



Cedefop workshop
***Testing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Relating international,
national and sectoral qualifications to the EQF***

Conclusions

Cedefop supports the Commission in implementing the EQF at European, national and sectoral level. An important part of this implementation is the systematic testing and piloting – within the Leonardo da Vinci programme – which started in 2006 and will go on until 2012. This testing was seen by national governments and other involved stakeholders as a pre-condition for supporting the EQF Recommendation.

For Cedefop, the testing and piloting projects provide a good opportunity to systematically observe and analyse the challenges involved in the implementation of the EQF. The projects started in 2006 and 2007 are now gradually starting to produce concrete results. The workshop *Testing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Relating international, national and sectoral qualifications to the EQF* (10-11 November in Thessaloniki) was organised to build on the lessons learned so far and to address the challenge of valorisation of the project results.

Promoters, covering 19 LdV projects, were represented in the workshop. These projects cover a wide range of issues relevant to the ongoing implementation of the EQF. They also cover a wide range of stakeholders, notably national authorities (ministries and qualifications authorities) sectors (including tourism, sports, automobile, construction industry, marketing and financial services, health and home care, hairdressing) as well as student organisations, social partners, non-governmental organisations, etc. and are thus illustrating the various ways in which the EQF (potentially) can be used to foster mobility and lifelong learning. Two main questions were identified and guided the seminar:

- How can national qualifications systems link up to the EQF and how can we solve the challenges of learning outcomes, National Qualifications Frameworks and best fit?
- How can the EQF serve the interests and needs of sectors, enterprises and to what extent can the EQF become a reference point for all qualifications, irrespective of their institutional or geographic origin?

The following conclusions were drawn from the two parallel sessions that addressed these questions:

- a) Common ways to define, design and categorise qualifications are needed to increase transparency:*

The EQF descriptors can be (and have been) read in different ways through the projects. Sometimes they have been contextualised in sectoral words (e.g. in financial services); some have separated the knowledge, skills and competence elements from each other; while others read them as related elements in one complete level statement. Projects showed however, that independently of the way the EQF descriptors are read and used, constitute a common basis for cooperation and comparison.

Participants recommended that we should focus on analysis and research to strengthen mutual trust and quality assurance in the referencing process. Common ways to describe and categorise qualifications (e.g. draw qualifications maps, qualifications typologies, etc.) should be developed to understand diversity, increase transparency and ensure mutual trust. Common best cases should be identified across the projects to illustrate the referencing process for different qualifications categories and levels.

- b) Common approaches / prototypes should be developed for identifying and defining learning outcomes:*

Project promoters highlighted the fact that there are many interpretations of learning outcomes not only between different but also within the same educational levels and sectors. There are cases for instance where competences as expressed through learning outcomes are not of the same nature as competences defined by human resources specialists (e.g. in marketing). There are also cases where the analysis of professions into required competences (e.g. in the various health services) is not transparent and appropriate. However, while we are lacking a generalised method for identifying and defining learning outcomes, several interesting approaches have been developed and tested, showing how stepwise identification and definition of learning outcomes is possible.

Participants agreed on the need for stakeholders to receive more concrete guidance in different sectors and areas on how to identify and define learning outcomes, for instance by developing prototypes. We need to build on Europass certificate supplement (and Europass diploma supplement).

- c) Need for a common language to establish zones of mutual trust:*

While most of the existing definitions in the EQF Recommendation are well accepted and understood by the different stakeholders and countries, their official translation into other languages is sometimes problematic (e.g. for terms such as competence, profile, qualification). Examples were given by different projects, where for instance, the official translations of descriptors were not reliable (e.g. in Financial services).

Participants agreed that the work on terminology included in the EQF Recommendation should be continued and taken forward. We should agree on additional terms which have become relevant during the test and pilot stage and build on the glossaries produced from the projects to move forward to a more comprehensive EQF-NQF-SQF glossary.

d) The way forward:

All participants agreed that we need to systematically draw on the results and recommendations of the test and pilot projects as there is a clear gain in terms of transparency, comparability and mutual trust. Extensive cooperation is necessary for ensuring ownership and involvement of all stakeholders concerned in the processes, for example when developing NQFs and for ensuring synergy between EQF-EHEA. The EQF National Coordination Points should be used for networking on referencing, learning outcomes and terminology, while the validation of non-formal and informal learning must be systematically addressed in the implementation of the EQF-NQFs.

At all these levels, Cedefop will be providing practical help to stakeholders:

- through its prominent role in the EQF Advisory Group and the cluster on recognition of learning outcomes, which brings together most bodies awarding qualifications in Europe;
- by analysing the results of EQF pilot projects and testing;
- by undertaking studies and compiling synthesis reports on key issues related to EQF implementation.