



Subject: Contribution of the European Youth Forum to the European Commission consultation on the European Qualifications Framework

The European Youth Forum took note of the European Commission consultation on the Commission staff Working document “Towards a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning” published July 7, 2005. It acknowledges the importance of having a framework which takes into account formal, non formal and informal learning. “The European Youth Forum asks that the framework be developed to take into account not only the recognition of non-formal vocational qualifications but other forms of non-formal learning such as that achieved in youth organisations.”¹ The European Youth Forum recognizes the will of the European Commission to involve all the stakeholders in the consultation process. We acknowledge and welcome the relevance and the feasible integration of the Bologna process, particularly the proposal ‘Framework for qualification of the European higher education area’ proposed in May 2005 in Bergen and the framework for recognition of vocational and educational training proposed in the Maastricht communiqué in December 2004.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum is willing to raise the issues which concern young people and youth organisations.

The need to broaden the understanding of non formal learning

The **role of youth organisations** in the lifelong learning process, that we still prefer to call lifewide learning as it takes more into account the various aspects of learning, need to be recognized as they are **provider of non formal education**. The individuals involved in youth activities and/or in youth organisations acquire through their

¹ The European Youth Forum response to the Council Resolution on lifelong learning, 30 May 2002, adopted by September 21, 2002

voluntary activities skills and competences which need to be recognized and integrated in the meta-framework for a lifelong learning perspective.

The European Qualifications Framework in the perspective of the learning throughout life should take into account the learning outcomes of non formal education provided by youth organisations.

That is why the European Youth Forum regrets that none of the eight reference levels of the European Qualifications Framework defined by learning outcomes - skills, competences, personal and professional competences, neither the supporting information about those levels in the EQF, give an obvious place and a role of voluntary work and specially the work done in youth organisations. It's disappointing that the sole non formal learning at the work place is recognized while the skills and experiences gained in youth organisation are not taken into account at all. The lifelong learning process focuses on the individual and its place in the society. Therefore, all the ways used in learning should be taken into account when defining the eight reference levels.

In addition we propose that voluntary activities and therefore youth work in youth organisations should be included in the definition of learning, qualifications and competences used in the paper, in order to give them a political recognition.

In concrete, the European Youth Forum proposes to develop the definitions proposed in the working document:

- Learning, as defined in the contribution p.10, should be *“Learning is a cumulative process where individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and wider competences. This process takes place informally, for example through **voluntary activities** or leisure activities, and in formal learning settings which include the workplace.”*
- Qualification *“A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual's learning has reached a specified standard of knowledge,*

*skills and wider competences. The standard of learning outcomes is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through a programme of study, ~~and/or~~—work place experience **and/or voluntary activities**. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade.”*

On the validation on NFE and NFL

Developing instruments for recognition of real competencies - that includes a person's combined knowledge, skills and learning achievements, whether they are acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal way - is a process that should include both international institutions/governments, social partners, formal education providers and representatives of youth organisations.

Against the backdrop of such a process, it must never be forgotten that non-formal learning in youth organisations does not take place for the sake of receiving diplomas or certification. Youth organisations underline yet again the importance of not letting processes of recognition lead to formalisation of non-formal education. Furthermore, there is still an obvious need to support and empower young people to self-asses, understand and explain their competencies acquired through non-formal education and to enable them to build upon existing qualifications gained.

Conclusion

The time is high for stakeholders to finally recognized skills and competences acquired in a non formal learning environment are of a high importance when it comes to lifewide and lifelong learning. Also in the perspective of a future profession, young people who were or still are volunteers are very likely able to comply with the requirements existing at the labour market as they learn complementary skills and competences which are more and more needed such as interpersonal skills, management or teamwork spirit.

In the context of lifewide and lifelong learning it is crucial to give a fully place, at all levels, to what is achieved through voluntary work and commitment.