



An introduction into the European Qualifications Framework

Education and training providers

The EQFs learning outcome approach: challenge and opportunity for education and training providers

It is the European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) major aim to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. For this purpose and due to the diversity of the different European education systems it was necessary to agree on one specific aspect of learning that makes qualifications comparable and transparent all over Europe. The learning outcomes of a learning process referred to within a qualification have been elaborated as being the element to make qualifications comparable. Learning outcomes describe 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. But this shift to learning outcomes has also implications for education and training practice and on those who are involved in implementing programmes and courses. In this sense it is a challenge for education practice but also an opportunity as testing results proof.



At the same time it may not be forgotten that this shift to learning outcomes makes the recognition of non- and informal learning taking place at the workplace or during leisure time a focal point for education and training. A qualification can therefore be achieved through a variety of education and career paths and not exclusively through the participation in a specific programme/ scheme. This opportunity is of special importance for job-seekers re-entering the labour market with many years of experience that often equals a higher qualification level but without formal recognition.

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 learners and employers to position a qualification within the own and other European education systems. In this way the EQF, the corresponding National and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and the qualifications description in terms of learning outcomes support learners to choose qualifications for their individual education and training/career pathways in order to take a next qualification step and/or to find a new position. At the same time an education provider can in this way evaluate an applicants record in terms of the abilities and/or qualifications required to start a new programme.

But qualifications differ so widely that it is very difficult to rely on them to achieve comparability. Therefore the overall system is built on learning outcomes that describe a qualification and decide about its level. Since work as such is more or less the same throughout Europe, work and business processes more and more serve as the major point of reference for allocating, structuring and consolidating learning outcomes.



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 the EQF work because qualifications are assigned to levels by the level of abilities holders of the qualification possess at the end of any kind of learning process. At the same time learning outcomes need to reflect the work processes they refer to.

This has consequences for education and training practice in terms of the way how qualifications are developed and described, how programmes and courses are planned and implemented and how learning is assessed. It also needs to be considered that the EQF strongly encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which reflects a wider shift within which the EQF is acting as a catalyst for reforms that also effect education providers thinking.

In order to make this concept work the active participation of all stakeholders involved is of fundamental importance. Only if stakeholders such as employers, labour unions, awarding bodies, public authorities 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:

