

MODULE 4

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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1. The Trends Towards Regional Frameworks

In the EU Member States and in the European Neighborhood, much of the impetus for developing national frameworks has come from the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) adopted by EU Member States in 2008 and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, part of the Bologna process, adopted in 2005. EU Member States and countries wanting to join the Union see NQFs as a practicable way to manage their diverse national qualifications systems and to link them to the EQF. Indeed, most ETF partner countries have opted for an 8-level NQF, modelled on the EQF and based on learning outcomes. This applies most strongly to those countries which are candidates or potential candidates to enter the EU but also applies to those which will not be EU States.

The EQF also exercises a particular influence on other regional or transnational frameworks. Regional initiatives such as the Southern African Development Community Framework, the Caribbean Qualifications Framework, the Southern Pacific Register, the Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Small States of the Commonwealth, the GCC initiative for a Qualifications Framework for the Gulf Countries and the debate on the designated the ASEAN Qualifications Framework are influenced by the EQF (a finding of the ETF study published in 2010, “Transnational Qualifications Frameworks”), and some are seeking to link to the EQF. In some cases, individual countries are actively pursuing links with the EQF - New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United Arab Emirates are examples.

The EQF is an example of a QF whose effect has been to encourage (even if this was not intentional in its design) convergence of systems – many new-generation NQFs resemble each other. They often have 8 levels, are lifelong learning in scope and, fundamentally, based on a foundation of levels descriptors written in learning outcomes. Other TQFs more directly promote harmonisation, and in some, such as the Caribbean Qualifications Framework, common qualifications are developed. We can probably expect greater convergence, partially pushed by globalisation and closer international cooperation. TQFs are both responses to globalisation and themselves globalising instruments.

As already mentioned, a rapidly emerging development is the cooperation in many world regions to, in turn, link these national frameworks to each other on a transna-

tional basis. The EQF is perhaps the best-known Transnational Qualifications Framework (“TQF”), or regional framework, but not the only one, as illustrated by the list in box 5:

Box 5: Transnational frameworks

- European Qualification Framework.
- Qualification Framework for the Countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council
- Southern African Development Community (SADC) Framework
- The Caribbean Qualification Framework
- The Southern Pacific Register
- The Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Small States of the Commonwealth
- The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Framework
- East African Community
- South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

2. European Qualification Framework: Overview

Strategic Context: Education and Training 2020 “Education and Training 2020” (ET 2020) is a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training that builds on its predecessor, the “Education and Training 2010” (ET 2010) work programme. It provides common strategic objectives for Member States, including a set of principles for achieving these objectives, as well as common working methods with priority areas for each periodic work cycle.

The EQF is unfolding in this strategic framework that provides 4 common strategic objectives for Member States, including a set of principles, common working methods and priority areas:

- making lifelong learning and mobility a reality (linked to the EQF)
- improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship

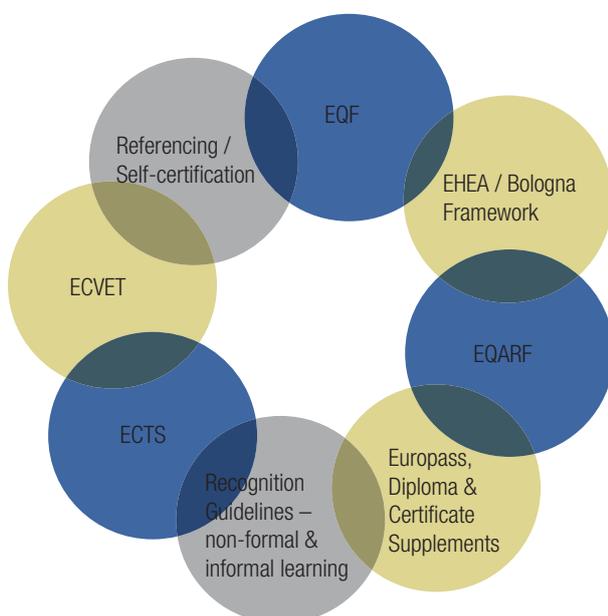
The following EU benchmarks for 2020 have been set for education:

- At least 95% of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education;
- fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds should be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;
- the rate of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 should be below 10%;
- at least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education;
- at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning;
- at least 20% of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad;
- the share of employed graduates (aged 20-34 with at least upper secondary education attainment and having left education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%.

Progress on these benchmarks is assessed in each EU country through a yearly country analysis, with the EU also providing recommendations. Drawing on the conclusions from the stocktaking, a 2015 Joint Report will identify key priority areas and concrete issues for future work at the European level.

The EQF is one of several tools developed by the EC in the area of education and training to achieve these common goals, as represented in the figure below.

Figure 10: Tools supporting the ET 20120 strategy



EHEA: European Higher Education Area

EQF: European Qualification Framework

ECVET: European Credit in Vocational Education and Training (See Chapter 5)

ECTS: The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver study programmes and award higher education qualifications. The use of ECTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes study programmes and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the recognition of qualifications.

EQARF: European Higher Education Quality Assurance Register

EUROPASS: It includes five documents to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe:

- Two documents freely accessible, completed by European citizens: the Curriculum Vitae and the Language passport (a self-assessment tool for language skills and qualifications).
- Three documents issued by education and training authorities: the Europass Mobility records the knowledge and skills acquired in another European country; the Certificate Supplement describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of vocational education and training certificates; the Diploma Supplement describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of higher education degrees (see below).

EQAVET: The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) is a reference instrument designed to help EU countries promote and monitor the continuous improvement of their vocational education and training systems on the basis of commonly agreed references. The framework should not only contribute to quality improvement in VET but also, by building mutual trust between the VET systems, make it easier for a country to accept and recognise the skills and competencies acquired by learners in different countries and learning environments. EU countries use the framework to improve their quality assurance systems in a way that involves all relevant stakeholders. This includes:

- setting up national reference points for quality assurance;
- actively participating in the relevant European-level network;

- developing a national approach aimed at improving quality assurance systems and making the best possible use of the framework.

EQAVET is a voluntary system to be used by public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance. Particularly relevant here, the European QA for VET includes a 4-phase cycle - planning, implementation, assessment and review, with quality criteria and indicative descriptors for each phase and common quantitative and qualitative indicators for assessing targets, methods, procedures and training results. EQAVET is fostering a culture of quality improvement and responsibility at all levels.

The fundamental principles underpinning validation of learning are as follow:

- Validation must be voluntary.
- The privacy of individuals should be respected.
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed.
- Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals.
- Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.
- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation.
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

The work on the Framework started in 2004 at the behest of the Member States. Initial proposals were developed by an expert group. The 3 descriptors defining the 8 levels of the EQF were developed between 2003 and 2008 in an extensive process building on research and widespread consultation involving experts and policy makers from all countries involved. The EQF was adopted in 2008.

EQF is in essence a common European reference framework to be used as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. Because Europe's education and training systems are so diverse, a shift to learning outcomes is necessary to make comparison and cooperation possible. The levels are described in terms of learning outcomes. In the EQF a learning outcome is defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. This means a change from a focus on inputs "such as length of study" or types of provider institution.

The learning outcomes which define the reference levels are specified in three "categories": knowledge, skills and competence. This signals that qualifications capture a broad scope of learning outcomes - in different combinations. Qualifications may include theoretical knowledge, practical and technical skills, and social competences where the ability to work with others will be crucial.

There are two principal aims to the EQF instrument:

- to promote citizens' mobility between countries
- to facilitate their lifelong learning

The EQF has 8 reference levels which "span the full scale of qualifications from basic to advanced". It "encompasses" general, vocational and academic education and training PLUS it "addresses" qualifications acquired in initial and continuing education and training.

The basic structure of the EQF descriptors is shown below:

Knowledge	Skills	Competence
Factual	Cognitive	Autonomy
Theoretical	Practical	Responsibility

- Level 1 may be thought of as receding workplace competence
- Levels 1-8 are concerned with "work or study"
- Levels 5-8 are "comparable" with the descriptors for Higher Education

Table 5: Examples of EQF levels

Lev.	Knowledge	skills	competence
1	basic general knowledge	basic skills to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change + supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
3	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts + take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.

An important function of learning outcomes-based level descriptors is to increase the transparency of qualifications in the labour market. This was one of the objectives pursued by the EQF, and is also visible in work at national level. It is possible to see the emphasis on transversal skills and competences and a holistic competence approach as linked to this need. It has been argued that the EQF level descriptors have a number of weaknesses, reducing their ability to act as ‘mirror of the world of work’. Particular concern is expressed over the ability of the descriptors to differentiate between levels of competence, pointing to inconsistencies in the use of terms (how to express a degree of complexity, the articulation of change and predictability/unpredictability, the role of context, etc.).

3. EQF Referencing Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF

The EQF Recommendation invites countries to refer their national qualifications levels to the EQF. To ensure that the referencing process is designed in such a way that

it can be understood and trusted by stakeholders in all countries involved, the EQF Advisory Group has agreed on a set of criteria and procedures to guide this process. In addition to listing the 10 criteria/procedures agreed by the EQF Advisory Group, this note contains a brief explanatory part clarifying context and intentions. Further clarification will be brought by debate within the EQF Advisory Group, based on work by its thematic subgroups and on the experience gathered through the practice of referencing. The 10 criteria have been developed on the basis of the criteria and processes used in the self-certification process for the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. They were adopted by the EQF Advisory group in 2009.

In the recommendation, the referencing process concerns the Member States and is limited to them. The success of the EQF around the world has encouraged a number of non-EU countries, if not to be part of the process of referencing, in any case to ask for an alignment of their qualifications framework. Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand are in this case. These are countries with a mature framework with whom the technical dialogue is not only possible but mutually enriching. But it will take a new Recommendation to allow the referencing process as such to be extended to non-EU countries.

Action by Member States (MS)

In order to carry out the referencing process, the MS had to establish National Coordination Points (NCP). The NCP would be responsible for relating national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework. The initial timeline was 2010 but it was extended. The NCP would use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications. The MS would have to include EQF levels in all new qualification certificates, diplomas and “Europass” documents and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the common European principles. In order to be referenced against the EQF, the Member States need to present a referencing report to the EQF Advisory dealing with the 10 criteria adopted in 2012.

Action by the Commission

The EC has established a European Qualifications Framework advisory group and promote close links between the European Qualifications Framework and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training. The EC role is one of facilitating and

fostering action at EU level as it is not a decision making body in terms of education in training.

The EQF referencing process is a process by which national authorities responsible for qualifications systems, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between NQF and the EQF. The remit of the EQF Advisory Group is to assist the Commission in the implementation of the EQF pooling the knowledge of the E&T 2010 countries, social partners and Commission and to follow up the Council recommendation on the validation of non formal and informal learning. There are 48 members:

- 28 representatives of EU Member states
- 12 pan-European organisations
- 8 representatives of candidate countries / other states

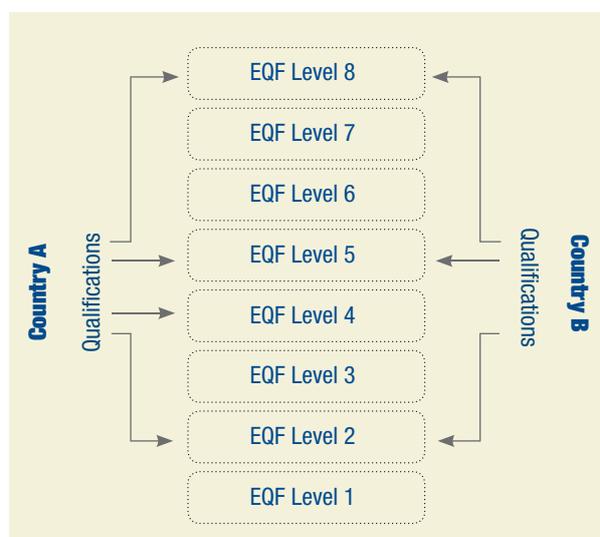
There are also criteria and procedures for self-certification against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area: (EHEA)

Overall, the referencing process has been running smoothly, illustrating that countries have taken on board the key elements of the EQF descriptors. So, while the German level descriptors, for example, are based on a different concept of competence from the EQF descrip-

tors, it is still possible to identify linkages and compare levels. It is interesting to note that no country has argued that the use of ‘responsibility’ and ‘autonomy’ by the EQF is irrelevant or wrong; the argument is rather that these categories are insufficient to reflect fully national and international reality.

