



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Complexities, demands and impacts of regional qualifications frameworks - the EQF case

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and recognition,***

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The EQF facts

What is EQF about?

The EQF is a common reference point - a translation grid - for European qualifications

EQF simplifies comparison and understanding of qualifications across European countries

- facilitates cross-border transfer of qualifications
- enables linking and combination of qualifications from different institutions and sub-systems



The design of the EQF

EQF operates with 8 qualifications levels described on the basis of learning outcomes and specified through

- **Knowledge**
- **Skills**
- **Competence (with a focus on autonomy and responsibility)**

EQF covers all types and levels of national qualifications, from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to doctorates. The aim, on a longer term, is for the EQF to also cover private and/or international qualifications.



Political and institutional basis of the EQF

- Based on a 'Recommendation' (2008) from the European Parliament and European Council
- In addition to the 28 EU member states, 8 additional European countries have joined the EQF cooperation
- Coordinated by the EQF Advisory Group (representatives from all countries, employer organisations, trade unions and civil society organisations)
- The European Commission, supported by Cedefop, provide technical and financial support



The original deadlines set for the EQF

- Countries to link their national qualifications systems/frameworks to the EQF by 2010
- Countries to introduce reference to EQF levels in certificates and diploma by 2012

Actual implementation slower

- August 2014, 25 countries have linked to the EQF
- A limited number of countries (for example Denmark, Lithuania, Germany) started to use EQF levels in certificates and diploma in 2013 and 2014



SVENDEBREV

Det faglige udvalg for Tjeneruddannelsen

bevidner herved, at

NN

personnummer: 123456-7890

har gennemført uddannelsen

Tjener

Dansk kvalifikationsramme for livslang læring: niveau 4
The European Qualification Framework (EQF): level 4

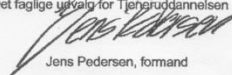
Uddannelsen er gennemført i overensstemmelse med Undervisningsministeriets bekendtgørelse nr. 329 af 28. april 2009 om uddannelse i den erhvervsfaglige fællesindgang mad til mennesker.

