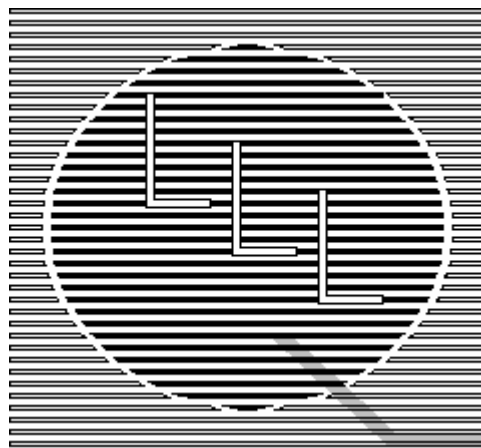


The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning

An OECD activity



Report from Thematic Group 3: Co-operation of different institutions and stakeholders of the qualifications systems

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OECD project: The role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning

Thematic issue group 3 (TG3) - Synthesis paper

Co-operation of different institutions and stakeholders of the qualifications systems

Report authors

Tim Oates (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority - QCA);
Jochen Reuling/Georg Hanf (Federal Institute for Vocational Training - BIBB)

Based on country descriptions provided by

Rita Dunon and Rita Cabus, Service for Educational Development, Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community; Ben Hövels, Knowledge Centre Vocational Training and Labour - KBA);
Miroslava Kopicova, National Training Fund; Madeleine Zulauf, Formation Musique Recherche

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Participants in TG3

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 & 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

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¹ Partners in this context is just a wider concept comprising institutions and stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1: The roles of partners in the development of occupational standards and vocational qualifications

1.1 Qualifications and standards development - methodologies and development processes

With the growth of international interest in outcomes-based approaches, formal qualifications (certificates, diplomas etc) have increased in structural importance. In countries such as the UK, their functions have grown. These now encompass not only recognition of skills and knowledge, but include also a strong influence on curriculum content and pedagogy; regulation of funding; judgement of the performance of teachers, institutions and the national system. Target setting in using tests and qualifications has mushroomed.

The role of qualifications in social reproduction, distribution of progression opportunities (to education, to employment), and control is clear. However, their persistence has developed amongst policy-makers not only a reliance on qualifications as an instrument of policy (control) but also an acceptance that qualifications (and related mechanisms such as qualifications frameworks) are a necessary feature of the education and training system. Evaluations by responsible agencies of the performance and impact of these have a tendency to focus on limited efficiency studies - and whether specific qualifications are meeting their often narrowly-stated aims. In other words, rather than examining the full set of effects (on society, on the economy) which derive from qualifications, such studies focus only on whether the qualifications and the development programmes used for specifying and revising the content of specific qualifications are working *as intended*, or *according to their design specification*.

Particular attention has been paid to the idea of '*responsiveness*' - frequently expressed as the time which it takes for qualifications to be revised in the light of changes in technology, the labour market, etc. However, focussing solely on qualifications as a *responsive component* of education and training systems can neglect the role which qualifications can play in respect of three key functions: *social reproduction*; *structuring labour markets*; and *conditioning learning*.

On *social reproduction*, this function operates through the promulgation of specific content in qualifications, particularly by supporting certain demarcations in knowledge and skill; by encouraging certain modes of practice; by promoting certain explicit/implicit values; etc. On *structuring labour markets*, this function operates through linkage of qualifications to licence to practice, by supporting job demarcations, by controlling labour flows. On *conditioning learning*, this operates through the impact of qualifications on the nature, structure and content of learning programmes.

With due irony, the call for qualifications to be more responsive highlights the extent to which qualifications can exert a structuring influence. But the responsiveness agenda suggests not only that qualifications should take their lead (in form, in content) from contemporary developments in the labour market and in social, but that any qualification which is not primarily responsive is exerting a negative influence (for example by reinforcing unhelpful labour demarcations and thus detracting from labour market flexibility). But it is crucial to recognise direct and indirect beneficial effects of qualifications in respect of: formalising progression routes and thus providing patterns of incentives for participation in education and training; providing clear labour market signalling of skills and knowledge; and supporting protective arrangements regarding labour rights, pay etc.

In the complex set of relations which operates in the labour market and VET systems, it is quite possible that policy oriented towards liberalising one element of the system (e.g. increasing flexibility of age entry to programmes) can lead to problems in other elements (e.g. reducing incentives for people to attain complete qualifications early in their career and increasing the risk of prolonged low grade employment amongst young people).

The importance of the analysis presented here is that it focuses not only on the characteristics of the qualifications once they are developed, but also on the characteristics of the arrangements for the

development of qualifications (and national standards). Critical of narrow 'efficiency' and 'responsiveness' perspectives, it tackles the difficult issue of developing an adequate basis for evaluation and review. This introductory analysis attempts to do this in respect of the development cycle for qualifications, focussing particularly on the role of partners in the production of the qualifications.

1.2 Describing the content of work; an essential but problematic aspect of vocational qualifications

Our analysis provides 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. Some are 'new school' outcomes-based qualifications whilst others have a much closer link to specific curriculum and pedagogy. But despite the differences in both scope and in the stages of the development process, this paper suggests that vocational qualifications depend – explicitly and implicitly – on effective representation of the content and requirements of either present and/or future competent performance in work activities (occupational competence). This becomes particularly evident with the rising dominance of outcomes-based approaches for the development and specification of vocational qualifications. But this paper suggests that 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 mediated by participating partners.

Our analysis 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.

1.3 Bias in approaches to observation

Observation, analysis and description of the content of work processes is not an unproblematic process, being both theory- and value-laden (Oates T, 1999; Oates T, 2004). The perceived content of specific work processes can change not only in the light of objective transformation of skill requirements (e.g. the introduction of new technology, of new work organisation) but also in the light of new conceptualisations of competence. This can include the recognition of new skill sets - such as the importance of communication skills in medical staff (Boreham NC & Lamont N, 2001); the importance of estimation skills in construction workers (Howsen G & McClone RR; 1983) – as well as new dimensions of competence such as the role of values in professional competence (Eraut M, 1994); the role of work-process knowledge in high-performing workers (Boreham N, 2002).

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:

Various models, essentially derived from Taylorist approaches, and refined through the 60's and 70's, based on observation of work activity, in some cases questions put to workers, and designed to feed into revised work systems, appraisal and reward systems, and grading structures.

Delphi:

Discussion-based technique based on structured discussion with selected groups of experienced workers. Produces descriptions of activities which are then validated with the groups.

Critical Incident Analysis:

Examining incidents of breakdowns in performance and/or superlative performance, using both observation of performance and questioning of workers.

Analytic work deriving from socio-psychological study of work:

Crucial but often ignored, empirical and analytic work on the psychology and sociology of work built up during the late 60's onwards, and impacted particularly in areas such as medical care. Such studies are now increasing in their significance as detailed studies are drawn on by specific sectors in the development of national standards.

Functional Analysis (used for UK National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)):

This uses discussion with experienced practitioners, job analysis/observation techniques and in some instances critical incident analysis, to identify the content of competence in an occupation. This is then broken down into blocks, which correspond to functions rather than tasks, which can then be expressed as 'units of competence'. It was acknowledged by the developers of this technique (Mathews D, 1987) that the process was essentially one of generating consensus, with no one description necessarily being the best, nor the process necessarily giving rise to the same outcome on different occasions with different groups.

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:

1. direct observation of work, or analysis of practitioners' descriptions of work (indirect observation)
2. development of agreed/consensus descriptions which will be included in the final qualification
3. interpretation by training providers, assessors, etc implementing the qualification
4. interpretation by those using the qualification in selection etc

Recognition of the impact of the last two processes is crucial in explaining the economic, social and personal impact of vocational qualifications. However, this paper focuses on the first two processes starting with the second.

1.4 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?

The descriptive text in the next chapter of the report unpacks these questions in respect of specific national arrangements.

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. It is these to which we now turn:

1

protracted development of consensus (gaining acceptance and mutual recognition of qualifications)

versus

responsiveness (rapid development of qualifications to meet emerging labour market requirements)

2

formal linkage to pay agreements, licence to practice etc, embedding the qualifications in formal regulatory arrangements, requiring acquisition of the qualifications for labour market activity

versus

loose linkage to regulatory arrangements, to enhance overall flexibility, attempting to weaken politicisation of the production process/of labour

3

development of qualifications within qualifications frameworks, classifications etc in order to enhance the coherence of the system and the clarity of progression routes

versus

removal of artificial barriers to the portability of qualifications (skills and knowledge) in the labour market (for example by removing demarcations between related skills in previously unrelated occupations, or by breaking down occupational hierarchies)

4

tensions in the views, aims, aspirations and modes of working of different providers - education-based, industry-based, etc

5

an organic and cumulative approach to acquiring necessary skills and knowledge over time

versus

a notion of 'beruf' - of occupational identity - acquired through coherently-structured initial and continuing professional development

6

employer/enterprise-specific qualifications - high status/currency in limited contexts

versus

nationally, internationally portable qualifications

7

qualifications based on the current content of working process, and thus capable of delivery in existing work contexts, and able to recognise existing competence (apl, vpl etc)

versus

qualifications preparing people for the future and /or strategically realigning work and the labour force around new modes and areas of production and activity

8

tensions in who decides when a new qualification is needed - the receptivity of the development system to change in production processes, the labour market, society etc

tensions in the cost of development - high involvement, high financial support to otherwise low status or marginalized participants in the development processes

9

cost - in operating the qualifications; quality assurance in assessment, professional training, etc

versus

quality in delivery of assessment, of learning

Widening the conceptual base for evaluation of the development and refinement of national standards and national qualifications

The questions relating to both empirical analysis of work and the development process for qualifications shows the complex nature of those processes and their interaction with the context in which they take place. However, as stated in the first section, evaluation of qualifications tends to take on a narrow perspective. If there are problems with the development of qualifications, these are seen principally in two ways:

procedural adherence issues

such as why the time schedule has drifted from the proposed schedule

practical issues

such as how to manage a wide enough consultation in a limited time frame, how to reach compromise between different lobby groups etc.

But the description of processes 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

The (implicit) models underlying empirical analysis should be made explicit and subject to critique. 'Competence' is not a stable or unproblematic notion. Oates T 2004 provides an extended critique of the extent to which: models of competence can vary; that this variation can have material impact on the extent to which key elements of performance (e.g. values) are identified or not; that new understanding of competence (situated cognition; work process knowledge; distributed competence) are constantly emerging; and that the language used for descriptions within standards and qualifications can be heavily value laden.

an understanding of power relations

The power bases of the different constituencies vary, and whilst recognition of this may emerge through a commitment to include workers (through focus groups etc) the dominance of employer groups and consultants in the standards development process is problematic. The frequent emergence of comments relating to arcane language, opaque descriptions etc are strong evidence of a serious problem in the development process. The failure to include consideration of different power relations in the consultation dynamic suggests that qualifications can legitimately be construed as *adverse* instruments of (social and economic) control.

an understanding of the existence of multiple functions

The early literature and criteria relating to English NVQs suggested that the sole function of qualifications was to delineate with precision the components of occupational competence. The purely outcomes-oriented approach was diluted over time to allow the qualifications to include specifications of underlying knowledge and understanding. However, the position that the qualifications carry this single function is naïve. While delineation of competence requirements lies at the heart of the qualifications, they carry further functions in respect of:

- specifying those things which carry currency in the labour market;
- supporting learning processes;
- supporting/defining labour demarcations.

Crucially, commentary and critique has omitted thorough scrutiny of the *overall* function of qualifications. Elsewhere (Coles M & OatesT, 2004) we have defined the function of public policy in respect of qualifications and related mechanisms as 'making skills available to the individual, to society and to the economy' and thus developed a single criterion for measuring the extent to which a policy instrument carries the capacity to recognise existing skills and to develop new skills. Some policy can patently fail against this criterion - for example by making qualification requirements highly sector specific, it is possible to erect barriers to mutual recognition of similar skills which have been developed in different occupations; another example: introducing new forms of qualifications which disturb existing patterns of incentives to participate in training and thus lowering the rate of skill renewal or development in an occupation. Examining the overall function of qualifications is thus vital - the performance of any one qualification needs to be judged - at least in part - in relation to the extent to which it is supporting personal, social and economic development. This in turn is dependent on the form of labour market and economic policy, which is dominating each nation state; are qualifications being structured and administered in such a way that they promote the development of profession (beruf) or are they designed to support increasingly flexible labour markets?

1.5 The notion of 'representation' in qualifications systems

Questions, questions. 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.

CHAPTER 2: 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 Issue Group 3 (TG3): Belgium, Germany (co-ordinator), England Netherlands, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. 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.² In the following sections of this chapter 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.

2.1 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 qualification systems.³ 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*, 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 qualification 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.

² The Annex contains a list of the working papers and short descriptions of the initiatives.

³ BEHRINGER/COLES differentiate the following components of qualification systems: Scope of application, control, accreditation processes for qualifications, framework within the qualification system, descriptors present in qualifications, access to qualifications and progressions for individuals, stability of the qualification system (BEHRINGER/COLES 2003).

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 IT sector. A mixture of public and private control has been introduced in the 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.

2.2 Participation structures and new forms of co-operation

Who decides who should be involved?

In all of the qualification 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. Ultimately, as is shown by the initiatives from Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Belgium, it is Government who decides what partners are to be involved in what functions.

However, the initiatives in the Netherlands and in Germany are different: at sectoral level, the governments of these countries have delegated significant decision-making authority to the social partners and (in the Netherlands) to representatives of the education sector. In the Netherlands, qualifications are developed by sectoral organisations that, while formally under the supervision of the social partners and of representatives of the education sector, make decisions independently, within their own sectoral frameworks. With regard to the initiatives in these countries, these organisations have thus acted on their own in choosing partners to carry out the various key functions.

What is their relative power?

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);
- new partners are competent only for limited functions, such as accreditation and awarding of qualifications (Germany).

In the Belgian case, the joint initiative of four ministries, in the form of the DIVA (Service Information, Training and Harmonisation) organisational platform, is likely to strengthen the Government’s power with regard to control of qualifications.

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. On the other hand, the cooperating partners exert influence on the overall framework in which determines the form, content and operation of the qualifications. What is more, while network organisations of this kind aim to ensure that win-win

situations result for all partners, this aim cannot be achieved without close consultation between the affected sectoral organisations. A problem thus arises in that each sector tends to have its own special agreements - based on established industrial relations - which exert specific pressures on the overall qualifications framework. This gives a underlying tendency towards uneven development of power and influence of specific partners.

In Germany, the social partners have traditionally held a strong position in the development of qualifications. A strong 'consensus principle' applies, under which the State accredits qualifications only after the social partners have approved them. The continuing training initiative in the IT sector, an initiative largely supported by the social partners, highlights the social partners' power in this regard. One new aspect of this initiative is that competences relative to accreditation and awarding of qualifications (for one qualification level) have been delegated to a newly-created body of representatives of 'practice', with companies' representatives receiving one-third of the seats in this body. The remaining partners come from a wide range of different organisations. However, whilst broad in its constitution, this body has limited power. The social partners retain the authority to appoint its members and to supervise its activities. What is more, the body must submit qualifications it develops to the social partners and to the state for approval as entrance qualifications (or to universities, for approval as accredited learning achievement) opening the way to acquisition of higher qualifications. So, while structural arrangements have changed, underlying power relations have not been fundamentally re-aligned.

What are their aims/aspirations/intentions in participating in the regulation/governance of the qualifications?

Qualifications have far-reaching societal functions, and they affect the benefits and costs of teaching and learning processes – for individuals, companies and education/training providers – in different ways (Gifford BR & O'Connor MC (eds), 1992; Green A, Wolf A and Leney T; 1999). In line with this, our study 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.

The case of Switzerland illustrates how representatives of all political and social groups can be included in planning and deliberation of a new law. The patterns of interests tend to be played out in the following way:

- the Cantons seek to represent interests of regional industry and of vocational schools in the face of interests of the Confederation; furthermore, that they have their own political and budget-oriented interests;
- occupational associations, which in Switzerland are employer-oriented organisations, represent company interests and interests relative to the labour market's functioning;
- unions, as the 'natural' counterpart to these occupational associations, tend to represent employees' interests;
- companies, schools, education/training providers, etc. seek to represent their own specific interests, as "interested parties", or will seek to represent interests of affected individuals.

Similar patterns of interest amongst key players emerge in the other countries involved in this study. However, specific interests within the various groups are seldom clear, and, as described in Chapter 1, they frequently in tension and conflict.

How well equipped are they to participate in the development process?

To develop qualifications, partners require subject-area knowledge and expertise, along with the ability to co-ordinate widely diverging interests; they must also be able to mobilise the financial resources needed for their tasks (with this financial requirement increasing in some national settings as the requirements of national criteria and frameworks increase in demand and specificity).

In Belgium, the DIVA organisational platform developed has the task of co-ordinating the interests of four involved ministries. It has its own financial provision from Government for the inclusion of researchers and experts, and of representatives of social partners, schools and training providers, in planning and decision-making processes.

In Switzerland, experts' groups were established to support consultation processes relative to the new law, to provide expert support to representatives of the various interested parties. Co-ordination of interests within, and between, the various relevant organisations has been able to rely on an established network of education institutions that have long been professionally involved in such tasks.

In general, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands all have strong employers' organisations and unions that consider co-operation in development of qualifications and (in Germany) relevant quality assurance to be among their basic tasks. These organisations and unions are also able to mobilise the necessary staffing and financial resources and to operate collectively with respect to their memberships. The significance of such arrangements becomes apparent in considering the Czech situation, which provides a counter-example. That country lacks any analogous structures, with the result that its social partners have a weak position in the development of qualifications.

By way of contrast, in the case of Germany, the sectoral committee appointed by the social partners to further develop continuing training in the IT sector had to rely significantly on additional expertise for consultation and developmental services – but financed by the Government. Financing such expenses via the market would have been an alternative, but this would have increased the requirement for re-couping development costs through the operation of the qualifications – transferring development costs onto participants in training arrangements.

What access do they have to the content of work in order to make judgements/assertions?

As mentioned above, the development of qualifications involves complex socio-political processes heavily conditioned by the sectional interests of the participating partners – and with the results of these processes strongly affecting societal interests. On the other hand, the sample cases also show that these processes are under a process of transformation – including processes which involve additional consultants and creation of new consultative bodies. One key aim in this transformation of arrangements is the attempt to update or 'modernise' qualifications through direct contact with work practices.

It is also clear that key interested parties have had an enduring involvement in development processes. Sectoral organisations in the Netherlands have their historical roots in the apprenticeship system. As a result, they have close contact to (training) companies, although they also cultivate contacts with regional vocational school centres. In Belgium, the DIVA organisational platform cooperates with representatives of schools, companies and training providers. In the Czech Republic, companies and schools develop curricula at the regional level. In Germany, to support the continuing training initiative in IT, an IT-sector committee with representatives of companies, universities, training providers, certification associations, labour authorities, etc. was established in the hope that its orientation to industrial and commercial practices would accelerate development of new qualifications.

What forms of support are available to specific groups in respect of participation?

The sample cases provide little information about this. Often, the various interest organisations finance their participation in qualifications development themselves, for their own purposes, since they also benefit from the results of such development. In the Netherlands, the various sectors differ widely. Some sectoral organisations have large structures, comprising more than one hundred staff. As a rule, such structures also include research and development departments. In some cases, such structures are financed by the sector funds used to finance continuing training. The Dutch national body of the construction industry is one such example. By contrast, in the Czech Republic, social partners thus far have maintained other priorities. In addition, all countries have cases in which the state pays experts – from the areas of both theory and actual practice – to provide consultation services.

How tight are the structural arrangements - what are the rules within the discussions that take place?

