Implementation and impact of NQFs: Report of a study in 16 countries- Stephanie Allais

International Labour Organization research into Impact and Implementation of National Qualification Frameworks

National Qualifications Frameworks are an increasingly popular policy internationally. One of their key aims is to bridge the gap between education institutions and labour markets, and provide greater transparency for employers; another is to reform curriculum and assessment; a third is to separate awarding of qualifications from specific learning programmes and educational institutions. Many countries are turning to this approach, in some instances to improve on previous competency-based vocational education systems, and in others to reform their entire education and training systems.

Although qualifications frameworks are being implemented in many countries, and much is expected of them, there is very little empirical research into them. This study, commissioned by the International Labour Organization, examined the implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks in 16 countries around the world. It is the first study to take a critical comparative look at attempts to implement qualifications frameworks internationally, and examine the results.

The study found very limited positive evidence in favour of national qualifications frameworks. While in many cases this could have been because of the early stage of development of the framework, it also found considerable evidence of many difficulties. Among these, a key one was employer involvement: in a nutshell, in nearly all cases employers did not participate in structures designed for them to lead, despite the desire of policy makers for employer leadership. In other instances, it seemed that emphasis in improving assessment mechanisms could undermine employer organizations with a history of involvement in assessment and certification. Furthermore, the idea of prescribing outcomes or competences to educational institutions met with various problems. Countries were selected to represent Europe, Africa, Asia/Pacific, and the Americas. For the five oldest frameworks, case studies synthesized existing research. For the 11 newer frameworks case studies involved interviews with policy makers, employer and worker representatives, and education institutions, as well as documentary analysis.

Biography

Stephanie Allais is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. Her interests are in policy, education, and development, with a focus on curriculum, sociology of knowledge, and political economy of education.

She has a PhD in education policy from the School of Public and Development Management at Wits University in South Africa, and has published in education and development journals and books as well as in the popular press. Immediately prior to joining the CES, she managed and conducted research for an international research project for the International Labour Organization, which compared qualifications frameworks in 16 countries. Prior to this, she was the director of the Research and Development unit of Umalusi, the statutory body responsible for the quality assurance
of primary, secondary, and vocational education and training in South Africa. She has worked in various parts of the South African education system, including working for a non-governmental organization in distance education, running the education department of a trade union, and teaching in a high school, as well as teaching part time in adult basic education and training, and leading a student organization. She served on three committees by appointment of the Minister of Education in South Africa, and has been involved in numerous policy processes.

**Selected papers and publications**

**2010**

**2009**
- Understanding Quality Assurance in Education. Johannesburg: Centre for Education Policy Development
- ‘Smoke and Mirrors: What’s really informing the growth of national qualifications frameworks internationally?’ Paper presented at the 10th UKFIET conference, Oxford University, 14-17 September 2009

**2008**

**2007**
- ‘Education Service Delivery: the disastrous case of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks’. *Progress in Development Studies*, 7(1)
- Special edition of the Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production. The focus of the special edition was on assessment, and I was the guest editor.

- Why outcomes can’t lead education reform: Understanding the failures of the NQF. Invited column in the Mail and Guardian, October 2007


- With M. King, L. Bowie, and C. Marock. The 'f' word: the quality of the 'fundamental' component of qualifications in general and further education and training. Pretoria: Umalusi.


- ‘Qualification metamorphosis in further education’. Quarterly Review. Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand.