



European Qualifications Framework

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Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

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EQF/HKQF Comparability Study

- Commenced in Nov 2014 and completed in December 2015; report published in January 2017: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7b374cac-61f6-11e7-9dbe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Aims to establish a trustworthy level-to-level relationship between HKQF and EQF
 - to enhance mutual understanding of qualifications, facilitating their recognition;
 - to facilitate learner/labour mobility between HK and Europe;
 - to foster economic cooperation



Methodology (1)

- A detailed analysis and comparison of the two frameworks, covering their purposes, governance, architecture, levels, operations, and underpinning QA systems
- **Criteria** adopted for the comparability study:
 - Transparent framework governance
 - Level-to-level comparison between the two frameworks
 - Adoption of (learning) outcome-based approach
 - Clear and transparent mechanisms for inclusion of qualifications onto QFs
 - Underpinning QA arrangements in line with international principles

Methodology (2)

- Consultation with relevant stakeholders in various sectors (government, education, training, industry, business...)
- Engagement of local and international experts (for the EQF: Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland)



Launch of the Study in November 2014 at the QF International Conference in Hong Kong + concluding meeting at the EQF AG in December 2015 in Berlin

EQF/HKQF – Similarities

- Both have a hierarchical structure based on learning outcomes
- Both are comprehensive covering learning experience from all sectors
- Both underpinned by rigorous QA mechanism and requirements
- Learning outcome statements in both frameworks are neutral in terms of the learning environment

EQF/HKQF - Differences

HKQF	EQF
Local framework	Regional framework (reference framework for European NQFs)
7 Levels	8 Levels
4 domains to describe outcome standards	3 domains to describe outcome standards
Detailed outcome statements in Level Descriptors	Simple and broad statements in Level Descriptors
8000 qualifications	No qualifications included (are part of European NQFs)

Level-to-Level Comparison

- **Structural comparison:** comparing the policy, architecture, concepts of learning outcomes, domain structure of the level descriptors (GLD), definition of levels
- **Technical comparison:** linguistic/textual analysis of the outcome statements of the level descriptors, a vertical and horizontal analysis of the level descriptors to compare the outcome standards attainable at each level
- **Contextual matching (“reality check”):** use of typical examples of qualification types linked to levels to validate matching outcomes
- **Social context matching:** how a qualification type be understood and used in the social and educational context.

Results of Comparison (1)

HKQF	EQF	Conclusion
Level 7	Level 8	Good Fit
Level 6	Level 7	Good Fit
Level 5	Level 6	Best Fit
Level 4	Level 5	Best Fit
Level 3	Level 4	Best Fit
Level 2	Level 3	Best Fit
Level 1	Level 2	Best Fit
	Level 1	No match

Good fit – a significant match could be ascertained across all domains at a particular level

Best fit – on balance of the relevant factors, a QF level on a framework most appropriately sits in reference to a level on another framework



HKQF-EQF Results of Comparison (2)

Comparison of QA System of EQF/HKQF

- QA of HKQF
 - Primarily responsible by an independent, statutory body - Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), and self-accrediting universities whose QA system are regularly reviewed by the Quality Assurance Council
 - Clear government policies and procedures for inclusion of qualifications into HKQF
 - Robust and professional accreditation system
 - Outcome-based accreditation
 - Acknowledges and recognises non-formal and informal learning



Comparison of QA System of EQF/HKQF

- QA of EQF no EU body, NQF responsibility, principles in the EQF Recommendation (revised May 2017)
 - Recommendation no 4 : EU MS should ensure that qualifications with an EQF level are in accordance with the common principles for quality assurance set out in Annex IV of the EQF Recommendation
 - The EQF referencing criteria:
 - The national QA system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the NQFs (or systems) and are consistent with EQF QA principles
 - The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant QA bodies
 - Annex IV: 10 quality assurance principles: all qualifications with an EQF level should be quality assured to enhance trust in their quality and level

Benefits of Comparability Study (1) - why HKQF wished to conduct the study

- Building trust and mutual understanding with QF and QA authorities in other jurisdictions
- Benchmarking of HK qualifications with European qualifications will facilitate learner and labour mobility
- Ground-laying for further and stronger cooperation and collaboration between HK and other countries/regions (e.g. academic and knowledge exchange, overseas recruitment, skills enhancement, manpower supply, business cooperation)



Benefits of Comparability Study (2) - additional benefits harvested from the study

- A rigorous and comprehensive self-assessment exercise of the HKQF (“health check”) leading to a critical review of the policy, principles and processes underpinning HKQF, and how it is perceived by stakeholders. For example:
 - Review of the Generic Level Descriptors in 2017
 - Review of accreditation standards by HKCAAVQ in 2017 to accommodate new developments in the education and training landscape
 - Tracking surveys on impact of HKQF to stakeholders in 2017 and 2020
- Enhancing communication with stakeholders; closer alignment of training to industry needs
- Facilitation for international comparative studies (with Scotland, Ireland, and New Zealand)



Benefits of Comparability Study (3) to stakeholders in Hong Kong

Learners & employees

- More learning and employment opportunities of HK people in European countries

Education & training providers

- Collaboration between education institutions in programme articulation, credit transfer, and student exchange opportunities

Employers & trade associations

- Better understanding of overseas qualifications, easier for business enterprises to make commercial decisions (availability of suitable workforce from overseas)

Benefits of Comparability Study in the context of the EQF

- This Study has taken place in the context of three pilots comparing the EQF with three mature qualifications frameworks; the HKQF, the AQF and the NZQF
- A better understanding of the principles and day-to-day operation of the HKQF, its qualifications as well as the QA mechanisms underpinning them.
- QFs are deeply embedded within the broader political, social and economic context. Technical experts need to become familiar with these complex contexts.

Benefits of Comparability Study in the context of the EQF

- It has been possible to establish comparability between two frameworks different in nature and purpose (but differences need careful explanation)
- Asymmetry between an the HKQF as a local framework and the EQF as a reference framework no obstacle
- Policy learning: the study and the mutual visits have allowed rich exchanges of knowledge and experiences which have been of invaluable benefit to the EQF side in the context of a reflection on the EQF as well as on the European NQFs and the policies and processes associated with these
- Despite differences in domains, detailed analyses of the descriptors of both frameworks did however prove possible and could be used to draw conclusions on the comparability of the levels of both frameworks
- Additional context analysis useful

Outlook from an EQF perspective

- Cooperation at European level between the EQF and non-EU qualifications frameworks can provide an umbrella under which bilateral relations between European NQFs and non EU frameworks can be developed avoiding different interpretations of the EQF
- The pilot was important for the revision of the EQF Recommendation: recommendation 13 to COM: “Explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF”



Thank you!