



BOLOGNA PROCESS AND EQF IMPLEMENTATION
Development of Qualifications Frameworks
**Fourth joint meeting of national correspondents (Qualifications
Framework-European Higher Education Area) and National
Coordination Points (European Qualifications Framework)**
7 November 2013
Hotel La Plaza, Brussels, Belgium

Minutes

AGENDA

9.30-9.35 Approval of the agenda

9.35-11.00 1-Policy updates from the European Commission and the Council of Europe

Latest policy developments from the European Commission:

- a) EQF and Europass evaluations (DG EAC)
- b) ESF EQF conditionality (DG EAC)
- c) Communication on "Opening up Education" (DG EAC)
- d) Latest developments on ESCO (DG EMPL)

Latest policy developments from the Council of Europe:

- a) Subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Bologna Secretariat)

11.00-11.25 2-Qualifications frameworks: Cedefop's study on EQF level 5

Presentation by Jens Bjornavold from Cedefop.

11.25-11.40 Coffee break

11.40-12.30 3-Quality Assurance, qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes: common challenges

Presentations by the national correspondents' network.

12.30-14.00 Lunch

14.00-16.00 4-The European Area for skills and qualification (EASQ) and European qualification frameworks.

Presentation by Koen Nomden (DG EAC) followed by a debate on these issues.

16.00-16.30 5-Any other business

All meeting documents and presentations have been uploaded at the meeting's site <https://eunetworks-jointmeeting.teamwork.fr/en/programme> [...]

Approval of the agenda

Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) welcomed the participants to the fourth joint meeting of EQF NCPs and national correspondents for QF-EHEA which was a follow-up of the meeting a year ago. He shortly presented the agenda with focus on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ).. It was stressed that the Commission is open to new ideas and suggestions for the development of EASQ; contributions of participants of the meeting are welcome, in particular taking into account that they are important stakeholders in this process..

Jean Philippe Restoueix (Council of Europe) apologized for the change of the meeting's date. He stressed the necessity of putting bridges between different policy directions and to reach a coherent approach in qualifications frameworks. This meeting would allow for the same information being given to people involved in two similar issues.

1. Policy updates from the European Commission and the Council of Europe

Latest policy developments from the European Commission:

a) EQF and Europass evaluations (DG EAC)

Europass evaluation

Pedro Chaves presented the results of the Europass evaluation (cf. ppt). This presentation focused on a report on the current state of play of Europass, currently being prepared by the Commission, and responding to a requirement of Europass' legal basis. This requirement states that every four years an external evaluation of Europass is done and the subsequent report is presented to the European Parliament and to the Council of Ministers of Education. The Europass report will be presented soon by the Commission to these institutions. A similar evaluation and report on EQF were conducted as well. Both reports will provide information on the current status of Europass and EQF and will present perspectives for the future of these tools which have also to be considered in the context of EASQ.

Questions, comments and answers

- How and when will Member States be consulted concerning the change of Europass' legal basis?
 - Pedro Chaves (DG EAC): The change of Europass' legal basis is just a possibility; at the moment the Commission is very inclined to think that change in the legal basis is necessary. But the first step is a consultation of stakeholders on the future design of Europass. Members States will be strongly involved in this consultation.

EQF evaluation

Anita Kremo (DG EAC) provided information on the EQF evaluation and its report. The Commission is preparing the report which feeds on various sources: the external evaluation, a study commissioned by the European Parliament on the state of play of the EQF, various CEDEFOP studies on particular aspects of the EQF, such as learning outcomes, assessment etc. and input from the EQF NCPs, the EQF Advisory Group and the Bologna group.. The report is being concluded now – a draft is being circulated in the Commission and will be published in mid-December.

The report responds to many of the challenges related to ET 2020 as it is helpful to raise discussions on what qualifications look like and how they feed into Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies. The EQF is accepted as a relevant tool in Europe in terms of LLL and transparency. More stakeholders use the EQF now, but that number still has to grow.

Countries use the EQF as inspiration for developing their national policies: 36 countries have developed NQFs, 29 of them are comprehensive LLL frameworks including both formal qualifications and non formal qualifications. The EQF has a key role in linking transparency tools –such as credit systems, QA systems, Europass etc.

Even if there is a strong political commitment towards the implementation of EQF, this process still needs to be speed up and all national referencing procedures need to be completed in order to make EQF an operational tool. Otherwise, stakeholders might begin to question the value of the EQF for themselves.

Before EQF can be considered a working tool adjustments will be needed, e.g. the competence definition presented in the Recommendation and the use of the competence concept in the EQF descriptors table are not identical.

Implementation of EQF main policy recommendations is the main priority in the EQF process. In principle in 2014 all EQF referencing reports will be ready. At the same time NQF developments should be integrated in national strategies and implemented on national level. The learning outcomes approach should be implemented to bridge the gap between the world of education and the world of work.

If it is not obvious what is relevant at national level, countries should communicate with the EQF Advisory Group in order to develop a strategy to monitor the follow up of the referencing reports.

The issue of quality assurance should be considered on both national and on EU levels.

The EQF should reach the citizens. This can be realized by e.g. indicating EQF levels in certificates and diplomas and including them in national databases as well as use them for recognizing qualifications.

At the EU level, a better link between EQF, internationalisation, LLL and mobility policies is needed. Progress was made concerning the Lisbon Recognition convention and common training frameworks, but even closer links are needed. There is still no mandate to refer international qualifications to the EQF; the role of

the EQF in this case should be clarified, as well as in Open Educational Resources (OER).

Current coordination between the Bologna framework and the EQF on EU level is seen as positive.

Questions, comments and answers

- What are the reasons for such delays in the referencing process in so many countries? Is it too complicated, too demanding?
 - Anita Kremo (DG EAC): The issue is not referencing; in most countries creating an NQF and agreement on it is more important, and this process needs the involvement of stakeholders and takes time. Political support is needed as well.
 - Jens Bjornavold (Cedefop): Some countries face policy challenges at government or parliament level, delay can be due to political reasons: discussions in national parliaments, the relation to national legislation etc. There is a good chance that most countries finalize by end 2014.
 - Answer from BG: in Bulgaria, the work is delayed due to a new government. The new politicians responsible have to get familiar with the issue before they can take decisions.
 - Jean Philippe Restoueix (Council of Europe): There can be different starting points in the countries concerning responsibilities, administrative constructions, if there are federal or national states etc. In some cases, e.g. when professional training is regulated on regional level all regions have to agree – such circumstances can cause delays. It is also a question of political will and relevance for the stakeholders. The fact that referencing national frameworks to the EQF is not obligatory creates differences between countries.
 - Answer from IE: having a qualifications framework is just the start of the work. Challenges remain in turning it into a tool to facilitate mobility and recognition on national and EU level.
 - Pedro Chaves (DG EAC): the Commission encourages and support governments to accomplish the process.
- Question: Explain the Common Training Frameworks in more detail?
 - Anita Kremo (DG EAC): The Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications has been modernised and now refers to common training frameworks. The directive covers seven professions where qualifications are automatically recognised. In this system common training frameworks will be included. These will be based on countries' joint discussions on a minimum level of skills, knowledge and competences for the respective occupations as a basis for entering the profession in another country. The development process for the CTF will start soon. The minimum levels need to be linked to EQF levels.

b) European Social Fund (ESF) EQF conditionality (DG EAC)

Pedro Chaves (DG EMPL) introduced the topic of the "ESF EQF conditionality" as a way to encourage countries to speed up EQF implementation by linking it with ESF funding.

Anita Kremo (DG EMPL) described cohesion policy as a main financial instrument to support national developments. Between 2007 and 2013, 10% of cohesion funds (35 billion euro) were related to issues of education and training. In the next period 2014 to 2020, 76 billion will be available for the support of national policy development in this area. Main investment priorities will be:

- The prevention of early school leaving
- HE policy support
- The development of LLL policies
- VET policy support

Support is available for countries needing a strategy to use these funds during these years,

The ex ante conditionality will mean that countries need to implement and document certain EQF policies to get the ESF funds. With 2016 as a deadline, countries need to show serious progress in order to access funding in priority areas. In some cases it will be sufficient to create transparency about existing processes: many countries have progressed quite far in referencing, but this is not visible in partnership agreements.

The EQF AG can provide written information on this issue.

c) Communication on "Opening up Education" (DG EAC)

Ricardo Ferreira (DG EAC) presented the recent Commission initiative on enhancing the use of ICT in education and training (cf. ppt).

d) Latest developments on ESCO (DG EMPL)

Vito Spinelli (DG EMPL) presented the structure and potential uses of the ESCO taxonomy (cf. Prezi)

Questions, comments and answers

- How many qualifications are in the qualifications pillar, are those visible on the website, and is there a link to the EQF?
 - At the moment six qualifications are online which were chosen because a lot of data and studies on these qualifications were available. Links with EQF are still not available.

- Some countries do have international qualifications like CISCO certificates in their NQFs.
 - When the NQF level is indicated for a qualification it is also indicated in the ESCO portal via its link to the EQF portal. There will be a dialogue with awarding bodies in order to gather information on this.
 - Anita Kremo (DG EAC): It is necessary to differentiate referencing to EQF and ESCO: ESCO is a taxonomy which shows qualifications in the labour market. When qualifications at national level are referenced to the EQF via the NQFs they will be included in ESCO. International qualifications will be directly included in ESCO. The EQF AG will discuss a qualifications that are included in some NQFs and linked to different levels.
 - Jens Bjornavold (Cedefop): Many certificates for labour markets are not linked to the NQF. It is important for ESCO to show them, e.g. welding certificates. The qualifications pillar is a starting point to sample most important certificates. So far, 150 different certificates were identified and will be included in ESCO. An important challenge is to find learning outcomes descriptions of qualifications.
- Who are the target groups for ESCO if not the end user?
 - Vito Spinelli (DG EMPL): The main goal of ESCO in the beginning was to use EURES to compare labour market information from employment services and to improve job and skills matching. ESCO has potential for different users, the main users are public employment services (PES). Currently the Commission and PES are discussing on how to implement ESCO at national level. By providing labour market data for everyone, ESCO can also be helpful for jobseekers and career guidance as it provides information linked to one's skills and competences. The reference groups describe occupational profiles in more detail. With the refined profiles, employers can better describe job vacancies.
- How is ESCO supposed to support education and training?
 - Vito Spinelli (DG EMPL): ESCO can bridge the gap between education and work by supporting a common language for the description of learning outcomes.

Latest policy developments from the Council of Europe

a) Subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Bologna Secretariat)

Jean Philippe Restoueix (Council of Europe) provided information on two recent conferences in Andorra and Helsinki.

In the Andorra conference, the Andorran presidency promoted the inclusion of intercultural competences on all levels of education as transversal competences. The Council of Europe underlines the importance to include transversal competences in NQFs.

The Helsinki conference dealt with the issue of quality in education. There is no international document, charter etc. which defines quality in education. So the main aim was to start a process to reflect on this with the "Helsinki agenda for quality in

education". One major topic was the fight against corruption in education as means of quality assurance. Corruption was looked at on a wider scale – not only concerning money but also including other kinds of reward. This can include matters of sexual harassment (exams or marks in exchange for sexual services) or to have to read or buy a certain book recommended by the professor in order to pass the exam. Another topic is the need for quality assurance concerning all qualifications included in quality frameworks.

Jean Philippe Restoueix informed about a conference in the following week dealing with education and citizenship which will be based on the charter of EDC (Education for democratic citizenship). Transversal competences including questions of citizenship and participation will be an issue during this conference, too.

Concerning the Bologna process, JP Restoueix stressed the importance of having tools coherent to each other and of creating coherence even and in particular when financial support to HE in member states decreases.

Another challenge concerns countries involved in the QF EHEA development: some countries are never present in these meetings, but the development of qualifications frameworks needs to include anyone. This can e.g. be done by regional cooperation on qualifications frameworks, e.g. in SEE or CIS countries.

It is necessary to guarantee implementation [of quality frameworks] by HE institutions, and stakeholders need to feel ownership for these instruments, see them not as administrative burden but as a goal in terms of improvement of HE in Europe.

Marta Simonyan (Bologna Secretariat) provided an update from her institution:

The meeting of the Structural Reforms (SR) Working Group (WG) was held in Brussels at the end of September. Carita Blomqvist briefed on the proposal for supporting the implementation of Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) principles in different countries. The members of the WG have made some suggestions:

- To promote further the implementation and usage of the EAR manual, as well as the versions of the manual developed specifically for HEIs.
- SR WG to come up with a strong recommendation to support the EAR manual.
- To establish more formal links between Asia and Pacific countries and LRC
- To better communicate on the interlinks between QFs and QA, the way they support each other and their role in recognition.

ENQA indicate that the European Approach for Accreditation of joint degrees should be drafted by a group of experts. This approach should be applied only to those programmes subject to compulsory accreditation schemes so far. The text should be kept simple.

Last October in Yerevan, Armenia was held the Regional meeting of the Ministers of Education on the Implementation of the EHEA, organized by CoE. Declarations from the meeting are available.

Concerning attendance to meetings the Bologna Secretariat prepared a list which was discussed in BFUG Board and in BFUG in Vilnius. The NQF group has low attendance, there is a need to find ways to encourage participation in the WG meetings.

2. Qualifications frameworks: Cedefop's study on EQF level 5

Jens Bjornavold (Cedefop) presented the study on EQF level 5. (cf ppt)

Questions, comments and answers

- Learning outcomes are described differently by countries. When assigning qualifications, countries refer to EQF and assign qualification types to certain levels. Does the study give directions towards referencing qualifications? Or will it be more transparent to reference individual qualifications?
 - Jens Bjornavold (Cedefop): Some countries integrate individual qualifications, but rather in the case of new qualifications or non-formal qualifications. These have to be assessed. We will see how this mix is developing. The majority of countries seem to include groups of qualifications, this will have to be discussed in the EQF Advisory Group. There are also differences between countries due to different descriptors for learning outcomes. A Cedefop study shows similarities on the descriptors for skills and knowledge; but there are differences on the competence descriptors among countries. There are also differences between subsystems: VET can be inspired by labour market standards. There were less differences between HE and VET qualifications than expected. This is a basis for dialogue, but the need to discuss differences remains.

- Level 5 seems to be a crucial point in referencing; in Sweden there are still discussions on Level 5 as universities are independent to decide on these matters. Can focus on quality in HE and VET support this issue?
 - Jens Bjornavold (Cedefop): This is an issue, are they using the same mechanisms of accreditation in the subsystems?

3. Quality Assurance, qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes: common challenges

John O'Connor (Quality and Qualifications, IE) presented an overview on the connections between quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes (cf. ppt)

Questions, comments and answers

- The question was raised if loose or close integration of QA and QF could be the answer.
 - John O'Connor (IE): In the case of Ireland QF and QA have fostered transparency and information, confidence and trust. But Ireland is a small country, maybe it is more challenging in other countries.
- Jean Phipippe Restoueix (Council of Europe): QA is perceived differently from different areas in one society, e.g. in HE and VET or HE and the labour market. In this context QA can be a problem – how to solve it if HE does not recognize all qualifications?
 - John O'Connor (IE): There are now more people progressing in HE with VET qualifications. Trust in VET qualifications has improved because they can be understood better in HE.

Participants were invited to share their own experiences on the interface of quality assurance, learning outcomes and frameworks.

- Experience from NL: QA and QF belong together. There is no institution in NL covering both topics, but there is communication between the regular QA organisations responsible for VET, HE and also non-formal qualifications. There will be a discussion on matching procedures between these three organisations responsible for QA. Concerning the non-formal qualifications: how can be assured that our procedures are not too complicated and keep non-formal qualifications outside the framework?
 - John O'Connor (IE): Having an open QF always brings risks. Common principles on QA should exist to support recognition of any type of learning and at the same time assure public confidence by use of minimal standards. However practices have to be different to fit the type of learning.
- Experience from FR: In France, there is an overarching framework including VET and HE and non-formal learning. Universities have to present descriptions in terms of learning outcomes based on the qualifications framework. In France, the issue of intellectual property is seen as related to QA.
- Experience from SE: In Sweden a NQF does not exist yet but it is currently being discussed. QA for learning and qualifications has become a topic also outside the educational system, e.g. in institutions with in-house trainings. Trust between public and private learning institution is seen as crucial.
- Experience from NO: Learning outcomes are part of internal and external QA in the HE system. There is a new regulation for VET schools stipulating learning outcomes as part of QA.
- Experience from LV: The question of implementation is deemed crucial. There is a current survey on how institutions implement and understand learning outcomes to find out how the legislative frameworks are used in institutions. There was also a seminar on qualifications frameworks for students.

Jean Phipippe Restoueix (Council of Europe) mentioned the need to provide QA for transversal competences like intercultural competences and citizenship. He raised the

question how QA could be guaranteed in non-formal education, e.g. in the context of NGOs, as different criteria would have to be applied here.

- Experience from UK: There is a lot of non-formal learning (but not connected to NGOs) considered in QF. It is a balancing act to underpin a framework by a QA system - there has to be a common set of principles, and it is necessary to assure assessment in QA. On the other hand, implementing these principles may create something that is no longer attractive to the learners. Probably some non-formal learning will never be included in the framework.

4. The European Area for skills and qualification (EASQ) and European qualification frameworks.

Presentation by Koen Nomden (DG EAC) followed by a debate on these issues.

(cf. ppt)

Questions, comments and answers

- Jean Philippe Restoueix (Council of Europe) brought up the issue that “Europe” is not only the EU countries and saw a need to differentiate in terms of legal bases and concepts connected with certain topics. Evaluations for EU tools are no problem, but what can the EU do about tools that are not in its competency? Terminology used in different contexts has also to be considered: The last Communication on internationalisation from the Commission was only on mobility and internationalisation. Conceptually, internationalisation is also about human rights, about citizenship. There are differences, and in dialogue differences need to be acknowledged to have a fair debate.
 - Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) answered that the Commission is well aware of these differences and fully recognises that the concept of "Education" is composed by different sub-concepts and trends. The aim of meetings like this one is to foster discussion about these issues and to get feedback from the members of the Bologna group on them.
 - Koen Nomden (DG EAC) added that written texts are formulated in a way that legal boundaries are respected, and limited competences of the EU in questions of education are considered.
- In another statement Jean Philippe Restoueix went even further with his criticism and stated that there was no need for further studies and survey but money and support for finishing current initiatives, e.g. implementing EQF and NQFs. There should be more stocktaking instead of working on new portals or taskforces.
- A representative from the European Students’ Union mentioned existing stocktaking reports for ECTS and asked about the Commission’s possibility to prompt changes in an area where they are not the only responsible actors.
 - Anita Kremó (DG EAC) responded that EASQ is represented at the EQF AG and Bologna groups, and as such it participates in the common work between Bologna and EQF.
 - Koen Nomden (DG EAC) added that the purpose of EASQ is not to create anything new but rather check the coherence of all tools from a common perspective. Existing evaluation results will of course be used, this is the

stocktaking. The question of ECTS will be tackled in the revision of the ECTS user's guide. A proliferation of IT tools will be avoided, and ESCO is another tool but one that did not exist so far and can make connections between education and the labour market. There will be a public consultation on EASQ so stakeholders can participate in its development .

- It seems difficult to renew the tools with the same parameter, so will EQF have a central function?
 - Koen Nomden (DG EAC): The EASQ process is designated as open, there is no secret agenda.

Following the discussion, the participants worked in groups of four on four questions prepared by DG EAC. The questions and results of the WGs are presented below.

Q1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of having two frameworks EQF and QF EHEA (two european meta-frameworks)?. Please consider european, national and global perspectives.

- Two frameworks can foster transparency, e.g. for the evaluation of a qualification which is linked to the EQF. There can also be confusion due to the existence of two frameworks.
- Strengths and weaknesses for whom? Having two frameworks can be a weakness and create confusion, especially on Level 5. And having sectoral frameworks – is it a weakness or strength? The strength lies in the stakeholders' ownership when there is a framework that is own e.g. in HE. But this goes at the expense of not looking at HE in terms of a LLL perspective.

Q3 Obstacles for implementing the learning outcomes approach?

- Time is needed as well as a change of teachers' mindset. Teachers need new training and guidance, a methodology and resources. The formal implementation of learning outcomes can be prescribed by law, but those who work with them don't understand the concept easily.
- The assessment of students, especially concerning competences, seems problematic. With lack of experience, teachers need adequate methods.
- Due to the Bologna process, the situation in HE is better than in general education.
- The implementation of learning outcomes might collide with university autonomy; there can be problems to understand the need to change to learning outcomes – it is necessary to better show their added value.

Q2: What do at european level to ensure a common reference point for all qualifications in all countries?

- A review of processes and instruments is needed in the context of EASQ. We have to invest in a more efficient referencing process that meets the need of institutions. The added value of referencing has to be made visible to universities. There is a need to build on the current referencing process and not to dilute it; the reform element should not be lost in the process of rationalising.

- The Commission should push further EQF implementation at national level and strengthen the position of EQF.

Q4: How should diploma supplements and certificate supplements be improved to become more relevant? Or better single supplement for all kinds of qualifications?

- We have to improve the way documents are created in terms of learning outcomes. But there has to be a balance between too general and too specific information. Then the use of the documents should be made more transparent, e.g. that they can be applied for mobility, but also for employability.
- Apart from learning outcomes, the description of levels and parity of esteem (e.g. between HE and VET) have to be considered.
- The documents should not be merged as they serve different purposes.
- The documents should be more simple and legible for all stakeholders. The format should be unified, at least on national level, maybe also on EU level.

5. Any other business

There was a final question concerning the licensing of the EQF logo.

Anita Kremó informed that the Commission policy demanded visual identity; so the use of logos should rather be reduced, the EU flag should be applied instead. For the moment, it is recommended to use the flag next to the EQF logo. In the next Advisory Group meeting this topic will be discussed.

List of participants (cf. pdf)