

GERMANY

European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

Germany has one of the highest employment rates for recent graduates in the EU. The employment of people with medium level qualifications (ISCED levels 3 and 4) in 2015 was 88.2% compared with an EU average of 70.8%. The employment of recent tertiary graduates is also high at 93.3%, far above the EU average of 81.9%. Participation in all forms of education and training has increased in recent years and outcomes have improved, including for disadvantaged groups. Early leaving from school was with 5.8% in 2014, below the EU average. Socioeconomic background has a strong impact on educational outcomes and integration of high number of recently arrived refugees – many being young and poorly qualified – is a major challenge (European Commission, 2016).

Germany has an eight-level national qualifications framework (NQF) for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes (German qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen* (DQR)). The framework is fully operational. It was given official status in May 2013 by the joint resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the conference of Ministers for Economics of the Länder and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy ⁽¹⁾. No other form of legal regulation is planned for the time being. A complete list of qualifications allocated to DQR levels and the DQR manual are included as annexes to the joint resolution ⁽²⁾. The DQR does not yet include all formal qualifications, though it includes most VET and higher education qualifications. Those from general education (including the general school leaving certificate *Allgemeine Hochschulreife*) are not yet part

⁽¹⁾ Joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning:
https://www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer_Beschluss_final_ohne_Unterschriften.pdf
[accessed 24.11.2016].

⁽²⁾ *Handbuch zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen* [Manual for the German qualifications framework]:
http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2013/13082_3_Handbuch_mit_nicht-barrierefreier_Anlage_MAM.pdf

of the framework and, consequently, not linked to the EQF. A decision on which levels they will occupy has been postponed and is planned for 2017.

The DQR is the result of lengthy development work which started in 2006, when the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Kultursministerkonferenz (KMK)) agreed to work together on it in response to the emerging European qualifications framework. Following extensive preparatory work, a proposal for a German NQF was published in February 2009. The development and implementation of the DQR has been a widely supported initiative in which social partners and business organisations have played a fundamental role through the German qualifications framework working group (*Arbeitskreis DQR*).

The DQR was referenced to the EQF in 2012.

Policy objectives

Germany has actively supported the EQF initiative from the start and the extensive effort put into developing the DQR reflects this. The EQF, with its insistence on the learning outcomes perspective, is seen as an opportunity to classify German qualifications adequately and to use it as a tool to improve opportunities for German citizens in the European labour market (Hanf, 2011, p. 50) ⁽³⁾.

The learning outcomes approach is seen as a catalyst for strengthening the coherence and overall permeability (*Durchlässigkeit*) of German education and training system, linking and integrating various subsystems and improving progression possibilities ⁽⁴⁾. Learners should be allowed to move between levels and institutions according to their knowledge, skills and competences, and be less restrained by formal, institutional barriers.

⁽³⁾ ‘... the clear outcomes and competence orientation of the EQF is first and foremost seen as an opportunity to classify German qualifications more adequately than existing international classifications, such as ISCED-97 or the 2005 EU directive for recognition of qualifications based on types of certificates and time spent in education and training.’ (Hanf, 2011).

⁽⁴⁾ One important principle of DQR is that each qualification level should always be accessible via various education pathways.

Providers of continuous training and those who provide training for groups at risk see opportunities to become part of the integrated system and offer better progression possibilities (Hanf, 2011, p 52) ⁽⁵⁾. The number of learners in the 'transitional sector' increased in 2015 by 7.2% compared to the previous year (BMBF, 2016a: pp 56-57).

The objectives of the DQR are:

- (a) increase transparency in German qualifications and aid their recognition elsewhere in Europe;
- (b) support mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries and within Germany;
- (c) improve visibility of equivalence and differences between qualifications and promote permeability;
- (d) promote reliability, transfer opportunities and quality assurance;
- (e) increase skills orientation of qualifications;
- (f) reinforce learning outcomes orientation of qualification processes;
- (g) improve opportunities for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- (h) encourage and improve access to, and participation in, lifelong learning.⁽⁶⁾

Levels and use of learning outcomes

An eight-level structure has been adopted to cover all main types of German qualification.

Level descriptors describe the competences required to obtain a qualification. The overall structure is guided by the established German terminological and conceptual approach referring to the ability to act (*Handlungskompetenz*) (Gehmlich, 2009). The DQR differentiates between two categories of competence: professional and personal. The term competence lies at the heart of the DQR and signals readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and

⁽⁵⁾ 'One of the main concerns in the past 15 years in Germany is increased enrolment in the so-called 'transitional sector', where students stay for about 0.5-1.5 years; this includes different training schemes, which do not lead to full qualifications. A total of 70-80% of students move into the dual system or full-time vocational schools afterwards.' (Hanf, 2011).

⁽⁶⁾ German EQF referencing report (BMBF and KMK, 2013).
https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eaceqf/files/German_EQF_Referencing_Report.pdf

for occupational and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as comprehensive action competence (Table 1). Methodological competence is understood as a transversal competence and is not separately stated in the DQR matrix. The DQR expresses only selected characteristics; the comprehensive and integrated notion of competence, underlying the DQR, has a strong humanistic and educational dimension ⁽⁷⁾.

Descriptors are partly expressed as alternatives, such as ‘field of study or work’ and ‘specialised field of study or field of occupational activity’. The broad and inclusive nature of level descriptors, using parallel formulations if necessary, makes it possible to open up all levels to different kinds of qualifications. This means that higher levels are not restricted to qualifications awarded within the Bologna process. The table of level descriptors (DQR matrix) and a glossary are included in the DQR outline.

Table 1. **Level descriptors in the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning**

Level indicators (*)			
Structure of requirements			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Autonomy
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, judgment	Team/leadership skills, involvement and communication	Autonomous responsibility/ responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence

(*) This is just an analytical differentiation; the interdependence between different aspects of competence is emphasised (DQR, 2011, p. 5).

Source: The German qualifications framework for lifelong learning (DQR, 2011).

Each reference level maps comparable, rather than homogeneous, qualifications. One key principle of DQR is that ‘alignment takes place in accordance with the principle that each qualification level should always be accessible via various educational pathways’ (DQR, 2011, p. 6).

Orientation to learning outcomes is increasingly becoming standard in education, vocational training and higher education (BMBF and KMK, 2013, p.

⁽⁷⁾ The ability to act (*Handlungskompetenz*) in vocational school curricula is not restricted to the world of work, but implies individual ability and readiness to act adequately socially and be individually responsible.

96). All subsystems of education and training have made important steps since 2009, albeit to varying degrees (Cedefop, 2016).

In VET, continuous development of the ‘ability to act’ concept (*Handlungskompetenz*), introduced in the 1990s, has gradually assumed a key role in qualifications definition, with clear input requirements about place, duration and content of learning. Competence-based training regulations and framework curricula structured in ‘learning fields’ have been developed.

Competence orientation is also characteristic of reform in general education and development of national educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*). They currently exist for German and mathematics in primary education; for German, mathematics and first foreign language (English/French) for the secondary general school certificate (*Hauptschule*); for German, mathematics, foreign language (English/French), biology, chemistry and physics for the intermediate leaving certificate (*Realschule*); and for German, mathematics and first foreign language (English/French) for the upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Abitur*) (BMBF and KMK, 2013, p. 99). Curricula are reformed to reflect educational standards. There is an ever-increasing focus on competence-based teaching, assessment and evolution in general education.

In higher education, the implementation of learning outcomes orientation was strengthened through the Bologna process in general and through the NEXUS project and the Quality pact for teaching, among others.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

Development and implementation of the DQR is characterised by a bottom-up and consensus-seeking approach (Klenk, 2013). A national steering group (*Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe*) was jointly established by the BMBF and the KMK at the beginning of 2007. This coordination group appointed a working group (*Arbeitskreis DQR*) which comprises stakeholders from higher education, school education, VET, social partners, public institutions from education and the labour market, as well as researchers and practitioners. Decisions are based on consensus and each of the members works closely with their respective constituent institutions and organisations.

The body in charge of implementation is the coordination point for the German qualifications framework (*Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle* (B-L-KS)), set up by a joint initiative of the federal government and the Länder. The B-L-KS which emerged from the former *Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe* also assumes the function of the national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF. It has six members, including representatives from BMBF, the Federal Ministry of

Economics and Energy, the KMK and the Conference of Ministers for Economics of the Länder. Its main role is to monitor allocation of qualifications to ensure consistency in the overall DQR structure.

The work of the B-L-KS (NCP) is supported by the appropriate units of the BMBF and the Secretariat of the KMK. The units collaborate in performing their tasks.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning pathways ⁽⁸⁾

Development of the NQF has also strengthened work on validation

Various arrangements permit full or partial recognition of informally or non-formally acquired competences. Validation of non-formal and informal learning occurs in all education sectors but with different, tailor-made approaches. Such validation also supports the transition from one education sector to another.

Legislation for validation of non-formal and informal learning is in place in VET. This includes the external students' examination under Paragraph 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act and Paragraph 37 (2) of the Crafts Code. These arrangements lead to award of a full qualification (equal to those formally acquired) in a recognised apprenticeship. Admission to the external exam is subject to specific employment requirements: this is usually 1.5 times the length of the formal programme or equally long periods of initial training in another training occupation, or if applicants can convincingly demonstrate that they have acquired vocational competence.

