Developing a RQF - the experience of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning
Overview & Key Questions

1. Why was the EQF developed?

2. How was the EQF developed?

3. How is the EQF implemented?

4. Next steps of EQF development and implementation

5. Lessons for other RQFs
Why was the EQF developed?
What do RQFs want to achieve?

Support NQF developments (sharing experience)

Quality assurance for mutually trusted qualifications

Workers & learners mobility migration

Transparency, Comparability & Harmonisation
EU strategic orientations 2000-2010-2020

✓ Lifelong learning and mobility should be possible and accessible to all

✓ Improved quality and efficiency of education and training

✓ Equal opportunities, social cohesion and active citizenship

✓ Enhanced creativity and innovation, including encouraging more entrepreneurial learners, students, adults at all levels of education and training
EQF and Lisbon process 2000-2010

European countries to increase competitiveness of their workforce globally and promote inclusiveness.

Diversity of education & training systems in Europe

Transnational trust, enable the exchange of qualifications internationally

European Qualifications Framework
EQF a voluntary Regional Qualifications Framework

- Education primarily competence of EU Member States
- EU countries have diverse qualification and education systems
- EQF is a tool for transparency, comparability and portability of people’s qualifications in Europe
- The EQF is a reference framework linking different qualification systems based on learning outcomes

Recommendations rather than Directives

- Recommendations are not binding but voluntary actions of EU Member States to improve cooperation
- Recommendations EQF of 2008- reviewed in 2017
- Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal Informal Learning 2012
In the 2008 EQF Recommendation Member States were invited to

*relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the EQF levels, and, where appropriate, by developing NQFs in accordance with national legislation and practice.*
What is the EQF?

Translation device for comparing qualifications

Neutral reference point based on learning outcomes
Swedish post-secondary engineering education (Påbygnadsutbildning)
= EQF Level 4
= Irish post secondary education at national level 6 (Advanced certificate)
What EQF is NOT!

- EQF not about replacing national/sectoral frameworks
- EQF not about harmonisation
- EQF CANNOT define new qualifications
How is the EQF implemented?
2003 Study on European Reference levels for Education and Training

- Understand Zones of Mutual Trust (ZMT): focus on working of transparency arrangements and public policies
- What is function of an agreed framework of levels to allocate qualifications and accumulated experience effectively to improve ZMTs?
- Recommend eight level framework

2004 European Commission establishes expert working group for developing EQF with Bologna representatives working on Dublin Descriptors and QA for HE, Council of Europe and representatives from EU Social Partners, experts, Cedefop and ETF

2006 Consultation with Member States and EQF Conference

Member States asked for simplication of levels and stronger role for member states in EQF development. New Working Group

2008 Recommendation of European Council and the Commission
Post 2008

Development didn’t stop with the EQF Recommendation but continued in the EQF AG

- EQF AG established in 2008
- Referencing process defined by the EQF AG
- Monitoring of NQF developments by Cedefop and ETF
- Information on EQF and NQFs
- Establishment of NCPs
- 2012 Recommendation on VNFIL
- 2014 Evaluation of EQF and 2017 Recommendation
- Guidelines for VNFIL
- Horizontal comparison
- International Qualifications
- Peer Learning events
- Erasmus projects
- Link with ECVET and ECTS
- Link with EQAVET and ESG
- Link with Europass
- Databases of Qualifications
- Horizontal comparison
- Updates of referencing
- Micro-credentials
- Comparison with 3rd country NQFs and RQFs
How is the EQF implemented?
A basis for co-operation

- EQF implementation is voluntary
- Entails *no legal obligations* on Member States or sectors
- *Fosters change* by supporting and informing reform
EQF Advisory Group

38 countries
• 27 EU member states,
• 4 EFTA countries and
• 7 pre-accession countries,

Employment, education and training & civil society stakeholders, including Social Partners, Chambers, provider networks, adult learning providers, voluntary sector

Council of Europe, important for the link to Bologna Process

Chaired by European Commission, supported by Cedefop and ETF
**National Contact Points**

in 38 countries
- 27 EU member states,
- 4 EFTA countries and
- 7 pre-accession countries,

Provide information about EQF to national stakeholders and beneficiaries
Often these are qualifications agencies

**Three other HE networks that are also important**

1. National Correspondents for the QF EHEA
2. ENIC-NARIC network for recognition
3. EQAR/ENQA network of QA Agencies for HE
Reaching out to learners, career counsellors, providers and companies

EUROPASS

Providing information of learning and employment opportunities (EURES)
European CV
Diploma and certificate supplement
Qualifications pillar – linking national databases of qualifications
Digitally signed certificates

ESCO providing a language for skills and occupations and for learning outcomes

ERASMUS+

Student and teacher mobility, requiring recognition
Joint programmes
Virtual mobility
Sectoral Cooperation
International Apprenticeships
Cooperation between different actors
Open for global cooperation
NQF = No Quick Fix

The Process of Development
Planning the EQF process

2008  EQF approved
2008  EQF advisory group established
2008  Referencing criteria agreed
2010  Referencing of national levels completed
2012  National qualifications mention EQF levels

Original timetable was extremely tight…
It takes time, agreement, resources and capacities developing a qualifications frameworks

access

progression

mobility

career & personal development

recognition

Can we deliver people with more opportunities to fulfil their personal, economic and societal potentials?

Health Warning for Policy Makers
Do not expect miracles
Qualifications Frameworks are Classifiers of Qualifications
How countries link NQFs and national qualifications to EQF

1. Referencing reports developed based on 10 criteria, with involvement of international experts. Referencing reports are discussed and peer reviewed in EQF Advisory Group,

2. After referencing report published on EUROPASS website,

3. Countries mention EQF/NQF levels on certificates,

4. Link national databases through EUROPASS to other countries

5. Countries update referencing report after 5-10 years
Influence of EQF on NQFs- situation 2014

• EQF recommends that countries establish NQFs.
• 2005/2006 start of NQF developments before EQF approval, 31 European countries aiming at NQF covering all EQF levels
• Basic principles and 8 level structure inspire national frameworks,
• Bologna 49 countries started to develop qualification frameworks for HE gradually integrated into NQFs covering all EQF levels & supporting LLL even in countries outside EQF
• Mutual trust between countries & stakeholders deciding success
EQF and National Qualifications Frameworks

EQF has acted as a catalyst for NQF developments in Europe.

This provides an opportunity

• NQFs link national systems to the EQF;
• NQFs are important instruments for increasing transparency and facilitating reform at national level.

Current challenges
A danger that NQFs preserve existing fragmented systems and fail in their role to facilitate integration

How can NQFs claim to offer new opportunities without opening up and integrating existing pathways?
State of play Spring 2021

38 countries in the EQF Advisory Group:

1. 35 countries referenced to the EQF 4 countries presented an update

2. 31 countries include EQF levels on certificates

3. 22 countries include EQF levels in databases of qualifications

4. 15 countries connected national databases or registers with Europass
Higher Education

Vocational Education

Lifelong learning
EQF and LLL

Council Resolution 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning invited CEC in close cooperation with Council and Member States,

• to develop a framework for the recognition of qualifications for both education and training, building on the achievements of the Bologna process and promoting similar action in the area of vocational training.


• to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training.
RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FEHEA</strong></th>
<th><strong>EQF</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HE Sector led, Council of Europe (CoE) 46 countries participating, global attention</td>
<td>Commission initiative, 32 countries signed up, interest from outside EEA enormous</td>
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<tr>
<td>To be established 2010</td>
<td>To be established by 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meta framework for European higher education area</td>
<td>Reference framework for lifelong learning (including HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on three cycles and intermediate descriptor laid down in Dublin descriptors, developed by BFWG</td>
<td>Eight level framework L5 – L8 considered to be aligned with Dublin descriptors, and developed with support of BFWG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self certification started =&gt; IRL and Scotland self certified</td>
<td>Referencing to start, joint criteria developed by EQF Advisory Group with support of HE representatives and CoE. Scotland is the first country to reference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focuses on HE frameworks and main qualifications</td>
<td>Supports the establishments of NQFs Levels for all types of learning/achievements at different levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECTS</td>
<td>ECVET??</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes are the basis</td>
<td>Learning outcomes are the basis</td>
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Making better qualifications?
Horizontal comparison
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION

FULL QUALIFICATIONS

PART-QUALIFICATIONS

STACKABLE MICRO CREDENTIALS

INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

MIX AND MATCH
Next Steps
• EQF Recommendation 2017 priorities
  – Finalising initial referencing and update/review of referencing
  – EQF levels on all qualifications/certificates
  – Link NQF databases/registers via Europass
  – Communicating the EQF wider
  – Learning outcomes – strengthening trust and supporting reform
  – NQF qualifications outside formal education and training
  – International qualifications
  – Third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks
International dimension of the EQF
What are the possibilities for EQF comparison of RQF initiatives?

- EQF comparison is based on dialogue and driven by mutual interest (common agenda with EU). EQF comparison is open for operational RQFs, this means that a number of NQFs are referenced or aligned with RQF in question and RQF is used.
- Most RQF are still at an early stage of development, and some struggle to advance.
- Piloting of comparison between EQF and SADC QF has been proposed to gain experience.
- Experiences can be shared in 2022.
- During the development of EQF comparison criteria and procedures, other forms of cooperation discussed but not elaborated.
# REFERENCING CRITERIA vs TOPICS FOR COMPARISON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referencing Criteria</th>
<th>Topics for Comparison</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Clear responsibilities of relevant national bodies</td>
<td>1. Objectives of qualifications frameworks</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Clear demonstrable link between the NQF and EQF levels</td>
<td>2. Scope of the frameworks</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) NQFs based on learning outcomes, VNFIL, possibly credit systems</td>
<td>3. Levels and level descriptors</td>
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<td>4) Transparent procedures for inclusion of qualifications in NQF</td>
<td>4. Learning outcome approach(es)</td>
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<td>5) QA systems refer to NQF &amp; consistent with EQF QA principles</td>
<td>5. VNFIL and RPL</td>
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<td>6) QA bodies confirm consistency of referencing with QA arrangements</td>
<td>6. Quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Referencing process involves international experts</td>
<td>7. Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Competent authorities certify referencing and publish report</td>
<td>8. Recognition processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) National report published on EQF portal within 6 months</td>
<td>9. Governance structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>10) Qualifications that are part of NQF will have reference to EQF level</td>
<td>10. Referencing/alignment processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>11) Transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process</td>
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Linking databases of qualifications
Marco de calificaciones esloveno

El Marco de Calificaciones de Eslovenia (SOQ) representa un sistema uniforme de calificaciones en la República de Eslovenia para clasificar las calificaciones según los resultados del aprendizaje.Consta de 10 niveles.

Buscar por titulaciones

- Búsqueda Avanzada
- Ayuda con el uso del motor de búsqueda

NOMBRE DE LA CALIFICACIÓN

CONFIRMAR BÚSQUEDA
• Link registers but keep control

• Digitally signed certificates

• Individuals decide what information they want to share

• Linking NQFs

• Linking QA agencies, recognition agencies, universities, awarding bodies, other providers and employers
Countries that published qualifications in europass

Countries testing qualification database in QDR

Countries with databases in place but not yet connected

Databases in development

State of Play November 2020 on progress of linking national databases of qualifications to Europass
Micro-credentials
EU Skills Agenda (2020) is addressing the COVID crisis and effects on employment

Upskilling and reskilling very much emphasised as well as lifelong learning, combining different learning experiences

Micro-credentials seen as critical for recognising short learning experiences

Micro-credentials should be based on learning outcomes and quality assured

Micro-credentials should be stackable (combinable and part of lifelong learning pathways)

Initiative started from higher education sector, but widened to VET and lifelong learning

European definition of micro-credentials proposed

Consultation on micro-credentials and Recommendation by end of 2021

Will micro-credentials become part of NQFs and EQF?
Some lessons learned
2010 cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes

Factors that inhibit policy learning

• Countries are at different stages and have different questions
• It is difficult to get the right people around the table
• It is difficult to disseminate the work of the cluster beyond the participants
• The PLA processes scratch the surface, there is not enough interaction to influence national processes
• National systems are not challenged (subsidiarity)
• There is competition from the Bologna process and the EQF advisory group, driving developments top down, which limit the potential for learning and strengthen the search for tools, mechanisms and procedures
2014 stocktaking ETF

• The EQF has made unexpected progress over the past 6 years. It is a very successful European development.

• But the work has only started and many challenges remain to be addressed.

• If these challenges are not addressed the EQF process could come to a halt because there will be no more trust in an instrument and in a process, that is unable to meet the expectations of its potential beneficiaries.

• It is our joint responsibility not to let that happen:

• We can make the EQF work together for the benefit of many, creating new opportunities that were unthinkable ten years ago.
Lessons for other RQFs

EQF is a **response to European situation** of different systems and limited responsibilities to act at European level. Unique is also the interaction with the QF-EHEA

Trying to **achieve results quickly** and **having impact** are often at odds with each other, but going for quick results at the start can help going deeper later

The success of the EQF has been the **mutual trust** through the Open Method of Coordination with a **strong role for EU member states** in the EQF Advisory group and a small group of people in European Commission, Cedefop and ETF supporting its development. **Consensus** have been driven the process which has been inclusive taking into account all participating countries, using more advanced countries as **trail blazers**.

**Peer learning** is a very important

Moving from Education and Training to **Lifelong Learning** is a real **shift** in thinking that needs time

**Never stop developing...**