The following figure shows how the European Qualifications Framework is used as a reference system. The referencing process created many rich discussions within and between countries on how relevant were the domains (descriptors) for them.

Figure 11: EQF as reference system



Box 6: The debate on learning outcomes and European descriptors (Source CEDEFOP).

With regard to the learning outcomes, the EU countries which have undergone the process of referencing can be divided into 3 categories

Aligning with the EQF descriptors

“A first group of countries use the EQF descriptors directly or align closely to them: Estonia, Austria and Portugal are examples of this. Most of these countries have, however, prepared additional explanatory tables or guides with more detailed level descriptors in order to be able to use the frameworks. Estonia has prepared detailed level descriptors for four sub-frameworks (higher education, general education, vocational education and training and occupational qualifications). Portugal has drafted guidelines (‘Understanding the NQF’) in which a more detailed and fine-tuned description of knowledge, skills, attitudes and context is provided. The approach is exemplified by ‘knowledge’ where a distinction is made between ‘depth of knowledge’¹⁷, ‘understanding and critical thinking’¹⁸. The skills and know-how domain is characterised by depth, breadth and purpose. The third column covers attitudes (defined as autonomy and responsibility). The context column (defining context of

application, predictability and complexity) has been added. The frameworks of Croatia, Greece, Malta, and Slovakia are also closely aligned to the EQF descriptors, starting from the three main pillars of knowledge, skills and competence and only introducing limited changes to the detailed descriptors. For instance, Croatia has emphasised social skills besides cognitive and practical skills.

Broadening of the EQF descriptors

A second group of countries is influenced by the EQF descriptors, but has broaden and (partly) reprofiled the ‘skills’ and the ‘competence’ columns. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Romania and Sweden are examples. All the countries in this category refer to ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’ but have mostly renamed the third ‘competence’ column. The Netherlands refers to ‘responsibility and independence’, Norway to ‘general competence’, Poland to ‘social competence’ and Romania to ‘transversal competences’. While all these countries include autonomy and responsibility in their interpretation of ‘competence’, they generally tend to incorporate additional transversal skills and competences like critical thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship,

learning to learn, communication and cooperation. Many countries, for instance Finland and Iceland, have made an effort to integrate the EU key competences¹⁹ in their level descriptors: the same is true of the Maltese and Norwegian NQFs. The inclusion of the term 'evaluation' in the Finnish and Polish frameworks underlines that individuals must be able to reflect on own knowledge, skills and competences and also be able to judge how to improve. In Latvia the terms 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'assessment' point in the same direction. Poland uses the term 'social competences' instead of 'competence': this is understood as 'identity' (participation, responsibility, models of conduct), 'cooperation' (including team work, leadership, and conditions) and 'responsibility' (which includes individual and team actions, consequences and evaluation). It is interesting to note that Ireland, having defined level descriptors prior to the EQF, uses four strands to define competence: context, role, learning to learn and insight.

This redefinition of the competence descriptors can be interpreted as an implicit criticism of weaknesses in the original EQF design, as described above. However, the redefinition must also be seen as an effort to reflect national objectives and priorities.

Challenging the EQF descriptors

The second group of countries has paid particular attention to the concept of 'competence' and the question of how to translate this into operational level descriptors. This focus is even stronger in a third group where 'competence' is used as an overarching concept, significantly influencing the way learning outcomes are defined and described. Examples of countries in this group are Belgium (Dutch, French as well as German speaking regions), Germany, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland. All these countries emphasise the holistic character of the term 'competence'. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are not 'atomised' entities which can be judged in isolation from each other; individuals have to combine and apply them in the concrete contexts provided by work and learning. The ability of an individual to act in a self-directed way is seen

as crucial to the understanding of 'competence' and allows differentiation between levels of competence. Méhaut and Winch (2012, p. 376)²¹ state that competence '... entails a capacity for independent action that goes far beyond positioning in a managerial hierarchy.' It focuses on the ability of a person to use knowledge, skills, attitudes and other personal, social and/or methodological abilities – in a self-directed way – in work and study situations and to deal with complexity, unpredictability and change.

The practical implication of this perspective is well illustrated by the German qualification framework where the term 'Handlungskompetenz' (action competence) is understood as 'the ability and readiness of the individual to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences and conduct himself or herself in a considered and individually and socially responsible manner.' (Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung und der Kultusministerkonferenz, 2011, p. 3)²². Consequently, the German level descriptors differentiate between professional and personal competence and show how knowledge (of varying depth and breadth), skills (instrumental and systematic, linked to judgement), social competence (communication, teamwork, leadership and involvement) and autonomy (autonomous responsibility, learning and reflectiveness) come together in defining the overall competence of the individual.

In the Netherlands the competence concept is also understood as integrative, aiming to cover a wide range of human abilities to cope with complex tasks. According to Westerhuis (2011, p. 76)²³, (the term) 'Integrative stands for the fact that (a) competences are multidimensional and (b) competent performance is only possible if all dimensions are addressed accordingly to a set of standards.' The Belgian-Flemish framework defines competence as 'the ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes when performing social activities, and integrate these into one's actions'²⁴. The Flemish descriptors introduce context as separate, underlining that knowledge and skills have to be applied in life, work or study to count as competence"

4. Irish Referencing Report Findings

Process

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) established a steering committee comprising Qualification and curriculum bodies and 3 international experts. The Draft report was discussed with a wide group of stakeholders, including providers and learners, ministry departments and social partners. The Final report was then prepared and agreed among national quality assurance bodies and the Ministry of Education and Science.

There are different purposes between national frameworks and regional framework, since the INQF designed before the creation of the EQF, so national purposes was more important than comparability. Yet, the Irish acknowledge similarities in terms of their architecture, including the categorisations of knowledge, skill and competence, and a common understandings of learning outcomes. The Irish framework was among the first to be referenced to the EQF and to recognize a clear rationale for comparing the sets of Levels in NQF and EQF.

Box 7: Structure of the Irish referencing report

1. Part 1 Introduction
Process on Referring the Irish NQF to the EQF
2. The Irish NQF and its Qualifications in Context
 - 2.1. General Education
 - 2.2. Further Education and Training
 - 2.3. Higher Education and Training
3. Criteria and Procedures to Referencing the NQF to the EQF
 - 3.1. The EQF's Advisory Group Criteria and Procedures
 - 3.2. The Irish Responses to the Criteria and Procedures
4. Matters Arising from the EQF Referencing Exercise
5. Conclusions
6. Annexes
 - 6.1. Steering Committee Members
 - 6.2. Establishing the Correspondence between the Qualifications Levels in the Irish NQF and the EQF

Appendices

1. Comparison of Irish Levels Indicators and EQF Levels
2. Comparison of threshold between levels in Irish NQF Levels Indicators and EQF Levels Descriptors

INFQ and EQF share core design features.

- They are comprehensive and integrated
- They are neutral in terms of formal/non-formal/informal learning
- NFQ level indicators and EQF level descriptors read across all strands of learning outcomes – the strands interrelate
- In both Frameworks the outcomes for a given level build on and subsume the outcomes of the Levels beneath.
- Key words or phrases are introduced as “threshold or distinguishing factors in the description of learning outcomes at each level.

5. Building on the Referencing Process

Some lessons have been gained from the on-going referencing processes involving all European countries. As analysed in the global Inventory, there seems to be different attitudes towards the EQF and in particular towards the learning outcomes which are sometimes challenged. This redefinition of the competence descriptors can be interpreted as an implicit criticism of weaknesses in the original EQF design but also as an effort to reflect national objectives and priorities. The level descriptors of the early national qualifications frameworks were designed to serve national purposes. Their task was to show how qualifications can be differentiated in terms of complexity

and expected outcomes, as well as how they relate to each other. In contrast, the level descriptors of the new NQFs have, from the outset, been designed to combine national relevance with international comparability; the three approaches outlined signal different ways to approach this balancing act. The first group of countries above, aligning their national level descriptors to the EQF, emphasises international comparability as an ultimate goal, but runs the risk of limited national relevance.

The EQF descriptors – on purpose using a general language – may not be able to capture the complexities of a national qualification system. This limitation is illustrated by the fact that countries like Portugal and Croatia have developed lengthy guidelines to support the use and interpretation of the national levels. The second group of countries, broadening descriptors to include transversal skills and competences, does this to strengthen the national relevance of descriptors and to promote particular policies; the inclusion of key competences in the Finnish and Icelandic descriptors exemplifies this last aspect. The third group of countries insisting on a holistic approach, largely expresses national traditions, concepts and values and may fear that the current use of learning outcomes - in particular the distinction between knowledge, skills and competence - may be applied in a way which leads to a ‘narrowing down’ of education and training and lifelong learning strategies. This is an important point as it underlines that learning outcomes and qualifications are not merely technical constructs but must be understood in a social and political context as well.

The referencing process reveals common tasks to be carried out by EU countries with regards to their NQF:

- managing their qualifications frameworks: what is and what is not acceptable as a qualification? are partial qualifications to be included in the register, if there is one? are new qualification types necessary to clarify the difference of levels or categories of qualifications?
- establishing more progression within the NQF. Is the framework allow vertical and horizontal mobility. How much integration is possible.
- communicating about qualifications: is the language of learning (learning outcomes, assessment, quality assurance) being disseminated or does it remain the language of a few.
- evaluating how learning outcomes are understood and used in the framework: learning outcomes should not be treated as merely technical con-

structs, but need to reflect and respect the social and institutional contexts they are operating within. If learning outcomes are formulated in too narrow and restricted ways, they can limit rather than broaden expectations towards learners.

- explaining and using qualification levels in different contexts: if learning outcomes are used differently between institutions, sectors and countries, their ability to strengthen transparency and aid comparison is weakened.
- extending the forms of recognition of qualifications
- securing the involvement and commitment of stakeholders
- establishing quality assurance systems which are the basis of trust between countries

6. SKYPE SESSION

The European Qualifications Framework Experience (Aileen Ponton)

- a. EQF descriptors
- b. Current reflections on the use of EQF outside Europe
- c. The Scottish experience

a. EQF Learning Descriptors

They are Knowledge (Theoretical or Factual), skills (cognitive and practical) and Competence (Responsibility and Autonomy).

Box 8: The Scottish and Indian levels descriptors

SCQF LD	INDIA LD
Knowledge and Understanding	Process required
Practice/applied Knowledge	Professional knowledge
Generic Cognitive Skills	Professional skills
Communications/ICT/Numeracy	Core skill
Autonomy/Working With Others	Responsibility

EQF Definition

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Using_learning_outcomes.pdf

In the broadest sense, the use of learning outcomes has a technical purpose, for example, to make existing standards (expectations in terms of knowledge, skills and

wider competence) clearer than is currently the case. This can facilitate the involvement and feedback of labour market stakeholders regarding the relevance of the qualifications standards for the labour market.

Learning Outcomes features:

- Statements of what a learner can be expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of a learning experience.
- Student learning outcomes are properly defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences.
- Learning outcomes are statements that specify what a learner will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or attitudes.
- Learning outcomes (are) specific measurable achievements
- Reflections on the use of EQF for non- EU countries

EQF REFERENCING CRITERIA were developed to broadly compare with the self assessment process for Bologna and higher education. They have not changed but the guidance in working with them has evolved. What follows is a draft process for third countries to use them to “align” or “benchmark” as part of a pilot project

b. Current reflections on the use of EQF outside Europe

Current EQF criterion

1. **The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities. In addition the structure of the education and training system is described**

Proposed amplification guidance

WHAT

The Government of the country should set out clearly which organisations have responsibility for the develop-

ment and maintenance of the QF and for the quality assurance associated with it.

The essential structure of the system covering ages, stages and pathways of education and training, including formal, non-formal and informal learning should be described in outline. Linkages between these pathways and major progressions should be clear. If possible some general statistics should be included.

WHY

This is so that the EQF AG can see that there is political will and support and can also understand the roles and responsibilities of the main actors. Secondly the addition is so that a clear understanding of the education system and its structures is provided.

2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

WHAT

Technical work needs to be undertaken to show the alignment of the levels of the QF to the EQF.

WHY

This is the fundamental basis for referencing. It will demonstrate to the AG that firstly the QF has clear and well written level descriptors and it also indicates a good technical understanding of what level descriptors can and cannot do. It needs to also demonstrate and understanding of the purpose of the EQF level descriptors. Finally it allows a comparison to be made of each level within the QF which helps understanding of qualifications and how they fit

3. The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems

WHAT

The qualifications within the QF must use learning outcomes. Where the use of learning outcomes is not well established the policy and the implementation plan for full use of LOs must be made clear.

WHY

It has been agreed as one of the key principles of the EQF that the use of learning outcomes supports many other measures such as assessment, mutual trust, links to informal and non-formal learning, mobility.

WHAT

Where credit and recognition systems exist the QF and its qualifications must demonstrate how it links to and uses systems for credit and for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Where these do not exist, the plans for further work must be made clear. Given the fact that Member states have used ECTS and ECVET to underpin this, in which measure does the Third Country need to make reference to this and explain similarities and differences to this approach?

WHY

The EC has produced a later recommendation on the Recognition of Informal and Non Formal learning and so all Member States countries are considering how they will meet this recommendation. In that spirit therefore it is important that third countries do so as well. If credit is used it is important to understand how it fits with individual qualifications and with the QF as a whole.

4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent

WHAT

The country needs to explain in some detail how qualifications get into the Framework. This explanation needs to be detailed and include relevant criteria, rules and associated guidance. It also needs to be explicit about whether the same rules are used for all types of qualification.

WHY

For mutual trust to exist countries need to see and understand the rules, criteria and methodology used to determine the level of a qualification and place it in the QF.

5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).

WHAT

The quality assurance processes which underpin each category of qualification in the Framework needs to be clearly explained along with an explanation of the quality assurance associated with the overall QF.

WHY

Again in order to support mutual trust Member States need to understand what processes are in place to ensure quality of each type of qualification as well as the Framework. It is also important to know which organisations perform that role and how these organisations relate to one another. Given the EQAVET recommendation the criterion asks that this explanation relates to those principles. However the country will wish to explain its own principles.

- 6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.**

WHAT

The final report of the referencing needs to include confirmation from those relevant quality assurance bodies that the explanation of their role and the description of their processes is correct. They also need to confirm their agreement to the referencing outcomes overall.

WHY

This is needed to support mutual trust and to give a formal agreement from the quality assurance bodies.

- 7. The referencing process shall involve international experts.**

WHAT

The referencing process not only technical work should involve a Technical Working Group made up of EU Member States plus the Commission plus Cedefop.

WHY

This will allow for mutual information sharing, discussion of technical detail, analysis of outcomes and reporting to the EQF AG

At this stage, there is yet no final referencing report.

- 8. The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.**

WHAT

The final report needs to address all of the above points, needs to demonstrate the buy in and agreement of key actors and social partners and should be produced in a user friendly format to aid understanding by other countries. It needs to include information on the consultation processes used and agreement reached.

WHY

Only those members of the Technical Working Group will have been involved all the way through the process. For the majority of members of the EQF AG it will be the written report, supplemented by questioning and discussion, that they will rely on to help them reaching a decision.

Scottish Referencing Process

SCOTLAND Contracted with an expert consultant to undertake technical referencing in April 2008. We established a Steering Group comprising main stakeholders and including 2 international experts in June 2008 who raised awareness of pending consultation August 2008. We issued final referencing report and consultation document to key groups and individuals in early September 2008 and put a final referencing report and consultation on web for open consultation in early September 2008. The Consultation closed end November 2008. A Quality Assurance digest was prepared October 2008 – January 2009 and discussed by Steering Group in February 2009 along with final report structure. The final report was published in July 2009. We are revisiting the process and content in light of 6 years of reports n 2015.

CHALLENGES experiences in the process are several

- Scope and size of consultation
- Weighting of responses
- Co-ordination across the UK
- Concerns in Scotland re lowest level of EQF and messages for learners

- Communication of NQF
- Links to sectoral frameworks
- Potential for overtrading/misunderstanding

CURRENT POSITION- the SCQF Database now shows SCQF and EQF levels for all programmes. Scotland is contributing to the dialogue around third country alignment – technical expert for Australia – but this is early days. We are also contributing to the work looking at international or “stateless” qualifications. We provided expert support to Poland, Belgium, Estonia. Scotland has signed a MoU with Hong Kong and with Bahrain.

FURTHER READING

- EQF Recommendation 2008
- Global Inventory of Regional And National Qualifications Frameworks, 2015 Or
- Mehaut, P and Winch, C, 2012, the European Qualification Framework: Skills Competences or Knowledge European Educational Research Journal, vol 11, n° 3