ETF COMMENTS ON THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

EQF beyond the borders of the EU

1. The document was discussed with representatives and stakeholders of all four candidate countries during the final quarter of 2005. Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Croatia have all provided supportive comments on the content and function of the EQF. The concept of a Meta framework was well received and the existence of an EQF was perceived as potentially playing an important role in the promotion of greater portability of learning. Each of these countries has provided submissions to the consultation process (see annex).

The EQF consultation document was used as background inputs during the second half of 2005 to the National Qualification Framework (NQF) projects in South Eastern Europe and in the Ukraine and in Russia. In all countries the EQF was supported as a positive mechanism that could serve as a useful reference point for national developments or recognised as a significant policy development that needed to be considered within national education policy. The EQF document has been translated and distributed in Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, Romanian as well as Russian.

The EQF will continue to provide a background to the work that ETF is undertaking in the area of NQFs. This work will continue throughout 2006 and will involve the Mediterranean region as well as South Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In the South Eastern Europe region, the EQF was also discussed extensively at a conference hosted by the Education Reform Initiative for South Eastern Europe during October 2005. The concept and direction of the EQF was well supported by countries participating in the conference. The conference identified 5 main issues associated with its application in the region:

- Awareness raising and commitment
- Common language and terminology of key concepts
- Making use of already existing structures and processes
- Capacity building measures
- Funding/financial assistance

The conference report can be found in annex.

Overall, the EQF offers partner countries of South Eastern Europe valuable reference points for the exploration of their own policy developments in education and training.

The usefulness and viability of the EQF is reinforced by the participation of many ETF partner countries in the Bologna process and their commitment through the Bergen Communiqué to ensuring

‘… complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as

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1 A total of 15 countries and territories of the 45 countries participate in the Bologna Process and are members of the Follow-up Group: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo), "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, and Ukraine are working with the ETF.
vocational education and training now being developed within the European Union as well as among participating countries.\(^2\)

Participation in the Bologna provides a foundation for partner countries as the upper levels of the EQF are consistent with Bologna. Additionally, they will also be able to incorporate elements of the EQF into their broader education and training system since many of the elements of the EQF are also coherent with the Bologna process. In particular, the three key items of Reference levels, quality assurance arrangements and learning outcomes are supported by Bologna. In the context of moves towards the implementation of Bologna, the EQF should – in theory – involve the extension of concepts that are already developing rather than the creation of new concepts.

External relations impact of the EQF

2. The ETF is engaged in discussions on the development of national qualification frameworks in MEDA, South Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The elaboration of National Qualification frameworks in the EECA region was identified as a key reform strategy by ETF in its contribution to DG RELEX on the identification of the possible programming assistance under the Neighbourhood Policy.

The new external relations instruments for Pre-accession states and Neighbourhood Countries (IPA and ENPI instruments) are intended to support activities that contribute to stability and facilitate economic growth across its border regions. The approach is policy driven\(^3\) by combining external relations objectives of stability and security together with development assistance. The reform and modernisation of learning systems is identified as a high priority to be addressed in the assistance measures.\(^4\)

The strategic aims of ENPI and IPA for partner countries and the EU place a stronger requirement for linking internal EU activities with external environments, i.e., the promotion of the ‘external projection of internal policies’\(^5\). For Education and Training this suggests bringing recent EU internal developments closer to partner countries, e.g., promoting awareness and innovations in areas associated with the Education and Training 2010 agenda, the move towards Lifelong Learning policies, the Bologna process and the use of common principles as part of greater European Co-operation. The use of these policies provides a basis for partner countries to shape their policies in order to achieve the objectives of closer integration and participation within EU programmes.

The EQF provides a basis for better comparisons and portability of learning and recognition between Member States, but its principles and processes appear to be also generally applicable to partner countries. The degree to which this applies depends on the progress of modernisation in each country. The EQF has already had a technical and policy impact on many Non Member States.

A key issue raised by partner countries is the concept of the EQF as a mechanism that is open to Non Member States, in particular the Pre-Accession states and the Neighbourhood countries and the reciprocal impact on partner countries and Member States of the introduction of the EQF.

The development of frameworks is advancing in South Eastern Europe and in the candidate countries where it is frequently perceived as means of integrating reforms into a coherent policy package. In many ways the EQF has accelerated the process of development as it is seen as providing a stronger link between partner countries and the EU and its Member States. Many of these countries are currently participating in the Bologna process and are also expected to increasingly transform their education and training systems towards lifelong learning. Although Bologna clearly does have an external relations impact, the EQF is expected to have a stronger impact in that it has a broader effect on all sectors of education and covers a broader range of education and training components – ranging from the use of learning outcomes and quality assurance to the tools and instruments of Europass, career guidance and key competencies.

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\(^2\) Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005

\(^3\) ENPI, page 3, article 3, scope of assistance

\(^4\) European Neighbourhood Strategy, p20

The progress by partner countries towards national qualification frameworks and their possible use of the EQF could in some degree strengthen the EQF since countries adopting it and putting it into practice will create a network of users whose size and frequency of use will encourage its incremental use by other countries, i.e., the more countries participating in the EQF, the stronger it is likely to become.

The European Qualification Framework also increases the possibilities for the recognition of qualifications between countries. The EQF represents the possibility of a shift from largely bilateral recognition arrangements to multilateral portabilities in learning opportunities between both Partner Countries and Member States. The EQF and its supporting instruments can contribute to the further development of skilled migration policies by offering a means of more consistently recognising skills held by potential migrants and the skills acquired by migrants during periods of employment in EU Member States. The use of these instruments will facilitate the participation of Partner Countries in the use of and possible co-development of emerging sectoral qualifications.

There is a possible dilemma in that neighbouring and Western Balkan countries are participating in the Bologna process without some complementary measures that would enable their participation in EQF processes to some degree. The direction of the Bologna process is now reaching a stage where the inclusion of additional participating countries will reach its limits, and the process will focus more on deepening the reforms proposed.

The implementation challenges for Bologna are not yet fully clear and although the Dublin descriptors have been developed and the Diploma supplement is encouraging countries and universities to use learning outcomes these instruments have yet to become mainstream in the higher education sector. In this respect, participation in the EQF could provide a support to these changes. Such support could be delivered through transparency and quality instruments such as peer learning activities or a self-reporting process with the participation of Member States.

We would therefore support an approach that enabled all countries that are in the Bologna process to join EQF to some degree, if they are able to meet the conditions. This would support a better alignment of education systems in neighbouring countries with European systems based on shared values and principles. The ETF is able to provide support to the Commission on an assessment process involving partner countries and the EQF. Facilitating the involvement of this group of countries in EQF processes would involve the allocation of resources.

The EQF as a META-Framework

3. The diversity of approaches to the development, issuance and delivery of qualifications in the European sphere are accommodated through the document’s emphasis on the EQF as a ‘Meta’ framework that can act as a transparency mechanism. Although the EQF shares some features with national qualification frameworks, it is not a national operating framework and does not set out processes for the regulation of qualifications or their endorsement. In this respect the EQF does not seek to impose a set of approaches on national states, but rather offers a series of broad and commonly available principles in a coherent package.

Reference levels

4. The features associated with qualification frameworks are well introduced in the document. Of these the most prominent are the reference levels contained in table 1 and Table 2 of the document and described further in annex 1. The structure and content of the reference levels follow the style and conventions included used in most national qualification frameworks. It can be expected that this coherence will facilitate the use of the EQF both by national systems that already have such levels and by countries that are considering developing such levels. In this respect the role of the Bologna descriptors reinforces the EQF as the Bologna descriptors – although different in the manner of expression - are sufficiently similar in style and format to provide a signpost to use and purpose of the EQF’s reference levels.

The reference levels do not appear to prescribe particular qualification levels in general. They are representative levels against which qualifications of different qualification types could be aligned. The approach of reference levels leaves it open for any education sector or provider to develop a
qualification at any level. In practice however, it may be that the upper levels of the framework will be mainly occupied by higher education qualifications – the coherence of levels 6, 7, and 8 with the three Bologna cycles identified in the Dublin descriptors suggest that these levels will mainly be covered by Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate degrees and qualifications. Some flexibility may be required to ensure this apparent alignment of particular qualifications does not constrain the growth of new qualifications in other sectors and within the higher education sector itself.

Although the levels are demarcated by refinements and discriminators to the descriptors, in reality, the reference levels overlap to some degree in reality and that there will not necessarily be a fixed correspondence between qualification types and reference levels. This ‘blurring’ at the margins of levels together with the alignment of particular qualification types may lead to controversy at intermediate levels of the framework, i.e. at levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 where sector qualifications overlap and where there may be differences between countries in levels of qualifications of the similar type and purpose. In this respect the ‘best fit’ referred to on pages 16 and 21 of the consultation is to be encouraged.

The EQF as an instrument of reform

5. The use of learning outcomes in the EQF potentially provides a strong mechanism for countries seeking to modernise their education and training system. The process of using learning outcomes as explicit statements of what is to be learned will frequently assist with the modernisation of education and training content by encouraging developers to examine the content of their learning programmes. In addition, the promotion of learning outcomes in the context of the EQF provides a unique opportunity whereby all sectors of education can refer to a shared approach for identifying learning content. This will promote better understanding between the different sectors and may go some way to resolving disagreements on the alignment of qualifications at particular levels. The use of learning outcomes also provides non public providers with greater clarity on the content of accredited programmes. The general effect of this in VET systems using qualification frameworks has been to enable private providers to have their programmes accredited and also a growth in both the supply and diversity of learning opportunities.

The descriptors are well constructed and there is a general thread of coherence in the expression of the descriptors from the basic level (level 1) to the highest level (level 8). The descriptors appear to play a number of roles in the framework – firstly, by providing a means of clarifying the likely or intended content of qualifications at different levels; secondly by offering a series of descriptions that indicate how different qualifications at different levels relate to each other; thirdly, the content of the descriptors by emphasising wider aspects of competence provide an incentive for qualification developers and issuers to focus on the role of broad based skills as important features of learning content. These skills are frequently identified as vital to ongoing employability and the ability to undertake learning throughout a working career. In the VET context of partner countries the introduction of these skills in the vocational curriculum is often an important feature of the reform process. Their highlighting in the reference levels of the framework gives added momentum to this.

In addressing each of the above roles, the reference levels do more than reflect the possible content of qualifications; the reference levels may also introduce a significant element of change or reform in the design and presentation of qualifications in national systems. From the perspective of Partner Countries, these inherent elements of the EQF are valuable since they provide countries seeking to modernise their education and training system with a focal point that they could adopt and valorise with reasonable confidence that they are drawing on mainstream or emerging European practices. Such a feature could significantly reduce the time spent in policy search. The wealth of technical information developed during the preparation of the EQF will also assist with this process.

In addition, the fact that the EQF covers all forms of learning means that potentially it could be a viable focus for the use of Sector Wide (SWAP) and Twinning highlighted in the proposed Neighbourhood Policy.
Stimulating additional learning pathways

6. EQF is expected to open more pathways to learners, combining easier learning in different settings and learning across borders. Learning in the workplace, will have to become more recognised. Institutional learning remains the most dominant form of recognised learning. Sectors will have to play an important role in innovation, as they can provide conditions that can facilitate structured learning on the job. It will also require that the dimensions of increasing complexity and responsibility that are reflected in the learning outcomes are reflected within given fields of learning, within a profile, sector, or group of occupations. Thus stakeholders from sectors can have an overview of related qualifications at all levels.

The social relevance of EQF

7. The countries recognise the need to open their systems to greater stakeholder involvement, especially from the world of work. The role of sectoral qualifications and the need to develop systems for non-formal and informal learning are generally acknowledged. The need for more investment to systemic approaches, aligning national systems to EQF, linking the sub-sectors in E&T and developing an NQF, in order to achieve more transparent national systems that are more responsive to the labour market and individual needs is generally acknowledged. The argument that this will contribute to more mobility, more progression and hence higher attainment rates, more participation in LLL, more stakeholder involvement, more employability and will make systems more flexible and can reduce the duration for obtaining a qualification for individual learners are all acknowledged and underlined by the countries in the debate on EQF.

The risk exists that EQF will be a goal in itself under the pretext that it will contribute to these effects. EQF and NQF are already moving up on the national agenda's on reform in education and training surpassing other development needs. From the experience with the countries that have developed an NQF, we know that the costs can be considerable. The public investments that countries are expected to make require that the social benefits of NQFs and EQF are better understood. It will be important to demonstrate how EQF is contributing to the above-mentioned effects. The introduction of a series of indicators at an early stage of the EQF would promote a better understanding of the benefits. Such indicators could include organisational and social benefits and estimated contributions to other national strategies, as well as mobility, higher employment, participation in continuing learning, higher attainment rates, more progression, shorter qualification routes, and more diversity in pathways.

Examples, clarification and dissemination

8. The candidate countries express a need for more practical examples of qualifications expressed in learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks. Since most of them are still at the start of a process that has been on-going in Member States for quite some time, they would welcome practical examples of learning outcomes, qualifications and qualification frameworks. One could use here the experience of Eurydice for the system descriptors or the National Inventories of the Certificate Supplements, but in order to move from the national to an international level that would promote transparency, a voluntary inventory could also be prepared on the basis of the reference levels and agreed fields of learning or sectors.

A number of countries refer reference to a glass ceiling that seems to exist between level 5 and 6. Linking qualifications between higher education and VET is still perceived as problematic as competences are differently understood. Although the Diploma supplement and the Dublin descriptors provide an international framework, there are practically no examples available of qualifications at higher education levels expressed in learning outcomes. The relatively small number of universities (as against training providers in the VET system) should lead to more progress in this area than in the framework of the Bologna process. It is clear that HE prepares persons for both labour market and academic careers. It is therefore necessary to open up the discussion with the Bologna process and identify as well international examples where HE qualifications are being developed with stakeholders from outside the academic world.
The EQF document appears to use the concept of learning outcomes in two ways: Firstly, to refer to the content and approach of the reference levels (page 5) and secondly to the manner of expressing specific learning content (page 11). Although the two uses are potentially reconcilable in the statements on page 11 of the document which states that learning outcomes can be formulated for number of purposes, it is recommended that some form of differentiation is made between the uses of learning outcomes as the specification of statements of knowledge, etc, and as the content of the descriptors.
ANNEX 1 - COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT TOWARDS A EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
The purpose of the national consultation process was to seek comments on the submitted Commission Staff Working Document “Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning”.

The national consultation process was launched by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science on the 12th of August 2005 and covered a three-month period. Representatives of different sectors directly concerned with the development and the implementation of the EQF were contacted. These included representatives of the ministries responsible for education and science, labor and social policy, economy, health, youth and sports, regional development, justice, transport and communications, culture and tourism. The Ministry of Culture further distributed the consultation document among the five national centers for the arts. Different departments of the actual ministry were also consulted.

Representatives of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, and the Vocational Training Center of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce were also contacted. NGOs, like Association for Academic Community Support also participated in the process, together with representatives of the academic community (Bulgarian Council of Rectors, Department for Information and Teacher Training). Last but not least, Bulgarian Teachers Trade Union was also involved in the consultation process.

The consultation document was distributed electronically. Participants were invited to provide comments on any aspect of the proposed EQF with additional comments on the questions addressing the key issues surrounding the EQF as formulated in Section 9 of the paper.

The proposed EQF provides guidelines for cooperation between stakeholders on different levels. It also provides basis for the development of tools and instruments that meet the requirements of individual citizens in terms of credit transfer, lifelong learning basic skills accumulation, validation etc. One should take into account that EQF implementation is voluntary, thus excluding any legal obligations. This approach is very promising in terms of qualifications framework development in different countries. Moreover, individual national qualifications frameworks could well be compared to the European one. As to the practical implementation of the EQF, related to the citizens’ needs and to the development of the education and training systems as well as of the European labor market, it depends largely on the comparability of the output levels of competences, assessed by objective quality criteria. Last but not least, the proposed EQF provides for objective assessment of knowledge and competences.

The vocational education and training institutions in Bulgaria are well defined (vocational secondary schools, schools of arts, vocational colleges, centers for vocational training, centers for information and professional guidance, centers for trainees qualification), thus successful
implementation of the EQF on national level could be expected. In general, the successful implementation of the EQF in Bulgaria requires adequate activities such as campaigns to raise awareness at national level, along with the use of already existing structures and processes, for example, Bologna promoters. Other activities should include different capacity building measures accompanied by peer learning and provision of technical expertise through existing networks for regional and international cooperation. The establishment of a European portal for learning opportunities would be particularly useful.

As to the specific questions, the results are summarized as follows:

The rationale of an EQF

The proposed consultation document presents the core objectives and functions to be achieved by a meta-qualification framework oriented towards a better comparability of the national approaches in this field. It also provides information on the way the EQF will function. The document meets the requirements for substantial social, technological and economical changes. The EQF, oriented towards modern education and education systems, takes into account the increasing mobility on European level. The objectives and functions of the EQF are related to the ongoing processes of reforms on national level, thus further assisting the contemporary conceptual developments in the field of education and training. On the other hand, the document introduces basic notions in order to guarantee their unification. It can be assumed that the proposed EQF defines the main trends for suitable development on national level as well.

The EQF’s basic function - enforcing mutual trust between the different stakeholders, involved in lifelong learning - is a premise to remove the barriers in the field of recognition. It is also a premise for effective use of the acquired knowledge, skills, and personal competencies. Concerning the communication between the systems on European, national, and sector level, EQF recommends general reference framework related to learning results and levels of competency. It not only facilitates the communication between training providers and learner, but also provides reference qualification levels and descriptors that are general enough to accommodate the variety of qualifications existing on national and sector level. EQF can function as a translation tool providing the opportunities to measure and compare the learning results on European level, as well as on national, regional, and sector level. It can also function as a common framework for quality assurance and development of education and training.

Lifelong learning becomes a necessity. It is characterized by important social, technological and economical changes. Several European countries are seeking to further improve their education and training systems in terms of accumulation of contemporary knowledge, skills and basic competences. In some cases institutional barriers, limiting the access to education and training, could be observed, thus preventing the effective use of already acquired knowledge and competences.

On European level, substantial work has already been done in the fields of quality assurance, informal and non-formal learning development, career guidance and basic competence acquirement. Each country is trying to implement the European document in this field, together with wider use of the already accumulated experience. The specificities of the existing education and training systems should also be taken into account, along with innovative approaches to process development. Within that context, some reference points should be defined. The proposed EQF could be considered as a document providing for
national qualifications frameworks development on national and sector level. Furthermore, it provides for comparability among different national frameworks, thus contributing to increased transparency on European level. The adoption of the EQF will also improve the use of acquired knowledge, skills and competences, and will further develop citizens’ mobility on national and European labor markets. Last but not least, the EQF will further facilitate qualifications transfer and recognition by using learning outcomes evaluated and certified by the competent authorities on national or sector level.

The EQF should be widely promoted on national level to make it work in practice. Its implementation should be related to reforms on national or sector level. EQF practical implementation could be achieved on several levels:

- European – through mutual agreements expressed in terms of decisions of the ministers or development of EQF or similar documents;
- National – by establishing a link between EQF and national legislation in the field of lifelong learning and National qualifications framework development; by organizing information campaigns oriented towards main stakeholders;
- Individual – through creating opportunities for acquisition, recognition and certification of professional qualifications; through establishing a relationship between learning outcomes and the national qualifications framework; through European documents’ implementation, to further develop qualification transparency.

The EQF should be implemented in a large number of European countries. It would also clearly define whether its applicability is compulsory, together with information on the way it should be implemented. At the same time main stakeholders should be well informed of the content of the proposed levels and descriptors, to ensure their common implementation. The EQF should serve as a reference framework for improving the information exchange, for closer cooperation between different stakeholders, for better transparency, etc. It should also provide user-friendly information for students, institutions and employers in order to guide them inside and between the different systems for vocational education and training and to determine their learning results in broad sense. EQF should provide direct support to the institutions responsible for education and training by providing them with the opportunity to set and compare their learning proposals. It should also ensure a framework for the sector and trade associations of the industry branches to help them to determine possible links, coalescence and differentiation of qualifications on both sector and national levels. In relation to recognition of education, training, and learning, EQF should also be considered a good tool for evaluation and recognition of qualifications acquired outside the EU.

In order to perform its functions completely, the EQF should:

- have enough publicity;
- a public agreement on its functions should be reached;
- a compatible national qualifications framework should be developed in compliance with the EQF
- criteria for its implementation in the process of foreign qualifications recognition should be adopted.
The proposed levels of knowledge, skills and competences should be included into the final qualifications awarded by different training institutions, to assist the process of information exchange as well as the overall recognition process.

EQF’s practical implementation on national level could be related to reforms in the field of education, orientated towards: 1) changes in the training programs, knowledge and skills assessment; 2) initiation of a dialogue between education institutions and employers; and 3) further development of criteria for awarding educational degrees and qualifications.

The reference levels and descriptors

The proposed eight levels, based on knowledge, skills and competences, reveal the complex character of the learning process. They are general enough to set up conditions to accommodate the variety of qualifications on national and sector levels. At the same time, they draw the opportunities for learning progress from lowest to highest level of education, training, and professional realization in the sense of development and improvement of competencies and mastery. The levels will provide for better practical orientation of the overall learning process. As to the meta-framework (Table 1), it is not directly related to the educational systems themselves, but refers to the educational levels. Such an approach is extremely useful for lifelong learning opportunities, taking into account that substantial part of the training process takes part in the workplace beyond the formal educational system. That is why EQF can be considered a multi-purpose framework, oriented towards all stakeholders in education and training, who are united by the necessity to deal with and participate in lifelong learning. The degrees of professional qualification in Bulgaria can easily be assigned to the proposed 8 reference levels.

The proposed eight levels referring to learning outcomes, together with the basic descriptors, could be considered a reliable basis for the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning. Concerning secondary general education, the proposed educational, training and learning structures and input characteristics do not present significant problems. The descriptors could also be considered adequate to the learning outcomes and the transition to the next level. They also provide information on the degree of independent work typical for each level. However, further precision of the criteria for each level could be recommended.

The eight levels with their corresponding descriptors oriented towards learning outcomes are in the very heart of the EQF. However, the EQF does not contain detailed descriptions of specific qualifications, learning paths or access requirements. These should be included within the national or sector qualifications frameworks. General descriptors play a key role in quality assurance, validation of informal and non-formal learning, consultancy, and improvement of the basic competences.

As to the content of Table 2, it presents clearly the description of the education system, and the structures for education and training, but it should also present in details the level characteristics, as well as the documents to be awarded by the competent authorities on each level. The outcome-based learning approach provides for better results than the “input-output” based systems. The supporting and indicative information presented in Table 2 contains information on different aspects of the qualifications systems that are closely related to the learning outcomes. That information might contribute to the further precision of the specific needs defined on national level.

The supporting and indicative information is expected to:
- Indicate the correspondence between education and training leading to professional competences acquisition;
- Define the requirements in compliance with the specificity of the legislation framework;
- Define the characteristics of the education and training systems and their readiness for lifelong learning implementation.

The EQF’s level descriptors correspond to the system of qualification degrees adopted in Bulgaria, with respect to the dimension and the specific volume of knowledge, skills and competences. From this point of view, the descriptors adequately present the learning outcomes in Bulgaria. They distinguish clearly enough the different levels and the transitions between them. The level descriptors proposed for levels 1-5 are comparable to the knowledge, skills and competences defined in the State education requirements for study content in different general education subjects.

The necessary clarity and transparency related to the qualification degrees in Bulgaria should be ensured with respect to content and role of the “supporting and indicative information” on education, training and learning structures and input (Table 2), regarding:

- Input level of education and qualification;
- Study content, organization, form, and methods;
- Output level of education and qualification;
- Opportunities for validation of qualification acquired by non-formal and informal learning;
- Opportunities for realization on the labor market;
- Opportunities and conditions for transition to the next qualification degree in order to implement long-term individual strategy;
- Correspondence of a given qualification degree to the EQF reference levels;
- Opportunities for recognition of qualifications outside the country;
- Specific information about the different target groups (learners, training providers, employers, institutions on the labor market, organizations of the social partners, institutions responsible for the quality of training, controlling institutions, etc.)

The legislation regulating secondary general, secondary vocational and higher education in Bulgaria is in compliance with the principles of lifelong learning. The levels of education could be easily recognized in the proposed 8 levels of the EQF: levels 1-4 are covered by the Vocational Education and Training Act, while levels 5-8 are covered by the Higher Education Act. Level 8 comprises different programmes for qualification upgrading, as well as programs for further education offered by different training institutions.
Actually, the list of professions in Bulgaria, as further completed and updated, defines the professions at a given level, according to the expected learning outcomes, oriented towards a given amount of knowledge, skills and competences.

The Bulgarian approach in defining qualification levels and professional competences is comparable to the approach developed by the EQF – it is based on knowledge, skills and personal qualities required for practicing a given profession. The in-depth analysis of the proposed levels, together with the additional information, indicates that the qualification levels in Bulgaria (including education levels as defined by the respective legislation) are comparable to the ones proposed by the EQF.

In the field of higher education in Bulgaria, the EQF’s qualifications are in compliance with the ISCED’97 levels, for example:

- EQF’s level 6 is comparable to levels 5 and 5B of ISCED’97 (degrees of Bachelor/Master and Specialist in Bulgaria)

- EQF’s level 7 is comparable to level 6 of ISCED’97 (Doctor’s degree in Bulgaria)

How can Bulgarian qualifications system be developed towards a learning outcomes approach?

In Bulgaria there is a list of professions for vocational education and training. It classifies these professions in four levels, based on competency. These levels can correspond to the learning outcomes described in Table 1 of the EQF (levels 1-4). Guidelines for developing State educational requirements for the acquisition of professional qualification were created in 2002. Undoubtedly, the adoption of the EQF will assist the development of the State educational requirements on the basis of a unified approach. The learning outcomes are represented by knowledge, skills, professional, and personal qualities thus simplifying the matching of qualification degrees to corresponding EQF levels.

National Qualifications Frameworks

The proposed staff working document meets the basic requirements for the development of a national qualifications framework, compatible with the EQF.

In order to develop the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning, it is necessary to work in the following directions:

- Analysis of the acting national qualification framework with respect to the EQF’s principles and philosophy;

- Matching the existing qualifications system in Bulgaria to the EQF’s levels and descriptors;

- Development of supporting and indicative information;
Development of the credit transfer system;

Linking the initiatives on sector level to the national qualification framework by consulting and joint work of representatives from the different sectors and the government, responsible for the qualification of the labor force.

From that point of view, the establishment of a national coordinating body, responsible for applying the EQF’s principles at national and sector level, is of a great importance. It can be established to an acting institution in the field of education, training, and development of human resources.

Concerning the timescale for the development of national qualifications system based on learning outcomes, a 1-year period could be proposed after the adoption of EQF on European level.

The Bulgarian Vocational Education and Training Act provides for the overall development of the system of vocational education and training. Its principles are further developed in the State educational requirements, in the framework programs for acquisition of professional qualification, and in the state examination programs for awarding a given level of professional qualification. National qualifications framework could be developed and successfully implemented using the existing legislation in this area, and developing the results obtained in the lifelong learning process. It is also expected that the national qualifications framework will establish the necessary link between the principles of the vocational education and training system and the concept of the national strategy for continuing vocational education on one hand, and the EQF on the other.

**Sectoral qualifications**

EQF could be considered a framework for individual’s development as part of the lifelong learning process; its implementation will encourage his/her professional improvement. In general, the EQF could be used for developments at sector level oriented mainly towards the sectors’ needs in different European countries and at European level as a whole. EQF could improve the transparency of the educational system in terms of qualification courses, and other types of qualification upgrading.

The basic approaches developed by the EQF could also be used for developments on sector level. It is expected that the sector frameworks will be developed to be compatible with the national ones. Moreover, close cooperation among the main stakeholders (national education and training authorities, employers, professional organizations, etc.) should be established.

The EQF can be regarded as a working tool for developing sector skills and knowledge by initiating the development of a sector based on competences qualification system, which in turn is the base for the further vocational training. Defining the sector framework should include horizontal qualifications as well as vertical ones. In this case, the sector labor markets dictate the conditions, which means they are predetermined. The links between horizontal and vertical qualifications in a given sector and their corresponding descriptions create the premises for establishing an open, effective, and integrated system for vocational training in the context of lifelong learning and continuing improvement of skills and competencies. It will give assistance for overcoming the practice of duplicate certificates.
To get the stakeholders on sector level involved in EQF implementation, decentralized decisions and actions, along with procedures for transparency improvement and distribution of responsibilities should be used. Their active involvement can also be encouraged by informing them on the objectives and functions of the framework, and on the way it can be implemented. In general, the existing sector qualifications are recognized on national level. Developing the sector frameworks of qualifications supports the development of a system for recognition of qualifications acquired by non-formal and informal learning and by training at the workplace. Sector frameworks of qualifications will contribute to a balance between initial and further vocational training, as well as to mutual trust between the employers and the labor force.

In the field of secondary general education, a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning could be developed through defining learning outcomes for different national education levels, in accordance with the learning outcomes, skills and competences defined in the EQF.

The EQF is expected to provide information and promote the development of vocational education on sector level. It is also expected to define a set of criteria for content, assessment and certification of vocational competences thus assisting both compatibility and transfer.

In the field of Transport, all existing qualifications in Bulgaria meet the characteristics of the international ones and follow their development. Several institutions in this area are certified according to the international standards and their qualifications are internationally recognized. Thus, we do expect that the EQF will further encourage their development.

As to the medical professions covered by the Directive on professional qualifications adopted on June 6 2005, they should be recognized according to its basic principles.

The EQF can be used as a tool for refreshing the skills, knowledge, and competencies on sector level through:

- Development of a system for monitoring the changes in qualifications on sector level
- Establishment of consultative bodies on sector level responsible for defining both the sector frameworks and the horizontal qualifications. Such bodies should include government representatives, social partners, and training providers.
- Development of the educational and training structures in accordance with the EQF principles
- Development of a credit transfer system on sector and inter-sector level
- Establishment of an institutional body for evaluating the final outcomes of the qualification acquisition in view of the national and sector qualifications frameworks
- Defining the links between initial and further vocational training

Applying the framework on sector level should contribute for developing the principles for:

- Transparency of competencies
- Comparability of skills and knowledge
- Adaptation to the constantly changing of the European, national and sector labour markets
- Credit transfer between the qualification levels and between the qualifications by themselves / there is no credit transfer system for vocational education and training in Bulgaria/.
- Guarantying the quality of qualifications on a given level by improving the system for evaluation of competencies
- Development of career paths for acquisition of international sector qualifications in the fields of environment saving, electro- and telecommunications, ICT, transport, etc.
- Development of the systems for accreditation of institutions, programmes, and services in the field of education, training, and qualifications

Activities that should be done before implementing the EQF on national level are on national, sector, inter-sector, and regional level. It is necessary to define the national framework taking in account the sector qualification frameworks. Also the regional experience in development of qualifications should be taken into account in developing the sector qualification framework.

Leading institutions in developing and applying the sector qualification frameworks are the national trade associations of the branches of employers and workers. Their representatives participate in the consulting bodies on sector level, in working groups for introducing EQF and in the national coordinating body.

How can the link between developments at sector level and national qualifications be strengthened?

There is a link between the development of sector qualifications and national qualifications in Bulgaria. The EQF provides for optimization of the link between the sector initiatives and the national qualifications.

It is recommended that sector initiatives be developed to be comparable to the national framework. At the same time, the EQF emphasizes that its implementation is responsibility mainly of the national institutions. Establishing a link between the sector and the national framework of qualifications requires closer co-operation between all stakeholders and most importantly, co-operation with the national bodies responsible for education and training. A national qualifications framework can be achieved by establishing a national coordinating body as well as the consulting bodies suggested above.

The role of EQF with respect to the link between the sector and national levels of qualifications consists of:

- Ensuring a common recommendable position, to oriente, inform, and promote the development of the education, training and learning on sector level, taking into account the sector needs on national and European level
- Establishing a link between the sector and national levels of qualifications
• Decentralizing the decision process for commitment of the sector initiatives to EQF. Ensuring that this process is executed by the stakeholders and by the institutions they represent, including the state representatives responsible for the qualifications on national level.

• Providing transparent criteria for linking the sector framework to the EQF to ensure that external institutions (such as national authorities and corresponding competent bodies) are able to evaluate whether the negotiated commitments are implemented.

• Ensuring a clear and visible link between the qualifications, the sector frameworks and EQF descriptors of degrees.

• If possible, making sure that the link between the sector frameworks and EQF is directed to the corresponding parts of the EUROPASS portfolio and any future developments of EUROPASS foresee the needs of the sectors for transparency of qualifications.

The existing processes and bodies on European level should be used as much as possible to promote involvement of EQF in the sector and national frameworks. The decentralization process, the transparency of procedures and the clear obligations related to the participation criteria should be a key element of this approach. It should be possible for all participants, as well as for the users, to understand the commitments on this level.

**Mutual trust**

EQF practical implementation would undoubtedly contribute to the development of mutual trust. The framework is mainly related to the development of a common quality standard for assessment and will further increase the comparability of qualifications. The increased transparency of the educational process ensured by the EQF will assist all participants in the educational process and most of all the learners themselves. On the other hand, training institutions should also be well informed on the content of the EQF and should be able to award final documents containing information on the level of knowledge and competences acquired by the learners. The existence of the EQF will facilitate the recognition of qualifications awarded in other European countries.

The importance of lifelong learning together with the necessity for qualifications transfer across institutional, system and national borders underline the importance of an integrated European system for credit transfer and accumulation. The EQF is closely related to individual’s needs for lifelong learning.

EQF could contribute to mutual trust development through implementation of the principles of the National qualification frameworks. Development of national legislation towards transparent mechanisms and instruments for quality assessment and lifelong learning will guarantee mutual trust between the participants in the process of lifelong learning at all levels.

The reference levels, as defined by the EQF, would assist national qualifications framework development. These levels will also assist trainees and workers in the process of their career planning. Last but not least, the development of national system for credit accumulation and transfer will assist mobility and realization at the European labor market in compliance with the national qualification acquired. The development of the national qualifications system will also increase individual’s motivation for lifelong learning, as well as the mutual trust among...
the participants in the training process – individuals, education and training providers, education and labor authorities representatives.

In order for the EQF to perform its functions as a tool for building mutual trust, the following actions are necessary on national level:

- **Analysis and evaluation of the national legislative documents**
  
  In the field of vocational education and training in Bulgaria they are: qualification degrees definitions, framework programmes related to the national qualification programme under the Law on Vocational Education and Training (VET), a List of professions in VET, the state educational requirements for acquisition of qualification by professions, etc.

- **Analysis and evaluation of the national achievements in realization of the basic principles and procedures in the key areas (quality of education and training, validation of non-formal and informal learning, improving the key competencies, information and consultation processes, etc)**

- **Drafting a Plan for Development of the national and sectoral qualification frameworks, in accordance with the EQF, with the participation of all parties responsible and all the stakeholders.**

How can the EQF become a reference point to improve the quality of all levels of lifelong learning?

The EQF ensures a common and conceptual approach in the formation and practical realization of the policies in the field of education and training. Adopting EQF creates a basis for unified information process and mutual understanding between the institutions and the participants on European, national, regional and sector level. It will allow an optimization of the links between them. In this way, the EQF will contribute to the active fusion of the efforts in order to improve the quality and public recognition of the results of this optimization process, as well as to the recognition of qualifications. It is a necessary preliminary condition for the decrease in the number of learning barriers and for better use of existing knowledge, skills and competencies.

As a meta-framework, the EQF gives to the national and sector frameworks the opportunity to connect and to communicate with each other. It will ease the transfer, transparency and recognition of qualifications. It provides a good basis for improvement of the levels in the lifelong learning framework by precisely defining all the components in the national framework and by achieving stability during the negotiation process on national level.
The objectives and functions to be fulfilled by a European Qualifications Framework are well set in the document, especially concerning linking sectoral and national qualifications systems (NQF). To function in practice, NQFs have to be set at national levels to help individuals identify their qualifications in Europe.

EQF recommends the introduction of NQF, which would standardize an educational system based on educational outcomes, and simplify the utilization of human potential and the planning of work processes. The approach will increase work efficiency when it comes to finding necessary experts and achieving full work efficiency (traineeship period for trainees, new employees). Based on input values, companies will prepare programs for the introduction of trainees to work processes, because precise information will be available about the potential employee’s level of knowledge and skills, while also achieving more effective planning of training programs within companies.

A prerequisite in the period of transition from the concept of permanent employment to that of permanent employability is raising the level of workforce skills in a knowledge-based society. This is achievable through continuing education. In other words, EQF will facilitate greater workforce mobility across national borders, thus making the EU workforce competitive and attractive in the emerging global market.

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The Croatian Chamber of Economy points to the necessity to introduce a body in Croatia that would deal with the forecasting and planning of needed qualifications as well as with the authorization of the existing ones. The future national body, based on a tripartite principle, should gather together all stakeholders included in economic processes in order to achieve the best possible definition of required qualification outcomes. The adoption of a tripartite principle would ensure activation of the system, thus allowing the identification of needs in order to make the system as efficient as possible.

EQF supports development of a national policy with an objective of modernisation of the national approach to education as a strong side of economy. It supports methodology of development of NQF and an active role of users in the education process.

Before setting up the EQF, terminology should be agreed upon between all countries to avoid misunderstanding and the EQF can orientate in the process of recognition of qualifications, and as basis for development of national criteria with regards to qualifications.

Differences between reference levels should be based on clearly defined scientific criteria; should be less descriptive but rather should follow principles agreed upon. More attention should be put to existing scientific and expert research and projects, such as Tuning project (http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/Tuning.html), the Association for Development of Higher Education advises, mentioning the already existing Bloom taxonomy of educational goals, classifying it to cognitive, affective and psychomotoric areas.

The EQF document coherently fulfils objectives and functions but only indirectly touches on the importance of employability. There is not enough attention paid to potential future outcomes on the labour market.

There is a need to establish a monitoring body including all Member States of the EU that would help solving problems during the process, for example, with regards to sectoral qualifications. There is also the question how complicated system of VET could adapt to one meta-framework?

