



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



European  
Qualifications  
Framework



# **The European Qualifications Framework: Added value and main challenges**

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## What is EQF about?

- **The EQF is a common reference point - a translation grid - for European qualifications**
- **EQF simplifies comparison and understanding of qualifications**
  - **facilitates cross-border transfer of qualifications**
  - **enables linking and combination of qualifications from different institutions and sub-systems**

**Responds to the increasing diversity of qualifications in Europe**

**EQF is based on 8 qualifications levels defined on the basis of **learning outcomes** and specified through:**

- **Knowledge**
- **Skills**
- **Competence (Autonomy and Responsibility)**

**EQF covers **the entire span of qualifications:** from end of compulsory school to highest level of professional and academic qualifications**

**The shift from an input (defining qualifications through duration and location and teaching input) to an outcome based approach a pre-condition for EQF:**

**Learning outcomes - what a learner knows, understands or is able to do at the end of a learning process**

**The learning outcomes perspective is becoming an increasingly important feature of national education and training reforms**

## **EQF – the main dates and deadlines**

- **22 April 2008; the EQF Recommendation was signed by the Presidents of the European Parliament and the European Council**
- **2010; Countries invited to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF**
- **2012; Countries invited to introduce reference to EQF in certificates and diplomas**

## **EQF implementation – current situation**

- 26 countries have (as of November 2009) stated that they will refer to the EQF by end of 2011
- All countries are developing comprehensive NQFs reflecting the EQF
- A growing interest in the EQF outside the EU - may point towards a international qualifications framework (?)

**The EQF is a voluntary process – the current progress proves its relevance**

## National Qualifications Frameworks - a key instrument for the implementation of the EQF



- We observe a snowball effect; the number of NQFs is growing rapidly, impacting
  - international cooperation
  - national education and training policies

## NQFs in the European Union

- prior to 2004 only UK, France and Ireland had introduced frameworks;
- NQFs are now being developed by **all** EU and EEA countries;
- Countries aim at **comprehensive NQFs**, covering the full range of qualifications awarded;
- The EQF – together with the Bologna process - has acted as a catalyst for these developments.





## Countries are going ahead – but have reached different stages of development

- **Conceptualisation:** *EL, SK, BU, CY, HU, IS, IT, NL, NO, PT, SE, TR*
- **Design;** *AT, BE (Wallonia) DE, FI, IT, CZ, LT, LU, HR, RO, SI, PL*
- **Implementation stage;** *BE (Flanders), DK, EE, MT*
- **Implemented (revision stage):** *F, IE, UK,*



# Main policy objectives and ambitions (I)

## NQFs are seen as instruments

- for referring national qualifications to the EQF and thus increase international transparency;
- to make national qualifications systems easier to understand and overview – for citizens, employers and other users;
- create a platform for cooperation and dialogue;
- reinforce the learning outcome orientation;



## Main policy objectives and ambitions (II)

**NQFs are seen as instruments to**

- **support LLL learning by making learning pathways visible and thus facilitate access, progression and participation;**
- **facilitate the recognition of a broader range of learning (including non-formal and informal learning);**
- **provide a reference point for quality assurance;**
- **strengthen the link to the labour market;**

## Learning outcomes

- All NQFs are to be based on learning outcomes;
- NQF developments reinforce the shift to learning outcomes;
- Learning outcomes are already integral to a range of recent and ongoing reforms at national level in many countries;



## Number of levels

- Most countries have proposed/adopted 8 levels
- Some countries have proposed/considered sublevels (Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary);
- A 5 level-structure is currently used in France but 8 levels are considered;
- 7 levels are proposed in Iceland;
- 9 levels adopted (entry level + 8 levels) for England and Northern Ireland, Wales
- 10 levels adopted in Ireland
- 12 levels adopted in Scotland and proposed in Croatia
- No final decision has been taken yet (EL, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, SK, SE)



## Level descriptors

- National descriptors build on but differ from EQF descriptors- need to be more detailed and contextualised;
- Descriptors for levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 an issue in many countries; in some countries Bologna descriptors dominate, in others EQF descriptors;
- Differences in nature of level descriptors reflecting national context:
  - Professional and personal competence (Germany)
  - Skills, knowledge, competence (France)
  - Autonomy and responsibility/context (B Flanders, Slovenia)
  - Key competences emphasised (learning competence, communication and social skills, entrepreneurship, judgment skills) (MT, SI, FI)



## Involvement of stakeholders

- NQFs development – a platform for dialogue
- A broad range of stakeholders involved:
  - Ministries of Education normally coordinate the process in most countries, in close cooperation with Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Ministry of Labour
  - Representatives of other ministries are involved (economy, health, labour, regional development etc.) and regions or Länder
  - Social partners: employers' and employee organisations, chambers
  - Public institutions and agencies from education and labour
  - Parents' and students' associations

## Important lessons learned (I)

- The shift to learning outcomes is a condition for success but is also a major challenge faced at all levels of implementation;
- NQF developments are political and require broad stakeholders involvement and dialogue - lack of involvement may undermine good technical proposals;





## Important lessons learned (II)

- **Comprehensive, learning outcomes based NQFs challenge the traditional distinction between VET and HE. This is exemplified by**
  - the discussion on the link between the HE frameworks and the comprehensive NQF
  - the level allocation of the ‘Meister’ (the master craftsman) nurses, etc.
  - the (possible) creation of professional and vocational qualifications at levels 6-8, parallel to universities

## Important challenges remain

How to allocate qualifications to NQF levels

- The concept of a '**learning outcome based qualification level**' something new in many countries;
- What is the level of generality vs. level of specificity;
- What does 'best fit' mean, what kind of simplification and tolerance is needed

How to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF

## Important challenges remain

Will NQFs be able to include:

- Certificates and diploma awarded by sectors, enterprises ?
- Certificates and diploma awarded by international organisations and enterprises (vendor qualifications)?

What does such an inclusiveness mean for

- Quality assurance?
- For the EQF?



## **NQF developments a global trend**

- **While developments in the EU are particularly strong, NQFs are developing all over the world**
- **More than 70 countries are currently actively developing NQFs**
- **The developments in the EU neighbouring regions fits into this picture, also reflecting the interest of these countries in the EQF**