment and engagement of a number of stakeholders, within and between different education sectors, as well as between those in education and groups such as employers and trade unions.

151. Many countries are relying on expanded private capacity and increased competition in the provision of learning opportunities as a way to improve efficiency and to increase capacity. The costs of recognition of learning, validation, accreditation and certification are inextricably linked with this
expansion. Over the 1990s, the private share in total financing of education increased, and a clear trend in favour of greater private contributions is visible in many OECD countries. This is because there are strong incentives for investment in human capital for both individuals and firms. However, the limitations of capital markets and other institutional arrangements dilute these incentives. Countries are experimenting with financing mechanisms to overcome these constraints and to provide incentives for greater private investment. At the tertiary level, there are a number of examples of innovative mechanisms to secure learner or third-party support such as means tested tuition fees and deferred, income-contingent and differential contributions. For adults, countries are experimenting with a range of new institutional arrangements to facilitate sharing of financial responsibilities and risks associated with investment in lifelong learning between individuals, employers and the state. For adults, countries are experimenting with a range of new institutional arrangements to facilitate sharing of financial responsibilities and risks associated with investment in lifelong learning between individuals, employers and the state (OECD, 2004).

152. It is clear from the evidence in country reports that costs of qualification have a bearing on participation in learning activities and any attempt to reduce the actual cost to individuals is likely to increase motivation to invest in learning and qualification. Clearly, savings gained through reducing costs of the qualifications system can be passed on to users, however reducing the sensitivity of the system to the needs of individuals and other stakeholders and compromising quality assurance procedures are likely to have a negative impact in the longer term.

Policy response 9 – Better manage the qualifications system

153. In most countries several bodies supply qualifications; there are four main types of suppliers: government agencies, educational institutions, chambers of commerce, and private charities. In addition, there is also a small but growing supply of qualifications coming from vendors whose products are sold across the world. Government agencies regulate and manage the qualifications system. Among the governments’ agencies, several ministries operate and a high level of co-ordination for developing and implementing policy is required. As lifelong learning and qualifications systems involve stakeholders beyond education ministries – learners and their families, institutional and other providers of learning and qualifications as well as social partners – co-ordination in policy development and implementation is essential. OECD (2000 and 2003) highlighted both the challenges of co-ordination and successful initiatives countries have taken in addressing them. The OECD study on adult learning (OECD, 2003) emphasised the close interaction that is required between education, training, labour market and social policies to meet the needs of adult learners. Another study on the transition from initial education to working life (OECD, 2000) illustrated a wide range of experiences on how countries are attempting to solve co-ordination challenges: through different ministries and agencies working together; through the involvement of employers, trade unions and other actors in policy development nationally and in programme delivery locally; through community involvement in local policy development and programme implementation. In Ireland, even though two ministries and several agencies are still involved in the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning, the recent reform of the qualifications system includes the gathering of responsibility for the design and operation of the system into the remit of a single national Authority, and the re-location of award-making powers from a multiplicity of bodies to two newly-formed awards Councils.

154. One important issue is the ownership of the qualifications systems. Typically these systems are closely linked to the formal sector of education and training provision. There is a sense of exclusion among those who are outside the system, for example in the non-formal and informal sectors. These sectors are becoming ever more important in the knowledge economy. An important challenge for management of the qualifications system is to ensure inclusion in the system by bringing in more partners and stakeholders into the process of supplying, assessing and recognising of qualifications.
Learners, at each stage of life, need to be provided with Curricula, pedagogical practices, organisation of learning and qualification processes that are coordinated. Provision therefore needs to be structured in a way that creates appropriate linkages and pathways.

Management of qualifications systems to enhance lifelong learning maybe held back by the lack of data on performance in the latter (OECD, 2004).

3.3. Issues related to using qualifications systems as a tool for reform

There are restricting pressures on developments to qualifications systems and countries have explained these in some detail. These descriptions are important and they are reported here because the mechanisms identified in this activity are intended to be tools to overcome such constraints. It is possible to see the kinds of constraint identified by countries under the following headings: structures for governance, complexity of the national qualifications system, institutional structures, economic constraints, and finally, social and cultural barriers to development.

Structures for governance

Federal systems of government and the constitutional division of responsibilities are reported to have a complicating effect on reform efforts owing to the complexity of processes involved in developing or implementing change proposals and the divergent political views on the need for change or the directions it should take. Consultation processes under such arrangements are reported to be more complex as stakeholder groups can operate in different ways in different parts of the countries involved. Social and economic variations within regional jurisdictions can also have a direct influence on the weight of opinion supporting or opposing reform. National qualifications systems in countries with strong regional governance are often more diverse than those countries with greater central governance of the system.

Complexity of qualifications systems

As national qualifications systems have evolved, usually under pressure to be more efficient and meet the needs of users more effectively, they have often become more complex. Consequently there are limits to which reforms can proceed without fundamentally altering the structure of the qualifications systems. This can have the effect of making piecemeal change more desirable as any substantial change is likely to destabilise the delicate balances (political, institutional and financial) that exist within systems. Countries have reported that sometimes too little effort has been made to adapt infrastructures to support innovation. Insufficient effort to develop the capacity of the national qualifications system and experts within it to make a new system practical is often a barrier to innovation.

Institutional structures

In many countries tertiary institutions, both universities and vocational education and training providers, enjoy considerable autonomy within broad frameworks of funding and accountability. This leads to divergent views regarding the merits of particular proposals.

One reason given for lower currency of vocational training compared to more academic provision – and thus creating a barrier to some cross-sectoral reforms – is that there is weak cooperation between education institutes or schools and on-site work places and between the relevant government ministries.

Sometimes institutions are expected to cater for needs across large geographical areas – this can be because there are too few institutions or because the specialisation of institutions means there are fewer delivering general training required in an area. This is a barrier to national qualifications system development and inertia in the national qualifications system makes it easier for these schools to deliver a
core of trusted and well-known qualifications programmes. Falling birth rates also create barriers for providers to offer a range of specialist courses, as there is likely to be insufficient demand for some of them.

**Economic constraints**

163. Previous economic policy and labour market management have created a need for change and act as a constraint on that change. For example, in some countries the focus on low skilled and low wage work and productive specialisation to reduce unemployment has produced a legacy of low regard for education and training within certain key groups in society.

164. A shortage of resource is identified as a significant constraint on reforms. The availability of resources depends on economic performance and taxation revenues and these have fluctuated in many countries. Reports of reforms being slowed by reductions in funding, or changes in funding policies are common.

**Social and cultural barriers to development**

165. The largest bank of evidence about barriers to national qualifications system reform is linked to social and cultural issues. Countries report the high cultural status of academic education and that key stakeholders, such as parents and school teachers, have misgivings about the legitimacy of vocational programmes. Schools are seen by many as primarily about academic preparation and as primarily leading to university entrance. Systems of selection reinforce this powerful cultural position. Within such a culture it is difficult to implement vocational programs, and where these are accepted, they may be used as a pathway for weaker learners, taught by teachers who feel less respected and valued. A limited understanding of vocational training and qualifications can slow the development of the qualifications system. This links to the often-quoted barrier of tradition and traditional approaches.

166. Measures to broaden achievement have encountered a series of constraints. For example it is reported that people are suspicious of the quality of qualifications achieved on the basis of assessment of prior learning and work experience. There is concern in some countries that recognition of non-formal and informal learning might undermine the status and quality of formal education. There is often a premium placed on external examinations and this has sometimes reduced the scope of what can be contained in a qualification; some knowledge and skills cannot be assessed through standardised tests, or only inadequately, artificially or at great expense. This knowledge and skills is then not tested, and because they are not tested they are sometimes not diligently learned or made the focus of teaching.

**In summary**

167. This chapter has drawn together information in accounts from countries of pressures for innovation to qualifications systems, actual reforms and the barriers that hold back development. In terms of pressures the analysis has highlighted several kinds of pressure and shown the growing power of economic pressures in particular to shape developments to the national qualifications systems in countries. They have undertaken a vast range of reforms and it is clear that qualifications systems are increasingly seen an effective vehicle for delivering important policy objectives such as increased lifelong learning, social inclusion and, as a consequence, greater skills supply to the labour market and equality of opportunity. Nine types of policy response have been identified:

− Policy response 1 – Increase flexibility and responsiveness
− Policy response 2 – Motivate young people to learn
− Policy response 3 – Link education and work
− Policy response 4 – Facilitate open access to qualifications
− Policy response 5 – Diversify assessment processes
− Policy response 6 – Make qualifications progressive
− Policy response 7 – Make the qualifications system transparent
− Policy response 8 – Review funding and increase efficiency
− Policy response 9 – Better manage the qualifications system

168. Many countries face the same kinds of barriers to reform that are proposed in the paper and of these those related to institutional structures and social and cultural belief seems to be the most powerful.

169. The analysis reported here forms an important background to the proposal for the theory of mechanisms that link qualifications systems and lifelong learning. The evidence suggests mechanisms can possibly become a tool with which to refine policy responses for improving lifelong learning through changes to qualifications systems.

170. The evidence reported covers many aspects of qualification reform. Countries were restricted in the space they had to describe their reforms, the rationale for them and some of the impacts they have had. It is clear that some of the findings reported in this paper could be usefully explored further by drawing in relevant literature on the effects of reforms in different countries.

References


Annex 3.1

Synopsis of country qualifications systems and reform programmes

Australia

Australia introduced the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 1995. It is inclusive of all national qualifications (fifteen in 2005) in the three sectors of education and training: schools (final two years), vocational education and training and higher education. The Australian Qualifications Framework has built upon the previous long-established system of national tertiary course award levels in Australia, and was introduced with the main aim of supporting the major reforms towards industry-based vocational education and training in the last decade. The Australian Qualifications Framework is seen as a powerful tool for:

- Better transition pathways for all young people through adding two lower-level vocational education and training qualifications to the qualifications system. These are able to be achieved in a range of learning settings, including as part of upper secondary school education, which has now been further broadened with the introduction of school-based apprenticeships with an AQF qualification outcome.

- Strengthened Linkages (including credit transfer) between qualifications in all three sectors. This includes -articulated programs between school education, vocational education and training and higher education; scope for delivery of qualifications in sectors other than the sector which sets the standards in order to optimise student choice within the constraints of local infrastructure; and institutional partnerships at the sectoral interface, in particular diploma to degree.

- Innovatory Training Packages based on national industry competency standards. The qualifications specified in the Training Packages are all accredited against the Australian Qualifications Framework requirements for the vocational education and training certificates and diplomas and so are fully integrated into the national system of qualifications in post-compulsory education and training.

- Expanded education, training and employment opportunities through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) where explicit and detailed AQF qualifications requirements underpin reliable assessments of an individual’s informal learning as an alternative pathway towards achievement of an AQF qualification.

- Improved capacity to respond to twenty-first century technology advances through a new short-cycle sub-degree qualification in higher education combining a multidisciplinary academic knowledge base with generic employment-related skills.
− New industry-based learning pathways through the addition of post-graduate qualifications which focus on competency in a workplace environment and are more readily accessible by a wider range of the adult population.

− Enhanced comparability of Australian qualifications with qualifications in other countries, based on significant commonalities in rigour of standards and accreditation, delivery and assessment requirements under the Australian Qualifications Framework, supporting trans-national recognition and global mobility.

The table and the chart below provide a description of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

**Australian Qualifications Framework – Table of Qualifications 2005 (by sector of accreditation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools Sector Accreditation</th>
<th>Vocational Education and Training Sector Accreditation</th>
<th>Higher Education Sector Accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Secondary Certificate of Education</td>
<td>Vocational Graduate Diploma Vocational Graduate Certificate Advanced Diploma Diploma Certificate IV Certificate III Certificate II Certificate I</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree Masters Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate Bachelor Degree Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Belgium (French speaking)

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in French speaking Belgium include:

− Reform of the dual system, with better linkages between education and the labour market.
− Creation of an overarching recognition system that harmonises the needs of learners, providers and employers.
− Move towards outcome-based qualification system.
− New administrative arrangements for handling development of the national qualifications system.

The chart below provides a full description of the national qualifications system of French speaking Belgium.
National Qualifications System of French Speaking Belgium

- **Main flows out**
- **Main bridging flows**
- **Qualification, year**
- **Technical bridging education**
- **General education**
- **Technical education leading to a qualification**
- **DAES (Degree to enter tertiary education)**
- **Occupational training**
Denmark

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Denmark include:

− New IT-based information and advice for all learners on qualification systems and programmes offered by social partners.

− New initiatives have been launched to renew the principles of dual vocational education and in line with the Government's plan on "Better Education".

− Both the general and the vocationally oriented gymnasium have also undergone reform in 2003. The main aim has been to improve young people's study competence and thus strengthen the basis for more young people completing a higher education programme. One of the elements in the Gymnasium reforms is to emphasise qualifications as supposed to subjects.

− There is a new framework for the adult vocational training programmes. This is intended to optimise single subjects in the vocational education and training programmes and in the adult vocational training programmes, facilitate transfer credit in completed vocational training, implement systematic measurement and evaluation of results and coordinate development work between vocational education and training programmes taking place in different locations.

The chart below provides a full description of the Danish general educational qualifications system.
The Danish general educational qualification system

The Danish general educational qualification system consists of a system of education and training programs leading to vocational and general qualifications. The system includes pre-school education, primary education, lower secondary education, and higher education programs. The image illustrates the structure of the Danish education system, showing the progression from pre-school education to tertiary education programs, including LVU (long tertiary education), VET (vocational education and training), and EGU (individual programs leading to vocational qualifications). The ISCED* levels are maintained after reforms of 2003.

* Prior Learning Assessment Recognition – Within the general higher education students may be accepted under the so-called Quota II for work, life, and liberal educational experiences.

France
Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in France include:

− A right for individuals to lifelong learning now exists and qualifications are intended to be the tangible evidence or benchmark for people to use of this right.

− A register of all vocational qualifications (RNCP) has been developed. The register shows linkage with other qualifications. The process of registering a qualification is a compulsory step in the creation of a qualification, and therefore a means of regulation.

− Steps are being taken to create a vocational degree in higher education (licence professionnelle), which is intended to strengthen the links between higher education and vocational training/preparation.

The chart below provides a description of the French structure of education system.
STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
FRANCE

AGE
19
18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2

UNIVERSITY AND NEW UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

COLLEGE

PRIMARIESCHOOL
(Ecole élémentaire)

NURSERY SCHOOL
(Ecole maternelle)
Germany

In order to encourage life-long learning, recent initiatives to reform the German qualifications system have focused particularly on the close relationship between initial and continuing vocational education and training and/or academic education.

The qualifications acquired at the end of upper secondary education prepare the individual for access to institutions of higher education and/or transition into the employment system. The majority of the learning programmes cover a period of several years and are targeted towards adolescent learners and the achievement of the entire qualification.

However, opportunities are also available for various groups of learners to exercise more self-determination and personal responsibility. Grammar school students are allowed an element of choice with regard to their courses and examination subjects in relation to their age and level of education. Learners at full-time vocational schools can choose between different learning paths, ranging from prevocational training, basic training and the achievement of a vocational qualification, to the achievement of a double qualification. In recent years, the structuring of training under the dual system in compulsory and optional units has also increased the influence of the individual in deciding what he or she would like to learn. However, the question of which optional units are actually available also depends on the individual training company. On the whole, these measures offer greater flexibility and are thus appropriate for encouraging learners to assume more personal responsibility and self-determination in the process of life-long learning. Nevertheless, the aim remains the achievement of an entire qualification as proof of the individual's ability to study and/or take up skilled employment. As a rule, the individual must take a final examination; the system does not provide for the accumulation of employable skills to form an overall qualification. This is intended to preserve the value of the qualifications and to strengthen their portability. This means that more value is attached to the transparency and acceptance of the qualifications, and the ways in which they can be achieved are set down relatively clearly.

These strict regulations on how qualifications are to be obtained during the phase of general and vocational learning are due to the fact that the German labour market is predominantly a vocational qualifications market. Individuals are paid according to the level of their qualifications, on the basis of collective agreements negotiated between the two sides of industry. In order to ensure the ability of the vocational labour market to function properly, the education system is geared towards generating individuals with the corresponding higher education and vocational qualifications. The strict regulation of the procedure for obtaining qualifications thus expresses public responsibility for this phase of general and vocational education.

The rate of participation in, and completion of, educational programmes at upper secondary level is high by international comparison, thus confirming the relative success of this strategy. The proportion of school students with higher education entrance qualifications (Abitur) has risen steadily over the last twenty years. By gaining higher education entrance qualifications, learners can choose between access to vocational training or higher education, both of which open the way to attractive careers. The high portability of qualifications under the dual system of education and training is a particular incentive for those people leaving school with lower general education qualifications to obtain vocational qualifications. On the one hand, these vocational qualifications enable the individual to find appropriate employment. On the other hand, they also act as a platform from which it is possible to undergo further formal, non-formal or informal training.

Despite numerous special programmes, however, just fewer than 15% of a year group do not complete vocational training. It is particularly difficult for school-leavers with poor school achievements to obtain qualifications under the dual system, *inter alia*, because the number of company training places varies
depending on market conditions. There are programmes to help young adults without vocational qualifications to gain a belated vocational qualification. The combination of learning and working, the modularisation of the curricula, and the documentation of credits offer this group an opportunity to shape and phase their training flexibly, according to their individual requirements, without, however, abandoning the aim of gaining a qualification.

There is the potential in the system to increase the number of people with higher education or advanced vocational qualifications. The proportion of people who have qualified under the dual system and who subsequently gain qualifications to enter higher education has remained low for many years. In terms of quantity, the proportion of people gaining vocational upgrading qualifications (outside institutions of higher education) has fallen over the past years. This applies in particular to younger age groups in industry and trade. Apart from obstacles to access, such as proof of professional experience, lack of recognition of qualifications, and the absence of opportunities to acquire employable skills, individual reticence could be due in particular to the high costs involved in acquiring such qualifications. Furthermore, access to tertiary level education is usually linked to a number of conditions. The amended Upgrading Training Assistance Act offers increased incentives for upgrading training in the years to come.

As far as the promotion of life-long learning is concerned, considerable potential is seen in the introduction of additional qualifications, which began several years ago. These may take the form of independent, supplementary qualifications or units which count towards advanced vocational qualifications. There are also great expectations for new qualification frameworks, the certification of informally acquired competences, and the introduction of a Credit Transfer System. These initiatives should open up new prospects for closer links between initial and continuing vocational education and training. Learners will be offered the following opportunities:

- There will be possibilities for a relatively smooth transfer between vocational training and continuing training for competent trainees who are interested in acquiring demanding vocational qualifications, particularly for those with *Abitur*. Apart from numerous dual courses of study with integrated initial vocational qualifications, the introduction of qualification frameworks, which is already taking place in the IT sector and is planned for further sectors, should help individuals to obtain qualifications right up to the tertiary sector.

- The question of access to continuing vocational education and training is particularly relevant for learners without formal vocational qualifications because this group needs alternatives to formal initial vocational training (as a precondition for continuing education and training). For this group, the flexibility of provision and the possibility of acquiring qualification units is just as important as the recognition of what they have learnt informally. This does not only apply to adolescents with poor starting chances and to young adults with low qualifications, but also to lateral entrants who are thus able to acquire a qualification in the field of continuing vocational training.

- The restructuring of the curricula into compulsory and optional units and the recognition of additional qualifications represent important preconditions for introducing more flexibility in the field of continuing education for the large majority of learners, most of whom are seeking to acquire qualifications within the framework of the dual system.

These initiatives which are now also anchored in the new Vocational Training Act (as of 23 March 2005) are aimed at making the qualifications system as a whole more coherent by restructuring training and continuing training, by introducing different forms of learning (both formal and informal), and by enabling flexible learning paths from initial vocational training to continuing training and/or higher
education. This means that learners enjoy framework conditions which allow more personal responsibility and self-determination when acquiring qualifications and developing competences.

The chart below provides a description of the basic structure of the educational system in Germany.
Greece

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Greece include:

− "Second Chance Schools" have been introduced to combat the problem of illiteracy and its negative consequences of social exclusion and unemployment. The aim is to reintegrate adults into the formal education system and eventually the initial and continuing vocational training system.

− Lifelong Learning Institutes (IDBE) have been established by higher education institutions to provide educational programmes addressed to either upper-secondary school graduates over the age of 25 or higher education degree holders. These programmes aim at widening adults’ educational and occupational options, providing opportunities for further learning and updating their knowledge and skills. The learners are to receive credits for every learning unit they complete successfully, which can be transferred only across the programmes of the Lifelong Learning Institutes. Learners will also have the possibility to recognise and credit their relative professional experience acquired prior to their programme admission. Professional experience will be credited for one or more learning units of an IDBE programme.

− The development of open-choice study programmes (PSE) in higher education. These are flexible programmes addressed to all age groups. The minimum entrance requirement is for people to be holders of the upper secondary school leaving certificate. They ensure access is broadened based on different sets of criteria and not solely on entrance examination results or school performance, opportunities are offered for acquisition of qualifications which facilitate integration into the labour market, and lifelong learning is promoted.

− The establishment of the Open University providing open access to higher education for all citizens.

− The upper-secondary cycle of education has been reformed with the establishment of Technical Vocational Schools (TEE) to provide technical and vocational knowledge and skills as well as an occupational awareness to facilitate young people's entry into the labour market. The day TEE are for young people 15+ who do not work, while the evening TEE are for working people up to the age of 50.

− The establishment and operation of the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) these provide formal vocational education and training to equip students with qualifications for employment and grant diplomas certifying vocational training at post-secondary level (Vocational Training Certificate). This certificate entitles them to sit for the vocational training qualification examinations in order to obtain the Vocational Training Diploma.

− A new national agency has been established to develop job profiles and correlate them with vocational education and training programmes.

The chart below provides a description of the Greek educational system.
The Greek Educational System

Ireland

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Ireland include:

- The development of a national framework of qualifications that is inclusive of all qualifications and will lead to credit transfer systems.

  - The development of the Applied Leaving Certificate recognises achievement across a whole programme rather than simply individual subject attainment. It is focused on vocational preparation, and a range of modes of assessment is used.

  - The development of the Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects (ACCS) scheme was initiated in 1989. ACCS allows learners to follow programmes for individual subjects and accumulate credits gained towards an award. The objective of the scheme is to facilitate greater participation by learners on a part-time basis and promote adult learning.

  - The development of a new model of standards-based apprenticeship.

  - The development and implementation of the Higher Education Links Scheme, a process designed to facilitate transitions from Further Education awards to programmes leading to Higher Education awards.

  - The Higher Education Links Scheme is a response to the increasing participation in programmes leading to Level 2 NCVA awards in post secondary education. Essentially higher education places are made available through links between particular Higher Education programmes and one or more NCVA Level 2 Certificate awards in related areas of study.

Another major reform of the qualifications system in Ireland has been under way since 2001. The central element in the reform is the development of a National Framework of Qualifications, a structure of levels allowing qualifications to be compared easily. Following the launch of the Framework in October 2003, implementation has proceeded quickly. New ‘framework’ qualifications have been in use throughout higher education and training since the autumn of 2004 and the introduction of a new system of awards for further education and training (including vocational education and training) is expected in mid 2005.

The Framework is a structure of ten levels. For each level, standards of knowledge, skill and competence have been set out, defining the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain awards. This introduces a new approach to the meaning of an award, that an award recognises learning outcomes – what a person with an award knows, can do and understands - rather than time spent on a programme.

The ten levels accommodate awards gained in schools, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges and universities, from the most basic to the most advanced levels of learning. All learning can thus be recognised, including that achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings.

A key feature of the Irish reform is that responsibility for awarding qualifications now rests with a small number of ‘awarding bodies’: a particular innovation is that all vocational education and training qualifications in Ireland are now awarded by one body, the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

The chart below provides a description of the Irish qualifications framework.
The diagram illustrates the 10-level structure of the National Framework of Qualifications. The Framework contains a set of 15 generic qualifications for which descriptors have been published. These are listed in the outer rings of the diagram.

The diagram also illustrates the various awarding bodies whose qualifications are included in the Framework. These are shown as coloured bands extending across the levels of the Framework as appropriate.
Japan

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Japan include the creation of a new vocational ability evaluation system through a combination of private and public bodies. The trade skill tests lead to the title of "Certified Skill Worker".

The chart below provides a description of the Japanese national qualifications system.
Korea

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Korea include:

− A program based on the Workers’ Vocational Training Promotion Act, the purpose of which was to stimulate the development and improvement of workers’ vocational capabilities throughout their working life, and to encourage the participation of the private sector in developing career capabilities and to provide better quality public or national vocational training.

− The Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Education Act meets demand for equal recognition of individual achievements through lifelong learning as those from regular education and to provide credits towards obtaining of degrees or credits.

− Two of the major reform efforts to the system are the Educational Reform Proposal of 1996 and Reform Proposals on Regulations of the Qualifications System of 1999.

The chart below provides a description of the Korean school system.
The Netherlands

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in the Netherlands include:

− An national action plan regarding life long learning’ focussing at both promoting the employability of employed, unemployed and teachers as well as combating educational disadvantages and re-orientating education and training towards a life long learning.

− Coordinating agency for the regulation and control of qualifications.

− Development of broad competency based qualifications, including cross sector qualifications.

− Flexible dual trajectories combining learning and work.

− The accreditation of prior learning.

The chart below provides a description of structure of the education and training system in the Netherlands.
Structure of the education and training system in the Netherlands

New Zealand

Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in New Zealand include:

− The development of the National Qualifications Framework.

− The development of unit standards.

− The development of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). The first stage was implemented in 2002, with level 2 implementation planned for 2003 followed by level 3 in 2004. The National Certificate of Educational Achievement will have full integration with the standards based National Qualifications Framework, using ‘achievement standards’ developed for the school curriculum and unit standards from the National Qualifications Framework. Achievement standards differ from unit standards in that they have four different levels of achievement (not achieved, achieved, merit, and excellence), and in some cases are externally assessed.

− International benchmarking and mutual recognition agreements.

− The adult literacy strategy with the goals of increasing opportunities for adult literacy learning, developing capacity in the adult literacy teaching sector and improving the quality of adult literacy programmes. The creation of a strategy for adult and community education (ACE).

− The development and enhancement of policy, funding and delivery of foundation education.

− Modern Apprenticeships, credit recognition and credit transfer arrangements.

− A system that identifies and defines foundation skills critical to participation in society and the labour market, and acknowledges learner progress in these skill areas through the National Qualifications Framework. It is acknowledged that learners can acquire foundation skills without that learning being recognised by qualifications. Secondary education has been reformed to develop positive attitudes to lifelong learning.

− A common credit currency, a levels system, learning outcomes and subject classification system for all qualifications quality assured in New Zealand. This Register provides a basis for credit recognition and transfer.

The chart below provides a description of structure of the New Zealand education system.
Figure 1: The New Zealand Education System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Institutes of technology &amp; polytechnics</th>
<th>Colleges of Education</th>
<th>Nnanga</th>
<th>Private training establishments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year of study</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of schooling</th>
<th>Year 13 schools</th>
<th>Year 9-13 secondary schools</th>
<th>Wharekura schools</th>
<th>Composite area schools</th>
<th>Special schools</th>
<th>Correspondence school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary and secondary schools</td>
<td>Year 13</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>Year 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education and care centres</td>
<td>Restricted composite (middle schools)</td>
<td>Intermediate schools</td>
<td>Full primary schools</td>
<td>Alf kaupapa</td>
<td>Maori schools</td>
<td>Nga puna</td>
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<td>Playgroups</td>
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</table>

# The majority of students complete their schooling within 13 years, but a small number continue to study in the school system for another 1 or 2 years.
^ A small number of degrees are over 3 years.
* Certificates can be registered at any level, and diplomas can be registered at any level between 5 and 10.
~ Apart from the Universities, currently only one of the institutes of technology also offers a doctorate.
** PTEs include a large range of institution types and sizes, many of which are focused on short certificate or non-certificate level courses.
Portugal

The education and training system in Portugal is based on a series of principles aiming at facilitating and assuring the right to education and training, as well as at ensuring equal opportunities of access and success, within a lifelong learning context, in close cooperation by three Ministries – Education, Science and Higher Education, and Labour and Social Solidarity.

1 – Pre-School education (optional attendance)

- Aimed at children aged between 3 and 5 years. Both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity cooperate in the promotion of the development of pre-school education provision, being the first responsible for the pedagogical quality and the second for the families support.

2 – Basic education (compulsory schooling)

- Aimed at young people aged between 6 and 15 years and includes three sequential and progressive cycles organized as follows:
  
  1\textsuperscript{st} cycle, four years, general education, single-teacher scheme.
  2\textsuperscript{nd} cycle, two years, organized in inter-disciplinary areas.
  3\textsuperscript{rd} cycle, three years, organized according to subjects within a unified curriculum plan.

It includes:

- General courses, mainly designed to lead students to further learning
- Initial vocational education and training courses, designed to prepare young people (over 15 years old) for the working life:
  
  Vocational education and training courses
  Apprenticeship (alternating vocational education and training courses, aimed at first job seekers who left school early, before completing basic education)

- Recurrent basic education (a second opportunity for those over 15 years of age who left school early)

The conclusion of basic education with success entitles to an academic diploma (lower secondary education) or double certification – academic and vocational qualification certification (level 1 or 2).

3 – Secondary education

- Aimed at young people aged between 15 and 18 years who conclude the basic education with success, preparing them to further learning and/or qualifying them for working life

It includes:

- General courses, mainly designed to lead students to higher education (university or polytechnic).
- Initial vocational education and training courses, designed to prepare young people for the working life:
  
  - Technological courses
  - Vocational courses
– Specialized artistic courses
– Apprenticeship (alternating vocational education and training courses, aimed at first job seekers who left school early, before completing upper secondary education)
– Vocational education and training courses

**Recrrent secondary education** (a second opportunity for early school leavers, over 18)

The recurrent secondary education courses are flexible and organised in a system of capitalised blocks and take into account learners’ prior experience and skills for the design of personalised learning plans.

The conclusion of secondary education with success entitles to an academic diploma (upper secondary education) allowing access to higher education or double certification - academic and vocational qualification certification (level 3), qualifying them for working life and/or allowing access to higher education.

4 – Post-secondary education - Technological Specialization Courses

- Aimed at those who have a secondary education course or a qualification legally equivalent thereto, and at those who have a level 3 vocational qualification. These courses award a technological specialization diploma (TSD) as well as a vocational qualification certificate (level 4) and/or allowing access to higher education.

5 – Higher Education

It has a variable duration, includes the University Education and the Polytechnic Higher Education and it awards a university degree (4 to 6 years) and a bachelor degree (3 to 4 years) as well as the respective vocational qualifications (levels 4 and 5). At this moment, following the Declaration of Bologna some recommendations were implemented, particularly those concerning the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the changing in the academic degrees in order to grant them a higher comparability, facilitating therefore the mutual recognition and the promotion of free mobility.

6 – Adult education and training

It includes:

**Recurrent education** - second chance learning to early school leavers:

- Aimed at providing with schooling the individuals who no longer have the normal age to attend secondary education (older than 18 years of age). There is a second chance learning to every non-higher schooling level. The second chance learning is organized in accordance with a studies plan, which is adjusted to the targeted age group level it is aimed at and it awards certificates and diplomas equivalent to those that are granted by regular basic and secondary education: certificate of vocational initiation, (level 1) and certificates of vocational qualification (level 2 and 3).

**Adult Education and Training Courses (EFA):**

- Aimed at adults (older than 18) without basic education and no vocational qualification. These courses are based on a training model according to competencies units, through which formally or informally previously acquired competencies are recognized and where basic academic education is articulated with qualifying training - They award an integrated certification (academic and vocational) through a certificate of adult education and training,
equivalent, in legal terms, to one of the three levels of basic education and level 1 or 2 of vocational qualification.

*The National System for Recognizing, Validating and Certifying Competences (RVCC System):*

- Carried out on the basis of a National Key-Competences Framework for Adult Education and Training points to the certification of a certain education level. This process is developed through the National Network of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies Centres and awards a certificate equivalent, in legal terms, to one of the three levels of basic education.

*Continuing vocational training:*

- To support the development of continuing training, which includes a range of actions-type for occupational qualification and further training of non-qualified or semi-qualified active population and for the specialization of qualified active population, by promoting training paths targeted at updating, recycling and professional improvement.

**Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Portugal include:**

Development of vocational training using an alternation model.

Two main areas of reform:

➤ **Initial vocational education and training supply (which is being implemented)**

Review of the legal framework on the apprenticeship system

1. Development and implementation of vocational education and training courses aimed at young people over 15 at risk of dropping out or at those who left school early, before having completed 12 years of schooling, as well as at those who have completed 12 years of schooling wish to enter into the labour market with a vocational training level formally recognised. These courses award double certification – school and vocational training (level 1, 2 or 3).

2. Reform of the vocational education and training as an alternative to the general upper secondary education, adjusting the current and emergent vocational profiles and defining a modular curriculum matrix allowing for transferability of the various training pathways, thus introducing more choice into upper secondary programmes. In fact initial vocational education and training awards double certification – school and vocational (level 3). The goal: up to 2010, duplication of the number of vacancies for the vocational and technological education at upper secondary is to be reached at an annual rate of 10% more vacancies for vocational education.

3. Strengthening the links between the education and training systems and the labour market.

4. Promotion of the greater involvement of the social partners in the process of vocational education and training.

5. Development of vocational guidance services making accessible guidance processes concerning the opportunities offered for acquisition of qualifications which facilitate integration of young and adult people into the labour market.

➤ **Adult education and training provision**

2. Implementation of the National System for Recognising and Validating Knowledge, Skills and Competences non-formal and informally acquired. The competences recognition and validation process is grounded on a national ‘Key-Competences Framework for Adult Education and Training’ providing a framework of reference for the awards developed on the basis of clearly described ‘learning outcomes’ defined in terms of standards of knowledge, skills and competences.

3. Implementation of the Adult Education and Training Courses, supervised jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. This kind of training awards double qualification: school and vocational training certificates. They offer modular, flexible, tailor-made pathways, articulating education and vocational training – through organised programmes based upon an initial process of recognising and validating prior non-formal and informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences according to the “Key-Competences Framework for Adult Education and Training. The training programme is organised according to the 4 key-competence areas proposed by the Framework: Language and Communication; Mathematics for Everyday Life; Information and Communication Technologies; Citizenship and Employability.

4. Establishment of a minimum number of annual hours (20 training hours until 2006 and 35 training hours afterwards) of certified training at the employer’s responsibility and who shall use such hours internally or recurring to external training institutions.

5. With the regulation of the Labour Code, there are now rules about, the training of minors admitted to work without having concluded compulsory education or without having professional qualification (new training referential for the Training Clause in labour contracts of minors not having compulsory educational attainment or, when having it, lacking a professional qualification previous to their hiring, focusing more the professional component of the enterprises continuing training, as a practical training in context of monitored labour).

6. A reform of higher education. It is recognised the free mobility of people in Europe and the European dimension of the labour market as an important element for the restructuring of higher education.

7. The creation of technological specialisation courses with a view to a new training entities supply alignment in the higher education

The chart below provides a description of structure of the Portuguese national qualifications system.
Recent reforms of the national qualifications system in Slovenia include:

- A better choice of vocational programmes based on standards involving opening of the curricula (allowing local variation), modularisation of programmes, and higher level of knowledge integration. Modularisation of programmes reflects the need to increase the access of adults to educational opportunities, especially in order to improve their formal qualification attainments.

- The transition from *nomenklatura*, a document that was a legal basis for vocational education and training programmes until 2002, to the occupational standards as the basis for educational programme or modules as parts of educational programme and/or the system of assessment and accreditation of prior learning.

- Introduction of the certification system.

- Assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and experiences as a measure to support lifelong learning and was introduced at the end of the 1990s. The assessment takes place against nationally agreed standards of knowledge and skill requirements for performing certain jobs existing on the labour market.

- Adoption of the acts related to the national qualification system development.

- Introduction of new forms of education and training in the educational system in the upper secondary and post secondary level and enabling the easier vertical and horizontal transfer from one educational level to another.

- Reintroduction of the dual system of education and training into the educational system.

- Promotion of the greater involvement of the social partners in the process of vocational education.

The Organisation and Funding of Education Act (1996) regulates the financing mechanisms, including qualifications, salaries and careers of teaching and non-teaching staff. This Act covers the whole vertical vocational education and training structure. In its final version, it now regulates more generally the procedures, bodies and organisations competent for approving standards for selected qualifications as the basis for assessment and recognition of prior and non-formal learning.

Recently, there are initiatives for forming of the expert group for the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework.

The chart below provides a description of structure of the Slovenian national qualifications system.
United Kingdom

National Vocational Qualifications system introduced in late 1980s, involving features of modularization, outcome standards drawn from work practice, core and options credit arrangements, recognition of informal learning together with a centralized design framework. Uptake reaches some 400,000 per year by the late 1990s, but National Vocational Qualifications do not – as originally envisaged – replace other forms of vocational qualification.

General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), introduced from 1992, in an attempt to apply National Vocational Qualifications precepts to full-time learning of 16-19 year olds. Though similar to existing BTEC awards, General National Vocational Qualifications carried greater official recognition and were used by school VIth forms wanting to diversify from an academic curriculum. Modified into A level style qualifications in 2000 in the interests of showing parity, and to allow mixing with academic qualifications.

The evolution of ‘Access’ courses to provide a channel for adults without the normal A level entry qualifications to enter higher education. Often embody credit principles, allowing a wide range of choice. Recognized by individual, and groupings of, universities.

From 1992 most courses funded by central government are restricted to those which carry qualifications. This leads to considerable increase in qualification titles. The Open College Network emerges as a major provider of unitized qualifications, validated on a co-operative basis, and with an internal credit framework. Partial relaxation of funding restrictions in 2001 brings in courses not leading to qualifications.

Merger of academic and vocational accreditation authorities, accompanied by the development of qualifications frameworks in each part of the United Kingdom, into which each type of qualification could ‘fit’ in a comprehensible relationship with others. Drive to rationalize qualifications within the frameworks.

Incorporation of key skills into courses and qualifications. The intention has been that these skills would provide a platform both for employability and for future learning. Specific qualification in key skills has had a mixed reception in 16-19 institutions, but resulted in 260,000 awards in 2002/3.

In the case of young people studying in school or college, the United Kingdom Government has recently announced plans for England to develop a rationalised system of a limited number of specialised vocational diplomas up to pre-university level. These would also have links with the apprenticeship system.

Since 1994 apprenticeship revived with government support, centred round National Vocation Qualifications, key skills and an off-the-job technical certificate. Available at levels 2 and 3. One in four young people participate in apprenticeship before the age of 22.

The charts below provide a description of the structure of the education system in England and Wales, Northern Ireland as well and Scotland.
### Diagram of the Education system in England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of education</th>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Year/grade key</th>
<th>Typical age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher and further education</td>
<td>Further education institutions (such as further education colleges, tertiary colleges, specialist colleges, and adult education centres)</td>
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<td>18 +</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher education institutions (universities and other higher education institutions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>GCE 'A' Levels, GCE 'AS' Level examinations and Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs) (taken at age 17/18) provide access to further and higher education and the world of work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Further education institutions</td>
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<td>School sixth forms or sixth form colleges</td>
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<td>Lower secondary education</td>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
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<td>Pre-school and nursery education</td>
<td>Reception classes (R) in primary schools</td>
<td>Foundation stage***</td>
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<td>4 - 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bold** = compulsory education

* In some areas, there are separate schools for key stage 1 and key stage 2, known as infant and junior schools respectively.

** In some areas of England, there are middle schools, which normally provide a four-year course for children aged between 8 and 12 years, or 9 and 13 years. In such cases, two-tier systems of primary and secondary schools exist alongside three-tier systems of first schools (for 5- to 8- or 9-year-olds), middle schools and secondary schools (for 12- to 13- to 16-/17-/18-year-olds).

*** Following a consultation in 2003, the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) is planning to introduce a 'foundation phase' of education for 3- to 7-year-olds. A pilot project for the foundation phase began in September 2004 and will be implemented gradually through a rolling programme running until 2008.

## Diagram of the education system in Northern Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of education</th>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Year/grade key</th>
<th>Typical age</th>
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<td>Lower secondary education</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foundation stage*</td>
<td>3 - 4</td>
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</table>

**Bold = Compulsory**

* Following an extensive review of curriculum and assessment arrangements, a foundation stage covering the pre-school year and years 1 and 2 of primary school (pupils aged three to six) has been proposed. Key stage 1 would then comprise years 3 and 4 and key stage 2 years 4, 5, and 6. Statutory changes are expected from September 2006.

