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Guidelines on the practical implementation of the European Qualifications Framework

INDEX

THE USE OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)

… FROM A TRAINING PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

Training providers need to assess, if people gain access to specific training programmes in the transport and logistics sector, based on their further education. If Paul has acquired a qualification as Transport and Logistics in Spain, which qualifies him for attending a higher training programme in Spain, this does not necessarily mean, that he gets entrance to such a course in Germany as well. It is difficult for the training provider to assess, if this qualification, acquired in Spain, meets the requirements of the training programme in Germany.

Because of the implementation of the EQF, both the qualification gained in Spain and the training programme in Germany are assigned to an EQF level. This enables the training provider to assess, if the learning outcomes Paul achieved match the learning outcomes which are defined as a necessary base for the training in Germany. So the training provider is able to decide, if Paul is qualified to gain access to the training or not.

… FROM A VET-STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Maria has successfully completed her initial education in a VET school in the field of Transport Management in Austria. She moves to Italy where she wants to continue her education at a University. To do this she needs to acquire a University Entrance Certificate. To gain such a certificate in Italy she must complete a 2 year training programme. Because both Austria and Italy have implemented the EQF, the University in Italy accepts the qualification gained by Maria in Austria as a University Entrance Certificate. This is because the qualification Maria has gained in Austria is at the same EQF level (and has similar learning outcomes) to the 2 year training programme leading to a University Entrance Certificate in Italy.

… FROM AN EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

Peter is an employer in the transport and logistics sector and owns a logistics company in the Netherlands. Stephanie has applied for a job as forwarding merchant in his company. Stephanie has successfully completed her training as a forwarding merchant, but in France. Therefore normally it would be difficult for Peter to assess Stephanie's knowledge, skills and competence.

The EQF facilitates an assessment of Stephanie's qualifications: Knowledge, skills and competences are described as learning outcomes. So Peter doesn't have to assess the institution, where Stephanie completed her training, or the length of her learning experience. Implementation of the EQF has made it possible for Peter to assess the learning outcomes Stephanie has achieved in completing her training as a design engineer in France and whether or not these learning outcomes fit the needs for a job as a design engineer in his company in the Netherlands.

The use of EQF

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which was agreed upon in 2008 is, a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning' (EC 2013).

For teachers and trainers the main use of the EQF is specifically to make levels of education comparable and to facilitate the mobility of their students during their education.

The examples show how the EQF is intended to be used from the perspective of teachers and trainers, but also from the perspective of their students and from the perspective of the (future) employers of their students.

The EQF enables employers, job seekers and qualification providers to compare qualification levels of qualifications from all over Europe

How the EQF looks like

The EQF reference levels shift the focus away from the traditional approach, which emphasises learning inputs (length of a learning experience, type of institution) to learning outcomes. In the EQF, learning outcomes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

> **Learning outcomes describe what a learner knows, understands and is able to do regardless of where the learning was achieved.**

For more information on learning outcomes see the euVETsupport-guidelines for EQF and ECVET application in VET praxis (Sandra Bohlinger).

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE EQF

KNOWLEDGE means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning (facts, principles, theories and practices). In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.

SKILL means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

COMPETENCE means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological abilities in work or study situations. In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Learning outcomes make learning comparable across borders
while learning inputs can vary widely and not comparable from country to country

Table1: EQF level descriptors Level 3 – 5
(*Source: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm (adapted for this guideline)*

	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work and study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circum-stances in solving problems
Level 4	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-manage-ment within the guide-lines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

In terms of structure, the EQF is based on eight reference levels (from basic Level 1 to advanced Level 8), each of them defined by a set of descriptors which indicate the achievement of learning outcomes.

Each of the 8 EQF-levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualification.

In the table above you can see the levels 3 to 5 and the general explanation of the allocated descriptive elements knowledge, skills and competence.

For VET-training the levels 3 to 5 are specifically relevant as they cover the educational fields of apprenticeships, lower and upper secondary schools or other qualifications with equivalent standards.

