European and External Relations Committee

The EU referendum and its implications for Scotland

Written submission from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership

We are a Company Ltd by Guarantee and a Charity. Our Memorandum and Articles include the following objective

Develop and maintain relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally

As part of that we have been nominated by Scottish Government as the National Coordination point in Scotland for the European Qualifications Framework and also for ECVET which supports credit transfer through mobility programmes. The two paragraphs below given some further explanation of those initiatives. In addition since our Framework has been around since 2001 we are seen as having a high level of expertise and experience in developing Qualifications Frameworks, levelling qualifications, capacity building, RPL and credit transfer. According to the latest OECD review there are over 140 countries developing Frameworks and the SCQF is still seen as the one functioning most fully.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Background

The EQF is an overarching framework designed to serve as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different European member states. Its aims are to promote citizens’ mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. The EQF is a framework of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes and is intended to encompass all levels of qualifications acquired in general, vocational and higher education settings. It was formally adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The referencing for the UK frameworks including the SCQF was published in January 2010.

The EQF has allowed, for the first time, countries to explore on a much more formal basis how to recognise learning gained in other countries and support mobility of labour and mobility of learners. Whilst the Bologna process has done this for Higher Education for some years, there was nothing in place to support general and vocational learning until the advent of the EQF. The UK, and Scotland in particular, has influenced much of this development and is seen as a leader in this work. This in turn has led to us being approached by countries outwith Europe such as Bahrain and Hong Kong to undertake work on their Qualifications Frameworks. This is much less likely to happen once we lose our link to the European Union.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) Background

The aim of ECVET is to facilitate the mobility of the workforce across Europe by supporting the accumulation and transfer of credits gained through the recognition of
learning outcomes. It has been tested in pilot projects across the EU with the intention of extending its application gradually to a wider range of VET qualifications, either existing or new – as part of the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework.

ECVET has been developed to facilitate the recognition of achievements in formal, informal and non-formal learning by developing a set of principles which provide a uniform way of gaining credit for learning outcomes achieved. ECVET facilitates the mobility of VET students by enabling the accumulation of credits from different training providers in different countries. Credits are validated by each awarding institution and recognised by the body that awards the final qualification.

Because the SCQF is one of the few Qualifications Frameworks in Europe which has a fully functioning credit system supporting articulation arrangements and credit transfer we are again seen as leaders in this area and have hosted a number of study visits from other European countries to look at this. During these we have also involved SQA, our universities and our colleges so it is of benefit to the education system as a whole.

We are currently involved in a number of European projects which will give you a sense of the kind of work we do, the benefits it brings, and the fact that this will no longer be available to us.

A  **NQF – IN project**

A research project funded by the European Commission looking at how countries are managing the recognition of non-formal learning in relation to their National Qualifications Framework. In our case the SCQF. This project involves 7 countries: Poland, Republic of Ireland, Croatia, France, Hungary, Czech Republic and Scotland and runs from September 2015 to September 2018. We will be producing a report and case studies as part of the project and are currently in the process of interviewing a number of Scottish stakeholders including the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Police College Scotland, QAA Scotland, Chartered Institute of Bankers and a range of Further Education providers. This will result in a project report and recommendations which will be picked up by many other European countries. We had hoped that this would lead to further EU funded work for us in this area.

B. **Twinning Project**

This project is in partnership with the Ministries of Education in Poland and Croatia. The aim is to support Macedonia (the former republic of Yugoslavia) to implement their National Qualifications Framework and in so doing to modernise their education system and amend their laws in support of this. Each of the three countries is leading on one particular aspect and the SCQFP is leading on building institutional capacity. This involves us in a wide range of missions in Macedonia to support universities, colleges, the Ministry and employers and stakeholders in moving to a more modern education system and making some fundamental changes to how different institutions and stakeholders work with each other. The project is physically located
within the Ministry of Education in Macedonia and runs from February 2016 – July 2017 and is funded through the Twinning programme. This work has increased our profile with both our partners and also with Macedonia. It is likely that this would have led to requests for additional support but we would no longer be able to apply under the Twinning rules.

C. EQF Portal project

This project is funded by the European Commission and is intended to allow us to update the SCQF database and link it to the European Qualifications Framework portal. The outcome is to support mobility of students and workers across Europe by providing more transparent information on the country qualifications. We currently hold over 11,000 qualifications on the database including all HE provision, FE provision and school provision which is on the SCQF along with a wider range of provision from employers, professional bodies and third sector qualifications which have also been credit rated. The project runs from June 2016 to November 2017 (but we hope to complete earlier). This money has allowed us to upgrade the SCQF database in a number of ways. We would have been unable to do this from our current Scottish Government grant.

D. ECVET

Since July 2011 the SCQF Partnership has been the designated National Contact Point for the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in Scotland. ECVET aims to give people greater control over their individual learning experiences and make it more attractive to move between different countries and different learning environments. The designated national contact points work closely with the UK National Agency for Erasmus+ on the implementation of ECVET through the Erasmus+ programme and the co-ordination of the UK team of 13 ECVET Experts, 5 of whom are based in Scotland to promote and raise awareness of ECVET.

An ECVET Peer Learning event in May last year saw us bring together partners from Iceland, Malta, Slovenia, Romania and the Republic of Ireland to examine quality assurance processes in validation in each of these countries.

Our Board has agreed that we need to take stock post Brexit and revisit both our European and International strategies. We are seen as a very attractive partner at the moment because our Qualifications Framework is so advanced but that will diminish as other countries will be unlikely to seek us out as partners for anything which is EU funded even before we eventually come out of Europe. Secondly some of our international work is related to the fact that we are directly referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. It is likely therefore that this area will also be impacted upon.