Horizontal comparisons of qualifications levelled in NQFs

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- Horizontal comparison project:
  - Objectives, working team and timetable
  - Methodology
- Choice of qualification
- Fiche and elements of core context information analysis
- Method of levelling – an example of good practice
- Expected results and continuation of work
Horizontal comparison (HC) objectives (AG32-3 note)

- The general aim of the pilot is to further improve the way EQF levelling takes place, building on national experiences;
- The specific aim of the pilot is to fine-tune and test a methodology for the comparison of levelling decisions and sharing experiences on existing strengths and weaknesses;
- The results will inform and support future levelling decisions at national level, and remain the property of these countries;
- The experiences from the pilot will inform and orient future ‘horizontal comparisons’;
- ‘Horizontal comparisons’ will address the consistency of the referencing of national qualifications, seeking (for example) to clarify:
  - whether seemingly comparable qualifications assigned to the same level are indeed comparable, and;
  - why seemingly similar qualifications have been assigned to different levels in different countries;
- HC also provides information on detailedness and way of describing learning outcomes across different countries.
Horizontal comparison working team

- Cedefop, Commision and EQF/AG experts from the following countries:
  - Hungary
  - Italy
  - Latvia
  - Norway
  - Poland (coordinator)
  - Sweden
Timetable for 2016

- February – preliminary discussion on method and agenda of work
- March - April – qualifications chosen and methodology / fiche accepted
- April - May – delivery of LO descriptions etc. by countries, first part of comparative analysis
- June – presentation of the HC first results at the AG36
- September – working 1-day meeting in Warsaw
- October – draft recommendation on methodology for work programme 2017 to be discussed with EQF AG
- November – final version of deliverables to be sent to EQF AG for discussion
- December - conclusion of pilot project, possible adoption of a work program for 2017-18.
## Fiche for horizontal comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country:</th>
<th>Country A</th>
<th>Country B</th>
<th>Country ...</th>
<th>Results of the horizontal comparison of qualifications and their levelling – similarities and differences</th>
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<td>• Purpose of the qualification at the labour market;</td>
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<td>• Quality assurance;</td>
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<td>• Other relevant.</td>
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<td>Conclusions of the qualification horizontal comparison between countries</td>
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<td>Recommendations (overall, per country, to EQF AG):</td>
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Fiche 1 – first stage of HC: core elements of context information and analysis of LO’s

It was decided to start the comparative analysis in reference to five categories making up the core elements of context informations:

✓ access rights
  ➢ Who is eligible to apply for qualification?
  ➢ What are the prerequisites?
  ➢ What are other requirements for applicants (formal, financial etc.)

✓ purpose of the qualification at the labour market
  ➢ Is the qualification required/ one of requirements / recommended to practice a certain profession.

✓ recognition practice
  ➢ Who is responsible for a recognition?
  ➢ What are recognition practices/procedures?
Fiche 2 – first stage of HC: core elements of context information and LO's analysis

- **Validation practices**
  - Who is responsible for a validation of the qualification?
  - What are the validation practices/procedures?
  - Who is responsible for quality assurance?
  - What are the quality assurance practices?

- **The LO’s of two qualifications:**
  - CNC-operator
  - Mechanical engineer

  were analysed.
Method of the comparative analysis of the fiche data sent by countries (PL, IT, SE, HU, NO, LV)

- The analysis of core elements of context information consisted of two stages:
  - Assessment if the submitted descriptions fulfill all the categories and if information given within each category is complete (Yes/No/Partly)
  - Comparison between countries of the descriptions for each category + synthesis of comparisons

- The analysis of LO’s information consisted also of two stages:
  - The LO’s were grouped thematically, in order to make it comparable
  - The coherence of descriptions was evaluated
First comments and conclusions after the analysis of core context information elements

- all project partners sent the descriptions of core elements of context information and of LO’s

- the vast majority of descriptions allowed to conduct the analysis however the sent descriptions were at different levels of detail

- in the three categories recognition practice, validation practices and quality assurance it is most evident, that the descriptions refer to the general procedures and rules of recognition, validation and QA established in different countries for vocational qualifications (descriptions of CNC machine operator) and for HE (descriptions of mechanical engineer).
First comments and conclusions after the analysis of core elements of context information (2)

- after the initial analysis of the submitted descriptions it was suggested to illustrate and supplement the analyzed qualification by description of a concrete qualification provided by the concrete institution

- the descriptions of LO’s also differ on how they are detailed; in qualification of CNC Operator only one country explicitly showed the knowledge learning outcomes. However, some aspects were implicitly visible in other cases.

- the descriptions of skills in case of CNC Operator are virtually identical for all countries

- in Mechanical engineer, the common part of skills was much more difficult to find, while the responsibilities and other social competences were relatively clear and similar.
Fiche 3 – second stage of HC – other context information

After the first core elements and LO’s analysis it was decided to continue the study in order to analyse the other information:

- **Purpose of the qualification in education system**
  - Determines if the qualification is required/ one of requirements / recommended to practice a certain profession.

- **Reference to occupational context**:
  - Is the qualification related to any specific: sector or branches? Institutions or companies?
  - Functions or positions?
  - Working culture?
  - Specific geographical region?
  - In which way?
Fiche 3 – second stage of HC – other context information

- Validation of informal and non-formal learning
  - Is it possible to validate prior achievements?
  - How does a learner validate her achievements?

- International standards;
  - Is the qualification referring to any international standards (e.g. sectoral)?
  - Which ones?
Analysis of LO’s and basis for levelling

- Analysis of the learning outcomes in order to determine the level of qualification.
  - Each learning outcome was compared with a level descriptors in a given NQF.
  - The adequate (“best fit”) descriptor has to be unequivocally indicated

- Basis of levelling
  - The description of a method that is used in a given country to determine the level of qualification.
Fiche 3 – second stage of HC:
Example of the Polish method of levelling (1)

- In order to determine the level of qualification it was sent to all project partners the assumptions of Polish method of levelling (as a good practice example)

- This method is a result of a pilot levelling of 413 Polish qualifications, that was held in 2012-2013,

- There are five stages of levelling:
Can we compare methods of leveling?
Yes, but:

- Confusion after answers concerning leveling – crucial for the project
- Even in case of one country different methods of leveling can be used for different qualifications
- PL case: presented method was appropriate for sectoral qualifications applying for registration
- But leveling qualifications of higher and general education is provided in another way: instruction for program design and control by quality assurance bodies;
  - “best fit” principle – what does it mean in this context?

  ✓ Illustration by case of concrete qualification can be helpful
Can we compare qualifications horizontally? 
Yes, but:

- The HC group did not have the opportunity to discuss the first findings because of the AG meetings cancellation in April
- First findings discussed on 14 June in Brussels:
  - the task is fascinating but we are learning by doing
  - next turn of delivering information – more precisely defined
  - method of leveling cannot be limited to formal comparison of LO and level descriptors
    - importance of context information
    - protecting variety of qualifications
    - One standarized pattern for qualification description probably cannot work
  - “best fit” principle – what does it mean in context of HC?
Can we compare qualifications horizontally?
Yes, but:

- Other countries involvement into the pilot project could give wider spectrum of information?
- Additional working meeting in Warsaw in September to discuss findings
- But deadlines to be met.
The systemic project “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”.
Project co-financed from EU funds as part of the European Social Fund.