

Institution: University of Westminster
Unit of Assessment: UoA 19; Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Cross-national Equivalence of Skills and Qualifications across Europe
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>As evidenced in policy documents and practitioner testimonies, the case study has had a significant impact on European Union (EU) and national VET (vocational education and training) policy through: modifying the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and associated terminology – including learning outcomes, skills, and competences – and influencing implementation in terms of sectoral alignment and the establishment of Zones of Mutual Trust (ZMTs). Based on two major research projects, the case identifies the difficulties and possibilities to establish equivalence of occupational qualifications and has been widely disseminated to reach major stakeholders, including the European Commission (EC), trade unions, employers and VET organisations.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The case is underpinned by research projects on VET carried out by Westminster Business School (WBS) over the past fifteen years under Professor Linda Clarke, in particular: <i>Cross-national equivalence of vocational skills and qualifications in Europe</i> (Nuffield Foundation), completed in 2009; and <i>Bricklaying Qualifications, work and VET in Europe</i> (EC), completed in 2011. The Nuffield project was jointly between WBS (Professor Linda Clarke and Dr. Michaela Brockmann) and Kings College London (Professor Christopher Winch), with partners in Germany (Dr. Georg Hanf – <i>Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung</i>), the Netherlands (Dr Anneke Westerhuis, Dutch Centre for Expertise in VET) and France (Professor Philippe Méhaut, Aix Marseille University. The project compared ‘skills and qualifications’ in Europe, explored the understanding of key VET concepts within different national contexts, and assessed the value and difficulties in applying the EQF. The methodology, focussed on four sectors (ICT, construction, health and logistics) and occupations (software engineering, bricklaying, nursing and lorry driving), was distinctive in exploring through empirical methods conceptual and linguistic variation at national, firm and workplace levels. The wide-ranging outcomes, including an Interpretive Dictionary and a paperback book, have been disseminated globally, fed into the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education in England and Wales (2003 – 2009), and had a significant impact on VET policy making. The most important findings were: <i>Varying definitions of key EQF terms have to be taken into account and transnational categories developed to establish equivalence between skills and qualifications; Nursing represents a ‘semi-professional’ model of occupational convergence and software engineering an ‘employability’ model, in contrast to the ‘skills’ model of divergence of bricklaying and lorry driving; Social partnership plays a prominent role in VET except in Britain; EQF implementation requires the development of ZMTs and alignment with sectoral qualification frameworks (SQFs).</i></p> <p>Scientific coordination of the 8-country EC Leonardo <i>Bricklaying</i> project, concerned with implementation of the EQF in the construction sector and based on national and company/site studies, was by WBS with technical coordination by the European social partners (employers and trade unions) for construction. The project aimed to further the recognition of bricklaying qualifications and competences by enhancing their transparency and comparability, and hence the mobility and the quality of labour. Key findings, disseminated across Europe through social partner and research networks, were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Three predominant models for bricklaying VET and qualifications:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Labour-market based, where labour market currency, the scope of knowledge, skills and competence acquisition, integration into the education process and social partner involvement are limited;</i> ○ <i>School-based, with holistic and broad qualifications emphasising wider project management competences but limited social partnership.</i> ○ <i>Dual, shared between workplace, workshop and classroom, dividing governance between the state, employers and trade unions, with strong occupational identity and breadth and distinctive competences. Models a & b form ‘natural’ ZMTs.</i> • <i>EQF may confront difficulties in defining ‘competence’ and separating knowledge, skills and competences gained through qualification from learning context.</i> • <i>Further SQF development for construction necessary.</i>

3. References to the research

* Brockmann, M., Clarke, L., Hanf, G., Méhaut, P., Westerhuis, A., Winch, C. (2011) *Knowledge, Skills, Competence in the European Labour Market: What's in a Vocational Qualification?* Oxford, Routledge paperback: **30 citations** (Google Scholar 14/11/13). This book has been widely reviewed, including in *Le Monde diplomatique*, where it was described as: “modèle du genre pour tout praticien de la comparaison internationale” (“a model of its kind for all involved in international comparison”).

*Brockmann, M., Clarke, L., Christopher Winch (editors) (2010) *Bricklaying is more than Flemish bond: bricklaying qualifications in Europe*, Brussels/London: CLR, ISBN 978-0-903109-28-4 http://www.clr-news.org/CLR-Studies/Bricklaying_qualifications_final%20report.pdf . Evidence of the quality of this work is given below in requests to present it.

*Clarke Linda and Christopher Winch (2007) *Vocational Education: international approaches, developments and systems*, Oxford: Routledge paperback: **63 citations** (Google Scholar 14/11/13). This book has been translated into Chinese.

* Clarke L. Winch C. and Brockmann M. (2013) ‘Trade-based skills versus Occupational Capacity: the example of bricklaying in Europe’, *Work, Employment and Society* (REF submission)

* Brockmann M., Clarke L., Méhaut P. and Winch C. (2008), ‘Competence-Based Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe: the cases of England and France’ *Vocations and Learning*, 1/3, 227-244: **38 citations** (Google Scholar 14/11/13)

*Brockmann, M., Clarke L. and Winch C. (2008) ‘Knowledge, Skills, Competence: European divergences in vocational education and training – the English, German and Dutch cases’, in *Oxford Review of Education* Vol. 34, No. 5, October, pp. 547-567: **58 citations** (Google Scholar 14/11/13) (REF submission)

*Clarke Linda and Christopher Winch (2006), ‘A European Skills Framework? – but what are skills? Anglo-Saxon versus German concepts’, *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 19. No. 3, July, pp. 255-269: **70 citations** (Google Scholar 14/11/13) (REF submission)

A European skills framework: cross-national equivalence of vocational qualifications – Nuffield Foundation, March 2006 to January 2009, total £115,000, jointly with Prof. Christopher Winch of Kings College London

Main scientific partner responsible for the scientific coordination of a 2-year, 380,000 Euros, 8 country Leonardo project for the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme entitled *Bricklaying Qualifications, work and VET in Europe*, 2 years from December 2008. Technical Coordination by European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) and European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC)

Evidence of quality

- Both research projects were very positively evaluated, in the case of the Nuffield project by the Nuffield Foundation and of the *Bricklayer* project, for the EU by the official evaluation partner Tom Leney of the Institute of Education/Danish Technological Institute.
- There have been many invitations from European and national official and government bodies to present the work, in particular the *Bricklaying* project and its outputs, including at the:
 - Joint meeting of EQF, EQAVET (European Qualifications Assurance for Vocational Education and Training) and ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) Secretariats, *Assuring the quality of VET qualifications – the contribution of EU tools to the definition and re-definition of learning outcomes based standards*, held 14-15 November 2011 in Bonn, Germany (UoW)
 - CEDEFOP conference, *The Role of Social Partners in Implementing European Tools and Principles*, Brussels, 24-25 Nov. 2011, to the session: ‘How learning outcomes based sectoral approaches support European co-operation and solutions; strengthening excellence and relevance. Presentation of good practices/projects’. (UoW/Kings)
 - German Ministry of Education and Research conference, *Fortbildung schafft Chancen*, 20.3.2012, Berlin (UoW/Kings).
 - *EQF Developing Sectors* conference in February 2011 in Glasgow (Kings)
 - Annual *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (BIBB) conference 2008 to German government, regional, trade union and employer representatives (UoW/ Kings).
- Invitations to present to other government and policy bodies, trade unions and employers:
 - European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Working Group on *Lifelong Learning*, 10.5.2010, Brussels (UoW)

Impact case study (REF3b)

- TUC conference, *The German and UK Training Systems: is the grass greener on the other side?*, London, 22.11.2010 (UoW/Kings)
- National Apprenticeship Service *Apprenticeship Seminar 'International Perspectives'* Coventry, 8.2.2011 (UoW)
- As keynote speech at International Working Party on Labour Market Segmentation conference on *Impact of the European Framework on Education and training systems and the Labour Market – Bamberg 11th – 13th July 2011* (UoW)
- 'Solidar (network of European Trade Union Academies) conference, *Achieving decent work and quality jobs through effective industrial relations, information and training of workers*, European Parliament, 21.9.2011 to NGO and voluntary organisation representatives concerned with EQF implementation. (UoW)
- Roundtable discussion at Institute of Public Policy Research on *Can England develop a 'social partnership' approach to education and training?*, 28 January 2013 (UoW)
- Subsequent European projects have been based on the *Bricklaying* project framework and methodology including *Bolster-up: Transparency for Upholstering and Cabinet Making Qualifications and Quality in the European Furniture Industry*, European Commission Leonardo project, October 2012-September 2014

4. Details of the impact***Nature of the Impact***

The case has impacted on VET policy-making, including influencing EQF adjustments and social partners' approach to its implementation at sectoral level, and terminology, with its especially innovative interpretations and definitions of key terms. As expressed by Hermann Nehls, member of CEDEFOP's Governing Board and executive member of the German DGB: "*The Impact has been to the modification of policy on EQF, both in Germany and the European Union. The seriousness with which the work has been taken by the German Government in this respect was evident in their invitation to present the findings.*" The particular contribution of UoW to this has been its extensive labour market research experience and expertise— above all of the construction sector – and of Kings especially in relation to education policy.

Significance of the Impact

Since the 2000 Lisbon Conference there have been a stream of EU VET initiatives, notably the official adoption of the EQF by the European Parliament in 2008, to provide a common basis for comparison of qualifications across Europe, with member countries encouraged to reference their national qualification frameworks (NQFs) to it by 2012. The EQF is based on learning outcomes and stipulates eight qualification levels, each describing 'knowledge', 'skill' and 'competence' components. Our work has been highly significant in: its timing - feeding into different stages of modification and implementation; serving to clarify and contextualise VET terminology; highlighting the problems and difficulties with EQF implementation at occupational level; providing practical guidance for further action, in particular through the proposals alignment of EQF with SQFs and the establishment of ZMTs, and helping stakeholders understand what is possible with the EQF and differences in standards applied. In representing a rare comparative transnational study of occupational qualifications within the EU, the case has also had an impact on comparative VET research, including in its distinctive methodology, paying close attention to conceptual variations. As a result, the *Bricklayer* project has been used as a template for further work on sectoral and occupational qualifications, for instance the *Bolster UP 11* and *Foster VET Mobility*. Projects.

Reach of the Impact

These impacts have reached within and beyond the UK and Europe, including in Australia, India and North America, and been confirmed in frequent references to the work, in invitations to present to diverse audiences, in critical feedback from key experts, and in the written testimonies provided. The *Bricklaying* project was a key sectoral study selected for presentation to the first joint EQF/EQAVET and ECVET meeting and to the 2011 CEDEFOP conference in the European Parliament. It has been rated by the EC as one of its five most valuable EQF projects, its conclusions endorsed by the head of the Brussels office of CEDEFOP, and the project commended to the EQF advisory board. The European Directorate General (DG) for Education and Training identified it among the 10 most valuable learning and development projects over the last five years as it links approaches to understanding competence across Europe and provides detailed recommendations on EQF implementation within the labour market. The impact has been especially evident in Germany, including in invitations to present to the annual BIBB (The German

Impact case study (REF3b)

Federal Institute for Vocational Education) conference and to the German Education and Research Ministry. The influence the case has had on policy-making is evident also in relation to social partners. The outputs of the *Bricklaying* project have been distributed to their national affiliates by the European construction social partners and extensive consideration given to the proposals by the ETUC (e.g. its Lifelong Learning Group) and the European Social Dialogue (involving social partners from each EU country) for the construction sector (e.g. Vocational Training meetings, 2010-2). This has made for a sustainable impact in particular on the construction industry at national and European levels and influenced debate on: improving VET activities; SQF development; and creating ZMTs. The Bulgarian construction social partners have disseminated the results to their national discussion forum and the EFBWW to the European Construction Forum and the Liaison Forum. The *Bricklayer* project engaged users at all stages, including social partners, colleges, firms and policymakers, and been widely disseminated through a range of written documentation and a special issue of the European Institute for Construction Labour Research (CLR) Newsletter (CLR News 1/2010) distributed through its 500+strong network. The impact has been evident in all the participating countries (UK, Belgium, France, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland) as well as elsewhere.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Accounts have been published in:

- the official journal of the *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*, the German VET institution, and in the key journal on VET in France, *Formation Emploi*.
- New South Wales Government, Education and Communities Office of Education (2011) *Rethinking Skills in Vocational Education and Training: from competencies to capabilities*, November, ISBN 978-1-9210840-33-4
- OECD Educational Working Papers (2011) *Workforce Skills and Innovation: an overview of major themes in the literature*, Phil Toner, OECD
- CEDEFOP (2013) *Analysis and Overview of NVQ Developments in European Countries: Annual Report 2012*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union
- Transatlantic Migration Council (2013) *Immigrant Workers and the Workforce Development System in the UK*, Migration Policy Institute

Organisations which have provided factual statements corroborating the claims are:

- *European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC)*, on the impact of the research on the European Social Dialogue for the Construction Sector and construction employer member organisations in 29 European countries through helping understanding of construction skills and qualifications, steering policy-making, and showing the possibilities of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and a sectoral qualifications framework (SQF).
- *European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW)* on the case impact on 72 EFBWW member organisations in 31 countries and the ETUC in a) understanding regions of mutual recognition and how the EQF aligns with a SQF and b) forming trans-sectoral policy demands strengthening qualification base, vocational education and training (VET) systems, collective agreements and workforce competences.
- *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB - German TUC)* on the case impact, evidenced in invitations to present and citations, in showing: a) the European VET agency CEDEFOP the difficulties - including terminological - in implementing the EQF at occupational level; and b) the DGB where German qualifications profiles sit and how they can align with other systems.
- *National Apprenticeship Service* on the case impact for understanding the EQF in UK, different forms of apprenticeship, and what international comparisons/ standards exist, used also to redefine rules governing which qualifications to include in England, as passed into law via 2009 Adult Skills and Learning Act.

Organisations which can be contacted to corroborate claims:

- *CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)*, on the case impact on CEDEFOP, the European Union's VET agency, and on the European Commission in their further development and implementation of the EQF, in particular on the modifications made, including with respect to terminology and learning outcomes, and on obtaining greater understanding of sectoral alignment.