



An introduction into the European Qualifications Framework

Labour unions / Workers councils

The EQF: an attempt to support the mobility of workers in Europe and to foster the recognition qualifications and of learning in the workplace

It is the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) major aim to promote workers and learners mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. For this purpose the EQF emphasises the results of learning (learning outcomes) rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study in order to make qualifications comparable based on their learning outcomes.

This comparability of qualifications across borders, sectors and institutions allows workers to be mobile while having their qualifications recognised also in other national, sectoral or institutional contexts. In this way a worker from Italy can apply for a job in Sweden and has his/her Italian qualification still recognised. This supports the filling of skill shortages in one part of Europe with workers coming from another European country but possessing the required knowledge, skills and competences. In this way the EQF supports the establishment of a European labour market.

As a major component the shift to learning outcomes makes the recognition of non- and informal learning taking place at the workplace or during leisure time a focal point. Based on the EQF, a qualification should be achievable through a variety of education and career paths and not exclusively through the participation in a specific VET programme/ scheme. This is of special importance for workers with many years of experience that often equals a higher qualification level but without formal recognition of their knowledge, skills and competences gained during work.



How does it work?

As of 2012 all newly issued certificates are supposed to bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level and therefore also the different qualifications should be referenced to the EQF via a National Qualifications Framework. This reference will assist workers and learners to position a qualification within the own and other European education systems and labour markets. In this way the EQF, the corresponding National and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and the qualifications description in terms of learning outcomes support learners and workers to locate qualifications within their own education and training/ career pathways in order to take a next qualification step and/or to find a new position and to ensure that their qualifications are properly understood and recognised by a potential new employer abroad.

At the same time assessment and validation of learning is opened up to the recognition of non- and informal learning such as learning that took place at the workplace and therefore to people who did not attend a specific course or programme. Learning outcomes play a crucial role in this regard because they can be assessed and validated independently from the learning process in which they have been acquired.



What needs to be done?

The *learning outcome approach* – currently applied to all kind of qualifications all over Europe – is of major importance to make this European Qualifications Framework work because qualifications are assigned to levels not by length of study but by the level of abilities holders of the qualification possess at the end of any kind of learning process.

But this approach needs to be transferred and integrated (in)to the very different national education systems in Europe. For this purpose National and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks are developed all over Europe in line with the nature of the social relations and specific cultural features existing in the different countries. The EQF therefore requires the involvement of education and training key players across education sectors and at all levels concerned with education.

In order to make this concept work the active participation of all relevant stakeholders is of fundamental importance in general. Only if stakeholders such as employers, labour unions, awarding bodies and education providers actively participate in the overall process, mutual trust into the different education systems and their application of the European Qualifications Framework can be reached.





The European Qualifications Frameworks mode of action

EQF implementation



The EQF is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It has two principal aims: to *promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.*

The Recommendation formally entered into force in April 2008. It sets 2010 as the recommended target date for countries to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF, and 2012 for countries to ensure that individual qualification certificates bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses *all levels of qualifications* acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training. Additionally, the framework addresses qualifications acquired in initial and continuing education and training.

EQF learning outcomes approach

Europe's education and training systems are so diverse that a *shift to learning outcomes* was necessary to make comparison between qualifications possible based on the learning outcomes they stand for.

In the EQF a learning outcome is defined as a statement of *what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.* The EQF therefore emphasises the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study.

Learning outcomes are specified in *three categories*:

Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, 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 context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

EQF levels and their meaning

The EQF is structured into 8 levels each referring to a certain level of knowledge, skills and competences. These descriptors describe the abilities the certificate holder has proofed to possess. The eight levels cover the *entire span of qualifications from basic to advanced levels.* Each level should, in principle, be achievable through a variety of education and career paths.

Examples for level descriptions:

Level 3	<p>Knowledge: knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study</p> <p>Skills: a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</p> <p>Competence: take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</p>
Level 7 (e.g. Masters degree)	<p>Knowledge: highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</p> <p>Skills: specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</p> <p>Competence: manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</p>

Comparing qualifications via the EQF

In order to compare qualifications with each other National (NQF) as well as Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQF) are currently developed and referenced to each other.

Referencing means the assignment of individual qualifications to specific NQF- and/or SQF-levels based on the learning outcomes determined for the qualification. The National/ Sectoral Qualifications frameworks are referenced to the EQF in order to have a common point of reference at the European level:

