

GLOSSARY

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

Definitions

For the purposes of the Recommendation, the **definitions** which apply are the following:

- (a) ‘**qualification**’ means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- (b) ‘**national qualifications system**’ means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework;
- (c) ‘**national qualifications framework**’ means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;
- (d) ‘**sector**’ means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology;
- (e) ‘**international sectoral organisation**’ means an association of national organisations, including, for example, employers and professional bodies, which represents the interests of national sectors;
- (f) ‘**learning outcomes**’ means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- (g) ‘**knowledge**’ means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- (h) ‘**skills**’ means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);

(i) '**competence**' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

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THE CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR AN EQF

A successful development and implementation of an EQF requires a shared understanding of certain key terms. The following definitions of learning and learning outcomes, qualifications, competences, and framework(s) are based on the work of OECD, CEDEFOP and other international organisations and takes into account developments under the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. The concepts have been adjusted to the specific purpose of developing a European meta-framework for qualifications.

Learning and Learning outcomes

The key purpose of an EQF is to support lifelong learning and to make sure that the outcomes of learning are properly valued and used. CEDEFOP provides the following definition of learning:

Learning is a cumulative process where individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and wider competences. This process takes place informally, for example through leisure activities, and in formal learning settings which include the workplace.

The term *learning outcome* is an essential part of ongoing efforts at national, regional and sector level to reform education and training systems. This is exemplified in vocational education and training where a number of European countries have introduced performance-based systems referring to learning outcomes. The same tendency can be found in higher education where learning outcomes are considered as essential elements of ongoing reforms. Finally, many of the efforts to develop and establish sector-based

Learning outcomes can be formulated for a number of purposes; in relation to individual courses, units, modules and programmes. They may furthermore be used by national authorities to define entire qualifications – sometimes structured within or linked to qualifications frameworks and systems. International bodies may, finally, use learning outcomes for the purposes of transparency, comparability, credit transfer and recognition.

Qualifications (and qualification frameworks) use learning outcomes as building blocks. In this context, the following definition is used:

The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.

Competence

Based on the examination of published literature from France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States of America, the following composite definition of competence is offered.

Competence includes:

- i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially;*
- ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity;*
- iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and*
- iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.*

The concept is thus used in an integrative manner; as an expression of the ability of individuals to combine – in a self-directed way, tacitly or explicitly and in a particular context – the different elements of knowledge and skills they possess. The aspect of self-direction is critical to the concept as this provides a basis for distinguishing between different levels of competence.

Acquiring a certain level of competence can be seen as the ability of an individual to use and combine his or her knowledge, skills and wider competences according to the varying requirements posed by a particular context, a situation or a problem. Put another way, the ability of an individual to deal with complexity, unpredictability and change defines/determines his or her level of competence. This understanding of competences will be reflected in the EQF reference levels described in this document where a distinction will be made between knowledge (reflecting element (i) of the above definition), skills (reflecting element (ii) of the above definition and, finally, wider competences (reflecting elements (iii) and (iv) of the above definition).

Qualifications

The term *qualification* is critical to an EQF and must be defined in a way that accommodates as far as possible existing common understandings. The following definition, based on work done by the OECD, is suggested:

A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual's learning has reached a specified standard of knowledge, skills and wider competences. The standard of learning outcomes is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through a programme of study and/or work place experience. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade.

Principally, qualifications are based on the authority of national education and training authorities. We can increasingly observe, however, that institutions and associations outside the context of national qualification policies claim the right to authorise learning outcomes.

An EQF must take this tendency into account in order to facilitate the linkages between national and sectoral qualifications frameworks and systems.

Qualifications framework

Qualification frameworks operating at national, regional or sectoral level can take many forms and this term also requires common understanding. Current OECD work provides the following definition:

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors.

The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area.

Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners.

All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

Meta-framework

A meta-framework – like an EQF-maintains the function of an organising system that enables users to see clearly how qualifications embedded in different national and sectoral systems relate to one another. It does this through a structure of common reference levels of learning outcomes.

However it does not carry the functions of detailed equating of specific qualifications one to another or any of the regulatory, legal, wage bargaining and quality assurance functions that are often deemed necessary at national or sectoral level.

This means that a meta-framework can look quite different to the common qualifications frameworks. We suggest the following definition:

A meta-framework can be understood as a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework.

The meta-framework aims to create confidence and trust in relating qualifications across countries and sectors by defining principles for the ways quality assurance processes, guidance and information and mechanisms for credit transfer and accumulation can operate so that the transparency necessary at national and sectoral levels can also be available internationally.