Here as well, analysing the relevant arrangements would necessitate carrying out detailed case studies. In general, it may be assumed that the tasks and responsibilities of state institutions are regulated by law. Such regulations are established via the countries' own legislative procedures. As the example of Switzerland shows, such arrangements can still allow involved partners to have powers of referendum in such procedures. The numerous network-based solutions, involving participation of the state, intermediary organisations (associations, unions) and individual experts, are an interesting category. Such arrangements are seen especially in development of occupational profiles, and of qualifications, in Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. In these countries, the decision-making processes are usually prescribed quite precisely. At the sectoral level, or at the regional and local levels, structural arrangements appear more open, witness the sample cases in the Netherlands and Germany, and the regional and local initiatives in the Czech Republic. In the Netherlands, it has been left largely up to the sectoral organisations themselves to choose organisational forms for their inter-sectoral co-operation. In Germany, the various partners (IT sector committee, curriculum developers, certification agencies, assessors, training coaches) have been permitted to structure their co-operation themselves. In the Czech Republic, co-operation between schools and representatives of regional and local industry is mixed - partly formalised and partly informal.

CHAPTER 3: 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.⁴ 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

⁴ Cf. Offe, C.: *Berufsbildungsreform. Eine Fallstudie über Reformpolitik*, Frankfurt am Main 1975, p. 93ff.

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. & 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 qualification 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.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Working papers for OECD-thematic issue group 3

DUNON, RITA and CABUS, RITA: Part one: Education and qualifications structure, Department of Educational Development, Ministry of Education, Flemish Community, Brussels 2003

DUNON, RITA and CABUS, RITA: Part two: Towards future oriented forms of co-operation between training institutions and the labour market, Department of Educational Development, Ministry of Education, Flemish Community, Brussels 2003

HÖVELS, BEN: Sector institutions for defining national qualifications and the challenge of cross-sector competence-areas, Knowledge Centre for Vocational Training & Labour Market (KBA), Nijmegen (The Netherlands) 2003

KOPICOVÁ, MIROSLAVA: Short overview of the qualifications system in the Czech Republic, National Training Fund, Prague 2003

KOPICOVÁ, MIROSLAVA: Involvement and co-operation of relevant stakeholders in the development of the qualifications system - example of the Czech Republic, National Training Fund, Prague 2003

REULING, JOCHEN and HANF, GEORG: New forms of co-operation between institutions and stakeholders in continuing IT training to promote lifelong learning, Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB), Bonn 2003

ZULAUF, MADELEINE (in co-operation with PETER GENTINETTA) The process of preparation for the New Federal Law on Professional Education: How the stakeholders co-operated in the modernisation of the Federal Certificate of Competence, Formation Musique Recherche (FMR) Zulauf, Jongny, on behalf of the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) (Switzerland) 2003. (Forthcoming)

Annex 2: Summarised presentations of the country initiatives

(1) Drivers of the initiatives

NL:	<p>Government requires broad, competency-based qualifications for diminishing total number of qualifications. Labour market needs cross-sector qualifications. Schools and regional labour markets wish to incorporate innovative developments in the labour market into national standards, or at least that national bodies take into account those developments.</p> <p>Labour market: Shortage of skilled employees in the IT sector.</p> <p>Education system: Enhancing the attractiveness of lifelong learning through the implementation of formal learning in continuing vocational training.</p>
D:	<p>Government plays a stimulating role by setting targets/requirements for lifelong learning: Raises the level of functional literacy of people and the number of people with ICT skills; combats the drop-out rate in schools, guarantees access to equal learning opportunities throughout life.</p>
B:	<p>Better linkage between education and labour market.</p>
CZ:	<p>Labour market requires higher quality qualifications.</p> <p>Education system is asking for a stronger legal framework for continuing training.</p>
CH:	<p>Education system: Increasing shortage of apprenticeship places from the early nineties. Labour market: Economic world pushes the demand for new training and competencies. Enhancement of the theoretical elements of training was required. The Federal Law on Professional Education from 1978 did not allow for such fundamental modifications of the system.</p>

(2) Goals and foci of the initiatives

NL:	<p>Development of qualifications that match national requirements and innovative learning programmes by (regional) schools and take cross-sector developments in work and on the labour market into consideration. Development of a suitable regime at national level for controlling and innovating qualifications.</p>
D:	<p>Linkage between informal learning, work experience and traditional upgrading training. Development of a suitable regime for enhancing the responsiveness and control of qualifications.</p>
B:	<p>Development of a compulsory and coherent qualifications and training system (umbrella structure) through a new approach to certification and recognition of non-formal and informal learning that harmonises the needs of learners, training providers and employers. For this purpose: Reorganisation of the administration structure through the establishment of the platform DIVA for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - combining initiatives of the Ministers on Education and Training, Employment, Economy, Culture, - defining necessary steps and timed actions, - consistent actions, contact and co-operation between different stakeholders - engaging the social partners.
CZ:	<p>Improving responsiveness of the VET system to meet the needs of the labour market, better linkage between the initial vocational training system and continuing vocational training. Involvement of more stakeholders in the negotiation processes about curricula development in initial and continuing VET to improve their quality.</p>
CH:	<p>A new Law on Professional Education to meet modern demands for competences and to allow flexibility for future developments.</p>

(3) Changes in qualification-systems regimes

NL:	<p>19 National Bodies (LOB's) for vocational education are involved in the development of qualifications. These bodies are organised by sector, they involve representatives from social partners and vocational schools and are responsible both for qualifications and attainment targets of the dual part as well as for the school-based part of VET. Regime is backed by law.</p> <p>National bodies have a key role both in defining qualifications as well as in "filling" qualifications with attainment targets.⁵ Constructing occupational profiles on the basis of which qualifications are defined is the responsibility of the social partners in each branch</p> <p><u>Hitherto:</u> Co-operation normally within one body res. sector.</p> <p><u>Now:</u> Big variety in forms of co-operation. Common feature: "One-stop-shop" as a kind of front office. Behind this, there is a back office to combine the expertise and opportunities of the different co-operating national bodies. Various forms of networking between the bodies as an organising principle.</p>
D:	<p>Qualifications in continuing VET (as well as those for initial VET) are regulated under the Vocational Training Act. Representatives of the social partners and the government are involved. The procedures for the development of qualifications, design, examinations and certifications as well as quality assurance are defined institutionally.⁶ Control of qualifications is carried out publicly and legally.</p> <p><u>Hitherto:</u> Control of qualifications and co-operation between the different stakeholders are carried out according to publicly and legally regulated procedures. Social partners have a key role in this context.</p> <p><u>Now:</u> Implementation of three qualifications levels for continuing VET in the IT sector. The two higher qualifications levels are controlled according to the traditional procedures. Implementation of the lower qualification level (specialist' qualifications) regulated by the private sector, under 'supervision' of social partners. Development of qualifications by members/experts nominated by social partners. Examination and certification by private certification offices and independent (external) assessors. Planning of projects for assessment at the workplace between candidates, internal or external supervisor, assessors and certification offices.</p> <p>In summary: Linkage between public and private governance of qualifications including social partners.</p>
B:	<p><u>Hitherto:</u></p> <p>Development vocational qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of occupational structure and occupational profiles by SERV (Flanders' social and Economic Council). SERV is composed of representatives of the Flemish social partners. SERV collaborates with the number of players (experts, practitioners etc.). - Development and implementation of education and training courses by the Department of Education and Training with the goal of improving the horizontal and vertical cohesion between the different courses and to formulate minimum targets, that become incorporated into the training profiles. - Consultation at all levels of education by VLOR (Flemish Education Council). General Council is composed of 39 members who represent the organising bodies, unions, parents, university experts, students, Department of Education and Training, the SERV. Composition of the council by the Flemish Government by decree. Remit for the VLOR is set out by law. - School board as the organising authority <p>Problem: No connection between these qualifications and non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p><u>Now and in the near future:</u></p> <p>Occupational structure and profiles developed by SERV are the framework for developing qualifications. DIVA (Service Information, Training and Harmonisation) develops outcomes-based qualifications by integrating formal learning with recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The four Ministries have joint responsibility for DIVA. DIVA has its own budget. DIVA sets up committees for different activities. Various stakeholders can be involved in these committees in</p>

⁵ The procedure of developing qualifications is described extensively by Hövels, B. and Kraayvanger, G. (April 2003), p.3 ff.

⁶ Cf. Reuling, J. and Hanf, G. 2003, chapter I. 3.4

	<p>relation to their goals and tasks. Existence of a strongly regulated initial VET system and a diversity of qualifications and certificates in continuing vocational training.</p> <p>CZ: <u>Hitherto:</u> The qualifications in initial VET were developed by several actors. The institutions from the sector of education had the decisive position in this process. The National Institute of Vocational Education was responsible for development of curricula proposals, which were then approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Curricula used by the Czech secondary and higher schools consisted of two parts. The first part (set by the institutions outlined above) was standardised and all schools were obliged to meet its requirements. The second part of the curricula was developed by the individual school and decision on it was taken by the school. This meant that the development of curricula was carried out both at national level and at local level. The social partners, especially employers, recognised the certificates awarded to individuals by the schools. They were also involved in the curricula development, however their position was limited. <u>Now:</u> Opening of education-led initial VET system and provider-led continuing vocational training system by the National Institute of Vocational Education through establishing more than 20 sector working groups with different stakeholders as consultative bodies at national level. The representatives of social partners, as well as other stakeholders (e. g. representatives of employment services or regional authorities) are involved in curriculum development at local level. Their activities are focused mostly on the second part of curricula used by vocational schools. The headteachers invite these relevant partners to consult on the implementation of some teaching subjects or themes specific for the school in a specific municipality or region with a specific economic and labour market structure. Their negotiations also deal with the implementation of new training courses required by local enterprises and labour market. The type of co-operation between school and the representatives of its environment differs: some schools use formalised co-operation (with official bodies with their statutes, regular meetings etc.), other schools consult the curricula issues within non-formal consultations, because this co-operation is not specified by the respective regulations.</p> <p>CH: <u>Hitherto:</u> Co-operation between several stakeholders has been the basis of vocational training for a long time. Federal government is responsible for vocational training and delegate its organisation to the "Office for Professional Education and Technology". Cantons are responsible for the vocational schools. Professional Associations play an important role in elaborating the training contents and participating in examinations.</p> <p><u>Co-operation of the different stakeholders:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Federal assembly demanded that the Law on Professional Education should be reviewed (1997). - Social consensus on professional education by preserving the traditional system. Consensus is reflected by two basic principles: (1) Education as an element of social heritage and of the social fabric must be organised by the authorities. (2) The system with two foundations (practical training, theoretical formation and some general training) will not be abandoned but rather reinforced. - Procedure of creating a new law was realised in a general climate of effervescence. Starting of several pilot projects for the reinforcement of apprenticeship. - Pressures and decisions in tension at a political level. - Federal Council nominated a group of experts, comprising representatives from different interested parties, incl. Social partners (1998). - Department of Economic Affairs forwarded a project for consultation to the ensemble of the interested partners: Cantonal authorities, political parties, federations of employers, trade unions associations, institutions responsible for education (lasted until November 1999). - Publication of a new project by the Federal Council, presented to the Federal Assembly. - Controversial debates. - Result: New law adopted by the Federal Assembly on 13 December 2002. - Neither a political party nor any other group used their right to launch a referendum, e.g. to ask for a popular vote about the law. - The new law was applied as from 1 January 2004. <p><u>Changes regarding the qualifications system:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certification is disassociated from the training course; those concerned will go through 'qualification procedures'. - Validity: Not only for subsequent employment but now also for higher vocational training or for continuing education; moreover opens routes into other streams in the upper secondary level.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Transmitting "competences": Law leaves the door open to all possible models of training (firms, vocational schools, full-time vocational schools. It will be fixed by the Ordinances to be created for each profession or field of activity.- The new law represents a conservative outlook in what concerns the collaboration between stakeholders, in the sense that the same stakeholders are to be involved as previously. Some slight differences among the tasks and responsibility they will have to assume.
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