The destined way of referencing national qualifications to the EQF are National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs). They are generated by developing new frameworks parallel to the EQF – like in the Netherlands (NLQF) or Germany (DQF) – or by adapting existing frameworks to the EQF-structure like in France (RNCP).

The euVETsupport portal provides information on national developments in selected European countries. Furthermore the National Contact Points (NCP) in each EU country provide up-to-date information on the national situation.

USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES

Use Active Verbs

It should be ensured that active verbs are used in the formulation.

Example: He/she can correctly prepare documentation for goods transported.

Insufficient: The learners were made familiar with documentation procedures.

Example: He/she is able to design, direct and coordinate all operations needed to organize international freight transport.

Insufficient: Organisational issues were properly identified and conducted. The student was able to handle organisational procedures.

Specify and Contextualise the Active Verb:

Therefore it is essential to provide an indication as to what the knowledge and skills refer to, and as to what kind of performance is concerned.

Example: He/she is able to create, develop and close the file for shipments.

Insufficient: He/she is able to make shipments.

Example: He/she is able to take into account customs legislation and regulations governing cross-border trade.

Insufficient: He/she can handle regulations.

Avoid Vague Formulations:

The formulation should neither be too general nor too specific.

Example: He/she is able to apply his / her communication and organizational skills in the coordination of people involved in the logistics chain.

Insufficient (formulation too general): He/she is familiar with communication and organizational skills in the logistics sector.

Example: He/she is able to use transport planning methods and models in analyses of the company's logistics work.

Insufficient (formulation too specific): He/she knows that analysis method A and B and knows the way of implementation used by company X.

The EQF in training and education

In practice, adapting to the EQF is not a formal process but means first and foremost to adapt **teaching and training methods** to the new requirements. Education explicitly has to target the development of the competences in question and must not stick to the traditionally known recitation of knowledge. The application and the transferability of the abilities has to be put into the focus by using supportive methods like simulations, training on the job and project work.

Having accepted this, also the **key elements of educational activities** – like occupation standards, curricula or assessment methods – can be adapted to the EQF. Some core issues for this process are presented below.

How to connect occupational standards/profiles with the EQF

Occupational standards help to define an occupation, job or task. They describe the competences that are essential in the work setting. If you are confronted with occupational standards using the EQF they will hopefully include a description of the work processes that specifies the occupation in a practical way – along fields of activities and by using the EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and competences.

The example in table 2 is taken out of the occupational profile of a freight forwarder. It shows one ("Implementing...") out of seven fields of activity which constitute this profile. The specifications in table 2 describe what a freight forwarder should

know, understand and be able to do in this specific field of activity.

While any teacher and trainer can imagine what "knowledge" is about, the difference between skills and competences is not so clear: A competence is a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes for achieving observable results. Hence, a competence is not a skill; on the contrary, a competence embeds skills. Whilst competences are holistic concepts, skills are precise and definite abilities, either hard technical, e.g. make cost/ benefit analysis, develop logistical plans; or soft, e.g. deploy empathy to customer needs, negotiate contract terms and conditions. Competence in this regard seems to excel the other descriptors. Autonomy and responsibility are important terms to describe competence: It can reach from "autonomously adapting to the context, under direct supervision" (level 3) to "acting on his/her own with confidence, under general supervision" (level 5).

Curricula mirroring work processes

Perhaps you contribute to the development of curricula at your institution. The following aspects should be considered here: Also curricula should be formulated in learning outcomes. Learning outcomes will always be described from the perspective of the learner and not from the perspective of the teacher. Nonetheless, they refer to qualifications and not to individual learners. This means that the reference point is always an average graduate, not a person who´s performances is departing from that. It is advisable to

formulate neither too many, nor too few learning outcomes. Too many could cause a lack of transparency, while on the other hand too few would not be conducive to transparency.

Information about career paths should be given as amendments to curricula – that also means to illustrate alternatives (e.g. a master degree in transport management can lead to career paths more oriented at the technical expertise or more oriented at management activities). Like the fields of activity are

structuring the occupational profiles, a curriculum should be structured in a modular way mirroring the real work structures. This enables learners to combine single modules according to their career objectives.

Table 3 shows the goals of a Degree Programme in the field of logistics management set up by a Swedish business college. Again, the goals of the curriculum are expressed in knowledge, skills and competences

Table2: Extract from occupational profile "Freight Forwarder"
(*Source: Project Central: Common qualification reference for the freight forwarder*)

IMPLEMENTING AND COORDINATING TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS OPERATIONS		
KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCES**
He / she has knowledge of: • environmental regulations and aspects • fundamental principles of supply chain management • modes of transport • transport / logistics service contracts • sub-contracting and its regulations • Relevant documentation (national and international) • scheduling and planning methods • goods, packaging, warehousing technology, logistical control • traffic geography • the company's controlling and documentation procedures • finance (bank-related operations)	He / she is able to: • create, develop and close the file for shipments • organize shipping of goods to final destination by air, sea and land taking into account legal, environmental and economic concerns • design, direct and coordinate all operations needed to organize international freight transport • prepare documentation for goods transported • draw up contracts and supervise their implementation, with assistance of legal experts, if needed • procure insurances for services rendered • take into account customs legislation and regulations governing cross-border trade • issue and check invoices and receipts • carry-out payment and dunning procedures • perform administrative tasks • apply charges and prices • identify and select potential sub-contractors	He / she is competent to: • consider economic aspects in his / her work (making use of opportunities to consolidate consignments into larger loading units) • take into account environmental aspects • apply his / her communication and organizational skills in the coordination of people involved in the logistics chain • conceive and implement transport solutions according to customers' needs • act on behalf of the client when dealing with customs and / or other organizations

Table3: Sample overall goal degree programme "Logistics Management"
(*Source: Brock, Niels (Copenhagen Business College, Lillebælt and Sjælland Academies of Professional Higher Education Curriculum) (2012), Guidelines for The Academy Profession Degree Programme in Logistics Management, Copenhagen.*

Overall goals of the Degree Programme		
Knowledge	**Skills**	**Competences**
Knowledge about: • purchasing, production and distribution functions and their relation to the value chain and related concepts, including logistics service • forms of transport, different logistics systems and the company's internal information technology, • the company's internal goals and processes, including financial management, organisation theory and management • socio-economic conditions, both national and international, different market forms and the importance of these for the company • transport law, including venue, choice of law, creditor insurance and liability • different financial forms, types of costs and calculations	The student can: • use analysis models in connection with the company's competitive strategy and evaluate risks and possibilities at different market levels • evaluate the company's purchase agreements based on both national and international rules • utilize statistical tools for quality control and forecasting • work out investment calculations, including relevant key figures • evaluate the relationship between a purchasing agreement and a transport agreement, and utilize rules covering transport liability and Incoterms in practical situations, and suggest solution options • use transport planning methods and models in analyses of the company's logistics work.	The student can: • participate in managerial and cooperative relations with people with different educational, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. • carry out negotiations related to the company's logistics processes, both written and orally, in English • manage the company's supply and distribution systems in the context of professional, cross-functional cooperation • gain, in a systematic and structured way, new knowledge, skills and competences in relation to the industry • optimize logistics efficiency through production and warehouse management.

Sometimes a Certificate Supplement is added to a curriculum. This document provides additional information such as the EQF-level, entry requirements and access opportunities to the next level of education. This makes the curriculum more easily understood, especially for training institutions or employers outside the issuing country.

Assessment procedures using learning outcomes

Assessment specifications define the tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which learning has been achieved. They are often considered as the easiest way to bring in the orientation on work processes via learning outcomes. So it is also the major starting point for teachers and trainers. However, a comprehensive approach should – next to the assessment methods – also include the other educational key lements (curricula, occupational profiles).