EQF will definitely assist in development of European system of lifelong learning. The Croatian Employment Agency already uses methods that presuppose lifelong learning approach and guidance in their everyday work.

They indicate that an EQF will shorten the period of search for relevant and comparable descriptors in the modern system of education and training with regards to both EU and national systems including quality assurance. Special attention should be given to the flexibility of recognising qualifications and credits so that certain professions can be legally recognised.
To implement a possible EQF, national education and training systems should be linked and updated according to changes in the labour market so that citizens get a clear picture of where their qualifications stand in the EU, that is, how they compare to similar qualifications in other EU countries. Development of EQF should be ongoing and should be updated regularly.

2. THE REFERENCE LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS

Most of stakeholders hold that the structure of EQF is satisfying and that 8 reference levels for describing the reality of lifelong learning in the EU are sufficient. Descriptors for knowledge and skills are adequate but are too abstract for personal and professional competences and it is not measurable which point to the problem of quality assurance. Additional information should be constantly updated according to labour market needs. EQF should be linked to recognition of qualifications (common database) and to the EUROPASS instrument.

However, different stakeholders see different problems and give different solutions and/or suggestions.

*The Association for Development of Higher Education* suggests conducting pilot research which could take samples from all structures included in lifelong learning and with the objective directed towards identification and categorisation of competences and learning outcomes.

*The Croatian Chamber of Economy* suggests that final decision on the number of levels should be made by experts. They refer to level 4, a notably crucial point, because it marks the division between the guidance (requiring guidance in the learning process) and leadership levels (leadership, capabilities, self-teaching).

*The Croatian Institute of Education* reminds that in Croatia there exists a qualification system on 8 levels by ILO-ISCO National Standard Classification of Occupations and even though this national classification system is not built on lifelong learning principles, its 8-level system is compatible with a possible EQF and it can cover all key levels of competences.
A suggestion is that lifelong learning is not oriented to the system but to individuals and therefore should cover formal, informal and non-formal learning, meaning that at the beginning of each qualification descriptors there should be thorough descriptions of competence for the respective level. This kind of approach was developed in the document: 'Key competences for lifelong learning', European Reference Framework, Nov, 2004, Council of Europe.

The Croatian Association of Employers points out that formally, 8 reference levels are described but 10 reference levels are used in practice. They suggest that each level should be better described in sublevels.

Level descriptors are general and there is a question of educational outcomes and validation of personal competences. Adding to that, they question is who is going to validate competences and what will be criteria used for validation. A suggestion is to include samples of qualifications and their positions within national systems in Table 2.

Tools for validation of non-formal learning should be mentioned and described. All questions regarding EQF should first be discussed and settled at national levels, possibly in NQF.

Recognition of qualifications across borders should not affect labour market demands in a negative way. Differences between qualifications should be analysed well so that countries can develop programmes to bridge these differences in order to simplify and support labour force mobility. Employers could use that as a quality assurance standard that would ensure better employability and improve human resource management.
Adding to that, the Croatian Chamber of Crafts advises that the labour market should be analysed to find out which, and if all occupations are required on the labour market.
It is important to mention that a National qualifications framework is not developed yet in Croatia. However, first steps have been made on different levels and in different institutions.

The *Agency for Vocational Education* reflects that NQF should be taken as foundations of education system development. Principles of EQF are reflected within certain programmes, such as master exams for crafts schools.

The period in which NQF could be developed, by some stakeholders, is within 5 years from now.

As already mentioned, establishment of NQF is in the process of development, and some suggest that preparing it in line with EQF could be the most effective solution.

The *Ministry of Science, Education and Sports*, working together with *Agency for Vocational Education*, plan to produce sectoral analysis with social partners for VET, after which they will produce a draft of NQF for the VET area.

NQF will provide higher mobility of labour force in labour market.

The *Croatian Chamber of Crafts* warns that before setting up an NQF, occupations based on formal, informal and non-formal learning should get legal recognition. Following that, there should be bodies responsible for the process of recognition of qualifications.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4. SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS</th>
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<td>EQF can catalyse and influence development of policies because the internationally accepted procedure of validation of qualifications will influence development at sectoral level.</td>
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</table>
However, it should be updated regularly according to the changing needs of a labour market and the modernisation of technology.

Setting up of NQF and harmonisation with EQF will bring better quality and development of skills in different sectors at the national level.

It is greatly important for all sectors to establish EQF to make mobility easier and the system of education more transparent.

*The Croatian Chamber of Economy* approach is based on sectoral approach. Tripartite principle would ensure the activation of the system, thus allowing the identification of needs in order to make the system as efficient as possible.

EQF could be seen as a guideline for the development of linkages between different educational levels and it can certainly assure better transparency of crafts occupations. A strategy should be developed to show which occupations are required in different sectors.

*The Croatian Union of Employers* points out the division which should be made between learning outcomes and descriptors, suggesting that within learning outcomes more descriptors could be included.

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5. **MUTUAL TRUST**

EQF can contribute to development of mutual trust because it will serve as one meta-framework for comparison, so that each country can compare their qualifications framework with one common framework.
Establishing both EQF and NQF will help establishing mutual trust based on appreciation of common principles in education, lifelong learning approach and its development on European, state, sectoral and local levels.

It is extremely important to describe in details all key terms in EQF for better understanding and easier translation to NQF. The Bologna follow-up group points out that parallel to Bologna process, lifelong learning system should be legally recognised in order to overcome unnecessary obstacles in the whole process.

Employers point to problems that could occur in the process of integrating qualifications into the European system. A central system of providing quality assurance should be developed, to ensure transparency and coherency of EQF, and which would also enhance mutual trust between participants. The problems could occur when dealing with migrations and mobility of non-qualified or semi-skilled workers, especially if the worker has weak or no formal education.
Non-formal and informal learning should complement formal learning to ensure and emphasize the recognition of non-traditional forms of learning.

Common terminology could ensure better understanding and easier recognition of qualifications in Europe by the individuals, as well as stakeholders and all involved.

The mere existence of EQF will give incentive to sectors and individuals to validate their qualifications within broader framework of qualifications. Individuals will have stronger motivation to be included in the world of learning throughout their whole life, thus acquiring the knowledge and skills needed in working life.

_The Croatian Chamber of Economy_ advises that only the synergy of all stakeholders in the lifelong learning process can produce higher competitiveness of the Croatian economy.