**Source:** NFER-Eurydice, April 2005.
Scotland

Applicants to HE or FE enter at level appropriate to qualifications held and/or relevant experience

Applicants to HE with HNC/D may gain entry to 2nd or 3rd year of degree programmes

Applicants to FE enter at level appropriate to qualifications held

Standard Grade (SCQF levels 3-5)
Intermediate (SCQF levels 4-5)
Access (SCQF levels 1-3)

Advanced Highers (SCQF level 7) and/or Highers (SCQF level 6)

Highers (SCQF level 6)

Age:

Enter primary education at age 5 years

Nursery education 3-5 years

Applications to HE or FE enter at level appropriate to qualifications held and/or relevant experience

Applicants to HE with Advanced Highers may gain some advanced

HIGHER EDUCATION

Honours degree (SCQF level 10)
Ordinary MA/Bachelor degree (SCQF level 9)

Intermediate 1-2 (SCQF levels 4-5)
Access (SCQF levels 1-3)
National Units, (SCQF levels 1-7)

Standard Grade (SCQF levels 3-5)
Intermediate (SCQF levels 4-5)
Access (SCQF levels 1-3)

FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES providing post-school initial and continuing education and training

HND (SCQF level 8)
HNC (SCQF level 7)
SGA’s (SCQF levels 2-7)
National Courses:
Advanced Higher (SCQF level 7)
Highers (SCQF level 6)
Intermediate 1-2 (SCQF levels 4-5)
Access (SCQF levels 1-3)
National Units, (SCQF levels 1-7)

WORKPLACE

SVQs 1,2,3,4,5 (SCQF levels 4,5,6,8 and 11)

HNC (SCQF level 7)

SGA’s (SCQF levels 2-7)

National Courses:
Advanced Higher (SCQF level 7)
Highers (SCQF level 6)
Intermediate 1-2 (SCQF levels 4-5)
Access (SCQF levels 1-3)
National Units, (SCQF levels 1-7)

The above diagram shows the main qualifications offered in Scotland’s schools, colleges, universities and workplaces. Scottish qualifications are not generally tied to mode, place or time of study.

Source: http://www.refernet.org.uk
Chapter 4

Do the numbers tell a story?
Quantitative evidence about the impact of national qualifications systems on lifelong learning

There is much research on both the domains of national qualifications systems and lifelong learning but there is a relative lack of available research on the relationship between the two. This holds both for qualitative and quantitative analyses but the situation is clearly worse for the latter.

This chapter aims to explore potential quantitative analysis of the potential links between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning activities. Earlier chapters and those that follow provide qualitative evidence which come largely from background reports provided by the participating countries. The use of quantitative analysis should contribute to a fuller understanding of the link between national qualifications and lifelong learning systems. The chapter focuses on quantitative data where they are available and uses a statistical approach drawing upon both the macro and micro level data.

Indicators of lifelong learning, even if not capturing all its aspects, are available from several sources (for example, Education Policy Analysis or Education at a Glance). Quantitative indicators of national qualifications systems, however, are not so common. This latter deficiency places serious limits on the quantitative analysis of the relationships between the two domains. Two alternative approaches are therefore used as “second best” approaches to derive aggregated information about country characteristics of national qualifications systems. The first approach is based on a typology developed for this activity in coordination with the experts from the participating countries (Table 4.1). The second approach uses household surveys to derive aggregated indicators of both national qualifications systems and lifelong learning. There is no claim that the correlations provided in the chapter prove causal relationships but this chapter aims to shed light on possible linkages between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning, which need to be further investigated.

The chapter begins by addressing data availability and deficiency issues in the fields under study and presents some basic statistics (Section 4.1). It then seeks to establish correlations at the macro level between lifelong learning dimensions and national qualifications systems, using the aggregated variables derived from the International Adult Literacy Survey, the European Union Labour Force Survey and some national surveys for non-European countries (Section 4.2). In conclusion, this chapter examines the main issues and proposes to set an agenda for future data collection in the fields of interest. The main conclusion of the chapter is that much work needs to be done to investigate the impact of alternative approaches to national qualifications systems on fostering lifelong learning (Section 4.3).

9 Micro data describes individual agents, such as enterprises or individuals, as opposed to macro data, which describes aggregates such as at the national level.
10 See OECD (2001) for a special issue on lifelong learning or OECD (2004b).
4.1. The quantitative background for linking national qualifications systems and lifelong learning

171. Lifelong learning is not a homogeneous concept. The definition adopted by the OECD encompasses all forms of learning at any age – from cradle to grave (OECD, 1996) – and Chapter 2 of this report underlines the four dimensions that would ideally be needed to examine the linkage between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning: volume, distribution, quality and efficiency.

172. This report is mainly concerned with national qualifications systems, not with individual qualifications as such. However, it is difficult to find existing data that provide information about qualifications systems at the international level, or even at the national level.

173. To conduct a meaningful analysis of the linkage between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning, it would be ideal to have:
   - Data on lifelong learning systems including volume, distribution, quality and efficiency.
   - Data on national qualifications systems such as those described in Chapter 2: accessibility, adapting to learning pathways, efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness and transparency.
   - Trend information for both types of data.
   - Data, mentioned above, that are comparable internationally.

174. One particular consequence of the existence of many dimensions of both national qualifications systems and lifelong learning is that a given policy response to the lifelong learning agenda or a specific policy tool (mechanism) from the qualifications system may encourage a certain group of the population to learn while discouraging another group from doing so because not all potential learners share the same goal(s) when considering learning activities. Some may learn for its own sake where other may seek a qualification or a job. Available data usually do not reflect this divergence of goal(s) among groups of learners. Therefore, before presenting some evidence, this section presents the available data, discusses methodologies and identifies some of the difficulties in relating quantitative data in the field under study.

Available lifelong learning indicators

175. Graph 4.1 gives information on the proportion of the population with upper secondary education. A major deficiency of these data is the limited availability of trend data. This stems from periodic changes (improvements) in the definition and measurements of key concepts, which make it difficult to develop a consistent series covering many years. An example is given by the reform of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) that makes it difficult to use the evolution over time of the proportion of individuals that have attained upper secondary education (Graph 4.2). In the absence of trend data, information on different age cohorts at a point in time (Graph 4.1) can be used as a proxy.

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11 See OECD (2001) and chapter 2 in particular.
More and more young people attain upper secondary education

Source: OECD (2004), processed by the authors.

Upper secondary education attainment is a useful indicator of lifelong learning. Graph 4.1 shows that, in most countries, a large fraction of the youth population is now reaching upper secondary education level. The improvement over the last two decades has been quite impressive, especially in Korea, Greece, Ireland and Spain (Graph 4.2). Therefore, as far as volume of lifelong learning is concerned, promoting it through qualifications systems is more of an issue for the adult population than for young people since most of the latter now reach upper secondary education.

Source: OECD (2004), processed by the authors.
177. The percentage of people that has attained tertiary education is another interesting indicator of lifelong learning (Graph 4.3). Enrolment and/or success in tertiary education are likely to be good indicators of the reach of the qualifications systems and whether they are conducive in promoting higher levels of learning. It is unlikely that young people will engage in long studies if their qualifications systems do not lead to good reward in the labour market or do not provide personal satisfaction or pathways to further learning.

Graph 4.3. Proportion of individuals that has attained tertiary education (2002)

Source: OECD (2004), processed by the authors.

178. Finally, literacy scores of the adult population are often used as a way of measuring non-formal and informal learning as well as the prevalence of lifelong learning among adults. The two sides of the same coin can be used: either the percentage of individuals having reached the minimum level of literacy adequate for functioning in the knowledge society (Graph 4.4) or the proportion of individuals below this threshold. Measuring literacy offers a different perspective and additional information than educational attainments data because it sheds light on literacy skill loss and acquisition since formal schooling. For example, there is evidence that some poorly educated individuals are highly literate (10% on average in the International Adult Literacy Survey), which is an indication that they have acquired literacy skills through other sources than formal schooling.

179. This chapter uses all these indicators of lifelong learning in an attempt to study its relationships with national qualifications systems. The indicators used to capture the national qualifications systems are now described before turning to the findings (Section 2.2.). It has proven the most difficult part of the exercise since there are real gaps in the availability of relevant data on national qualifications systems.\footnote{See for instance Qualification and Curriculum Authorities (2004) and chapter 5 in particular, for similar conclusions.}
Chapter 2 provides a list of components that best describe a qualifications system, based on eleven components (Annex 2.1): scope of application of the qualifications system; control of the qualifications system; accreditation processes for qualifications; a Framework within the qualifications system; descriptors present in qualifications; access to qualifications for individuals; progression for individuals; stability of the qualifications system; awarding processes; credit system; and international reference points. The way these components are combined and used in countries explains the overall performance of a qualifications system. A list of criteria for assessing this performance is also proposed in that chapter, such as accessibility, responsiveness or transparency. A quantitative analysis would ideally require measures of performances on these criteria. However, such indicators do not exist. It was also a task before the scope of the activity.

181. It is therefore proposed to use some alternative proxy measures that can be described in quantitative terms. The approach adopted in the chapter is to develop a typology of national qualifications systems around some of their general structural elements on which agreement could be obtained among knowledgeable observers. The proposed typology uses the following eight general structural elements: 1) whether the end of secondary education leads into an apprenticeship with shared responsibility for programmes between an educational institution and a firm; 2) whether there is an explicit framework linking qualifications from different educational and occupational sectors; 3) whether there is a large proportion of a cohort engaging in studies linked to a specific occupational area; 4) whether the qualifications system is unified throughout its regions and control lies in one main agency or with government; 5) whether entry to the labour market is regulated through qualification and most occupational sectors use this type of regulation; 6) whether there is a clear national programme or system for recognising non-formal or informal learning; 7) whether unitised qualifications – with large uptake – exist and units from different qualifications can be combined; and 8) whether credentials are essential for entry to the labour market or higher education and for further progress in work or study. This list was
developed in consultation with experts from countries participating in the activity. They were also asked to rank their country’s qualifications systems along a four-point scale, from 1 (true) to 4 (wrong) (Table 4.1).

182. There are several ways of constructing the ordinal scales. For example, the scale could range between 1 and 4, as used here, or a scale from zero to ten could be used. The latter would have provided more variance but this degree of differentiation was difficult for the experts to identify. In fact, consensus was difficult to achieve, even on a simple scale with four rankings. For example, when several institutions were consulted in a country, the responses were not always the same and what is reported in Table 4.1 is sometimes an average of the different rankings proposed. It was not always possible to consult with several experts in each country but, when it was possible, the relative homogeneity of the responses provided support in using this typology.

183. Table 4.1 could certainly be further refined but it will serve as a first basis to organise the international comparison of qualifications systems and the linkage with variables describing lifelong learning. This typology is also useful as background information regarding national qualifications systems in the participating countries.

**Table 4.1. Typology of qualifications systems in selected countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Dual system</th>
<th>QF²</th>
<th>VET in school¹</th>
<th>Centralisation¹</th>
<th>LM¹</th>
<th>RPL¹</th>
<th>Credit system²</th>
<th>Credentialist³</th>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:** 1. This is definitely true for my country; 2. This is only partially true for my country; 3. There is only limited experience of this in my country; and 4. This is not present in my country.

**General structural elements of national qualifications systems:**

1. Countries where the end of secondary education leads into an apprenticeship with shared responsibility for programmes between an educational institution and a firm; 2. Countries with an explicit framework linking qualifications from different educational and occupational sectors; 3. Countries where a large proportion of a cohort engages in studies linked to a specific occupational area; 4. Countries where the qualifications system is unified throughout its regions and control lies in one main agency or with government; 5. Countries where entry to the labour market is regulated through qualification; and most occupational sectors use this type of regulation; 6. Countries where there is a clear national programme or system for recognising non-formal or informal learning; 7. Unitised qualifications (large uptake) exist and units from different qualifications can be combined; and 8. Credentials are essential for entry to the labour market or higher education and for further progress in work or study.

**Source:** consultation with the countries.
Constructing macro variables with micro data: another second best approach

184. In addition to the typology displayed above, another possibility is to derive continuous quantitative indicators. Ideally one would like to measure whether the qualifications system promotes learning, or not. An assumption made in the chapter is that the number of learners that seek a qualification, as compared to those learners for whom obtaining a qualification is not the primary goal, could be used as a proxy variable for describing the overall “conduciveness” of a qualifications system in promoting lifelong learning. The second approach used in this chapter is to use the International Adult Literacy Survey (Box 4.1 and Annex 4.3), which provides information on the reasons why adults participate in learning.

Box 4.1. What old data means?
Comparing the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey and the 2004 Adult Literacy and Life skills survey

The International Adult Literacy Survey took place between 1994 and 1998. New data, from the Adult Literacy and Life skills (ALL) survey were released in May 2005 (Statistics Canada and OECD, 2005). Since the two surveys are based on the same theoretical corpus and collect similar data ten years apart, they could offer observations on two points in time. Unfortunately, the way questions are phrased in the more recent background questionnaire are different from the earlier survey. In addition, only seven countries have carried out both the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Adult Literacy and Life skills survey: Canada, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the United States of America. Nevertheless, subject to some caveats, the surveys can be used to produce information on the main reasons for undertaking learning activities. In regards to those learners who are primarily seeking a qualification, the changes between the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Adult Literacy and Life skills survey for different countries are: from 40% to 33% in Canada, from 43% to 59% in Italy, from 22% to 44% in Norway, from 19% to 42% in Switzerland and from 28% to 36% in the United States of America. Two conclusions can be made: 1) except in Canada, seeking a qualification seems more important in 2004 than ten years ago; and 2) the general pattern of the ranking of the countries is maintained, again with the exception of Canada. This stability over time suggests that International Adult Literacy Survey data may still be helpful for understanding individuals’ behaviour in the context of this report, even though it was collected ten years ago. Therefore, mainly because of the small number of countries involved in the Adult Literacy and Life skills survey and its poor overlap with countries participating in the OECD activity underlying this report, it was decided to concentrate on the International Adult Literacy Survey data and the Adult Literacy and Life skills was not explored further.

Measuring the conduciveness of qualifications systems using the International Adult Literacy Survey

185. The International Adult Literacy Survey, despite being a rather old survey (Box 4.1) provides information on participation in adult learning and the motivations for doing so. For some individuals, the primary reasons for participation is to seek a qualification (Box 4.2), while for others the primary motivation could be career upgrading or a mix category of other reasons, such as learning for its own sake. Since the learners were asked to give only one reason, it would be realistic to interpret that the three categories are mutually exclusive, at least as far as the primary motivation goes. It may well happen that a person learning for her/his personal consumption ends up being recruited thanks to the competencies acquired but it would still be the case that the initial purpose of the learning was not job related. The proportion of individuals undertaking learning activities and primarily for a qualification (Tables 4.2 and A.4 in annex) are consistent with the figures reported in the country background reports that have reported quantitative information on the motivations of learners. This similarity of findings gives confidence in the International Adult Literacy Survey data.
Table 4.2 – Aggregated reasons for undertaking learning activities (first mention)
International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for undertaking learning activities</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Career Upgrading</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Number of learning spells reported in the sample (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>47*</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23°</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flanders)</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, in Australia, 47% of the adults reported undertaking learning activities for obtaining a qualification for the first reported learning activity. ° 23% of the individuals described a first education and training period.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

186. The proportion of individuals seeking a qualification is relatively high in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Australia and Italy, in that order (Tables 2.2 and A.4 in annex)\(^{13}\). At the lower end are Sweden and Germany followed, by a distance, by Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Finland and Denmark where the proportion of individuals seeking a qualification is low. These data can be interpreted in different ways. As noted above, they give one indication of whether the qualifications system is more or less conducive to learning in a country. An explanation may come from the additional information that countries where the culture of learning is more widely spread do not rank very high in this league. The argument here could be that, if learning is part of the culture, it is likely that more people will be participating in learning for its own sake and seeking a qualification may not be the dominant motivation.

187. Before using these numbers, it would be useful to provide further evidence on the robustness of the data on qualifications seekers. It is well known that learning activities leading to a qualification are longer, or more intensive, than the other learning activities. As can be seen from Graph 4.5, there is indeed a high degree of correlation between the average number of hours spent on learning, whatever the type of

\(^{13}\) Chile is the top ranked country but did not participate in the activity.
learning activities (job related and general interest learning), and the proportion of individuals seeking a qualification. The fit displayed on Graph 4.6 when using job-related training instead of any kind of learning activities confirms that the proportion of individuals seeking a qualification seems to be a reliable indicator.

**Graph 4.5. Intensity of learning (any type of learning) and qualifications**

![Graph 4.5](image1)

Source: the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

**Graph 4.6. Intensity of learning (on-the-job training) and qualifications systems**

![Graph 4.6](image2)

Source: the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

---

14 The quality of the model is acceptable but it can be improved by removing the potential outliers – Czech Republic and Chile (in italics) – which, ultimately, gives a particularly good model: \(Tx=4.2\) and \(R^2=0.57\) (where \(Tx\) is the Student statistics and \(R^2\) the goodness of fit indicator).

15 The quality of the model becomes reasonable when removing the potential outliers (Czech Republic and Chile): \(Tx=2.8\) and \(R^2=0.38\).
Measuring adult learning using the European Labour Force Survey and some national surveys

188. Following the same line of thought, the European Union Labour Force Survey (EULFS) is used to derive aggregated indicators of lifelong learning. This survey is more recent than the International Adult Literacy Survey but it covers only European countries and some national surveys are used to complement it (Annex 4.1). The surveys provide information on participation in adult learning in a given reference period, which is usually over the last four weeks or during the last twelve months. For the purpose of this analysis, an additional indicator is used that provides information on the duration of the learning activity, which gives an indication of the intensity of the learning activity. Both indicators of participation in adult learning are used in Section 4.2 but, before turning to these findings, the next section attempts to illustrate the expected relationships when trying to link national qualifications systems and lifelong learning in quantitative terms.

Box 4.2. Characteristics of learners whose primary goal is to seek a qualification

To complement the evidence displayed on Graphs 4.5-4.6 and 4.9-4.12, it is useful to describe the characteristics of the individuals who are primarily interested in achieving a qualification when they undertake learning activities. To some extent, informing decision making with the determinants of seeking a qualification also informs about the most effective ways to organise national qualifications systems. If the latter are to be used to promote lifelong learning, it is useful to know what are the sub-groups of the population more likely to be interested in using the qualifications system and what are the ones that need extra attention because, precisely, they are not interested in, and/or deterred from, using it.

Throughout this chapter, the same question F5 from the International Adult Literacy Survey background questionnaire is used. It is phrased as follows: “Were you taking this training or education towards… (read category/mark only one)

1- A university degree / diploma / certificate?
2- A college diploma / certificate?
3- A trade-vocational diploma / certificate?
4- An apprenticeship certificate?
5- An elementary or secondary school diploma?
6- Professional or career upgrading?
7- Other”

For the purpose of this Box, this variable is collapsed in two categories: seeking a qualification (items 1 to 5 are collapsed) or not (items 6 and 7). The obtained variables is used in a statistical model using many explanatory variables to attempt to describe the characteristics of the individuals primarily interested in a qualification when undertaking learning activities (Tables A.7-A.8 in Annex 4.2). The following results must be interpreted holding everything else equal:

- Highly literate people are more interested in a qualification than poorly literate people. The variable measuring literacy level is more significant than the one describing initial educational attainment, which does not indicate an influence of initial education attainment on the primary objective of learning.

- Individuals in high level occupations are less interested by a qualification when they undertake learning activities. Blue collar workers and unemployed people are more interested in a qualification. Again, this finding must not be confused with the Matthew effect which says that individuals already qualified are more interested in learning than others. Here, it is likely that individuals with poor labour market performance have realised that achieving a qualification brings is a necessity. This evidence is confirmed by the fact that the higher their income the less individuals are interested in a qualification.
- Men want a qualification more often than women. Individuals who are not socially active also want a qualification more often.

- In countries such as Denmark, Czech Republic and Australia individuals are very interested in achieving a qualification. In countries such as Finland, Switzerland and Portugal, individuals do not seem very interested in a qualification when they undertake learning activities. Finally, countries such as United States of America, Slovenia and Canada are in between these two extreme groups. This high level of discrepancy in the way individuals regard the fact of achieving a qualification must have to do with the components and sub-components of their qualifications system as well as with its performance (Chapter 2).

This evidence confirms the idea stated above that individuals engage in learning for a qualification for economic reasons and/or personal development.

**Expected relationships**

**Upper secondary education and tertiary attainment and national qualifications systems**

189. If national qualifications systems have a significant impact on lifelong learning, it should be possible to see it at several levels. The end of upper secondary education is an obvious point where general qualifications are awarded in all the countries. They usually open up access to tertiary education. Therefore, if national qualifications systems have an impact on lifelong learning, some characteristics of the national qualifications system should be reasonably correlated with the proportion of individuals having successfully reached upper secondary education. The rationale is that it is possible to assume that a conducive qualifications system would most likely lead to a situation where many young people achieve a qualification at upper secondary education level.

190. However, the variable describing the proportion of the population that has attained upper secondary education level does not correlate well with the eight general structural elements used for the typology of a qualifications system (Table 4.1). A somewhat strong link was anticipated, but not found, between the country being rather “credentialist” and the proportion of people reaching upper secondary education level; the latter being a necessity to success in the transition from initial education and training and working life (OECD, 2000).

191. Within the tertiary education system, the same kind of arguments applies. If the qualifications system in a country provides clear benefits to young people leaving upper secondary education, then clear correlation must be visible between enrolments in tertiary education or completion rates and some of the characteristics of the qualifications system. On the contrary, if the qualifications system is so organised that it does not provide benefits enough to users, and even if participation in tertiary education depends on others factors, the interest of enrolling in tertiary education may be considered low by upper secondary graduates. Here too, a somewhat strong link was anticipated, but not found, between the country being rather “credentialist” and the proportion of people enrolling in tertiary education. In fact, among all the indicators used for lifelong learning, none of them correlate well with any of the eight general elements of the typology.

**Participation in adult learning and national qualifications systems**

192. A qualifications system providing clear information about the outcomes of learning as well as guidance about the way to benefit from them can be expected to, in one way or another, trigger learning behaviour among the adult population. On the contrary again, lack of information and guidance about the qualifications system and its main features may deter individuals from undertaking adult learning activities. Once again, and perhaps more surprisingly, the proportion of 25-64 year old individuals engaged
in adult learning activities does not correlate with almost any of the eight general elements of the national qualifications system typology. It is somewhat surprising because indicators such as the existence of a system of recognition of prior learning or even of a credit system are supposed to be conducive to engaging in adult learning activities because both provide transparency and give information about outcomes and this is important to motivate adults (OECD, 2003 and 2005a). The existence, in a country, of a qualifications framework, by providing clear information about possible routes throughout the qualifications system, is similarly expected to be an incentive to adult learning. To this extent, it is interesting to note that according to the way of measuring participation in adult learning – standard or duration weighted rate – the evidence found is more convincing regarding the quality of the correlation found when the weighted participation measure is used but not when the unweighted participation measure is used.

193. As described above, deriving aggregated indicators describing national qualifications systems with household surveys such as the International Adult Literacy Survey is a possible alternative and has been attempted as a second best approach. Ideally, this requires having lifelong learning indicators for the same period, which is not the case. However, the existing data were used in many attempts to map together national qualifications systems and lifelong learning variables using derived indicators from the International Adult Literacy Survey for the former and usual (recent) variables for the latter. The experiments did not find a link between the proportion of adult learners seeking a qualification and the eight general elements of the national qualifications system typology. One explanation for the lack of association is that there is a time lag between the International Adult Literacy Survey and the construction of the typology (between 5 and 8 years according to the country). In order to avoid the problem of time lags in data, the International Adult Literacy Survey could be used to derive indicators describing national qualifications systems and lifelong learning indicators could be computed for the earlier period of the International Adult Literacy Survey. In doing so, both sets of derived indicators would be contemporaneous and the expected correlation better (Section 4.1).

194. The above experiments represent only selected examples of how the available data could be used to explore the relationship between the qualifications system and lifelong learning. A comprehensive approach would require that all the components and sub-components of a qualifications system, as described in Chapter 2, are taken into account such as: flexibility, responsiveness and transparency for example. For now, the next sections will show that national qualifications systems characteristics and lifelong learning variables correlate to some extent.

4.2. An attempt to relate national qualifications systems to lifelong learning

195. This section uses very broad descriptors of the national qualifications and lifelong learning systems to provide the reader with a first glance at possible links between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning. In view of the lack of data on the quality and the efficiency of lifelong learning, the section relies on data on two aspects of lifelong learning, namely the volume (participation) and equity (distribution) of lifelong learning.

Participation in adult learning and the national qualifications systems

196. The volume of lifelong learning can be measured by counting the number of participants in adult learning over a given reference period, such as over the last four weeks or the last twelve months depending on the particular survey. Two alternative measures, the standard participation rate and the weighted participation rate, were used. The information in Graph 4.7 attempts to bring together a measure of lifelong learning volume and a measure of national qualifications system. The participation rate variable refers to the number of adults involved in learning between the ages of 16 and 65, weighted by the duration of the learning period. The national qualifications system variable in the Graph refers to the degree to
which a country has a dual system, which is one of the eight structural elements of the national qualifications system typology shown in Table 4.1. Graph 4.7 shows a relationship between participation in adult learning and the degree to which a country has a dual system.

197. On the contrary, the standard participation rate does not correlate with the existence of a dual system in a country. This shows that different measures of participation in lifelong learning are related in different ways to different measures of national qualifications systems and it is difficult to find a straightforward relationship between the two.

**Graph 4.7. Participation in adult learning and existence of a dual system in the country**  
(Both the number of adult participants in learning and the duration of learning are taken into account)

**Summary:** if a qualifications system has a dual system, the high the level of adult learning

![Graph showing relationship between participation in adult learning and the existence of a dual system](image)

**Source:** data from Miyamoto and Werquin (2005), processed by the authors.

198. Overall, the participation rate data drawn from the European Union Labour Force Survey and one measure of the national qualifications system typology reported in Table 4.1 seem to show linkages between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning. On the other hand, aside from the measure of national qualifications systems reported (whether the country has a dual system), we did not find significant correlations between other measures of national qualifications systems and the measures of lifelong learning.

**Participation in adult learning and conduciveness of the qualifications system to learning**

199. As mentioned earlier, the International Adult Literacy Survey provides information on the motives for participating in learning activities. Graph 4.8 portrays the relationship between the aggregate participation rate (the vertical axis) and the percentage of adults who are participating in learning primarily to obtain a qualification. The Graph shows a negative correlation: the higher the proportion of individuals in a country that are primarily interested in a qualification, the lower the participation rate in adult learning activities. When the same graph is repeated by using job related adult learning, instead of any kind of adult learning, the findings are similar and confirm a strong relationship (Graph 4.9). One interpretation of this
finding may be as follows: it can be argued that, in countries where learning is more widely in practice, there is a wider range of motivations and that obtaining a qualification is one among several motivations, not necessarily the main motivation, compared to other reasons such as personal interest, job upgrading and so on. The findings in Graphs 4.8 and 4.10 below both show that learning and seeking a qualification are two separate concepts, that one can go without the other simply because there are many different motivations for undertaking learning (see also Box 4.2 for additional developments on the motivations of individuals).

Graph 4.8. Extent of lifelong learning: participation in adult learning (16-65), 1994-98
(Standard participation rate, over the last 12 months, as defined in the International Adult Literacy Survey)

Summary: the higher the proportion of individuals interested in a qualification the lower the adult learning participation rate

Source: the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

The quality of the model here also becomes reasonable when a few outliers such as Germany, Belgium (Flanders), Hungary and Poland are removed. It is worth noting that it is not surprising that Germany, for instance, appears as an outlier because the German background questionnaire did not ask the question about adult learning in a comparable way to serve domestic purposes (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000).
(Standard participation rate, over the last 12 months, as defined in the International Adult Literacy Survey)

Summary: The higher the proportion of individuals interested in a qualification the lower the participation rate in job related adult learning

\[
y = -0.33x + 40 \\
R^2 = 0.32
\]

Source: the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

National qualifications systems and the distribution of lifelong learning

200. The second dimension explored below relates to how equitably the learning opportunities are distributed in the population. The question posed here is whether measures of distribution are in some way related to the features of national qualifications systems. Two variables representing the distribution of lifelong learning are used here: the initial educational attainment (measured by the ISCED level of individuals at the end of initial education and training\(^{17}\)) and the current literacy level of the individuals (captured by their ability to read a text in prose), both coming from the International Adult Literacy Survey. As previously, the measure of national qualifications systems used is the proportion of adult learners who are seeking a qualification. Graph 4.10 brings these two variables together and shows that the proportion of those who are seeking a qualification when they undertake learning activities is higher in a country where the overall attainment of education is lower.

201. This finding may be interpreted as a particular illustration of the “second chance” motivation, which is not just another chance for additional learning but also another chance for obtaining a qualification. On the face of it, this finding may be seen as contradictory to the so-called Matthew effect (OECD, 2003): less educated people participate less in learning activities than others. The Matthew effect is well documented and many reasons have been offered for why the less educated people participated less in adult learning activities: cost of learning, lack of time, dislike of assessment, fear of failure, and perception of stigma \textit{vis-à-vis} the family, the friends and the neighbourhood. The finding here does not contradict the Matthew effect. It is not addressing the issue of access to adult learning as such but explores the motivations of adults and the purpose of the learning once the barriers to engaging in learning have been overcome.

\(^{17}\) Using other variables such as the average number of years of schooling or the proportion of individuals having ISCED level 3 and above provide also good correlation.
Graph 4.10. Distribution of lifelong learning: low initial education and search for a qualification

**Summary: the Matthew effect in reverse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of individuals at ISCED level 2 and below</th>
<th>% of individuals seeking a qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CAN, SLV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL, AVG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL, AVG, NOR, CHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL, AVG, NOR, CHE, DEU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL, AVG, NOR, CHE, DEU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>USA, CAN, SLV, NZL, AVG, NOR, CHE, DEU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

**Literacy levels as a proxy for current competencies**

205. Adult learning is an important component of lifelong learning, whether undertaken in formal settings or not. The ISCED level is a good indicator of level attained in initial education and training but not a comprehensive indicator of real competencies later in life at the time of the measurement. The International Adult Literacy Survey data are useful for this purpose. The distribution of lifelong learning can be captured by analysing the size of the proportion of individuals at the lower end of the literacy scale. Using this variable, we find a positive correlation between the proportion of individuals at level 1 of Prose literacy and the proportion of individuals seeking a qualification (Graph 4.11). In countries where the proportion of less literate people is high, the proportion of people learning for a qualification is also high. This finding is consistent with the finding shown in Graph 4.10.

206. Overall, the two previous sets of findings, about initial education attainment and current literacy level offer interesting results. It seems that, despite the fact they may have weak participation rates in learning, poorly educated and less literate individuals are more interested in getting a qualification. This finding is also supported by the information cited in Box 4.2. The explanation may be that individuals realise that there are good potential benefits of holding a qualification, presumably in the labour market. One implication of this finding is the greater importance of foundation qualifications for the poorly educated and for finding ways of addressing this need.
Graph 4.11. Distribution of lifelong learning: individuals with very low literacy levels (Prose)

Summary: people with low literacy levels are more inclined to seek a qualification

Source: the International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

207. It is interesting to note that there is some clustering of the countries in most of the graphs. The data suggest that these countries have something in common and this may be systemic features of the qualifications system. However, it is difficult to test potential correlation within these groups because sub-sampling needs to take place in a very small sample and the results may be unreliable.

4.3. Concluding remarks: setting a research agenda

208. Chapters 3 and 5 above have presented qualitative evidence on the link between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning activities. This chapter explores the quantitative dimensions of the link, which are rather limited.

209. This section proposes to conclude the chapter along two main lines. Firstly, it will summarise the possible reasons why the quantitative results are rather limited. These limitations can come from three different sources: 1) it is possible that the national qualifications and/or lifelong learning systems have not been measured properly; 2) the relationship between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning is too complex to be measured at a very aggregate level; and 3) there is, in reality, no relationship at all. Our conclusion is that considerable work is needed in finding conceptual approaches to identifying the characteristics of national qualifications systems before quantitative counterparts can be defined for the purpose of examining a link with lifelong learning. Secondly, this section proposes a research agenda to address the linkage between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning.
Three possible sources of the paucity of quantitative evidence

National qualifications systems are not measured properly

210. The primary reason for finding only limited quantitative evidence in linking national qualifications systems and lifelong learning seems to be the failure to measure useful conceptual descriptions representing the former that can have implications for the latter. There exists quantitative data describing lifelong learning but, as pointed out above, the main problem is that the possible indicators for describing a qualifications system do not exist or do not describe the system in an adequate way for sound quantitative analysis. Features of a qualifications system have been identified (Chapter 2) such as accessibility, efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness or transparency but they could not be measured; and therefore a broader concept of conduciveness to learning of national qualifications systems has been derived form observing individual behaviours toward learning for a qualification. The chapter presents a description of national qualifications systems through general structural elements in the form of a typology (Table 4.1) as a second best approach to the description of national qualifications systems.

211. The mechanisms provided in Chapter 5 also describe the process through which the links between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning can be examined. However, they could only be established at a qualitative level and attempt has not been made here to find quantitative empirical counterparts to the 20 mechanisms proposed in Chapter 5. New conceptual work is therefore needed to identify the features of national qualifications systems that could be measured or, if the ones proposed are satisfactory, to propose a methodology to measure them.

212. Even on the side of lifelong learning indicators, where relevant data exist, some effort could be devoted to produce more recent data, more in line with recent reforms likely to impact on lifelong learning activities. In addition, trend data would be necessary to appreciate over time evolution and impact of recent reforms.

A too complex relationship to measure at an aggregate level

213. In addition to the conceptual and empirical problems of measuring systemic features, it is also possible that the quantitative findings reported above are rather limited because the relationship between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning is too complex and has not been properly captured in the above experiment. In particular, it may be difficult to measure the complex processes through data at an aggregate level. The complexity of this relationship can be observed in the sheer existence of so many mechanisms that can link national qualifications systems and lifelong learning (Chapter 5). Because of these complexities, the linkages may not be visible when mapping out broad quantitative variables measured at the macro level. A better alternative would probably be to examine micro level relationships, between sub-components of the qualifications system, for example, the scope of application or the control (Annex 2.1) and lifelong learning, for instance.

214. In addition to, and probably because of, this complexity, it is likely that there are cancelling effects too – different mechanisms may have impacts that run counter to each other. In this case, they would blur the clarity of the overall findings, or the net effect. For example, a given policy targeted at qualifications systems may incentivise a sub-group of the population to undertake learning activities but may discourage another sub-group from doing so. The overall effect would be difficult to observe. Attempting to identify a net effect between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning with aggregated variables is not totally appropriate also because aggregated variables are often correlated with hidden variables that must be controlled for.
A relationship that may not be displayable at a quantitative empirical level

215. Finally, there remain a possibility that there is no relationship at all that can be displayed at a quantitative empirical level. However, it is difficult to infer further and to provide clear negative statements denying the existence of such a relationship until the two sets of issues above are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Possible ways forward

216. There are expected relationships between national qualifications systems and lifelong learning that can be described at the theoretical level. This conceptual approach helps in understanding the need for future data collection. The systemic variables that would be needed, especially for national qualifications systems where the lack is the most glaring, have been defined and described at length above and in Chapter 2. The opinion of individual users and potential users about the conduciveness (transparency, responsiveness etc.) of the qualifications system for promoting learning is a key element for a better understanding between qualifications systems and lifelong learning and this information needs to be collected. Information on as many as possible of these characteristics of qualifications systems would be necessary for a sound quantitative analysis. One approach could be to organise a group of international experts to work on a set of key national qualifications system characteristics and the best way to conceptualise and define them at an international level. Secondly, individual or household surveys should be used more systematically, in addition to their initial and main purpose, at collecting information about the perception that individuals have of their qualifications system. These additional short modules would have the merit of providing affordable key quantitative elements in a relatively short period of time. Such an approach, through a regular existing survey, would also allow for some enrichment of the analysis by using relevant variables usually collected in such surveys: gender, educational attainment, labour market status, social background, occupation, industry etc.

217. Linking indicators describing national qualifications systems and lifelong learning variables has proven a difficult exercise because it requires many conditions to be met in addition to appropriate variables to be available for the appropriate period of time. There are lessons to learn and the following represent key elements of a research agenda for the future:
   - There is a need for sound conceptual work about the best way to define systemic variables and to produce appropriate indicators describing national qualifications systems.
   - There is a need for research on the best way to relate national qualifications system to lifelong learning through quantitative variables.
   - There is a need for international data to be collected as empirical counterpart for the conceptual work proposed above.
   - There is a need for a stronger focus on micro relationships, at the level of the components and sub-components of qualifications systems.

Conclusion

218. What this chapter has achieved is clearly to show some of the gaps in existing data. It offers ideas on a research agenda for further data collection with specific focus on national qualifications systems and/or individuals qualification(s) when it comes to individual or household surveys. The proposed typology for national qualifications systems is a first step toward a quantitative knowledge of complex systems. It needs additional confrontation with country experts and refinement but it is a first step toward an agreed typology.

219. In addition to specific data, trend data will also be necessary. It will take time and efforts but it would allow for more appropriate reflection on the way national qualifications and lifelong learning
systems evolve over time. This may require some stability in the way variables are measured. If national qualifications systems are to become a policy tool, policy makers will have to be more thoroughly informed of current data as well as trend data to avoid fragmentation of policy-making.

220. Finally, the data collection process may have to leave the circle of direct benefits to lifelong learning and gather information on broader social effects such as those related to crime or health factors.

References


OECD, 2005a. *Promoting Adult Learning*, Paris. (Forthcoming, title to be confirmed)


Annex 4.1

Assumption, caveats and technical notes

The use of quantitative data in analysis is always based on certain basic assumptions about the data. The assumptions, caveats and notes to the reader concerning the national qualifications system typology and the adult learning data are grouped in this annex to avoid chattering the main text with these technicalities.

- Assumption: The chapter assumes that the individual motivation for learning for a qualification or learning for some other purpose carries useful information about the qualifications system. When it is observed that more individuals undertake learning to obtain a qualification, we interpret it to mean that the qualifications system is facilitative or instrumental in leading to learning. Thus, it is assumed that individual behaviour toward a particular qualification carries explanatory power as far as the system itself is concerned. And therefore counting the number of individuals primarily seeking a qualification is an indicator of the qualifications system.

- Note 1: For the sake of comparison, and to provide additional benchmarking points to the countries involved in the OECD activity, all the countries where data are available are included in the graphs and tables, whether they have participated in the activity or not. This is particularly useful for the countries not involved in the preparation of a country background report but involved in the activity one way or another; through the thematic groups for instance. From a technical point of view, this also allows for a larger sample size, which makes any reported correlations more robust.

- Note 2: Not all the countries are systematically displayed in the tables and graphs because there are missing values sometimes, for some countries and/or particular year(s).

- Note 3: For some cases, the available data may refer at times to the country as a whole (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland or the United Kingdom) but, in some instances, the data may only cover a region of the country (Flanders, Québec, the German speaking Swiss cantons or England).

- Note 4: The European Union Labour Force Survey (EULFS) does contain interesting questions related to education and training. However, it does not include qualifications achieved by the individuals. Therefore, this survey is only used to derive an indicator of participation in adult learning, except for the Netherlands (2001) and Switzerland (2003) for which national surveys are used.

- Note 6: To complement the European Union Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2002), which covers only European countries, national surveys were used: Statistics Canada (2002); INEGI (2001); Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2000); United States National Center for Education Statistics (2001).

- Note 7: The Adult Literacy and Life skills survey (ALL) is an updated and improved version of the International Adult Literacy Survey but it will not be used herein, except for establishing the value of the
International Adult Literacy Survey (Box 4.1) because too few countries (seven) were involved in the first round (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005), the only one available at the time of preparation of this report.
Annex 4.2

Additional Tables

Table A.1 – Participation in adult learning by type of learning. International Adult Literacy Survey, 15-64 years old, 1994-1998 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All learning</th>
<th>Job related learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total participation rate (female rate)</td>
<td>Mean number of hours per participant (Quality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>39 (40)*</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flanders)</td>
<td>21 (20)</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>38 (42)</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>19 (27)</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>26 (23)</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>56 (63)</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>57 (67)</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>19 (21)</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (the)</td>
<td>37 (39)</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>47 (51)</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>48 (50)</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>14 (13)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>14 (20)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>32 (41)</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>53 (53)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>42 (41)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>44 (47)</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>40 (42)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>35 (35)</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, in Australia, 39% of the adult population has undertaken learning activities over the past 12 months (the rate is 40% for the female population).
° Not comparable for Germany

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role on national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.
Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors
Table A.2 – Proportion of the population at each literacy level (Prose), International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prose literacy levels (Distribution)</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4/5</th>
<th>% of individuals still in initial education and training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flanders)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (the)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average/Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, in Australia, 17% of the adult population is in the first literacy level.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role on national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
### Table A.3 – Pathways into learning. First, second and third reported learning activities aggregated.

**International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>University or college qualification</th>
<th>Trade-voc or app. qualification</th>
<th>School qualification</th>
<th>Professional upgrading</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Mixed pathways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>13*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flanders)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (the)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average/Total</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, in Australia, 13% of the adults learning pathways have a dominant in terms of “university or college qualification” as the purpose of the learning.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role on national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

**Source:** International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
Table A.4 – Aggregated reasons for undertaking learning activities (first, second and third mention).
International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for undertaking learning activities</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Career Upgrading</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Number of learning spells reported in the sample (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>47/22/14*</td>
<td>42/63/75</td>
<td>11/13/11</td>
<td>23/9/5°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flanders)</td>
<td>23/15/15</td>
<td>30/36/37</td>
<td>36/33/28</td>
<td>11/4/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>40/22/28</td>
<td>43/62/57</td>
<td>17/16/15</td>
<td>21/7/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>60/24/7</td>
<td>33/67/86</td>
<td>7/9/7</td>
<td>21/5/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>53/43/26</td>
<td>17/17/16</td>
<td>28/23/20</td>
<td>14/6/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>23/10/6</td>
<td>54/68/70</td>
<td>23/21/23</td>
<td>33/14/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>23/11/11</td>
<td>63/73/73</td>
<td>14/16/16</td>
<td>31/14/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9/8/2</td>
<td>66/68/77</td>
<td>25/23/18</td>
<td>11/4/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>21/9/2</td>
<td>46/55/51</td>
<td>28/29/27</td>
<td>14/3/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>48/15/9</td>
<td>27/41/38</td>
<td>25/20/22</td>
<td>19/5/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>43/14/7</td>
<td>47/73/80</td>
<td>11/13/13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (the)</td>
<td>25/13/10</td>
<td>23/21/22</td>
<td>51/67/69</td>
<td>28/9/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>35/22/16</td>
<td>47/57/66</td>
<td>18/21/18</td>
<td>23/10/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>22/8/5</td>
<td>68/82/86</td>
<td>10/10/9</td>
<td>26/13/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>21/15/6</td>
<td>63/78/81</td>
<td>16/5/7</td>
<td>11/2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15/2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>39/65/8</td>
<td>55/62/80</td>
<td>5/10/9</td>
<td>28/8/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6/51/-</td>
<td>-/-</td>
<td>93/64/-</td>
<td>31/7/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>19/5/3</td>
<td>41/37/32</td>
<td>28/28/20</td>
<td>24/10/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>27/11/9</td>
<td>19/23/27</td>
<td>54/64/63</td>
<td>23/12/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>28/18/17</td>
<td>48/40/31</td>
<td>17/11/9</td>
<td>19/7/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>29/17/15</td>
<td>44/44/38</td>
<td>24/21/17</td>
<td>22/6/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, in Australia, 47% of the adults reported undertaking learning activities for obtaining a qualification for the first reported learning activity, 22% for the second and 14% for the third.
° 23% of the individuals described a first education and training period, 9 a second and 5 a third.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
Table A.5 – Level of educational attainment of the individual looking for a qualification, first reported learning activity, International Adult Literacy Survey, 1994-1998 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISCED</th>
<th>0-1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6-7</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University degree, diploma or certificate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College diploma or certificate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade-vocational diploma or certificate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship certificate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary or secondary school diploma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, among the individuals seeking a university degree, 2% have attained ISCED 1 level upon leaving initial education and training.

° Not necessarily 100% because of non-response.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.

Table A.6 – Motivation of individual undertaking learning activities according to their level of educational attainment, first reported learning activity, International Adult Literacy Survey, 1994-1998 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for undertaking learning activities:</th>
<th>Individuals seeking a qualification</th>
<th>Individuals seeking other things than a qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED: University degree, diploma or certificate</td>
<td>University diploma or certificate</td>
<td>Trade-vocational diploma or certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For example, among the individuals seeking a university degree, 2% have attained ISCED 1 level upon leaving initial education and training.

° Not necessarily 100% because of non-response.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
Table A.7. Logit simple, complete specification, International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (%)

| Parameter | Estimated Parameter | Proba. > |T| |
|-----------|---------------------|----------|---|
| Intercept | 1.9**               | 0.00     |
| Literacy score (the best of the three available scale: Prose, Doc, Quant) | 0.002** | 0.00 |
| Income (Reference: percentile 0-20): | | |
| No income | 0.06                | 0.48     |
| Percentile 20-40 | -0.42** | 0.00 |
| Percentile 40-60 | -0.86** | 0.00 |
| Percentile 60-80 | -1.37** | 0.00 |
| Percentile 80-100 | -1.34** | 0.00 |
| Occupation (Reference: White-Collar High-Skilled): | | |
| White-Collar Low-Skilled | 0.06 | 0.25 |
| Blue-Collar High-skilled | 0.18** | 0.01 |
| Blue-Collar Low-Skilled | 0.19** | 0.00 |
| Out of labour force | 0.65** | 0.00 |
| Educational attainment (Reference: ISCED 0 or 1): | | |
| ISCED 2 | 0.12 | 0.26 |
| ISCED 3 | 0.03 | 0.78 |
| ISCED 5 | 0.2 | 0.08 |
| ISCED 6 or 7 | 0.09 | 0.44 |
| Industry (Reference: agriculture, only the significant industries are kept): | | |
| Mining | -0.52* | 0.02 |
| Construction | 0.22 | 0.07 |
| Communication | -0.22 | 0.08 |
| Personal Characteristics: | | |
| Live with partner (Reference: lives alone) | -0.38** | 0.00 |
| Gender (Reference: Male) | 0.29** | 0.00 |
| Age | -0.07** | 0.00 |
| Engagement in the community (Reference: often): | | |
| Going to a library: barely | -0.58** | 0.00 |
| Going to a library: never | -0.87** | 0.00 |
| Going to a concert: barely | -0.07 | 0.22 |
| Going to a concert: never | -0.1 | 0.15 |
| Going to a sport event: barely | -0.04 | 0.28 |
| Going to a sport event: never | 0.05 | 0.25 |
| Working in the community or NGOs: barely | 0.16** | 0.00 |
| Working in the community or NGOs: never | 0.19** | 0.00 |
| Countries (Reference: United States of America): | | |
| Australia | 0.67** | 0.00 |
| Belgium (Flanders) | -0.68** | 0.00 |
| Canada | 0.13 | 0.17 |
| Chale | -0.97** | 0.00 |
| Czech Republic | 0.75** | 0.00 |
| Denmark | 1.54** | 0.00 |
| Finland | -2.59** | 0.00 |
| Germany | -0.67** | 0.00 |
| Hungary | -0.67** | 0.00 |
| Country                  | Estimated Parameter | Proba. > |T| |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Ireland                 | -0.84**             | 0.00     |
| Italy                   | 0.04                | 0.74     |
| Netherlands (the)       | -0.2                | 0.09     |
| New Zealand             | -1.01**             | 0.00     |
| Norway                  | -0.68**             | 0.00     |
| Poland                  | -0.06               | 0.50     |
| Portugal                | -1.11**             | 0.00     |
| Slovenia                | -15.91              | 0.89     |
| Sweden                  | -0.14               | 0.17     |
| Switzerland             | -2.68**             | 0.00     |
| United Kingdom          | -0.31**             | 0.00     |

Likelihood ratio test: 0.00

*/***: The number in the right hand side column is the error that one should make to reject the assumption that the estimated parameter is nil; to accept that it is statistically significant that is. It is usually accepted that estimated parameters are significant when the error is below 5% (0.05), they are flagged with *, and very significant when it is below 1% (0.01), there are flagged with **.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role on national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
Table A.8. Logit simple, three aggregated variables and gender, International Adult Literacy Survey, 16-65 years old, 1994-1998 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable: “towards a qualification” (Items 1-5 in question F5)</th>
<th>Estimated parameter (and Proba. &gt;</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Highly literate (4 and 5)</td>
<td>High level job (WCHS and High income)</td>
<td>Highly educated (ISCED 567)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.2 (0.00)**</td>
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*/**: The number in brackets is the error that one should make to reject the assumption that the estimated parameter is nil; to accept that it is statistically significant that is. It is usually accepted that estimated parameters are significant when the error is below 5% (0.05), they are flagged with *, and very significant when it is below 1% (0.01), there are flagged with **.

The countries are ranked by alphabetical order. The countries in bold are the ones involved in the OECD activity on the role on national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, processed by the authors.
Annex 4.3

International Adult Literacy Survey Background Questionnaire

This appendix provides the phrasing of the questions, from the International Adult Literacy Survey background questionnaire, from which variables are derived for use in this workshop paper. Even if the International Adult Literacy Survey was operated in different countries with different languages and cultural backgrounds, all the background questionnaires are similar. They are available from www.oecd.org/edu/literacy. The questions about “adult education” – from which the two questions below are extracted – were asked to all the individuals that have had periods of adult education in the 12 months preceding the interview. There is a maximum of three periods described.

Section F, on “Adult Education”

**Question F1:**

“During the past 12 months […], did you receive any training or education including courses, private lessons, correspondence courses, workshops, on-the-job training, apprenticeship training, arts, crafts, recreation courses or any other training or education?”

**Question F5:**

“Were you taking this training or education towards… *(read category/mark only one)*

1- a university degree / diploma / certificate?
2- a college diploma / certificate?
3- a trade-vocational diploma / certificate?
4- an apprenticeship certificate?
5- an elementary or secondary school diploma?
6- professional or career upgrading?
7- other
Chapter 5

Identifying mechanisms to promote lifelong learning?
Analysis of the interaction between stakeholders and qualifications systems

Identifying linkages between national qualifications systems is an important task since there are huge benefits to be gained from enhanced lifelong learning, for individuals, communities, enterprises and the social and economic welfare of countries and regions more generally. How qualifications systems influence lifelong learning needs to be understood and the national policy responses produced in the quest for more lifelong learning need to be evaluated and developed further so that incentives for learning for qualification are included and disincentives are removed from these policy responses. In Chapter 4, quantitative data is presented that provides evidence about the impact of national qualifications systems on lifelong learning; analysis of this data also raises many questions that require further investigation, including the availability of quantitative evidence for any effect. Thus in this chapter an attempt is made to overcome the shortfall of evidence in Chapter 4 and look at qualitative evidence closely. Throughout the chapter evidence is drawn from country background reports and other national sources and is included in distinct boxes. In each case, the country of origin of the example is identified.

If lifelong learning is to develop further in countries then the patterns of behaviour of individuals, employers and learning and qualification providers will need to change. Qualifications may play a role in the process of changing behaviour and in this chapter the qualification-based factors that might influence behaviour are analysed by reviewing empirical evidence and theoretical literature that relates to national qualifications systems. In Section 5.1 of this chapter the scope of the review of evidence in this study is discussed. This is followed by an evaluation of the drivers of change influencing lifelong learning and the barriers to learning that confront individuals (Section 5.2), employers (Section 5.3) and learning and qualification providers (Section 5.4). The evaluation generates the 20 mechanisms that can be used to optimise the impact of lifelong learning policies; these are presented in Section 5.

5.1. Some important considerations

Who are the stakeholders in lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning is an activity carried out by individuals, therefore the motivation and capacity of individuals to take up further learning as influenced by the qualifications system\(^\text{18}\) is the core of this analysis\(^\text{19}\). The OECD has adopted a ‘cradle-to-grave’ concept of lifelong learning that embraces all

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\(^{18}\) Qualifications systems have been defined in chapter 2 – it is important to note that when considering the effects of the qualifications system on lifelong learning it is often the process of qualification rather than the whole qualifications system that has an effect. For the purposes of this activity a specific qualification is considered part of the qualifications system and therefore the qualifications system can be said to be responsible for the effect.

\(^{19}\) Qualifications systems are the focus of this activity and before a more detailed discussion of linking mechanisms is undertaken it is important to accept that many factors influence lifelong learning and that qualifications systems may be just one of them. It is also important to accept the view that increased use of formal recognition of knowledge and
learning activity undertaken throughout life which has the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. Another major group of stakeholders are employers: they are both suppliers of learning and users of qualifications since they require people with skills often as testified by qualifications and with trusted quality assurance processes. Employing organisations of all sizes create the opportunity for employees to learn during the process of work, both formally through on-the-job training and informally through observing and engaging with other more experienced employees as the day’s problems present themselves for solution. Providers of learning and qualification are numerous and include, for example, schools, colleges, and sector specific learning centres and assessment centres, qualification providers as well as employers. These providers, by means of their prospectus, and by means of their firm grip on high stakes qualifications that are embedded in popular and political mores, have an influence on opportunities for lifelong learning.

224. The community – this could be a social group based on locality, culture, ethnicity or sector – is another important stakeholder group. In several country reports communities are identified as important in terms of lifelong learning. It is difficult to conceive of community as a stakeholder in the same sense as individuals, employers or providers in this report. Communities are not generally direct users of qualifications in the same way as these other stakeholders. In addition, they are much more diffuse as an entity than, for example, employers consequently they are not amenable to analysis in the same way as other stakeholders. Inducements and constraints acting on communities are included in Section 5.2 (individuals).

225. The arrangements for governance of qualification systems vary widely between countries and include a range of bodies (including government departments, government agencies with more specific tasks, private institutions, qualification awarding bodies and bodies responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to others). This group of governing or managing bodies are extremely important stakeholders and whilst they are not users of qualifications, they can have a direct and powerful influence on the operation and direction of development of qualifications systems. This report is aimed at such stakeholders. Giving consideration to the inducements and constraints on these stakeholders in the same way as direct users of qualifications is not considered in this report. Instead Chapter 7 is written specifically for these bodies and brings to their attention the ways they could act to bring about changes in qualifications systems that would lead to better lifelong learning.

The effects of qualifications systems on lifelong learning

226. Qualifications systems influence these three groups of stakeholders – individuals, employers and providers of learning and qualification in many different ways and it is the nature, scope and intensity of these influences that are the focus of this chapter. Qualifications systems can act as a motivator for people to learn, provide incentives for employers to recognise and develop qualifications, and the means for providers of learning and qualifications to respond to need and operate efficiently. For example gaining recognition for learning can lead to financial rewards for individuals as well as enhanced self-esteem and improved life chances. Regulating entry to the labour market through qualifications can drive up skills supply for employers and create a strong market for providers. Qualifications systems can also act as an obstacle; for some people fear of failing to make the required standard leads them to resist participation, others may lack basic skills and be unable to express their skills through some means of assessment. There are costs involved in qualification and these may inhibit some people and employers from participation and this has a knock-on effect on providers. All these factors are amongst a range of evidence that suggests that a qualifications system can incentivise and disincentivise participation in learning.
227. Lifelong learning can be improved by increasing its quantity, quality, distribution and efficiency. Qualifications systems can influence the quantity of lifelong learning by, for example:
- Maintaining transparency for users (increasing confidence by reducing uncertainty).
- Improving the range and relevance of qualifications (meeting needs).
- Easing access to qualifications through flexible qualifications structures (overcoming systemic obstacles).
- Minimising the cost of qualifications (for all stakeholders, more can be afforded).
- Encouraging employers to use qualifications in workforce development activities (raising currency and providing incentives).

228. Quality of provision can be influenced by qualifications systems by:
- Developing diverse quality assurance systems (that are each tailored to purpose).
- Improving training provision for trainers (raising quality of inputs).
- Evaluating stakeholder perception to ensure needs are being met (sensitive feedback becomes available).
- Involving stakeholders in qualification design (increasing ownership).
- Regulating access to the labour market through qualifications (raising the quality by defining standards that must be met).

229. Equitable distribution of lifelong learning is influenced by qualifications systems by:
- Removing barriers to provision for specific groups (easing access).
- Recognising non-formal and informal learning (easing access for people with diverse learning histories).
- Reducing constraints on flexible approaches to learning for qualification (overcoming environmental barriers).
- Focussing on outcomes of learning whenever possible (communicating purpose of learning clearly).

230. Efficiency of lifelong learning, in terms of governance, is influenced by qualifications systems by:
- Developing a single coordinated system of qualification (efficiency of scale).
- Maintaining a clear structure of qualifications (avoiding wasteful confusion and repetition).
- Ensuring assessment, accreditation and certification processes are fit for purpose (as they are consumers of time and money).
- Maintaining stability in the system (change is expensive in a national system).

231. There are many other factors that contribute to enhance lifelong learning. The foregoing analysis and what follows aims to be solely concerned with the effects of qualifications systems. However it is extremely difficult to draw a line where non-accredited learning stops and learning for qualifications begins and the threshold is interesting territory. If qualifications systems are to draw in more learners it implies that they need to increasingly embrace informal and non-accredited learning and yet this type of learning may be attractive to learners precisely because there is no formal assessment. In other words learning has certain attractions for people and recognising this learning through qualification and certification may not be regarded as wholly desirable. The analysis therefore includes discussion of unintended consequences of formal recognition of learning.

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20 The OECD is currently considering how to investigate this issue.
Country and community context matters

232. Before moving on to consider the more specific influences of qualifications systems on different stakeholders it is worth noting that the influences of qualifications systems are not independent of the social, economic and cultural conditions in which they exist. For example, the condition of the labour market with its demands regarding volume and structure of work translates into job opportunities and the necessity to acquire higher skills and probably qualifications. Innovation and new technologies provide another example – technological development requires workforce skill development and updating of qualification. Institutional regulations also account for demand for qualifications; an example is the prerequisite in some countries to undertake vocational training in order to be entitled to unemployment benefits. The degree of compression of the wage structure and the general rate of labour turnover influence the possible returns of training for employers and in turn opportunities for individuals to train. Together with cultural values these factors influence anticipated costs and benefits of qualification and are likely to differ between communities in a country.

In France, the action plan “se former autrement” (learning differently) specifically focuses on preparing people to enter the knowledge society in the context of its reform of vocational training. The Division for Employment and Vocational Training (DGEFP) of the Ministry of Labour delivers an initiation module to Internet. It lasts 14 hours on average and focuses on navigation, communication and information gathering. It leads to a certificate from the Ministry of Labour that is aimed at many individuals as possible entering education and training programmes, especially those sent by the main adult learning organisation (AFPA) or the public employment service (ANPE). Since its first implementation, in October 2002, 150,000 unemployed people, for instance, have received this certificate.

Understanding the main stakeholder groups

233. None of the three main stakeholder groups can be unambiguously defined and treated as a single entity with clearly defined behaviours. Nevertheless it is necessary from the point of view of analysis to be able to discuss these stakeholder groups in the analysis. In an attempt to recognise the diversity within the groups the analysis signals wherever possible the different effects qualifications might have on sub-groups. It is also important to acknowledge from the outset that the three main subgroups may not embrace all stakeholders and that there is no tight boundary between these groups – for example employers are made up of individuals and employers often provide learning.

234. Individuals cannot be treated as a single homogenous group of users with common needs and resources to commit to learning. The diversity within populations is vast and it is essential that a clear description exists of the composition of this entity called from now on **individuals**. It is useful to identify the main dimensions of variation that might be important from a qualifications system-lifelong learning point of view. The needs of younger people aiming to make an investment for later rewards are different to those who are near the end of working life and looking forward to retirement. Younger people using the school system have a different set of opportunities than a previous generation who now have access to adult learning provision. Women and men can have their aspirations for learning for qualification tempered in different ways by social and cultural differences. For example in some traditions men are still firmly expected to be the main wage earner although in other societies even a period of childbearing does not now seriously hamper career development in women. We know from countless studies that individuals who have qualifications are much more likely to be looking for further learning than those who are not qualified and as work is often an important place of learning those people in work clearly have better chances of participating in learning than the unemployed. Finally learning is often associated with communities and those who are firmly established within the network of a community will know of information sources and availability of opportunity and may find it easier to access services than those new to a community. Even within some strong communities the general disposition to learn for formal qualification can vary from the strongly antagonistic and disapproving to the firmly supportive and encouraging.
Employers come from a diverse group of organisations. It is simplistic to view employers as managers, bosses and leaders; an employer has functions that cover recruitment, training, business efficiency and development and these dimensions and others interact with qualifications systems. Employees as a group (rather than as individuals) have a function to develop the organisation to provide greater rewards and stability of employment. The organisation may have a not-for-profit status and this may influence the type of learning that is encouraged within the organisation. The learning for qualification ethos in small employers is likely to contrast with that in multinational companies. Employers also vary in the general level of skills required for the central function of the company – some are low skills and low technology firms others may be high skills and high technology in nature. Training needs will vary greatly between these types and qualification use may also vary.

The term providers has always been a ‘catch-all’ to cover diverse interests in making training available and providing some kind of quality assurance process for users. In this group all formal learning institutions are included (for example, schools, colleges adult learning centres and training departments in firms) together with organisations that manage assessment procedures, awarding processes and certification. These bodies may be publicly funded, charities (not-for-profit) or private firms. Funding agencies can also be considered providers. Some institutions deliver training and certification and quality assurance others may focus on delivery or quality assurance. In some cases sectoral (professional) bodies may carry out these functions. Increasingly electronic communication and management are transforming this kind of work and this is influencing the institutional structure.

The notion that any one of these three groups of stakeholders in the qualifications system can have its behaviour changed is thus a broad notion and we need to work through its complexity to determine whether, on the balance of probability, a change will take place within a defined range of stakeholders.

Financing lifelong learning

The broad analysis presented here may provide an opportunity for policy analysts to consider who pays for qualifications system development. Much of the literature on benefits accruing from education focuses on the returns to individuals in terms of higher incomes, less unemployment and other positive outcomes. This suggests that individuals should pay for qualification. However there is also evidence that employers benefit from a more educated workforce and in consequence they should meet the cost of qualification. Further evidence shows that there are substantial public benefits from higher levels of education, including lower social benefits payments and lower costs for the health and justice systems, and these suggest that the state should pay. There is a vast amount of policy-related work in the area of financing lifelong learning (OECD 2000a and 2001a) and clearly this impinges on the financing of qualifications systems. Whilst financing policy is fundamentally about influencing behaviour of all types of stakeholders, in this study the issue of funding is restricted to considering the cost of the qualifications system, and returns on investments in learning for qualifications.

The concept of a mechanism

In Chapter 2, the existence of mechanisms that link qualifications systems and lifelong learning outcomes is proposed. There is evidence of support for the idea of a mechanism in country background reports and discussions that have taken place between country experts have confirmed the usefulness of the concept. However all of this evidence needs to be confirmed by logical argument about how these mechanisms function in terms of changing behaviour.

Before such a logical derivation of potential mechanisms is described it may be helpful to review the concept. Mechanisms can be understood as a combination of two elements, a structural change and a conditional change. These two parts can act independently of one another and they help identification of
the likely positive and negative effects a mechanism might have when applied in a particular context. Structural change to the national qualifications system might include the modularisation of qualifications or the introduction of new type of qualification. Changes to the conditions in which the qualifications system operates could include, for example, demographic changes, labour market factors, economic policy or the quest for a stable and culturally rich society. One mechanism may work for or against the effects of another mechanism and these interactions are explored in later Chapter 7, as is the effect of social and cultural conditions on the ways mechanisms work is also considered.

241. This chapter now considers the ways the stakeholder groups interact with their qualifications system and identify the ways behavioural changes might arise. For each group some contextual evidence is considered before looking closely at inducements to learn and constraints that reduce the quantity, quality, distribution and efficiency of lifelong learning. Some issues are specific to certain stakeholder groups and these are examined so that they might be better understood as policy is formulated. The evidence is used to create a list of mechanisms, which is included as Section 5 of this chapter.

5.2. Motivating individuals to learn

242. Lifelong learning is fundamentally individualist as the individual as the primary unit of activity and consequently lifelong learning implies diversity and individuality in learning patterns. Government bodies (for example, schools, national and local agencies, funding bodies, career guidance services, labour market research organisations) support learning processes by supplying information, infrastructure and incentives and this may shape and influence the behaviour of individuals, families, communities and companies. Employers may do likewise. However these bodies do not control the learning processes of individuals. Learners may have competing aspirations not identical to those of government and employers and this may lead to distortion of goals as individuals decide how to utilise learning.

243. Economic approaches to lifelong learning tend to treat the disposition of individuals as stable, equal for all individuals and mainly based on money. Sociologists place emphasis on different and changing lifestyle preferences. Generally speaking, in taking decisions individuals try to optimise the benefits that range from personalised non-pecuniary rewards through to highly instrumental utility considerations. The subjective perception of alternatives, restrictions and possible benefits are influenced by the values the individual holds. It is these subjective expectations that influence the decisions of individuals. This means that their perception of possible benefits connected to the award of the qualification is a decisive factor, and this is influenced by assessment of the chances of success and the risk of failure.

Inducements to learn

244. The ways qualifications systems motivate or demotivate individuals to learn is possibly the most critical aspect of this analysis. It is a single person that, when all else is done, makes the decision to learn or not to learn. Research has shown that motivation to engage in learning can arise from the wish to progress in work, an interest in the content or subject matter, the wish to gain some personal development and make progress in work and study. Possibly less obvious is the motivation that can arise following a critical incident (such as closure of a workplace) and during life transitions (such as leaving the family home or becoming a parent). Not to be underestimated is peer pressure and the wish to be accepted and valued by a group of learners.

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21 The word motivation is taken to cover a range of an individual’s behaviours in terms of the way they initiate things, determine the way things are done, do something with intensity and show perseverance to see something through to an end.
In order to view qualification as having value, the individual needs to be aware of the fact that knowledge and skills can be acquired during all kinds of activity and that sometimes that they already have knowledge, skills and competencies that they have gained during their life. The individual must then be able to identify the benefits of having their learning recognised, for example for entry to vocational or higher education or improved job prospects. One implication of this process for policy makers is to give priority to promoting an understanding of the nature of lifelong and life wide learning and illustrating how the harnessing of this learning can contribute to education and employment outcomes.

In France, about 8% of education and training programmes lead to a qualification; which seems to show little interest, in the qualification component of education and training programmes as opposed to the learning component itself. Studying the French evolution from recognition of prior job-related learning (VAP, Validation des acquis professionnels) to recognition of any kind of prior learning (VAE, Validation des acquis de l’expérience), Chiousse and Werquin (2005) show, on the contrary, that the former was not welcome as much as the latter by the individuals since Validation des acquis professionnels very often required some additional learning programme to reach a qualification whereas Validation des acquis de l’expérience can lead to a qualification without any additional formal learning required. This is evidence that the qualification component seems to be attractive.

Currency and returns to qualification

Within the range of motivations to learn is the belief in what being qualified will bring, such as higher earnings, protection against unemployment, a better job, higher standing in the community and the non-pecuniary rewards such as higher personal status. There is also the possibility of a sense of self-fulfilment and well being that arises when a personal target is reached and this might lead to greater self-belief and capability. The extent to which any of these returns motivates a person depends on the circumstances of the individual (including their capacity to discover and understand the benefits of qualification) and the prevailing social, cultural and economic context in their locality. For example, a person who lives in a country where entry to the labour market is tightly regulated and who is at the transition point from school to work will be particularly interested in learning for getting a job and what that may lead to. Someone nearing the end of their working life in a good job will be motivated to learn more about a personal pastime and may only want to have their learning recognised for reasons of reaching a personal target or to improve their standing within a circle of like-minded enthusiasts.

The ‘currency’ of a qualification probably cannot mean the same as the ‘rate of return’ to a qualification. Clearly the latter influences the former: higher wages for qualified workers will raise the status of a required qualification. However the term currency is probably more commonly understood to have a broader origin within the social and cultural context of a country or community. For example a factor in raising currency is that achievement of the qualification is known to be limited in terms of the numbers of people who achieve it (CEDEFOP, 2003). The wider the ownership of a qualification the less value it has for each individual. Currency is high when recruiters demand a specific qualification and when communities believe that a qualification has the potential to improve a person’s status. In summary for maximum currency a qualification should:

- Have clearly communicated links to labour market rewards.
- Be clear about what learning is recognised.
- Be part of a progressive track where one qualification can lead to another.
- Be part of the process for regulating entry into occupations.
- Be constructed so that is has the potential to provide credits towards other qualifications.
- Be supported by socially accepted rules or norms.

The timescale over which benefits accrue from qualification is an important factor. Short-term gains such as labour market entry through initial qualification can lead to long-term gains in remuneration and job security. Evidence shows that initial qualification is likely to lead to more learning and this might
lead to higher qualification with consequential higher returns (QCA, 2004) and that full-time employment outcomes achieved by those who complete a qualification are significantly better than for those without post-school qualifications Ryan (2002). This confirms that high currency of initial qualification during upper secondary education; these qualifications are crucial in terms of future prospects both in the short-term (labour market entry) and in the long-term (prospects for further qualification).

Microeconomic evidence from Denmark for the period 1993-2001 confirms a significant positive relationship between the number of years spent in education and income. Male returns are found to be 6.5% per year of education, which is approximately 1% more than the equivalent female returns. Calculations of the internal economic rates of return to the individual and society of different types of education show that in general there is a positive return. The private rate of return is between 5% and 39%, while the social rate of return is between 3% and 17%.

In Switzerland, there is a clear wage premium to be earned when qualified: the higher the level, the higher the wage with a significant premium for tertiary qualification holders. Overall benefits increase with the level of qualification attained: they are objective (employability, wage, job status and long terms returns) and also subjective (personal satisfaction, willingness to undertake more learning activities). The owners of tertiary degrees from the newly created Hautes écoles spécialisées seem to do better than others from these multiple benefits. There is evidence that individuals’ qualification(s) impact on the condition of the school to work transition. In short, the higher the qualification the faster the transition into employment after leaving the initial education and training system (Buchmann and Sacchi, 1998).

From a regulation point of view, in France, since the seventies, collective agreements and wage grid resulting from collective bargaining among industry organisations and trade unions rely on qualifications achieved before joining the company. On the other hand qualification achieved after joining the company does not necessarily lead to a better wage or a career upgrade. In Belgium (Wallonia), this approach seems to have a longer history with a strong reference to qualification in the regulatory determination of wage in 1945.

United Kingdom evidence shows very considerable returns to qualifications when gained in initial education and training (i.e. to the age of around 25), but very limited returns in terms of wage premium, to qualifications gained by adults over that age. This lack of evident economic return spans all levels of qualification. The principal exception was for those adults who had gained no qualification at all during initial education. For them qualifications gained later in life were important in giving access to jobs and to higher earnings – in these cases ‘second chance’ qualifications seemed to attract some benefits usually associated with initial education.

Source: Country Background Reports.

249. There is substantial evidence to confirm the human capital\textsuperscript{22} argument that individuals are inclined to sacrifice current resources in order to invest for future labour market returns (OECD, 2001a).

Currency and job mobility

250. Modern economies reflect change in terms of the blend of types and size of employers and sectors and in terms of working practices within organisations. As a consequence levels of mobility of workers is now higher than it was and as new working practices are generated the need for new skills means more training is required for those in work than previously. There is evidence to show that there is increased demand for qualification than previously (Grubb, 2004), in the past the learning of a job was by means of formal and informal observation, trial and error and networking. This is now much more likely to take place in a formal learning environment and lead to official recognition, for example in Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom (van Ravens, 2002). People move voluntarily between jobs because they have become more highly qualified and want to capitalise on their learning by seeking higher returns.

\textsuperscript{22} Taken to mean: the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.
and more stability, they also move for new learning experiences. They might also leave jobs and re-enter
the labour market for personal reasons that are unrelated to the job market, for example, a change in career,
to raise children, a move to another region or country. Qualification is also a safety factor during such
transitions, for example a person returning to work after staying at home to look after children will be
carrying proof of competence in the form of qualification. It is reasonable to conclude that a system that
maintains qualifications with high currency will facilitate movement of people and support a developing
economy through capitalising on learning gained through many routes.

251. Traditionally the link between a person’s identity and the firm they work for has been a strong
one. In recent years there has been a weakening of this link and, certainly for skilled workers, identity is
associated more with their track record of working experience, sometimes in different firms. In other words
it is more individually determined according to a person’s own life design. A consequence of this process
is that reputation and working achievements have to be recorded externally to the firm and thus the link
between qualifications and occupational mobility becomes interesting. German evidence indicates that for
half of the people who changed occupation, their position had considerably improved - the higher the level
of qualification the more successful the change. The change in occupation had a particularly positive effect
if it was determined by individual choice, if job wishes could be fulfilled and if the change was backed up
by systematic preparation for the new occupation through further education and training (Hecker, 2000a).

Employability

252. There is increasing reference to the notion of employability (European Commission, 2004;
OECD, 2003); this refers to the readiness for work and competence to function within a work environment.
It is a dimension which is well established in some qualifications systems, notably and obviously those
including apprenticeship. Employability often includes generic skills such as communication skills,
numeracy, team working and new information and communication technologies competence but it can
equally be the learning of work-related technical skills. The need for employability is felt most strongly by
young people and the long-term unemployed; how can qualifications systems help these people gain
‘employability”? Clearly if this is possible the motivation to learn is enhanced. In many countries (for
example, Scotland) initial qualifications are being transformed to deliver these generic skills and should
develop higher employability if, as public pronouncements indicate, employers seek them and this is
communicated to those who need them. Japan stresses the difference between skills in specific types of
work and specialised vocational ability where the latter can be applied to a wide range of work.
Qualifications that include testimony to skills that are more broadly applicable could lead to wider
opportunities for employment and higher value for the qualification. In another example of the value of
breadth (and therefore employability) over three quarters of employed Greek seamen undergoing training
considered that the most important benefits of training were the acquisition of additional skills useful for
the company itself – thus providing some job stability - while an equally large proportion believed the
acquisition of skills useful for the wider labour market was more important – thus increasing employability
and job mobility.

253. Changing occupation is unproblematic if the knowledge and skills learned during training can
also be put to use outside the occupation for which a person has trained. In the case of qualifications gained
in the German dual system, it was found that, if the change in occupation was within the more narrow
occupational field in an economic sector, in almost all sectors, 42% of people who changed their
occupation were able to apply "a great deal" or "a fair amount" the skills and knowledge learned during
training in their new job (Hecker, 2000b). There is obviously value of generic knowledge and skills for
individuals and there may be incentives to learn in communicating the nature and potential value to people
who wish to develop their employability.
Increasing employability is also an objective of benefit systems for the unemployed in many countries. Typically, in order to qualify for extended unemployment benefit, individuals are encouraged to undertake vocational training that could lead to a qualification. This is the case in Australia, England (New Deal) and France (*Contrat d’adaptation ou de qualification*).

Several countries have given examples or statistics regarding the better employability of highly qualified people as opposed to lowly qualified ones. In Belgium (Wallonia), in 1999, hiring prospects were a lot better for individuals with highly technical upper secondary qualifications or with short-term tertiary ones. However, almost a third of employers did not state a clear qualification level for their intentions of hiring people. In Switzerland, the lower the qualification level, the higher the unemployment rate is. In 2002, the overall unemployment rate is 2.9%. For those with no more than compulsory schooling, it is 4.5%. For tertiary degree holders, it is 2.2%.

In France, the Ministry of Labour stresses the notion of quality when designing a qualification. Employability is a clear concern in this process and quality is viewed as a way of ensuring currency of qualifications in the labour market and possible progression in the education and training system. Notions such as visibility and portability are at the heart of the work carried out by the five commissions in charge of creating or amending a vocational qualification.

**Progression**

One of the benefits people seek when they learn for qualification is that it puts them on the starting grid for another qualification that will itself yield benefits. Indeed this higher qualification may itself be a personal goal and represent motivation beyond pecuniary or job-related returns. This stepwise approach to qualifications is becoming more explicit in qualifications systems. We see this in the development of national qualifications frameworks and other attempts to make qualifications systems transparent. In some cases the progressive nature of qualifications is a fundamental architectural element in new systems. In some countries qualifications are named in a sequence that gives the idea that there is a route already prepared.

In Denmark the latest amendments to Reform 2000 and the adult education and training reforms will increase options for obtaining a qualification recognised in the labour market. Qualifications are expressed as one level within a broader level based qualification. An example is IT support, which is a recognised qualification in the labour market. At the same time it is also a step towards the qualification Datafagtekniker (Data technician). This offers the individual increased options for re-entering into the educational system at a later stage as an adult either in adult vocational training (CVT) or in the further education system for adults to obtain a higher level of qualification.

In Belgium (Wallonia), Bruxelles-Formation, the Centre for Adult Vocational Training, delivers education and training programmes to unemployed people, among others. The programmes will promote inductive actions so that unemployed people are more incentivised to undertake further learning activities. They also stress employability and are free of charge, which is a way of permitting progression. More broadly, there is clear evidence in Belgium (Wallonia) that some qualifications are more often leading to additional qualification(s): obtaining an upper secondary qualification (CESS, certificat d’enseignement secondaire supérieur) in a vocational section (7th year) leads more often to short tertiary tracks.

In Switzerland, some recent developments have led to better vertical bridging and more frequent opportunities for progression within the education system for individuals engaged in vocational tracks. For example the creation of the vocational *matura (maturité professionnelle)* at the end of upper secondary education and the creation of the Universities of applied sciences.

Similarly in France the creation of the Vocational Baccalaureate (Baccalauréat professionnel) in the mid eighties, is probably the major reform carried out over the last 30 years in order to facilitate upward progression of individuals engaged in vocational tracks. The owners of a vocational baccalaureate, like those of the general baccalaureate have direct access to tertiary education.
Qualifications frameworks are a new international phenomenon (Young, 2003). The goals of national qualifications frameworks are challenging and wide ranging and focus on making progression (vertical and horizontal) clear, increasing flexibility in future qualification routes, facilitating credit transfer, extending recognition of some qualifications, clarifying linkages between qualifications, eliminating as far as possible barriers to access and providing some kind of quality assurance. The OECD Thematic Group on this subject explored this phenomenon in detail and a summary of its report is included as Appendix A. The report provides full details of how qualifications frameworks aim to facilitate progression from one qualification to another. New proposals within the Danish and English systems offer the individual student lifelong multiple horizontal and vertical pathways at all qualification levels through credit transfer mechanisms and through recognition of prior learning, regardless of context. In each of these countries an ambitious and integrated national framework for clarification and assessment of competences has been prepared and is being considered for implementation. The blueprint for the new national framework of qualifications in Ireland includes specific policies and strategies to improve access, transfer and progression for learners, and the need to facilitate progression was a key design feature in the development of the framework itself.

Whilst clear progression tracks are likely to motivate learners to seek qualification, people’s preferences change over time; in life opportunities develop and new demands emerge. A person might be motivated to set out on a long programme leading to qualification but, for a variety of reasons, the programme may become a disincentive to learning as time passes. Thus there is the likelihood that flexibility within qualifications such as stepping off points or opportunities to specialise can maintain motivation. This flexibility may be particularly important to people at the early stages of building a career since opportunities and constraints are likely to be more common as they grow into a work environment. Older people also need to sense that from within a stable personal and work situation with well-known demands there is opportunity to learn for a qualification that is sufficiently flexible to be accommodated within current routines. This situation has been recognised in Germany (as well as in other European countries following the Bologna-Process) where university provision is geared primarily to young people below the age of 30. Dual study courses designed for working adults, which have shorter learning programmes and recognise vocational learning achievements, are not common. However the introduction of the new Bachelor's and Master's degrees provides an additional incentive to take up a course of study: These two-step degree courses allow qualification requirements to be met more flexibly, while offering more vocational orientation and better opportunities in the international labour market. The benefits of these courses are shorter periods of study and more flexible organisation of time and course content. This facilitates new interdisciplinary links and the pursuit of studies while in employment.

Learning programmes and assessment

The outcome in the form of a qualification is not the only factor that can determine motivation to learn, the internal structure of learning programmes and assessment practices is also important. Students with different backgrounds have different forms of ‘cultural capital’, which are reflected to greater and lesser extents in qualifications. The constructs of knowledge used in qualifications and rewarded in assessment systems, favour certain forms of learning, such as abstract conceptualisation, compared to concrete experience or active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, they favour certain forms of intelligence, notably active experimentation and logical-mathematical intelligence compared with bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1993).

Learners take a positive view of modular learning programmes; whilst they may not always meet learning needs the programmes do match learning habits (for example, learners were given some scope for self-organisation of the learning process). Modularised curricula enable the education provider to respond quickly to changes in job requirements due to new technologies or caused by the restructuring of work organisation in companies (Steinhauser, 2002). The fact that people have preferred learning styles is well
documented (Kolb, 1984) and it is clear that if a programme is not structured according to their preferred learning style people will fear underachievement. The dimensions of choice are numerous and include what is to be learned, how it is to be learned, with whom it is to be learned, where it is to be learned, the time frame for learning including the pace and sequence of learning episodes. Each of these dimensions can be subdivided further and a landscape of enormous variation can develop. However this is the learner view and learning providers must develop programmes that are manageable. Thus the match between learner preferences and institutional offering becomes an influence on the motivation to learn.