In general, the formulations are to be chosen such that it can be determined during an evaluation process if the learner has achieved the learning outcomes. These learning outcomes refer to the day of testing, i.e. to what the learner knows, is able to and capable of doing on this day. The failure should be avoided to restrict the learning outcomes orientation only to knowledge and to forget about skills and competences. An example for an assessment procedure would be a regulation or an instruction for an examination which is expressed in knowledge, skills and competences – however, in terms of learning outcomes it would look exactly like a curriculum (see example above).

In order to navigate through the requirements of the EQF a change of perspective and in thinking is needed

Practical hints for a beneficial EQF application

EuVETsupport collected good practice projects of the transport and logistics sector which had made efforts in applying the EQF in a reasonable way. These examples imply to pay special attention to the following aspects:

The EQF is a framework, not as concise tool

Be aware of the fact that the EQF is not a tool which can be used for assessing qualifications all over Europe without further ado. The EQF rather is the big framework in which single national or sectoral tools try to come to the best conclusion possible for comparing qualifications.

Work process orientation is the key

Before losing yourself in the details of EQF assignment make yourself clear that the basic idea behind is to make visible the real processes of the world of work. So sometimes it makes more sense to assess what a student is really able to do in the practice of work instead of painstakingly comparing credit points

Offering specific learning pathways

As far as it is within your reach, try to give your students a perspective of their learning future. The concept behind the EQF is called lifelong learning and what they need is a pathway through their learning lives. The EQF can support you specifically when the learning life takes place in different European countries.
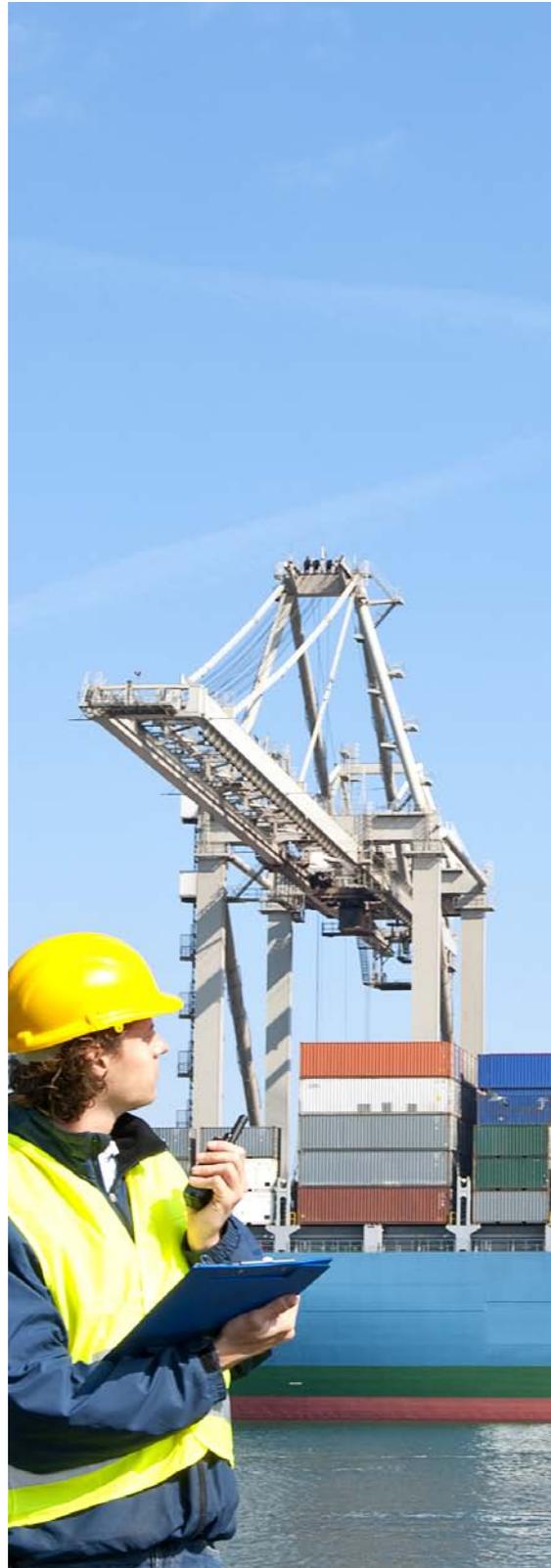
The EQF only a tool
but needs to be brought to life by people

The euVETsupport portal

Transparency and comparability of qualifications, the recognition of non- and informal learning, flexibility and mobility within vocational education and training (VET) as well as a European approach within VET are more important than ever in times of skill shortages, economical challenges and high youth unemployment rates in Europe.

