INTRODUCTION

The twenty-second meeting of the EQF AG was attended by representatives from 34 countries, representatives of social partners and stakeholder organisations. In addition, representatives of the European Commission, Cedefop, the European Training Foundation, and external experts to the Commission also attended.

COM chaired and opened the meeting. The agenda was accepted without further comment. There were no immediate comments on the draft minutes of the twenty-first meeting of the EQF Advisory Group of 26-27 September 2013; participants were given the possibility to communicate any comments in writing by the end of the week.

Participants requested the Commission to distribute preparatory documents within sufficient time before the meeting in order to give participants the opportunity to discuss these issues at national level. COM ensured that participants would be granted sufficient time for comment on all documents distributed. Also, only one document would require conclusion within the AG-22 meeting (the structure of national reports on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; cf. Note AG22-8).

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1 Please note: all meeting documents and Power Point presentations have been uploaded to the e-community of the EQF Advisory Group: http://europa.eu/sinapse/directaccess/qualification_framework
1. **RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING.**

COM referred on the latest developments and follow-up to the meeting of the EQF AG of 26-27 September 2013 (cf. Note AG22-1).

- On 3 December 2013, the Council adopted the Erasmus+ programme (the EU’s new programme for education, training, youth and sport). Some of the operating grants (e.g. for Euroguidance, Europass networks) are being turned into grants for action (activity grant). This may have some implications on the planning of work at national level.

  The programme foresees an increase in budget by 40 percent compared to the previous budget. Under the new programme, funds will not be earmarked, i.e. those applying for funds will directly compete with each other. It is key for projects to have strategic and systemic impact.

- The Commission has recently adopted the Annual Growth Survey 2014. There are also references to education. The Commission will prepare country-specific recommendations to be released at the beginning of 2014. Last year, 23 Member States received country-specific recommendations.

**Information on developments in the Copenhagen and Bologna Processes**

**Bologna process:**

Council of Europe informed about recent developments in the Bologna process:

- 2014 is set to be stocktaking year for the Bologna Process. In a number of countries, it will be necessary to re-check who is responsible for following the process at national level. The names of responsible delegates often just disappear, leaving it unclear who is in charge of the process. Some countries are considered as ‘black spots’ in this respect. Since this is a joint European movement to reform higher education, it is a serious issue when there are a countries that do not actually implement the required changes.

- Paradigm shift towards a learner-centred and learning outcomes based approach: in HE, it will take a really long time for this to reach the level of professors, to be actually implemented and not just existing on paper.

**Copenhagen process:**

COM informed about recent developments in the Copenhagen process:

- Bruges Communiqué: The Commission launches a review process on the progress made so far in terms of the deliverables to be achieved. Publication is scheduled for the first semester of 2015, under the Latvian Presidency.

- ECVET evaluation: First results have been received and discussed by the ECVET Users’ Group. These results do not bear major surprises. ECVET is a set of principles, which are a helpful asset for VET in countries. The exact impact however is difficult to evaluate. One major issue are synergies between ECVET and other
transparency instruments. The final results from the ECVET evaluation will be presented mid-2014.

- The Commission report on the evaluation of EQAVET is going to be published in January 2014, together with the report on quality assurance in HE (ESG).
- The Commission report on the evaluation of the EQF will be published in the next few days (mid-December) and is going to be discussed in detail at the next EQF AG meeting. COM hopes for the Council and Parliament to issue a reaction to the report in the course of January 2014.
- The Adult Learning Conference, jointly organised by COM and UNESCO, took place in Vilnius (LT) at the beginning of December. The conference highlighted the need for qualifications frameworks to take non-institutional and non-formal education into account.

Information from the outgoing and forthcoming Presidencies

LT Presidency (outgoing): no comments.

EL Presidency (forthcoming): no comments, but EL announced a presentation to be held at the forthcoming EQF AG meeting in February 2014.

2. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EQF

COM presented the updated roadmap on referencing and requested feedback on the referencing plan overview (cf. Note AG22-2 and ppt).

Comments regarding the expected date for the presentation of draft EQF referencing reports (cf. Table 1).

- NO intends to present its referencing report in the first semester of 2014, but more likely in April or June than at the February meeting.
- SE will not be able to present their report in February, but more likely in June or in the 2nd semester of 2014.
- ES will be able to present their report either in February or April, but would prefer to do so at the February meeting.

No comments on the roadmap presented for the 2nd EQF milestone - indicating EQF levels on certificates, diplomas, Europass Supplements and in national qualifications databases.

Information on Cedefop Briefing Note on NQF developments in Europe

Cedefop presented the recently published Briefing Note on NQF developments in Europe.

- The Briefing Note is based on data from the annual Cedefop survey; Cedefop thanks everyone for their input provided. The full report will be available soon.
- More and more countries reach the stage of early NQF implementation, where the focus is on practical arrangements. So far, five countries have reached an advanced implementation stage – IE, FR, MT, UK and DK – where the framework is already visible through databases.
• The country fiches are being updated at this time and will be published in February 2014.

3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE REFERENCING REPORT OF THE FRENCH COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM

‘Report on Referencing the French-Speaking Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning’ (cf. ppt)

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from UK, IE, DK, MT, Cedefop, Council of Europe):

• BE-fr received compliments on their comprehensive report, which was considered to hold a high standard and to illustrate the complex institutional framework in place very well. Participants pointed out that more examples of qualifications could have been included to illustrate how it is applied.
  o BE-fr: It is quite difficult to strike a balance between drafting a comprehensive report and providing many examples. The report includes some footnotes to specific examples. As regards HE, they need to be given the autonomy to develop their own approaches.
• Status quo: It is difficult to find out from the report whether a formal decision or legal basis has already been adopted or whether the framework development and referencing are still work in progress. Some more information on this is requested.
  BE-fr: The process is very much influenced by the fact that BE-fr used a bottom-up approach, where providers take a leading position. BE-fr agreed to inform EQF AG once the legal framework has been adopted. The fact that a political compromise between the three governments has been achieved is remarkable by itself. There will probably be an official cooperation agreement, decided on at the beginning of next year. Having political agreement from all governments involved represents a huge step forward.

• How open/inclusive is the CFC towards qualifications that have been obtained elsewhere? Which qualifications are recognised by public authorities?
  o BE-fr: Qualifications issued by certified operators will be recognised. There will be a political decision on whether to open up the framework to qualifications from the outside.
• Continuing vocational education and training (CVT) qualifications: What are the plans to include CVT qualifications in the framework? Will there be VET qualifications beyond level 4 in the framework?
• It was pointed out that a concrete indication was missing on how the qualifications would be linked to the levels (apart from HE qualifications). It was emphasised that EQF AG should be informed about this and examples would have been helpful.
• Size of qualifications: The report mentions that the minimum size of (units of) qualifications was an issue but does not include any details on this. Can you give an indication of the minimum size?
  o BE-fr: It was very difficult to define the size; one of the most important criteria for inclusion was employability. In particular for vocational qualifications that would directly lead into the labour market, the goal was to make it possible for people who only have acquired certain units to still have good chances of finding a job.
- The method of ‘block positioning’ (p. 43) - including qualifications to the framework raised several questions. Is there an approach for including qualifications that are no longer offered?
  - BE-fr: The methods and procedures are in place for new qualifications, which meet frameworks criteria anyway. For old qualifications, the quality assurance system ensures that criteria are met. EQF AG will be informed of the progress made.
- Participants welcomed the intensive communication that had been taking place between the three Belgian communities. May be this could be followed by a joint presentation in the future. What are the plans towards future cooperation between the three Belgian frameworks?
- Education system: The presentation of higher education in BE (p. 18) does not include any reference to the nature of universities. This would be important information for external readers.
- ‘Transitional’ Bachelor degrees. Are these qualifications in the sense of the EQF or just clusters of units?
  - BE-fr: ‘Transitional’ Bachelor degrees are full qualifications. Learners completing a transitional bachelor will generally continue with a Master qualification.
- Permeability: The report does not include information on how a learner can move from one system to another. There is no reference to possible pathways between the systems. This would be important information in order to see how the three BE frameworks can fit together and cooperate with each other.
- Criterion 2: Could you explain what is meant by ‘behavioural know-how’ – this might be unclear to external readers.
  - BE-fr: This term is used in the profiles. It describes aspects that are considered absolutely necessary for someone to have in order to be successful in the labour market.
- Criterion 3: This refers to the ROME classification. How is the LO approach going to be implemented in VET in relation to this classification?
  - BE-fr: These references are already being used - people have to refer to ROME. It will be the social partners who are going to be defining the professional profiles. Social partners have been given full responsibility to develop the occupational profiles.
- Criterion 4: It is highly important. The EQF AG should be informed on how the process will be organised after legal adoption.
- Criterion 10: This refers to including levels on Certificate Supplements and Diploma Supplements, but there is no information about the reference to levels on the diplomas and certificates themselves. The report does not indicate what type of qualifications register/databases is going to be developed.
  - BE-fr: It is still being discussed whether there will be a reference to the level on the certificate or diploma itself.

COM expressed high appreciation of the BE-fr report, which was considered to be of high quality and fully met the ten criteria. It is work in progress, but this applies to many qualifications frameworks in Europe. COM invited Be-fr to concentrate their work on the size of the qualifications and their link to the labour market. The ‘block positioning’ approach has raised several questions, partly because this was new to many participants. COM took note that this was the product of consensus from a bottom-up approach, that would allow BE to obtain political agreement between 3 governments.
COM also emphasised the need to reassure EQF AG that there were specific examples behind this framework, and that it was not an empty framework. COM invited BE-fr to report to EQF AG once the necessary political decisions have been taken and they would be able to show how qualifications are linked to the national framework. COM invited all three Belgian regions to have a joint presentation on the coherency and parallels between the three Belgian frameworks. This is not to be regarded as a commitment, but COM pointed out that it would help other countries to learn more about the specific situation in BE.

4. **EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF THE EQF**

Proposal for exploring the role of the EQF in cooperating with third countries (cf. *Note AG22-3*).

COM informed that they have received expressions of interest in investigating a possible alignment with the EQF from three countries: formal requests from Hong Kong and New Zealand, as well as an informal request from Australia. These requests urge the need to discuss on how to proceed in such cases, as COM would need to respond to these letters in due course. COM emphasised the need to discuss within the EQF AG how to take this work forward. Should these requests be discussed case-by-case or should a more systematic approach be developed?

COM presented an example for such a systematic approach, based on three elements (cf. *Note AG 22-3*) including European criteria for cooperation, an exploratory process and a roadmap.

COM invited participants to discuss the following three questions at national level and submit their comments by the end of January. The EQF AG meeting in February 2014 would then be used to take stock of countries’ positions and to schedule a process.

- What is the mandate of the EQF AG as regards external dimensions of the EQF and its role in cooperating with third countries? Who should be consulted in order to determine whether the EQF AG possesses the required mandate? What should this process look like?
- How to proceed with the three countries that have expressed their interest in cooperating with the EQF? What could a systematic approach look like?
- Are there any operational comments on the proposed approach (cf. *Note AG22-3*)? E.g. specific steps, a dedicated working group, etc.

**Information on the Regional Qualifications Project supported by ETF**

ETF informed the EQF AG about the Regional Qualifications Project and reported on the ‘Qualifications in the Mediterranean region’ conference that was held on 26 November 2013 in Brussels. The conference was used as an opportunity to share the project progress and main orientations for the future. Also, the new EuroMed Steering Committee on Qualifications (EMSC) was launched. The EMSC will be in charge of overseeing the project implementation, linking the project to the institutional level in the partner countries and supporting regional cooperation. Its members include representatives and experts from ministries (VET) and qualifications authorities, social partners, sector bodies, EU Member States and European social partners. Formal nominations for the EMSC and the EMSC Bureau will be launched mid-January.
ETF invited EQF AG to submit their comments on the following issues by the end of January:

- What kind of relation should be maintained with the EQF AG (e.g. information, reporting only?).
- ETF informed that Morocco, being the most advanced country within the project, had expressed a clear interest in participating as observer in the EQF AG. How should such requests be dealt with? Should any one country receive preferential treatment compared to others?
- Approval for EQF AG to be members of the EMSC committee.

5. **Presentation and Discussion of the Referencing Report of Iceland**

'Referencing the Icelandic National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning' report.

The Icelandic EQF referencing report was presented by Ólafur Grétar Kristjánsson (cf. *ppt*).

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from FR, IE, UK, NO, Cedefop, Council of Europe):

- Participants thanked IS for presenting a clear, transparent and good report. The high level of honesty, in particular as regards the challenges, was widely appreciated.
  - IS emphasised that their report represented work in progress. Issues to be tackled include a better integration of HE and AE, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- The report represents a well-documented basis for referencing; the ten referencing criteria are clearly met.
- The ISQF is closely integrated with the educational reform; this presents an interesting picture. It is important to clarify how the QF fits into the mission of education – IS has solved this in an interesting way.
- Terminology: Terminology focuses on the formal system, for instance by using the term 'students' in the descriptors.
  - IS will take this into account and use the term 'learner' instead.
- Level descriptors: The report does a good job on integrating transversal skills. However, there are significant overlaps between skills and competence which would still need to be worked on.
  - IS acknowledges these overlaps and confirms problems in making clear cuts between the different concepts. Observations from other countries on this would be highly appreciated.
- Diploma level in HE (ad p. 40): The referencing of the diploma level (EQF level 5 or 6) does not become clear from the report. What duration do these programmes have? What is the relation between the Diploma level and the Bachelor degree? There seem to be two different sets of descriptors for Master level and Master degree – this could be clarified.
• Criterion 3: One third of upper secondary schools have not started to implement the system. There seems to be some kind of resistance – this would be an issue to elaborate on.
  o IS: There is no opposition at school level from teachers – they have been rather enthusiastic about the framework and new curriculum, as it provides them with a new tool to work with.
• Credits: To what extent are the credit systems reflecting learning outcomes? Credits linked to school qualifications are not based on LO. How does this link to the educational reforms?
  What is the link between credits from school-based qualifications and ECTS?
  o IS: Credits from upper secondary schools can lead to exemptions in HE, there is a specific provision for this included in the Act. Some schools have already started this work. There is a module-based system in IS.
• Criterion 10: The report mentions that levels would also be included in certificates – the presentation only referred to the supplements. This should be clarified.
  o IS confirmed that this would be applied to the certificates as well; they consider it important that the EQF level appears directly on the certificates.
• Relations with HE are obviously difficult and conflict-laden. However, participants also emphasised that IS was certainly not the first country where HE had serious reservations towards being included in the framework.
  o IS: Work with HE has been very difficult. In particular the area around level 4 has been a political ‘minefield’. They could not include the self-certification report as an annex to the referencing report as it could not be finished. This remains a challenge; they have not found a solution yet. Also, HE institutions in IS are very sceptical towards validation.
• Relations with AE seem to be difficult as well.
  o IS: AE reported that they did not see themselves in this framework. Also, they would prefer to have an 8-level framework (instead of 7 levels). This discussion is still ongoing.
• (Non-existing) link between ISQF and employment policy: It was emphasised that the involvement of stakeholders in the process would be important as a next step.
• The fact that no qualification is issued at the end of compulsory schooling was highlighted as a point of interest.

COM welcomed the Icelandic report, in particular for its level of honesty and transparency, and the fact that the LO approach had been introduced as a key component of educational reform.
COM summarised that the school system was currently at the core of the framework, and that IS would then need to work on integrating the other elements of education – in particular adult education and higher education, which had expressed reservations and dissatisfaction. COM invited IS to come back to the EQF AG once they would have reached a more advanced stage of development.

6. INFORMATION ON LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN ESCO

Outcomes of the ‘ESCO goes live’ conference on 23-24 October 2013 (Cf. Note AG22-5.1 & NoteAG22-5.2)

COM presented a short report on the ‘ESCO goes live’ conference and announced that a conference report would be available for download from the website.
National qualifications will be linked to ESCO via the EQF portal. The interconnection of national qualifications databases with the EQF portal is requested. COM offers free-of-charge technical assistance to support this development. In addition, COM provides the possibility for NCPs to apply for a grant for building, improving and connecting national databases in 2014. International qualifications relevant for the EU labour market and not included in NQFs, will, be directly included in the ESCO qualifications pillar; there will be no extra work for Member States.

Information from the meeting of the ESCO Board on 25 November 2013

COM informed participants about the meeting of ESCO Board meeting that took place on 25 November 2013. The Board made a very important statement in saying that ESCO was indeed a joint project and that the three ESCO pillars had to be seen as being of equal value. Now that the first version of ESCO is in place, more focus needs to be placed on the development of a communication strategy, for both the world of employment and education and training.

ESCO and learning outcomes terminology

The ESCO Board reaffirmed that it would beneficial to strengthen en enrich ESCO with learning outcomes terminology used by education and training. However, the ESCO Board also expressed concerns about the practical consequences. Working methods must be adjusted to better introduce education and training terminology and at an earlier stage. Two workshops will be organised, including the Sectoral Reference Groups that are closest to finish their sectoral work. (agriculture, forestry and fishery & hospitality and tourism). The workshops are expected to provide input for a proposal on how to include LO terminology in the ‘Skills and Competences’ pillar of ESCO and an outline on possible solutions for linking this pillar to the Qualifications pillar by March 2014.

The ESCO Board agreed to consult the EQF Advisory group on the approach for learning outcomes terminology in ESCO. COM asked EQF AG members to provide their feedback on the questions in Note AG22-5.2 by the end of January. COM also invited members to contact them in the event that they would need further info about ESCO in order to prepare their feedback.

- Is there an agreement on the need for systematic integration of LO related terminology into ESCO?
- If yes, how can the EQF AG facilitate and support the compilation of material to be used as a basis for the ESCO terminology.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from FR, AT, UK, DK, IE, NO)

- Participants welcomed this initiative and the possibility for EQF AG (and the field of education and training in general) to intensify their contribution to the development of ESCO.
- Knowledge/Skills/Competences should serve as a central basis for descriptions, also for the Reference Groups. It will not be possible to build this connection otherwise. Also, continuous dialogue with the Reference Groups will be essential.
- Participants pointed out that the knowledge/skills/competences might have a different meaning in the world of work than in education and training. What is the result of
this work going to look like? What would a skills and competence profile look like post-enrichment?

- Cedefop: There is an imbalance in the way terminology is being developed. ESCO is a terminology; it is definitely not a standard, and its formative impact should not be exaggerated. However, there is significant potential for enrichment, this is why this work is undertaken.

- ESCO, after all, is only a taxonomy, this needs to be kept in mind. The original intention of ESCO is to build a bridge between labour market and education and training. Even the name used is ‘Skills & Competences’ pillar, there is the notion of including ‘Knowledge’ – i.e. the two sides might be talking about very similar things, but just using different terminology.

- Ad p.3 (cf. Note AG22-5.2): Page 3 mentions that ESCO could become an important facilitator in the dialogue between the labour market and education and training. Would not take this ESCO much further than being a mere taxonomy? What would be the implications?

- It was widely acknowledged that ESCO is work in progress. There were concerns regarding how well rooted ESCO was in the Member States and how this would be maintained in the future.

- Experts: Based on information from the website, anyone could basically propose themselves to become an expert. Are they independent? Do they represent their institutions or their country?
  - COM clarified that ESCO does not have the status of the EQF Recommendation.
  - COM clarified that ESCO has the ambition to bring as many stakeholders as possible to this process. It is important to note that the experts are not representing their Member State.

7. LEARNING OUTCOMES WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Report from the PLA on increasing synergies between the implementation of the learning outcomes approach and quality assurance arrangements

COM provided a brief summary report on this peer learning activity, which took place 28-29 November 2013 in Leuven, BE. The PLA brought together 45 participants from 18 different countries. The PLA provided a good learning opportunity and highlighted the fact that the structures and arrangements in VET and HE are rather different. Key messages included the importance of providing training to those working with LO (trainers, teachers, etc.) and the involvement of main stakeholders at each stage of the QA process. Assessment was highlighted as a critical aspect.

Explicit links would need to be made between ESG (European Standards and Guidelines), EQAVET and the QA principles in Annex III of the EQF Recommendation. Also, a clear reference to the learner should be introduced in the Annex III principles.

Ideas for further analysis: use of learning outcomes for transversal skills both in VET and HE, use of learning outcomes and quality assurance of professional qualifications, use of learning outcomes and quality assurance of on qualifications linked to EQF level 5.
Report from Cedefop conference on ‘The shift to learning outcomes and its impact: taking stock of European policies and practices’

Cedefop provided a short presentation on this conference, which took place 21-22 November 2013. The conference was attended by 160 participants from 27 different countries. One of the topics discussed was the use of learning outcomes for governance. Information is available on the Cedefop website. The issue of how to move from intended LO to actual outcomes was at the centre of discussions at the conference.

Comments, questions & answers (reaction from AT):

- It was pointed out that the conference had been very interesting, and that the summary represented a significant step forward. COM could use this as an opportunity to produce a policy paper or similar kind of document on learning outcomes. This could serve as a basis for discussion.

Update of the work programme 2014

COM informed that the learning outcomes work programme for 2014 had not been completed yet. Two upcoming PLAs: PLA on learning outcomes, NQFs and the recognition of qualifications in March 2014; PLA on linking NQF levels and referencing (e.g. how Maester qualifications are linked), to be confirmed. COM invited EQF AG members to volunteer hosting any of these PLAs.

8. STATE OF PLAY OF EQF IMPLEMENTATION IN ROMANIA

RO presented the state of play of EQF implementation in Romania. RO announced that it would present its referencing report at the EQF AG meeting in February 2014. The required ordinance by the government had initially been blocked by the Ministry of Justice. It was the recent ESCO developments that had helped RO to better explain the importance of the ROQF at national level.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from PL, Cedefop, Council of Europe)

- Participants appreciated the effort made by RO so far.
- What does the roadmap for implementation look like? What will this process look like?
  - RO: The ROQF was approved only one month ago, it is thus too early to talk about specific ideas or a roadmap. More details to be presented at the February meeting of the EQF AG. RO faces the need to bridge the gap between labour market needs and what the education system produces – this is one of the most important goals of the ROQF.
- Learning outcomes & level descriptors: The last Cedefop monitoring reported extensive work on level descriptors in RO – how did these developments feed into the proposal? How are learning outcomes implemented in the Romanian context?
- Linking to QF-EHEA: The ROQF aims to cover the entire education and training system, while the QF-EHEA has been developed in parallel, self-certified. How are these processes inter-linked – is there a link between the two?
- What were the challenges encountered by RO in the process? This would provide valuable information to EQF AG members.
• How was the integration work within the framework of different sub-systems, e.g. HE, perceived?
• HE has already rich experience in bringing different stakeholders to the table. How can this rich experience be used?

COM summarised that this was a very young framework, designed as a comprehensive framework, i.e. encompassing all forms of learning. One of the main aims would be to make RO qualifications more transparent (to the European labour market).

9. RELATING INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS TO THE EQF

Contribution from Luisa Coutinho, European Welding Federation (EWF) (Cf. ppt)

Luisa Coutinho presented the EWF system that had been established some 20 years ago and is centered around the Welding Quality Chain. A 2012 survey among EWF members suggested that in particular for higher-level welding qualifications, such as the European Welding Engineer, there were pronounced differences as regards the EQF levels between the countries. The EWF reinforced its willingness to work and cooperate with EQF AG on this matter.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from BE, UK, DK, FR, EL, DE, MT, FI, AT, RO, NO, NL, UEAPME; Council of Europe)

Specific comments on the presentation

• Participants thanked EWF for their input and for providing a picture on how the EQF is looked upon from the outside. Also, they considered it interesting to learn on how the terminology created by the EQF process would be used on the outside.
• Is there a system of credit points in place?
  o EWF: No, but the EWF has been trying to convince its members that this would be an important next step. They have already worked on this topic through European projects, but bringing 44 countries to the table represents a significant challenge. In fact, the harmonised guidelines could only be achieved because they were the central deliverable of a project, which had a deadline. Otherwise the countries would probably still be discussing the details.
• EWF pointed out that in Europe, welding qualifications were mostly on top of another degree, e.g. a MSE. For the EWF, it is not a necessity to include EQF levels on their certificates, as their system is already well-established. However, EWF thinks that it would be a good idea to cooperate with the EQF.
• Is this system based on learning outcomes?
  o EWF: Learning outcomes have been defined, but only after the EQF had been introduced. Their aim is to revise them in a way to make them better understandable to people outside the field of welding.
• It was pointed out that level discrepancies could be partly explained that the fact that the EWF requirements referred to minimum requirements. At national level, they might be part of a more comprehensive qualification that was eventually linked to a higher level.
Level discrepancies

- The central question would be whether the level discrepancies can be explained by materials, methods, etc. (i.e. differences in learning outcomes) or whether they come from misinterpretation.
  - EWF assumed it would be the latter, as countries would reference the European Welding Engineer (EWE), not EWE-plus-something.
- Level discrepancies in practical terms: It is important to talk about the reasons for the discrepancies in level, but it is equally important to talk about their effects. What do they mean for a welder in this particular case?
- Participants highlighted the need to clarify, before discussing and comparing specific levels, whether this discussion refers to qualifications or parts of qualifications. It was argued that in many countries, welding would be part of some other qualification. This is the case for many qualifications in the sectoral field. It was also emphasised that when a given qualification was related to level 6, it could still include distinct elements that would be on level 5 or level 7, respectively.
- It was pointed out that much misunderstanding seemed to come from the fact that different concepts of qualifications were applied. National qualifications should not be confused with the qualifications issued by European associations. Still, both these types of qualifications should be included in the qualifications frameworks. Discussions within EQF AG should focus on trying to prevent scenarios where the same qualifications are assigned to different levels.
- Since in most cases, welding would be a component of national qualifications, it was suggested that, instead of establishing a direct link to the EQF, an indication of the appropriate EQF level of these components could be given. I.e. the EWF (or any other provider of international qualifications) would give an (informal and non-formative) indication of the appropriate EQF level, and the formative referencing would be carried out through the NQFs, at national level. This might help reaching an alignment of levels.

Organisation of future work

- Several participants would appreciate having a sub-group to work on specific issues (such as level discrepancies) and inform the EQF AG about the developments.
  - COM took note of this request but also pointed out that they were not sure whether this work should be taken to a working group. These issues have political relevance – discussion thus might require the presence of all Member States. In particular, after there have been concerns on the scope of the group’s mandate.
- It was suggested to design this group as a preparatory ad-hoc working group, rather than an implementing working group. Also, this forum could be used to follow up on European EQF projects that were carried out in this field and to use their outcomes for this work.
- It was however also pointed out by participants that they would prefer to have a joint discussion by all members on this particular matter.

COM concluded that the topic of international qualifications in the context of the EQF implementation is important and should be discussed in the plenary meetings of the EQF Advisory Group. However, there was the desire among EQF AG members to establish a
working group. COM invited countries to signal their interest in being involved in this preparatory work and to identify issues for their work by the end of January. COM suggested that it should not chair this subgroup. Further discussion, including on a proposal from the Commission for a roadmap to advance on this theme, to be held in the next EQF AG meeting.

- BE offered to provide meeting facilities (without translation services). In addition, stakeholders could be invited to join the discussions of the group.
- DK pointed out that COM’s suggestion was not sufficient and considered unsatisfactory for a long-term plan, in particular as this issue had already been discussed at a number of EQF AG meetings.

10. **EQF Portal developments**

COM provided an update of the current EQF Portal developments and presented the first draft (testing version) of the new portal, including various new search features. Usability testing will take place in early 2014. COM plans to present the final version of the portal at the February meeting of the EQF AG. The official website launch is scheduled to take place within Q1 of 2014. Static website text will be translated into all EU languages. Google Translate will be used for translating the search results.

No immediate comments on the portal. COM announced that it would send out the web link and invited EQF AG members to provide their comments by mid-January. COM informed that the matter would only be once more discussed during the February meeting if the comments to be received were of substantial nature.

11. **Presentation and discussion of the first draft of the referencing report of Greece**

EL presented the first draft of its EQF referencing report. The final report is scheduled to be presented to the EQF AG at the meeting in February 2014.

**Comments, questions & answers (reactions from PL, HU, IE, UK, SI, BE, Cedefop)**

- Participants appreciated the effort made by EL, in particular given the difficult economic situation that surrounded these developments. At the same time, it was acknowledged that this draft report is work in progress and that a series of issues still would need to be worked on.
- The report emphasises the reform role; NQF development in EL is part of a broader reform of education and training. The report however does not make it clear what is already in place and what not.
  - EL: Both in the formal system and in VET (considered as non-formal in the Greek context) curricula are being reformed based on the LO approach. This is a huge project, but EL intends to complete it within one year.
• The report was considered difficult to read and included some incoherencies, e.g. in the tables on p. 9 and p. 100. Some concepts would require further explanation to improve readability.
• Translations: Using two different English translations for one term should be carefully avoided.
• Concept of non-formal education: The report should clarify how this is understood in Greece, since this obviously differs from the concept applied by other countries.
  o EL explained that this was a particularity of the Greek education system. With the 2010 reform of the system, government decided to define IVET as non-formal education. It is essentially treated in the same way as formal education. The only difference is that IVET graduates will not have access to HE:
  • Scope of the report: The scope of the report should be made clearer. In one place, the report says that non-formal learning is included; in another it says that it would only be included as a further step.
    o EL acknowledged that it would focus on presenting the scope of the report in a clearer way.
• Using examples: Several examples of qualifications and their NQF levels could be included in the report; this would clearly present added value.
• Learning outcomes approach: How is the LO approach implemented? How will the learning outcomes transform into standards, curricula – maybe you could provide some plan for that? Are curricula already written in terms of LO? How is this process quality assured?
  o EL: The questions and concerns that were raised regarding the implementation of the LO approach and its impact are understandable. The respective law has only been passed very recently. As a result, curricula will be redesigned to integrate the LO approach. EL acknowledges that there might still be ‘policy gap’ between policy design and implementation.
• Levelling of qualifications: The report should include more detailed information on the process of levelling qualifications. What was the exact process? Who took part in the actual assignment of levels? Which stakeholders were involved? Was there a public consultation or a broader debate on the levelling of qualifications?
• ‘Qualification types’ approach: EL has defined 23 different ‘qualification types’, i.e. clusters of qualifications which are assigned to NQF levels. It is mentioned that this approach would still require to be worked on more thoroughly. What is the exact procedure for including qualifications into the HQF framework?
  o EL: The level descriptors clearly describe the LO for the ‘qualification types’ in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
• Level descriptors (p. 52): Level 1 only refers to the ‘field of work’, while level 2 refers ‘field of work or study’ – why would ‘study’ not be included at level 1?
• Stakeholder involvement: It would be interesting to know how stakeholders have influenced the process and what challenges this implied.
  o EL: There is close and continuous cooperation with social partners. They are actively involved, e.g. in organising exams for initial VET and in organising certification processes. EL also confirmed that they would work on including more examples of stakeholder involvement in their report.
• International experts: their involvement in the referencing is not clear from the report. What was the feedback received from them?
• Education system (p.21): The chart provided might be misleading for the reader, as it gives the impression that all pathways would directly lead into the labour market.
• HE involvement: While the involvement of vocational education and training becomes clear from reading the report, the involvement of HE seems less clear. Readiness to change and to modify can be problematic among HE—many other countries have experienced this as well.
• EL is one of the countries that did not sign the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The report mentions that Rectors were involved in the process but does not make it clear to which extent they are actually involved.
  o EL: HE representatives have been actively included in the process, Conference of Rectors. They did not only participate in the Advisory Committee, but also participated in drafting the report.
• The report includes misleading information which might lead readers to think that there were private providers in HE—which is not the case.
  o EL: This will be clarified in the report.
• Participants were surprised to read that ‘old’ qualifications would be included to the framework. How did EL do this methodologically, since they were obviously not learning outcomes-based?
• From the report, it is not always clear what is already happening today and what in the future. A detailed roadmap and objectives would be helpful.
• It was suggested that EL should carefully decide on the number of NQF levels and make sure that this decision is based on what is best for the country (instead of adopting an 8-level framework just because most other countries chose to do so.)

COM acknowledged that EL had embarked on a big endeavor, with the NQF being part of a broader reform of the educational system. COM emphasises that further work would be required in particular with regard to explaining further the scope of the report and the state of play, addressing comments on language. COM invited EL to share the outcomes of their consultation process that will take place in December–January with the EQF AG. COM emphasised that EL may not be able to achieve all this work by February 2014; however, GR should provide a roadmap on how these issues are going to be tackled.

12. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Structure of national reports on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (cf. Note AG22-8)

COM informed that no comments had been received since the 21st meeting of the EQF AG. The structure of national reports as presented in note Ag22-8 had thus been approved by the EQF AG.

Information on the update of the inventory of non-formal and informal learning 2014 (cf. ppt)

Cedefop thanked participants for their involvement and valuable contributions and apologized for the delays in the timetable. The country reports have been sent out to Member States who are now asked to validate the information in the reports by 17 January 2014. Countries that did not receive such e-mail, are asked to contact Cedefop
Cedefop reminded participants to be as specific as possible when writing their comments.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from PT, ESU, European Youth Forum)

- European Youth Forum and ESU raised the request to receive the country reports and to be given the opportunity to comment.
  - EQF AG agreed that the reports could be shared with the exception of the Portuguese report.

Proposal for national roadmaps for putting validation arrangements in place by 2018 (cf. Note AG22-6)

COM informed that contributions from four countries had been received, and that some perceived the roadmap to be too long-term. The proposal suggests the presentation of national one-off reports for 2018.

COM emphasised that the document represented a proposal for countries to follow on a voluntary basis. The indication of years would not be compulsory. COM asked for written comments to this proposal (cf. Note AG22-6) by the end of January.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from UK, NO, SE, Council of Europe, EUCIS-LLL, European Youth Forum)

- Participants appreciated the roadmap and considered it as a good basis from which to move forward. At the same they also appreciated its voluntary nature and highlighted the need for Member States to be able to proceed in a way they see fit.
- Is there any systematic funding for bringing the stakeholders into the discussion?
  - ESF funding (if countries included such actions in their Partnership Agreements), Erasmus+ (K2: Strategic Partnerships), NCP grant.
- The intentions and expectations of the different stakeholders would need to be clarified. A peer learning activity on this matter could be organised, bringing different stakeholders to the table to discuss how this process could be started. This might help to determine whether it makes sense to discuss this together at all.
- The creation of a working group could add to a more inclusive process. The inclusion of the European Youth Forum and other organisations could provide added value to that.

CONCLUSIONS AND AOB

Upcoming dates:

- 25-26 February 2014, ‘Making Learning Visible’ conference organised by the UK EQF National Coordination Points
- 26-27 February 2014, 23rd meeting of the EQF Advisory Group in Birmingham, UK
- 28-29 April 2014, 24th meeting of the EQF Advisory Group
- June 2014, 25th meeting of the EQF Advisory Group (exact date to be confirmed, being subject to the end of the EASQ consultation process)
## Annex: List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>First name</th>
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