

# EQF celebrates 10th anniversary

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Having come into force in April 2008, the European qualifications framework (EQF) has become a common reference point for comparing qualifications across national and institutional borders and making them easier to understand. It consists of eight learning-outcomes-based levels, described in terms of knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility, to which national qualifications levels are linked or ‘referenced’.

National qualifications framework (NQF) and EQF levels increasingly feature on new certificates, diplomas and/or Europass supplements and qualification databases. As a result, learners, employers, training providers and recognition bodies can better understand the level, content and value of a qualification.

The EQF has acted as a catalyst for NQF development and contributed to changes in the qualification landscape in Europe. Before 2005, NQFs had been set up in just three European countries: Ireland, France and the UK. In 2018, frameworks have been, or are being, developed and implemented in all 39 countries cooperating in the EQF: the 28 EU Member States plus Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey. Although these frameworks have reached different implementation stages, an increasing number are now becoming operational and making contributions to education and training policies and practices in their respective countries.

The EQF has promoted two important principles supporting the transparency and modernisation of qualifications systems in Europe:

- the learning outcomes orientation, focusing on what a holder of a qualification is expected to know, be able to do and understand. This provides a new perspective on qualification systems, and content and profile of qualifications. The EQF has reinforced qualifications design in terms of learning outcomes, which provides a common language to compare qualifications. Calibrating the qualifications description requirements and NQF level descriptors is work in progress in many countries;
- the comprehensive approach covering all levels and types of qualifications from formal education and training to those awarded in non-formal contexts and through validation of non-formal and informal learning. The comprehensive approach draws attention to progression across education sectors and borders.

Countries have voluntarily adapted these principles to their national circumstances and needs. The 10 EQF referencing criteria have been set up to help ensure that NQFs are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way.

By the beginning of 2018, 34 countries had formally linked their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy,



Cedefop expert Jens Bjørnåvold (second left) speaking at the EQF anniversary conference

Kosovo, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

The EQF referencing reports represent a ‘snapshot’ in time and, as national qualification systems and frameworks evolve, will eventually become outdated; this means a need for regular updates building on visible national progress. The revised EQF recommendation, adopted in 2017, also encourages the trend of implementing comprehensive frameworks which comprise qualifications of all types and levels, awarded by different bodies and subsystems, including private and international qualifications. In the years to come, the question of the framework impact on lifelong learning, employability, mobility and social integration will become important.

Equally important will be to make sure that the framework is more visible to European citizens. We can already observe significant progress in that area: 23 countries have introduced the NQF and EQF levels in national qualifications documents or Europass supplements, while 17 have included levels in their national qualifications databases.

## ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

On 15 and 16 March, Cedefop contributed substantially to the conference organised by the

European Commission in Brussels to celebrate the EQF’s 10th anniversary. Cedefop expert Jens Bjørnåvold presented the agency’s work on monitoring NQF developments since 2009 and reflected on the perspectives of EQF/NQF developments on the way ahead.

Cedefop Director James Calleja participated in a panel discussion on how the EQF can improve understanding of qualifications in the labour market and support the understanding of labour market needs. According to Mr Calleja, developments show that qualifications frameworks have truly served as catalysts for changes in education systems, in improving the image of vocational education and training (VET) and in bridging the divide between VET and higher education. Learners and workers, as well as employers, are the key beneficiaries of this process. In the long term, Europe’s education landscape will be enriched by qualifications frameworks that support access, mobility and permeability. ■

EQF referencing reports



More on the EQF anniversary conference

