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**TOWARDS A EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS  
FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION**

This paper outlines the main features of a future European Qualifications Framework (EQF). EU Heads of Government at their meeting in Brussels in March 2005 requested the creation of an EQF, thus supporting and strengthening previous recommendations (February and December 2004) made by the Ministers of Education and Training. The paper constitutes the basis on which a wide ranging consultation will take place in the period July-November 2005. It thus precedes a formal recommendation on the EQF to be proposed to the Council and Parliament in Spring 2006.

### **Main purposes and functions**

The EQF will be developed and implemented on a voluntary basis, not entailing any legal obligations. It is envisaged as a meta-framework increasing transparency and supporting mutual trust. It will thereby enable qualifications frameworks and systems at national and sectoral level to be related to each other – thus facilitating the transfer and recognition of the qualifications of individual citizens.

### **Core elements**

The EQF will consist of three main elements:

- The core will be a set of common reference points – referring to learning outcomes - located in a structure of 8 levels.
- These reference levels will be supported by a range of tools and instruments addressing the need of individual citizens (an integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning, the Europass instrument, the Ploteus database on learning opportunities).
- The EQF will also include a set of common principles and procedures providing guidelines for co-operation between stakeholders at different levels – in particular focussing on quality assurance, validation, guidance and key competences.

### **Multiple stakeholders and users**

The three main elements of the EQF address different groups of stakeholders. The common reference levels have been designed and written to support the work of policy makers and experts at national and sectoral levels and provide ‘a reading grid’ facilitating comparisons and cooperation between national and sectoral frameworks and systems. The same applies to principles and procedures supporting co-operation and policy co-ordination. However, the common instruments and tools play a different role by using the principles of the EQF to promote individual mobility in learning and at work. The relevance of the EQF to individual citizens will be further strengthened when national and sectoral qualifications are systematically referenced to the EQF.

## **8 levels referring to learning outcomes**

Qualifications at each level in the EQF are described (in table 1 and annex 1) in terms of three types of learning outcomes:

- knowledge;
- skills; and
- wider competences described as personal and professional outcomes.

Each level of the EQF is described (table 1) in terms of typical learning outcomes that can be related to qualifications and qualification frameworks throughout Europe. However, the learning outcomes do not include details of specific qualifications or systems that operate in countries and sectors and which are a national responsibility. By approaching the design of the EQF in this way, each national or sectoral qualification or level can be matched by national and sectoral experts and competent bodies to a particular level in the EQF.

Supplementary indicative information is provided (table 2) to explain the way EQF-levels relate to existing, formal education and training systems and frameworks. This information should be useful in the consultation process and in the implementation of the EQF.

## **EQF as a framework for co-operation**

The proposal outlines the relationship between the EQF and qualifications frameworks and systems at the national and sectoral levels. As the EQF is voluntary and will not entail any legal obligations, the success of the initiative depends on the level of commitment to the framework from different stakeholders operating at different levels.

National authorities must determine how the qualifications within each country are linked to the EQF. From the point of view of the EQF, the optimal approach would be that each country set up a single National Framework of Qualifications and link this single National Framework to the EQF. Considering the rich diversity of national education and training systems and their stages of development, each country should therefore put in place a process whereby existing qualification structures and systems (whether a single national framework or system of qualifications, or various systems of qualifications) are linked to the EQF.

The EQF will also provide a common reference point to guide and inform developments of education, training and learning at sector level. Where possible, these sectoral developments should be linked to national frameworks – thus facilitating transfer and compatibility. The EQF common reference also makes it possible to link sector initiatives to national qualifications and thus facilitate transfer and compatibility. Linking a sectoral framework to the EQF furthermore implies an acceptance of, and a commitment to, a set of criteria regarding quality and transparency. The decision on linking sectoral initiatives to the EQF should be made by the stakeholders themselves, in consultation with representatives of national authorities responsible for qualifications.

## Relevance and credibility

The success of the European Qualifications Framework depends on its relevance and credibility for education and training institutions, employers and policy-makers and ultimately for individual learners. In particular, the stakeholders must be convinced that a European meta-framework is needed and can contribute - indirectly and directly - to lifelong learning.

Consequently, the framework can only be developed and implemented on the basis of an extensive consultation process. The following questions are of particular importance for this consultation process:

### *The rationale of an EQF*

- Are the most important objectives and functions to be fulfilled by an EQF those set out in chapter 4 of this paper?

### *The reference levels and descriptors*

- Does the 8-level reference structure sufficiently capture the complexity of lifelong learning in Europe?
- Does the distinction between knowledge, skills and wider aspects of competence reflect the realities of lifelong learning?
- Do the level descriptors, in table 1, adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in levels?
- What should be the content and role of the ‘supporting information’ on education, training and learning structures and input (table 2)?

### *Principles*

- How can the proposed common principles for Quality Assurance be improved in order to support the development of mutual trust?
- How can the common principles on validation be strengthened and how can they support the development and implementation of the EQF?

### *Tools*

- How can the EQF be linked to and supported by a credit transfer and accumulation system (such a system is the object of a related, parallel consultation document and process)?
- How can the EQF be linked to the Europass and what future developments of transparency related instruments based on learning outcomes can be foreseen?

### *National Qualifications Frameworks*

- How can National Qualifications Frameworks for lifelong learning – reflecting the principles of the EQF - be established?
- To which extent can national systems of education and training be based on learning outcomes?

*Sectoral qualifications?*

- To which extent can the EQF become a catalyst for developments at sector level?
- How can the EQF be used to pursue a more systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at sector level?
- How can stakeholders at sector level be involved in supporting the implementation of the EQF?
- How can principles and procedures for co-operation be developed and agreed ?
- How can the link between sectors development and national qualifications be improved?

*EQF and regulated professions*

- How can the EQF support and complement the efforts of the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications towards the free movement of professionals within the internal market?

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the main features of a future European Qualifications Framework (EQF)<sup>1</sup>. EU Heads of Government at their meeting in Brussels in March 2005 requested the creation of an EQF, thus supporting and strengthening previous recommendations (February and December 2004) made by EU Ministers of Education and Training.

The paper constitutes the basis on which a wide ranging consultation will take place between July and November 2005. It thus precedes a formal proposal on the EQF to be presented to the Council and Parliament spring 2006.

The EQF is envisaged as a meta-framework increasing transparency and thereby enabling qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral level to relate and communicate to each other. A principal function of the EQF is to strengthen mutual trust and co-operation between the different stakeholders involved in lifelong learning. This is important for reducing barriers to learning and for enabling learners to make better use of available knowledge, skills and competences. Its role is furthermore to enable and promote mobility of learners and labour market mobility across borders. While the EQF should be implemented on a voluntary basis and would not entail any legal obligations, its role is to foster change by supporting and informing reform at national and sector level.

- The core of the EQF will be a set of common reference points – referring to learning outcomes - located in a hierarchy of 8 levels. These reference levels have primarily been designed and written to support the work of policy makers and expert bodies in Member States and sectors.
- These reference levels cannot stand alone and will be supported by a range of tools and instruments addressing the need of individual citizens – notably through the implementation and dissemination of an integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning, the Europass and the Ploteus database on learning opportunities. Following an adoption of the EQF, individual qualifications awarded at national or sectoral level should contain a clear reference to the EQF, further strengthening the direct relevance of the framework and the common reference levels to citizens.
- Finally, the EQF will consist of a set of common principles and procedures providing guidelines for the co-operation between stakeholders at different levels – notably in quality assurance, validation, guidance and key competences.

The development of the EQF is of direct relevance to the proposal for ‘a Framework for qualifications of the European higher education area’ adopted by the Bergen Ministerial conference of the Bologna process in May 2005. While the scope of the EQF is broader than that of the framework for higher education, compatibility has been ensured between

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<sup>1</sup> The consultation document has been prepared by the Commission with the active support of an expert group (See annex 4) representative of the various educational sectors (higher education, Bologna follow up group, vocational education and training, adult education, students) and the of the interests of the labour market (sectors, employers, trade unions).

these two initiatives with the objective of one overarching European qualification framework addressing lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>.

This paper presents in some detail the rationale behind the EQF (chapter 2), the main purposes and functions to be fulfilled (chapter 3), the conceptual basis (4), the common reference levels (5), the common principles and procedures to be applied (6), the supporting tools and instruments to be included (7) the relationship between the EQF and stakeholders at national and sectoral level (8) and, finally, brief conclusions and a list of questions to be asked during the forthcoming consultation process (9).

## **2. WHY A EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK?**

Lifelong learning has become a necessity in a Europe characterised by rapid social, technological and economic change. An ageing population accentuates these challenges – underlining the need for a continuous updating and renewal of knowledge, skills and competences. The realisation of lifelong learning is however complicated by the lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers and authorities at different levels. Barriers between institutions and countries not only prevent access to education and training but also prevent an efficient use of knowledge and competences already acquired. This problem is primarily caused by a lack of transparency of qualifications, by a reluctance to recognise ‘foreign’ qualifications, and by the lack of arrangements allowing citizens to transfer qualifications from one setting to another. It is also caused by the tendency to regard learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings (for example at work) and as inferior to formal qualifications delivered in initial education and training.

These are some of the underlying problems and challenges addressed by a European Qualifications Framework.

### **2.1 Qualifications frameworks as a means of supporting lifelong learning**

Qualifications frameworks are being established in many countries and sectors - in Europe and beyond (OECD 2003, 2004). These frameworks take many forms and appearances, according to national and sectoral specificities. Common to them all is a wish to tackle the increasing complexity of modern education, training and learning systems. Their principal aim is to clarify (for students, parents, learning providers, employers and policy makers) the main routes to a particular qualification, how progress can be made, to what extent transfer is allowed and on which basis decisions on recognition are taken. Qualification frameworks are also used for quality assurance and development purposes; providing a reference for improvement at local, regional, sectoral and national level.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bergen Ministerial conference (19-20 May 2005) states: ‘We underline the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the European Higher Education Area and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education and vocational education and training as now being developed by the European Union as well as among participating countries’.

In a situation where the mobility of workers and learners is growing, where citizens increasingly combine education and training from different countries and where lifelong learning has become a necessity the communication between these frameworks increasingly matters. Questions related to progress, transfer, accumulation, recognition and quality development can only to a limited extent be treated in the context of single (isolated) national or sectoral frameworks; the challenge is thus to build bridges between these frameworks and systems enabling communication, comparison and mutual trust.

## 2.2 The political mandate

Since 2003, European policy makers have repeatedly called for the development and implementation of a European Qualifications Framework strengthening the links between frameworks at national and sectoral level and thus supporting lifelong learning.

The Joint Interim report of the (Education) Council and the Commission (February 2004) on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme<sup>3</sup> gives priority to the development of a European Qualifications Framework as an essential contribution towards the Lisbon strategy. The report states that such a framework could stand as a common reference enabling and promoting transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications and competences in Europe.

In the Maastricht Communiqué (14 December 2004) on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), the Ministers responsible for VET in 32 European countries, the European social partners and the Commission agreed to give priority to the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework providing a common reference to facilitate the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both VET and general (secondary and higher) education<sup>4</sup>.

In higher education, the Berlin Ministerial conference (September 2003) of the Bologna process encouraged Member States to develop an overarching framework of qualifications. This resulted in the outline of 'a Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area' (February 2005). Adopted by the Bergen Ministerial conference (May 2005) of the Bologna process, it was emphasised that a framework for higher education must be seen within the broader framework of lifelong learning, underlining the need for one overarching European Qualifications Framework<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir\\_council\\_final.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Maastricht Communiqué states that '*such a framework will improve permeability within education and training, provide a reference for the validation of informally acquired competences and support the smooth and effective functioning of the European, national and sectoral labour markets. The framework should be underpinned by a set of common reference levels. It should be supported by instruments agreed at European level, particularly quality assurance mechanisms to create the necessary mutual trust. The framework should facilitate the voluntary development of competence based solutions at the European level enabling sectors to address the new education and training challenges caused by the internationalisation of trade and technology.*'

<sup>5</sup> 'The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the goals'. Communiqué of the conference of European ministers responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005

In March 2005 the European Council asked for the adoption of an EQF in 2006, significantly strengthening the political basis for taking forward this initiative.

### 3. THE CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR AN EQF

A successful development and implementation of the 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. A range of other relevant concepts are defined in Annex n.

#### 3.1 Learning and Learning outcomes

The key purpose of the EQF (see also chapter 4) 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 qualifications (and qualification frameworks) use learning outcomes as building blocks. In this context, the following definition is used<sup>6</sup>:

*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.*

Learning outcomes can be formulated for a number of purposes at different institutional and geographical levels. Learning outcomes may be defined for individual courses, units, modules and programmes. They may furthermore be defined at national level covering entire qualifications and be structured within or linked to qualifications frameworks and systems. Finally learning outcomes may be defined at international level for purposes of transparency, comparability, credit transfer and recognition.

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<sup>6</sup> Bologna working group on qualifications framework, February 2005, p 39

### 3.2 Competence<sup>7</sup>

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 personal 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 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).

### 3.3 Qualifications

The term *qualification* is critical to the 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.*

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<sup>7</sup> The definitions of qualifications and competences provided in this note are compatible with those agreed by the European social partners in 2001: Competences are the knowledge, skills and know-how applied and mastered in a given work situation; Qualifications are a formal expression of the vocational or professional abilities of the employee. They are recognised at the national or sectoral level.

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

### 3.4 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.*

### 3.5 Meta-framework

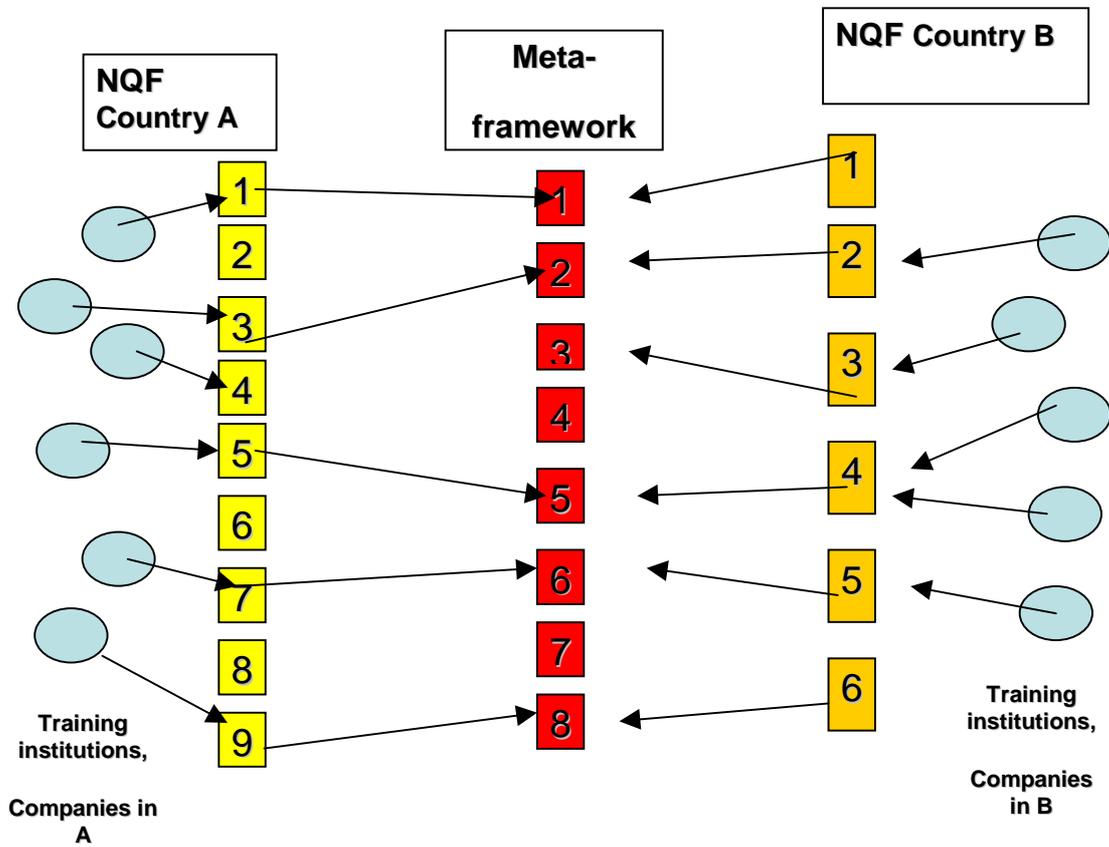
A meta-framework – like the EQF - maintains the function of an organising system that enables users to see clearly how qualifications embedded in different national and sectoral systems relate to one another. It does this through a structure of common reference levels of learning outcomes. However it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

Figure 1 illustrates how the relationship between different national frameworks and systems can be simplified by introducing common reference levels and common principles for co-operation. The figure illustrates – in an abstract way - the existing complexity of national frameworks and systems. A co-operation based on bi-lateral or

multilateral contacts between frameworks and systems would be extremely complex and would severely limit transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications.

**Figure 1** A meta-framework enabling and simplifying the relation between national qualifications frameworks and systems



#### 4. THE MAIN PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF AN EQF

The EQF is a meta-framework, enabling frameworks and systems at other levels (national and sectoral) to relate and communicate to another. A principal function of the framework is to strengthen mutual trust between the different stakeholders involved in education, training and learning. This is considered to be a necessary precondition for reducing barriers to learning and for making better use of existing knowledge, skills and competence. The following specific functions will be fulfilled by the EQF:

- The EQF will establish a shared reference point - referring to learning outcomes and levels of competence - simplifying communication between providers and learners in education and training. This requires reference levels and descriptors which are sufficiently generic to encompass the variety of qualifications existing at national and sectoral level. They must at the same time be able to distinguish between different levels – expressed in terms of increased competence and expertise.
- The EQF will function as a translation device – a converter or reading grid – making it possible to position and compare different learning outcomes. This is important at European level but increasingly so at national, regional and sectoral levels.
- The EQF will function as a common reference for quality assurance and development in education and training.
- The EQF will provide a reference for the development of qualifications at sector level. The introduction of common reference levels and descriptors will make it possible for stakeholders at this level to identify interconnections, synergies and possible overlaps.
- The EQF will be a force for change at European, national and sector level within the lifelong learning perspective, supporting the follow up to and implementation of the common objectives for European education and training systems agreed in 2002<sup>1</sup>.

The EQF will be of direct relevance to policy makers and expert bodies at national and sectoral level responsible for education, training and learning policies and systems. The relevance of the EQF to individual citizens will be ensured by the development and implementation of common instruments and tools like a credit transfer and accumulation system, the Europass instrument and the Ploteus data base on learning opportunities. Following the adoption of the EQF, individual qualifications awarded at national or sectoral level should contain a clear reference to the EQF, further strengthening the direct relevance of the framework to citizens.

The following specific functions will not be fulfilled by the EQF:

- The EQF will not replace existing national and/or sector frameworks; it fulfils additional and different tasks and should not be understood as the ‘the sum’ or ‘representative average’ of national/sector frameworks.
- The EQF cannot encompass detailed descriptions of particular qualifications, learning pathways or access conditions. This is the task of qualifications frameworks at national and/or sector level. National systems and institutions maintain their capacity to increase and to go beyond what is envisaged for the EQF.

- The EQF cannot encompass processes for defining new qualifications or for communicating the range of qualifications to potential users. Again, this is a task of qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral level.
- The EQF does not directly carry the functions of detailed equating or comparison 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.
- The EQF is not a device for making final decisions on recognition. These decisions must be made by relevant sectoral, national or international agencies or official bodies on the basis of the increased transparency provided by the EQF

Compared to national and sectoral frameworks, the EQF thus fulfils additional and different functions. The EQF addresses the needs of stakeholders (providers and users of education, training and learning) at different levels. The EQF should:

- Enable individual citizens to navigate within and between complex systems and locate their own learning outcomes in this broader context.
- Provide direct support to education and training authorities and institutions and other providers enabling them to position and compare their learning offers according to a reference commonly understood throughout Europe.
- Provide a common reference for those authorities recognising education, training and learning outcomes. An EQF could also prove important for the assessment and recognition of the qualifications from outside the EU.
- Provide a (voluntary) framework for sector and branch level organisations and associations enabling them to identify interconnections, synergies and possible overlaps between offers at sectoral and national level.

The above list illustrates that the EQF is a multipurpose framework needing to serve a number of stakeholders operating at different levels. Common to all these stakeholders, however, is a need to address lifelong learning.

The role of the EQF is thus to inform and support reform at national and sectoral level. While the introduction of a neutral reference level structure in itself will contribute to change, a set of principles and procedures should be agreed guiding the co-operation and interaction between stakeholders and frameworks at European, national and sector level. Consequently the development of an EQF should be paralleled by the development of national and sectoral qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning. This would be in line with the proposals in higher education where the implantation of a European framework is linked to the creation of national frameworks (see also chapters 6 and 8).

## **5. COMMON REFERENCE LEVELS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the core of an EQF will be a set of reference points defined by learning outcomes that will relate to qualifications and qualification frameworks (national and sectoral) that are in use across Europe. These reference points are located in a hierarchy of levels that span the full range of qualifications from completion of programmes in primary and secondary

schools to the most advanced qualification for senior professionals including qualifications acquired through non formal and informal learning and through lifelong learning opportunities. This span of qualifications is described using the most appropriate national and sectoral reference points for the widest appreciation of the qualifications on offer; sometimes this takes the form of a national qualification framework with a number of levels. The EQF builds on these national and sectoral systems and so it is important that the number of levels in the EQF reflects a consideration of current patterns of levels and of the full range of international research information about levels in qualifications frameworks.

## **5.1 Eight levels**

The 2004 QCA study carried out for CEDEFOP to support the development of credit transfer system for VET concluded that 8 levels would be an appropriate number for a European framework covering higher education and VET. This number was based on analysis of evidence from research, from structures of work practise in companies and from the developing Bologna agreements of cycles in higher education. An eight level structure also provides a 'best fit' match to the main national qualifications structures in many countries. A balance needs to be struck between having a small number of broad levels that would be easy to understand and a greater number that would provide more detailed information about each level but which would become difficult to appreciate as a transparent framework. Since the CEDEFOP report was published, the 8 level approach has met with broad approval from the many bodies with an interest in qualifications systems including those operating outside the area of VET.

Each of the levels in the EQF requires a description of what is distinctive about qualifications that are classified at that level. Writing these level descriptors is a complex process as many forms of description are possible. However the use of the concept of competence as the building block of level descriptors has offered clarity to many users of qualification frameworks and allows the EQF to become a truly meta qualification framework that leaves to countries and sectors the task of determining the details of the structure of learning programmes and of qualification structure (including, content, delivery and assessment). Reference to competence and learning outcomes also corresponds to the direction of travel of higher education instruments such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and is a comfortable concept for many VET qualifications.

## **5.2 Learning outcomes**

The European Commission's expert group has advised that qualifications at each level in the EQF should be described in terms of three types of learning outcomes:

- knowledge;
- skills; and
- wider competences described as personal and professional outcomes.

These three types of outcomes can be described at each level of the framework in a way that facilitates amplification and exemplification by national and sectoral bodies. In consequence, each level of the EQF can be described in terms of typical learning outcomes that might be expected and should not include details of specific qualifications

or systems that operate in countries and sectors. By approaching the design of the EQF this way each national or sectoral qualification or level can be matched by national and sectoral experts and competent bodies to a particular level in the EQF.

Detailed work has been carried out to formulate types of learning outcomes that are appropriate in a European framework. Reference has been made to various reports that have been commissioned to clarify the issues involved in describing learning outcomes and competence. The 3 types of learning outcome (knowledge, skills and personal and professional competences) develop from the lowest level of qualification to the highest. It is important to attempt to define this progression in learning outcomes so that EQF levels are clearly progressive and can be defined consistently when all three types of learning outcome are combined to form a level descriptor. Table 1 below presents the 8 common reference levels and is based on an analysis of progression in the three types of learning outcome. Annex 1 provides the same information in a different format in order to highlight the progression of the three types of learning outcomes across the eight levels.

**Table 1: The eight levels of the European Qualification Framework defined by learning outcomes**

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Personal and professional competence			
			(i) <i>Autonomy and responsibility</i>	(ii) <i>Learning competence</i>	(iii) <i>Communication and social competence</i>	(iv) <i>Professional and vocational competence</i>
1	Recall basic general knowledge	Use basic skills to carry out simple tasks	Complete work or study tasks under direct supervision and demonstrate personal effectiveness in simple and stable contexts	Accept guidance on learning	Respond to simple written and oral communication  Demonstrate social role for self	Demonstrate awareness of procedures for solving problems
2	Recall and comprehend basic knowledge of a field, the range of knowledge involved is limited to facts and main ideas	Use skills and key competences <sup>8</sup> to carry out tasks where action is governed by rules defining routines and strategies  Select and apply basic methods, tools and materials	Take limited responsibility for improvement in performance in work or study in simple and stable contexts and within familiar, homogeneous groups	Seek guidance on learning	Respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication  Adjust role to different social settings	Solve problems using information provided
3	Apply knowledge of a field that includes processes, techniques, materials, instruments, equipment, terminology and some theoretical ideas	Use a range of field-specific skills to carry out tasks and show personal interpretation through selection and adjustment of methods, tools and materials  Evaluate different approaches to tasks	Take responsibility for completion of tasks and demonstrate some independence in role in work or study where contexts are generally stable but where some factors change	Take responsibility for own learning	Produce (and respond to) detailed written and oral communication  Take responsibility for self understanding and behaviour	Solve problems using well known information sources taking account of some social issues
4	Use a wide range of field- specific practical and theoretical knowledge	Develop strategic approaches to tasks that arise in work or study by applying specialist knowledge and using expert	Manage role under guidance in work or study contexts that are usually predictable and where there are many factors involved that cause change and	Demonstrate self-direction in learning	Produce (and respond to) detailed written and oral communication in unfamiliar situations	Solve problems by integrating information from expert sources taking account of relevant social

<sup>8</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/basic2004.pdf>

		sources of information  Evaluate outcomes in terms of strategic approach used	where some factors are interrelated  Make suggestions for improvement to outcomes  Supervise routine work of others and take some responsibility for training of others		Use self understanding to change behaviour	and ethical issues
<b>5</b>	Use broad theoretical and practical knowledge that is often specialised within a field and show awareness of limits to knowledge base	Develop strategic and creative responses in researching solutions to well defined concrete and abstract problems  Demonstrate transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge in creating solutions to problems	Manage projects independently that require problem solving where there are many factors some of which interact and lead to unpredictable change  Show creativity in developing projects  Manage people and review performance of self and others.  Train others and develop team performance	Evaluate own learning and identify learning needs necessary to undertake further learning	Convey ideas in a well structured and coherent way to peers, supervisors and clients using qualitative and quantitative information  Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement with others	Formulate responses to abstract and concrete problems  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction within a field  Make judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues
<b>6</b>	Use detailed theoretical and practical knowledge of a field. Some knowledge is at the forefront of the field and will involve a critical understanding of theories and principles	Demonstrate mastery of methods and tools in a complex and specialised field and demonstrate Innovation in terms of methods used  Devise and sustain arguments to solve problems	Demonstrate administrative design, resource and team management responsibilities in work and study contexts that are unpredictable and require that complex problems are solved where there are many interacting factors  Show creativity in developing projects and show initiative in management processes that includes the training of others to develop team performance	Consistently evaluate own learning and identify learning needs	Communicate, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information  Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view manifesting solidarity with others	Gather and interpret relevant data in a field to solve problems  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction within a complex environment  Make judgements based on social and ethical issues that arise in work or study
<b>7</b>	Use highly specialised theoretical and practical knowledge some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in the field. This knowledge forms the basis for originality in developing and/or	Create a research based diagnosis to problems by integrating knowledge from new or inter disciplinary fields and make judgements with incomplete or limited	Demonstrate leadership and innovation in work and study contexts that are unfamiliar, complex and unpredictable and that require solving problems involving many interacting factors	Demonstrate autonomy in the direction of learning and a high level understanding of learning processes	Communicate project outcomes, methods and underpinning rationale to specialist and non-specialist audiences using appropriate techniques	Solve problems by integrating complex knowledge sources that are sometimes incomplete and in new and unfamiliar

	<p>applying ideas</p> <p>Demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields</p>	<p>information</p> <p>Develop new skills in response to emerging knowledge and techniques</p>	<p>Review strategic performance of teams</p>		<p>Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them</p>	<p>contexts</p> <p>Demonstrate experience of operational interaction in managing change within a complex environment</p> <p>Respond to social, scientific and ethical issues that are encountered in work or study</p>
8	<p>Use specialised knowledge to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise new and complex ideas that are at the most advanced frontier of a field</p> <p>Extend or redefine existing knowledge and/or professional practice within a field or at the interface between fields</p>	<p>Research, conceive, design, implement and adapt projects that lead to new knowledge and new procedural solutions</p>	<p>Demonstrate substantial leadership, innovation and autonomy in work and study contexts that are novel and require the solving of problems that involve many interacting factors</p>	<p>Demonstrate capacity for sustained commitment to development of new ideas or processes and a high level understanding of learning processes</p>	<p>Communicate with authority through engaging in critical dialogue with peers in a specialist community</p> <p>Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them</p>	<p>Critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas and strategic decision making based on these processes</p> <p>Demonstrate experience of operational interaction with strategic decision-making capacity within a complex environment</p> <p>Promote social, and ethical advancement through actions</p>

It will be a task for Member States, national authorities, sectoral bodies and training providers to review existing qualifications and programmes and to ensure that they can be understood as learning outcome-based qualifications, thus enabling them to be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. The above table of learning outcomes is the tool that will enable experts and competent bodies to accomplish this task. Specific qualifications may be particularly related to one type of learning outcome with a lighter focus on other outcomes. It is likely that any one qualification may match types of learning outcomes at different levels. Table 1 is therefore offering the opportunity of a 'best fit' match of national and sectoral qualifications to a level and should not be interpreted as defining the precise set of outcomes for each specific level.

The 'Dublin descriptors', that are a product of the Bologna process for coordination of higher education, have been used extensively to reflect the 4 highest levels of the EQF. Where the Dublin descriptors have been amended for the EQF descriptors, this has been done to (i) achieve consistency with lower-level descriptors, (ii) to ensure that the learning outcome focus of the EQF is maintained and (iii) to include high-level VET learning outcomes. Annex 3 presents the overlap between the Dublin descriptors and the descriptors of the EQF.

### **5.3 Supporting and explanatory information for each level of the EQF**

It may be useful and supportive of the experts using these level descriptors, especially for the consultation process and for the implementation of the EQF, to have some further explanatory information on the levels of the EQF. For this purpose a series of level-related statements have been prepared (table 2) that relate more directly to the context of the qualification process but do not form part of the reference levels themselves. We therefore recommend that table 1 is read in conjunction with the supporting and explanatory information in table 2.

Table 2 includes information about aspects of qualifications systems that are not directly related to learning outcomes such as programme delivery and progression in employment and learning that is normally associated with a level of qualification. Clearly the diversity of practices across Europe and across sectors makes it impossible to be definitive about such aspects of qualification systems. The information should be taken as generalised and indicative and therefore needs to be treated with caution when used in any specific setting.

**Table 2 Supporting information about levels in the EQF**

Level	Supporting information that is typical and indicative of qualification at each level
1	<p>Learning contexts are simple and stable and the focus is general learning of basic skills.</p> <p>Learning is normally developed during compulsory education and contributes to general education but is also achieved through adult learning programmes (including popular adult education) and through non-formal and informal learning opportunities.</p> <p>When formally taught to young people basic knowledge and skills are developed in a supervised environment by direct teaching methods. Learning usually based in a school, college, training centre, an out-of-school training programme or an enterprise. The content of learning is often well established and regulated. However the development of basic skills is also closely associated with informal learning contexts in workplaces and communities.</p> <p>Education and training regulatory bodies operate quality assurance systems on formal qualifications at level 1.</p> <p>The achievement of qualifications at level 1 leads to further learning opportunities and to access to unskilled employment that may include a further element of training. This level is often the entry point to a lifelong pathway for people with no qualifications.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level A in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>20-40 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 1.</p>
2	<p>Learning contexts are stable and the focus is the broadening of basic skills (including key competences<sup>9</sup>)</p> <p>Learning at this level is formally acquired during compulsory education and can include an induction to work. Learning is usually based in a school, an adult education centre, college, training centre or an enterprise. Learning can also develop through non-formal means through work-based or popular adult education in communities.</p> <p>Knowledge and skill is learned formally in a supervised environment through direct teaching and coaching. The content of learning is well established and regulated. However the development of basic skills is often closely associated with informal learning contexts in workplaces and communities.</p> <p>Education and training regulatory bodies determine quality assurance of formal qualifications at level 2.</p> <p>The achievement of qualifications at level 2 provides entry into qualification-based training programmes and to access to unskilled employment that may include a further element of training. This level can be the entry point to a lifelong pathway.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level A in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>40-60 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 2.</p>
3	<p>Learning contexts for developing and demonstrating competence at this level are generally stable but some factors change from time to time leaving scope for personal expression in improving methods used. People with this level of qualification will usually have some experience of the field of work or study.</p> <p>Level 3 achievement reflects formal learning in upper secondary education or adult education (including popular adult education labour market training) in schools, colleges, training centres or learning in workplaces. It also reflects non-formal learning through work. Normally associated with part of upper secondary education or basic training in an occupational field, these qualifications at level 3 recognise a general education and skills base suitable for many job functions.</p> <p>Direct teaching and coaching are the main characteristic of formal learning programmes. The content of learning is well established and regulated. Non-formal learning opportunities are available through work based and community programmes.</p>

<sup>9</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/basic2004.pdf>

	<p>Educational and sectoral regulatory bodies determine quality assurance of qualifications at level 3.</p> <p>Qualifications at level 3 typically provide access to semi-skilled employment, further training and higher education. This level can be a key stage in a lifelong pathway.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level B in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>60-90 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 3</p>
4	<p>The context for developing and demonstrating competence at this level is usually predictable. There are many factors involved that can cause change in the learning context and some are related to each other. A person with this level of qualification will usually have experience of work or learning in a given field.</p> <p>Level 4 achievement typically reflects completion of upper secondary education and some formal learning in post compulsory education adult education including labour market training and popular adult education. It takes place in a range of institutions and also takes the form of non-formal learning through work. Level 4 qualifications are also used as gateways to learning opportunities in higher education</p> <p>Coaching is typically the main feature of the learning programme. The content of formal learning programmes is well established and regulated by competent bodies within the field.</p> <p>Quality assurance at level 4 is largely determined by expert review that is based on institutional or sector based agreements.</p> <p>People with this level of qualification typically have routes to further learning (sometimes including higher education) and to employment in skilled work. This level of qualification also supports further specialised training for those seeking job enhancement. Qualification at level 4 also provides access to employment in skilled work that can be performed independently and entail supervisory and coordination duties.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level C in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>90-120 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 4</p>
5	<p>Typical learning situations at this level require that problems are solved in a predetermined learning process. There are many factors some of which interact and therefore change in the context is sometimes unpredictable. Learning is based on experience in a given field that is often specialised.</p> <p>Qualifications at level 5 typically follows completion of a post secondary learning programme, such as apprenticeship together with post programme experience in a related field. High-grade technicians and managers achieve these qualifications that often bridge secondary and tertiary education and training. Higher education qualifications at this level are associated with the 'short cycle' (within the first cycle) of qualifications in the framework developed under the Bologna process and are often supported by advanced textbooks.</p> <p>Learning at this level demands some independence from the learner and is typically achieved through coaching in well-established procedures and knowledge.</p> <p>Quality assurance is largely determined by expert evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements.</p> <p>The achievement of qualifications at level 5 provides access to higher education programmes at level 6 (often with some credit exemption), to employment in highly skilled work or to career progression through improved recognition of work capabilities. These qualifications can also provide direct access to job roles requiring managerial duties.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level C in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>100-120 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 5 (in accordance with Bologna process).</p>

<p>6</p>	<p>Learning situations are usually not stable at level 6 and require that complex problems are solved in the learning process. There are many interacting factors that mean change in the context is unpredictable. Learning is often highly specialised.</p> <p>Learning for level 6 qualifications usually takes place in higher education institutions. However work settings also provide a sufficiently demanding context and sectoral and professional bodies offer recognition of learning achieved by this route. Learning at level 6 builds upon the learning in general secondary education and, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, typically includes some aspects that are at the forefront of the relevant field of study. People working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions achieve these qualifications.</p> <p>Level 6 qualifications are associated with the first cycle of qualifications in higher education in the framework developed under the Bologna process.</p> <p>Experts normally lead learning either by direct teaching or by practical coaching. Learners have limited control over formal content and methods used but are expected to show independence of research and response to problems.</p> <p>Quality assurance is largely determined by expert evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements usually involving third party review.</p> <p>Level 6 qualifications provide access to professional employment opportunities and are often career entry qualifications for professional and managerial work. Level 6 qualifications also provide access to further learning opportunities in higher education.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level D in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>180-240 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 6 (in accordance with Bologna process)</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Typical learning situations are unfamiliar and require solving problems that involve many interacting factors and not all of these may be obvious to the individual. Many factors are changing making the learning context complex and unpredictable. Learning is often highly specialised.</p> <p>Formal study for qualifications at level 7 usually takes place in specialist higher education institutions involving knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with level 6. Sectoral and professional bodies offer recognition for learning gained at this level in a work setting. Senior professionals and managers achieve these qualifications.</p> <p>Level 7 qualifications are associated with the second cycle of qualifications in higher education in the framework developed under the Bologna process.</p> <p>Learning is usually associated with independent working with other people at the same level or higher. There is some scope to develop the work or learning according to interest. Some guidance of others working at high level in the domain is normally expected.</p> <p>Quality assurance at this level is largely determined by expert peer evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements.</p> <p>Level 7 qualifications offer access to employment and to career progression within the specialist (or closely related) field. They also open access to further specialist learning in higher education.</p> <p>These qualifications are equivalent to level E in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p> <p>The consultation paper indicates that a range of <u>90-120 credit points</u> can be allocated to level 7 (in accordance with Bologna-process)</p>

<b>8</b>	<p>Learning situations for level 8 qualification are novel and require solving problems that involve many interacting factors, some of which are changing and are not obvious to the individual and therefore cannot be anticipated making the context complex and unpredictable. Learning takes place in a highly specialised field.</p> <p>Study for these qualifications mostly takes place in specialist higher education institutions. Learners achieving a qualification at level 8 have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.</p> <p>Level 8 qualifications are associated with the third cycle of qualifications in higher education in the framework developed under the Bologna process.</p> <p>Learning at this level is mostly independent of formal learning programmes and takes place through self-initiated actions guided by other high level experts. Individuals working at this level will often coach others to high levels of expertise.</p> <p>Quality assurance is largely determined by expert peer review coupled with institutional procedural requirements.</p> <p>Level 8 qualifications offer access to employment opportunities in specialised fields and career progression for those involved in jobs requiring research skills, scholarly work and leadership.</p> <p>These qualifications have no equivalent in the Directive on <i>Recognition of professional qualifications</i>.</p>
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#### 5.4 Summary indicators of level

The eight levels with descriptors that focus on learning outcomes is the core of the EQF: the levels are the reference points that will be the tools of articulation between different national and sectoral systems. However some users do not need the detail of the full table of learning outcomes. To support these users a summary indicator of what each level in the EQF means has been developed (annex 2). This broad overview of qualification levels lacks the specificity of the set of learning outcomes in table 1 but has the advantage of being a concise generalised statement for each level to provide a useful quick reference tool. These broad indicators of level are not considered part of the EQF but are a guideline to the learning outcome descriptors for the three types of competence.

#### 5.5 How to use the instruments

The different instruments introduced in this chapter offer broad support to the different users looking for reference points in the EQF. Each instrument has a different role in the kind of support it offers: for example;

- the *table of learning outcomes* (table 1) is the fundamental basis of the EQF, it provides qualifications experts with a tool to examine national or sectoral provision in detail and make judgements about the match with an EQF level.
- the *supporting and explanatory information* (table 2) offers a different kind of information to people wishing to gain a general impression of the way existing qualification processes relate to EQF levels and the potential links between aspects of qualification systems in different countries. This information is not outcome related and therefore does not have a definitive link to each level of the EQF. However it may be useful for consultation and implementation purposes for a wider range of citizens who use qualifications from different countries, including learners, careers advisers, employers, social partners and learning providers.

- The brief *level indicators* (in Annex 2) is for people who wish to gain an overview of the 8 levels of qualification proposed for the EQF, including employers, social partners and learning providers.

## 6. THE EQF AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CO-OPERATION; COMMON PRINCIPLES

The success of the EQF depends on its ability to promote voluntary and committed co-operation between stakeholders involved in education, training and learning at all relevant levels. While the common reference points have a key-role to play, this co-operation must also rest on a set of common principles and procedures. This is in line with the joint interim report of the European Council and Commission (February 2004) on the follow up of the education and training elements of the Lisbon process. Here it is stated that:

*‘...the development of common European references and principles can usefully support national policies. Although such common references and principles do not create obligation for Member States, they contribute to developing mutual trust between the key-players and encouraging reform (...) These principles should be developed as a matter of priority and implemented at national level, taking account of the national situation and respecting Member States competences.’*

Common principles and procedures could be developed in many areas but particular attention will be given to quality assurance, validation of non-formal and informal learning, guidance and counselling and promotion of key-competences. Important work has already been carried out at European level in these four areas and the following sections will illustrate how this work can be linked to and integrated into the EQF.

### 6.1 Quality assurance

Quality assurance (QA) is a crucial dimension of the proposed European Qualifications Framework and commitment to a set of common principles is a precondition for co-operation between stakeholders at different levels. This section builds on experiences from vocational education and training as well as from higher education and lists a limited number of quality assurance principles which could become an integrated part of the EQF.

Quality assurance systems are set up in order to ensure improvement and accountability of education and training. They aim at increasing the effectiveness and transparency of provision at all levels and thereby promoting mutual trust, recognition and mobility, within and across countries. Quality assurance deals with provision and learning outcomes. It should be noted that quality assurance does not guarantee improved quality. This is the responsibility of those providing education and training. Quality Assurance may however provide important support to these providers.

Member States, institutions and relevant stakeholders remain fully responsible for the definition of QA policies, systems and procedures. These vary across sectors and levels according to societal constructions, specific contexts and institutional environments. Given the diversity and complexity of quality assurance approaches within and across

Member States, there is a need to improve the transparency and the consistency of policy and practical developments in this field.

This could be achieved through common European principles, which would reflect a shared understanding of sound quality assurance approaches. These principles would help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight into how the existing QA models work, to identify areas of improvement and to take decisions based on common references.

Building on the Common Quality Assurance Framework in VET<sup>10</sup> and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education<sup>11</sup>, a certain number of common principles on QA could be agreed at European level, as part of the EQF.

### **Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training**

- QA is necessary to ensure accountability and improvement of education and training
- QA policies and procedures should cover all levels of education and training systems
- QA should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions
- QA should include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies
- QA external monitoring bodies or agencies should themselves be subject to regular review
- QA should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.
- QA systems should include:
  - Clear and measurable objectives and standard
  - Guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement
  - Appropriate resources
  - Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review
  - Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement
  - Widely accessible evaluation results
- QA initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis

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<sup>10</sup> Copenhagen process, December 2002

<sup>11</sup> Bologna process, Ministerial Communiqué Bergen 19/20 May 2005

- QA should be a cooperative process across levels, involving all relevant stakeholders, within countries and across Europe
- QA guidelines at European level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer-learning.

## 6.2 Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Most European countries are in the process of developing and implementing methods and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning. This makes it possible for an individual to acquire a qualification on the basis of learning taking place outside formal education and training - contributing in an important way to the objective of lifelong learning.

A set of common European principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning have already (May 2004) been endorsed by the (Education) Council in the form of a Council conclusion. Reflecting the experimental character of many validation approaches, the main objective of this conclusion was to stimulate an increased exchange of experiences<sup>12</sup>, to strengthen compatibility between systems and to improve overall quality and credibility.

These principles are directly relevant to the EQF and can guide co-operation between stakeholders at different levels. The principles cover four main aspects considered to be of particular relevance:

- *Individual entitlements.* The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.
- *Obligations of stakeholders.* Stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.
- *Confidence and trust.* The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.
- *Credibility and legitimacy.* Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders. The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

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<sup>12</sup> This exchange of experiences will also be supported by the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. A pilot version of this inventory is available <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory2004/>

While formulated at a general level, these principles provide important guidelines for the future development of European validation methods and systems.

### **6.3 Guidance and counselling**

Major progress has been made at the European level in the field of guidance and counselling. Since 2002, the following outcomes have been achieved:

- A set of reference points for quality assurance of lifelong guidance systems.
- A Council Resolution on lifelong guidance was adopted (in 2004).
- A policy makers' handbook on policies for lifelong guidance was published (in 2005).

The development of common European aims and principles for guidance to support national policy development was a recommendation of the March 2004 Joint Report of the Council and Commission to the European Council "Education and Training 2010". These principles should be an integrated part of the EQF and support peer review and development of guidance services at European, national, regional and local levels .

### **6.4 Key competences**

The work on key competences initiated within the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme is of relevance to the European Qualifications Framework. The 2004 Joint Interim Report of the Commission and Council recommends that this work is taken forward through a set of common principles and references. Based on the recommendations of a Commission appointed working group, 8 different key competences have been identified (communication in mother tongue, communication in another language, basic competences in maths, science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal and civic competences, entrepreneurship and cultural expression). These competences should be acquired by the end of compulsory education and training and maintained through lifelong learning

These key competences have partly been integrated into the common reference levels and descriptors of the EQF. This applies in particular to 'learning to learn', 'interpersonal and civic competences', 'entrepreneurship' and 'cultural expression' which have been captured within the category 'personal and professional competences'. Other key competences, for example language skills, digital skills and maths, science and technology are formulated at a level of detail more appropriate in national and sectoral frameworks.

The development of the EQF - and in particular the common reference levels and descriptors - illustrates how the key competences identified in the Education and Training 2010 process play an important role at all levels of learning and for the entire scope of qualifications.

The Council recommendation on key competences planned for 2006 will provide an opportunity to establish a clear link to and a synergy with the EQF.

## 7. TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS SUPPORTING LEARNERS

The EQF needs to be of direct relevance to individual citizens and their efforts to pursue lifelong learning. This will in part be accomplished by the introduction of common reference points making it easier for learners and employees plan their lifelong learning careers. In addition, firm links between the EQF and credit transfer and accumulation mechanisms (7.1 and 7.2), the Europass framework for transparency of qualifications and the Ploteus portal on learning opportunities must be established.

### 7.1 An integrated credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning; main principles

The priority given to lifelong learning and the need to stimulate transfer of qualifications across institutional, systemic and national borders underline the need for one integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning. A concrete and detailed proposal on an integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning is presented in the Commission staff working paper on ‘A European credit and accumulation system for lifelong learning’ which is subject to a separate but parallel consultation process. The introduction of the 8 EQF-levels will facilitate the development and implementation of this system. Building on the experiences from higher education (ECTS) and vocational education and training (ECVET), an integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning could be based on the following main principles:

- It must be implemented on a voluntary basis.
- It must be sufficiently simple and functional to be of practical relevance to individuals, education and training providers, qualifications authorities and other relevant bodies.
- It must build on a transparent and agreed set of principles, conventions and procedures promoting mutual trust at all relevant levels.
- It must build on learning outcomes acquired through learning processes in formal, non-formal as well as informal settings.
- It must be flexible enough to cover the diversity of education and training encountered in lifelong learning (initial and continuing education and training in formal systems as well as learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings)
- It must enable descriptions of qualifications – and the units they are constituted by - in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
- Units allowing for capitalisation and accumulation should be explicitly correlated to the EQF-levels
- It must allow individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences assessed and recognised at a time of their need, and in the form of units - which can be capitalised - thereby recording and supporting learning progress. Units allowing for

capitalisation and accumulation can only be obtained after appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.

- It must allow for accumulation and capitalisation of units of assessment; individuals must be able to use and combine these units when progressing towards a particular qualifications level.
- It must allow for transfer of units of assessment - between institutions, systems and countries.
- It must allocate credit points to qualifications and the units these build on. By convention, credit points supplement the units and are a numerical and simplified expression of the relative weight of the learning outcomes. Different methods for the allocation of credit points to qualifications and units are possible to express the volume, intensity, complexity etc. of learning outcomes and, where necessary, proxy indicators like workload linked to learning outcomes etc.
- Technical specifications of credit systems should be open to different methods for the assessment of learning outcomes and awarding of credit points (assessment can range from written tests to methods based on observation and simulation, demonstration of samples of work etc.)

## **7.2 An integrated credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning; links to the EQF and principles for allocating credit points**

Qualifications corresponding to each specific level of the EQF will be described in terms of learning outcomes. This is a fundamental feature of the EQF. These descriptions may be complemented by other sources, for example by referring to units or credit points. A unit is defined as a part of a qualification. Credit points do not replace learning outcomes and - in general - is not a direct translation of these. Credit points will be attributed to the achieved learning results, meaning the totality of knowledge, skills and competences required for a qualification or a qualifications unit. The requirements for a qualification or a qualifications unit must be defined by the relevant awarding body at national (and possibly sectoral) level.

The same learning outcomes resulting in a qualification or a unit, can be acquired through:

- Formal education and training, consisting of programmes of diverse duration, mode of learning and assessment,
- Non-formal learning (training at work, study activities in voluntary organisations etc)
- Informal learning (self-study, learning at work, personal and professional experience of various kinds)

This diversity of learning modes, processes and pathways does not influence the attribution of credit points to a qualification or a qualifications unit.

*Convention regarding attribution of credit points to qualifications*

The EQF is based on a structure of eight reference levels. The number of credit points required for a qualification is determined within a range of points linked to each level of

the EQF. Credit points are identified by the specific EQF-level to which they are linked (credit points at EQF-level 1, 2 ... « undergraduate », postgraduate »). The credit ranges suggested for each reference level are indicated in table 2 above.

These credit ranges are defined according to a convention:

- explicitly referring to progress in learning outcomes when passing from one level to another.
- indicating the recommended range of points (minimum and maximum) for qualifications at different levels<sup>13</sup>.

As a matter of principle it must be possible to transfer credits from one level to another. Credits linked to a qualification or unit at a particular level should – within limits – be recognised at other levels. Based on the above convention, and for a given qualification, credit points transferred from a lower level can as a maximum attain up to 25% (for example: if a qualification at level 4 requires 100 credit points, a maximum of 25 credit points can be transferred from level 3).

Consequently, credit points may enable a learner:

- to pass from one qualification to another at the same EQF-level
- to pass from one EQF-level to another.

#### *Credit points and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences*

European credit points may be used to identify and indicate the learning progress of individuals. Credit points do not imply an automatic recognition of learning outcomes, recognition is the responsibility of the bodies at national and sector level responsible for qualifications. However, as credit points are linked to the EQF-levels, they may facilitate the development of arrangements allowing for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences.

### **7.3 Europass**

Introduced in January 2005, the Europass framework brings together all European documents supporting transparency of qualifications. This portfolio approach makes it possible for individual citizens to present their learning outcomes in a simple, clear and flexible way to educational institutions, employers or others. Two documents, the Europass curriculum vitae (CV) and the Europass Language Passport can be filled in by the individual himself; three other documents, the Europass Certificate Supplement, the Europass Diploma Supplement and the Europass Mobility must be filled in and issued by competent organisations. These documents will gradually (during 2005) be made available in more than 20 languages.

Clear links should be established between the Europass documents and the reference levels of the EQF. Future developments of the Europass portfolio and its component documents should take into account the common reference levels and descriptors of the EQF and be based on learning outcomes.

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<sup>13</sup> For levels 5-7, ranges have been defined with reference to the cycles and degrees adopted in the Bologna process.

#### **7.4 Ploteus portal on European learning opportunities**

The PLOTEUS portal on Learning Opportunities aims to help students, job seekers, workers, parents, guidance counsellors and teachers to find out information about education, training and learning opportunities in Europe (web-sites of universities and higher education institutions, databases of schools and vocational training and adult education courses). It also contains descriptions and explanations of the different education systems of European countries.

Future developments of the Ploteus portal should be closely linked to the EQF. The EQF common reference levels should be used as an organising principle for the portal showing how different provisions may be linked to a particular level.

### **8. COMMITMENTS AND CHALLENGES AT NATIONAL AND SECTORAL LEVEL**

The development and implementation of an EQF implies a review of European education, training and learning systems and should result in even closer co-operation and links between them. The framework - and in particular the new reference levels – represents an important shift in focus. Taking learning outcomes into consideration moves us away from our traditional position of considering learning programmes and delivery as the definitive elements of qualifications.

The EQF will not succeed, however, if it remains a purely European-level initiative. The practical impact of the EQF on lifelong learning depends on the extent to which it can inform, inspire and guide national and sectoral education, training and learning policies and their implementation. The operational aim is that all existing qualifications will link - primarily through national systems/national frameworks - with the learning outcomes for one of the levels in the EQF.

The following sub-sections address the relationship between the EQF and qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral levels respectively. The following main processes are proposed for the interaction between national and sectoral systems and frameworks with the EQF:

- It is a national responsibility to define how national qualifications structures (including frameworks)<sup>14</sup> should be related to the EQF levels; guidelines are required to facilitate this process. A link between national and sectoral frameworks and systems should be encouraged.
- The EQF will provide a common reference point which could guide, inform and inspire developments of education, training and learning at sector level. Where possible, these sectoral developments should be linked to national frameworks – thus facilitating transfer and compatibility.

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<sup>14</sup> Individual qualifications are not related independently to the EQF; they are related through structures identified by the competent national authorities

## **8.1 The relationship between the EQF and a national framework of qualifications or national systems of qualifications**

Deciding on how a particular qualification should link (through national systems/frameworks) with the EQF is a key issue for the implementation of the EQF and for ensuring that the EQF attains its objectives. The intention is that the process by which qualifications link with the EQF will be supported by procedures, guidance and examples when the EQF is adapted as policy<sup>15</sup>.

It is important to note that the regulation of qualifications is an aspect of the system of learning within which the qualifications are issued. The EQF is not a regulatory instrument. It serves as a reference point to help national authorities (and other agencies, institutions, individuals and sectoral bodies) in determining how their qualifications might be compared and related to others within the EQF.

The EQF will be developed and implemented on a voluntary basis, not entailing any legal obligations. The EQF cannot be implemented, however, without clear commitments from national education and training authorities to a set of agreed objectives, principles and procedures. This requirement has been clearly demonstrated in the Bologna-process for higher education where voluntary but committed co-operation has resulted in far-reaching reforms.

It is a matter for national authorities to determine how the qualifications within a particular state are linked to the EQF. From the point of view of the EQF, the optimal approach would be that each country set up a single National Framework of Qualifications and that each country link this single National Framework of Qualifications to the EQF. Considering the rich diversity of national education and training systems and the fact that different countries have reached different stages of development, a process should be put in place whereby existing qualifications structures and systems in a country (whether single national framework or system of qualifications, or various systems of qualifications) are linked to the EQF. The following criteria could be helpful for the verification of this process:

- The national ministry or ministries<sup>16</sup> responsible for qualifications should define and decide the scope of the framework (which systems, sub-systems and responsible bodies to be included).
- A clear and demonstrable link is established between the qualifications in the systems or framework and the level descriptors of the EQF.
- The procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the various national systems or framework are transparent.

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<sup>15</sup> The proposal to use eight levels in the EQF to cover all kinds of qualifications from basic skills education to the most advanced research qualification means that the range of outcomes that define each specific level is broad. This does not mean however that any particular qualification will have the characteristics of every outcome at that level. It also means that qualifications may have characteristics that span learning outcomes for more than one level in the EQF.

<sup>16</sup> Ministries involved might include those responsible for General Education, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and Employment.

- The arrangements for quality assurance for qualifications in the national system or framework are consistent with quality assurance developments in the Bologna and Copenhagen Process.
- The national system or framework and its linkage with the EQF are referenced in the Europass portfolio of documents.
- National systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning should be compatible with common principles agreed at European level.
- National authorities should make full use of the opportunities provided by credit transfer and accumulation systems – supporting the development and implementation of an integrated credit transfer and accumulation mechanism for lifelong learning.
- The responsibility of the domestic parties to the national systems or frameworks are clearly demonstrated and published.

## **8.2 Compatibility of national systems with EQF; the principles of self-certification and transparency**

It is important to consider the process by which each country will certify the compatibility of its own qualifications with the EQF. Furthermore, it would be appropriate that the manner in which each country does this should be published.

It is proposed that the procedures for such compatibility would apply to self-certification by each country. The competent national body or bodies should oversee this process. While the process should mainly be a national one it must be ensured that international experts are involved. It is important that the evidence supporting the self-certification process should identify each of the criteria which are to be developed and that this should all be published. It is envisaged that the evidence would involve addressing in turn each of the criteria which are to be developed and that there would be a formal record of the decisions and arrangements that are put in place in relation to the systems or framework.

A further key element is that the relevant networks involved in the transparency of qualifications including the ENIC and NARIC networks, the NRP network and the Network of National Europass Centres would maintain a public listing of states that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process.

Summarising from the arrangements set out above, it is envisaged that the manner in which individual qualifications from countries will be compared is that each qualification will be related through the national framework or systems with a level in the EQF. Thus, various qualifications at the same level which are linked into the EQF can be compared through their own national systems. The key element of this is that if there is more than one national system in place in any country, there is a common single decision at national level to decide on the linkage of all such systems to the EQF levels.

## **8.3 Sectoral relationships with EQF**

In the December 2004 Maastricht communiqué it is stated that the EQF

*‘...should facilitate the voluntary development of competence based solutions at the European level enabling sectors to address the new education and training challenges caused by the internationalisation of trade and technology’.*

The explicit reference to sector initiatives is significant as it recognises that sectoral standards and qualifications are developed outside the scope of national frameworks and systems – notably at sector level and frequently addressing the need for European/international education and training solutions. The implementation of the relevant conclusions of the Maastricht communiqué requires a structure and a set of procedures allowing for a systematic, voluntary development and linking of sectoral standards to the common reference levels. Where appropriate, implementation might also mean application of common principles and instruments by relevant stakeholders in sectors. It is crucial to encourage dialogue among stakeholders on how the EQF could serve stakeholders at sectoral level. The following points could be used as a starting point for this dialogue:

- EQF provides a common reference point which could guide, inform and inspire developments of education, training and learning at sector level -addressing the needs of sectors and branches within single countries as well as at European/international level.
- EQF provides a common reference making it possible to link sector initiatives to national qualifications and thus facilitate transfer and compatibility
- Linking a sectoral framework to the EQF implies an acceptance of, and a commitment to, a set of criteria regarding quality and transparency.
- The decision on linking sectoral initiatives to the EQF should be decentralised and made by the stakeholders themselves, the bodies they appoint, including representatives of authorities responsible for qualifications on a national basis
- The criteria for linking a sectoral framework to the EQF should be transparent and external parties must be able to judge whether agreed commitments are met (for example regarding quality assurance etc).
- There should be a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the sectoral frameworks/systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.
- If possible, the link between the sectoral frameworks and the EQF should be referred to in the relevant parts of the Europass portfolio. Future developments of the Europass should take into account the need of sectors for transparency of qualifications.
- Existing processes and bodies at European level should – as far as possible – be used as a basis for such a process. The European sectoral social dialogue is of particular interest, as is the Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training and the sector platforms set up as a part of the 2005 Directive on recognition of regulated professions.

Decentralisation of decisions, transparency of procedures and a clear commitment to shared criteria are thus key features of this approach. It must be possible for everybody involved – for providers as well as users - to understand the arrangements at this particular level. This proposal envisages that the EQF will provide a common reference point which will make it possible to link sector initiatives to national qualifications. It is recommended that sectoral initiatives are developed in such a way that they could become compatible with national frameworks. The common references provided by the EQF can facilitate this. At this time, it is recognised that qualifications primarily are the responsibility of national authorities. Accordingly, establishing a link between sectoral and national frameworks requires co-operation between the relevant stakeholders – including national education and training authorities. However, it is important to note that

where there is an agreement about such linkages, this can be clearly signalled in any European sectoral framework development and the national linkage can be shown to be in place

#### **8.4 The link between the EQF and the Directive on recognition of professional qualifications**

The Directive on ‘Recognition of professional qualifications’ – originally put forward by the Commission in 2002 – replaces fifteen already existing directives and thereby introduces a simpler and more uniform regime for recognition of regulated professions.

The Directive and the EQF are complementary initiatives aiming at some of the same basic objectives. Both initiatives aim at the reduction of barriers to free movement and put in place mechanisms supporting cross-border transfer of qualifications. This reflects that the challenge of recognition needs to be tackled through a variety of approaches. Legal approaches as represented by the Directive on Recognition are important but must be supplemented by co-operation arrangements and mechanisms seeking to systematically promote mutual trust and common solutions between involved stakeholders. The following aspects are central to the Directive:

- It builds on two different approaches to recognition. Automatic recognition is applied in a limited set of professions (mainly health professions) where minimum requirements in education and training qualifications have been agreed. Other professions (not part of the above approach) are covered by a general system for recognition. The fundamental principle of this system is that ‘...any host Member State where a profession is regulated must take into account the qualifications obtained in another Member State’.
- It addresses regulated professions (understood as professions where access and/or use of professional title is regulated through legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions).
- The general system specifies that host Member States – in the absence of harmonisation of training conditions - may impose a compensation measure. This compensation measure should be proportionate, take into account the experience of the applicant and be based on an aptitude test or adaptation period.
- To ensure an adequate level of qualifications and to promote a more automatic character of recognition, the Directive opens up for establishment of common platforms at European level where professional associations, organisations and/or Member States can agree on common criteria (for example prescribed minimum level of qualifications).
- The process of recognition is supported by a set of five reference levels referring to formal education and training from general primary and secondary education (A) to post secondary education of more than 4 years duration (E)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The compatibility between the 5 levels of the Directive and the 8 levels of the EQF is shown in table 2.

The following aspects are of particular importance to the EQF and illustrate where it differs from (and can contribute to) the Directive on Recognition of professional qualifications:

- The EQF addresses the entire range of national and sectoral qualifications relevant to lifelong learning. The EQF covers the widest possible range of qualifications, not only those acquired in initial, formal education and training.
- By referring to learning outcomes (instead of years of formal education and training or experience) the EQF provides a precise reference point for comparing qualifications. The framework firmly establishes the principle that it is the result of learning that matters, not where or how the learning took place.
- The EQF takes as its point of departure that new and emerging qualifications and professions are rarely 'regulated'. We can observe a tendency towards individualisation of learning pathways and towards professions based on new (horizontal) combinations of knowledge, skills and competences.

An important objective of the EQF is to facilitate and strengthen voluntary co-operation between national and sectoral education and training authorities and providers.

- The EQF will support quality assurance and development in education and training systems and institutions. This will be facilitated by the common reference levels and by the common principles for quality assurance.
- Realisation of lifelong learning requires the reduction of barriers between education and training institutions and systems. Learning outcome based reference levels will contribute to this, as will the introduction of a credit transfer system for lifelong learning

The Directive on Recognition and the EQF can mutually support each other. The EQF will, through the establishment of a voluntary framework for co-operation - strengthen mutual trust between national and sectoral stakeholders and thus facilitate and simplify recognition of professional qualifications.

The EQF will furthermore be able to support the development of common platforms. Professional bodies, associations and Member States can use the EQF as a voluntary reference for development of common criteria - for example regarding minimum requirements for education and training.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION**

This paper has argued for a shift in the way education, training and learning frameworks and systems are conceptualised and - in effect - organised. Qualifications need to be opened up to a broader set of learning contexts and environments than is the case today. While formal education and training is an indispensable part of lifelong learning, acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences at the workplace, in leisure time activities and at home is of equal importance. The European Qualifications Framework responds to this challenge by introducing a set of reference levels and descriptors independent of formal education and training institutions and entirely based on learning outcomes.

The success of the European Qualifications Framework very much depends on its relevance and credibility to individual learners, education and training institutions, employers and policy-makers. These stakeholders must be convinced that a European meta-framework is needed and can contribute - indirectly and directly - to lifelong learning.

While this paper has pointed to some possible ways an EQF could operate, the framework can only be developed and implemented on the basis of an extensive consultation process opening up for critical but hopefully constructive suggestions on how to pursue a European meta-framework for qualifications. This is important not only for the technical functionality of the framework, but also the relevance and credibility of a future EQF which is very much linked to this process of consultation.

## **9.1 The consultation process**

The Europe-wide consultation process will run from June to November 2005. It is designed to invite all those experts with a direct interest in the EQF to give us their views on what the structure, content and aims of the EQF should be. We will specifically invite comments from the 32 countries (EU, EEA and candidate countries) taking part in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. The Bologna follow up group will also be invited to give comments. Countries will be invited to organise their own national consultations and we anticipate participation of both education and employment ministries, relevant qualification authorities and providers.

In addition to these, European social partner organisations (employers and trade unions), European NGOs and service and industry sectoral associations will be invited to give their comments. DG EAC committees and networks will also be addressed.

The output from this consultation process will inform the formal proposal on an EQF to be presented by the Commission in the form of a Council/Parliament recommendation in spring 2006.

The recommendation on the EQF should be followed by financial (and other forms of) support to stakeholders at national and sectoral level (for example related to the development of national qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning). It should also establish a clear time-frame for the implementation.

## **9.2 Questions for the consultation process**

The following questions are deemed to be of particular importance for the development of an EQF.

### *The rationale of an EQF*

- Are the most important objectives and functions to be fulfilled by an EQF those set out in chapter 4 of this paper?

### *The reference levels and descriptors*

- Does the 8-level reference structure sufficiently capture the complexity of lifelong learning in Europe?

- Does the distinction between knowledge, skills and wider aspects of competence reflect the realities of lifelong learning?
- Do the level descriptors, in table 1, adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in levels?
- What should be the content and role of the ‘supporting information’ on education, training and learning structures and input (table 2) ?

#### *Principles*

- How can the proposed common principles for Quality Assurance be improved in order to support the development of mutual trust?
- How can the common principles on validation be strengthened and how can they support the development and implementation of the EQF?

#### *Tools*

- How can the EQF be linked to and supported by a credit transfer and accumulation system (such a system is the object of a related, parallel consultation document and process)?
- How can the EQF be linked to the Europass and what future developments of transparency related instruments based on learning outcomes can be foreseen?

#### *National Qualifications Frameworks*

- How can National Qualifications Frameworks for lifelong learning – reflecting the principles of the EQF - be established?
- To which extent can national systems of education and training be based on learning outcomes?

#### *Sectoral qualifications?*

- To which extent can the EQF become a catalyst for developments at sector level?
- How can the EQF be used to pursue a more systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at sector level?
- How can stakeholders at sector level be involved in supporting the implementation of the EQF?
- How can principles and procedures for co-operation be developed and agreed ?
- How can the link between sectors development and national qualifications be improved?

#### *EQF and regulated professions*

- How can the EQF support and complement the efforts of the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications towards the free movement of professionals within the internal market?

## ANNEX 1 Learning outcomes; progression from level 1 to 8

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<b>Knowledge</b>	Recall basic general knowledge	Recall and comprehend basic knowledge of a field, the range of knowledge involved is limited to facts and main ideas	Apply knowledge of a field that includes processes, techniques, materials, instruments, equipment, terminology and some theoretical ideas	Use a wide range of field- specific practical and theoretical knowledge	Use broad theoretical and practical knowledge that is often specialised within a field and show awareness of limits to knowledge base	Use detailed theoretical and practical knowledge of a field. Some knowledge is at the forefront of the field and will involve a critical understanding of theories and principles	Use specialised theoretical and practical knowledge some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in the field. This knowledge forms the basis for originality in developing and/or applying ideas  Demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields	Use specialised knowledge to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise new and complex ideas that are at the most advanced frontier of a field  Extend or redefine existing knowledge and/or professional practice within a field or at the interface between fields
<b>Skills</b>	Use basic skills to carry out simple tasks	Use skills and key competences <sup>18</sup> to carry out tasks where action is governed by rules defining routines and strategies  Select and apply basic methods, tools and materials	Use a range of field-specific skills to carry out tasks and show personal interpretation through selection and adjustment of methods, tools and materials  Evaluate different approaches to tasks	Develop strategic approaches to tasks that arise in work or study by applying specialist knowledge and using expert sources of information  Evaluate outcomes in terms of strategic approach used	Develop strategic and creative responses in researching solutions to well defined concrete and abstract problems  Demonstrate transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge in creating solutions to problems	Demonstrate mastery of methods and tools in a complex and specialised field and demonstrate Innovation in terms of methods used  Devise and sustain arguments to solve problems	Create a research based diagnosis to problems by integrating knowledge from new or inter disciplinary fields and make judgements with incomplete or limited information  Develop new skills in response to emerging knowledge and techniques	Research, conceive, design, implement and adapt projects that lead to new knowledge and new procedural solutions

<sup>18</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/basic2004.pdf>

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<b>Personal and professional outcomes</b>								
<i>(i) Autonomy and responsibility</i>	Complete work or study tasks under direct supervision and demonstrate personal effectiveness in simple and stable contexts	Take limited responsibility for improvement in performance in work or study in simple and stable contexts and within familiar, homogeneous groups	Take responsibility for completion of tasks and demonstrate some independence in role in work or study where contexts are generally stable but where some factors change	Manage role under guidance in work or study contexts that are usually predictable and where there are many factors involved that cause change and where some factors are interrelated  Make suggestions for improvement to outcomes  Supervise routine work of others and take some responsibility for training of others	Manage projects independently that require problem solving where there are many factors some of which interact and lead to unpredictable change  Show creativity in developing projects  Manage people and review performance of self and others.  Train others and develop team performance	Demonstrate administrative design, resource and team management responsibilities in work and study contexts that are unpredictable and require that complex problems are solved where there are many interacting factors  Show creativity in developing projects and show initiative in management processes that includes the training of others to develop team performance	Demonstrate leadership and innovation in work and study contexts that are unfamiliar, complex and unpredictable and that require solving problems involving many interacting factors  Review strategic performance of teams	Demonstrate substantial leadership, innovation and autonomy in work and study contexts that are novel and require the solving of problems that involve many interacting factors
<i>(ii) Learning competence</i>	Accept guidance on learning	Seek guidance on learning	Take responsibility for own learning	Demonstrate self-direction in learning	Evaluate own learning and identify learning needs necessary to undertake further learning	Consistently evaluate own learning and identify learning needs	Demonstrate autonomy in the direction of learning and a high level understanding of learning processes	Demonstrate capacity for sustained commitment to development of new ideas or processes and a high level understanding of learning processes

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<i>(iii) Communication and social competence</i>	Respond to simple written and oral communication  Demonstrate social role for self	Respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication  Adjust role to different social settings	Produce (and respond to) detailed written and oral communication  Take responsibility for self understanding and behaviour	Produce (and respond to) detailed written and oral communication in unfamiliar situations  Use self understanding to change behaviour	Convey ideas in a well structured and coherent way to peers, supervisors and clients using qualitative and quantitative information  Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement with others	Communicate, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information  Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view manifesting solidarity with others	Communicate project outcomes, methods and underpinning rationale to specialist and non-specialist audiences using appropriate techniques  Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them	Communicate with authority through engaging in critical dialogue with peers in a specialist community  Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them
<i>(iv) Professional and vocational competence</i>	Demonstrate awareness of procedures for solving problems	Solve problems using information provided	Solve problems using well known information sources taking account of some social issues	Solve problems by integrating information from expert sources taking account of relevant social and ethical issues	Formulate responses to abstract and concrete problems  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction within a field  Make judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues	Gather and interpret relevant data in a field to solve problems  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction within a complex environment  Make judgements based on social and ethical issues that arise in work or study	Solve problems by integrating complex knowledge sources that are sometimes incomplete and in new and unfamiliar contexts  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction in managing change within a complex environment  Respond to social, scientific and ethical issues that are encountered in work or study	Critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas and strategic decision making based on these processes  Demonstrate experience of operational interaction with strategic decision-making capacity within a complex environment  Promote social, and ethical advancement through actions

## ANNEX 2 Indicative summary of EQF-levels

EQF Level	Brief indicator of level of qualification
1	Qualifications at level 1 recognise basic general knowledge and skills and the capacity to undertake simple tasks under direct supervision in a structured environment. The development of learning skills requires structured support. These qualifications are not occupation specific and are often sought by those with no qualification.
2	Qualifications at level 2 recognise a limited range of knowledge, skills and wider competences that are mainly concrete and general in nature. Skills are applied under supervision in a controlled environment. Learners take limited responsibility for their own learning. Some of these qualifications are occupation specific but most recognise a general preparation for work and study.
3	Qualifications at level 3 recognise broad general knowledge and field-specific practical and basic theoretical knowledge, they also recognise the capacity to carry out tasks under direction. Learners take responsibility for their own learning and have limited experience of practice in a particular aspect of work or study.
4	Qualifications at level 4 recognise significant field-specific practical and theoretical knowledge and skills. They also recognise the capacity to apply specialist knowledge, skills and competences and to solve problems independently and supervise others. Learners show self-direction in learning and have experience of practice in work or study in both common and exceptional situations
5	Qualifications at level 5 recognise broad theoretical and practical knowledge, including knowledge relevant to a particular field of learning or occupation. They also recognise the capacity to apply knowledge and skill in developing strategic solutions to well-defined abstract and concrete problems. Learning skills provide a basis for autonomous learning and the qualifications draw on experience of operational interaction in work or study including management of people and projects.
6	Qualifications at level 6 recognise detailed theoretical and practical knowledge, skill and competence associated with a field of learning or work, some of which is at the forefront of the field. These qualifications also recognise the application of knowledge in devising and sustaining arguments, in solving problems and in making judgements that take into account social or ethical issues. Qualifications at this level include outcomes appropriate for a professional approach to operating in a complex environment.
7	Qualifications at level 7 recognise self-directed, theoretical and practical learning, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a specialised field that provides a basis for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context. These qualifications also recognise an ability to integrate knowledge and formulate judgements taking account of social and ethical issues and responsibilities and also reflect experience of managing change in a complex environment.
8	Qualifications at level 8 recognise systematic mastery of a highly specialised field of knowledge and a capacity for critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas. They also recognise an ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt substantial research processes. The qualifications also recognise leadership experience in the development of new and creative approaches that extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.

## ANNEX 3 Complementarity, Dublin descriptors and EQF descriptors

The table below summarises the place of the Dublin descriptors (underlined text) within the higher EQF levels.

Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<p>Use of <u>broad theoretical and practical knowledge that is often specialised within a field</u> and show awareness of limits to knowledge base</p>	<p>Use detailed theoretical and practical knowledge of a <u>field. Some knowledge is at the forefront of the field and will involve a critical understanding of theories and principles</u></p>	<p>Use of highly specialised <u>theoretical and practical knowledge some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in the field. This knowledge forms the basis for originality in developing and/or applying ideas</u></p>	<p><u>Critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise new and complex ideas that are at the most advanced frontier and highly specialised</u></p>
<p><u>Formulate strategic and creative responses in researching solutions to well defined concrete and abstract problems</u></p>	<p>Demonstrate mastery of methods and tools in a complex and specialised field</p>	<p>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field</p>	<p><u>Extend or redefine existing knowledge and/or professional practice within a field or at the interface between fields</u></p>
<p><u>Demonstrate transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge in creating solutions to problems</u></p>	<p><u>Devise and sustain arguments to solve problems</u></p>	<p><u>Integrate knowledge from new or interdisciplinary fields to create a research based diagnosis to problems</u></p>	<p>Research, conceive, design, implement and adapt projects that lead to new knowledge and new procedural solutions</p>
<p>Manage projects independently in work or study that require problem solving where there are many factors some of which interact and lead to unpredictable change in the context</p>	<p>Demonstrate Innovation in terms of methods used in solving problems</p>	<p><u>Make judgements with incomplete or limited information</u></p>	<p><u>Demonstrate critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas</u></p>
<p>Manage other people and review performance of themselves and others. Coach other workers/learners and develop team performance</p>	<p>Accept administrative design, resource and team management responsibilities in work and study contexts that are not stable and require that complex problems are solved. There are also many interacting factors that mean change in the context is unpredictable</p>	<p>Develop new skills in response to emerging knowledge and techniques</p>	<p><u>Demonstrate substantial leadership, innovation and autonomy in work and study contexts</u> that are complex, unpredictable and novel and require the solving of problems that involve many interacting factors, some of which are changing and cannot be anticipated</p>
<p>Show creativity in developing projects</p>	<p>Show creativity in developing projects and demonstrate initiative in management process</p>	<p><u>Demonstrate leadership and innovation in work and study contexts that are unfamiliar and that require solving problems involving many interacting factors some of which are changing making the context complex and unpredictable</u></p>	
	<p>Train other workers/learners and develop team performance</p>	<p>Review strategic performance of team</p>	

<u>Demonstrate self-direction in learning and self-awareness including diagnosis of learning needs</u>	<u>Consistently evaluate own learning and identify learning needs necessary to undertake further learning</u>	<u>Demonstrate autonomy in the direction of learning</u>	Demonstrate capacity for sustained commitment to development of new ideas or processes and a high level understanding of learning processes
<u>Convey ideas in a well structured and coherent way to peers, supervisors and clients using qualitative and quantitative information</u>	<u>Communicate qualitative and quantitative information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques</u>	<u>Communicate project outcomes, methods and underpinning rationale to specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques</u>	<u>Communicate with peers in a specialist community with authority</u>
Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement with others	Express a comprehensive internalised personal world view manifesting solidarity with others	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them
Experience of operational interaction within a field	Experience of operational interaction within a complex environment	Experience of operational interaction in managing change within a complex environment	Experience of operational interaction with strategic decision-making capacity within highly complex environment
<u>Formulate responses to abstract and concrete problems</u>	<u>Gather and interpret relevant data in the field to solve problems</u>	<u>Solve problems by integrating complex knowledge sources that are sometimes incomplete and in new and unfamiliar contexts</u>	<u>Critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas and strategic decision making based on these processes</u>
Make judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues	<u>Make judgements based on social and ethical issues that arise in work or study</u>	<u>Respond to social, scientific and ethical issues that are encountered in work or study</u>	<u>Promotion of social, and ethical advancement through actions</u>

## **ANNEX 4 Members of the EQF expert group**

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