



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

CONSULTATIVE FORUM



31 MAY 2016

MEETING REPORT

Introduction

The fifth meeting of QQI's Consultative Forum took place on 31 May 2016 at the Fitzwilliam Hotel, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. 40 delegates from stakeholder organisations, representatives from the QQI Board and QQI executive staff attended the Forum. See Appendix 1 for a list of attendees and Appendix 2 for the agenda. The purpose of the Consultative Forum is to contribute to the development and implementation of an enhanced further and higher education and training and qualifications system, through consultation and dialogue. The central theme of the fifth meeting of the Consultative Forum was the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

QQI Update

The CEO of QQI, Dr Padraig Walsh, opened the Consultative Forum with an update on QQI's activities since its last meeting in November 2015. The key points he covered were:

- » QQI's Strategy Statement for 2016-2018 has been published and its Corporate Plan for 2016¹ is the first plan devised under the new strategy. A Management Framework Agreement (MFA) for 2016 has also been agreed with the Department of Education and Skills (DES);
- » Significant progress has been made in policy development in the last six months, in particular in the critical areas of QA Guidelines² (core, sector and topic-specific), cyclical higher education review³ and validation policies and criteria⁴. Policy development has continued to reflect the co-regulatory nature of QQI's relationship with providers, recognising that the provision of a quality learning experience is largely in the hands of providers themselves;
- » The new validation policies and criteria will be implemented incrementally;
- » The timetable for the implementation of cyclical reviews of higher education will commence in 2017;
- » QQI is undertaking a review of Mary Immaculate College on behalf of the University of Limerick (UL);
- » An enhancement event for Education and Training Boards (ETBs) addressing self-evaluation methods took place in April. Events addressing topics of interest to higher education institutions and English language training providers will take place in the latter part of the year;
- » A study has been published on the impact of diminishing resources on quality;

1 The 2016-2018 Strategy Statement and the QQI Corporate Plan 2016 are both available at the following link: <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Planning-and-Reporting-07.aspx>

2 <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/QA-Guidelines.aspx>

3 <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Cyclical%20Review%20of%20Higher%20Education%20Institutions.pdf>

4 <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Programme-Validation07.aspx>

- » New standards development and standards review is currently taking place in areas including ELT, agriculture and architectural technology;
- » QQI has continued its support of the expansion of apprenticeship through its membership of the Apprenticeship Council and its development of topic-specific quality assurance guidelines that address apprenticeship;
- » The DES has taken steps to amend the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 under which QQI was established. Amendments will address issues including the recognition of qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and implementing the International Education Mark (IEM).

Theme: The National Framework of Qualifications

John O'Connor, Head of Qualifications and Skills Policy, provided a presentation on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and on how QQI intends approaching its statutory review of the Framework (the slides are included in the Appendix 3). His presentation included the following points:

- » The wish to use the review of the NFQ to establish a mandate for the Framework that reflects its national nature and ownership. The consultation process will be structured with a view to meeting this objective;
- » Differing expectations can accompany Frameworks e.g., that they will act as a regulator of the market and can inform supply and demand of qualifications;
- » Qualifications have a dependence on trusted quality assurance systems;
- » There is a significant difficulty in showing causal relationships between, for instance, the existence of an NFQ and the status of lifelong learning. The type of evidence that can inform this type of analysis needs to be considered and identified;
- » It is important to keep the NFQ connected to education and training and qualifications practice rather than operating at the level of an abstraction.

Feedback received from participants

A series of questions were posed to the participants (see Appendix 4) and feedback sought. Some of the key points arising from across the tables are included below:

Feedback related to the foundations of the NFQ

- » Some political decisions were made when the NFQ was launched in 2003 and these need to be revisited;
- » The NFQ has been based on a negotiated settlement between national parties rather than on consensus;
- » The descriptors may need to be reviewed, the language used is very technical and may not have retained its currency.

Meeting labour market requirements

- » There are insufficient qualification types for the labour market;
- » The NFQ needs to meet employer as well as learner needs;
- » The space that the Framework inhabits in the world of education and work needs to be established;
- » Workplace learning is a big component in a lot of programmes and it needs to be seen if this is properly reflected in the descriptors.

ATP

- » The importance of the NFQ to adult learners was raised in terms of recognising achievement – need to ensure the Framework is for everyone;
- » The availability of awards at Levels 1 and 2 has greatly contributed to the inclusive nature of the Framework;
- » Greater standardisation is required between institutions to enable learners to progress from levels 5 to 6, and 6 to 7 (selective implementation of ATP is taking place with recruitment rather than progression operating);
- » Recognition of prior learning needs to be more widely facilitated;
- » The inclusion of two level 6 qualifications, one further education and training and the other higher education, has to be addressed;
- » Some selective recognition of standards for further education and training awards is taking place in higher education institutions;
- » Further education and training major awards at level 5 are not deemed comparable with the Leaving Certificate award;
- » The NFQ plays an important role in the context of international recognition.

Other advantages of the NFQ / policy development areas

- » Transparency of the relationship between qualifications has been gained by the existence of the NFQ;

- » The NFQ has provided a common language at all levels and clarity for the learner as a result;
- » Easier for other awarding bodies to work with a country that has a qualifications framework;
- » The DES is responsible for the implementation of the EU Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications. There are linkages between the Directive and qualifications frameworks, that can potentially facilitate increased transparency and recognition of professional qualifications across borders;
- » The recognition of existing vendor qualifications through the NFQ needs to be a priority.

Other feedback received

- » It is important to increase public knowledge of the NFQ;
- » QQI needs to have a clear sense of whether it is playing the role of guardian or regulator when it comes to the NFQ;
- » Higher social recognition of some institutions continues to exist regardless of the concept that the same qualification type compares favourably;
- » The importance was noted of not having unrealistic expectations that the NFQ is able to address the branding of education and training institutions;
- » It was identified that there are challenges with the breadth of the Framework – nationally we need to be thinking long-term and working together towards a common qualifications direction;
- » The NFQ is considered to be supporting a drive upwards in the level of qualification attainment.

Closing Comments

John O'Connor finished out the Consultative Forum with the following comments:

- » QQI is starting a conversation about the NFQ – further input will be sought as part of that process;
- » The EU Commission is about to launch the New EU Skills Agenda. At EU level priority areas to address are improving the quality and relevance of skills formation;
- » Participants were thanked for their attendance and contribution.

Appendix 1: List of Attendees

Aidan Kenny

Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI)

Katherine Moore

ACCA

David O'Grady

Marketing English in Ireland

Dr Martin Gormley

Adult Education Officers Association

Geraldine O'Neill

National Forum for the Enhancement
of Teaching and Learning in HE

Gillian Harris

National Adult Literacy Association

Grace McRandal

Irish Tax Institute

Ian McKenna

Higher Education Colleges Association

Janet Dawson

NEBOSH

John Fitzgibbons

Education and Training Boards Ireland

John McGuigan

Department of Employment and Learning
Northern Ireland (Higher Education)

Laura Irvine

Department of Employment and Learning
Northern Ireland (Further Education)

Mary Dooley

Irish Nursing Board

Niamh O'Reilly

AONTAS

Philip Sheridan

City and Guilds

Roger Acton

CIMA

Ronan O'Loughlin

Chartered Accountants Ireland

Rory O'Sullivan

National Association of Principals
and Deputy Principals

Shiela Power

Irish Council for International Students

Suzanne Kyle

AONTAS

Wendy Ross

Department of Education and Skills
(Higher Education)

QQI Board Member

Gordon Clark

Chairperson

Ann Louise Gilligan

Thomas McDermott

QQI

Padraig Walsh

CEO

Angela Lambkin

Ann Graves

Barbara Kelly

Paul Brady

Angela Lambkin

Trish O'Brien

Deirdre Miller

John O'Connor

Andrina Wafer

Laura Carrigan

Tina Medjber

Appendix 2: Copy of the Agenda

CONSULTATIVE FORUM | 31 MAY

AGENDA

10.30 Registration

11.00 Welcome
Dr Pdraig Walsh, CEO, QQI / Forum Chair

Updates from QQI

1. Comprehensive Policy Development Programme updates
2. Corporate Plan 2016

THEME: Qualifications Frameworks Towards 2030

11.30 Presentations and discussion
John O'Connor, Head of Qualifications and Skills Policy, QQI

1. The National Framework of Qualifications – Future Directions
2. Table discussion and feedback
3. European Developments in the area of Qualifications and Skills

13.00 Close and Lunch

AGENDA



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John O'Connor

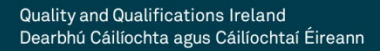
Update on the NFAQ

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NFQ- Key achievements

- NFQ established in 2003
- New way of thinking about qualifications
- Visibility of NFQ
- NFQ supported by national awarding bodies
- Strong international connections
- NFQ used in qualifications recognition processes
- Emerging relationship between NFQ and quality assurance processes.



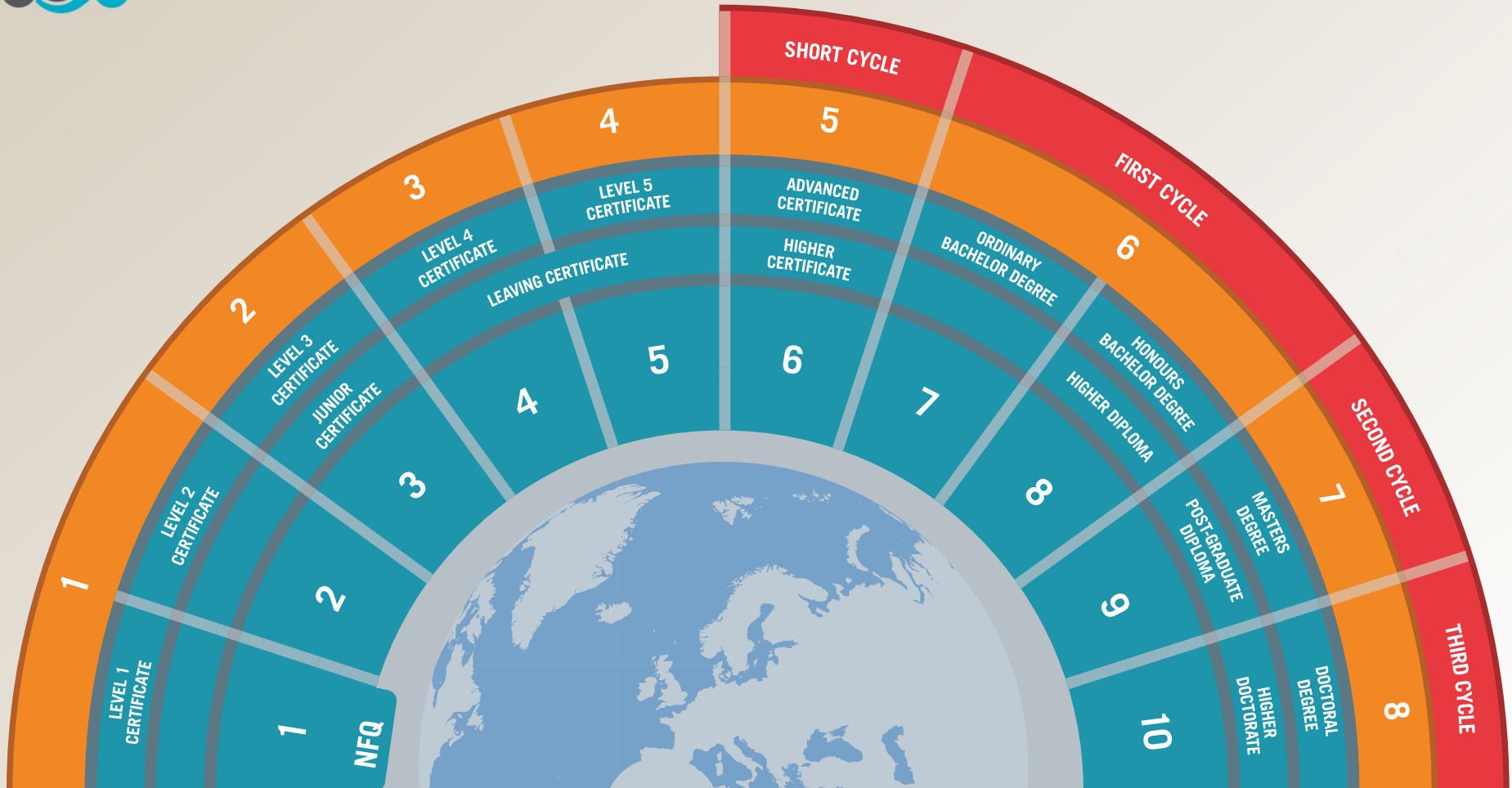


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NFQ -International orientation



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Impact of NFQ?





NFQ – Challenges

- Comparability of acquired standards of knowledge, skill or competence.
- NFQ for transparency ↔ NFQ for regulation?
- Voluntary access to NFQ for awarding organisations.
- Build evidence for impact of NFQ.
- Qualification mismatch.
- Digitalisation and representation of skills and qualifications.
- Underperformance in lifelong learning participation rates.
- Need to confirm international referencing.
- RPL.
- (Re-)Connect NFQ in practice with policy formation and evaluation.



Table Discussion – 15 mins

- What would be lost if we never had the NFQ?
- What are the future priority areas where the NFQ can make a contribution?
- How can we ‘measure’ the effects of the NFQ?

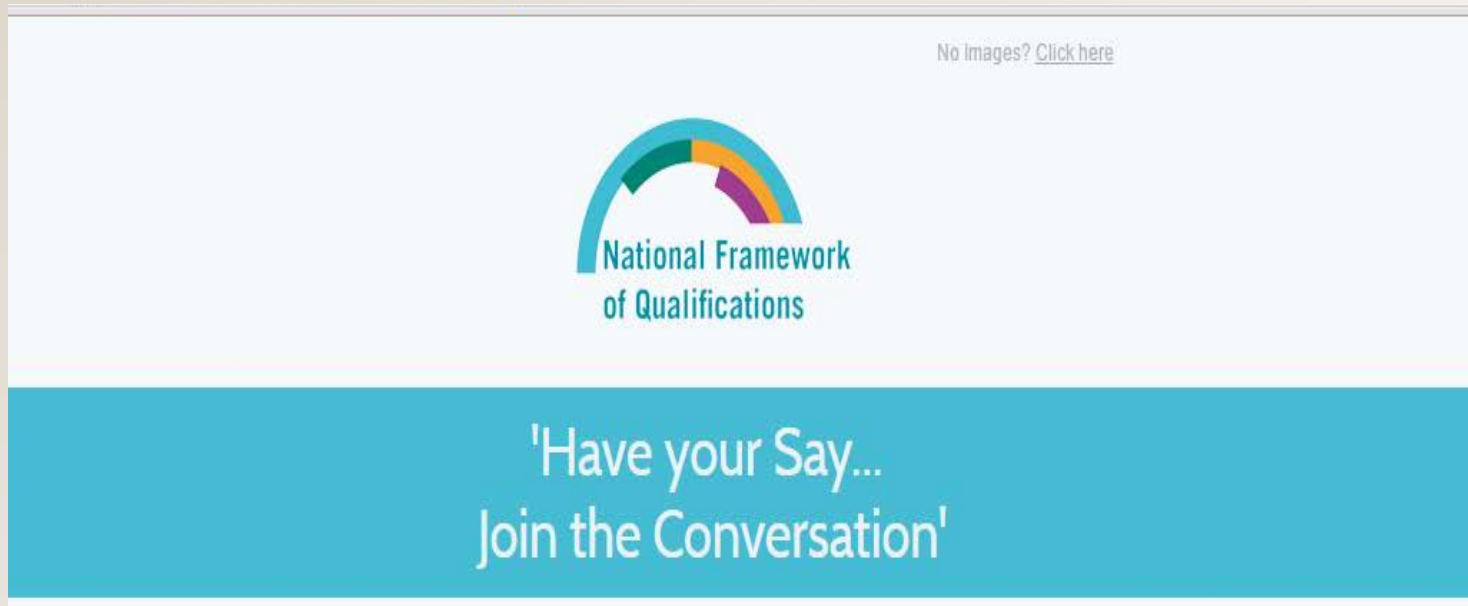


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Towards a strategic approach for the future development of the NFQ...



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Update on New EU Skills Agenda

Consultative Forum May 2016

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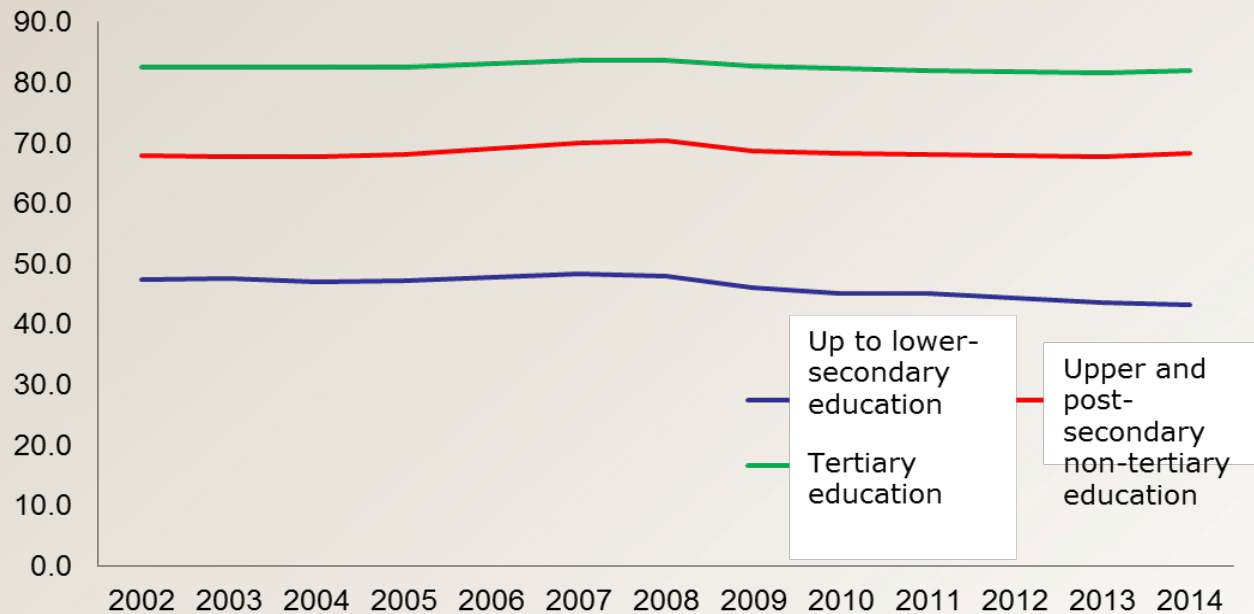
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New EU Skills Agenda - Challenges

Employment rates by level of qualification EU 28





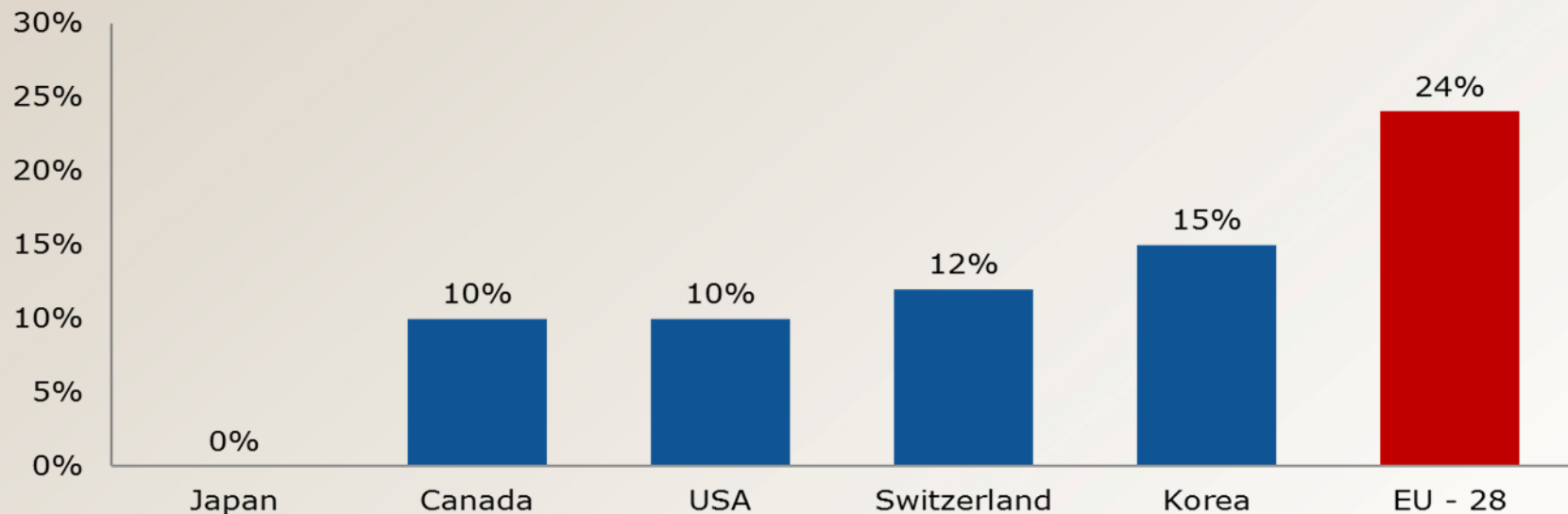
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New EU Skills Agenda - Challenges

Percentage of adult Europeans without upper secondary education



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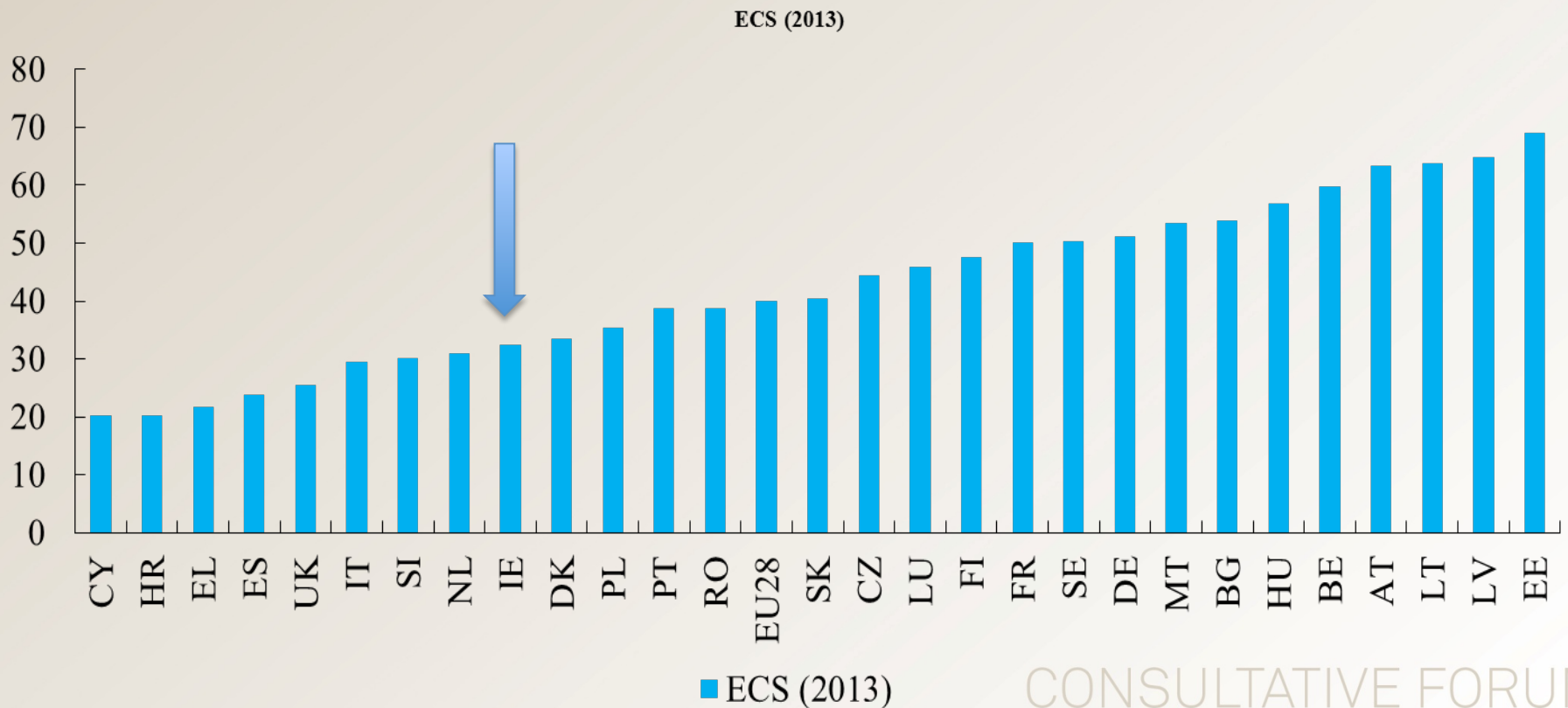
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New EU Skills Agenda - Challenges

% employers reporting difficulties in finding employees with the right skills



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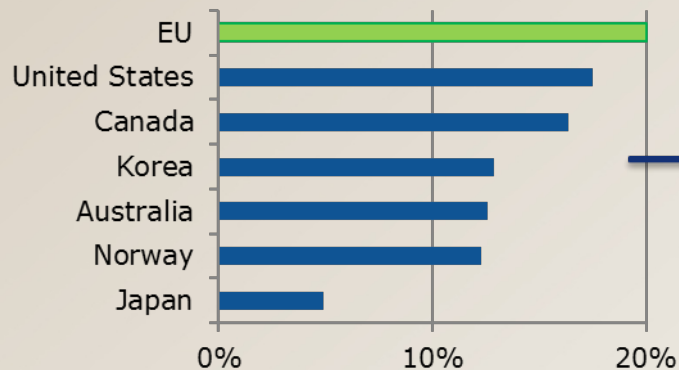
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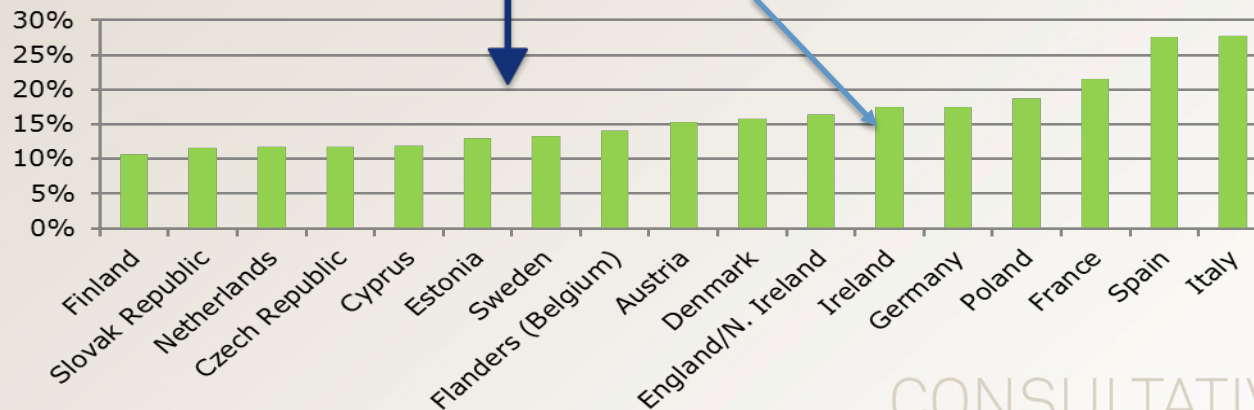
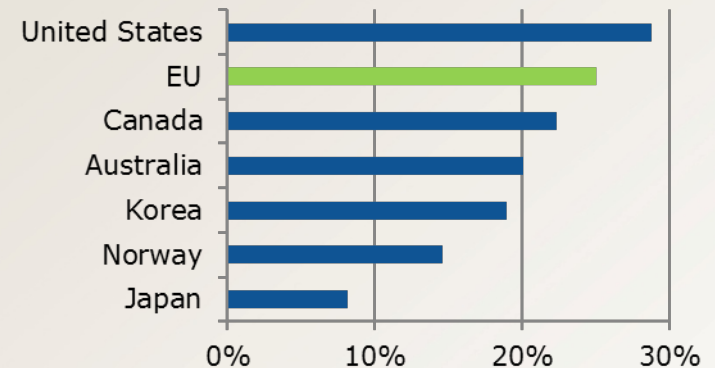


Europe and its competitors

Low Literacy Levels



Low Numeracy Skills



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New EU Skills Agenda – Priority Areas

- 1. Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation**
- 2. Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable**
- 3. Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices**

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Revision of EQF Recommendation

- Insufficient transparency of individual national qualifications
- Insufficient comparability of national qualification systems
- A lack of permeability of education and training systems
- Lack of transparency and comparability of international qualifications
- Lack of comparability of qualifications awarded in the EU with third country qualifications
- Absence of coordination and information on recognition decisions at European level
- Vacuum in European cooperation mechanisms of recognition of VET qualifications



New EU Skills Agenda – June deliverables

1. Policy Communication, *accompanied by proposals on:*
2. Council Recommendation on Skills Guarantee
3. Revision of EQF Council Recommendation
4. Revision of Europass Council Decision
5. Staff Working Document with 5 technical annexes supporting the legal proposals



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Appendix 4: Questions for Participants

- » What would be lost if we never had the NFQ?
- » What are the future priority areas where the NFQ can make a contribution?
- » How can we 'measure' the effects of the NFQ?