Similar to the external students' examination within IVET, admission to further training examinations in the context of, among others, the *Industriemeister* (industrial master) and *Handwerksmeister* (master craftsman) is also possible via validation. This means that access to the examination is granted by work experience only. Preparatory training for this examination is not compulsory. General education school leaving certificates can be also acquired through an external examination (*Schulfremdenprüfung*, *Externenprüfung*) in all Länder,

⁽⁸⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2016 update to the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al., 2016).

fulfilling the residence and minimum age requirements as well as evidence of appropriate examination preparation.

The Vocational Qualifications Recognition Act (BQFG), introduced in April 2012, provides individuals with the right to have their foreign-acquired qualifications matched to a German qualification by an appropriate authority. This act also includes, in Paragraph 14, other procedures for determining equivalence when no proofs for prior learning can be provided; this opens opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The act applies to initial vocational education and training (IVET) as well as further vocational education and training (CVET). The implementation and impact of the BQFG are evaluated regularly ⁽⁹⁾.

To complement these procedures with a systemic approach, the BMBF agreed with the umbrella organisations of the chambers to run the pilot project ValiKom ⁽¹⁰⁾ from 2015. ValiKom is considered as the reference project to set up a validation system in Germany, addressing adults who acquired skills and competences through work but lack a formal qualification and a certificate. The project takes into account both the commitment the German government states in its coalition treaty and the Council recommendation. However, it addresses not only low-skilled adults working in Germany but also employees from a variety of backgrounds who wish to access further training. Refugees with work experience who have no formal qualifications and are not targeted by the Recognition Act (BQFG) might also benefit from the validation procedure. The project builds explicitly on the unique role chambers have to play as suitable bodies due to the vocational training act (BBiG). In doing so, the project avoids setting up a parallel activity outside the regular VET system. Instead, the approach refers to the prevailing training regulations and occupational profiles and finally issues a certificate (*Gleichwertigkeitsfeststellung*) expressing the extent to which the skills demonstrated are equivalent to those normally gained under the vocational training act.

Two decisions of the KMK provide the basis for validation in higher education. The first refers to access to higher education for qualified workers and

⁽⁹⁾ BMBF (2016b). *Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2016 [Report on the Recognition Act 2016]*.

https://www.bmbf.de/pub/Bericht_zum_Anerkennungsgesetz_2016.pdf

⁽¹⁰⁾ ValiKom project:

<http://www.bildungsspiegel.de/news/weiterbildung-bildungspolitik/17-valikom-chancen-fuer-menschen-ohne-berufsabschluss>

has been in place since March 2009. People holding certain vocational qualifications, without a proper upper secondary qualification, can be admitted to higher education. The second refers to granting credits for competence acquired at work. According to these decisions, knowledge and skills acquired outside higher education can be recognised up to a maximum of 50% if content and level are equal to the equivalent in formal qualifications. Procedures to credit non-formal and informal learning were developed and tested in the *Transitions from VET to higher education* initiative (*Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung (ANKOM)*)⁽¹¹⁾.

There are also several initiatives below legislative level, in the form of projects or different stakeholder programmes. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB)) currently manages the project *Implementation of methods for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – requirements and possible courses of action*. In 2015, expert monitoring was put in place by the BIBB and the *Bertelsmann Stiftung*⁽¹²⁾ regarding expert opinion on opportunities and limitations of validation methods for recognising non-formal and informal learning⁽¹³⁾.

Further projects and initiatives directed towards auditing individual competence profiles, to define a career project or plan professional reorientation or training, are often (but not exclusively) initiated below legislative level. One of the most successful initiatives of this type is ProfilPASS, a system of counselling and documentation of learning outcomes based on biographical methods⁽¹⁴⁾.

There are different certificates and validation opportunities in the third sector that document voluntary engagement. *Kompetenznachweis Kultur* (Certificate of competence culture) documents competences acquired in artistic and cultural activities. The *Nachweis International* documents participation (Certificate of participation international), engagement (Certificate of engagement international) and competences (Certificate of competence international) acquired in

⁽¹¹⁾ The ANKOM initiative: <http://ankom.his.de/beschluesse>

⁽¹²⁾ The Bertelsmann Foundation: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/home/>

⁽¹³⁾ The monitoring stressed the need for stronger appreciation (valuing) of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. 70% of the experts support a nation-wide validation system. Current validation opportunities such as *Externenprüfung* are considered as insufficient by the experts (Velten and Herdin, 2016).

⁽¹⁴⁾ ProfilPASS-system: the feasibility study was conducted over 2002-03 while the system itself was implemented over 2003-07:
<http://www.profilpass.de/fuer-nutzer-innen/profilpass-system/>.

international youth work projects. Links to general education are so far not established, although strongly advocated by youth and youth workers. However, such validation results have been evaluated as very positively perceived by potential employers (Baumbast et al., 2012).

Qualifications from the non-formal sector have not yet been allocated to the DQR. An expert working group has developed recommendations on behalf of the German qualifications framework working group for linking learning outcomes of non-formal education to the DQR. DQR committees are currently examining the possibility of developing appropriate procedures for the non-formal sector.

NQF implementation

The DQR is fully operational. Key documents and responsibilities for its implementation have been agreed by main stakeholders and published:

- (a) the joint resolution of 1 May 2013 paved the way to full operation of the DQR ⁽¹⁵⁾.
- (b) a new DQR website and database was launched in mid-2014 ⁽¹⁶⁾;
- (c) the DQR manual was adopted ⁽¹⁷⁾. It describes responsibilities, procedures ⁽¹⁸⁾, standards and methods of qualification allocation. A list of allocated qualifications is attached. It will be updated continuously. A description of the procedure for allocating qualifications from non-formal learning contexts will be added when agreed.

Most qualifications from VET and higher education have been included in the framework. An important characteristic of DQR is that each qualification level should always be accessible via various education pathways. VET qualifications were allocated from levels 1 to 7. One example is allocation of the bachelor and master craftsman qualification to level 6, which shows that higher DQR levels are

⁽¹⁵⁾ See the joint resolution on the German qualifications framework for lifelong learning:
https://www.bmbf.de/files/Gemeinsamer_Beschluss_final_ohne_Unterschriften.pdf

⁽¹⁶⁾ DQR website and database: <http://www.dqr.de>. An extended version of the databased has been developed in an EU funded project from 2014 to 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁾ *Handbuch zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen* [Manual for the German qualifications framework]:
http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2013/13082_3_Handbuch_mit_nicht-barrierefreier_Anlage_MAM.pdf

⁽¹⁸⁾ See <http://www.dqr.de/content/2445.php>

open to qualifications from different education sectors and regarded as comparable ⁽¹⁹⁾. Qualifications from general education (including the general school leaving certificate, *Allgemeine Hochschulreife*) are not yet allocated and consequently not linked to the EQF. A decision on inclusion level has been postponed and is planned for 2017. Higher education levels and qualifications have been integrated into the DQR.

In 2016, 21 qualifications from regulated further training were allocated to the DQR. Currently, there are discussions on assigning remaining further training qualifications. Developing and implementing criteria and procedures to include the results of non-formal learning in the DQR by 2017 is also an important goal ⁽²⁰⁾.

The DQR is a non-regulatory framework and its integration into policies of different education sectors is an evolutionary process. First references to the DQR and its categories have already been made in regulatory instruments of the formal sector and in curricula of the non-formal sector, as in the new framework curricula for part-time vocational schools (*Berufsschule*) of the Länder. The DQR is also used in the academic sector for development of accreditation procedures. BMBF, with the Federal Institute for VET (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* (BIBB)), social partners and universities, carried out a project exploring possibilities of joint descriptions of learning outcomes and development of joint curricula basis on DQR level 5. Two subprojects analysed the level 5 qualifications 'IT specialist' and 'motor vehicle service technician' in comparison with higher education study programmes. The aim is to aid permeability between VET and higher education in both directions ⁽²¹⁾. Evaluation of the results continues. The BMBF has launched a study, supported by EU funding, on use of the DQR for main target groups: learners, workers, employers, education providers. First results are scheduled for mid-2017.

⁽¹⁹⁾ See <http://www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php>

⁽²⁰⁾ Cedefop (2015). *Survey on the sustainability and visibility of NQFs*.

⁽²¹⁾ See <https://www.bibb.de/de/25789.php>

Referencing to the EQF

The joint steering committee set up by the federal government and the Länder in 2007 is in charge of referencing. The referencing report was presented in December 2012 (BMBF and KMK, 2013).

Gradually, from January 2014, EQF and DQR levels are featuring on VET certificates, certificate supplements and higher education diploma supplements. DQR levels are also indicated in the qualification database ⁽²²⁾. For example, German master craftsperson certificates have indicated the NQF/EQF level since 2014. Like the bachelor degree, they are related to level 6. From an education and training policy perspective, this is considered a milestone ⁽²³⁾. Allocation to level and reference on certificates signal the high value and quality of this qualification. In Germany, VET qualifications are placed on nearly all NQF/EQF levels except level 8, with three-year apprenticeships leading to level 4.

Important lessons and future plans

Development of the DQR is embedded in a broader context of reforms to strengthen the outcome orientation of German education and training. It is also linked to initiatives to support permeability within VET and between VET and higher education, such as the ANKOM initiative, that involves stakeholders from VET and higher education to support recognition of learning outcomes.

Development of the DQR is also characterised by a comprehensive vision and coherent set of level descriptors, spanning all levels of education and training. This approach makes it possible to identify and understand better the similarities and differences between qualifications in different areas of education and training. A permeable system, with better horizontal and vertical progression possibilities, is at the heart of DQR developments, as is parity of esteem between VET and general education and efforts to include non-formal and informal learning.

NQF development and implementation is also characterised by a strong and broad involvement of stakeholders from all subsystems of education and training

⁽²²⁾ See <https://www.dqr.de/content/2316.php#qs-result>

⁽²³⁾ See the relevant press release of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research: <http://www.bmbf.de/press/3574.php>

(general education, school and work-based VET, higher education), and from the labour market, ministries and Länder.

Stakeholders also agree that alignment of qualifications within German education to reference levels of the DQR should not replace the existing system of access. Achieving a DQR reference level does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level. Achievement of a reference level has also not been considered in conjunction with implications for collective wage bargaining and the Law on Remuneration (DQR 2011, pp. 5-6).

The five-year implementation phase of the DQR ends in 2017. It is expected that all main qualifications of the formal sector will be allocated by that time. The inclusion of qualifications outside the formal sector will take longer.

Further source of information

German qualifications framework webpage: <http://www.dqr.de>

German national qualifications framework (DQR)

NQF levels	Qualifications	EQF levels
8	Doctoral studies	8
7	Master, strategic IT professional (certified)* Strategischer IT Professional (<i>Geprüfter</i>), other further vocational training qualifications according to Vocational Training Act and Handicraft Code (level 7)	7
6	Bachelor, commercial specialist (certified) (<i>Fachkaufmann (Geprüfter)</i>), business management specialist (certified) (<i>Fachwirt (Geprüfter)</i>), master craftsman (certified), (<i>Meister (Geprüfter)</i>), operative IT professional (certified)* (Operativer IT Professional (<i>Geprüfter</i>)), <i>Fachschule</i> (State-certified...), <i>Fachschule (Staatlich Geprüfter...)</i> , other further vocational training qualifications according to Vocational Training Act and Handicraft Code (level 6)	6
5	IT specialist (certified) (<i>IT-Spezialist (Zertifizierter)</i>), service technician (certified)* (<i>Service-techniker (Geprüfter)</i>)	5
4	Dual VET (three-year and three-and-a-half-year training courses), full-time vocational school (assistant occupations) (<i>Berufsfachschule</i>), full vocational qualification (full-time vocational school) (<i>Berufsfachschule</i>)	4
3	Dual VET (two-year training courses), full-time vocational school (general education school leaving certificate obtained on completion of grade 10 at <i>Realschule</i> or, under certain circumstances, at other lower secondary school types) (<i>Berufsfachschule (Mittlerer Schulabschluss)</i>)	3
2	Vocational training preparation (<i>Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung</i>), employment agency measures (<i>Maßnahmen der Arbeitsagentur</i>), year of prevocational training (<i>Berufsvorbereitungsjahr</i>), introductory training for young people (<i>Einstiegsqualifizierung</i>), full-time vocational school (<i>Berufsfachschule</i>), basic vocational training, (<i>Berufliche Grundbildung</i>)	2
1	Vocational training preparation (<i>Berufsausbildungsvorbereitung</i>), employment agency measures (vocational preparation schemes) (<i>Maßnahmen der Arbeitsagentur (Berufsvorbereitende Bildungsmaßnahmen)</i>), year of prevocational training (<i>Berufsvorbereitungsjahr</i>)	1

(*) The DQR working group agreed that additional further vocational training qualifications should be allocated in accordance with the procedures described in the DQR manual.

Source: German EQF referencing report (BMBF and KMK., 2013): EQF NCP.

List of abbreviations

ANKOM	<i>Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung</i> [transitions from vocational high school education]
BIBB	Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung [Federal Institute for VET]
B-L-KS	<i>Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle</i> [national coordination point]
BMBF	<i>Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung</i> [Federal Ministry of Education and Research]
BQFG	Vocational Qualifications Assessment Law
DQR	<i>Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen</i> [German qualifications framework for lifelong learning]
IT	information technology
KMK	<i>Kultusministerk Konferenz</i> [Standing Conference of the Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder]
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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