260. A particularly powerful influence on the motivation to learn for a qualification is the method of evaluation or assessment of learning that is employed. There is sometimes a fear of failure and frustration arising from a sense of knowing and being able to do things that cannot be recognised through some assessment regimes. In Germany one of the factors likely to discourage pupils from going on to the upper secondary level with the aim of achieving the Abitur is the performance-based entrance requirements. In Greece Second Chance Schools aim to re engage learners and a combination of a personal portfolio with systematic monitoring of student performance to identify gaps in learning at an individual level. This systematic monitoring involves a written assessment that is suspected of being a serious deterrent to participation in second chance schooling. Research evidence supports this suspicion; active involvement of tutors and learners in feedback processes is known to improve retention and raise achievement (Black and William, 1999; Torrance and Coultas, 2004). Learners across all sectors prefer coursework assessment and practical competence oriented assessment to end of course written tests. But coursework and practical assessments are not without problems: both can lead to bureaucratic processes for students and tutors when the outcome of assessment is used for third parties for quality assurance and accountability processes.

261. One of the issues for assessment models is the extent to which they can recognise the breadth of desirable characteristics developed in individuals, for example in Japan the ability of the individual worker can be seen as consisting of the following three elements: latent specific knowledge and skills that are necessary for performing work; cooperativeness, positiveness, and other patterns of approach and behaviour inherent in each individual when performing work; and latent personal attributes such as motivation, personality, temperament, beliefs and values. This range of qualities is extremely difficult to assess effectively and efficiently. One of the tools the Japanese are exploring is an initial diagnostic stage of self-assessment and simulations for complex skills that are difficult to assess in other ways.

262. At the post school level the major challenge has been to develop qualifications that meet the needs of the full range of types of learners. Evidence of increased individual demand for vocational education and training in Australia suggests that the flexible nature of vocational education and training qualifications and their assessments has increased demand from individuals and employers for vocational training. Vocational education and training qualifications are now recognised nationally and clearer about outcomes than previously. In some countries the goal of flexibility has resulted in the central control of the system being eased at the cost of coherence. There is a balance to be struck between the tailoring of provision to a range of learners and maintaining a system that looks and works in a coherent fashion.

In Germany the state has traditionally organised in some detail the acquisition of qualifications in schools and higher education institutions. There is a correlation between, on the one hand, age and level of qualification and training, and, on the other hand, the degree of independence and individual responsibility granted to learners to determine what, how and where they learn. Opportunities are now available for various groups of learners to exercise more self-determination and personal responsibility. Grammar school students are allowed an element of choice with regard to their courses and examination subjects in relation to their age and level of education. Learners at full-time vocational schools can choose between different learning paths, ranging from prevocational training, basic training and the achievement of a vocational qualification, to the achievement of a double qualification. In recent years, the structuring of training under the dual system in compulsory and optional units has also increased the influence of the individual in deciding what he or she would like to learn. However, the question of which optional units are actually available also depends on the individual training company. On the whole, these measures offer greater flexibility and
are thus appropriate for encouraging learners to assume more personal responsibility and self-determination in the process of life-long learning. Nevertheless, the aim remains the achievement of full qualification as proof of the individual's ability to study and/or take up skilled employment.

The United Kingdom National Vocational Qualification system is entirely constituted of modules, and this is true also of the Open College Network system of validated courses and the Scottish Higher Still structure. There are however different experiences. While in Scotland it is common for people to undertake an aggregation of modules without undertaking the particular combinations laid down in grouped awards, in England it would seem that fewer than 20 per cent of those taking National Vocational Qualifications settle for less than a full qualification – and often this is because they have had to cut short their studies for involuntary reasons.

263. Portability of qualifications is a key issue for motivating users and it is highlighted in the OECD work on improving the financing of lifelong learning (OECD, 2001a) and in particular the ways the funding of qualifications can be optimised to raise benefits and reduce costs. Cross sectoral recognition of qualification is seen as crucial in this optimisation process and in order to achieve portability it is suggested the knowledge skills and competencies that are embodied in qualification as learning outcomes need to be explicit and clear to recruiters and those that fund qualification achievement. In some countries (for example, Denmark) systems of recording credits or partial qualification is seen as a positive step towards cross-sectoral recognition of achievement in qualification.

France has had different experiences of improving portability of qualifications. On the one hand, qualifications delivered by the industries have limited currency (CQP, Certificat de qualification professionnelle). On the other hand, some implementations of the new law on the recognition of prior learning (VAE) are a vivid example of where inter-institutions co-operation can lead. In the latter case, wage earners can have access to qualification(s) that is portable throughout three different institutions: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the Commerce and Distribution Industry. The experience was piloted in two regions in 2002. The main aim of this experience was to develop a tool for bridging (passerelle) qualifications. New information and communication technologies have been intensively used and a fourth partner, the Ministry of Agriculture, was involved for subsequent experiment in 2003. The whole experiment seems to be a success but the main conclusion is that without a sound analysis of what each individual can do, it is not possible to create bridges between qualifications.

264. Some learning is gained through experience and non-formal means. It is interesting to note what motivations people have for wanting this learning to be formally recognised. Although there is much evidence arising from surveys of learners about reasons for learning, it is more difficult to find evidence related to the desire for qualification. This is the subject of a new OECD research activity.

265. The fact that countries are taking steps to ease the influence of formal assessment may signal that demand for qualification, as opposed to learning, is less important for some people. In Australia practitioners have been reluctant to introduce award based qualifications for cost reasons and because the formal assessment requirements might act as a deterrent to learners who lack confidence and have had poor experiences of formal learning. Nevertheless, as the sector has grown some States have introduced new qualifications that are designed to provide re-entry routes into education pathways or progression routes. One recent example is the Certificate of Tertiary Education introduced in Victoria in 1999. Its pilot phase indicated a high level of articulation into subsequent levels of education and training.

In Ireland, Kelly (1994) surveyed the provision and accreditation needs of adult learners in non-formal, community-based situations. She found that for some adults who had left formal schooling without any qualifications, any kind of certification, however informal, has high personal value. Other people in the community may also value it, so that the learner is consulted in decision-making in the community and they experience support and gain affirmation from other learners and from tutors. Examining the factors that influence non-formal learners to seek accreditation, it finds that the majority (47%) did so for reasons of quality/credibility, as against progression opportunities (21%) and job seeking (32%). This suggests that for many non-formal learners accreditation is important primarily in establishing the quality and credibility of the skills and competencies they have developed.
In summary whilst evidence shows that assessment for qualification, especially more formal means, might be a deterrent to learning. However for the more confident learners, assessment can have positive effects in terms of building up and sustaining self-esteem and self-confidence, spurring participants on to further learning (Schuller et al., 2002).

**Shortening school to work transition**

For people leaving schooling and entering work there is a well-documented period (Leney, 2002; OECD, 2000b) when motivation is volatile. Self doubt, poor knowledge of options and personal and social factors make decision making for the longer term difficult and commitment unreliable. At the same time, for some people the relevance of some learning programmes are at odds with immediate personal needs. Thus a period of instability develops when people need learning to be satisfying in both pecuniary and non-pecuniary ways. Effective support and provision of well-communicated options are likely to shorten this period of instability and provide the confidence for some individuals to commit to learning, possibly for qualification.

In Switzerland, there is evidence that individuals’ qualification(s) impact on the school to work transition. In short, the higher the qualification the faster the transition into employment after leaving the initial education and training system (Buchmann and Sacchi, 1998). In addition, the job obtained (status, wage) is more influenced by the type of qualification(s) hold rather than by the number of years of schooling.

In France, surveys carried out on the school to work transition by the Centre d’études et de recherche sur les qualifications, Céreq, signal when an individual failed to obtain a qualification, even if s/he studied all the way until the final examination have lower employability. Transition from school to work, in particular, is a lot easier for those who have a qualification. It is even the case that the gap, in terms of labour market performance, between the holders of qualification(s) as opposed to the others, is widening.

**Personal fulfilment and the wider perspective**

The immediacy of personal development, financial rewards and high self esteem in motivating people to learn for qualification is well established; however there may be much wider social goals that encourage individuals to learn. For example people may see learning for qualifications offering themselves and others a sense of inclusion and engagement in the development of society, leading to healthier lifestyles, lower propensity to commit crimes, higher levels of trust, richer social networks, and greater levels of participation in volunteer organisations and democratic institutions. In a longitudinal study of the social benefits of higher education Bynner and Egerton (2001) showed that graduates (as opposed to people with ISCED level 3 qualifications) were more likely to be:

- In managerial jobs.
- Protected from unemployment.
- Involved in further learning.
- Assessing themselves as healthy in body and mind.
- Safe from accidents.
- With children with no educational problems.
- More likely to be involved in civic activities.
- More likely to be egalitarian and have faith in the political process.

This represents a clear series of wider benefits, what is still to be confirmed is the precise way higher education qualifications lead to these benefits.

Research with older learners (aged 50-71) identifies a wide range of motivations to learn which bear only two references to qualifications (Dench and Regan, 2000). As almost all the people surveyed accepted that ‘you need qualifications to get anywhere these days’ it is clear that qualifications have a role
as achieving a personal goal and, for a minority, some kind of instrumental value, for example getting a new job, adapting to a new job role.

**Constraints to learning**

270. Having identified some of the evidence for positively influencing the propensity to learn for qualifications it is important to take a view of the constraints on learning that could be remediated through the qualifications system. These constraints include psychological and attitudinal positions about learning, the flow of information and advice and its complexity, lack of time, costs and lack of physical support facilities such as transport or a crèche. Mechanisms need to deal with these constraints if lifelong learning is to be enhanced. A useful and comprehensive review of barriers to learning (although not specifically learning for qualification) is presented by de Rick et al. (2003) in their work on ‘learning climates’.

**Early experiences of learning**

271. There is extremely strong evidence that if a person has not successfully engaged with learning for qualifications soon after leaving compulsory education it is likely that this pattern will continue. It seems that people form negative views of formal learning through their initial experiences of school and these are resistant to change. It is difficult to resolve from the evidence whether these negative attitudes are held towards institutionalised formal learning or to assessment of learning or to both.

In Australia recent analysis of factors influencing participation in further education and training, using data from household surveys of education and training, reported that irrespective of the type of study or training (formal education, formal training, any education or training) there was a higher probability of participation for those with higher levels of prior educational attainment. Participation in study leading to a qualification was 27 per cent for those whose highest educational attainment was upper secondary education compared to 60 per cent for those who held a postgraduate qualification.

272. Research using appropriate measures to examine the independent effects of qualifications suggests that the risk of unemployment is substantially lower for those who obtain post-school education and training qualifications. Ryan (2002) in a study of the effects for individuals of different qualifications found that full-time employment outcomes achieved by those who complete a qualification are significantly better than for those without post-school qualifications. All over the world countries have been attempting to break down these constraints on early achievement. Some of the more promising approaches are described in the next section.

**Psychological barriers**

273. Some individuals, particularly those with low self-esteem, may not recognise the potential value of their knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning. People with low formal educational attainment are sometimes fearful of re-entering a system that they remember as a negative and painful experience for them (Bryce, 2004). The individual may feel that the assessment exercise is likely to focus on a lack of competencies; fear of further failure is a powerful disincentive.

A survey undertaken by Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2000) under its National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning found that about 22 per cent of Australians appear to face strong attitudinal barriers to learning. They have usually not undertaken any study or training for some time and have often achieved the level of learning they need for their current job or see no role for any further learning. Some in this group do not see education and training as relevant to themselves. Others do not see a need for study or learning. Most lack confidence in their own learning abilities and therefore do not participate. Among the non-participants, many are early school leavers and formed negative views of formal study and learning through their initial experiences of school or further study.
Cost

274. After such powerful attitudinal and psychological constraints have been taken into account it is likely that, for some people, costs also limit participation in learning for qualification – these costs go beyond the fees needed to pay for courses and assessment and include the time that needs to be set aside and the impact that has on lifestyle. There are also opportunity costs associated with time demands since it is possible that learning will take the place of earning in the short term.

In Sweden education throughout the national school system, from pre-school to university, is free of charge for the individual. In conjunction with a well-developed study support system this means that many people have reduced financial constraints to study. The study support system is the most common way of financing adult studies. It consists of two parts, a grant and a loan, and together they cover living expenses during full time studies. Study support is a form of general support in the terms that everyone receives the same amount for the same study time and study time, regardless of age, family affairs or place of residence. Additionally all employees in Sweden have had the legal right to leave of absence to study so long as they have been employed for six months with one employer. Employees themselves determine what kind of education they wish to participate in. The employer has the right to postpone giving leave of absence for a maximum of six months. Employees have the right to return to work when they wish.

275. Co-financing strategies include those that reduce the risk to individuals of investing in learning by sharing it with others. One example is the model of tertiary tuition loans where repayment is income dependent first introduced in Australia in 1989 as the higher education contribution scheme. Under this scheme students are entitled to take a loan to cover tuition fees. Students are liable for repayment in the form of 3 percent tax on income, once their income reaches a threshold – (approx EUR 14,000) in 2002/3. Thus, while expected average returns for a tertiary qualification may be substantial, under the scheme the government assumes the risk for those individuals whose post-graduate earnings are exceptionally low. In 2002 the government extended the logic of income-contingent repayment loans to lifelong learners by establishing the Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme.

276. Subsidy to individuals is one way to reduce cost but there are other possibilities based on more flexible provision leading to shorter periods of study as well as the use of approaches such as assessment of prior learning and more flexible modes of delivery of learning (for example, modularisation) that are seen as a means to greater efficiency. These possibilities merit further consideration as a way to improve the benefit to cost ratio and thus help resolve financing issues.

277. It is difficult to estimate the proportion of people who are put off learning by cost. A survey in Germany revealed that of all those eligible for higher education, 8% gave cost as the reason for not choosing higher education courses.

278. Students who accept financial responsibility and continue with their studies and endure any financial hardship may be more motivated to look for high quality in their learning provision. In New Zealand, students pay a significant amount of their course costs (range from 0% to 70%, average about 30%), and consequently some express strong concerns about the quality of the education they receive.

288. The cost of recognising learning with a formal qualification may not always lead to added value for all types of learning; the cost involved in accreditation of learning that is not greatly valued in external markets may deter potential learners due to added costs and perceived bureaucracy, without yielding much benefit in terms of external recognition. Decisions about whether and how to accredit learning need to pay regard to the balance to be struck in terms of the benefits of practical external recognition as against the disbenefits in terms of additional costs and constraints on learning. It is likely that different degrees of rigour in accreditation will be appropriate to different types of learning, and to different groups of learners.
Whilst significant amounts of vocational learning takes place through paid work, it is increasingly common for learners to be workers and for these two activities to be entirely separate. Full time learners are often part time workers, the latter being done to support life as a student.

**Information flow**

It is unlikely that detailed information about long-term benefits arising from qualification is communicated to potential learners, much more likely is communication of a rather general message of the value or currency associated with qualification. The latter is important but more people might be inclined to study for qualification if the rates of return were communicated better. However there is a view that details of actual returns to qualification is a second order problem when information about qualification needs for specific occupations is not communicated well to those who might be interested in working in occupations where recruitment is difficult. The problems here that need to be solved are to do with the availability of accurate information about qualification needs, the returns to qualification and its accurate communication and the availability of advisory services to help people interact with it (OECD, 2003). Sometimes the careers advisory services have training requirements themselves that hinder effective work (OECD, 2004). In Japan the provision of vocational information and careers guidance is an important part of the development of a labour market that is independent of large corporations; interestingly the dimensions (information and counselling) are considered separate systems to be developed.

In a review of information advice and guidance services in Europe (European Commission, 2004) it was concluded that the role, quality and co-ordination of information and guidance services should be strengthened so that they support learning at all ages and in a range of settings to empower citizens to manage their learning and work, particularly making it easier for them to access and progress through diverse learning opportunities and career pathways. The report also stated that due account should be taken of individual requirements and needs of the different target groups.

In Belgium, Bruxelles-Formation, the Centre for Adult Vocational Training, pays a lot of attention to information and guidance. It has many purposes but two are of particular importance: 1) interfacing between education and employment worlds; and 2) providing information and guidance to learners and potential learners. Several countries, have mentioned the particular situation of vocational training, very kept in low esteem except for high level technical training. In Belgium there are many attempts to raise the profile of vocational qualifications and the corresponding programmes. One of them has been to communicate more often and more positively and this is certainly a way forward even if it is believed that a lot of work remains to be done before reaching parity of esteem.

**Flexibility matters**

Already highlighted above is the desire amongst individuals for flexible delivery of learning. A study of how flexibility in vocational education and training is conceptualised across 31 European countries revealed that flexibility is a ‘fluffy’ concept with no consensus on meaning (Leney et al., 2004). Modularisation is reported as the most common policy to enhance flexibility – nearly all European countries are developing some kind of modularised curricula. A few countries are increasing flexibility by establishing national qualifications frameworks and credit transfer systems (including the award of partial qualifications) that together can contribute to better horizontal and vertical progression routes through vocational education and training systems. The realisation of an individualised pathway through these systems is less common.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning (see the summary of the thematic group’s report at Appendix A) is an issue that is on the policy agenda of nearly all countries. The process of having learning recognised has the potential to incentivise individuals to learn for qualification by signalling respect for a person’s learning (and therefore identity), and offering the possibility of exemption from some learning requirements and so reducing cost implications for learning.
In April 2004, the Flemish Government approved a Decree concerning formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning related to work experience. This Decree focuses on validating meaningful, profession-related competencies obtained in daily experience inside and/or outside the workplace. Individuals can step into a recognition procedure and can obtain a 'certificate for work experience' ('Title for Vocational Competence'). The Decree grants formal recognition to people who can prove they have the skills and knowledge needed for a particular profession.

294. Following the European developments on the structure of Bachelor and Masters Degrees for Higher Education, the Flemish Government installed the Decree on Flexible Learning (April 2004). This means that Higher Education institutions can grant exemptions within certain study programme units and can even grant a degree if the outcome of assessment concludes that the competencies are indeed held by the applicant.

295. In most countries there are very few small qualifications available, or where these exist they seldom have any significant national currency. In a lifelong learning context, more small awards will be needed to provide recognition for the variety of learning achievements likely to be involved. Obviously, it is logical and necessary that it be possible to amalgamate small qualifications into bigger qualifications – at which point we see the value of accumulation of credit. Awareness of the potential of small qualifications for encouraging learners is possibly the underlying need that has resulted in so many countries expressing interest in credit systems.

296. Credit transfer processes have the potential to offer flexibility in qualifications systems. These processes allow individuals to have learning recognised when programmes are only partially completed and enable them to gain exception from future learning by being able to 'cash in' their credits on enrolment for new programmes. There is limited experience of working national credit systems across the world, possibly limited to New Zealand, Scotland and Sweden with firm plans in place in other parts of the United Kingdom. However the European Commission has a substantial programme underway to provide the infrastructure for credit transfer (Maastricht Communiqué) for vocational education and training that will synchronise with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) that operates in higher education institutions in Europe.

297. Whilst qualifications frameworks, recognition systems for non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer systems are becoming solid concepts they need to have more widespread practical application if lack of flexibility is to remain a barrier to learning for qualification.

**Motivating individuals to learn – some issues**

298. The focus on lifelong learning aims to deliver more and higher level of skills for economies and a personal and social advantage for individuals and communities. Underlying the literature on lifelong learning is that economic advantage allows other benefits to be afforded. An issue that arises from this position is that there may be a mismatch in the kinds of ways qualifications systems may be developed for economic purposes and the way they might be developed for the advantage of individuals although clearly any development to the economy is likely to be of advantage to the population of a country. The issue centres on the diversity of needs and interests of individuals and the much more limited and focussed needs of a countries economy. For example investing in the development of qualified information technology specialists might not serve the best interests of individuals who need to raise their levels of basic literacy.

299. Using economic argument to increase learning often involves devolving responsibility for learning to the individual since they will be the beneficiary of learning. One of the approaches used is to move away from state designed and funded provision and to place responsibility on individuals to pay for their professional development. The effectiveness of this policy and the equitable nature of the policy depend on the availability of the required provision so that the individual can exercise the responsibility...
they have (Billett, 2001). Thus the funding probably needs to be shifted to supporting individuals when sufficient learning opportunities are available.

Inequality is resilient

300. Creating equality of opportunity does not guarantee equity of taking advantage of opportunity. For individuals there are consistent findings within and between countries that the distribution of learning - in the form of qualifications - is strongly related to measures of social inclusion (Bynner and Parsons, 2001). There are deeply embedded trends in the ways social groups vary in their use of provision. The key social groups identified as being resistant to attempts to involve individuals in learning for qualification are adult learners or mature students; people with disabilities; learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, more particularly learners living in disadvantaged communities or in remote districts, members of minority ethnic groups including travellers and refugees. There are many factors that combine to bring about under-participation by these groups, including financial, provision supply and community values. It is difficult to identify from these the part played by the qualifications system in promoting or inhibiting access. In some countries policy has established equal opportunity for men and women, however qualification outcomes remain better for men and the most acute at lower levels although there are signs that this pattern is reversing (Murray and Steedman, 1999).

In Switzerland, many disparities between genders still exist. Nevertheless, it seems that the gap in terms of achievement and progression in the qualifications system is closing. Except maybe for the very high levels, which still are highly dominated by men: 45% of university qualifications go to women and the proportion is even lower for doctorates (34%). Women are largely outnumbered in terms of vocational qualifications and almost absent in Hautes écoles spécialisées, the recently created highly performing university vocational system.

301. Higher aggregate individual participation does not necessarily signal equal access amongst these disadvantaged groups.

In Australia, some defined equity groups have very low access. For example in 2001, only 1.2% of domestic students were from an Indigenous background, although Indigenous people constitute around 2.7% of the 15-64 year old population. Students from the lowest socio-economic status quartile of residential locations contribute only about 15% of total enrolments - a proportion unchanged over the past decade (though absolute numbers have risen over this period in line with the overall increase in student numbers). Regional differences in participation are also marked; these often intersect with Indigenous status and/or low socio-economic background.

Monitoring necessary

302. There are many national and international surveys of skills needs and learning provision. Responding to the needs of individuals by making qualifications fit for purpose requires knowledge of the needs, ambitions and constraints felt by individuals. Strategic actions can only be taken if information that is sensitive to changes in personal dispositions towards learning for qualification at low levels in the system. Thus an issue arises about the status, sensitivity, style and capacity of monitoring and evaluation exercises used in countries. An effective monitoring system will signal where a shift of policy and resources might be advantageous.

Belgium (Wallonia) and France have in common the Job Directory (ROME, Répertoire opérationnel des métiers) that lists and describes, with permanent update, all the existing jobs. This monitoring is seen as a possible way to motivate employers, which can be incentivised to fund qualifications and to use them.
Governance of qualifications systems

303. In many country reports the qualifications system is described as a top-down, centrally controlled provision that varies considerably in the way that social partners interact with it. One issue that arises is to what extent regionalisation and more involvement of key stakeholders would increase learning for qualification. In many countries the control of the qualifications system is being adjusted to meet policy objectives. In Switzerland, a new Law on Professional Education has been prepared and adopted. Its aims include changing access to qualifications and progressions for individuals, and changing accreditation and awarding processes, in order to enhance flexibility for future developments and, thereby, to make it possible to meet the demand for modern skills. In Ireland new (1999) legislation is the basis for a major reform of the qualifications system, including new centralised structures for the design and maintenance of the system and a streamlining of the range of bodies empowered to award qualifications.

304. There is evidence of increased use of qualifications frameworks as a policy tool. As the report from Thematic Group 1 (Appendix A) makes clear there are many perceived benefits to government of producing a central declaration of qualifications types and linkages between them in the form of a framework. These advantages often include increased transparency and flexibility, higher participation rates and increased mobility of students. However Young (2003) also identifies qualifications frameworks as instruments of accountability for educational institutions and a basis for international comparisons of national systems. In some countries the national qualifications framework is a tool for regulation and quality assurance, where the status of admission to the framework is a prize to be achieved for qualification providers. By using the frameworks in this way they may be acting to reinforce central control over provision and restrict the expansion of individualisation and regionalisation. Thematic group 3 (Appendix A) also identify the tendency for governments to retain tight control over the development of qualifications framework whilst acknowledging the gains to be made by involving a wide range of stakeholders.

Over qualification

305. There is a growing concern in research and policy as to whether and to what extent workers are overqualified with regard to their jobs and whether or not a “skills gap” exists between skill profiles and job requirements (Tessaring, 1999). Reports from several European countries indicate a considerable share of workers who cannot fully utilise their skills at work and thus are regarded as overeducated or overqualified. These findings question the pressure applied by some qualifications systems to increase learning for qualification and instead for them to focus more on recognising and using knowledge and skills that already exist in individuals. Of course young people who have acquired high and broad skills may have been better trained than is necessary to perform a first job and they may feel themselves overqualified during their first working years but the training they have received should have prepared them better for coping with future and unpredictable job demands and for occupational mobility.

There seems to be evidence of increased over qualification in Switzerland. When comparing a cohort of young people entered in the labour market in the early eighties and another one that did so ten years before, it seems that the latter received less benefits than the former, when qualification is kept equal. The explanation could come from a slow depreciation of qualifications with the overall improvement of the levels of qualification attained.

5.3. Encouraging employers to use and support learning

306. The idea of qualification is extremely important to employers. It is a means for employers to signal what they seek in terms of skills supply and it is a means to filter the supply of skills itself so that they get what they want during recruitment. The latter is possible if qualifications provide reliable signals as to the likely productivity of the qualified worker (Spence, 1973). Both these process have been
described in the direction employment/labour market -> qualifications system -> learners. However it also possible that the qualifications system allows people to develop the skills that employers come to value.

307. It is important to recognise that even in highly regulated labour markets there a few hard rules to describe the interaction between qualification and the needs of employers (CEDEFOP, 2003). The idea that people learn relevant knowledge and skills over a certain period of time and that this ‘qualification’ then prepares them for entry to a job is a social construction in the form of a standard, that helps the learner, communities, employers and learning providers make sense of the fuzzy relationship between qualification and the labour market. The expectations of all the partners of the ‘standard’ represented by qualification must be met most of the time otherwise this system would collapse. Evidence in this activity suggests that recently the trend has been to further strengthen the notion of qualification standards in the minds of all partners – learners, communities, employers, providers and governments.

In Spain after the passing of the Act 5/2002, the management of continuing training subsystem has been modified in order to adapt training to the qualifications framework (diplomas or certificates) and establishing a new funding model whose object is to simplify and speed up the administration procedures making easier the involvement of small and medium employers: the amount of co-funding depends of the size of the employers, with a maximum bonus to small employers.

308. The needs of employers, even those based on an aggregate of all employers, are not the same as those of the economy. The needs of employers are likely to be dominated by immediate skills needs generated by modernising work practices due to technological development and changing trading conditions. Many of these needs will be short term in nature as the driving forces behind them have themselves been generated in the short term. The needs of the economy will be influenced by longer-term goals of maintaining an infrastructure generating a foundation of skills supply and satisfying broad national social and economic policy and well as responding to changes in trading conditions. Part of the infrastructure of the economy is the network of learning providers that require steering during periods of growth and contraction and therefore requires a longer-term view of priorities. Since the competencies requirements in the labour market seem to evolve very quickly, it has become difficult to anticipate the future needs of the labour market, even in the short run. This theme is especially difficult when considering that the adaptation of the qualifications system, since updating the national qualification registers describing all the qualifications and, sometimes, the qualifications framework, is also time consuming. The situation is therefore complicated because three different processes cohabit in the labour market: the training process, the qualifying process and the production process, the latter defined as the time an individual becomes ready to be a worker.

309. In many countries the supply of skills (represented by a combination of the number of people entering the labour market and their level of qualification) is set to become an issue because a demographic downturn is expected in the next generation and the level of completion of upper secondary education seems to be reaching a plateau (CEDEFOP, 2003). This will mean that in countries where this becomes the case employers will be seeking to recruit from a shrinking pool of qualified people. A consideration of role of employers in enhancing lifelong learning is therefore likely to be particularly and timely.

310. In the large scale study of adult learning (OECD, 2003) the role of the employer as a provider of professional upgrading was highlighted and whilst this survey did not focus specifically on learning for qualification it did highlight the extent of unmet demand for learning amongst workers and, taken with other more general evidence of the rise in the need for qualification as described above, this could indicate unmet demand for qualification.
Inducements to use and support qualifications systems

Involvement in qualification development

311. One of the pressures that could encourage employers to make more use of qualification and provide more resources for learning for qualification is direct involvement of employers in qualification development. There is a full report of the rationale and the issues involved in stakeholder involvement in the qualification development process in the report of Thematic Group 3 (Appendix A), here some further issues are raised that relate particularly to steps to involve employers more fully.

312. Employers already play key roles in qualification development and management, these range from being the lead partner in initiation of new qualification to making serious interventions around the issue of reliability or validity of awarding processes. Often central agencies appoint leaders from employers (including employee representatives) to committees that govern the qualifications system or some its features. There are many examples:

In Belgium (Wallonia), a qualification committee produces qualification profiles to help employers define the way adequate competencies can be acquired through qualification.

In Germany, the social partners and the federal government work together closely in the development and adaptation of qualifications offered in the dual system of vocational training. Representatives of employers, unions, the Federal Government and the Länder work together within the principal committee of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB). Qualifications are developed on the basis of a procedure approved by all the parties. Both the interests of the sector-based associations and the umbrella organisations of industry are coordinated, and the basic syllabuses for the part-time vocational schools are aligned in terms of schedules and programmes with the training regulations for in-company training.

In Denmark there is a tripartite cooperation between government, employers and employees - these social partners decide on the aims, content, duration, and final status of the individual programmes. Within the framework of this distribution of tasks and authority, which is laid down by law, the development and innovation of programmes take place in a tripartite consensus. This co-operation shall ensure that the education and training effort appears unified to individuals, colleges, employers, and administrative authorities. It is also intended to ensure coherence between education and employment possibilities, accommodating both education and training policy, qualification requirements of the labour market, and individual skills and needs, thus ensuring programme relevance and quality.

Until 1992 the social partners did not play any role in the development of vocational training in Greece. The State was the most important agency for planning and implementing vocational training and education measures. In 1998 they became involved in the administrative boards of organisations involved in training and education.

In Ireland the social partners are key stakeholders in the process of developing a national framework of qualifications and their involvement carries legal status. Both the employers' and trade unions' national organisations make nominations to the memberships of the Qualifications Authority and each of the Awards Councils. Employers and unions are also involved in a structural way in some aspects of the qualifications system, particularly in the development and monitoring of Apprenticeships. Many employers are involved at programme level in local partnerships with providers of education or training.

In Korea the roles of industry, including the labour unions as representatives of workers, in the qualifications system are minimal. Demands are growing for more active participation in the establishment of new qualifications, the elimination of old, existing qualifications, and testing and exam preparation standards. Since economic development has been the outcome of a rapid process of government-led industrialisation the function of each industry association has been limited, as human resource development was initiated by the government.
In New Zealand employers are key participants in Industry Training Organisations (ITO), helping to build industry ownership of training and training infrastructure. New legislation requires these bodies to develop arrangements for the collective representation of employees in the governance of the Industry Training Organisations.

In Australia, the vocational education and training system has undergone a decade of continuous reform that has featured industry leadership. The system now consists of mainly industry developed and validated qualifications, which provide nationally recognised competencies.

In Slovenia ties between national qualifications and the employment system have been strengthened by participation of representatives of employers and employees in all phases of the development of qualifications which are expected to guarantee that they are relevant for the labour market and no additional recognition procedures by social partners are needed.

In France vocational training competence is shared among four partners: state, employee representation, occupational sectors and employers. Qualifications are defined by Commission professionnelles consultatives; employers are represented in these Committees, together with the other social partners. Employers are also involved in the definition of some curricula, such as for the "Licence professionnelle" and the delivery of some part of the training by providing placements for learners. Some sectors have created certificate called CQP (certificat de qualification professionnelle). Employers are involved in a jury for examining applicants’ achievements for recognition to formal qualifications such as the mainstream vocational education and training qualifications, Baccalaureate professionnel and the BTS.

In Japan the legal status of social partners have been incorporated in a process where the government determines the level of skill and associated knowledge needed in order to pass each grade for each trade, and ensures consistency in the technical levels required for each grade in each trade. In doing so, it consults expert reviewers. Test criteria are updated and test questions prepared by experts on technical matters who are recommended by cooperating organisations in industry and appointed by the Japan Vocational Ability Development Association.

In Spain the regulation and coordination of the National Qualifications and Vocational Training System as a task of the General State Administration is done through the General Council of Vocational Training (consultative body for institutional participation by the public Administrations, General State and Autonomous Communities, and social partners).

In the United Kingdom a Skills for Business Network has been developed which through its various employment related partners has a central role in developing and maintaining national occupational standards and therefore influencing the qualifications that flow from these standards. The newly formed Sector Skills Councils have a key role in skills needs analysis for sectors and forming a range of qualifications that meet these needs.

313. Having established that there are substantial returns to employers for providing training, Billet and Smith (2003) suggest that involvement with credential development is a productive way of persuading employers to invest more in employee development.

Raising employer demand for qualification

314. Employers are more likely to make specific demand for qualification during recruitment and more likely to invest in qualification related training if qualifications offer value for money in recognising knowledge and skills in the workplace and the potential to work at specific levels in employers. Employer surveys generally reveal the desire for the qualifications system to be responsive to their needs in terms of the content of qualifications and the administrative arrangements necessary to validate learning. They pinpoint the key quality of relevance to their working practices. The employer view of quality in qualifications is based on any experience that recruits or trainees with certain qualifications have consistently proven themselves as capable workers. This perception takes time to establish and at least partly explains why employers’ views of qualification development can be rather conservative.
Returns to qualifications to employers have been consistently strong (OECD, 2001b). Most evidence suggests that returns to general or academic qualifications tend to be better than for vocational qualifications, although this is by no means clear-cut. The nature of the signalling function provided by qualifications is much debated and varies across countries, regions and types of qualifications and their related labour markets. Nevertheless, where reliable evidence of strong returns to employers exists, for example, in certain sectors or at certain qualification levels, this needs to be communicated to employers and their representative organisations.

In a Belgian (Wallonia) survey of employers 70% of all recruitment was based on information in qualification. A similar United Kingdom survey of employers produced the same result and it was apparent that there had been a significant rise in employers' requirements for qualifications, particularly at degree level. There was also limited evidence of credential inflation - respondents who considered that employers would demand a qualification for someone to undertake their job, but that the qualification would not actually be necessary to carry out the job in question (see overqualification above). This applied to around 30% of jobs that required qualifications. The figure of about 70% of recruitment using qualification is further confirmed in a German survey of training managers in small, medium-sized and large companies. 77% of them are of the opinion that successful participation in company-based continuing education and training measures should be validated. And 67% of them believed that it should also be possible to certify the skills that staff acquired as part of their work (Grunewald and Morall, 2001).

This suggests that both recruitment and training have a firm basis for using qualification and that for employers this is not a one-way street but rather a two-way process - the discovery of skills development in employers has revealed skills that need to be recognised, which in turn has repercussions on the design of the qualifications system itself. The French experience is important here: professional organisations of employers are the most often at the origin of a new qualification; they may make a case for a new qualification or for modernisation of an existing one. This might arise from demand for a special skill or adjusting the level of demand of qualification. Sometimes, large employers require a qualification to serve their own purposes.

In Japan the biggest area of concern is how to eliminate mismatches between labour supply and demand. The issue of needs analysis is discussed later but here the focus is on getting employers to use qualification as a tool for skills development. In Japan building a system of evaluating workers' vocational ability as a social framework is expected to play an important role in facilitating labour mobility (as well as eliminating mismatches) and consequently the role of trade skill tests has increased. The trade skill test system, though implemented on a limited scale at present, plays an important role in stabilising employment, facilitating re-employment, and improving the social status of workers. Having said this it is not the case that a high proportion of employers regard a pass in a trade skill test as a judgmental factor in recruitment processes, however they are a factor in judging the employee's motivation or ability to meet challenges, rather than a benchmark for judging vocational ability.

Although the majority of Australian employers agree that vocational education and training graduates possess the skills appropriate to employers' needs, employers indicated some lack of clarity in what a qualification tells them about a graduate's skills. In 2001, about three in four employers with recent vocational education and training graduates agreed with the view that it is difficult to tell what a person can actually do from their educational qualifications (NCVER, 2001). This was larger than two years earlier when only 68% of employers held this view. It suggests that some Australian employers do not view qualifications as a reliable source of information on whether candidates for jobs have appropriate skills.

Jobholders, as opposed to employers, offer a different perspective about what qualifications are needed for their jobs (Felstead et al., 2002). While 29% of United Kingdom jobholders thought that
qualifications were important, this was considerably outweighed by experience (49%) and motivation (35%).

321. The demand for an in-firm qualifications system is growing especially in very large international companies. In countries such as Korea the acquisition of skills required in work is not readily publicly available to potential recruits making it necessary for the process to take place within the companies. The Korean Ministry of Labour has been providing budget support to employers with excellent in-firm qualifications systems to ensure quality control. Some large Slovenian firms and services have started to develop their own systems of qualifications and competences and their own training delivery systems. However, these qualifications are usually used to supplement national qualifications. In such cases national qualifications above all serve as an indicator of "trainability" of newly hired workers. In New Zealand, McDonalds offers employees training that can lead to certificates and diplomas registered on the national qualifications framework, rather than offering its own qualifications. One reason for McDonalds operating within the qualifications framework is its role as a 'first employer' that needs to offer training that will be recognised within New Zealand by future employers of its current staff.

322. Increasingly employers are using qualification as a means to meet regulatory requirements geared to protection of the consumer or worker – qualifications are important as an assurance that employers have fulfilled their obligations (Selby et. al, 2004). Large firms are becoming - in effect - regulators of a sub-contracted labour force. They were contracting out, but were held accountable, by customers for the quality of the work that they arranged. In turn, therefore they needed a system for licensing those who worked on their projects, even though they did not have direct line management control. Qualifications are an obvious way of doing this. Employers who feel they need to guarantee the quality of the work of sub-contractors therefore have an added interest in making sure demand learning for qualifications is maintained.

Eliminating the gap between qualifications and skills needs

323. For many countries understanding the future needs of the labour market is identified as a major concern. The good management of the qualifications system is certainly an instrument for upskilling of the labour force. Workers competencies have also become a key component of the asset of employers that rely more on human capital than on any other input to maintain high added value and productivity.

324. The role of qualifications as indicators of potential for learning is reflected in research showing that employers see qualification as a kind of guarantee of greater and faster adaptability to changing work practices (CEDEFOP, 2003). The changing demand for competencies reflect wider changes such as the opening up of the world market, the international mobility of workers, the globalisation of trades, the worldwide use of the new information and communication technology and the pervasiveness of the knowledge economy/society. What kind of qualification is desirable in this changing labour market? Will broad based high-level general education qualification become more desirable at the expense of qualification in highly specific technical skills? In Germany the forecast is that, despite the already high proportion of skilled workers in the working population, global demand for employees with vocational training qualifications will rise further, already demand for highly qualified employees in the service industry has risen considerably; unemployment among skilled workers with vocational qualifications in these occupations is lower than in manufacturing jobs.

325. In Denmark the outsourcing of functions to other countries, relocation of knowledge intensive international firms in Denmark, technological advance, sector convergence, emerging new markets, and customer preferences have driven developments in education and training. For example in the electronics industries and the high end of the textiles industry, there are examples of new models of supply and strategic partnerships. These build on networking in a one-stop-shop principle with close school-firm and inter-firm local collaboration. It is common that education and training is understood by the providers to be
part of the broader context of innovation and institutional specialisation; providers take a less institutional approach to training and learning. From a demand point of view, education and training providers contribute to increased productivity and product and process innovation, and they have led to local and/or sectoral economic growth or restructuring, firm localisation and net job creation within sectors that are under heavy global competitive pressure.

326. In Australia some large-scale reforms have attempted to improve the match between qualifications and the skills needs of employers. For example, the introduction of national training packages to meet current and emerging skill requirements is a development aimed at ensuring that vocational qualifications are industry-based, and assessment relies more on skills and knowledge acquired under workplace conditions. Another example is the inclusion of generic skills and competencies in the frameworks underpinning the senior secondary certificate in most States and Territories.

| National surveys of employers of vocational education and training graduates (1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001) provide information on employer views on vocational education and training and levels of satisfaction with the skills of vocational education and training graduates (NCVER, 2001). The proportion of employers who viewed the vocational education and training system as providing graduates with skills appropriate to employers’ needs increased by about 13% between 1995 and 1999 (to 70%). Employers’ overall satisfaction with the quality of vocational education and training graduates (and by implication with vocational education and training qualifications) has remained stable since 1997, with around four out of five being satisfied. Compared with 1995, a larger proportion of employers in 2001 agreed or strongly agreed that the vocational education and training system is providing graduates with skills appropriate to their needs, while the proportion who agreed, or strongly agreed, that training pays for itself through increased productivity has remained stable. |

327. This level of satisfaction is not evident in Korea where there is a view that what is taught through vocational training curriculum is not what is required in the workplace and consequently the training which is offered at education institutes or schools is the subject of great dissatisfaction on the part of industries, causing industries to turn their backs on qualifications. One of the reasons why vocational training falls below par in quality is because there is an absence of cooperation between education institutes or schools and on-site workplaces, between the central government and regional governments, and among the relevant government ministries. The problem is further compounded because the competitive environment itself acts as a disincentive to cooperation.

328. Several studies have noted the shortage of specific vocational skills in the Irish workforce, and some also note that this shortage does not appear to be corrected by in-work training programmes on any widespread basis (O’Connell and Lyons, 1995). Employers use various means to identify gaps or emerging trends, at both national and local levels. For example, at national level the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs undertakes periodic studies on the skills needs of the Irish labour market. Its third report (2001) investigates the employment and training needs of the construction industry 2001-2006, and recommends that the number of apprenticeships be increased, and suggests that the possibility of accelerating the training of some apprentices be considered. The Expert Group attempts to quantify skills needs in terms of both occupation and level of qualifications. It is notable that the new Standards Based Apprenticeship was based on an analysis of future skill needs, and that trade employers are directly involved in the monitoring and ongoing development of this qualification, ensuring its continued relevance to the particular labour market sectors concerned.

329. The emphasis on initial recruitment of generalists by employers in Ireland has resulted in a considerable participation in programmes leading to "add-on" qualifications, for example, MBA and other business-oriented qualifications are often acquired by non-specialists who were recruited into management levels of organisations and specialist graduates (such as engineers) who were recruited as specialists, but have been promoted into management or organisational development positions. In Portugal the increasing demand for middle management is a result of the emergence of new forms of employer organisation where
the demand for a higher production specialisation relies on qualified workers at middle management level. The priority given to the middle management qualification may be considered as a strategic measure in the framework of the modernisation process that is essential for the competitiveness and development of the national economy.

Easing recruitment processes

330. The area of employer use of qualifications in recruitment is under-researched and little substantive literature exists. The general message from small-scale studies suggests that qualifications are used primarily as a screening mechanism (prior to interview) as the main tool of discrimination between potential recruits. This is particularly the case for the recruitment of first entrants to the labour market. If qualifications were perfectly matched to the needs of employers and future skills needs were identified systematically, employers might be encouraged to strengthen the use of qualification in recruitment and, in so doing, increase the demand for learning for qualification. There are three points of interest to employers in using qualifications in recruitment: (i) can the quality of the qualification be relied upon, (ii) is the qualification title make clear the content and level of knowledge, skills and competencies involved, and (iii) are there enough recruits for the qualification to be used as a sifting mechanism.

331. An important question is the amount of detail employers need in qualifications for purposes of recruitment. In New Zealand the national Certificate of Educational Achievement is intended to provide learners and employees with more information about what a person has actually learnt from education. The qualification provides a more complex picture of achievement by reporting it against national standards. It is evident that some employers avoid being too restrictive in defining qualification requirements: they ask for alternative levels of the same qualification, where the lower level can be compensated by greater work experience. The field of qualification is also often defined fairly broadly in recruitment literature, for example “higher education in an appropriate subject”. This provides employers with enough space for taking into consideration additional criteria while hiring new workers. There is an assumption that certain services (above all financial and business services) regard tertiary level qualifications as an indicator of general skills and abilities while field specific qualifications are developed on-the-job or in specially designed training organised by the employer.

332. Some qualifications, especially those linked with secondary education, do not set out to recognise work-specific skills and competencies but concentrate on broad occupational skills and transferable qualifications. Naturally these are open to the criticism made by employers that these qualifications are not relevant for workplace as young people are not capable of applying knowledge obtained from school in practical circumstances. In countries where this is the case (for example, Slovenia, United Kingdom) it is common that employers require in addition to formal qualification some form of work experience.

333. In some countries there are legal requirements to use qualification in recruitment. In Slovenia work organisations are legally required to define the system of jobs and qualification requirements to pursue these jobs. Qualification requirements are defined in terms of levels and fields of formal education. However employers are free to decide about the level and type of qualifications and are not obliged to stick to the existing national qualification structure. In France having a qualification is key to successful recruitment where the emphasis on a certificate of qualification is crucial. In heavily regulated labour markets, such as those based on qualification through dual systems, the recruitment process is dominated by the information arising from the qualification process. The vocational education and training qualification in Germany leads to three complementary certificates, namely the examination certificate from the responsible chamber, the certificate from the vocational school and the training certificate awarded by the company. A survey (BIBB, 1998) found that almost all companies rate the training certificates awarded by companies as "very important" or "fairly important", second only to the job interview. Almost all companies agree that this certificate provides the most information as far as
specialised knowledge, practical skills, care and precision in work and comprehension of the occupation are concerned. Other information sources, such as grades in the final examination at the chamber, were rated as "very important" much less frequently. The examination certificate awarded by the chambers provides information about learning ability with respect to more theoretical questions and about intellectual skills rather than about proficiency in the occupation. Accordingly, only 23% of the companies in the surveys largely or fully agreed with the statement, "The examination certificate provides valuable information about proficiency in the occupation."

334. Keating et al. (2004) report that employer’s understanding of (and reliance on) qualifications is relatively subjective. The secondary role of qualifications after work experience in selection is not to do with lack of trust, rather it is related to employers’ view of what provides the better preparation and background for recruits, together with a high value placed on risk minimisation. Most employers acknowledge that qualifications signal greater potential for learning and skills acquisition, but they see them as weaker signals for more immediate competence because of the limited learning experiences for which they testify.

335. Evidence seems to suggest that there is a need to build on the screening role of qualifications and their role as indicators of potential for learning and skills acquisition. A view from employers that qualifications were a reliable information source about future employees would lead to more systematic use of qualifications in recruitment and would act as an incentive for learning for qualification.

Portability of qualifications and fluidity of the labour market

336. Job mobility and, to a lesser extent, geographical mobility seem to be an issue in many of the countries involved in the OECD activity. From an employer perspective the opportunity to have employees move from one company site to another can be useful. Notwithstanding social, cultural and linguistic considerations there may be a role for qualifications in making this process easier. The qualification in question must be transparent in terms of the knowledge skills and competencies it attests the learner has acquired and, as stated above, this may be a serious limitation. However even if such transparent qualifications were available in every national system there would still remain the problem of articulating one national qualification with one from another country. Some international companies have developed qualifications that can be regarded as international (for example by organisations such as Microsoft, Cisco, Novell, and 3 Com). Likewise many international bodies offer accreditation and certification services for specific occupational needs. In higher education an international market for qualification and learning has been developing for some years. The indications are that this type of international business in qualification will continue to expand.

337. There is an international framework of education and training (OECD, 1999) that offers the possibility of matching one national qualification to one from another country. However the reference points are made up of generalised statements about programme design and sequencing rather than qualification. It is an especially poor system for comparing vocational education and training qualifications. The European Union has embarked on developing a qualifications framework for Europe (Maastrict communiqué reference) and this is explicitly designed to cover vocational education and training and higher education qualifications and builds directly on the Bologna process which brings some international transparency to university qualification levels. A specific and detailed analysis of qualifications frameworks and levels was commissioned by CEDEFOP (Coles and Oates, 2004) in order to define reference levels for facilitating transfer of information from one national system to another.

338. Besides full qualification there is an opportunity to bring about more learning if partial qualification could be recognised in other countries. An employer would be able to move people with specific skills from within its own company workforce and consequently would be raising the currency and
support for partial qualification. The CEDEFOP reference level study was directly linked to a credit transfer system being developed by the European Commission. This system is geared to making it possible for people to have learning achieved in one country valid to a qualification in another country. Many countries (for example, Denmark, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and Sweden) have developed or are exploring the development of credit transfer systems which will be useful for employers in terms of not only managing deployment of their workforce but in increasing flexibility in other ways such as recognising training episodes and making it easier to modernise qualifications. In Denmark a system of credits for partial qualification is used to make a link between initial vocational education and training and continuing vocational training.

**Collective agreements**

339. Some countries report the use of qualification as part of the collective bargaining process linking wages to work levels. The link with collective bargaining processes can be a strong influence on the ways employer use and sponsor the development of qualification and consequently on the demand for learning for qualification.

340. Greece has a system of payments directly linked to qualification level from school-based qualification through to doctorates. In Portugal specific labour contracts have been enacted in range of sectors that are diverse in nature and include, for example, agreements on covering travel costs where training is some way from a person’s work or home. Slovenia has arranged jobs/posts into nine tariff categories covering simple jobs to doctoral degrees. Clearly there are benefits for employers of involvement and ownership of such schemes and extending the influence of employers over what is to be included in a qualification and how it is best delivered to learners. This process may bring increased relevance and efficiencies but in countries where no such linkage exists an argument will be made for the process bringing bureaucracy and costs into a process that needs to be flexible, adaptive and cost efficient at all times.

**Monitoring the system**

341. From an employer point of view interaction with the qualifications system is likely to be dynamic. The processes of expansion, contraction, modernisation, cost cutting, relocation, merging with other companies, human resource development, recruitment, remuneration and many others can have an effect on and be influenced by qualifications. These dynamic interaction demands a monitoring system that can be sensitive to trends in the ways employers use qualifications and their desire to see new elements of qualification.

342. In many countries specific employer surveys and labour force surveys are conducted regularly; international organisations also monitor employer views (CVTS, Eurostat). However many of these services are weak on dealing with changes in demand for qualification and in some cases data on qualification is not compatible with useful information from other surveys (Maastricht communiqué, 2004).

343. In some countries there is a tradition of the *Observatory*, where experts from different interest areas joint together to commission and review research into, amongst other things, the employer/qualification interface. In Portugal the OEVA (Observatory of Entries into the Working Life) is a mechanism of permanent observation of the vocational integration of the population who have completed vocational training. Such mechanism allows the obtaining of detailed and updated information on the relationship between training and employment and continuing education.
Constraints on using the qualifications system

344. In the sections above the means of motivating employers to use qualifications more in recruitment processes have been described in full and the discussion has already raised, albeit implicitly, the constraining influences such as perceptions of poor matching of existing qualifications with employer needs and the consequent effects of low currency and credibility for employers. One of the possible reasons for these perceptions is the inevitable tension between the management of an education system for social purposes such as citizenship education and health education and more explicit employment related functions. A further tension arises for qualifications systems when the needs of employers become firm and specific and the interests of individuals and communities are inevitably wider and longer term. The diversity of needs by both employers and individuals can lead to complexity in the qualification offer itself and this is a constraint on development and use of qualifications.

Costs of supporting qualification

345. Most obviously costs can constrain the involvement of employers in qualification development. Billet and Smith (2003) discuss the motivations for employers to invest in training (not specifically learning for qualification) and conclude that the motivations are mostly subject to cost benefit analyses that yield mixed results in terms of providing incentives to invest. However quoting the research of Smith (2001) they stress that better methods of appraising returns to companies need to be employed and when these are used returns are impressively high and employers may be more inclined to contribute more willingly if they were more widely known. (See Wolter and Schweri (2003) for some evidence for Switzerland). Switzerland has an on going programme of special initiatives to encourage the enterprises to offer apprenticeship-places to young people. These are backed up by legal arrangements put in place in 1996 and 1999 (www.bbt.admin.ch/berufsbt/projekte/lsh2/f/index.htm).

346. Smaller employers have a basic resource constraint on becoming involved in qualification development; the Belgian and Slovenian reports signal that larger companies are much more likely to become involved in a range of labour market, employment and qualification related activities.

347. One of the main ways companies contribute to qualification development is through direct involvement in training. These schemes are subject to the fluctuations that are typical of HRD and recruitments needs.

In Denmark an analysis carried out in 2003 seems to indicate that the reduction in the overall number of apprentice places is a reflection of company changes. International takeovers seem to have a negative effect on companies' willingness to take in apprentices. Other types of in-house training schemes, both for social or re-employment purposes or for other educational levels, seem also to have a negative effect, as do major organisational changes and outsourcing from the public sector to the private sector since conditions concerning apprentice places do not seem to be a part of the outsourcing contracts made with private firms.

Research in Slovenia indicates however that funds of employers are by far the most important source of direct financing of participation in training. Employers (co-)finance 65% of training of employees while individual employees themselves cover about 25% of the costs. According to these data the scope of training (co-)financed by the employers is increasing with the size of employers. In organisations with up to 20 employees, the employer (co-)funds approximately 50% of the training of the employed and in large organisations (500 and more employees) about 80%.

348. The OECD study on adult learning (OECD, 2003) concludes that employers, whilst serious contributors to learning provision are sometimes buying in high level skills though consultancy than investing in long-term development of skills through training.
Encouraging employers to use and support learning for qualification: some issues

Credential inflation

349. If lifelong learning policies meet with great success they could yield a situation where a high proportion of the population is qualified to high standards and that investment in learning is considered a good risk by many people. Such a situation is not without its implications for a qualifications system. For example where qualifications operate in a free market their currency can be derived from more than such things as a good match with recruiters’ requirements, the relative value of a qualification can depend on the availability of people with the qualification. An abundance of such people will devalue the qualification and a shortage will raise its currency. Over-qualification, sometimes known as ‘qualification inflation’ is a phenomenon witnessed when many people seek to be recruited with the same qualification; recruiters begin to raise requirements in terms of qualification in order to make the recruitment process manageable, at the same time acknowledging that the higher level skills are not likely to feature in the job specification. Several countries including Australia, Belgium (Wallonia), France and Korea raise the issue of credential inflation. For example the Australian report states that the high levels of school retention reached in the late 1980s and maintained (after some decline) over the next decade occurred against a background of labour market change and industry restructuring which weakened the employment value of the senior secondary certificate. Many school graduates obtained jobs for which they would have been regarded as over-qualified in earlier years (Teese and Polesel, 2003).

350. In Korea an attempt at measuring the effect has been made. One study shows how well educational background and skills levels are aligned with current jobs. The average score of shows workers receive more education than their current jobs require. In the same study the level of alignment between a worker’s skills level and the current job shows that current jobs require less skills level than workers have.

351. The Australian report also points out that credential inflation can also reflects upward shifts in required skill levels and competencies associated with economic and technological change. One of the ways to deal with this issue has been to develop a national framework for recognition of competencies acquired in different learning settings to ensure transferability of learning. This creation of national standards for occupations is becoming a more common activity across countries. Once developed all qualifications can be mapped against these standards and any further credential inflation can be understood independently of the employers demand for higher skills.

5.4. The qualifications system and the role of learning and qualifications providers

352. From the discussion above of changes in the behaviour of individuals and employers it is possible to conclude that providers are likely to be considering ways to widen their client base by finding ways to engage new types of learners and responding to the need to develop more efficient and effective education and training methods in order to deliver employers the qualified people they seek. Whether they are private or publicly funded they are probably working to meet these needs with little extra in terms of financial support. Learning provision is changing in accordance with these needs, the spectrum of learning includes all the different forms of organised learning, virtual learning and learning in the workplace as well as non-formal learning. In addition to organising learning, providers fulfil a wide range of functions that include assessment. These functions will cover:

- Recording of existing knowledge, skills and competencies - the process of personal identification of the competences obtained previously.
- Validation of knowledge, skills and competencies: the formal process linking existing achievements to predetermined standards based on content and level.
- Certification: a process that confirms the validated competences obtained in formal, non-formal and informal context.
The focus on qualifications means that it is necessary to note the contribution of the less formal providers of learning since these are often small and have as one of their strengths the lower status of formal recognition. The following example from Australia is typical of the sort of provision.

Adult and community education in Australia owes much to the informal settings in which courses may be offered. A typical example is the ‘neighbourhood house’ converted to a suite of classrooms, with a kitchen and play areas for children. Adults who come to classes in these settings are not under the kinds of academic pressures faced by senior secondary students or by those in university lecture theatres or the classrooms of vocational education and training institutions.

One reason why this kind of provision is important is because they are likely to serve as a bridge to formal learning. People with poor expectations of themselves and people experiencing some transition in their life may be reluctant to engage in full scale learning programmes and this kind of non-accredited learning cannot be overlooked as an important part of the ways providers create opportunities for learning for qualification.

Providers are beginning to feature more strongly in the debates on lifelong learning and OECD (2003) provides a useful summary of the issues involved. There is increasing evidence (QCA, 2004) that a significant means to drive up lifelong learning is to support innovative practice in terms of pedagogy. The new practices often develop in employers and in new learning arenas - some of them virtual in nature. The challenge is to research this area and produce training programmes so that practitioners and providers can judge the benefits of developing new ways of delivering what individuals and employers want. New practices can allow practitioners to extend their influence and guide learners who might be deterred from learning by using traditional pedagogies. Distance learning and the use of new communications technology offer major advantages as well as difficult challenges for providers.

**Inducements**

*provider involvement*

As with employers a key inducement is to involve all stakeholders as closely as possible in the learning organisation: this facilitates a close match of provision to need and a sense of ownership that can foster expansion of learning provision. Students, parents, local community representatives and labour-market partners are major stakeholders in improving provision and providing access to it. Countries report (for example, Belgium (Wallonia), Denmark and United Kingdom) that this is often currently the case. In France, building of “référentiels de diplômes” is more and more often based on consultation with social partners. In Switzerland, the success of the reforms of the upper secondary level (Maturité professionnelle) and the preparation of the law on vocational training owe a lot to the process that involved all stakeholder groups. In Denmark students’ rights are embodied in student councils and, not least, in their right to be consulted on matters pertaining to the organisation of teaching, choice of themes in single subjects as well as choice of teaching and working methods. Linked to the idea stakeholder involvement is the formation of partnerships between the range of agencies that can present a more coordinated approach to provision. This is discussed in detail later in this section.

In Belgium (Wallonia), some of the training delivered by the Walloon Bureau for Vocational Training and Employment (FOREM, Office wallon de la formation professionnelle et de l’emploi) is organised in partnership with other providers of learning and/or with industry sectors. This allows for reaching different groups of the population and to deliver vocational preparation in different field. Qualifications achieved range from basic literacy to marketing techniques for graduates.
**Recognition of prior learning**

357. A key area for improving the take up of learning provision is the extent to which existing learning outcomes, however achieved, can be recognised as contributing to a formal qualification. The main advantages as far as encouraging more learning is the way it opens up access to learning programmes by raising self esteem and by lowering costs (by providing some exemption) for some parts of learning programmes or assessment processes. However the bridge between formal qualification and recognition of non-formal learning is not straightforward (Bjørnåvold, 2002); there is very little research evidence of benefits arising from learners translating non-formal learning into learning for formal qualification. Recent evidence from France and Japan, where the opportunity to have learning recognised for formal qualifications has been introduced, the growth in use of the system suggests the market for recognition is very strong (Chiousse and Werquin, 2005). Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is covered in detail in the report of the Thematic Group 2 (Appendix A). It is important to note that the membership of thematic group 2 was particularly wide and many countries see the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as having some potential to meet social and economic needs. These needs are also described in detail in the appendix. Most of the 31 countries offering advice on progress towards developing vocational education and training in order to meet the European Union’s social and economic goals also identified progress or solid plans to develop recognition systems to encompass non-formal and informal learning.

| In Spain | The assessment, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been the object of an experimental project conducted with the purpose to establish the foundation of a link to the new National Catalogue of Occupational Qualifications. The aim is to evaluate and to accredit the occupational skills acquired through on-the-job-experience or non-formal training channels, taking as basic referent the unit of competence so as to facilitate the cumulative partial accreditation with the finality of completing the training towards the proper diploma or certificate. The experimental project has been applied in six vocational families and in various contexts so as to gain a more extensive basis of evidence about the procedures, social processes implied and involved costs. The project takes into account European and international experiences and it has been implemented under criteria guaranteeing the evaluation’s reliability, objectivity and technical standards. |

**Quality assurance processes**

358. Learning providers need to be able show their customers that provision matches or exceeds criteria governing quality of provision. This is especially important when private providers are responsible for small-scale specific training. There is possibly an optimum size for quality assurance systems; if these systems are small scale it might not be possible for to establish widespread trust; if such systems are too large they might become bureaucratic and insensitive to the styles of local provision. In Switzerland the diverse and rather incoherent system may have created the need for an umbrella quality organisation and the EDUQUA system that is a relatively inexpensive quality assurance system that providers can use (Pont and Werquin, 2003). It is important to note that EDUQUA does not meet some well-known international standards because, were this to be the case, some small-scale providers might not be able to comply. Thus a balance needed to be struck between levels of quality assurance required and provider resources.

359. Central determination of quality assurance processes is common. Countries have developed systems of regulation by publishing a documents setting out criteria or protocols for offering qualification. These documents are important to private and public providers in setting out their learning offer in ways that can assure learners of their status as a quality learning or qualification provider.

| The introduction of a competitive training market in Australian vocational education and training has led to a greater diversity of providers obtaining registration and hence to the potential for uneven quality. The development towards a deregulated system, occurring at the same time as the introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework, has required progressive strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms in the vocational education and training sector. The national quality assurance framework (in its third generation following the National Framework for the |
Recognition of Training, then the Australian Recognition Framework, and now the strengthened Australian Quality Training Framework) provided the means to quality assure, and provide for, a truly national vocational education and training system. The implementation of a national system of awards has boosted the employment value of nationally recognised vocational programs and facilitated progress through different levels of the vocational education and training system.

In 2002 in France a new national Repertory of Certifications was introduced with the aim of creating an all-encompassing architecture of vocational education and training qualifications. Eligibility for registration in the repertory requires meeting two basic conditions: qualifications must be accessible not only through training but also through the accreditation of prior experience (VAE); and it must be shown that the social partners were involved from the start in the design of the qualification in question. In conformity with the common currency principle, all qualifications registered in the repertory must be structured in terms of units of competence. The purpose of this new coordinating system is to bridge the recognition gaps between the various systems of qualifications whilst also imposing common quality criteria on all providers.

Co-ordination of provision

360. There are advantages to be gained by coordinating the learning provision of the range of institutions involved. These advantages derive more from increasing efficiency and ensuring a breadth of provision that is available to a wide range of people than searching for economies of scale. Countries with Federal systems of Government report that there are issues to be addressed arising from regional differences in administrative arrangements. The Dutch experience summarises the gains to be made from coordination.

In a Regional Vocational College (ROC) the old institutions for the various types of vocational education and adult education in a region are merged into one single administrative and organisational unit. These new institutions include colleges of intermediate vocational education, schools for part-time instruction as part of the apprenticeship training route, schools for basic adult education and day/evening education etc. Within the framework of the policy of decentralisation, these institutions have a relatively great measure of administrative and financial autonomy. Regional Vocational Colleges are considered to have a variety of advantages. Combining various types of education and expertise makes it easier than before to provide tailor-made programmes for specific groups of students. It also is supporting to have the advantage of being able to better take into account the wishes and needs of regional trade and industry. The Regional Vocational Colleges should become the central network of significant regional actors for example, by making common learning arrangements with local trade and industry.

In Switzerland, the need for further coordination is clearly accepted especially at the upper secondary level. The purpose is not to create a singular route or a singular form of upper secondary qualification. The necessity to keep separate tracks is clear. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of a need to coordinate actions at the upper secondary level to help young people achieve their goals. Therefore, a pilot project – *Projet secondaire II* – has been initiated to help the dialog between the different actors (CDIP, 1996; CDIP, OFFT/EDK and BBT, 2000). Its main purpose has been to create a centre of competencies (*Centre de compétences*) for upper secondary education at the national level. One of its main tasks is to develop better coordination.

Outcomes based qualification

361. One method of developing transparency in learning programmes (including assessment and certification) is to build the programme on expected outcomes of learning rather than input measures such as a syllabus. Even long-standing, large-scale programmes are clearer to learners when outcomes are used to describe the learning. The advantages are many: in addition to setting standards (in terms of outcomes) and benefiting from the opportunity to quality assure provision the use of outcomes allows users
(individuals and employers) to use the qualification to meet several objectives\(^23\). The French report points to the advantages for providers themselves in being able to streamline provision and make efficiency savings.

362. Where a credit transfer system is available the opportunity to use a range of credits to initiate a new area of learning or to reduce unnecessary repetition of learning is a high prize.

In Denmark many adult vocational training courses give adults a formal right to credit transfer into an initial Vocational Education and Training program. This may result in a reduced study programme for adults. Together with credit transfer, the option of recognition of non-formal and informal learning (especially work-based learning) opens up flexible pathways for the unskilled worker towards a nationally recognised qualification as a skilled worker. The kind of further education programme that is relevant to the participant depends not only on his or her educational background (level and vocational field), but also on the person’s needs or aspirations for vocational progression as a supplement to the original educational background. Equally important are the more flexible possibilities at the Basic Education level of receiving transfer credit and thus shortened study/training programmes in youth vocational education and training programmes, thus giving adults a ‘second chance’ to acquire skilled qualifications.

Korea has developed a “credit bank system” that allows individuals to accumulate credits from all sorts of institutions including universities and non-formal education/training institutions. A student can receive a degree depending on the number of credits accumulated. Since non-formal educational/training institutions were previously not allowed to issue credits, it was difficult for university dropouts, employed/unemployed adults, and inactive adults to accumulate human capital that would lead to a degree that is recognised in the labour market. For non-formal educational/training institutions to issue certified credits, they need to be formally accredited by the Ministry of Education, which involves complying to standardized curriculum and syllabus developed by the Korean Educational Development Institute. The Korean labour market is characteristic of putting excessive weight on formal degrees. The “credit bank system” is thus a key initiative that allows individuals of all ages and skill-levels to invest in human capital, to be more productive, and to be valued in the labour market. Since the “priority” groups are the very people that would benefit the most from skill upgrading and degree-acquisition, the “credit bank system” is a key scheme to support lifelong-learning among these groups.

In Switzerland, it is possible to obtain a Federal Certificate of Capacity (CFC, Certificat fédéral de capacité) without passing formal tests. It was first introduced in the original 1999 and the idea is to not to base assessment on participation in formal programmes but to create an ad hoc procedure of qualification. It is therefore the first step, in Switzerland, toward recognition of prior learning.

Progression and partnerships

363. Evidence from around the world suggests institutions are now more active than in the past in creating bridges into sectors once external to them. Secondary schools in particular have introduced or expanded vocational studies within upper secondary programs. Universities have become more open to vocational education and training students and inter-sector provision of qualifications has become more common. In Australia articulation and credit transfer arrangements between schools and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and between Registered Training Organisations and universities involving efficient articulation of programs and maximum credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning, by which credits are granted towards qualifications through assessment of an individual’s knowledge and skills gained through education, training, work and life experience. During the past few years in Denmark a growing youth cohort has made a transition to a vocational education and training programme after having completed a general academic upper secondary programme or one of the mixed programmes at the

upper secondary level. A growing number of students in vocational education and training thus obtain a dual qualification through transfer credit from another upper-secondary programme.

The workplace as a learning site

364. Workplaces represent a major site of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal learning may be found in the delivery of structured programs of learning which are not recognised for qualification - such as induction programs for new recruits, graduate trainee programs, workshops in skills development and so on. In many cases however course components compare with those of recognised qualifications both in presentation and learning outcomes. They are of significance in documenting the value of a worker and providing assurance that training has taken place up to a requisite level and are of particular significance in signposting career pathways within an organisation. Recognition of the workplace as a learning site for qualification-based learning could lead to a major enhancement of lifelong learning: OECD research (2003) indicates unmet demand. Recognition of less formal work based learning is already a major initiative in many countries, especially for those who are gaining experience in work to improve employability.

Special provision

365. The country background reports contain details of a great many initiatives that have a special focus on learning provision for a particular social group or describe a particular kind of relationship between learning providers and employers. Some of those initiatives are summarised briefly here.

In Greece, over the last two years certain shortcomings in education have been covered by the institution of Second Chance Schools with the aim of re-integrating adults into the formal education system or into non-formal education and training. A new law gives Greek citizens aged over 18 who did not complete their compulsory education the opportunity to attend an 18-month programme and acquire a certificate corresponding to completion of lower secondary level education. This institution is aimed at adults who, save in very few cases, do not make use of the rights to enter formal education in joint classes with children of school age. Social circumstances are taken into account for entry and special weighting is given to former prisoners or former drug users but cases of individuals with adaptation difficulties or mental disabilities are not accepted. Studies are completely free and included teaching material and stationery. In many cases the municipal authorities supports the programme by providing participants with means of transport or youth clubs for children.

In Japan, the University of the Air was established in 1985 by the national government to promote life-long learning; it accepts - without examination - those aged 15 or above with no certificate of senior high school completion, as major-specific or credit-based students to take a range of basic courses. Depending on their academic performance, University of the Air students can enter a bachelor's degree program at a university.

In Korea, the Self-Study Degree Award System is intended to provide opportunities to acquire degrees through self-instruction or self-study. When a new law was introduced in 1990, the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation began holding certified humanities courses and exams for the first time that year, and at present, the Korea National Open University runs the Self-Study System. In order to acquire the degree, the candidate should pass four rounds of exams. The first exam is the basic general humanities exam to evaluate the general competency of the candidate. The second exam is the basic major exam that deals with knowledge and technical issues across each of the majors necessary for studying the respective major. The third exam is an upgraded exam that evaluates whether the candidate has specialized knowledge and technical competency in his major. The last exam is the bachelor's degree acquisition exam that evaluates a candidate's overall ability, and whether the candidate possesses the appropriate specialized knowledge and technical know-how for a bachelor's degree.

In New Zealand, the growth of private training organisations (PTEs) is an example of an education reform initiative linked to the qualifications system by providing a new form of delivering qualifications to learners. A law allowed private provision of tertiary education, and established a mechanism for use of public funds. Private training organisations have to be a corporate body with goals and purposes that relate primarily to education and/or training.
Some private training organisations have been established for profit, but not all private training organisations are profit-driven. For example, some private training organisations are established to serve the interests of local community groups. In 2001, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) estimated that 64% of private training organisations were limited liability companies, 14% were trusts and 22% were incorporated societies. Most learners attending private training organisations are engaged in education and training after compulsory education, but for some senior secondary learners private training organisations offer an alternative education to secondary schools. The impact that a private training organisation will have on lifelong learning depends on the goal of a particular private training organisation and the courses that it is delivering.

Constraints on providers

Complexity of range of providers

366. As indicated above several countries specify the problems encountered by employers and individuals when there are too many and very different forms of provider within the system. The quest for transparency may force the managers of provision to coordinate their offerings. However whilst the goal is clear there may be local issues that prevent this process happening – there appears to be a move on some countries (such as the United Kingdom and France) to decentralise control and allow some local interpretation of effective provision to grow. Vendor qualifications from international companies may grow in popularity as this more diverse provision becomes established. The main issue for learners when provision is complex may not be so much making sense of what is on offer but is more likely to be ensuring the learning for qualification carries good currency in the labour market and has the potential to lead to a further qualification.

Costs

367. Almost all countries identify costs as a constraint in developing learning provision to meet needs, some of these constraints are related to the providing institutions and others cost constraints (on individuals and employers) have a serious knock-on effect. This issue is also raised in terms of adult education more generally where funding is insufficient and requires increased investment from both private and public sources (OECD, 2003).

368. Several countries identify measures to support individuals and employers to bear the cost of learning for qualification – examples of these measures are Individual Learning Accounts, Career development loans, small firms training loans, support for trade union activities, facilitating flexible working arrangements, structural learning funds (inc. covering part of the cost to install Information and Communication Technology equipment).

369. In some countries (New Zealand and United Kingdom) there is public concern that the cost of tertiary education, including the cost of student loans, may act as a disincentive to post-compulsory study. The universal access to the student loan scheme, has maintained participation rates in post-compulsory education among sections of society that were previously not well represented in higher education.

The qualifications system and providers: some issues

370. The main issues for providers of learning for qualifications have been raised above. These relate to the following.

− Managing the systems so that the overall provision is co-ordinated and efficient whilst allowing for local diversity so that specific needs can be met.
− Monitoring the use of the system in terms of the extent to which it meets the needs of users, the quality of provision and the efficiency with which resources are used. The lack of monitoring information makes strategic decision making less robust.
Allowing for growth in the capacity of institutions and practitioners to develop new pedagogies that can have an impact on the learning careers of individuals and the development of employers. In relation to this the Portuguese report includes the following key features of pedagogy:

1. The basic features of the educational model based on the thematic organisation, duration and sequence of the modular system, the qualification of teachers and trainers and the environment of stimulating learning in accredited organizations.

2. The flexible and non-constraining model of attendance, leaving the responsibility for the results to those attending them. The public funding, which assures zero cost, should be sufficiently motivating for individual efforts of active citizenship.

3. The range of training options must be flexible but at the same time avoid excessive dispersal. At stake is the funding for which reason it should be selective, without hindering local promoters from undertaking the training initiatives they find most suitable.

371. There is also the need to build the expertise of trainers in the processes of assessment that provide motivating feedback to learners. Negotiating learning objectives and recording learning outcomes is growing in importance in non-formal settings and this holds promise for other sectors, especially work based learning (Torrance and Coultas, 2004).

5.5. Mechanisms affecting behaviour

372. The analysis so far shows that there is significant evidence that the learning behaviour of individuals, employers and providers of learning for qualifications are directly and indirectly influenced by the kind of qualifications system operating in the country. The analysis leads to the identification of specific changes in terms of structure or operating conditions, which will change the likelihood of each of these groups participating in, using and providing qualifications. These change agents have been labelled mechanisms in Chapter 2 and now it is possible, using the evidence in this chapter, to support the theoretical idea with concrete evidence and lay out 20 mechanisms for consideration as tools to aid the transition of policy responses for improving lifelong learning into positive outcomes. Table 5.1 lists the 20 mechanisms and describes how each might work.

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<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Outline of how the mechanism might work</th>
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<td>1. Communicating returns to learning for qualification</td>
<td>The incentives are based in the qualifications system itself and they hinge around the reward and returns (financial and otherwise) for gaining qualification. The process of communicating the advantages of learning for qualification may inspire individuals to seek out learning. Individuals would be motivated to learn for qualification. Employers would have a greater skills market to draw on and may see investment in learning as more secure if learners seek learning in work. Providers would be involved in communicating returns to build the learner market.</td>
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<td>2. Developing employability</td>
<td>For some people the barrier to further learning is that they cannot find quality work that enables work-based learning. Their general skills level is low. For these people the provision of work experience that focuses on employability skills may be a breakthrough to further learning. Individuals with poor general skills levels might be inclined to learn these skills and then go on to further learning later. Employers would need to make available work experience and possibly training in these skills, they could gain from a wider skills supply. Providers would need to develop learning programmes in this area and would be meeting client needs.</td>
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might be motivated to learn if they can be guided towards appropriate qualifications for their aspirations. They might also have confidence in nationally approved qualifications. Employers will find a framework helpful in setting out qualification requirements for a job and in relating an applicant’s qualification profile to a standard reference point. It may help rationalise training provision. Providers might find a framework of qualifications useful for promotional material as they can market qualifications according to a well-known structure and, like recruiters, they might feel more secure in the knowledge that certain qualifications are national benchmarks.

However flexibility may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of credits, they might be more ambivalent on credit systems because it might add to administrative costs but the engagement of many more people on unit-based programmes will be an incentive. Recruiters too may feel confident in a simple system with an established track and they may feel that candidates who have remained on track are more committed to their chosen field than those who had decided to change track at some stage. Providers may find management of more flexible programmes more difficult and more costly.

With low self-esteem, low confidence or poor record of education achievement will find unnecessary obstacles on their specific needs. If qualifications systems have options within it for providers to tailor programmes to these preferences then participation may increase. Individuals may find flexibility in a framework of qualifications useful for promotional material as they can market qualifications according to a well-known structure, and like recruiters, they might feel more secure in the knowledge that certain qualifications are national benchmarks.

Individuals might be motivated to learn if they can be guided towards appropriate qualifications for their aspirations. They might also have confidence in nationally approved qualifications. Employers will find a framework helpful in setting out qualification requirements for a job and in relating an applicant’s qualification profile to a standard reference point. It may help rationalise training provision. Providers might find a framework of qualifications useful for promotional material as they can market qualifications according to a well-known structure and, like recruiters, they might feel more secure in the knowledge that certain qualifications are national benchmarks.

This mechanism is about the exercising of personal responsibility. Qualifications should be designed so that there are clear exit points (with credit) for those who have a change of plan. Choice may be more about options within qualifications than options between qualifications, although crossing points between qualifications may be seen as advantageous. Individuals may be motivated by the freedom and power to make decisions about their future study. Employers may find the increased complexity of qualifications complicates recruitment and planning. However they may come to see that exercising choice becomes an aspect of a candidate’s identity and so could make selection more effective. Providers will come under pressure to differentiate course offerings in response to more selective demand, for example, by creating awards delivered through both sectors, double degrees, and courses in new cross-disciplinary or more specialised fields.

This mechanism focuses on the ways learning programmes are responsive to the learning styles of the individual - qualification processes can limit the flexibility of programmes. Individuals will be motivated by programmes that match their learning and assessment preferences. If the qualifications system has options within it for providers to tailor programmes to these preferences then participation may increase. Employers may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of particular relevance to the firm the recruitment process itself will be more complicated. It offers a chance to tailor training to their specific needs.

There is a clear need to differentiate between qualifications, although crossing points between qualifications may be seen as advantageous. Individuals may be motivated by the freedom and power to make decisions about their future study. Employers may find the increased complexity of qualifications complicates recruitment and planning. However they may come to see that exercising choice becomes an aspect of a candidate’s identity and so could make selection more effective. Providers will come under pressure to differentiate course offerings in response to more selective demand, for example, by creating awards delivered through both sectors, double degrees, and courses in new cross-disciplinary or more specialised fields.

This mechanism ensures the qualifications system creates career and learning opportunities through the definition of tracks or routes that appeal to learners’ interests and ambitions, providers’ structures and recruiters’ needs. The existence of crossroads where individuals can change track without penalty is an important feature. Individuals may find the security of a designated qualification track appealing, although the lack of choice may be a disincentive to learn. Recruiters too may feel confident in a simple system with an established track and they may feel that candidates who have remained on track are more committed to their chosen field than those who had decided to change track at some stage. Providers may find management of more flexible programmes more difficult and more costly.

Credit transfer processes will provide flexibility for individuals and employers. It will also be a means of using an individual’s existing skills and learning to count towards further qualification so cutting the cost of repeating work. It will ease the burden of time or financial commitment. It might also act as an incentive for job progression when credit will count in different job environments. Individuals may be motivated by the way they can cash in credits earned earlier and gain credits for a range of future options. The flexibility may overcome some kinds of personal constraints. Employers may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of particular relevance to the firm the recruitment process itself will be more complicated. It offers a chance to tailor training to their specific needs.

This mechanism focuses on the ways learning programmes are responsive to the learning styles of the individual - qualification processes can limit the flexibility of programmes. Individuals will be motivated by programmes that match their learning and assessment preferences. If the qualifications system has options within it for providers to tailor programmes to these preferences then participation may increase. Employers may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of particular relevance to the firm the recruitment process itself will be more complicated. It offers a chance to tailor training to their specific needs.

The diverse reasons for non-participation in learning demands a range of entry points is available and that specifications for entry point requirements are clear and minimal. The mechanism needs a clear linkage between non-award bearing programmes and award bearing programmes. Funding regimes and quality assurance processes need to be differentiated so that they are tailored to low stakes qualifications. Individuals with low self-esteem, low confidence or poor record of education achievement will find unnecessary obstacles on their specific needs. Employers may need to create flexibility so that workers seeking further learning are encouraged to participate in it. Providers will need to create new routes and may create stronger markets in this area.

Cost is a key inhibitor to qualification for some specific groups. Both time and money are included as there are direct costs (of programmes, of assessment) and indirect costs (opportunity costs, personal time costs). The individual is the prime focus for cost but providers and employers pass on costs in one way or another and so costs to them are important. Individuals will be less inhibited by lower costs, costs spread out over time, costs where payment is deferred until later and will be motivated by any support to minimise opportunity costs. Employers will be motivated to use qualification based learning if impact on productivity costs is low. Flexibility in the system (for example, credit transfer, recognition of prior learning) is likely to reduce employers’ costs. Providers will strive to ensure systems are efficient to reduce costs to individuals and employers – therefore system maintenance costs (quality assurance, international benchmarking, qualification development) will be important areas for efficiency savings.