Europe facilitates this process with European VET instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET). The proper application and implementation of EQF and ECVET offer many advantages and help both HR departments and VET providers to successfully master the challenges faced by industry today.

The euVETsupport portal guides and advises VET providers and HR departments in applying and implementing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) in their daily praxis. The portal serves as the virtual environment of the euVETsupport users and network. Aligned to the individual needs and particular requirements of the VET practitioners concerned, the portal provides its end-users with specific information, support tools and assistance for making best use of the European instruments in their daily practice.

The portal will be open to the public after a testing and adjustment phase as of April 2014 and after the project's end. Please get in touch with the project coordinator in order to participate in the testing.

www.euVETsupport.eu

EQF and ECVET in transport and logistics

EURO TRANS LOG

This project aimed to consider the companies' needs to define standard definitions within transport and logistics in order to create transparency between countries based on EQF and ECVET. www.eurotranslog.eu/

CENTRAL

The changes occurring in the logistics sector give rise to increased demand for new skills. But existing certificates and training do not always provide a satisfactory response to the needs of employers and training bodies. This project was launched in order to improve existing systems and develop new approaches to i.e. support learner mobility in this sector with ECVET.
www.logisticsqualifications.eu

PROLOG/ EUCOLOG

The core of these two projects is the SOLOS model (an organisational development model that aims to support workers to improve their skills through learning on the job). Three learning outcomes based profiles based on the EQF were exemplary defined for the learning model SOLOS. www.solos-model.eu

MetaLOG

The MetaLOG project intends to setup a sectoral qualifications framework for the transport and logistics sector aims to support the long-term establishment of a "European Logistics Skills Network".
www.project-metalog.eu

ProfDRV

This project explored the occupation professional driver and aimed to develop a learning outcomes based profile as well as related EQF-compatible quality standards for a comparable implementation of professional driver qualification in Europe based on directive 2003/59/EC and further vocational programmes for this occupation.
www.project-profdrv.eu

ICT-DRV

The major aim of this project is the exploration of multimedia based learning with CBT and simulators within professional driver qualification. The learning outcomes approach is used based on the ProfDRV quality standards and in order to increase quality of technology-based learning in this occupational field.
www.project-ictdrv.eu
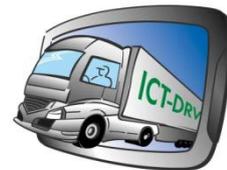
KNOW-IN

The KNOW-IN project created a new professional figure for the Road Freight Transport Sector: the European Road Transport Manager (EU-RTM) who has the management skills, tools and interventions needed to address the challenges the sector faces. The profile is based on EQF learning outcomes and incorporates ECVET as a tool to enable the recognition of prior learning.
www.know-in.eu

Resources

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Brock, Niels (Copenhagen Business College, Lillebælt and Sjælland Academies of Professional Higher Education Curriculum) (2012), Guidelines for The Academy Profession Degree Programme in Logistics Management, Copenhagen.

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European Commission (2013): The European Qualifications Framework (EQF). URL: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm (02.06.2013).

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Project Central (2011) Common qualification reference for the freight forwarder.

Online:

EC: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm (02.06.2013).

EC: http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/uploads/file/EQF%20National% 20Coordination %20Points.pdf (10.09.2013).

European Projects:

Beyond the sources mentioned the general results of the following European projects were considered: CENTRAL, DOCET, EQF Predict, NQF-SQF, TAMTAM, Ways to Sustainability, ZOOM, ProfDRV

Notes

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