



NQF-SQF

National Qualifications Frameworks
Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks



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Common grounds for referencing NQFs and SQFs to the EQF



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Referencing sectoral approaches to the EQF: Methodological issues

Claudio Demartini
Politecnico di Torino

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Summary

- Introduction
- Employability Grid
- The Reference Scenario
- SQFs referenceability to work process
- Relationship between SQFs and NQFs

Introduction

- The **implementation of EQF** is a **complex matter**.
- The **goal of this study** concerns the **relations between NQF and sector-based qualifications and between NQF and EQF or between sector-based qualifications and EQF**.
- The first schema deals with the opportunity to **directly link sector-based qualifications to EQF**. In the second one the link to EQF would be set out through the NQF; thereby it will be necessary to **check whether a link between NQF and sector-based qualifications already exists**
- The analysis carried out in the **construction, ICT, logistics, public services and retail sectors** was functional to provide indications on the opportunities and **ways to link sector-based qualifications to EQF**.
- The results have led to set out some **general indications**, that can be applied both at **national and sector-based level**.



Employability grid (1)

- An **holistic model of abilities** required for working as a professional by **mirroring the work process** is presented. The key outcome of the approach is represented by the **Employability grid**, a **set of descriptors based on a limited number of categories** specifically referring to those distinctions between levels which play a role in the real world of professionals.
- Assumption: the EQF descriptors, “**competences**” steer “**skills**”, and “**skills**” steer “**knowledge**”; thus, “**competence**” can be considered as the **overarching category** that should **drive the referencing process**.

Therefore, the discriminating capabilities of the “competence” descriptors with **respect to the concept of core work objective**, regarded to as the reference point for **relating vocational standards to work**, determining **relationships between work processes and standardized abilities to carry them out**.

Level	Competence in EQF terms	Action with regard to action of others	Action with regard to context	Context
1	<i>work or study under direct supervision in a structured context</i>	Steered by action of others	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Structured</i>
2	<i>work or study under supervision with some autonomy</i>	Steered by action of others	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Not structured</i>
3	<i>take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</i>	neutral	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Including changing circumstances</i>
4	<i>exercise self-management within the guidelines 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</i>	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Not changing/changing
5	<i>exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others</i>	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Changing
6	<i>manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</i>	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Changing
7	<i>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</i>	Steering action of others	Determining context <i>Transforming</i>	Changing
8	<i>demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research</i>	Steering action of others	Determining context <i>Transforming and replacing</i>	Changing

Employability grid



Employability grid (3)

- the grid is used as a **reference tool** for the purpose of **categorizing qualifications** considered in the NQF-SQF project according to their **referenceability to the work process**.
- In particular, following the inspiring methodology behind the grid and the deliverable on “**Key Questions for NQF/SQF Analysis**”, a **questionnaire is proposed** to **gather relevant information** on this subject for **selected SQFs**.
- The information is exploited, in combination with **details on sectoral frameworks objectives** and structure as well as with **their relations with national frameworks** to **draft recommendations** on **how SQFs could be enhanced and refined** in order to **make work processes transparent** to which described sectoral standards are related.

The reference scenario (1)

- Two sectors, **construction in Romania and retail in a transnational perspective** are **developing a SQF (in specific projects)** to **exploit EQF guidelines** for the definition of core elements of a qualification.
- **SQF has already been developed in Spain for the public service sector and in France for the logistics sector.**
- **According to the above initiatives, SQFs related to the public sector and to the logistics sector should exploit NQFs in order to be linked to EQF.**

However, for example, **linking the French Logistics Qualification Frameworks to the EQF**, implies that French stakeholders would have to shift from a “**competence**” approach (organized in 5 levels) to one (organized in 8 levels) where skills, knowledge and abilities are formally separated and distinguished.

The reference scenario (2)



- Private sectors are more complex: the link SQF-NQF could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages.
- Since NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour world, industries prefer a direct link SQF-EQF.
- Another key point when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the difference between competences and performance needs: usually, qualifications are described in terms of competences, while wages are linked to performance.
- The EQF Advisory Board has recommended that SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs.
- important to create a uniform reading of the qualifications also at National level.

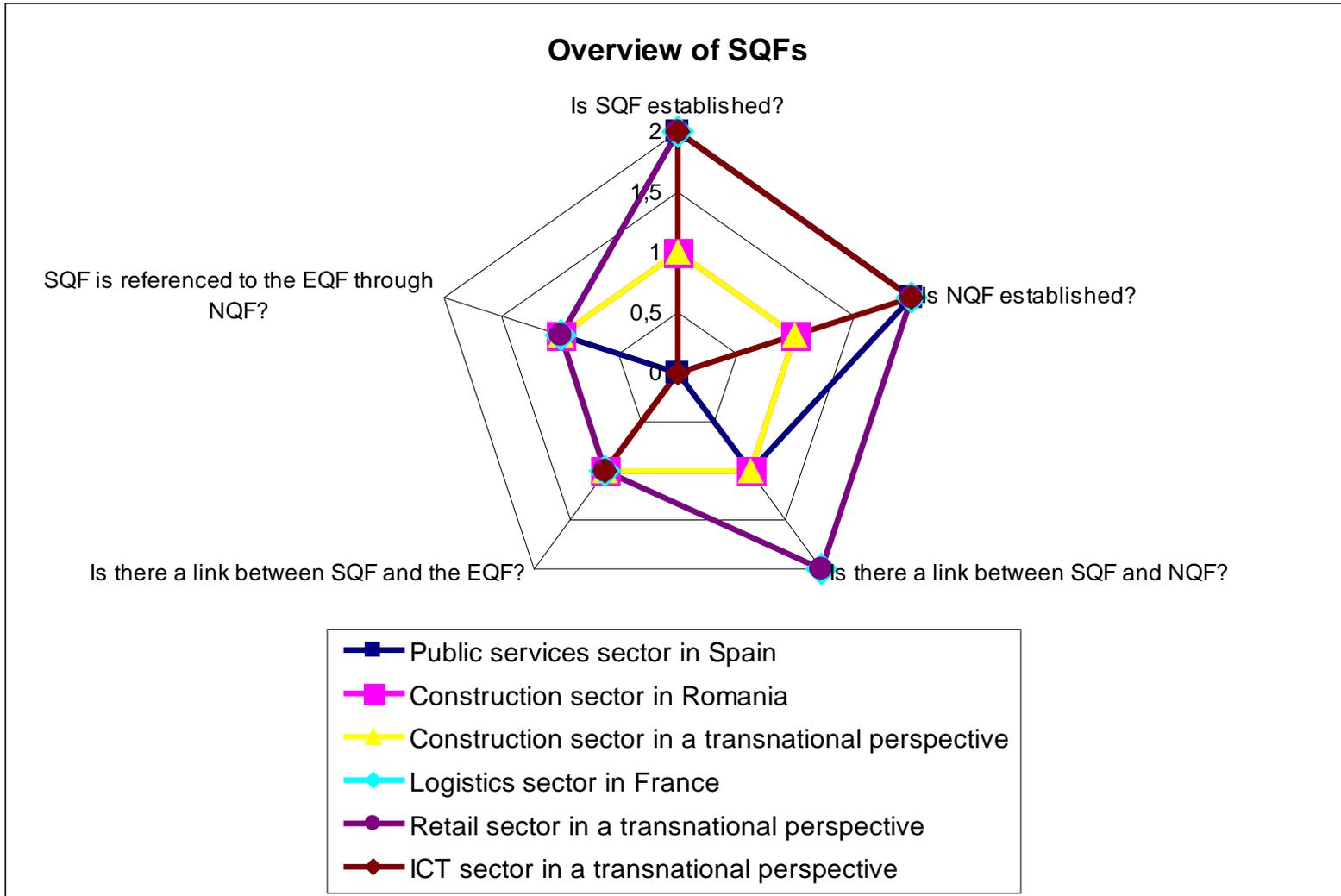
The reference scenario (3)

ICT sector with the **European e-Competence Framework** establishes a **European common language for ICT competences** that can support the definition of jobs, training courses, qualifications, career paths, formal and non-formal learning rules, certificates, etc.

The reference scenario (4,



- Hence several **aspects threaten the direct link SQF-EQF (also via NQF)**:
 - **political implications** (as in the case of Spain): change professional categories of a current SQF is a big issue;
 - **poor knowledge of the EQF principles** (as in the case of Romania);
 - **loose cultural differences as consequence of progressive homogenization** of qualification frameworks (as in the case of France);
 - **need of having a local sectoral qualification** since abilities are gained through “learning on the job”;
 - **language and semantic barrier** (as in the case of construction sector);
 - **structure of the sector** being considered: sectors characterized by **small companies**, have **less interest in the internationalization process.**

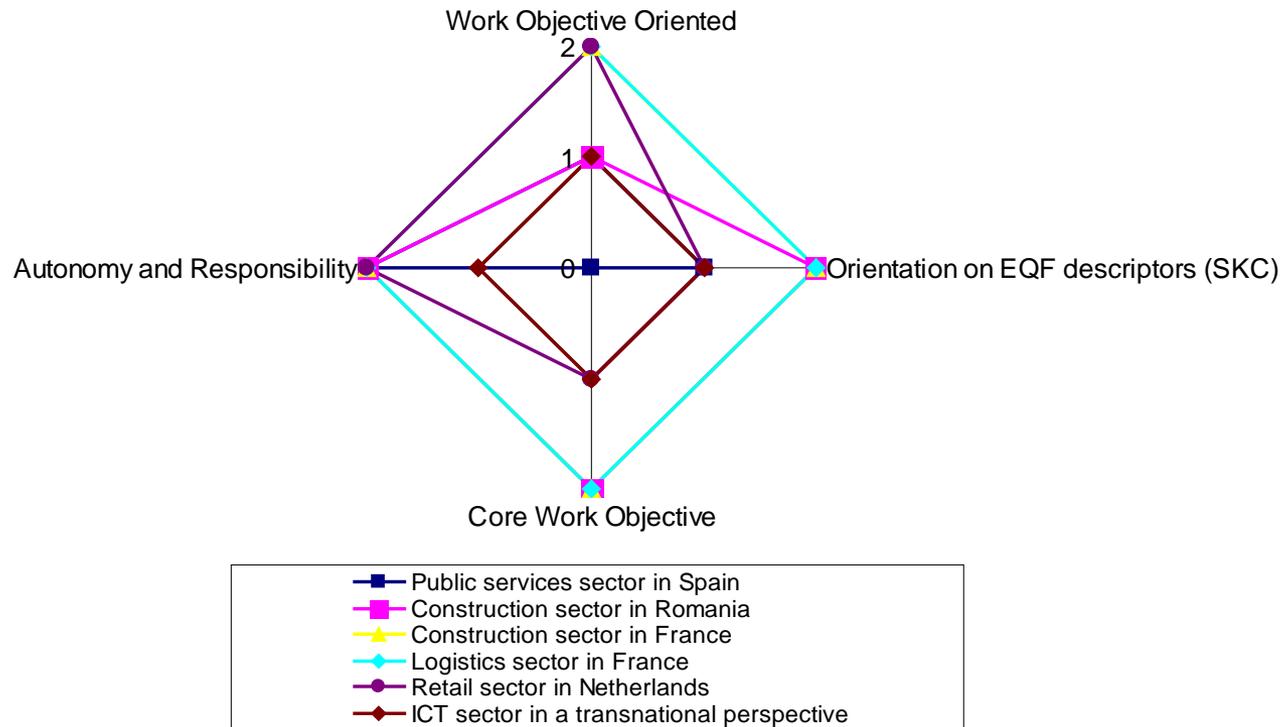


Overview of SQFs

SQFs referenceability to work process (1)

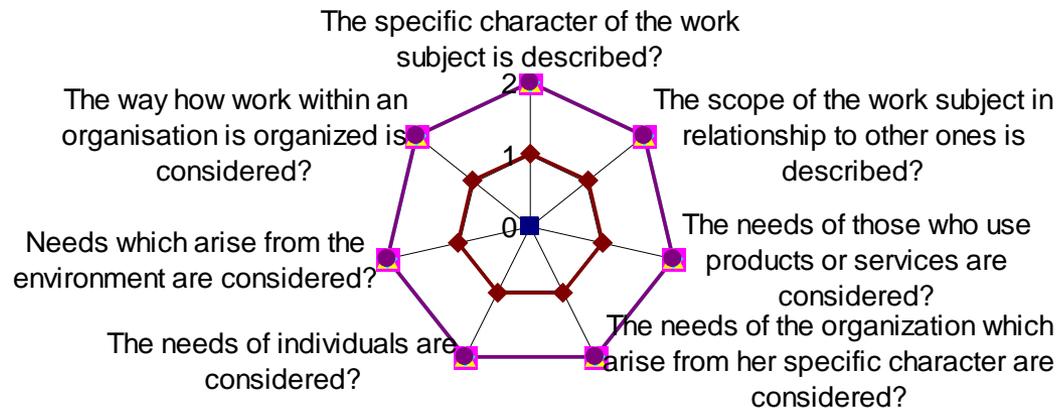
- With the Employability grid, it is emerged that **in the majority of sectors** (like for example **logistics and construction sectors in France**) **SQFs are work objective oriented and follow the work core objective**
- **For SQFs orientation on EQF descriptors (SKC), it is emerged that in the majority of sectors this orientation can be found.**
- **in some cases** (like for example logistics and construction sectors in France) **the relation among “knowledge”, “skills” and “competences” is really aligned with the logic of the EQF.** For example, in Spain the relation among “competences”, “skills” and “knowledge” is aligned with the logic of the EQF, but not following the same logic structure. For doing this, ***it is necessary to dive into the professional profiles description and restructure the content.***
- Finally, **autonomy and responsibility concepts are visible in all the sectoral qualifications frameworks analyzed.**

Typology of SQFs based on their referenceability to work process (by exploiting the Employability grid)



Typology of SQFs based on their referenceability to work process (1)

Core work objective



Typology of SQFs based on their referenceability to work process (2)

SQFs referenceability to work process (4)

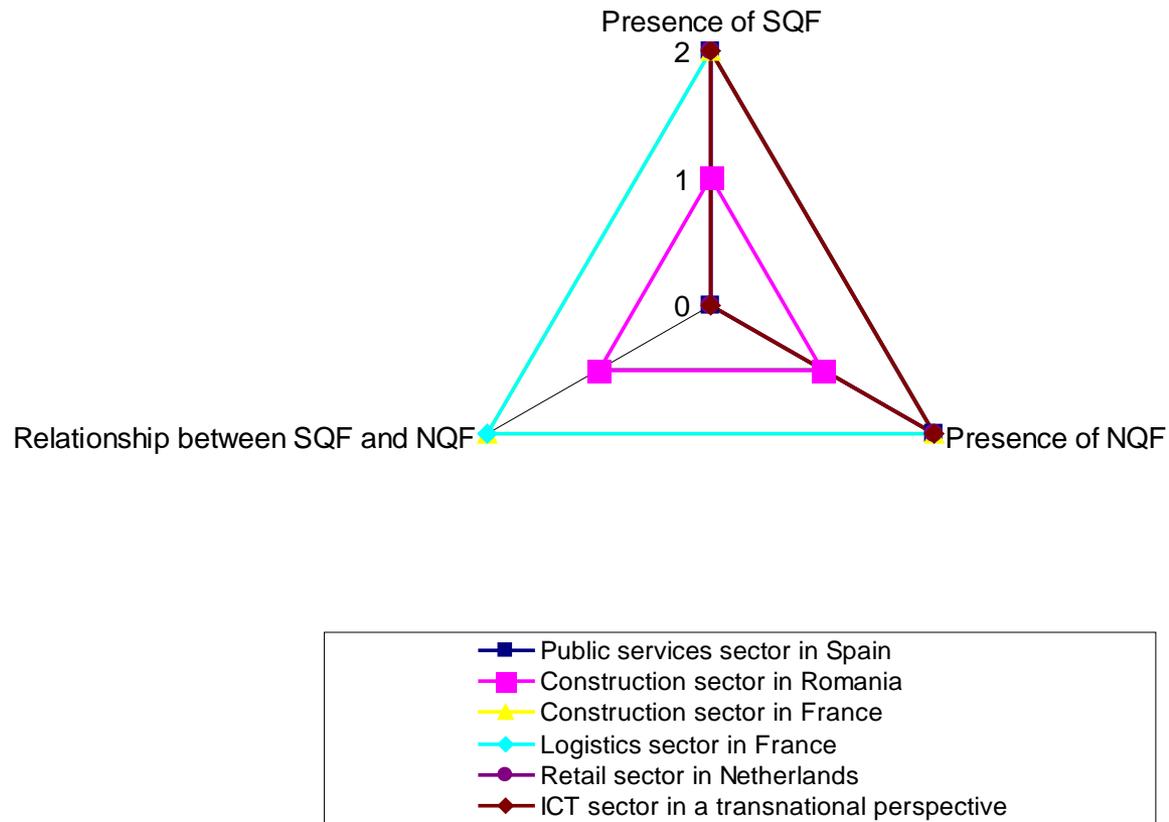
- The SWOT analysis shows the main strenghts, weaknesses, opportunities and threats emerged in relation to the SQFs referenceability to the work process.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal origin	<p style="text-align: center;">Strenghts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The logic adopted in the employability grid is work process oriented, and the logic of SQF is based on the logic of recognition of the required/needed core competences (based on the work process) to ensure that an individual is able to perform a job. * There is a broad consensus that employability and lifelong learning in Europe need to be fostered by transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The work-orientation criterion is not so easy to consider in practice. In fact, SQFs could be "real" work-objective oriented, if SQFs levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry or "in theory" work-objective oriented, if SQFs levels fit only in part to the needs of the labour market. * Only in some cases the relation among "knowledge", "skills" and "competences" of the SQFs is aligned with the logic of the EQF.
External origin	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * EU demands of homogenising education frameworks and improve mobility added by the lack of workforce in many sectors in Europe may help companies to get on board on the qualification subject (SQF-NQF-EQF). 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Collective Agreements are old and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour marked. To change the very fundamental pillars of these structures as are the way professional profiles and categories are describe requires a political decision and a consensus among Labour Unions, Companies and Government. This can be translated in: LOT of time ahead. * The EQF offers the possibility for Member States to compare their education systems. In this sense, it is nothing more or less than an instrument. EQF will not replace a NQF; it is sufficient that the EQF can be matched with the NQFs. The role of the EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries. Quality assurance, principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should not be integrated in an EQF.

Relationship between SQFs and NQFs (1)

- It is emerged that **only some countries has SQFs integrated in their NQF**.
 - This will be a sensitive issue that **will be dealt at collective agreement and will take years at least at the private company realm**.
 - One reason of these issues resides in the fact that **linking SQFs to the NQF could imply to reassess workers professional level which could eventually lead to salaries rise at large**.
 - Moreover, **SQFs in general are described in “Professional Categories”**, not in “Qualifications” and these **Professional Categories are pretty much related to “Job positions” than related to “Competences”**.
- Furthermore, it is emerged that in the majority of cases **it is preferable an indirect link between SQFs and the EQF through the NQFs**.

Typology of SQFs based on their relationship to the NQFs



Typology of SQFs based on their relationship to NQFs

Relationship between SQFs and NQFs (3)

- The SWOT analysis shows the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats emerged in relation to the SQFs' relationship with the NQFs and to the need of an indirect link between SQFs and the EQF through the NQFs.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal origin	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Referencing the SQFs directly to the NQFs is the political correct way, because it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability. * Promote mobility in the European Countries. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Some NQFs are not oriented only on work processes, but also on values. These orientations lead to conflicts in daily life work practice, e.g. if the interests of clients and employers are not identical. * Referencing the SQFs directly to the NQFs is the political correct way, but for industries it is a big problem to apply their qualifications to the NQFs. * If companies make use of NQFs, it could come to some conflicts (power or policy), e.g. Labour Union says somebody has a Level 3 and companies decide it is a Level 2. * Promote mobility in the European Countries is not so easy, because a Level 4 in a Country must not mean Level 4 in another European Country.
External origin	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A VET-system should react to changing labour market conditions. Enterprises very often change their work requirement. However, curricula often change only every 5 years. This means that the learner needs learning-competence to keep up-to-date with work requirements. Therefore, it is important to consider in how far a successful implementation of SQFs/NQFs/EQF is based on the right environment, which delivers the right possibilities. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Work orientation must be valid for NQFs, but not suitable for companies because companies fear that the levels could change and influence the salaries of their employees. * Levelling polyvalent jobs (which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels) could be a problem. * The mutual recognition of European Qualifications is not working well and the major reason for this often is the protection of the own labour market.

Recommendations (1)

- Although the relationship between SQFs and work processes seems obvious according to their sector-orientation, it is not self-evident that this relationship is properly expressed in a way that the sectoral qualification becomes comparable with similar qualifications embedded in the NQFs and in the EQF.
- In order to decide how sectoral qualification approaches could best be referenced to the EQF – directly or over the NQFs – it is also important to know what the relationship of sectoral systems to national systems is, if their existence mirrors a critical position of sectoral stakeholders against NQFs, or if they can – in a wider sense – be considered supplements of the national systems.

SWOT Analysis		Internal Analysis	
		Strengths	Weaknesses
External Analysis	Opportunities	<p>Referencing SQFs to the EQF is commonly recognised like a useful tool to enable and increase permeability, transparency and comparability of qualifications. This also means enable mobility of employees.</p> <p>Furthermore, SQFs are obviously work oriented and the EQF is also implicitly work oriented. For this reason work orientation is one of the main objectives of the Employability grid.</p> <p>In the study it is emerged that SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs. It is the political correct way, in fact it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability because this guarantees a direct link between the National Agencies for the Qualification Frameworks and the European Commission.</p> <p>Referencing SQFs to the NQF is also useful to make a qualification aligned with local, national and transnational perspectives and to implement a target setting and a quality-assurance tool for training providers.</p>	<p>Link SQFs to the NQF and than to the EQF could also be seen as a weakness. In fact it could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages. For industries it is a big problem to apply their qualifications to the NQFs. In particular, industries fear that the levels could change and influence the salary of their employees. For these reasons, and for the fact that the NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour word, industries prefer a direct link SQFs-EQF.</p> <p>Furthermore, in some cases qualifications are as diverse as the cultures they represent, because some NQFs are not only oriented on work processes but also on values. These orientations lead to conflicts in daily life work practice, e.g. if the interest of clients and employers are not identical. So, the assumption "it is preferable a direct link between SQFs and NQFs" could be seen as a strength, if we think in terms of decrease the complexity of the overall referenceability system and as a weakness, if we think in terms of opportunities of valorisation of the sectoral international visibility and interaction.</p> <p>Promote mobility in the European countries is not so easy, because – for example – a qualification recognised like a "level 4" in a country must not mean "level 4" in another European country. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of European qualifications is not working well, and the reason for this is often the concept of "protection" of the own labour market.</p> <p>Furthermore, a key point that should be considered when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the difference between competences and performance needs. Usually, qualifications are described in terms of competences, while wages are linked to performance. These two point of view are not related to each other.</p> <p>At last, another weakness is that the work-orientation criterion (explicit in the EQF and for this reason also in the Employability grid) is not so easy to consider in practice. SQFs could be "real" work-objective oriented if its levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry, or only "in theory" work-objective oriented if the relation among "knowledge", "skills" and "competences" of the SQFs is not aligned to the logic of the EQF.</p>
	Threats	<p>The main opportunity is to overcome the gap between the different European qualification systems and the differences in the content and interpretation of occupations on the European labour market. This means harmonise sectoral qualifications across Europe; identify employability features and attract employees with a clear education framework and help companies to get on board on the qualification subject.</p>	<p>Some threats related to referencing the SQFs to the EQF are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ poor need of having sectoral qualifications related to the EQF (most of the time the only element searched by employers is motivation, since abilities are gained through learning on the job); _ structure of the sector (sectors characterized by small companies, mainly working on the territory, will probably have less interest in the internationalization process); _ polyvalent jobs (levelling polyvalent jobs, which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels, could be a problem); _ lose cultural differences (lose cultural differences as consequence of progressive homogenization of qualification frameworks could be a problem for some countries); _ political implications (Collective Agreements and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour market are old; change the very fundamental pillars of these structures and the way professional profiles and categories are described requires a political decision and a consensus among Labour Unions, Companies and Government; this can be translated in: big issue and lot of time ahead); _ EQF like a mere instrument (the EQF offers the possibility for Member States to compare their education systems, in this sense it is nothing more or less than an instrument; EQF will not replace a NQF, it is sufficient that the EQF is matched with the NQF; so the role of the EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries).

Recommendations (3)

(Strengths)

- Referencing SQFs to the EQF is commonly recognised like a useful tool to enable and increase permeability, transparency and comparability of qualifications.
This also means enable mobility of employees.
- SQFs are obviously work oriented and the EQF is also implicitly work oriented.
Work orientation is one of the main objectives of the Employability grid.
- In the study it is emerged that SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs.
It is the political correct way, because it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability and guarantees a direct link between the National Agencies for the Qualification Frameworks and the European Commission.
- Referencing SQFs to the NQF is useful to make a qualification aligned with local, national and transnational perspectives and to implement a target setting and a quality-assurance tool for training providers.

Recommendations (4)

(Opportunities)

- The main opportunity is to overcome the gap between the different European qualification systems and the differences in the content and interpretation of occupations on the European labour market.
- This means:
 - harmonise sectoral qualifications across Europe;
 - identify employability features;
 - attract employees with a clear education framework;
 - help companies to get on board on the qualification subject.

Recommendations (5)

(Weaknesses) (1)

- Link SQFs to the NQF and than to the EQF could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages.
- NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour word industries prefer a direct link SQFs-EQF.
- In some cases qualifications are as diverse as the cultures they represent, because some NQFs are not only oriented on work processes but also on values.
- The assumption “it is preferable an indirect link between the SQFs and the EQF through the NQFs” could be seen as a strength or as a weakness.

It is a strength if we think in terms of decrease the complexity of the overall referenceability system and it is a weakness if we think in terms of opportunities of valorisation of the sectoral international visibility and interaction.

Recommendations (6)

(Weaknesses) (2)

- Promote mobility in the European countries is not so easy: **a qualification recognised like a “level 4” in a country must not mean “level 4” in another**
- **Mutual recognition of European qualifications is not working well**, and the reason for this is often the concept of “protection” of the own labour market.
- when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the **difference between competences and performance needs**.
- Usually, **qualifications are described in terms of competences**, while **wages are linked to performance**. These two point of view are not related to each other.
- Another weakness is that the work-orientation criterion (explicit in the Employability grid and in the EQF) is not so easy to consider in practice.

SQFs could be “real” work-objective oriented if its levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry, or only “in theory” work-objective oriented if the relation among “knowledge”, “skills” and “competences” of the SQFs is not aligned to the logic of the EQF.

Recommendations (7)

(Threats)

- **poor need of having sectoral qualifications related to the EQF**
- structure of the **sector** (sectors characterized by small companies, mainly working on the territory, **will probably have less interest in the internationalization process**);
- **polyvalent jobs** (levelling polyvalent jobs, **which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels**);
- **lose cultural differences**
- **political implications** (Collective Agreements and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour market are old;
- **EQF like a mere instrument** (the **EQF** offers the possibility **for Member States to compare their education systems**, in this sense it is nothing more or less than an instrument; **EQF will not replace a NQF**, it is sufficient that the EQF is matched with the NQF; so the role of the **EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries**).



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Thank you for your attention