Recognition systems for non-formal and informal learning make explicit the value of learning that is not assessed as part of a formal learning programme. This kind of recognition can act as a safety net for those who have not yet fully engaged with learning. Individuals with relatively low levels of formal achievement might be motivated to enter programmes and continue learning if their knowledge and skills acquired through experience can be recognised and used to reduce the costs of qualification. Employers may see wider skills supply if more learning is recognised in the workforce. On the other hand this might lead to a

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<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Outline of how the mechanism might work</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
<td>Qualifications frameworks can make progression routes clear and can bring coherence and quality assurance to qualifications systems. Individuals might be motivated to learn if they can be guided towards appropriate qualifications for their aspirations. They might also have confidence in nationally approved qualifications. Employers will find a framework helpful in setting out qualification requirements for a job and in relating an applicant’s qualification profile to a standard reference point. It may help rationalise training provision. Providers might find a framework of qualifications useful for promotional material as they can market qualifications according to a well-known structure and, like recruiters, they might feel more secure in the knowledge that certain qualifications are national benchmarks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Increasing learner choice in qualifications</td>
<td>This mechanism is about the exercising of personal responsibility. Qualifications should be designed so that there are clear exit points (with credit) for those who have a change of plan. Choice may be more about options within qualifications than options between qualifications, although crossing points between qualifications may be seen as advantageous. Individuals may be motivated by the freedom and power to make decisions about their future study. Employers may find the increased complexity of qualifications complicates recruitment and planning. However they may come to see that exercising choice becomes an aspect of a candidate’s identity and so could make selection more effective. Providers will come under pressure to differentiate course offerings in response to more selective demand, for example, by creating awards delivered through both sectors, double degrees, and courses in new cross-disciplinary or more specialised fields.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
<td>The mechanism ensures the qualifications system creates career and learning opportunities through the definition of tracks or routes that appeal to learners’ interests and ambitions, providers’ structures and recruiters’ needs. The existence of crossroads where individuals can change track without penalty is an important feature. Individuals may find the security of a designated qualification track appealing, although the lack of choice may be a disincentive to learn. Recruiters too may feel confident in a simple system with an established track and they may feel that candidates who have remained on track are more committed to their chosen field than those who had decided to change track at some stage. Providers may find management of more flexible programmes more difficult and more costly.</td>
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<td>6. Providing credit transfer</td>
<td>Credit transfer processes will provide flexibility for individuals and employers. It will also be a means of using an individual’s existing skills and learning to count towards further qualification so cutting the cost of repeating work. It will ease the burden of time or financial commitment. It might also act as an incentive for job progression when credit will count in different job environments. Individuals may be motivated by the way they can cash in credits earned earlier and gain credits for a range of future options. The flexibility may overcome some kinds of personal constraints. Employers may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of particular relevance to the firm the recruitment process itself will be more complicated. It offers a chance to tailor training to their specific needs. Providers may be more ambivalent on credit systems because it might add to administrative costs but the engagement of many more people on unit-based programmes will be an incentive.</td>
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<td>This mechanism focuses on the ways learning programmes are responsive to the learning styles of the individual - qualification processes can limit the flexibility of programmes. Individuals will be motivated by programmes that match their learning and assessment preferences. If the qualifications system has options within it for providers to tailor programmes to these preferences then participation may increase. Employers may see a unitised system as overly complex and whilst they can recruit people who have specialised in units of particular relevance to the firm the recruitment process itself will be more complicated. It offers a chance to tailor training to their specific needs. Providers may be more ambivalent on credit systems because it might add to administrative costs but the engagement of many more people on unit-based programmes will be an incentive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Monitoring the qualifications system</td>
<td><strong>This mechanism represents a feedback loop for the qualifications system. The outcome of the data analysis will allow the managers in the qualifications system to gauge how well it is responding to the needs of individuals, providers and recruiters.</strong> Individuals will benefit if for some of them the monitoring process is sensitive to identify their needs in terms of learning for qualification. Employers will find information on skills needs strategically useful if it is reliable, sensitive and if trend data can be produced. Providers can use information to develop programmes to meet better the needs of their clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system</td>
<td><strong>The likelihood of qualifications meeting needs is enhanced if all users are genuine stakeholders and play a part in modernising qualifications. Inclination to use qualifications will be higher if a sense of ownership exists. Agreements between the stakeholders on developments to the qualifications system may be more stable. The stakeholders might operate in a more coordinated way and communicate more coherent messages about the qualifications system. Individuals will be more inclined to learn for qualification if it is evident that the learner voice has been heeded in qualification design and delivery. Employers need to be sure qualification meets their needs and involvement is a way to do this. Providers need to know their clients needs and will wish to be clear about new methods of delivery and cost implications of new development.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up to date</td>
<td>If there is a systematic way of reviewing qualifications against labour market and economic needs the qualifications based on these processes will be perceived as relevant and worth investing in. The methods used must also prepare for the future. Individuals will be encouraged by the value placed on up-to-date qualifications by employers. Employers will appreciate the value of people qualified in theory and practice and the currency of qualification reflecting this will be raised. Providers will be confident in marketing modern qualifications to clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Improving qualification use in recruitment</td>
<td>Recruitment processes that use qualifications to sift and discriminate potential recruits will gain high currency. Individuals will be inclined to learn for qualifications if they are widely used in recruitment and for ensuring progress in careers and learning. Employers will be motivated to use qualification in recruitment processes if they are useful as a proxy for knowledge and skills; if they can be sure of the standards and content included in the learning programme and that it is delivered and assessed effectively. Providers will be inclined to support qualification programmes where there is strong demand for qualification by recruiters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
<td>By allowing qualifications to be used to make easier transitions between jobs or between learning programmes the value of learning for qualifications will be raised. The mechanism depends on zones of mutual trust developing within a country – these might use international reference points as the basis of agreement. Individuals would be more inclined towards participation if their qualification could be used for them to progress across educational or occupational sectors as well as within a sector. Employers may find the process of dealing with many different qualifications confusing and inefficient. Providers would be able to promote qualifications with a high portability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Investing in pedagogical innovation</td>
<td>Efficient and effective teaching will, over time, contribute to the value placed on the qualification that recognises this learning. Good delivery of education and training lowers costs for qualification-based learning. Individuals can be highly motivated by good quality delivery. Employers will see cost benefits and better matching of training to needs. Providers will need to quality assure teaching quality and deliver the training for teachers and trainers. There will be cost implications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes</td>
<td>Making clear to learners, providers and recruiters what the outcomes of the qualification are in terms of knowledge, skills and competences leads to firmer expectations. Individuals can be motivated by this clarity and because it raises the possibility of gaining credit for learning already acquired. Employers will be able to specify their recruitment needs more clearly and have more confidence when using qualifications in the process of matching candidates to jobs. Providers will find the outcomes based approach easier for coordinating different learning programmes. They might also be more confident in explaining the value or currency of a qualification based on outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Improving co-ordination in the qualifications system</td>
<td>The mechanism produces a clear infrastructure of qualifications, structure of institutions delivering them and well designed, comprehensive guidance processes. Individuals are motivated by clear and consistent information, guidance and advice from all the agencies involved. Employers will see gains in receiving consistent information and may be more motivated to provide and use qualifications. Providers may find cost savings from this coherence and savings in rectifying wrongly placed learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Optimising quality assurance</td>
<td>The levels of quality assurance processes applied to the development and operation of qualifications affects the ways people view qualifications. High levels of QA might increase the value ascribed to qualifications on the other hand it might develop constraints on the ways qualifications can respond to different user needs. Individuals are likely to be motivated to learn by qualifications of guaranteed quality and cost reduction that is gained as a result of reduced bureaucracy requirements for providers. Employers will be concerned for the maintenance of minimum effective QA procedures. Providers will be confident in marketing of qualifications of guaranteed quality and will benefit from cost savings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications systems</td>
<td>Effective information, advice and guidance services using communications technologies could increase the quantity and distribution of lifelong learning. Individuals may overcome some barriers to learning if guided through the information maze of qualifications. Employers would benefit from a one-stop-shop for qualifications information. Providers may benefit from marketing of qualifications of through information, advice and guidance centres.</td>
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</table>
By reviewing all the evidence about the ways the behaviour of the three main stakeholder groups (individuals, employers and providers) it has been possible to derive these 20 mechanisms that could develop qualifications systems so that they play their part in enhancing lifelong learning. Whilst mechanisms themselves are an important concept and each has the potential to support policymaking in relation to qualifications systems it is the way that these mechanisms interface with policy responses to lifelong learning that is important. These policy responses can be existing ones as outlined in Chapter 3 or new ones being formulated by policy makers. In Chapter 6 this interface between policy responses and mechanisms is examined in depth.

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Adam, S., 2004. Using learning outcomes – a consideration of the nature, role and implications for European education of employing learning outcomes at the local, national and international levels, United Kingdom Bologna Seminar, Herriot Watt University, Scotland.


Black, P. and William, D, 1999. Inside the Black Box, King’s College, London.


Torrance, H and Coultas, 2004. Do summative assessment and testing have a positive or negative effect on post 16 learners’ motivation for learning in the learning and skills sector?, Learning and Skills Research Centre, London.


After consideration of all of the influences on the behaviour of stakeholders (Chapter 5), it is possible to identify 20 mechanisms that can be used to improve understanding of policy responses (Chapter 3), that are intended to secure more, high quality, equitably distributed and efficient lifelong learning. Policy responses have been derived from actions and plans reported by countries. The rationale for each policy response may vary in terms of supporting evidence, the weight of political intention and the degree to which other policy responses are mutually supportive. The effects of policy responses are sometimes not fully evaluated and it is possible that some are not fully understood in terms of the way they work or do not work. On the other hand mechanisms have been identified on the basis of research evidence of their effects on stakeholders in the qualifications system. It is therefore possible to be more confident that mechanisms can have a predictable effect and can be used, individually or in combination, as a tool for understanding, optimising and evaluating policy responses.

In Section 6.1, each policy response is taken in turn and examined by considering the mechanisms that might enable it. An attempt is made to judge the potential strength of influence or support each mechanism has on relevant policy actions. Short case studies are provided to illustrate the practical application of mechanisms in actual country policy responses. Deeper discussion of the ways mechanisms act is provided in the Chapter 7. In preparation for this discussion an analysis is provided of the breadth of influence of each mechanism on policy responses providing a kind of ‘usefulness’ ranking based on the power and versatility of each mechanism in relation to the whole range of policy responses (Section 6.2).

6.1. Policy responses and mechanisms

Each mechanism acts in specific ways, for example communicating returns to qualifications for individuals may concentrate the attention of potential learners and providers on the qualifications with highest net returns for them. However one mechanism may influence a policy response in a strong or weak way and it can have a positive or negative effect on lifelong learning when linked to other mechanisms. In this chapter, the strength of the effect is considered and the positive and negative dimension is left for discussion in Chapter 7.

It is useful to examine each policy response and consider which mechanisms could be active and support strongly the policy response and which ones might offer some useful support but not have a decisive effect. This is summarised in Table 6.1 where an attempt to allocate mechanisms to policy responses in three ways is made by using three categories: strong role, supporting role and no effect (omitted from the table). For example the mechanism increasing learner choice, is likely to be powerful within the policy response increase flexibility and responsiveness, and therefore have a strong role to play. However the mechanism lowering the cost of qualification is likely to have a weaker but nevertheless important, support for increase flexibility and responsiveness policy response. The boundary between strong and weak is inevitably arbitrary and in some contexts it is likely that the power of a mechanism...
could be stronger or weaker than is outlined in Table 6.1. The table is therefore a broad guide to the relationship between mechanisms and policy responses. In this chapter each mechanism is considered as acting alone, free from the influence of other mechanisms. This situation is hardly likely to be encountered in practice and Chapter 7 considers interactions between mechanisms in detail. Table 6.1 is offered as a toolbox of useful devices (mechanisms) for enhancing lifelong learning and it represents a significant outcome of the activity.

Table 6.1. A broad guide to the relationship between mechanisms and policy responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy responses</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a strong role</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a supporting role</th>
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In this table an inclusive approach has been adopted. If it can be argued that a mechanism can have any positive effect on a policy response it has been included, regardless of whether it does not combine well with other positive mechanisms or whether it might not have a positive effect under certain conditions.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Diversify assessment processes</th>
<th>6. Providing credit transfer</th>
<th>7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>19. Optimising quality assurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Make qualifications progressive</td>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
<td>7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications</td>
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<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
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<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16. Investing in pedagogical innovation</td>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Make the qualifications system transparent</td>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
<td>1. Communicating returns to learning for qualifications</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
<td>11. Monitoring the qualifications system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18. Maximising co-ordination in the qualifications system</td>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
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<td>19. Optimising quality assurance processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Review funding and increase efficiency of the qualifications system</td>
<td>6. Provide credit transfer</td>
<td>1. Communicating returns to learning for qualification</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Lowering cost of qualification</td>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
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<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system</td>
<td>16. Investing in pedagogical innovation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up to date</td>
<td>17. Increase the use of outcome-based assessment methods</td>
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<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
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<td>19. Optimising quality assurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Better manage the qualifications system</td>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
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376. The following paragraphs offer a brief explanation of how the mechanisms support each policy response. Examples of the effect strong mechanisms are given in the first paragraph for each policy response and the supporting mechanisms are exemplified in the second paragraph.

6.1.1. Policy response 1: Increase flexibility and responsiveness

377. Flexibility in qualifications systems is supported by all mechanisms that increase choice, for example, by providing options within the learning programmes that lead to qualification. Credit transfer offers flexibility within programmes, between programmes and can lead to partial qualification that will ease stepping out of a qualification programme and stepping back in sometime later. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning will also support the policy action through enabling flexible entry into qualification programmes. Portability of qualifications also opens up options for people who revise their career plans or see a different opportunity to learn for qualification. Responsiveness to the needs of employers will also be aided by these flexible measures but perhaps more important to these stakeholders will be improvements in the ways skills needs are included in qualification structures. By involving learners as stakeholders in qualification design and management, the qualification itself might become more learner-centred. Employers and providers will find qualifications that are outcome-based are clearer to use and understand. The involvement of stakeholders generally will help maintain the pressure to respond to needs.
378. There are mechanisms that support customisation by creating more flexible outcomes for learners but they do not play a direct role. For example, qualifications frameworks will illustrate linkages and opportunities to transfer from one qualification programme to another. Lowering the cost of qualification means people can afford more and therefore have more choice. Another aspect of this learner orientation might be improved by monitoring the qualifications system to make sure that their needs are met. Whilst pedagogy is not directly part of qualification, diversity in pedagogy could create a sense of customisation for the learner.

In Sweden, the Adult Education Initiative is part of a reform of adult learning. The intention was for all education and training that took place within the Initiative to be governed in form and content by the needs, wishes and capacity of the individual. The idea being that those adults most in need of education should be given a chance to catch up and add to their stock of knowledge and perhaps gain qualifications.

Approximately 800,000 adults, almost 20 per cent of the work force, were given a chance to supplement their previous education during a five-year period. Many of those taking part in the Adult Education Initiative were people who would probably otherwise never to have the chance to continue studying and gain qualifications. The broad recruitment was successful partly thanks to generous, earmarked funding as well as the follow-up activities carried out by trade-union organisations and organisations for the disabled.

The municipalities and the state were jointly responsible for the Adult Education Initiative. Financing took the form of state grants but each municipality was individually responsible for organising, planning and implementation.

During the spring 2001 the Swedish government presented goals and strategies for the development of adult learning based on the needs of the individual in the Bill (Adult Learning and the Development of Adult Education (prop. 2000/01:72). The Bill sets out a strategy for support from the state and the municipalities for adult learning based on the needs of the individual – adult learning should satisfy people's needs for learning based on the individual's personal wishes, needs and prerequisites. The focus is shifted from teaching in school-like forms to more flexible ways of providing support for the individual's learning. The individual should be the focal point and education should as far as possible be steered by the demands of its users. Outreach activities, guidance, validation, accessibility and study support may be said to constitute the cornerstone of an infrastructure for lifelong learning. Responsibility for ensuring that all the elements of this structure are in place – with the exception of study support – rests with the municipal councils.

This flexibility must be developed on the basis of local conditions in each municipality in order to meet the needs of the individual. The municipalities play an important role as educational organisers, but should also develop their role as coordinators of information measures, counselling and educational opportunities. This involves building up networks, creating forms and channels for co-operation and coordination between municipal administrations, state authorities and institutions, popular adult education, education and consultancy companies, partners on the labour market, organisations representing handicapped persons and other actors involved.

6.1.2. Policy response 2: Motivate young people to learn

379. The key mechanisms for motivating young people to learn are those that create clear benefit for getting a job. Young people will also be motivated to learn if they receive advice and guidance on the returns to qualifications in different careers. More choice also motivates young people, such as in range of qualifications available, different learning pathways and flexibility in learning programmes, including pedagogical innovation. More choice through flexibility, for example by providing credit transfer, should lead to stronger motivation to learn for qualifications. Another kind of mechanism that could motivate young people to learn is the way qualification generates employability and increases the perceived quality of the education and training on offer as well as the qualification that results from learning. High costs of qualification (both in money and opportunity to earn) will demotivate young people and lowering costs might have the opposite effect.

380. Motivation may also rise if recruitment processes make more use of qualification from secondary education and recruitment processes make explicit use of the clarity resulting from use of qualifications frameworks and outcomes based assessment methods. If more qualifications are seen as portable across the boundaries between types of job and types of learning programme they may be seen by young people as
more desirable. Motivation to learn for qualification may be higher if the key stakeholders (learners, employers and learning providers) are involved in the management of general education.

In the United Kingdom the drop out across the school to work interface has been uncomfortably high for some years. Recent reports and comparative studies signal that this is an issue that needs attention. The participation rates of 16 year olds in full-time education have remained relatively static at about 70-72%, and at 58-59% for 17 year olds. The Government set up an enquiry into 14 – 19 education that had the objective of reforming the qualifications process for young people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that would shift the balance of incentives and would lead to a greater proportion of young people prepared to commit themselves both to staying on and to making further progress in the education and training system compared to previous cohorts. This enquiry has led to the production of a White paper for 14 – 19 education that aims to reduce the rate of disengagement from schooling.

The reforms will begin with a review of the curriculum experienced before age 14 on the basis that providing a sound foundation for what follows after age 14 needs to be a starting point for those likely to disengage. The level of prescription in the curriculum of 14 year olds will be reduced to allow room for greater concentration on the functional elements Maths and English. Curriculum (and qualification) relevance is to be achieved by providing choice and flexibility, particularly by introducing more coherent and better quality vocational provision. Young people who currently leave at 16 will be encouraged to stay in learning if they can tailor the vocational curriculum to their needs and aspirations but in a way that provides them with clear progression opportunities in the future, this will include the option of combining vocational elements with more general learning. A system of interlocking diplomas at different levels has been proposed to motivate young people to enter a system where they can see where they are going and were they can gain credit for what they are doing. The Diplomas are to be developed through the involvement of all stakeholders and are intended to become established as a clear and valued alternative to the traditional academic qualifications route for vocationally oriented young people For the most disengaged 14-16 year old learners a special pilot programme based on an existing post 16 scheme ‘Entry to Employment’ will be developed.

6.1.3. Policy response 3: Link education and work

381. There are many mechanisms that strengthen the link between education and work. At the level of learning programmes the inclusion of work-oriented study in general education programmes, possibly as vocational tracks, is likely to be supportive. Content of programmes that lead to higher employability is also supportive as will be the systematic analysis of skills needs in enterprises. The latter will ensure qualifications are up to date and will encourage employers to use them in recruitment. Education and work can also be strongly linked by setting up a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning so that learning in the workplace can be used in further qualification and learning gained outside work can be recognised in work settings. Establishing qualifications frameworks that show clearly the links between qualifications that are generally vocational and academic in nature will help and in the same way portability of qualifications can bridge the gap between education settings and work settings. Credit transfer arrangements and increased portability of qualifications can also enable this bridging. Another strong mechanism is the involvement of stakeholders from enterprises who might appreciate the opportunities of better use of qualifications in recruitment processes and workplace development.

382. Supportive mechanisms will include the investment in pedagogical innovation that will enable work based learning to become more attractive to learners and providers as will the provision of new routes to qualifications. If qualifications used outcome-based methods the additional clarity might make work applications of qualification clearer to qualification users. Sometimes existing qualifications may serve the purpose of linking education and work but the information available to learners may be weak, making sure the information is up to date and relevant is there a supportive mechanism. Monitoring the response of learners to qualifications provision will allow coordination of the different elements to be optimised for linking education and work through qualifications.

In Germany from the mid-1990s onwards four new IT qualifications were created for training at skilled worker level and in 1997 they were recognised nationally. The main characteristic of the qualifications developed is that they are based on new structural models for initial vocational qualifications. They consist of a relatively stable core of vocational knowledge and skills, which make up the mandatory units. These are linked to optional units, which – depending on the occupational field – account for between one third and half of the overall qualification.
Building upon these four qualifications, a system of “continuing education and training” with three career levels and a total of 35 qualifications was defined by the BIBB on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, accompanied by an expert advisory panel appointed by the leading associations of the two sides of industry. On the first level you find “specialists”, on the second “operative professionals” and on the third “strategic professionals”. The first level is made up of 29 specialist profiles (customer advisor, software developer, technician, etc.). They are accessible to holders of the four skilled worker qualifications and for learners from outside the profession. The individual profiles or qualifications are clearly defined by their fields of work (no substitution possible); it will be possible to use them as entry qualifications for the next level up (operative professional level); qualification and certification should take about one year. There are no examinations: the qualification is certified by an accredited private organisation. However, the operative professional exam is open to those who can make a convincing case that they have acquired the skills that justify them being admitted to the exam. This means that formal learning can be replaced by certification of work experience.

In a second step, four qualifications at the second career level and two qualifications at the third career level of the system were defined. For both levels a public exam in accordance with the Vocational Training Act is envisaged. The second career level (operative professional) covers the following areas of qualification: IT skills, staff leadership/management, budget management, technical engineering, process engineering, project management and marketing. The staff leadership/management section is recognised as part of the trainer eligibility exam. At the third career level (strategic professional) the qualifications relate to the development of business policy and to planning resources, product lines or investments. The middle level of the system is considered equivalent to a Bachelor of Engineering, the highest level is equivalent to a Master of Engineering; the tasks at this level are currently for the most part carried out by university graduates.

In order to facilitate transition between the systems for vocational training and academic studies, the education and economics ministries and the social partners have advocated a system for counting vocational qualifications towards higher education qualifications, along with regulations for IT continuing education and training. The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs was called upon to allow such qualifications to be counted towards further studies in the case of the new IT qualifications by applying a points system as practised within the framework of the European Credit Transfer System.

### 6.1.4. Policy response 4: Facilitate open access to qualifications

383. Strong mechanisms include the development of new routes to existing qualifications that might be more attractive to some learners. This includes the transfer of credit for achievements from previous learning. Lowering the cost also means access to more expensive qualifications will become possible. Any mechanism that makes requirements of qualifications clear through better information and guidance systems will support this policy action as will the opportunity to have prior learning recognised for a qualification.

384. Other mechanisms also help; flexibility in learning programmes might engage learners who were not inclined to qualification based learning and a qualifications framework will make opportunities clearer to learner. Using learning outcomes to describe qualifications and learning programmes has the potential to clarify the necessary preparation for qualification based learning and consequently open more routes to qualifications. Any monitoring that uncovers obstacles to learning for qualifications will be useful for providers to consider. Involving a wide range of stakeholders might develop stronger trust in the access routes to qualifications that are often blocked. However the more open access and closer involvement of a range of partners will call for closer coordination of the parts of the qualifications system involved.
In Switzerland modularisation contributes to opening up of access to qualifications. During the 1990’s, policy debates focussed on increasing flexibility by introduction of a modular system, especially into Higher vocational education and training. Some professional associations started to work on a scheme for professional examinations and higher professional examinations under the auspices of Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology. One of the outcomes has been the common development of similar curriculum modules for different professions (e.g. accountability, SME-Management) thus enabling more open access.

During a first period of experimentation, this system was well received by the professional associations as there were positive effects on the professional outcomes for many modules. On the base of these positive experiences the Swiss Parliament decided to strengthen the legal base for a general introduction of modularisation in Swiss vocational education and training system in the new federal law on professional education (accepted by Federal Parliament by the end of 2002). One important element of the regulation is the dissociation of curriculum and qualification procedure.

The most important goal of the modularisation allows to individuals to choose individual curricula, especially in terms of date, localisation of the module and composition / structure of the curriculum. By recognising partial qualifications, this system meets the need of permeability and flexibility and increases the mutual recognition of modules.

The Federal Office is in charge of the further development of modular education, assures information on modular vocational education and training and coordinates the mutual recognition of modules, curricula and pathways between different curricula. In order to achieve these goals, the federal office produced Guidelines for Modular vocational education and training at the end of may 2002.

6.1.5. Policy response 5: Diversify assessment processes

385. Strong mechanisms for this policy action include the introduction of credit transfer where different modes of assessment will need to be evaluated before transfer can take place. The same may be true for systems recognition of prior learning. Outcome based methods may also require the development of more diverse modes of assessment.

386. Supporting mechanisms involve changes to learning programmes, through response to learner choice, or due to innovation in teaching methods, will contribute more diverse methods as will the need to make sure assessment methods are fit-for-purpose and fulfil requirements of quality assurance methods. Monitoring developments in diversification of assessment methods will also be necessary to maintain confidence in the qualification outcomes resulting from these new approaches.

In Mexico attention has been paid to diversifying assessment processes through the use of three initiatives. (a) Setting up systems to recognise non-formal and informal learning

Active and unemployed workers who may aspire and have access to certification of their occupational competency, regardless of how they acquired it are encouraged to use the services of new assessment centres (Centro de Evaluación, CE) – which may be an enterprise, a chamber, an enterprises association, an educative institution, or a union – evaluates candidates. Currently 1,413 centres are accredited to carry out assessments; of which: 349 are private enterprises; 137, public enterprises; 700, public and private educative institutions; 171, chambers and associations; 55, independent evaluators; and 1 is a trade union.

Persons possessing an occupational competency certificate may obtain recognition of their competencies within the academic and vocational routes, based on the Agreement 286 that is being implemented. This agreement will makes it possible to establish common assessment credit criteria to correspond, in some measure to occupational competency certificates with partial or total contents of current study plans and programs in the different educative cycles, levels and careers of the National Educatve System. The agreement includes the possibility that people who had acquired learning outside the mentioned routes, and who do not have any certificate, may present tests to obtain recognition of their previous learning. Agreement 286 stipulates that beneficiaries may achieve recognition through certificates, records, diplomas or titles, according to learning accreditation by subject matters, grades, cycles, levels or careers. By this way, to date, almost 28,000 individuals have received the upper secondary education certificate (3C level, ISCED), and above 500, a bachelor degree) in one of 24 careers.

(b) Increase the use of outcome-based assessment methods

This mechanism is an intrinsic part of the standards based development of vocational education. There are many examples of its application in the transformation of the national education management infrastructure for vocational education and training and the educational institutions. In this context, the assessment method used is outcome-based, according to criteria established in the national agencies. In other words, learning evidences are evaluated with respect to the performance criteria and application fields established to determine if a person is competent or not yet competent.

(c) Provide credit transfer

The academic credit recognition and transfer is of great importance issue for the 138 public and private institutions of higher education affiliated to the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institution (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior, ANUIES). Some inter-institutional programmes have started to be implemented around credit transfer. Some examples are the covenants and agreements among higher education institutions for credit transfer and student mobility. This is the case of Aguascalientes Technological University (Universidad Tecnológica de Aguascalientes) with Aguascalientes Autonomous University (Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes), where graduates from the first institution on 2-year study programs may continue bachelor studies and later graduate studies in the second institute, by means of recognition and credit transfer.

6.1.6. Policy response 6: Make qualifications progressive

387. The key mechanisms all relate to increased coherence of the qualifications system, for example the development of a framework of qualifications and the existence of firm learning pathways that could include new routes to qualifications. Outcome-based methods and the operation of a credit transfer system will allow a clearer idea for all stakeholders of how one qualification builds or leads to another. The infrastructure of the qualifications system also needs to be well coordinated.

388. This policy action is also supported by any action to make qualifications systems flexible and ways of recognising achievement in one qualification count in another through, for example, recognition of non-formal learning and ensuring qualifications are portable. The involvement of stakeholders will help to ensure that unnecessary barriers to progressive qualification are identified and removed and that information and guidance is designed to show the progressive nature of qualifications. In addition to quality assurance measures this policy action will be informed by systematic monitoring of how people progress (or do not progress) through the qualifications system – quality assurance has the potential to require providers of qualifications to make sure that qualifications are clearly progressive in practice.

Introduction of an Associate Degree as a new higher education qualification in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), able to be delivered across sectors.

The Associate Degree was added to the Australian Qualifications Framework in 2004. It is a new sub-degree qualification of two years duration, positioned at an equivalent level to the Advanced Diploma (a mainly vocational education and training qualification).

In the past, some universities under their autonomous powers offered an associate degree as a local award accredited against local criteria. Now that the Associate Degree is part of the Australian Qualifications Framework as a national qualification title with nationally-agreed criteria and guidelines, the Associate Degree can be offered on a consistent basis across sectors by a range of providers which are able to meet the relevant government requirements for higher education qualification, including public vocational education and training (e.g. TAFEs) and private vocational education and training as well as higher education institutions.

The Associate Degree illustrates the flexibility inherent in the sectoral structure of the Australian Qualifications Framework. Because Australian qualifications are clearly sector-specific in their outcomes and quality assurance requirements, they are able to be offered across a range of different types of providers in all sectors without loss of clarity and certainty in respect of their particular sector-specific quality and standards. The capacity for a single institution to offer qualifications across sectors is an important aspect of the responsiveness of the system to local needs for a diversity of learning pathways.

The Associate Degree is also a progressive addition to the Australian Qualifications Framework in the following respects:
- It is a short-cycle degree particularly suited to the newer evolving knowledge-based, multi-disciplinary occupations for paraprofessionals in fields such as biotechnology and nanotechnology.
- As such, it is responsive to the diversity of the international market and the globalisation of knowledge.
- It offers an alternative pathway – with full credit – to a related Bachelor Degree, and an early exit point, as well as being a qualification in its own right.
- It is a stimulant to creative re-design of bachelor degrees where an articulated pathway with full credit is required.
- It offers a learning alternative to the Advanced Diploma, with greater emphasis on the knowledge base of the academic discipline and on generic rather than specialist employability skills.

6.1.7. Policy response 7: Make the qualifications system transparent

389. Many mechanisms are strongly associated with increasing transparency. Qualifications frameworks and learning pathways are usually designed for this purpose. Making clear the learning goals of qualifications through the use of learning outcomes will help make the qualification clear to learners and more useful to recruiters. Coherence in management of all the wider aspects of qualifications systems (including the use of quality assurance processes) and the range of agencies involved in qualification design and delivery will be important. Involving stakeholders in qualification development will act as a means of detecting areas where the system that requires clarification.

390. In addition to these strong measures the portability of a qualification across settings may also be supportive of this policy response. The same benefit could arise from systematic monitoring of learner views of qualification and the linkages between them. However sometimes the qualifications that are available and their requirements needs to be explained more clearly to potential users and this might include the potential returns to individuals for achieving a qualification.

The Spanish vocational education and training system has been reformed to make it more transparent for all users. The goal was the creation of an overall system of vocational training, qualifications and accreditation, in coordination with active policies for employment and fostering worker mobility and lifelong learning. The creation of a national system of vocational qualifications was the national programme of reform (1998-2002), where the purpose of advancing towards integration of subsystems of vocational training was a main goal. Among the proposed measures was the creation of the National Institute of Qualifications. In 2002 a new law on qualifications and vocational training became the basis for a vocational education and training qualifications framework and as basic notion the technical concept of occupational qualification, understood as the set of skills with meaning for employment and acquired through a formal and non-formal/informal process that are the object of the proper evaluation and accreditation procedures.

The establishment of the vocational education and training qualifications framework allowed for the identification of the tools of transparency: the procedure for the recognition, evaluation and recording of occupational qualifications, the roles for information and guidance in vocational training matters; the restructuring of the network of vocational training centres and the reordering and continuous updating of the vocational training offers linked to the vocational education and training qualifications framework. With these tools and through the study of equivalences between vocational training subsystems and the procedures for credit attribution in formal and non-formal learning and the monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the quality and workings of the national framework for vocational qualifications made a major contribution towards transparency.

The vocational education and training qualifications framework comprises the national catalogue of occupational qualifications, that are modular in structure (modular catalogue of vocational training), arranged in 26 vocational families and ordered in five levels; this is now in advanced process of elaboration.

The effects of the Act are now visible in its development through the regulation of the catalogue of occupational qualifications in its role of backbone of the system, the accreditation prior learning measures adopted and the reordering of the initial vocational training, specially in general education. A recent document on education and training matters (“una educación de calidad para todos y entre todos”, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, debate educativo.mec.es, 2004) reaffirms the will to advance on the progressive integration of subsystems, recognising at once some of the more pressing and historical problems. The document is now open to a process of social and political debate.
6.1.8. Policy response 8: Review funding and increase efficiency

391. Efficiencies and cost reduction will arise from making qualifications count for more – through portability, transfer of credit, recognising existing learning and raising the awareness of employers of the value of greater use of qualifications during recruitment processes. These mechanisms can be supplemented by others that ensure that qualifications are meeting needs of stakeholders as well as possible – these mechanisms include making sure that needs analysis methods are accurate, the latter may be helped by involving key stakeholders. Quality assurance methods and monitoring procedures can be used to ensure the qualification process itself is efficient and minimises the cost of individual qualifications. Finally measures to increase coordination will directly affect the efficiency of a qualifications system.

392. Some mechanisms will support this policy response, notably the effective communication of returns to learners. Qualifications frameworks and providing new routes to qualification and pedagogical advances might also reduce costs and make qualification more efficient. Outcome-based assessment has the virtue of transparency and might reduce inefficiencies raise the level of coherent operation of the system.

In Denmark, Individual Competence Clarification (IKA or Individual Kompetenceafklaring) has been legally linked to adult vocational training as an option since 1997. The aim of the individual competence clarification is to clarify the individual's personal and professional competences and eventual further training needs and to prepare the individual to participate in adult vocational training. In 2002, approximately 22'000 people participated in an individual competence clarification programme. Compared to figures from 1999 this represents an increase of 13'776 persons, corresponding to an increase of about 168%.

If the applicant does not meet the admission requirements, the college is required to inform the student about those requirements that must be met for admission. Counselling forms an integrated part of the application and assessment procedure.

On the basis of the assessment process mandated by legislation a personal educational plan is drawn up for the applicant. The personal educational plan has a validity of six years. The flexible duration allows adults to work while obtaining a vocational qualification corresponding to the I-VET level. From a system perspective this is a way to increase system efficiency. From an individual perspective it may raise motivation to participate in lifelong learning, because the individual only needs to complete modules in areas where s/he does not possess the required competence within a given qualification. From an economic point of view it might also make lifelong learning more affordable, insofar the individual competence clarification opens up for qualification on a partial basis over an extended period.

6.1.9. Policy response 9: Better manage the qualifications system

393. Increasing the performance of the management of qualifications systems management might arise through use of mechanisms that introduce clear structures (frameworks), monitor the way the system is operating and communicate clear messages about how the system works. Involving stakeholders in these processes will also help with coordination. However tools of better coordination are a crucial part of the management process as is the deployment of an effective quality assurance process.

394. Some other mechanisms will link qualifications and help coordination; credit transfer systems and arrangements for making sure qualifications are optimally portable are important. Supporting the drive for better management will be mechanisms such as development of effective needs analysis methods and making sure information to users about the system is accurate and useful.

In Ireland, a process of reform and redevelopment of the qualifications system is under way. This process is based on legislation [the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act] and involves a combination of structural reorganisation and the introduction of a national framework of qualifications.

Three new statutory organisations were established in 2001 – a National Qualifications Authority and two Awards Councils – and they have been set the task of developing and implementing a national framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. A blueprint for the Framework was published in March 2003 and it is becoming operational over a short transitional period.
The establishment of the new bodies, and the other provisions in the legislation, have already had significant effects throughout the structures and organisations that make up the qualifications system in Ireland. Arising out of a concerted process of consultation driven by the new Qualifications Authority, there has been widespread debate and discussion on issues concerning all aspects of awards and qualifications and this has contributed strongly to the design of the new system of qualifications. The Authority is the single, independent policy-making and development engine driving the reform process. The new Awards Councils have removed much of the complexity that characterised the previous system. Several awards systems previously located in various vocational education and training organisations have been gathered together under the remit of the new ‘Further Education and Training Awards Council’, which is now the only statutory body awarding vocational education and training qualifications in Ireland. The new ‘Higher Education and Training Awards Council’ awards qualifications for a wide range of higher education institutions.

The central element in the reform of the Irish qualifications system is the development of a National Framework of Qualifications, a structure of levels allowing qualifications to be compared easily. The Framework is defined as

“The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.”

Following the launch of the Framework in October 2003, implementation has proceeded quickly. New ‘framework’ qualifications have been in use throughout higher education and training since the autumn of 2004 and the introduction of a new system of awards for further education and training (including vocational education and training) is expected in mid 2005. In the meantime, work is proceeding on referencing hundreds of existing and former qualifications that will now be replaced by new awards, to the levels in the Framework.

The Framework is a structure of levels. The ten levels accommodate awards gained in schools, the workplace, the community, training centres, colleges and universities, from the most basic to the most advanced levels of learning. All learning can thus be recognised, including that achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings. Details of the Framework and its operation can be found at www.nfq.ie

For each level in the Framework, standards of knowledge, skill and competence have been set out, defining the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain awards. This introduces a new approach to the meaning of an award, that an award recognises learning outcomes – what a person with an award knows, can do and understands - rather than time spent on a programme.

In addition to the development of the Framework itself, the Qualifications Authority was mandated to introduce policies and procedures to promote learner mobility and improve opportunities for learners to gain access to qualifications. The resulting strategy sets out to bring about changes in relation to:
- Credit systems and recognition of prior learning
- Transfer and progression routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision for learners.

The design of the Framework of Qualifications takes into account the need to facilitate the mobility strategy. Further details of the strategy can be found in the paper ‘Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners’, available at www.nqai.ie

6.2. Power and versatility of the mechanism

395. As noted above when presenting Table 6.1, mechanisms are classified in three ways according to the role they seem to play: strong, supporting and no role. It is therefore possible to review the ways mechanisms support each policy response using Table 6.1 and to rank each mechanism according to the number of policy responses it is capable of supporting. In Table 6.2 below, the mechanisms are ranked according to how many policy responses are supported by each mechanism. Powerful ones are likely to have a strong role to play. However, again, the boundary between strong and weak is arbitrary and it is necessary to carefully investigate what the ranking is telling us.
## Table 6.2. Ranking the influence of mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Number of policy responses where the mechanisms has a strong role</th>
<th>Number of policy responses where the mechanisms has a supporting role</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Communicating returns to learning for qualifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing employability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Increasing learner choice in qualifications</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Providing credit transfer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Creating new routes to qualifications</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lowering cost of qualifications</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Recognising non-formal and informal learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Monitoring the qualifications system</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up to date</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Improving qualification use in recruitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Investing in pedagogical innovation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Maximising co-ordination in the qualifications system</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Optimising quality assurance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What is the ranking telling us?

396. First, it is important to appreciate that policy responses are derived from the country evidence provided. They exist in countries as mature policies or as a clear policy intention. The mechanisms are not directly derived from country evidence in the same way. They are based on a wider evidence base concerned with the ways they might change the behaviour of the main stakeholders. It is quite possible that some mechanisms are not used in some countries.

397. A useful exercise is to consider the meaning of a top rank for a mechanism. It might mean any or all of the following:

- It is the most useful way of improving lifelong learning through qualifications systems because it supports more policy response than the other mechanisms.
- It is the most cost effective action since it supports many policy responses.
- Where policy responses are ill-defined perhaps because of the absence of reliable diagnosis of issues, the mechanism represents a safe option for optimising lifelong learning.
- It serves more purposes than the lower ranked ones because the purposes the latter serve are more specific.
- The mechanism is powerful because it is so broad that it should be considered as a policy response.

398. The high ranking mechanisms will have some properties that are worthy of further exploration. There are five mechanisms that support many policy responses: these are provide credit transfer, optimise stakeholder involvement, set up systems to recognise non-formal and informal learning, establish qualifications frameworks and provide new routes to qualifications. Each of these five mechanisms support almost all the policy responses and most support the policy responses strongly. The origins of these mechanisms are elaborated in Chapter 5 and their supportive function is described above. It might be useful to consider the possible source of their power in a little more detail.
Provide credit transfer

399. Allowing a person to have some of their learning achievement for one qualification be recognised in another seems a relatively simple process. However when achievement is transferred from one system to another there are preconditions that call on many parts of the qualifications system. Firstly the achievement to be transferred must be defined and communicated, this means the curriculum and learning outcomes must be made explicit for each qualification, secondly the reliability and validity of the assessment of the learner and the quality of the qualification process must command respect. Thirdly the institution that provides the recognition of achievement and the receiving institution must be in some kind of systemic relationship where operations are compatible.

400. Thus providing credit transfer touches on a range of important characteristics of qualifications systems and, if a process is designed and established, it acts as a powerful reforming tool and a generator of coherence in the system. Providing credit transfer involves all partners in the qualifications system to review processes and reform those that are incompatible with the goal of allowing a learner’s achievement that is recognised in one place to be recognised in another. The result is that the qualifications system becomes more systemic in function and thus many of the policy responses are strengthened. The more obvious examples are that the more systemic approach makes the qualifications system more transparent and makes qualifications progressive but it could also lead to greater efficiency in delivering learning for qualifications.

Optimise stakeholder involvement

401. In the final analysis stakeholders own the qualifications system and as providers of learning for qualifications and as consumers of learning for qualifications their views on the ways of improving the system are obviously important. If policy responses aimed at improving the qualifications system are to be effective the stakeholders need to be engaged as deeply as possible. This engagement can take two forms, firstly as managers and operators of the qualifications system: this can be improved by creating an infrastructure of advisory and management boards for aspects of the qualifications system, and secondly by providing feedback loops from monitoring and evaluation activities into the core management of the system. The involvement of stakeholders therefore can provide an engine for further development of most aspects of the system and it is therefore not surprising it has powerful potential as a mechanism. Stakeholders are also a conduit for monitoring the qualifications system and communicating how the systems works in practice and can act to bring about transparency and coherence. Involving stakeholders in the qualifications systems therefore can create the conditions for system development.

Set up systems to recognise non-formal and informal learning

402. Recognition systems that generate information about learning achievements that have been acquired in a range of settings and that contribute formal qualifications act as a means of opening access to these qualifications for many people. The volume of informal and non-formal learning is huge and therefore the potential to create routes into learning for qualification for individuals is also huge. These systems may also be effective ‘early warning’ devices for specific learner needs and employer needs that are arising in life and work. They may also innovate in terms of assessment methodology, if the formal system is conducive to development the information arising from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning may be a rich source of developmental ideas. The recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning also brings in a range of new stakeholders who have been outside the formal systems (e.g. small enterprises, specific social groups) these stakeholders can create the conditions for involving more people in learning for qualification.
Establish qualifications frameworks

403. Qualifications frameworks make explicit the relationship between qualifications. They aim to increase transparency and to show potential progression routes and can become the basis of credit transfer systems. They are overarching tools that can be used to engage all stakeholders in developing and coordinating the qualifications system. Often they are used as tools for regulation and quality assurance. At the same time a qualifications framework can open opportunities to potential learners because it makes progression routes clear and it can offer rationalisation of the number of qualifications and reduce the overlap between qualifications. In all of these ways the frameworks create an environment where the whole qualifications system can be reviewed. This means the management of the qualifications framework can be used as a tool to enhance many policy responses.

Provide new routes to qualifications

404. The creation of new routes of qualifications, including more flexible and multi entry pathways, requires that careful analysis of need for these new routes has taken place and that stakeholders are involved in discussions about the most appropriate form for these new routes. The development of these routes helps to clarify relationships between qualifications and, because it does not involve the creation of a new qualification, it is a relatively simple way of developing an environment that is more conducive to lifelong learning. Often the new route to qualification will draw on other mechanisms such as the recognition of lifelong learning and by focussing attention to these it will be effective in promoting lifelong learning.

The value of supporting mechanisms

405. Some mechanisms appear often as having a supporting role. Some of them also appear in the column "strong role" and this is unsurprising because a strong mechanism is also expected to have a supportive role in many instances ("3- Establish a qualifications framework" and "17- Increase the use of outcome base assessment methods"). More interestingly, some of these mechanisms that are significant in the “supporting role” do not feature in the "strong" category ("11- Monitor the qualifications system, “16-Invest in pedagogical innovation” and “20- Upgrade information, advice and guidance services”). Why should monitoring of qualifications systems, pedagogy and information and guidance have a strong supporting role without being strong or “engine” mechanisms and supporting policy responses directly? These three mechanisms deserve some attention from the policy making point of view.

406. The rationale for the "monitoring of the qualifications system” (Mechanism 11) has to do with providing bottom up information to decision makers. In systems that have often been criticised as being too supply driven, it is not a surprise that listening to the demand is a mechanism that can have a strong supportive role without being a key engine. To a large extent, information and guidance services (Mechanism 20) enter the same category but the other way around: There is clear evidence that informing potential learners and/or individuals seeking a qualification may have a supportive role (OECD, 2003, 2004 and 2005a). The rationale is twofold. Firstly, individuals who are not aware of the possibility they have to undertake learning activities for a qualification, must be informed about the potential benefits of a) learning; and b) learning for a qualification. Secondly, for the individuals already convinced about the value of learning, and learning for a qualification, appropriate information and guidance would lead to better choice of qualification because these individuals need to be guided through their almost always complex qualifications system. Finally, pedagogical innovation is also typically a mechanism (16) that must have a supporting role. In the field of adult learning for instance, it is clear that lack of pedagogical innovation has been a strong deterrent to participation. Adults cannot be taught the same way as young people are. It may not be a powerful mechanism but again, a good complement to strong mechanisms by acting on individuals’ motivation to learn and to learn for a qualification.
407. Overall Table 6.2, in addition to identifying top ranked mechanisms that should probably be considered as top priority mechanisms, also identifies mechanisms that, if implemented with the strongest ones, provide lubrication to the system and make it run smoothly. Some mechanisms are therefore engine, other are acting as lubricant. And it is interesting to find out that these mechanisms that have a supporting but not decisive role, are very close to the needs of the individuals, namely: listening to them, adapting the pedagogy to their abilities and expectations and informing and guiding them through their own qualifications system. This is highly relevant for policy making because these considerations have an impact in terms of costs. Where organising credit transfer (Mechanism 6), recognition of prior learning (Mechanism 10) or a qualifications framework (Mechanism 3) might be extremely expensive, there are reasons to believe that monitoring the qualifications system, adapting the pedagogy or informing and guiding people might be less costly and still provide adequate complement to high stake policy responses.

408. The implications of these conclusions are discussed further in Chapter 7 and are the focus of a new OECD activity on recognition of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer (OECD, 2005b).

6.3. Change mechanisms

409. There is evidence that some countries attach special significance to particular mechanisms because their deployment can have deep or wide-ranging effects on systems. It is possible to analyse the set of mechanisms in terms of their potential as triggers’, enablers’ or ‘multipliers’, and on this basis three mechanisms emerge:

- Establishing qualifications frameworks.
- Communicating returns to learning for qualifications.
- Investing in pedagogical innovation.

410. In interpreting how these three mechanisms are used, it becomes clear that in contrast to the ‘lubricant’ mechanisms discussed above, they generally do not affect learners directly, and that they provide few direct benefits for learners. Their effect is seen in the system dimension, and their main characteristic is that they are agents of change. We can contrast the powerful benefits for learners arising out of the introduction of a credit system with the less immediate results of the introduction of a qualifications framework. However, from a system perspective, it can be seen that a qualifications framework can facilitate the development of credit systems, for example by providing an environment in which credit arrangements can apply on a wider scale than is otherwise possible (nationally or even internationally).

411. These ‘change mechanisms’ are seen to have particular effect in their interaction with other mechanisms, where they can operate as ‘enablers’, ‘triggers’ or ‘multipliers’. Investment in pedagogical innovation can provide the environment which enables action to increase flexibility in learning programmes to be implemented. Communicating the returns to learning for qualifications can directly focus attention on employability, and provide the trigger for improvement in the use of qualifications in recruitment processes. The establishment of qualifications frameworks is identified as a powerful multiplier, enhancing and coordinating the effects of many other actions such as the development of learning pathways, the introduction of credit systems, and the provision of new routes to qualifications. Table 6.3 arranges the set of mechanisms to illustrate the key ‘change mechanisms’ and the other processes with which they primarily interact; obviously, multiple interactions are possible.
Table 6.3. Change mechanisms and their interaction with other mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change mechanism</th>
<th>Establishing qualifications frameworks (3)</th>
<th>Communicating returns to learning for qualification (1)</th>
<th>Investing in pedagogical innovation (16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanisms with which ‘change mechanisms’ primarily interact</strong></td>
<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
<td>2. Developing employability</td>
<td>7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Creating routes to qualifications</td>
<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in qualifications system</td>
<td>13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Recognising non-formal and informal learning</td>
<td>14. Improving qualification use in recruitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Monitoring the qualifications system</td>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
<td>17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in qualifications system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Improving co-ordination in the qualifications system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Optimising quality assurance</td>
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</table>

412. The use of mechanisms as change agents is illustrated with particular clarity in the establishment of qualifications frameworks (3). In the countries where this mechanism has been deployed as part of a policy response, it is explicitly identified as a means of initiating wider system change or of deepening the effect of such change. The Irish country background report heralds the introduction of a national framework of qualifications as the leading edge of a thorough reform of the qualifications system. This process is outlined in an appendix to the report of Thematic Group 1 in this activity (on the development and use of qualifications frameworks as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems). The Thematic Group 1 report addresses the effect of qualifications frameworks as ‘drivers of change’ (Appendix A).

413. At the time of preparation of this international synthesis report, it is known that several European countries are actively considering the development of national or systemic frameworks of qualifications. International framework development is also under way. The European Heads of State have asked for a European Qualifications Framework to be in place by the end of 2006.

References


OECD, 2005a. Promoting Adult Learning, Paris. (Forthcoming, title to be confirmed)

Chapter 7

Linking qualifications systems and lifelong learning policy: Using mechanisms to review policy responses

This chapter draws on all the evidence and analysis presented in earlier chapters to discuss three tools that policy makers can use to develop qualifications systems to deliver more and better lifelong learning. The emphasis is on concrete actions and practical advice. The first tool is the use of mechanisms to review present and future policy on qualifications systems to test their robustness and to see if the benefits they promised have been delivered. Some mechanisms are more powerful than others in making qualifications systems more responsive to the lifelong learning agenda in that they appear to have a potentially greater influence on policy responses to lifelong learning than others. The practical application of these special mechanisms in policy responses to lifelong learning forms the second tool. The third tool is based on the complexity of interactions between mechanisms and how they can be used to support one another (and therefore the policy response) and how counterproductive interactions can be avoided.

7.1. Qualification systems influence lifelong learning

414. Policy making for lifelong learning in the arena of qualifications systems is difficult, underdeveloped and possibly undervalued. This chapter suggests that it is useful to review the role of qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning and discusses some of the practical issues for policy makers.

415. Lifelong learning is one item on the political agenda that has positive consequences in almost all domains of the life in a country, it is crucially important in terms of the well-being of a population. It is used as a way of achieving global benefits such as economic advantage but also wider benefits, such as good health. Lifelong learning has certainly a role to play in many of the main issues than cut across most OECD member countries: ageing of populations, skills shortages, human capital development, productivity, competitiveness, immigration, democracy and citizenship. In recent years, policies for developing lifelong learning have ranged over many areas of social and economic activity that influence education and training systems; the latter has been changed significantly in many countries with renewed efforts to increase accessibility and participation in learning. Policies for raising basic skills levels and the creation of financial incentives for learning or providing learning are examples. Participation in this OECD study has led to the examination of qualifications systems as potential levers to enhance lifelong learning. As a result in many countries, the qualifications system is now much more central to lifelong learning policy and the key question has shifted from ‘can qualifications systems influence lifelong learning?’ to ‘how can we optimise the qualifications system so that it provides the greatest incentive to learn throughout life?’. In this study information has been scrutinised from 23 countries regarding the latter question and an analysis has been prepared and has already been reported in chapters 2-6.

416. From the wide ranging discussion of evidence generated by this activity it is clear that there are opportunities to use qualifications systems to develop lifelong learning. This chapter deals with three main sets of tools that policymakers can consider. Firstly, existing policy responses to lifelong learning that involve qualifications systems can be examined through the use of mechanisms to discover if the original logic underpinning their creation remains robust and if the benefits they promised have been delivered or remain confidently expected. In most countries policy responses have not been evaluated for impact and
there is a belief that some of them are still to deliver the desired outcomes several years after their deployment. This belief is emerging from a close look at the qualitative data collated and analysed in this activity. It is clear that the main statistical sources of impact of qualifications systems on lifelong learning are not able to yield the feedback policy makers require; limited quantitative evidence is reported in Chapter 4.

417. Systematic review of current policy responses to lifelong learning that involve qualifications systems is therefore a good starting point. It is possible to use the mechanisms as ways to build new policy responses to lifelong learning that draws on the knowledge that each mechanism is defined as a means of influencing the behaviour of main stakeholders and therefore offers potential for optimisation of policy responses. Mechanisms are therefore a valuable new tool for policy making. During the spring of 2001, the Swedish government presented goals and strategies for the development of adult learning based on the needs of the individual in a Bill that sets out a strategy for support from the state and the municipalities for adult learning based on the needs of the individual to facilitate access to learning. This approach clearly has to do with the four mechanisms that put the learner at the centre of the learning process: communicating returns to learning for a qualification, increasing learner choice in qualification, investing in pedagogical innovation and improving information and guidance about qualifications system. Another example comes from Mexico where attention has been paid to diversifying assessment processes through the use of three initiatives: setting up systems to recognise non-formal and informal learning; increase the use of outcome-based assessment methods; and provide credit transfer that are mechanisms also identified in many other countries.

418. The identification of mechanisms is significant but the activity goes further and suggests (in Chapter 6) that a second tool is available which is may be more incisive in making qualifications systems more responsive to the lifelong learning agenda in that they appear to have a potentially greater influence on policy responses to lifelong learning than others, either in their wide applicability to policy responses or in their potential as ‘agents of change’. The practical application of these somewhat special mechanisms in policy responses to lifelong learning is also examined in this chapter. They offer prioritisation of investment in using mechanisms that will be useful where the availability of resources restricts full scale review or where policy responses are working effectively but may need to be refined. These powerful mechanisms can form the basis of new reforms to develop lifelong learning.

419. A third tool for policy makers arising from the activity is the opportunity mechanisms offer to appreciate the interaction between different reforms in the country context. In Ireland for example, the rhetoric developed around the newly implemented qualifications framework clearly states that a qualifications framework is a way of making other actions more efficient. The country context matters a great deal when considering the usefulness of mechanisms and will make the deployment (or otherwise) of mechanisms unique to each country. An issue that arises immediately is the complexity of interactions between mechanisms and how they can be used to support one another (and therefore the policy response) and how counterproductive interactions can be avoided. This issue is also examined through examples later in this chapter.

7.2 Mechanisms in strategic combination

420. The concept of a mechanism is a good basis for review of policy responses because this activity shows that mechanisms should lead to positive outcomes in terms of lifelong learning (Chapter 5). Policy makers could therefore begin a review of policy responses by examining whether each of the mechanisms identified in this study are used in the policy responses operating in their country. Table 6.1 in the previous chapter lists all the policy responses identified by countries and presents a list of mechanisms with a strong role in promoting each policy response.

421. Some, if not all, of the mechanisms presented in this international synthesis report connect, at least to some extent, with another. Policy makers need to take account of these possible interactions and assess the consequences of using combinations of mechanisms. In this chapter it is not possible to provide
a comprehensive review of the strategic use of mechanisms in combination which takes account of the many country contexts in which they are deployed, nevertheless it does draw attention to possible effects of interactions. These interactions may positively amplify the expected effects of mechanisms or create undue competition among stakeholders whose behaviour is triggered by the mechanisms. There is, in fact, little evidence available regarding the use of mechanisms in combination with one another. The aim in this chapter is therefore to suggest ways in which mechanisms can work in strategic combination, and also how to avoid mechanisms that might work counter productively.

422. The ranking of mechanisms, as set out in Section 6.2 indicates that certain mechanisms are used in many countries, or that many countries view certain mechanisms as tools that can be used if or when policy changes are required to promote lifelong learning. The five highly ranked strong mechanisms identified in Chapter 6 are, in order of descending importance: providing credit transfer, optimising stakeholders involvement in qualifications system, recognising non-formal and informal learning, establishing a qualifications framework and creating new routes. They require special attention in terms of interactions as the case is made that they are powerful because they are strong elements of many policy responses. It is also possible to analyse the set of mechanisms in terms of their potential as ‘multipliers’ or ‘enablers’, and on this basis some change mechanisms emerge which have been identified in Section 6.3. A third group of mechanisms has been identified as important because they play a supportive role in many policy responses, possibly because they act at the level of the individual. All these three categories of powerful mechanisms are summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Powerful mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five highly ranked strong mechanisms</th>
<th>Three change mechanisms</th>
<th>Five key supporting mechanisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Establishing a qualifications framework</td>
<td>17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes</td>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Creating new routes to qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

423. Reviewing Table 7.1 suggests that establishing qualifications frameworks is particularly significant as it is highly ranked as a strong mechanism against others, has the potential for system change and is a significant supporting mechanism. Of particular significance is the fact that establishing a qualifications framework is a change mechanism that enables all five of the highly ranked strong mechanisms. Few countries have a qualifications framework but many are considering the potential, especially in Europe. The benefits of introducing a qualifications framework have been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 and a summary listing is included in Appendix A. For all of these strengths, there may be some good reasons not to introduce a qualifications framework. These could include reasons of devolved governance, perceptions of a challenge to the primacy of demand led driving forces and cost.

7.3. Examples of policy review – addressing two problems

424. From a policy making point of view, there are two main approaches to using qualifications systems (and mechanisms) to develop lifelong learning. The first is to work on motivation of learners and the intermediaries that work with learners and the second is to reduce barriers to learning for qualification. There is recent research suggesting that motivation of key stakeholders may not be the most important aspect of delivering lifelong learning (Coffield, 2001). The removal of structural and social barriers (e.g. gender, employment status) is considered to be more important. Whilst the removal of barriers is clearly important, in the context of lifelong learning regardless of qualification, there is evidence that motivation of learners and intermediaries may not be evident even if all the possible barriers are lifted. Therefore, motivation itself cannot be only a second order condition. However, even if it accepted as a primary factor
there is little research evidence about the link between motivation and learning for a qualification. This OECD activity aims to look across motivation and barriers to learning and the lack of evidence may be a reason for the high level of interest by countries in this activity.

425. Motivation needs to be understood in this wider context and there are possibly three reasons for this. Firstly, if national qualifications systems are to impact on lifelong learning, all stakeholders involved in designing and shaping national qualifications systems should be convinced about the possible linkages between the former and the latter and, eventually, should be motivated to work purposely toward an improvement of national qualifications systems in the direction of a better promotion of lifelong learning. Secondly, motivation of individuals – the main stakeholder group – is one of the necessary conditions for individuals to undertake lifelong learning activities (OECD, 2003 and 2005). Thirdly, observing the mechanisms listed in Chapter 6, it is obvious that motivation is the key concept underlying many of these mechanisms as it is through analysis of motivation in Chapter 5 that they have been identified.

426. Addressing the issue of motivation involves all the other issues that the reader may come across in the previous chapters: a lower cost, a better coherence, a greater transparency, maximum responsiveness, some stability, a high degree of trust, etc. All these factors, by bringing motivation, create the conditions for a full involvement of the main stakeholder groups: individuals, employers, providers of learning and providers of qualifications. Practically, and in more specific terms, this requires analysis to be made locally, nationally or internationally when evidence appears. This analysis aims to identify 1) the stakeholders that must be motivated (not all of them need motivation at any point in time because they may already be highly motivated or because it is not relevant in a particular context or at a particular time); and 2) the best way to motivate them given the analysis that has been made.

427. Policy makers confront problems and it is the approach to the diagnosis related to two specific problems that are described later that the evidence of mechanisms, of mechanisms working together and the ways stakeholder groups can be motivated is brought together. The problems that have been chosen as the context of this synthesis will inevitably be hypothetical since no single country context is a usefully general model for contexts in other countries.

428. Even if there is clear evidence of a problem area, for example, there is no culture of learning for a qualification or the performance of the labour market is not very high, the analysis of the problem can be difficult. The difficulties may arise from the point of view of almost every single stakeholder. In the first example for instance, individuals seem to be the prime cause of this lack of culture. However, further thinking immediately leads to the providers that may not have created an effective culture of learning for a qualification, perhaps by not communicating enough about the potential benefits of qualification. It is also probably the case that employers do not reward qualification(s) enough and therefore they also contribute to the problem. Interestingly in some countries, the problem may come because individuals value learning for its own sake. As a consequence the possible outcomes of learning are not well known and certainly not fully utilised.

429. Precisely because the matter is complex and because most of the stakeholders are involved in every analysis that can be made, the mechanisms proposed in this report can be used in combination to target the appropriate stakeholders, according to where motivation is deficient. This has to be so because the motivation of stakeholders depends on many factors; and the stakeholders described in this report are very different from one another. To be efficient, the mechanisms have to be utilised according to the diagnosis being made, this is the main thesis that underpins this section. The use of motivation in this way is based on mechanisms because the latter are designed on the basis of an analysis of motivation. However, in this chapter, the effect of motivating more than one group is important whereas each mechanism may act only on one.

430. Qualifications systems are ‘heavy’ bodies and it is rather costly to change them – qualifications systems are usually extremely complex and the product of decades of evolution. It is costly time-wise,
because of the many stakeholders involved and the time it may take to build a consensus. It is costly also in terms of financial resource because it is rarely possible to change just one part of the system in isolation. In short, national qualifications systems are slow moving and it is not even clear that the main stakeholders have any interest in making it move. However the existence of conditions – such as a sustained economic growth or a stable social context – under which mechanisms operate more or less smoothly and more or less effectively cannot be denied.

431. Two broad problems are now discussed: lack of performance of the labour market and lack of perception of the value of qualification(s).

**Problem 1: Weak link between education and the labour market**

432. If labour market performance is an issue and if the policy response to the lifelong learning agenda is to try to motivate stakeholders through linking education and work through qualifications (Policy Response 3), then ten mechanisms can be used and six with a supporting role. They are described in Table 6.1 and repeated here (Table 7.2). These affect all three stakeholders groups and to analyse all these interactions would be very complicated. The context of the country will also affect the way it is analysed. In this section, some of the interactions are identified as examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Link education and work through qualifications</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a strong role</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a supporting role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing employability</td>
<td>8. Creating new routes to qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Establishing qualifications frameworks</td>
<td>11. Monitoring the qualifications system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Clarifying learning pathways</td>
<td>16. Investing in pedagogical innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Providing credit transfer</td>
<td>17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications</td>
<td>18. Maximising co-ordination in the qualifications system</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system</td>
<td>20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up to date</td>
<td>14. Improving qualification use in recruitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ensuring qualifications are portable</td>
<td>19. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes</td>
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</table>

433. The policy response *link education and work through qualifications* can affect most of the stakeholder groups in a positive way. Individuals in particular will feel they should seek a qualification because, with this link made explicit, it is likely that the return to investing in additional learning and/or getting a qualification will be higher. For example, individuals will be incentivised to undertake learning activities but they could also claim a qualification through recognition of prior learning. However, typically, too narrow a focus on employability may revive the usual gap of understanding and the lack of consensus between the education side and the labour market side: the former usually privileges rapid job placement where the latter is more interested in skills and competencies being acquired and documented. There are situations where individual needs rapid placement into a job; for example, when their subsistence is difficult or where a family is to be fed. Taking time to study a qualification is not a priority. There are also situations where individuals would be better off completing a cycle of qualification before (re)entering the labour market; this is the case when individuals need a qualification to progress further in the qualifications system. There is evidence in many countries that, when the economic growth is good and employers are in need of additional labour, individuals undertaking learning activities, either in the initial education and training system or in the adult learning system, are recruited even before the completion of their qualification. This report does not aim at deciding which way is best but it is clear that there is competition of purposes and careful evaluation of the pros and cons is needed when a job is in competition with a qualification.

434. Using other mechanisms such as *investing in pedagogical innovation or improving information and guidance about qualifications system* will certainly have a positive effect on individuals (OECD,
However, they may have an impact on cost and have a deterrent effect on either or all of the other stakeholders: employers and providers. Several other mechanisms will create positive incentives for some stakeholders but may create additional complexity for others. It is the case for mechanisms such as creating new routes to qualifications. Another clear example of the complexity of policy making is this field is the mechanism that develops employability. It will clearly encourage individuals to seek a qualification but it may scare employers away if they feel there is a risk of poaching; employees leaving for a better labour market position after acquiring qualifications. Poaching effects are also to be expected with mechanisms such as ensuring qualifications are portable.

435. In summary, there is no such a thing as a set of mechanisms operating in strategic combination that provide only positive impacts on the main stakeholders and national qualifications and lifelong learning systems. There would be many more examples to use under this heading of lack of labour market performance that would produce positive and negative influences but further analysis would not help the reader. Here, the intention is to raise awareness regarding the complexity of using the mechanisms together. Having said that, this first example started from a very broad analysis of lack of performance of the labour market but there are some simpler examples where the range of possibilities is narrow and therefore where the appropriate use of mechanisms is easier to determine. This is the case for the second example.

**Problem 2: Lack of perception of the value of qualification(s)**

436. If a lack of perception of the value of qualification(s) is a problem, there are many possible policy responses. If the policy response to the country lifelong learning agenda is to try to motivate stakeholders through facilitating open access to qualifications (policy response 4), then five mechanisms with a strong role can be used. They are described in Table 6.1 and repeated here (Table 7.3). As in the previous example, the lack of perception of the value of qualifications can be treated by motivating individuals or employers. Some of the former may not realise all the benefits they may get from being qualified. Some of the latter may not see any interest in matching their recruitment policy with a particular set of qualifications.

Table 7.3. Facilitate open access to qualification as a policy response (4). Extract from Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy response</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a strong role</th>
<th>Mechanisms with a supporting role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. Facilitate open access to qualification | 6. Providing credit transfer  
8. Creating new routes to qualifications  
9. Lowering cost of qualifications  
10. Recognising non-formal and informal learning  
20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications system | 3. Establishing qualifications frameworks  
7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications  
11. Monitoring the qualifications system  
12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system  
17. Increase the use of outcome-based assessment methods  
18. Maximising co-ordination in the qualifications system |

437. Many of the mechanisms listed in Table 7.3 and seen as having a strong role are likely to have an impact on the motivation of individuals. These mechanisms are interesting for policy makers because often individuals are not interested in a qualification. They often believe they will have to learn again if they engage in a qualification process. This belief of a learning component in the qualification process is a strong deterrent for many individuals, especially if they think they will have to learn in a formal setting, such as a classroom (considered poorly attractive), and especially for low skilled people who are the ones most commonly denying their (re)skilling needs (OECD, 2003 and 2005).

438. However, many of these mechanisms are disconnected from any formal additional learning. Providing credit transfer or recognising non-formal and informal learning does not necessarily require additional learning in formal settings. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes allows delivering a qualification without additional formal learning either. As a consequence, if the lack of individuals’ motivation comes from a lack of interest in learning as such; using all these mechanisms in combination...
and communicating their outcomes effectively would provide a clear incentive for individuals to seek a qualification.

439. Interestingly, this communication issue has raised again the question of the typical gap between education and employment. The gap is also still embedded in this policy response about facilitating open access to qualification. There is indeed some evidence that improving information and guidance about qualifications system is a mechanism that has a strong role in motivating individuals because, as seen above, individuals must know that there are other ways than traditional learning in a classroom setting to achieve a qualification. In addition, explaining the potential benefits of a qualification may incentivise individuals: there is evidence that poor awareness of the direct and indirect effects of a qualification is a clear factor for people to disregard qualification(s).

440. If individuals become aware of the return on investing in a qualification, they are more willing to undertake a qualification process. However, there is clearly a difference between information about qualification(s) programmes and guidance on progression in work. In the former case, information and guidance officers would clearly focus on lifelong learning issues, such as obtaining a qualification precisely or making a progression in the qualifications system. In the latter case, guidance officers would rather stress job placement issues and job progression. As an example, this latent issue has become particularly important with the growing use of one-stop centres to provide a wide range of services in one single place. The initial idea is quite tempting: minimising cost and waste of time for potential learners by providing all sorts of related services in one single institution. As far as information and guidance is concerned, they are very relevant to the subject because there is evidence of some sort of conflicts between education officers and employment ones. Again, this report does not aim to provide a clear cut answer to whether lifelong learning goals have priority on job placement or the other way around; especially considering that they want many purposes in common. However, this potential competition is to be underlined.

7.4. Conclusions

441. Many studies have been carried out on both of the topics of national qualifications systems and lifelong learning. However, very few of them explicitly link the two and the intersection is under researched and therefore still relatively poorly understood. This international synthesis report and the publications associated with it – especially the country background reports and the thematic groups’ reports – are therefore important for improving the understanding of the potential role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning. The dissemination of this report could for instance improve the communication among experts, users and practitioners by providing a common language and useful concepts. In this context, the definitions of the key terms, especially the new ideas of policy responses and mechanisms, are useful because they are based on discussion and on significant international consensus. Beyond this conceptual component, the many examples reported throughout this report could help shaping the future thinking and, ultimately, policy responses.

442. A lot of work remains to be done to fully grasp the consequences of the findings contained in this report in terms of policy responses. The most useful way to use this report would be for countries to reflect on their priorities and their possible policy responses to the lifelong learning agenda. Not all countries would like to see the same issues addressed (in the field of education and training or regarding the labour market), nor do they all have the same target groups for their policy actions. There is some common high priority target groups across countries, such as low skilled individuals, small and medium enterprises and low quality providers of qualifications but there are many more and they need to be defined locally. The possible outcomes, in terms of socio-economic benefits for the main stakeholders, depend a lot of adequately setting this policy framework. Despite the glaring lack of theoretical support to underpin the

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empirical findings provided in this report, some recent work has been helpful in providing a background to helping policy makers (Grubb, 2004; ETF, 2004).

443. It may be useful to consult with countries that did not participate in this activity to review whether all these policy responses to lifelong learning have been fully considered. The value of international activities relies greatly on the capacity to exchange and share. If not used comprehensively everywhere, all these policy responses to lifelong learning are used to some extent somewhere. If generalisation may not always be appropriate, awareness of other countries policy responses to specific issues in specific circumstances often offers added value. To that extent, the policy response review using mechanisms suggested earlier in this chapter is a step toward an improvement of policy learning from one country to another. These reviews would provide an excellent opportunity to carry out an evaluation of the cost for using such mechanisms. Any type of comparative exercise would bring added value in the search for diagnoses of common problems/issues related to lifelong learning.

444. All the participants to the OECD activity are well aware of the many other ways lifelong learning can be promoted that do not include the use of national qualifications systems. However, this report suggests that the lifelong learning agenda can be significantly improved using tools based on national qualifications systems. It has helped to identify some potentially useful tools for policy makers and has proposed 20 mechanisms that provide a means by which qualifications systems can promote better lifelong learning. The ways these mechanisms are deployed depends on the problems, the country context and the prevailing social and cultural conditions. Because these external conditions are so significant, and as often is the case, this report probably raises more questions than it provides answers. Nevertheless, an agenda seems to be set for the further development of qualifications systems targeted at lifelong learning. One of the most important agenda for future action is the development of better quantitative data.

445. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer (in the context of a qualifications framework) are two themes that have emerged from this activity as particularly important and the OECD plans investigate further these two themes in a follow up activity. Whilst some countries have made significant progress in these fields, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer are fairly new on the policy agenda to many countries, and institutional arrangements are fragmented at the international level. To help develop useful information for policy makers, there is a need to gather extensive evidence. What are the actual arrangements for developing these fields? How such arrangements are linked to the qualifications systems? Who governs the arrangements? Who finances them? What are the drivers behind such developments? The new activity aims to examine the key issues, on which the lack of data is conspicuous: i.e. the different institutional arrangements; technical organisation; the cost of different arrangements and the means for the public and private to finance the systems; the characteristics of users and the relevance to the labour markets; and the impact of current trends such as internationalisation and the new information and communication technologies. The activity aims to answer the research questions, which are critical in promoting lifelong learning: under what conditions experiential knowledge and skills can be best codified and credits transfer be best arranged? Under what conditions such codification and credit transfer would potentially bring ‘negative’ effects? The outcome will serve a wide range of stakeholders; government policy-makers, institutional decision-makers, the industry leaders, and learners.
References


Additional bibliography


CEDEFOP (Tissot, Philippe), 2003. 80 terms to better understand European vocational education and training policy.


Appendix A

Summary reports of the three thematic groups

Thematic Group 1: The development and use of ‘Qualifications frameworks’ as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems

Coordination: Ms. Anna Murphy, Ms. Tina Simota and Mr. Edwin Mernagh

This is a summary of a larger report that forms a contribution to the OECD activity on ‘The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning’, which is designed to investigate how different national qualifications systems influence the patterns and quality of lifelong learning within countries, and what actions within qualifications systems countries can take to promote lifelong learning. It examines countries’ experiences in designing and managing qualifications systems and attempts to identify the impact of different approaches and innovations upon lifelong learning and outcomes.

While the activity is being implemented primarily through the preparation and synthesis of Country Background Reports, it also includes a thematically-focused inquiry into certain key aspects of the agenda. Three Thematic Groups were established to explore and develop key themes that have emerged within the activity:

1. The development and use of ‘Qualifications frameworks’ as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems.
2. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
3. Involvement of stakeholders in qualifications systems.

The TG1 report assembles the products and outcomes of the work of Thematic Group 1 on the development and use of ‘Qualifications Frameworks’ as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems. It does not set out to synthesise the detailed work of the group; rather, it provides a compendium of main outputs, which separately and together can contribute to the wider OECD activity as a whole.

The Group formed after the November 2002 plenary meeting of national representatives in Paris. Ireland, with Greece, took the lead role in establishing the Group, beginning a process of document exchange by email that was continued throughout the work of this thematic group. This process was further enhanced by the initiation of a Smartgroups.com website. In this way, a small initial core group of participants gradually expanded (11 countries in all) and a group agenda began to form. Group participants represented countries with extensive, well-established frameworks as well as those who have recently introduced them or are actively considering them. It also included participants from CEDEFOP (the European Union’s agency for the promotion of vocational education and training) and from the International Labour Organisation. This agenda provided the basis for a first meeting of the Group in Dublin in May 2003. A second meeting of the Group took place in Athens in September 2003.
Products

The Group developed a range of products which might assist any country in developing a general concept of qualifications frameworks, and in gaining an overview of current practices in various countries and an understanding of how frameworks can benefit qualifications systems’ further development. These products comprise:

1. Definitions of qualifications frameworks and qualifications systems

These definitions were developed in order to clarify the distinction between qualifications frameworks and qualifications systems and to contribute to a common understanding on the meaning of these terms:

**Qualifications system**

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications

**Qualifications framework**

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

2. Features of qualifications framework models

A range of common features of qualifications frameworks was identified from case studies developed by Group members to examine and clarify how frameworks in different countries compare to one another. As a model of how a framework has been introduced into a qualifications system, the emerging national framework of qualifications in Ireland is presented.

Common features of frameworks are set out as

**Purpose**

The studies indicate that countries introduce qualifications frameworks in order to:

- Better match qualifications with knowledge, skills and competences and to better relate qualifications to occupational (and broader labour market) needs. The aim is to address present and future needs. It is clear that in some countries there is a tension between the objectives of facilitating lifelong learning and the labour market needs, at least in the short term.
– Bring coherence to sub-systems of qualifications, e.g., higher education, adult learning, school awards, and in particular vocational education and training qualifications, by creating an overarching framework for them.

– Support life-long learning (by opening up access, targeting investments and recognising non-formal and informal learning). and

– Facilitate the involvement of political actors and stakeholders, especially in vocational education and training.

**Drivers of Change**

In general, government ministries with responsibility for Education and Labour appear to be the main drivers of change. In many cases, significant reforms of vocational education and training are underway and qualifications frameworks are being considered or introduced in this context. In addition, particular groups play key roles, depending on the national situation. In some countries, autonomous communities (for example, Spain) and partners in social dialogue (for example, Germany, Spain, Greece) are significant. The involvement of social partners in developing the framework and qualifications is highlighted in the Czech Republic case study as being important to making qualifications more relevant. In Ireland's case, the engagement of statutory agencies charged is considered to be very important.

The importance of underpinning legislation is underlined in most of the case studies - this gives certainty about the framework and may be used to allocate clear responsibility for the framework to a particular body or bodies.

A number of cases refer to the need to take account of and link with social partnership agreements and to national employment strategies (for example, Germany, Greece, Spain). This may also be an important consideration in many other countries, the EU countries in particular.

Members of the Group felt that the case studies may not have identified certain underlying key drivers of change that steer developments in many countries – for example, the internationalisation and globalisation of learning and the development of wider regional (European or transnational) labour markets.

**Benefits of qualifications frameworks**

From the case studies, a list of main benefits, expected by countries from the introduction of frameworks, was identified. Frameworks can:

– Contribute to a coherent, transparent and more integrated qualifications system.

– Increase and target access to qualifications also for certain disadvantaged groups.

– Open up progression routes (both to higher and broader skills).

– Introduce flexibility for learners, providers and users.

– Promote recognition and validation of all qualifications (including non-formal/informal learning).

– Promote vocational education and training and adult learning (in its own right and through opening access to higher education).

– Make qualifications more relevant to societal and labour market needs. and

– Promote investment and participation in skill development in the workplace.
In addition, frameworks can serve two main functions. First, they can be a tool for communications about qualifications systems, acting as a common reference point for all kinds of qualifications and promoting a culture of lifelong learning. Second, they can be used to regulate in which case they create certainty about the value of qualifications, set out key requirements of qualifications (e.g. standards) and provide quality assurance mechanisms for qualifications.

The international dimension of frameworks was highlighted in a number of case studies. They have a potential role to support mutual recognition and the transparency of qualifications across different jurisdictions.

**Conditions for the introduction of frameworks**

The Group identified a number of general conditions that were deemed to be important to the successful development and implementation of frameworks:

− The importance of a legislative basis for a qualifications framework is underlined in a number of case studies. However, it was also noted that a voluntary ‘buy-in’ and commitment of stakeholders are important to successful framework implementation.

− The case studies point to the general need for all those engaged in education and training and in labour market policy to work together.

− National frameworks of qualifications need to be communicated to the population in general if they are to be successful.

− It seems from the case studies that it takes some considerable length of time to develop, maintain and successfully introduce frameworks of qualifications.

3. Benefits of Qualifications Frameworks

A paper was developed setting out the benefits of qualifications frameworks. Benefits are identified on two levels: general benefits, and benefits more specifically relevant to the development of Lifelong Learning.

**General benefits of qualifications frameworks**

Qualifications frameworks can bring benefits in four areas:

− **Benefits for qualifications systems and provision**
  
  ▪ To reduce complexity and enable coherence, transparency and integration despite increasing regionalisation, decentralisation and individualisation of provision (notably in relation to post-compulsory and continuing provision of education and training).
  ▪ To open access and enable progression to further qualifications, independent of whether they are initial, higher or VET/LLL qualifications.
  ▪ To enable learners and trainers/teachers to be guided and to facilitate them in identifying appropriate learning pathways.
  ▪ To set targets, taking into account societal, labour market, companies and citizens’ or learners’ needs, attitudes and preferences.
  ▪ To provide support for quality assurance and the development of standards, for systems of credit accumulation and transfer, and to enhance transferability, comparability and compatibility of qualifications.
Benefits to career development, guidance and employment placement, information and orientation, including occupational mobility

- To enable coping with accelerated change of needs and adaptation of learners, providers and enterprises within a sustainable framework.
- To communicate reference points for qualifications and increase their social acceptance and recognition on the labour market and in education and training. and
- To enable mapping of provision and qualifications in relation to skills supply, demand and occupational challenges.

Benefits to the international and transnational dimension of qualifications

- To contribute to increasing mobility, cooperation and exchange as well as intercultural understanding and mutual recognition.
- To enable a more in-depth cooperation and the development of mutual trust between providers, teachers and trainers from different countries and world regions.
- To promote recognition, transparency and (credit) transfer of outcomes of (modules) of training, delivered by different countries. and
- To enable the development of a common language in the discourse on qualifications (e.g. the concept of ‘meta frameworks’).

Benefits to regulation, legislation and institutional arrangements

- A regulatory framework would allow for the building of mutual trust, reliability and sustainability of quality of provision within national qualifications systems.
- Frameworks can establish reference points for standards for and between sectors.
- Frameworks can include regulatory elements for, and facilitate, quality assurance.
- Frameworks can provide for stability of qualifications while at the same time allowing for flexibility and adaptation.
- Frameworks can allow for decentralising, and for increasing the autonomy of providers of education/training. and
- Frameworks can provide the basis for establishing minimum requirements for standards of qualifications and skills as well as their accreditation.

Benefits of qualifications frameworks to lifelong learning

- To promote a culture of lifelong learning to a wider set of learners in the context of demographic developments and trends in most OECD countries, e.g. ageing of working population and skill supply / mismatch problems.
- To ease the transferability and transportability of skills and competencies from one area to another.
- To enable non-standard forms of access, including accreditation of prior learning and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
- To enable a further improvement of basic skills, e.g. language and social-communicative skills and basic ICT skills for different target groups of adult learners with different backgrounds of education attainment level and work experience.
- To support the development and improvement of guidance materials, which could be more easily developed, produced and disseminated if they referred to largely accepted frameworks.
− In the context of qualifications frameworks, establishing equivalences between qualifications provided by different segments of education, learning can be more easily focused on both individual and company learning needs.

− Frameworks can reduce incidences of time spent by learners re-learning to reach outcomes already achieved in other contexts. and

− Frameworks provide clarity and simplicity, to policy makers, stakeholders and companies preparing new measures and reforms, about skills and qualifications needed.

4. Scenarios for future development

This is a scoping exercise, in which members of the Group have sketched out scenarios for the future development of qualifications frameworks in their countries.

5. The international dimension of the debate on qualification frameworks

In the work of Thematic Group 1, a number of increasingly important elements and points were identified about the international dimension of framework development. This section summarises contributions from papers and meetings. Sources referred to in this debate include studies implemented and published by Cedefop and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on European developments linked to qualifications frameworks and their comparison, and also a more recent study undertaken by Jack Keating (an Australian consultant).

The section concludes by noting that the increasing use of international (world-wide or regional) frameworks could assist:

- To facilitate the increasing international mobility of labour, students and trainees.
- To assist training providers in the search for cooperating partners not only on bilateral but also on multilateral and international level.
- To identify more effectively issues for a sustainable cooperation and exchange.
- To promote understanding of the context in which education and training is delivered and to enable comparison and discussion despite geographic and linguistic distance or difficulties.
- To contribute to mutual recognition or transparency of qualifications and skills.
Thematic Group Two: Standards and quality assurance in qualifications with special reference to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning

Coordination: Ms. Jo Doyle

Thematic group two explored the above topic. The group quickly identified that the preferred focus would be on:

− The recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
− Reference to standards and quality assurance systems would be only in the context of how they support, or hinder the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Development of the report

The work of the Thematic Group Two took place between April 2003 and October 2004. Two meetings were held in July and November 2003. Further work was carried out through electronic exchange of information.

Definitions

The group immediately identified the issue of commonly accepted definitions. The range of definitions used by participant countries to capture the concept of recognising learning that takes place outside of formal educational settings and is not normally recognised was the first item to agree up on. There was some commonality of definitions used, particularly among European Union countries. Credit here needs to be given to the work on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning carried out by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). The descriptions that were arrived at by Thematic Group Two encompassed elements of existing definitions and are also broad enough to allow countries that are not familiar with the CEDEFOP definitions to locate their own practices within them.

Policy Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

The recognition and certification of competencies obtained outside formal education provides numerous opportunities on a policy level. These opportunities may relate to a country’s objectives in areas such as skilled employment, education, equity and immigration. The countries that participated in Thematic Group Two viewed these opportunities within the context of lifelong and life wide learning.

The key opportunities afforded by having a system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning are outlined below.

The ability to contribute to the quality, quantity and distribution of life long learning by:

− Facilitating a tailored approach to learning where the learner, not the system is the focus.
− Optimising existing training paths and more efficient training expenditure as a positive outcome for recognition of non-formal learning.

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27 TG2 included two countries that do not belong to the European Union. The participation of Mexico and New Zealand in this thematic group added to the diversity of understandings.

28 For a summary of the definitions arrived at by TG2, refer to the Thematic Group Report published in the OECD Education Series.
− Promoting the individuals self-knowledge, self esteem and self concept and thus increasing the likelihood that they will engage in learning.
− Reducing the study time required to gain a recognised formal qualification, and
− Increasing participation (especially for members of disadvantaged groups within societies) in formal education and qualifications.

_Harnessing the human resource potential of citizens: improving access to and mobility within the labour market by:_

− Enhancing the appreciation of skills gained in the workplace.
− Providing opportunities to have personal capital formally recognised and thus improving employment and career prospects and access to further learning opportunities, and
− Assisting employers to overcome skill shortages, meet industry standards and gain competitive advantages.

_Overcoming social, cultural and economic inequity by:_

− Improving the access of members of disadvantaged groups to further education and employment.

_Challenges_

Whilst recognition of non-formal and informal learning provides a number of policy opportunities linked to high-level goals such as building a country’s skill base and achieving equity, with these opportunities come challenges that arise from the systems employed. Thematic Group Two identified a number of policy challenges, these are summarised below.

_Achieving acceptance of the labour market_

If qualifications gained partly, or fully through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning are not accepted in the labour market, the value of a recognition system to the individual, and to society is diminished.

_Maintaining consistency across the system_

This is a risk particularly in decentralised systems where there are many local or industry specific variations in the way recognition of non-formal and informal learning is implemented. It is therefore important that recognition systems are built on commonly agreed principles and that measures and methods are structured and integrated as much as possible into existing quality assurance and assessment systems in order to avoid the system losing legitimacy.

_Managing expectations_

Recognition systems could be set up to fail if the expectations of individuals and society in relation to better job prospects and entry or credit towards formal education are not met.

_Ensuring recognition is not ghettoised_

If validation is available only to specific groups, such as immigrants, indigenous populations or those with no formal education, it may result in segregation rather than integration if these groups are forced to use the system to have their informal knowledge confirmed.
Maintaining engagement with formal learning

Recognition systems, if widely used, could lead to a changing pay structure resulting in a lowering of value placed on formal education. In this situation, a lower participation rate in formal education would be an un-intended negative consequence of the recognition system.

Current Practices

Many countries in the world are investigating or developing ways to raise awareness to the fact that people learn always and everywhere and formal education is only one of many learning pathways available. Whilst formal education has formed the backbone of what are becoming known as knowledge societies, the importance of harnessing the full range of available skills and knowledge is being increasingly appreciated. Evidence suggests that countries see advantages for individuals, communities, enterprises and the economy in recognising this informal and non-formal learning.

Each country implements its practices depending on the context, the system and its own barriers. Therefore each country has its own challenges to deal with. Some countries overtly encourage or require processes for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Others have systems that allow or facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, but do not regulate it. In some cases a legislative base exists, in others change has been influenced through high level strategic policies linked to skilled employment or equity or though initiatives developed by local communities.

The range of practices that take place in the countries that contributed to the work of Thematic Group Two are summarised below. In many ways this summary does not do justice to the innovation, pragmatism or boldness of the various initiatives. We hope, however, that it gives readers a ‘taste’ of the activities being undertaken.

Legislation and Policy

Participant countries use a variety of legislative or policy levers to influence the provision of recognition systems. In some countries individuals have a legal right to be examined without having completed formal courses. In others, qualifications frameworks have the principle of recognising all forms of learning imbedded within them without so that it is part of everyday practice rather than an exception.

Linking to the formal system

For most countries that participated in Thematic Group Two, the links between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the formal qualifications systems are access, entry and credit towards the formal qualification. There were a number of examples of specific initiatives to recognise non-formal and informal learning for the purpose of meeting entry requirements for formal education programmes.

Local initiatives

Some countries have systems for recognition of non-formal and informal learning that developed from local communities, organisations or industries rather than from a nation-wide or government led approach. These initiatives occur when groups with specific interests identify a need and develop a process to address that need – local solutions to local problems. Within the participant countries there were examples of specific industries establishing processes for recognising learning that occurred in the workplace in order to raise the over-all skill level of their workforce. Other examples included community organisations establishing learning centres for disadvantaged groups where a range of flexible packages is developed according to the individual’s needs. These packages might include formal, non-formal or informal learning and the opportunity to gain qualifications.
Social partnerships

Many countries have recognised the importance of having strong social partnership models that facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Examples from within the participant countries included engaging with professional advisory groups that set standards, devolved systems where the social partners such as employers organisations and trade unions are included in decision making and in implementation of policy and systems based on networks recognition centres based in and accountable to, local communities.

Target groups

Whilst the participants in Thematic Group two considered that access to systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is important for all sectors of society, they noted that some groups, due to their needs, interests and relative level of disadvantage may gain more from having their non-formal and informal learning recognised than the less disadvantaged. Participant countries provided a number of examples of how the recognition of non-formal and informal learning may be targeted for disadvantaged groups.

Demand for recognition systems

Thematic Group Two found that there was a limited amount of data on the uptake of recognition systems. In some cases this was because the system does not require the method of learning to be recorded. In other cases, recognition systems are relatively new and have not yet been in operation long enough to produce such data. It is anticipated that as systems develop, rich sources of data will become available.

Barriers to the Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning

All participating countries were able to identify barriers to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Given the diversity of systems involved, the commonalities among the barriers are perhaps surprising. The issues raised can be categorised according to whether they relate to the supply of learning and assessment opportunities (the system), or the demand for such opportunities (the individual).

Barriers relating to the system included:
− Inconsistency in the development and implementation of standards.
− Costs in terms of time and money in relation to benefits.
− Restricted access resulting from inadequate or badly targeted promotional activities.
− Lack of parity of esteem with the formal education system.
− Funding systems often do not provide incentives, particularly for educational institutions to implement systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Barriers relating to the individual were:
− Inability to recognise the potential value of knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning.
− Fear of failure due to negative formal educational experiences.
− Low perception of potential benefits.
− Difficulty in accessing recognition systems due to financial cost or the time involved.

Addressing the Barriers – Developing Principles for Recognition Systems

A number of suggestions can be made about improvements to policy, or practice that go some way to breaking down the barriers discussed in this summary. The following general principles were accepted by Thematic Group Two as a way of guiding the development of recognition systems.
− Recognition systems are a mechanism for individuals to have all of their skills, knowledge and competencies identified and valued (some countries express this as a ‘right’ of the individual).
− Participation in recognition systems must be voluntary.
− Recognition systems must be flexible enough to meet the needs of diverse individuals and contexts.
− Standards and procedures must be transparent, reliable, objective, relevant and impartial.
− High quality guidance and counselling should be part of the system.
− The system should ensure equity of access to recognition procedures.
− Parity of esteem with the formal system is desirable.
− Mechanisms to enhance awareness and access should be part of the system.
− Recognition systems should be part of a holistic approach to lifelong learning and therefore be linked to other services such as quality assurance and career guidance. and
− Mechanisms for measuring the effectiveness of the system in reaching its stated objectives should be included in the design.

Recommendations

Through sharing information about the practices of recognition of non-formal and informal learning the participants of Thematic Group 2 identified some common themes and issues that a country wishing to establish or enhance systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning may need to consider. Therefore it is recommended that whilst developing or reviewing such systems, countries give consideration to the following factors:

Purpose of the system

It is important that the purposes of a system are clearly identified. It is difficult to design a system if the desired end result is unknown.

Context

The educational, political and social context in which the system will operate must be considered. This context may affect what is possible and will dictate the areas that resources must be directed to. For this reason, this report does not suggest one model. Each country must develop its own model, perhaps learning from the practice of other countries and considering the benefits and constraints of their own context.

Establishing national standards

In implementing a recognition system, countries often face the dilemma of balancing the need for consistency with the desire of local communities to develop their own solutions. The development of national goals, principles and standards within which local communities and/or individual providers of recognition services are able to operate may assist in addressing this issue.

Assuring quality

It is essential that quality assurance be built into any system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This can be achieved in many ways, including the setting of national standards and guidelines, self-assessment by providers of recognition services and monitoring for consistency and transparency. The goals of quality assurance may vary from maintaining a minimum benchmark to the promotion of continual improvement.
**Targeting user groups**

Countries need to consider carefully the issue of targeting services to certain disadvantaged groups. Whilst this can be the most effective use of resources, it runs the risk of encouraging people to view the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as only relevant for disadvantaged groups. This, in turn, can lead to the devaluing of non-formal and informal learning.

**Enhancing awareness and access**

Recognition systems will only be successful if individuals are aware of them, consider them to be of value and are able to access them without unnecessary restriction. This means that consideration needs to be given to appropriate mechanisms for raising awareness of recognition systems and their potential value to individuals and to society. Consideration also needs to be given to the minimisation of barriers to participation such as cost and time.

**Removing disincentives in the system**

An examination of current systems to identify disincentives that may exist is recommended. Funding systems for formal education are often the site of such disincentives, particularly where funding is based on the number of enrolments rather than the credits or qualifications gained. This can mean that there is little incentive for formal education institutions to recognise non-formal and informal learning.
Thematic Group 3: Co-operation of different institutions and stakeholders of the qualifications systems

Coordination: Mr. Georg Hanf and Mr. Jochen Reuling

Acceptance and credibility of qualifications and qualifications frameworks are highly depending on the involvement of social institutions and stakeholders. Therefore the Thematic Group 3 - Belgium, the Czech Republic, England, Germany (co-ordinator), the Netherlands, Switzerland - was looking at the various roles of partners in the development of occupational standards and vocational qualifications and at new forms of co-operation between them.

1. Describing the content of work - an essential but problematic aspect of vocational qualifications

The Thematic Group 3 has elaborated a framework for analysing the role of partners in the processes which are used to move from analysis of the content of work through to the production of a final qualifications specification, recognising that the scope of the final qualifications specification varies in different national settings. The development of qualifications is not a simple reductivist process dependent on, and explained purely in terms of, an element of simple empirical analysis of the content of occupational competence. While analysis of occupational competence remains at the heart of vocational qualifications, the final form of qualifications can only be explained as being a product of the operation of complex social processes mediation by participating partners.

The working group suggests that an adequate theoretical base for the analysis of the development of vocational qualifications has to include (1) recognition of the value-laden and theory-laden nature of processes used for analysis of occupational competence – and thus the existence of explicit or implicit bias; (2) recognition of social processes of mediation in the production of qualifications which introduces further specific orientations/bias in the final representations of the content of work.

The importance of bias deriving from the choice of observational/analytic method is highlighted by the differing descriptions of the content of similar work, which can be derived from different methodologies: Work flow analysis; Delphi; Critical Incident Analysis; Analytic work; Functional Analysis.

Observation of work for the purpose of qualifications design is thus not a simple matter. Nor is observation the sole process involved in the development of the final version of the qualification – the version, which will operate in learning settings and in selection processes. There are four mediating processes associated with the content of qualifications:

− Direct observation of work, or analysis of practitioners’ descriptions of work (indirect observation).
− Development of agreed/consensus descriptions which will be included in the final qualification.
− Interpretation by training providers, assessors, etc implementing the qualification. and
− Interpretation by those using the qualification in selection etc.

2. Development of qualifications - a complex socio-political process

Even in processes where consensus is readily obtained over the function and content of a specific vocational qualification, the participation of different groups with different perspectives and aims entails processes of mediation. Thus, an understanding of this complex mediation becomes essential to

understanding why a qualification takes a particular form in a particular (national) setting. This is illuminated by the following questions:

- Who decides who should be involved?
- What is their relative power?
- What are their aims/aspirations/intentions in participating in the development of the qualification?
- How well equipped are they to participate in the development process?
- What access do they have to the content of work in order to make judgements/assertions?
- What forms of support are available to specific groups in respect of participation? (funding etc)
- How tight are the structural arrangements - what are the rules within which the discussion takes place?

From the questions given above it can be seen that the development of qualifications is not merely a practical process but is political (relating to questions of relative power of different groups) and value-laden. Proceeding through arrangements, which are more strongly structured (formalised) in some national contexts than others, the development process can readily manifest difficult tensions.

The description of processes outlined above (observations/empirical information relating to competent performance in occupational roles; and consensus descriptions of that competence) requires far more sophisticated critique, which includes at least the following:

- An understanding of implicit/explicit models of competence
- An understanding of power relations
- An understanding of the existence of multiple functions.

3. The notion of ‘representation’ in qualifications systems

There are many questions to be addressed: Of power relations; of (unequal) partnerships; of voices (loud and powerful, weak and unheard); of models of competence; of value-laden language; of mediated empirical evidence from the processes of work; of implicit and explicit attempts to stimulate economic and social processes. All things which are crucial to understanding the (actual and possible) role of qualifications and related mechanisms.

While diverse, these can be brought together through the notion of ‘representation’. This is a powerful concept for synthesising consideration of the operation and purposes of qualifications. It includes mediation of observation by theory; description of reality through language; and the informal and formal representation which occurs through consultation. By using the notion of ‘representation’, the extent to which groups' interests, meanings and understandings are represented in the development processes also becomes clear. Alongside this, the use of this concept allows theory and practice in representative apparatus (democratic representative arrangements) to be brought to bear – allowing the administrative arrangements put in place to support representation to be subjected to due critique.

This may not only be the basis for more effective review and critique of the extent to which existing arrangements are working or not, but also the means of developing far more effective, legitimate, accountable and inclusive practical arrangements for the development and refinement of qualifications.

4. Ongoing changes in qualifications systems regimes

In recent years, numerous initiatives to change qualification-systems regimes have been seen in all countries that have co-operated in Thematic Group 3. Central to the analysis in this report, we take ‘qualifications-systems regimes’ to include: the specific partners who develop and maintain occupational
qualifications, the forms of co-operation in which such work takes place, the levels on which it takes place and the instruments used to carry it out. Some of the initiatives examined in our analysis have already been implemented, and relevant experience has been obtained regarding their effects. Some of these initiatives are still in progress, however, and thus it is not yet possible to determine whether these will truly achieve their intended aims.

For this study, the TG3 participants selected relevant initiatives in their own countries and described them in working papers. In the following sections these papers are used as a basis for analysing the participation structures and co-operation forms applied by the partners involved in regulating qualifications. Before doing this, however, we briefly present the drivers, goals and foci of the various initiatives.

5. Drivers, goals and foci of initiatives for change

The selected initiatives for changing the qualification-systems regimes were prompted especially by quantitative and/or qualitative problems in the relevant national labour markets. In some cases, the problems had already arisen. In others, they were expected to arise in the near future, in the light of the growing requirements to which the countries’ workforces were being subjected. Only in the case of Belgium did the changes in the qualification-systems regime relate directly to the aim of promoting lifelong learning. At the same time, the changes carried out in other countries could have the function of promoting lifelong learning. This becomes apparent on closer inspection of the goals and foci of the various initiatives.

The initiatives in the various countries are aimed at changing individual components of qualifications systems. In all cases apart from Switzerland, measures have been taken to change the control of qualifications systems. In Switzerland, a new law on professional education has been prepared and adopted. Its aims include changing access to qualifications and progressions for individuals, and changing accreditation and awarding processes, in order to enhance flexibility for future developments and, thereby, to make it possible to meet the demand for modern skills.

In Belgium (Flanders), the administrative structure of ministries responsible for vocational training – and co-operation between such ministries – has been reorganised, via implementation of an entirely new set of arrangements between Government, social partners and key agencies. This is formalised as the ‘DIVA organisational platform’ – intended to permit development of a comprehensive, coherent qualifications framework. This effort has also included changing the descriptors present in qualifications and in accreditation and awarding processes.

The central aims of the Czech initiative include integrating social partners in the development of qualifications. The aim here is to enhance the scope of application of the vocational training system and to open the way to tighter regulation of the continuing training system.

The initiatives described by Dutch and German representatives are located at the sectoral level. In the Netherlands, an attempt has been made to promote cross-sectoral development of qualifications – in order, inter alia, to expand the scope of application of innovative learning programmes.

In Germany, initiatives to change qualification-systems regimes are aimed at continuing training in the information technologies sector. A mixture of public and private control has been introduced in the

30 Behringer/Coles differentiate the following components of qualifications systems: Scope of application, control, accreditation processes for qualifications, framework within the qualifications system, descriptors present in qualifications, access to qualifications and progressions for individuals, stability of the qualifications system (Behringer/Coles 2003).
development of qualifications, and accreditation and awarding processes have been changed with the aim of linking informal learning, work experience and the traditional methods of upgrading training.

In all of the qualifications systems considered here, the locus of control lies with the governments of the various relevant countries. In some cases, responsibilities are distributed among several different ministries or among different state institutions, on different levels (such as the Federal Government and the cantonal authorities in Switzerland or the Federal Government and the Länder in Germany). In addition, important players, such as the social partners and representatives of the education sectors, are involved in consultation and decision-making processes.

6. What is the relative power of partners in qualifications systems?

The governments in question involve a range of different partners, with the aim of making appropriate decisions that will be acceptable to all parties – this is best expressed as ‘mediated consensus’. In principle, existing power structures can be changed through inclusion of new partners. The nature of the initiatives in the various countries suggest, however, that the powers of new partners are likely to remain rather limited. The reasons for this include:

- Additional partners are included only for the duration of change processes (Switzerland).
- Participation of social partners is on a voluntary basis and is not legally enshrined (Czech Republic).
- Participation extends primarily to consultation processes, and not to decision-making processes (Switzerland, Belgium), and
- New partners are competent only for limited functions, such as accreditation and awarding of qualifications (Germany).

The cross-sectoral initiatives in the Netherlands, which aim to establish networks between various different sectoral organisations, tend to strengthen the position of the partner who receives ownership of, and operates, the newly developed qualifications.

In line with this, the study of Thematic Group 3 has produced evidence of how qualifications become a focus of various partners’ aims to incorporate their own interests - through influence on the design and regulation of those qualifications.

7. Conclusions

As the sample cases from the various countries show, in the past few years a number of relevant changes in the countries’ qualification-systems regimes have occurred. New partners have been included in governance of qualifications, and many different forms of co-operation have been applied or tested. In closing, we will briefly discuss the potential significance of these changes – which have come about primarily as a result of problems in the countries’ labour markets – in the promotion of lifelong learning.

The study shows the different structural forms which have emerged in the transformation of arrangements – and reinforce the notion that the promotion of lifelong learning must include strengthening the links between the various different qualification and training areas. This process, in turn, includes strengthening the links between general education, vocational training and higher education and intensifying co-operation between education and employment, with the aim of integrating formal, non-formal and informal learning. Overall, this process entails extensive participation and co-operation between relevant partners. Analysis of the various sample cases has revealed that in some instances new partners have been included in qualification-systems regimes and that this has changed participation structures and forms of co-operation. At the same time, the state or other responsible parties have sought to maintain their existing influence, in the face of such changes, by deciding on selection of partners and,
thus, on ‘admission’ of interests. What is more, discussion and decision-making have often been confined to carefully and narrowly selected subjects, at the expense of other, potentially relevant issues – for example in some cases new arrangements have been put in place in particular sectors, without challenging the sector demarcations in which this narrow, sector-based innovation is based. It is essential to recognise the persistence of existing power relations, even within reformed structural arrangements – under these conditions, no comprehensive co-operation between old and new partners has ensued, and traditional power structures have remained largely in place. This tends to preserve the influence of established interests, and it blocks access to the options that would be available, for all participants, under arrangements with more comprehensive co-operation and integration.

Still, it should be remembered that more comprehensive co-operation between various partners would not be without its own problems. The extent to which new partners’ decision-making processes could be integrated in such consultation and decision-making systems is unclear. What is more, a polarisation of interests could emerge from new integrated systems, with the result that the systems would block decisions or permit agreements only at the level of the ‘lowest common denominator’. Needless to say, such risks grow as the spectrum of involved partners, interests and issues becomes more comprehensive. Whether the ‘strategy of limited co-operation’ seen in the case studies enables links between training sectors to be strengthened to an extent conducive to promotion of lifelong learning is a question that needs continued empirical monitoring.

We would suggest that if qualifications are to promote lifelong learning, their development must not stop at sectoral and occupational boundaries. Such demarcations must thus become more permeable – or, at least, must be changed – in keeping with the requirements of process-oriented labour organisations and of the development of overarching competence profiles. In other words, in line with the transformation of work processes themselves. As the case studies show, it is commonly the case that social partners and education-sector representatives, or organisations engaged by these partners, develop qualifications or are involved in relevant development steps. With such arrangements, the state frees itself of a number of weighty management problems and decision-making responsibilities. The state no longer has to take the various relevant interests into account; it can leave this task up to the participating partners. Still, as the example of the Netherlands indicates, sectoral organisations do not always find it easy to co-operate inter-sectorally. Industrial relations within individual sectors – manifested, for example, in various labour-market regulations – can tend to ossify existing demarcation lines. At the same time, the example of the Netherlands also shows how network-oriented co-operation, across sectoral boundaries, can make such demarcations more permeable, thereby permitting development of more innovative competence profiles that are more relevant to the labour market.

Finally, lifelong learning can also be promoted via recognition of a wide range of different forms of learning used to acquire qualifications. The relevant spectrum includes different forms of organised learning, virtual learning and learning in the workplace (including informal and non-formal learning. Colardyn D. and Bjørnåvold J., 2004). The key to this approach is that comparable qualifications earned in different ways must be considered to have the same value. The case studies show how different countries are seeking solutions in this area, on different levels. In Switzerland, a legal framework has been created that includes all relevant political and societal groups. In Belgium, an inter-ministerial organisation has been created, via administrative reorganisation, in order to strengthen coherence between qualifications earned via formal, non-formal or informal learning. In Germany, a new decision-making body, consisting of experts from the "practical" sector, has been created for control of development of workplace-oriented qualifications, including their certification and awarding. This body, like the qualifications it has developed, remains a part of the traditional qualifications system, however. A common feature of all these approaches is that they seek to promote mutual confidence in the value of different avenues to qualifications, by promoting co-operation between strong partners and coordinating different interests in defined, planned ways. This finding emerges powerfully from the study: policy makers are recognising the
need to adapt qualifications systems to new forms of industrial organisation but are not switching to fully ‘flexibilised’ and ‘individualised’ arrangements. Tripartite co-operation and wider forms of organised co-operation are not being abandoned but are being refined and transformed – co-operation, consensus and collaboration remain prominent in the management and operation of systems, they retain a crucial role in mediation of sectional and competing interests.
Appendix B

List of the fifteen countries that prepared a Background Report and National coordinators31

Australia: Mr. Matthew James
Belgium (French speaking): Mr. Dominique Barthélémy (in French)
Denmark: Mr. Jan Reitz Jörgensen
France: Ms. Nadine Prost (Background Report available in French only)
Germany: Mr. Georg Hanf and Mr. Jochen Reuling
Greece: Ms. Christine Papadimitriou
Ireland: Ms. Anna Murphy and Mr. Edwin Mernagh
Japan: Ms. Keiko Fujimori
Korea: Mr. Kwango Kim
Netherlands: Mr. Ben Hövels
New Zealand: Ms. Jo Doyle
Portugal: Ms. Cândida Soares
Slovenia: Mr. Miroljub Ignjatovic
Switzerland: Mr. Andri Gieré (Background Report available in French only)
United Kingdom: Mr. Sandy Rodger

31 The authors of the Country Background Reports are given in most of the Country Background Reports.
Appendix C

Countries participating in Thematic Groups and Coordination

Participants in Thematic Group 1 (8 countries)

Coordination: Ms. Anna Murphy, Ms. Tina Simota and Mr. Edwin Mernagh

Country delegates
Australia:
Ms. Judy Forsyth, AQF Advisory Board to MCEETYA

Czech Republic:
Mr. Miroslav Kadlec, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

Germany:
Mr. Georg Hanf, BIBB

Greece:
Ms. Vasso Papadiamanti, EKEPIS (National Accreditation Centre)
Ms. Tina Simota, EKEPIS (National Accreditation Centre)

Ireland:
Ms. Anna Murphy, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Mr. Edwin Mernagh, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Italy:
Ms. Gabriella Di Francesco, ISFOL

Spain:
Mr. Jose Luis Garcia Molina, Incual (National Institute of Qualifications)

United Kingdom:
Ms. Mandy Hobart, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

International organisations
CEDEFOP: Mr. Burkart Sellin

ILO: Ms. Akiko Sakamoto, Skills Development Department

OECD:
Mr. Mike Coles, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (United Kingdom), Research consultant to the OECD
Mr. Patrick Werquin, Head of project
Participants in Thematic Group 2 (12 countries)

Coordination: Ms. Jo Doyle

Country delegates
Belgium (Flanders):
Ms. Patrice Schroeters, VIZO
Ms. Sofie Beunckens, VIZO
Ms. Ria Van Herck, VIZO

Denmark:
Ms. Annelise Hauch, Ministry of Education
Ms. Vibe Aarkrog, the Danish University of Education
Mr. Steen Høyrup, the Danish University of Education

Finland:
Mr. Petri Haltia, University of Turku, Department of Education
Mr. Kari Nyyssola, National Board of Education

France:
Mr. Michel Aribaud, Ministry of Education

Ireland:
Ms. Angela Lambkin, FETAC

Mexico:
Mr. Miguel Ángel Tamayo Taype, Ministry of Education
Ms. Maria Luisa de Anda y Ramos, Ministry of Education

The Netherlands:
Mr. Rigo Van Raai, Empowerment Centre EVC
Ms. Betty Feenstra, Empowerment Centre EVC

New Zealand:
Ms. Jo Doyle, New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Portugal:
Ms. Cândida Soares, Ministry of Labour, Department for Studies, Forecasting and Planning

Slovenia:
Mr. Miroljub Ignjatovic, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana

Sweden:
Ms. Carina Lindén, Ministry of Education and Science

United Kingdom:
Mr. John Dick, SQA, Scotland
Mr. Sandy Rodger, Department for Education and Skills

International organisations
ILO: Ms. Akiko Sakamoto, Skills Development Department
EUROPEAN COMMISSION: Mr. Jens Bjørnávold
OECD:
Mr. Mike Coles, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, United Kingdom), Research consultant to the OECD
Mr. Patrick Werquin, Head of project
Participants in TG3 (6 countries)

Coordination: Mr. Georg Hanf and Mr. Jochen Reuling

Country delegates
Belgium (Flanders):
Ms. Rita Cabus, Service for Educational Development, Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community
Ms. Rita Dunon, Service for Educational Development, Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community

Czech Republic:
Ms. Miroslava Kopicova, National Training Fund

Germany:
Mr. Georg Hanf, Federal Institute for Vocational Training, BIBB
Mr. Jochen Reuling, Federal Institute for Vocational Training, BIBB

Switzerland:
Mr. Peter Gentinetta, Formation Musique Recherche Zulauf
Ms. Madeleine Zulauf, Formation Musique Recherche Zulauf

The Netherlands:
Mr. Ben Hövels, Knowledge Centre Vocational Training and Labour - KBA

United Kingdom:
Mr. Tim Oates, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

International organisations

EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION:
Ms. Evelyn Viertel

OECD:
Mr. Patrick Werquin, Head of project

Two additional countries acted as observers only: Italy and Poland.
Appendix D

Tree used to code all the Country Background Reports

(1) Component 1
(1 1) Component 1/Political, legal, demo
(1 2) Component 1/Background to NQS
(1 3) Component 1/education system
(1 4) Component 1/Recognition of Learning
(1 4 1) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal
(1 4 1 1) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Objectives
(1 4 1 2) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Target Groups
(1 4 1 3) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Flexibility
(1 4 1 4) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/standards
(1 4 1 5) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/funding
(1 4 1 6) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/history of system
(1 4 1 7) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers
(1 4 1 7 1) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/HE
(1 4 1 7 2) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/adult/com ed
(1 4 1 7 3) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/Schools
(1 4 1 7 4) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/apprenticeship
(1 4 1 7 5) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/general
(1 4 1 7 6) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/vocational
(1 4 1 7 7) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/Distance learning
(1 4 1 7 8) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Learning Institutions and providers/Employers
(1 4 1 8) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/Occupational sectors
(1 4 1 9) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/creating a formal qualification
(1 4 1 10) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Formal/procedures
(1 4 2) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal
(1 4 2 1) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/Objectives
(1 4 2 2) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/Providers
(1 4 2 3) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/funding
(1 4 2 4) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/Facilitating access and participation
(1 4 2 5) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/responding to need
(1 4 2 6) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/procedures
(1 4 2 7) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/standards
(1 4 2 8) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Non-Formal/Informal/Target groups
(1 4 3) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation
(1 4 3 1) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation/Age
(1 4 3 2) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation/Gender
(1 4 3 3) Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation/Social class
Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation/Educational achievement
Component 1/Recognition of Learning/Participation/Special Group
Component 1/Recognition of Learning/responding to need
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Extent of NQS
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Principles of NQS
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Social Partner Involvement
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Authorities and Control of QS
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Authorities and Control of QS/Responsibilities
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Authorities and Control of QS/Monitoring
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Authorities and Control of QS/Promotion of LLL
Component 1/Governance, Linkages, Pathways/Authorities and Control of QS/Focus on specific groups
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/HE
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/adult/com ed
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/Schools
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/apprenticeship
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/general
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/vocational
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/Distance learning
Component 1/Learning/Learning Institutions and providers/Employers
Component 1/Quality Assurance/Quality
Component 1/Quality Assurance/QA and LLL
Component 1/Quality Assurance/Non/in formal learning
Component 1/Quality Assurance/QA Agencies
Component 1/Quality Assurance/accreditation process
Component 1/Quality Assurance/Benchmarks for progress
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Recognition of prior learning
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements/Legislation
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements/Flexibility
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements/Financial incentives
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements/Benefits and rationale
Component 1/Direct Linkage Systems/Formal Credit Transfer Arrangements/Credit Transfer processes
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Background
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Major Purposes
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Responsibility
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Instruments
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Structure
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Link with LLL
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Impact of NQF
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Future development
Component 1/Qualifications framework/Tensions
(1 11) Component 1/Information Systems
(1 12) Component 1/International Links
(1 13) Component 1/Recent changes in QS
(2) Component 2
(2 1) Component 2/Benefits to Individual
(2 1 1) Component 2/Benefits to Individual/Further learning
(2 1 2) Component 2/Benefits to Individual/Pathways in careers
(2 1 3) Component 2/Benefits to Individual/employment
(2 1 4) Component 2/Benefits to Individual/progression in work
(2 2) Component 2/Learning and Skills Needs
(2 2 1) Component 2/Learning and Skills Needs/Recruitment Process
(2 2 2) Component 2/Learning and Skills Needs/Skills needs
(2 2 3) Component 2/Learning and Skills Needs/Mobility
(2 3) Component 2/Pecuniary Benefits
(2 3 1) Component 2/Pecuniary Benefits/rates of return
(2 3 2) Component 2/Pecuniary Benefits/trends over time
(2 3 3) Component 2/Pecuniary Benefits/collective/company agreements
(2 3 4) Component 2/Pecuniary Benefits/Effect on participation
(2 4) Component 2/Non Pecuniary Rewards
(2 6) Component 2/Impact
(2 6 5) Component 2/Impact/background on impact
(2 6 6) Component 2/Impact/On enterprises
(2 6 7) Component 2/Impact/On society
(2 6 8) Component 2/Impact/On education system
(2 6 9) Component 2/Impact/On people in specific social/ethnic groups
(3) Component 3
(3 1) Component 3/Background and statistics
(3 2) Component 3/Pressure from global changes
(3 3) Component 3/National pressures for changes/innovations
(3 4) Component 3/Actual reforms/innovations
(3 4 1) Component 3/Actual reforms/innovations/aims
(3 4 2) Component 3/Actual reforms/innovations/LLL relationship
(3 4 3) Component 3/Actual reforms/innovations/Effectiveness
(3 4 4) Component 3/Actual reforms/innovations/Limitations
(3 5) Component 3/constraints on reforms/innovations
(3 5 1) Component 3/constraints on reforms/innovations/demands of qualifications
(3 5 2) Component 3/constraints on reforms/innovations/quality assurance
(3 5 3) Component 3/constraints on reforms/innovations/costs/management
(3 5 4) Component 3/constraints on reforms/innovations/mobility
(3 6) Component 3/major debates about the future of QS
(3 6 1) Component 3/major debates about the future of QS/key stakeholders
(3 6 2) Component 3/major debates about the future of QS/underlying tensions
(3 6 3) Component 3/major debates about the future of QS/future directions
(3 6 4) Component 3/major debates about the future of QS/New factors
(3 7) Component 3/Funding
(4) Component 4
(4 1) Component 4/Background to level of individual and institution
(4 2) Component 4/views of individual
(4 3) Component 4/Qualifications
(4 4) Component 4/information, guidance and advice
(4 6) Component 4/Learning Programmes
(4 6 1) Component 4/Learning Programmes/Adult education
(4 6 2) Component 4/Learning Programmes/Workplace education and training
(4 6 3) Component 4/Learning Programmes/Upper secondary
(4 6 4) Component 4/Learning Programmes/community
(4 6 5) Component 4/Learning Programmes/regional
(4 6 6) Component 4/Learning Programmes/national
(4 6 7) Component 4/Learning Programmes/Higher Education
(4 6 8) Component 4/Learning Programmes/Private training programmes
(5) Conclusions
(6) LLL
(6 1) LLL/recent developments
(6 2) LLL/policy
(6 3) LLL/description
(6 4) LLL/Barriers
(6 5) LLL/Progression
### Appendix E

## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCS</td>
<td>Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects (Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Adult and Community Education (New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AET</td>
<td>Adult Education and Training (Portugal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPA</td>
<td><em>Agence pour la formation professionnelle des adultes</em> (Adult Training Organisation, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Adult Literacy and Life skills survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANPE</td>
<td><em>Agence nationale pour l’emploi</em> (Public Employment Service, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANUIES</td>
<td><em>Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior</em> (National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institution, Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVCE</td>
<td>Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBB</td>
<td><em>Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung</em> (Federal Institute for Vocational Training, Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS</td>
<td><em>Brevet de technicien supérieur</em> (Technical Degree at Tertiary Level, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBR</td>
<td>Country Background Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDIP</td>
<td>Conférence suisse des directeurs cantonaux de l’instruction publique (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDEFOP</td>
<td><em>Centre européen pour le développement de la formation professionnelle</em> (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFC</td>
<td><em>Certificat fédéral de capacité</em> (Federal Certificate of Capacity, Switzerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Céreq</td>
<td><em>Centre d’études et de recherche sur les qualifications</em> (Research Centre on Employment and Qualifications, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CESS</td>
<td><em>Certificat d’enseignement secondaire supérieur</em> (Upper Secondary Education Certificate, Belgium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINOP</td>
<td><em>Centrum voor Innovatie van Opleidingen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQPF</td>
<td><em>Certificat de qualification professionnelle</em> (Job-Related Training Certificate, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVT</td>
<td>Continuous Vocational Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVTS</td>
<td>Continuous Vocational Training Survey (European Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Employment and Skills (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGEPF</td>
<td><em>Direction générale de l’emploi et de la formation professionnelle</em> (Division for Employment and Vocational Training of the Ministry of Labour, France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVA</td>
<td><em>Dienst Informatie Vorming Afstemming</em> (Training and Alignment Information Service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer System (European Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUQUA</td>
<td><em>Éducation de qualité</em> (Quality Assurance System in Adult Learning, Switzerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Adult Education and Training Courses (Portugal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EKEPIS</td>
<td><em>Εθνικό Κέντρο Πιστοποίησης</em> (National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training – Greece)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETF</td>
<td>European Training Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EULFS</td>
<td>European Union Labour Force Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurydice</td>
<td>European information network on education (not an acronym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FD</td>
<td>Foundation degrees (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDA</td>
<td>Foundation degrees for Arts (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDS</td>
<td>Foundation degrees for Science (United Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education and Training Award Council (Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMR</td>
<td><em>Formation Musique Recherche</em> (Training Music Research – Switzerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOREM</td>
<td>Office wallon de la formation professionnelle et de l’emploi. (Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Employment, Belgium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Education (United Kingdom)</td>
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<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education (United Kingdom)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>General National Vocational Qualifications (United Kingdom)</td>
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<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HERO</td>
<td>Higher Education Research Opportunities</td>
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<td>HES</td>
<td><em>Hautes écoles spécialisées</em> (Specialised Tertiary Education College, Switzerland)</td>
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<td>IALS</td>
<td>International Adult Literacy Survey</td>
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<td>Information and Communication technology</td>
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<td>Lifelong Learning Institutes (Greece)</td>
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<td>IKA</td>
<td><em>Kompetenceafklaring</em> (Individual Competence Clarification, Denmark)</td>
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<td>International Labour Office</td>
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<td>ISFOL</td>
<td><em>Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori</em> (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for the Workers – Italy)</td>
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<td>International Synthesis Report</td>
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<td>Learning and Skills Council (United Kingdom)</td>
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<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia)</td>
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<td>National Assembly for Wales</td>
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<td>Numerical Unstructured Data – Indexing, Searching and Theorising</td>
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<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>QF</td>
<td>Qualifications Framework</td>
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QS  Qualifications system(s)
RNCP  Registre National des Qualifications Professionnelles (National Occupational Qualifications Directory, France)
ROC  Regional Vocational College (the Netherlands)
ROME  Répertoire opérationnel des métiers (Job Directory, Belgium and France)
RPL  Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO  Registered Training Organisations (Australia)
RVCC  Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (Portugal)
SCQF  Scottish Qualifications Framework
SQA  Scottish Qualification Authority
SSC  Sector Skills Council (United Kingdom)
TEE  Technical Vocational Schools (Greece)
TG  Thematic Group
TIMSS  Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TSD  Technological Specialization Diploma (Portugal)
USA  United States of America
UCAS  Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (United Kingdom)
UK  United Kingdom
VAE  Validation des acquis de l’expérience (Recognition of Prior Learning, France)
VAP  Validation des acquis professionnels (Recognition of Job-Related Learning, France)
VET  Vocational Education and Training
VIZO  Vlaams Instituut voor het Zelfstandig Ondernemen (Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship)
WB  World Bank
Three letter country codes used in the tables and graphs

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