

## **Answers to the questions for the EQF REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

It is obvious that in the EU there is a vast variety of educational systems and as a result there is a plethora of types of degrees, certificates, accreditation procedures for knowledge, competences and skills during the citizens' academic and professional lives.

We consider that the establishment and functioning of the EQF could contribute towards the communication in this field and will facilitate mobility of the EU citizens-students and workers.

Nevertheless, we believe that the overall process demands profound consultations at both, European and national level of the member states.

It should be noted that any decision, especially at national level, should consider the fields that concern:

- education and training (at all levels, from Primary through to University–postgraduate studies) and the respective documents of accreditation-validation of the results;
- work and professional training which are related to employment, recruitment and promotions, in the private and public sectors;
- the legal aspects-amendments of laws and regulations – whether there will be changes in the procedures for employment, recruitment, promotion, as well as accreditation, evaluation, validation and certification of knowledge, skills, and competences that concern the qualifications of the individuals.

This entails a complex and complicated procedure. Therefore, any consultations at any level must not exert pressure on the time that is necessary for the development of the consultations, if we wish to have a serious and effective approach to the issue. It is significant to point out that the participation of the member-states is voluntary and will be judged according to their own conditions and priorities.

Throughout the overall process the rights of the member states must not be violated concerning their exclusive competences in education-training. Therefore, the establishment and operation of the NQF and EQF will be the result of decisions on the legal basis of the Treaty [article 149] as well as of the legislation in each member-state. This applies for the setting of the reference levels as well as the procedures that knowledge (formal, non-formal, informal) competences and skills will be certified and validated and the various ways the qualifications of individuals will be classified at various levels.

Any decision on the form and structure of the NQF must indispensably correspond its reference levels to those of the EQF in order to achieve the cooperation and communication on the issues of mobility of students and workers.

On account of the fact that the EQF is highly ambitious, it would be advisable to have a period of trial operation of the EQF among a small number of member-states.

In Cyprus we have already initiated a series of consultations at governmental level – Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, Planning Bureau, Legal Service, University – as well as among social partners and their organizations – such as

employees, employers, students etc. This process, too, cannot be completed within the narrow limits proposed by the Commission for the aforementioned reasons.

Our initial views on the Commission's document are presented below. However, it is clear that we will continue our remarks during the course of consultations and whenever we participate in various bodies of the EU – Commission and Council, according to the developments of the consultations in our country.

<b><i>The rationale of an EQF</i></b>	<b>General Answers</b>
<b><i>Are the most important objectives and functions to be fulfilled by an EQF those set out in the consultation document?</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The development is a positive one. However, it is a difficult venture. It is not clearly expressed in the document that there is such difficulty. It must be stressed that it depends on decisions at national level and the priorities and legislation which are in force in each member-state.</li> <li>▪ It is obvious that the aim to facilitate mobility of workers and students however, it is not so clear the voluntary feature of its implementation. It implicitly expresses policies in relation to education/training, which it is the responsibility of the member states, and the need to respect their authority is not evident. It is not clearly stated that the member-states are responsible to form their NQF based on their own policies.</li> <li>• It is not clearly indicated that without the operation of a NQF the operation of the EQF could not be useful. In the document of the Commission, it is not taken into consideration that wide consultations are necessary at national level, which takes time. There is no clear indication for careful manipulation concerning education, whose targets go beyond labour market. The references do not clearly indicate how EQF will contribute to quality.</li> </ul>
<b><i>What is needed to make the EQF work in practical terms (for individual citizens, education and training systems, the labour market)?</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide consultations are very important for the overall issue as it concerns fields such as education, training, professional training, relation to work – employment, recruitment, promotions, etc, and, evidently, legislation.</li> </ul> <p>This entails long time procedures.</p>

	<p>We consider that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The procedures should be developed alongside with the developments of a NQF.</li> <li>• It should be stressed that there is a need for consultations at National Level for the establishment and functioning of the NQF that it is a prerequisite for the EQF</li> <li>• It could easily be accepted by states which have already a NQF. It is difficult to be accepted by those countries which do not have NQF. The required national procedures should be respected.</li> <li>• There should be no rush for political binding decisions which concern the form and the implementation of the EQF.</li> <li>• Information and transparent procedures should be employed for the structure and the functioning as well as its relation to citizens, on national and European level.</li> <li>• It could be implemented on a small scale and then the results of the implementation could be evaluated accordingly.</li> </ul>
<b>The Reference Levels and Descriptors</b>	
<b><i>Does the 8-level reference structure sufficiently capture the complexity of lifelong learning in Europe?</i></b>	The way they are described does not seem to cover the diversity of learning in general.
<b><i>Do the level descriptors, in table 1, adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in levels?</i></b>	<p>The descriptions-explanations in Table 1 are not clear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no “clear” picture how the individual will be evaluated so that one’s knowledge, skills and competences are classified at each reference level (horizontal and perpendicular columns – Table 1 of the European Commission document)</li> <li>• There is no clear picture of the correlation of reference levels.</li> <li>• The correlations between knowledge, skills, and competences as well as the way the</li> </ul>

	<p>personal characteristics of each interested person are measured are not clear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptions are presented, while it is not clear that is NOT the EQF that will determine the qualifications of the citizens but the NQF whose structure/functioning will be the result of the decisions of the member-states, on the basis of their priorities and their respective policies, conditions and legislation.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>What should be the content and role of the 'supporting and indicative information' on education, training and learning structures and input (table 2)?</i></b></p>	<p>The issue of education is much more complicated and complex from "inputs-outcomes". The classification based on learning results will have an adverse effect on education and its targets, especially the attempts to relate directly with the labour market. After all it is the responsibility of the member state to judge this correlation-certification-validation and classification.</p>
<p><b><i>How can your national and sectoral qualifications be matched to the proposed EQF levels and descriptors of learning outcomes?</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relevant consultations are at the initial stage of their development.</li> <li>• Thus our national consultations will decide about the establishment, structure and correspondence and classification of qualifications that will be described in our NQF.</li> <li>• The question could more easily be answered by states which already have NQF (Ireland or Scotland, Wales etc).</li> </ul>

<b>National Qualifications Framework</b>	
<p>How can a National Qualification Framework for lifelong learning be developed in your country – reflecting the principles of the EQF-be established?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The necessary consultations are at their initial stage of their development.</li> <li>• Any decision will be the result of correlating the policy in education and training and lifelong learning. Its principles and structure are the responsibility of each member state.</li> </ul>
<p>How, and within which timescale, can your national qualifications systems be developed towards a learning outcomes approach?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The necessary consultations are at their initial stage of development.</li> <li>• It is not possible to predict the time duration as this involves issues of policy and legislation in various fields.</li> <li>• The structure on which classification will be based has not yet been decided. We are still concerned about the validation-certification of the informal, non-formal learning and their correspondence to level references.</li> <li>• Our orientation is towards the correlation of the various leaving certificates, diplomas, degrees etc to the various reference levels.</li> <li>• As concerns Primary and Secondary Education (lower and upper), we are considering corresponding the existing certificates of primary and secondary education at the reference levels of NQF.</li> <li>• As concerns Higher Education and the degrees/post-graduate degrees we will follow the agreements of the Bologna process (which is the result of an agreement between 45 European states).</li> </ul>

<b>Sectoral qualifications</b>	
To which extent can the EQF become a catalyst for developments at sector level?	The consultations are at the initial state of their development.
How can the EQF be used to pursue a more systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at sector level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not the EQF which will contribute to the further development of knowledge, competences, skills on a national level but the national policies of the member state.</li> <li>• This is not the role of the EQF as this is the responsibility of each member-state and its education policy.</li> </ul>
How can stakeholders at sector level be involved in supporting the implementation of the EQF?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The necessary consultations are at their initial stage of development.</li> <li>• Nevertheless in Cyprus we abide by the policy of cooperation and coordination with social partners for issues of common interest. The same practice will be applied on the issue of the EQF and the NQF.</li> <li>• It is positive to have cooperation and coordination with social partners.</li> </ul>
How can the link between sectors development and national qualifications be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relevant consultations are at their initial stages of development.</li> <li>• It is the NQF that will somehow contribute to the development of the sectoral framework qualifications.</li> </ul>
<b>Mutual Trust</b>	
How can the EQF contribute to the development of mutual trust (e.g. based on common principles for quality assurance) between stakeholders involved in lifelong learning-at European, national, sectoral and local levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adoption and implementation of the EQF is voluntary.</li> <li>• No legal binding steps vis-à-vis the EU or other states should be taken for granted nor should be imposed the harmonization</li> </ul>

<p>How can the EQF become a reference to improve the quality of all levels of lifelong learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The member-states, through transparent procedures, should inform about their NQF structures and the correspondence with the reference levels of the EQF.</li><li>• EQF could contribute to the lifelong learning process, however, at a national level the main role will be played by the NQF and the policies of the member states.</li></ul>