Den afsluttende faglige prøve er

Bestået med udmærkelse Sølv

den 31. januar 2013

Det faglige udvalg for Tjeneruddannelsen


Jens Pedersen, formand



The impact of the EQF at national level

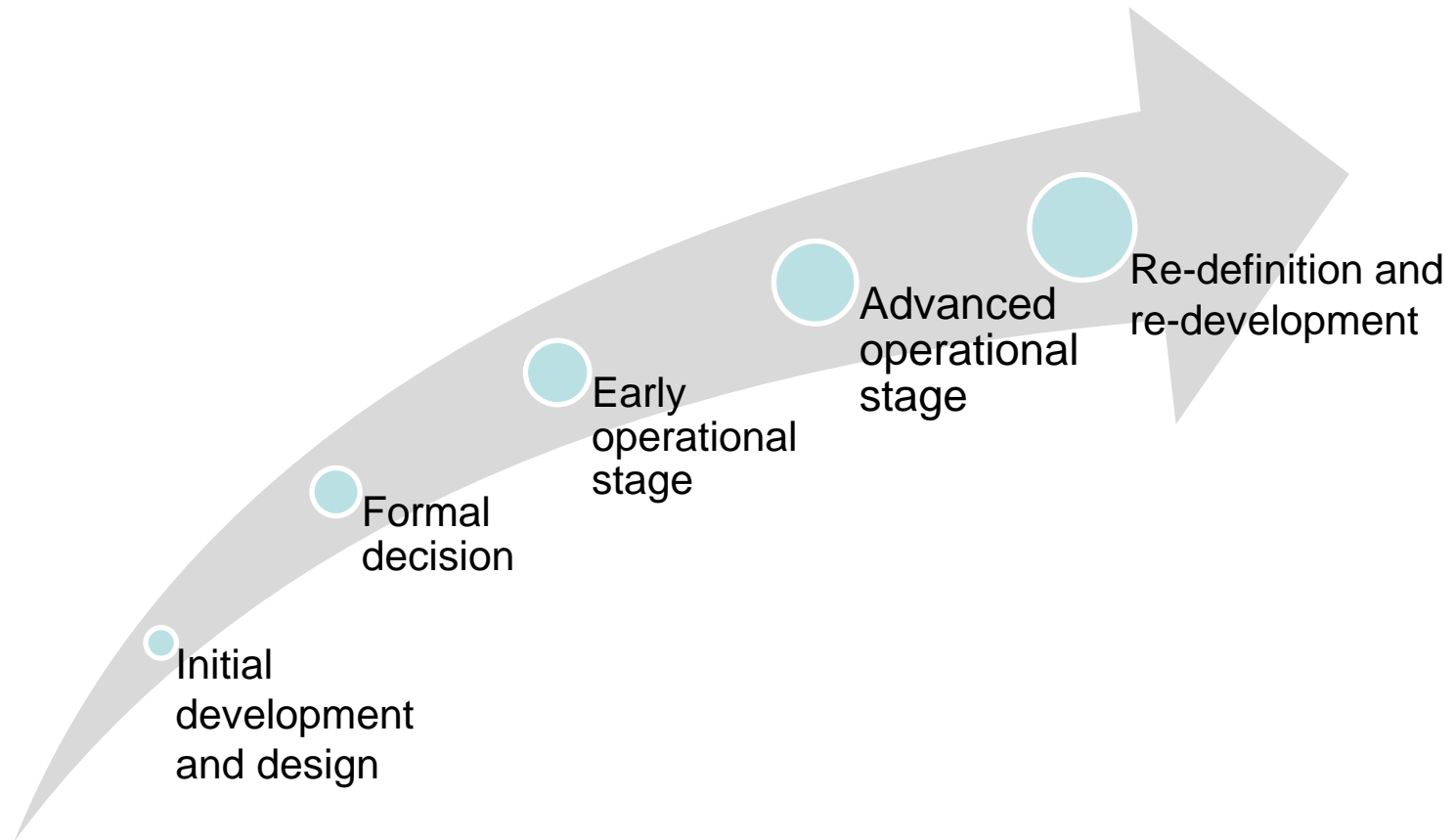


The EQF – a catalyst for national qualifications frameworks

- A decade ago, only 3 European countries with national qualifications frameworks
- Today, NQFs are being developed and implemented in all 36 countries cooperating on the EQF
- NQFs have mainly been introduced to increase transparency of existing qualifications
- NQFs are increasingly used to promote reform of education and training systems
- NQF developments are still work in progress, less than 20 NQFs are partially or fully operational



Stages of NQF Development in Europe





Design and development of frameworks (1)

This stage decides the NQF's rationale, policy objectives and architecture. The involvement of stakeholders determines future credibility.

By the end of 2013, most of the 36 countries had agreed on the overall structure of their frameworks.



Design and development of frameworks (2)

- 28 countries have adopted eight-level frameworks like the EQF; the rest operate with 5, 7, 9, 10 and 12 levels.
- Level descriptors now exist for all countries - inspired by EQF but considerable national variation – in particular on ‘competence’

6 have introduced partial NQFs covering a limited range, but 30 are working on comprehensive NQFs, covering all types and levels of qualification.



Formal adoption

Involves adopting a formal mandate - for example in the form of an NQF law, amendments to existing laws, decree or some other form; initiatives have been weakened due to delays in this area.

So far - 25 frameworks have been formally adopted - most recently by Croatia and Romania

Finland and Sweden are examples of countries where progress now depends on a formal adoption.

The early operational stage

Following formal adoption, countries start work on practical arrangements, such as the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, and develop criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications to NQF levels.

We consider ten countries – for example Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and Portugal – to be at this stage.



The advanced operational stage

- At this stage the NQF constitutes an integral part of the national qualifications system
- We consider the frameworks of six countries - Denmark, France, Ireland Malta, the Netherlands and the UK – to belong to this category.

Denmark adopted a comprehensive NQF (8 levels) in 2009 and completed referencing to the EQF in 2011.

- By 2013 the framework had become well known to national stakeholders (70% of respondents to an external evaluation ‘know it well’).
- In January 2013, Denmark started issuing VET qualifications with an explicit reference to national and European levels.
- NQF levels inform national databases on qualification, thus increasing the visibility of the learning outcomes approach.
- The NQF provides a reference point for designing qualifications



Redefinition and re-development...

- NQF developments a never-ending story
- Requires Continuous review and redevelopment
- The moment a NQF is considered 'finalised' (and forgotten) it is in grave danger
- More than anything else, a NQF is a platform for continuous cooperation and dialogue and needs to evolve

The UK

- The UK pioneered NQFs
- Scotland, England/Northern Ireland and Wales have chosen different strategies as regards the form and function of frameworks
- Question whether the current multiplicity of frameworks supports transparency and adds value



Have the National Qualifications Frameworks come to stay in Europe - and are they making a difference to education and employment policies and practises?

- An institutional basis has been created
- The jury is still out on their impact on policies and practises
- Experiences show they can make a difference – but this is not a given fact

The European level implementation – technical and conceptual challenges

The issue of MUTUAL TRUST

- For the EQF to work as a common reference point across borders, it must generate mutual trust.
- The quality of the linking – or ‘referencing process’ – is of critical importance
- 10 ‘referencing criteria’ have been agreed to guide and orient what is in effect a voluntary process
- Agreement that these criteria help to identify national strengths as well as weaknesses
- There is agreement that EQF process will continue after all 36 countries have completed the first stage of the referencing end 2014/early 2015



EQF criterion 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.

Key challenge – the consistency of national and European level descriptors

- National and regional level descriptors fulfil different purposes; the 'dialogue' between them poses a problem
- National level descriptors need to specify how achievements increase from level to level; only then is it possible to refer qualifications to EQF levels
- National level descriptors must clarify how different learning dimensions (knowledge, skills and competence) are understood and distinguished in order to refer them to the EQF
- The precision of level descriptors can still be improved



Key challenge – the learning outcomes principle

EQF Criterion 3

The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes....

- Learning outcomes have not been fully implemented in all European countries;
- The placing of qualifications is thus not only based on learning outcomes, but is frequently reflecting traditional institutional structure/status
- The understanding of learning outcomes differs between different parts of education and training, potentially hindering transfer and recognition
- In some cases the application of the learning outcomes approach has led to changes, for example the placing of the German Master craftsman at level 6



EQF Criterion 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.

Challenges – the ‘placing’ of qualifications

- The placing (‘best fit’) of qualifications to a NQF and EQF level must be trusted and is thus of critical importance
- Countries tend to provide too little information on what lies behind the levelling decisions
- A tendency to assign ‘blocks’ of qualifications (for example all higher education or all VET qualifications) to levels
- Some countries have carried out extensive testing prior to levelling (for example Germany), this clearly strengthens trust.



EQF Criterion 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).

Challenges – Quality assurance

- Transparent arrangements for Quality assurance is essential for EQF and for mutual trust
- Only qualifications with explicit QA arrangements supporting them can be referred to the EQF
- The role of quality assurance in relation to learning outcomes and certification is a challenge and is weakly addressed by countries
- The role of EQF in supporting recognition depends on strong QA arrangements underpinning mutual trust.



Key challenge – the role of international and ‘non-state’ qualifications

- The EQF cooperation has so far been between national governments working with national qualifications
- The increasing role played by international qualifications (for example in ICT and transportation) challenges the EQF
- The EQF provides a good instrument for comparing all types of qualifications, including international ones, but
 - Who should be given the role of assigning levels to international qualifications?
 - Who will have the capacity to monitor this highly complex area?



A final word – the need to address learners and citizens and the importance of stakeholder involvement

- The period 2008-2014 represents the first preparatory stage of EQF implementation
- The period from 2015 and onwards must ensure that the EQF becomes visible to learners and citizens
- The inclusion of EQF levels in individual certificates and diploma is of critical importance and will make the framework visible to a wider public
- The future success of the framework depends on the involvement and commitment of stakeholders, not so much on the technical design of the framework