



An introduction into the European Qualifications Framework

Industry / Employers

The EQF helps to overcome the shortage of qualified workforce in Europe

In order to cope with the shortage of qualified workforce it is important that the EU population behaves as a unified country in terms of labour market. In this sense mobility of workers around the EU territory plays a key role to make best use of Europe's human resources. For this purpose, a worker from Slovenia should have his/her qualification and professional level clearly understood when applying for a job in Germany where his/her qualification might be desperately needed. In the same way a company from Sweden should easily understand qualifications and professional level of CVs received from Italy in order to fill their open positions. Without this possibility, this Slovenian worker will not move to work in Germany and this Swedish company will hardly hire these Italian candidates because they cannot be sure about the workers abilities or will not have their qualification recognised. This does equally apply when a worker wants to move between sectors and companies and wants his/her qualifications properly considered.

But why is this important? It is important because we are living in a competitive world. EU faces and will face even harder in future a serious constrain as far as workforce availability is concerned due to its demographic shortage (ageing population and workforce) and cannot afford having unemployed people in one of its countries whereas a company in another country is facing difficulties in finding qualified workforce. These unbalances have direct effects on EU productivity and competitiveness in the world which, in the long run, compromises EU citizens' welfare state and the EU economy's strength.



How does it work?

If a company wants to hire someone from abroad who should have a certain level of abilities, the employer can easily check via the EQF and the level indicated on the applicants certificate what qualification level the applicant has based on his/her certificate. The other way around also job-seekers can easily find out, if they have the requested qualification level for a vacancy, if the vacancy indicates the necessary EQF level. The EQF serves in both cases as a translation device to better understand the terms and titles of the different European education systems. In this way it makes recruitment from and applying for a job abroad easier for employers and job-seekers.

But that's not all about the EQF. It's learning outcomes approach strongly supports and facilitates a better match between labour market needs and education and training provision. Qualifications differ so widely that it makes little sense to rely on them in order to achieve comparability throughout Europe. At the same time, the work as such is more or less the same throughout Europe. Therefore 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?

As of 2012 all newly issued *certificates are supposed to bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level*. This reference will assists employers to reference foreign workers' qualifications much more easily to qualifications he/she knows from the own country and therefore to decide if an applicant meets a positions' qualification requirements.

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. For workers seeking a job in another EU country, this provides an easier way to describe their abilities to recruiters and employers and therefore to get their qualifications recognised abroad.

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:

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| 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:

