

**Expert Workshop**  
**“Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning”**  
**Vienna, October 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Summary Report**

**BACKGROUND**

Lifelong Learning has become a necessity in a Europe characterised by rapid social, technological and economic change. Addressing the now visible need for continuous updating and renewal of knowledge, skills and wider competencies is not possible without efficient communication and co-operation between education sectors, authorities, institutions and between countries<sup>1</sup>.

In order to reach the Lisbon goals the EU Heads of Government requested at their meeting in Brussels in March 2005 the creation of a European Qualifications Framework supporting previous recommendations by Ministers of Education and Training both in the framework of the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process.

The EQF is envisaged as a meta-framework enabling qualification frameworks and systems at national and sectoral level to be related to each other. This should increase transparency and mutual trust, and hence ensure access to education and training by removing barriers between institutions and countries, as well as by facilitating both recognition of “foreign” qualifications and transfer of qualifications of individual citizens from one learning setting to another.

Considering the rich diversity of national education and training systems and their stages of development, each country can 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.<sup>2</sup>

Based on inclusive consultation processes at the respective national levels EU member states are invited to comment on the proposed draft EQF concept at the end of 2005. The possible shape of the future EQF will be one of the key points of discussion in education and training at EU level in the coming years.

The Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, in close cooperation with the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, has therefore initiated a consultation process for SEE on the European Qualifications Framework. An expert workshop “Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning - Relevance, Feasibility and Implications for SEE” (Vienna, October 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005) offered a forum for a broad discussion on the topic. Participants were HE and VET experts from the SEE Ministries of Education, experts from EU member states, the European Training Foundation and the OECD, as well as from the European Commission.

**WORKSHOP CONCLUSIONS**

At the last Ministerial Conference in Bergen in May 2005 the Ministers responsible for higher education agreed to adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area and to elaborate National Frameworks for Qualifications

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<sup>1</sup> Cp. Commission Staff Working Document, Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, Brussels SEC (2005) 957, p. 8

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4-5

and to have started work on this by 2007. This includes all countries of the region as well.

The development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks is widely seen as the “optimal approach” for linking national qualification systems to EQF<sup>3</sup>. While being at different stages of development, most of the countries in SEE have already started discussion processes on the possible development of NQF. Equally, education development processes in most countries place increasing importance on learning outcomes rather than inputs.

Thus the development of the EQF is also fully in line with education development processes in SEE providing a reference instrument for evolving NQFs.

### **Qualification Frameworks: Feasibility and Implementation Scenarios**

Having this in mind and based on the sharing of experience, workshop participants highlighted the following prerequisites for the successful development and implementation of QFs:

- Designing and implementing a NQF should be based on structured and inclusive national consultation processes, involving stakeholders from all relevant sectors in the society (going beyond VET and HE) and ensuring a broad public debate.
- The impetus for the development of QFs in Higher Education (framework of the Bologna Process) and VET offer the chance for a broader consensus and the establishment of national networks to intensive working on the development of respective NQFs.
- NQFs as well as the EQF must be/become useful to all members of society.
- All levels and level descriptors should be developed together and in agreement with the relevant stakeholders in order to avoid inconsistencies and overlaps, e.g. between VET and HE.
- The EQF is a transparency instrument but it also has the potential of becoming a driving force for change.
- Broad consensus on the purposes, needs and a strategy with regard to the general aims of the EQF and the national education policies is an important precondition for sustainable success
- as the main aim of developing an EQF is to increase transparency the priority is to include existing qualifications and to find their place in the system. This will in some cases lead to a review and the development of new qualifications.
- In the processes of establishing an NQF close links to mechanisms/systems of quality assurance are important.

### **A Focus on Learning Outcomes and Its Implications for the Learning Process**

The focus on learning outcomes is an approach which is part of the reform process in SEE and other parts of Europe. The emphasis in the EQF is thus coherent with the developments in the region. However, this change of focus from input to outcomes will

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<sup>3</sup> Cp. Commission Staff Working Document, Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, Brussels SEC (2005) 957, p. 34

necessitate further changes in the organisation of learning processes and the assessment of their outcomes. The following development needs were highlighted:

- Learning outcomes need to become the basis for curriculum development and the content of teaching and learning processes.
- The role of teacher will change from “instructors” to facilitators of learning processes for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies. In order to enable teachers to fulfil this new role the importance of new forms of qualifying teachers and the need for school based development were highlighted.
- Learning outcomes introduce greater objectivity in the assessment process and make more transparent what is learned and achieved. At the same the learning outcomes approach makes the assessment process more complicated to design, i.e. the assessment of personal competencies. New forms of monitoring and quality assurance would hence depend on institutional and procedural reforms such as the establishment of new forms of inspectorates and creating new guidelines for evaluation.

Sustainable change needs time. Qualification Frameworks while being a valuable lever for reform generate institutional challenges. Hence, development and implementation of NQFs and their alignment to the EQF must be seen as a long-term, non-linear process.

### **Priorities for Development**

To support the above outlined developments the expert meeting identified the following priorities:

- **Awareness raising and commitment**  
To be able to move forward in the process, the SEE countries need strong commitment by Ministries, Government and Social Partners involved in the effort of establishing EQF-compatible national qualification frameworks – respective activities such as awareness raising campaigns, etc. need to be considered.
- **Common language and terminology**  
As terminology and concepts vary from language to language, respectively country to country further steps should be taken to clarify key concepts and terminology used in the EQF consultation process.
- **Making use of already existing structures and processes**  
In developing QFs and promoting reform initiatives existing structures and processes should be used (e.g. National BFUGs, Bologna Promoters, etc.).
- **Capacity Building Measures**  
Valuable experience in the development and implementation of QFs is already available at European, regional and international level. Peer learning and provision of technical expertise at regional level through networks for regional cooperation like ERI SEE or the European Training Foundation play an important role. Lessons learned from international evaluations, eg, the 2005 Scottish evaluation and the 2005 South African evaluation may provide useful insights into the implementation of QFs.
- **Funding/Financial Assistance**  
As EQF/NQF refers to all sectors of education, financial resources will be needed to support successful implementation processes – both from national as well as international sources. It is therefore vital that funding instruments of the

European Commission will be available for the implementation of QFs in the life long learning perspective including the relevant interfaces. It will be important to draw attention of national governments as well as the European Commission to the fact that the participation of the SEE countries in the new LLL programme will not eliminate the need for special 'assistance funding' for education reforms in the region.