



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**