Note AG 43-4

EQF Advisory Group, 12-13 December 2017, Brussels

Note on the Updating of EQF referencing as part of the EQF AG work programme 2018-19

1. Introduction

Recommendation nr. 2 of the EQF Recommendation invites Member States to review and update, when relevant, the referencing of the levels of the national qualifications frameworks or systems to the levels of the EQF.\(^1\)

EQF referencing reports represent a ‘snap shot’ in time and will eventually, as national qualification systems and frameworks evolve, become outdated. The referencing reports should make sure that the information underpinning the referencing is accurate and transparent, as this directly influences the extent to which the EQF is trusted. In this way the translation of national qualification levels into EQF levels will remain relevant and in line with the national qualification systems. This also determines to which extent the EQF is able to facilitate comparability and portability of qualifications.

This note proposes a set of EQF AG guidelines on the updating of referencing reports. It addresses the following points:

- On which occasion is an update recommended?
- How should the update be done and what should be updated?
- The EQF referencing criteria.
- Procedure for report discussion and its follow up by the EQF AG.
- Commission and Cedefop support.

The guidelines should help achieving a common understanding within the EQF AG about updating the EQF referencing. They could further be a support to Member States and other participating countries in the process of updating their EQF referencing.

Referencing updates do not put into question the EQF AG’s endorsement on the initial referencing.

The EQF AG is invited to:
- discuss the note;
- agree on elements for a common approach for updating the referencing (guidelines);

\(^1\) As set out in Annex II and using the criteria set out in Annex III, with due regard to the national context.
discuss the possible development of guidance materials supporting the updating process.

2. **On which occasion is an update recommended?**

There is neither a time indication in the Recommendation as to when this should (ideally) be done, nor another indication under which circumstances an update is recommended. It is up to each Member State or other participating country in the EQF AG to determine when it considers an update of the referencing report to be relevant.

Updates should aim at both a strengthened comparability of national qualifications systems and at improved transparency of qualifications included in the frameworks. An update of the referencing is recommended if the referencing report does no longer faithfully reflect the national qualifications framework or system. In other words, substantial changes of the national qualifications framework or system need to be reflected by the EQF referencing report. There are many possible examples of substantial changes to the national qualifications framework or system. A few are mentioned below (the list is not exhaustive):

- The scope of the NQF has changed, e.g.:
  - a change as regards structure and/or orientation;
  - a change as regards institutional and legal basis;
  - a change as regards the coverage of qualifications (for example the inclusion of general education qualifications;
  - a procedure has been agreed to include non-formal (private or international) qualifications in the framework;
  - validation of non-formal and informal learning as a way to obtain a full or part of qualification has been added;
  - other scope extensions.
- The procedures for allocating levels to qualifications have been modified.
- Substantial changes in quality assurance arrangements have occurred.
- A more mature operational stage of implementation of the framework has been reached.
- Any other reason considered relevant by the country concerned.

3. **How should the update be done and what should be updated?**

In principle each country should be free to present an updated report in accordance with its own preferences, as long as it is structured in line with the EQF referencing criteria (cf section 4).

The following options are imaginable:

- A revised version replacing the existing referencing report is presented.
- An addition to the existing report is presented. In this case it is important that the existing report still faithfully reflects the NQF or national qualifications system.
In both options it would be useful to present a summary of the main changes. Reports and summary should be presented on the LOQ portal or its successor.

The updated report should also be seen as an occasion to address comments made by the EQF AG at the stage of initial referencing.

4. The EQF referencing criteria

The EQF referencing criteria as specified in annex III to the EQF Recommendation apply. The updated referencing report or the specific updating report should address each of the 10 referencing criteria separately.

The information provided on each of the 10 criteria should reflect the current state of play of implementation of the national framework or system. E.g. the report should provide clear information on the state of play of inclusion of and evidence on the levelling of qualifications in the national qualifications framework (criterion 4). Countries are invited to provide the link to the qualifications register and a table with included qualifications or qualification types. The updated report should include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies (criterion 6). The (at least two) international experts from (at least) two different countries need to provide a written statement with their assessment of the report (criterion 8). The report should include information on the state of play of indicating EQF levels on certificates, diplomas, supplements) and/or qualification registers (criterion 10).

It could additionally include information or a further assessment, on a voluntary basis, of the impacts which the national qualifications framework and/or the EQF have had at national level. In this context countries are encouraged (and supported by the Commission) to invite a group of EQF AG members for a country visit as part of this revision process. The purpose of the visit is to show and discuss the implementation and added value of the NQF for different beneficiaries and how it relates to the EQF. The receiving country should prepare a programme giving a good understanding of the way in which the national framework operates, including meetings with relevant stakeholders and policy-makers and a limited number of ion-site visits to e.g. education/training providers.

5. Procedure for report discussion and its follow up by the EQF AG

The procedure for report discussion in the EQF AG could take the current procedure as source of inspiration, and consist of the following steps:

- The draft revised report is sent to all EQF AG members 4 weeks in advance of its discussion by the EQF AG.
- A small group of EQF AG members (3-4) analyses the report and presents its views to the EQF AG when the report is discussed. This could replace the current procedure whereby EQF AG members can, on a voluntary basis, give their comments.
Cedefop analyses the report and provides written comments that are shared with the country at the latest one week before the report discussion.

In the EQF AG meeting the country updating the referencing gives a presentation of the update (max 30 minutes), which is followed by a discussion started by Cedefop, the Council of Europe (in particular to ensure compatibility with the QF EHEA) and the countries that have prepared the comments. The entire discussion will last about 1.5 hrs.

The EQF AG members, analysing and commenting the report during the EQF AG meetings should be different from the international experts that provided written statements included in the report in accordance with criterion 8). The EQF AG members involved in the preparation of the discussion could both represent countries or stakeholders. They could be chosen either ad random or proposed by the country. There should be a fair distribution of work among all members of the EQF AG in the process of discussing updates of referencing reports.

Follow up to the discussion in the EQF AG:

- Cedefop and the Council of Europe draft a summary note which will be sent to the country within 4 weeks after the discussion in the EQF AG.
- In line with referencing criterion 9 and within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the updated referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

6. **Support by the Commission and Cedefop**

The Commission will provide the following support to the updating of the referencing:

- Expenditure related to updating the referencing report can be included in the 3-year grant request under Erasmus+ sent to EQFG-NCPs on 21 November.
- Travel costs for visits to other Member States and other participating countries in the EQF, that relate to the update of the referencing will be reimbursed in accordance with the applicable rules with regard to the reimbursement of experts.
- Any Peer Learning Activity in the area of updating the EQF referencing should this become part of the EQF AG PLA programme.

The Commission further intends to update and/or replace the guidance notes which date back to the early stages of EQF referencing, namely:

- EQF Note 2: Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks in implementing the EQF (2010).
- EQF Note 3 Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF (2011).
- EQF Note 5 Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF (update 2013).

The notes have been useful for the initial stage of referencing, but are not up to date with the new Recommendation. In particular with regard to learning outcomes.
Cedefop has carried out further work\(^2\), but this is not yet included in the guidance notes. Moreover, the national examples included in the documents only relate to a limited number of (early) frameworks and do not reflect the current operational stage of NQFs in Europe. Reflection on guidance materials needed could be subject of a separate EQF AG note.

Cedefop will, as part of its mission, fully support the process of updating the EQF referencing in the same way as it has been done so far, including its support to the EQF AG, to the PLAs, its work on NQFs and its work on learning outcomes.

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