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   - Mr Radovan Fuchs, PhD, Assistant Minister for International cooperation
   - Ms Andreja Zulim, MA, Department for European Integration,
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Ms Viola Dessanti, Department for European Integration
Mr Zelimir Janjic, State Secretary for Secondary Education
Ms Mihaela Dubravac-Šigir, Department for Vocational Education
Ms Marina Crnčić-Sokol, Directorate for Secondary Education
Mr Tomislav Popić, Directorate for Higher Education

2. Institute of Education
Mr Vinko Filipović, prof, Head of the Institute for Education
Ms Nevenka Lončarić-Jelačić, Department for Adult Education

3. Agency for Vocational Education
Ms Ana Lasić, Department for International Cooperation

4. Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship
Mr Igor Lučić, Assistant Minister for International Cooperation

5. Bologna follow-up group
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Mr Ivan Prskalo, PhD

6. Association for Development of Higher Education- ‘Universitas’
Ms Vesna Kovač, PhD, University of Rijeka, Department for Pedagogy; acting president of ‘Universitas’
Mr Igor Radeka, PhD, University of Zadar, Department for Pedagogy

7. Croatian Chamber of Economy
Ms Zdenka Peternel, prof.
Ms Vesna Štefica

8. Croatian Chamber of Crafts
Mr Petar Sindičić, PhD, Secretary of Croatian Chamber of Crafts
Ms Olga Lui, MSc, Head of Department for education

9. Croatian Employers’ Association
Jelena Katic, International Relations Department

10. Croatian Employment Agency
Ms Cvijeta Ivana Raguž Milanović, Head of Croatian Employment Agency, Zagreb office
Ms Irena Bačelić, Department for Professional orientation and Education
Dear Director General,

Subject: Consultation on the European Commission Staff Working Document “Towards a European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning” – conclusion of the consultation process in Romania

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your directorate for the remarkable developments achieved during 2005 in the Education and Training European work programme that are informing the modernization and transformation processes in Romania.

European Qualification Framework (EQF) is part of the integrated and comprehensive developments at European level and I will refer to the conclusion of the consultation process in my country on the European Commission Staff Working Document “Towards a European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning”.

The EQF consultation process coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) has finalised with the great majority stakeholders’ conclusion: Romania is supporting EQF and is ready to implement it on volunteer basis. We are aware of the preparatory work we have to do in this respect but actions to be taken are already part of our long term action plan.
The consultation process was designed and developed with the support of the Romanian ACVT members and ETF and has been facilitated by:

- the European Integration Directorate within MoER;
- the National Adult Training Board acting as National Qualification Authority (a tripartite body);
- the National Agency for Qualifications and Partnership of universities with economic and social environment – responsible for the qualifications framework in higher education;
- the National Centre for TVET Development - responsible for initial VET development.

The employers and trade unions representatives in the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training of the DGEAC have conducted on their turn the consultation of the social partners’ organizations.

Questionnaire responses, focus groups and three national conferences allow us to formulate a point of view on the document submitted to consultation. Please, see attached the main and the most frequent aspects highlighted by the participants to the consultation process.

The social partners’ opinion is in favour of extending the consultation period in order to reach the expected understanding and consensus, and subsequently, the support of the EQF implementation.

The common opinion of participants to the consultation process is pilot projects development during the volunteer implementation will support EQF endorsement. Romanian institutions are motivated to take part in these projects type which maybe supported from European Community programmes.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your DG colleagues Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Yours faithfully,

Mihail HÂRDÂU

Minister

Enclosure: 1
Consultation on the European Commission Staff Working Document
“Towards a European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning”
conclusions of the consultation process in Romania

The rationale of an EQF

- EQF is in our view a translation device and a driver of change - Romania is in favour of both perspectives and is taking part in all related developments as: introducing QA in all education and training sectors, prior learning validation, ECVET.
- EQF workpaper should emphasize more on learners’ benefits since LLL approach is one of its added values. Maybe an additional document, reader friendly, will help others than experts to read and understand better what EQF is about and which are the different stakeholders’ benefits.
- EQF should be better co-ordinated with European directives on qualifications.
- More practical samples, good practices or an implementation guide from countries that have put in place their NQF correlation to EQF will facilitate EQF work in practical terms. However, clear parameters for examples of good practice are needed.

The reference levels and descriptors

- The intention seems to be to separate out the various constituents of knowledge, skill and personal competence. Though in some senses this is useful, it may actually make more difficult the process of allocating a given qualification to an EQF reference level. This is for two reasons:
  - the ‘narrower’ fields sometimes make it difficult to differentiate between levels; for example, what is the difference between “a wide range of field-specific practical and theoretical knowledge” (EQF 4) and “broad theoretical and practical knowledge that is often specialized within a field” (EQF 5)?
  - it leaves entirely open the practical question of how many of the various descriptors a qualification needs to satisfy in order to be allocated to a level. If the answer is “some but not all”, nowhere is guidance given other than that a ‘best fit’ solution needs to be found.

For these reasons most people will refer to the much more concrete Table Two and the focus on EQF will be diluted. Therefore level descriptors should be more relevant and distinctive and clear guidance should be on minimum descriptors that define a reference level.
- Between EQF 5 and 6 there is a glass ceiling which divides the academic world from the vocational one.
- At national level more details on the qualifications framework could be included as indicative information in relation to EQF (table two).

National Qualifications Framework

- At the end of 2005 about 30% of VET qualifications are learning outcomes based.
- The Romanian NQF action plan includes, as priority, the qualification development based on learning outcomes, and the completion timeframe is three years from now.
All developments will be assisted by Phare projects (Phare programming years 2004-2006). The validation of achieved results will take about 5-8 years.

- Correlation of VET and HE is part of the above priority. At the same time, despite the clear aspiration in time to merge the Bologna EHEA framework and EQF, more agreements between the two will be at help.

**Sectoral qualifications**

- Qualifications development has already a sectoral approach for VET in Romania. Sectoral Committees are on the process of institutional building, some more being advanced than others. The above mentioned Phare assistance, as well as other projects, is supporting these developments and EQF is a real catalyst in this respect. But, decisions related to this investment sustainability in terms of role distribution, resource allocation, authority, responsibility and accountability are crucial in the near future.
- Sectoral developments as other developments in education and training should be based on collaboration of key stakeholders. Dialogue between sector and national levels has not to be an exception in case of qualifications development.
- The facility for sectors, rather than whole member states, to use the EQF to establish equivalences with similar sectors in other member states is sensible and might be a major use of EQF until the “common language” of credits will be agreed. Globalized business is increasingly working to common standards in any case.

**Mutual trust**

- EQF can contribute to mutual trust development, but trust between partners should also be part of the process of making EQF a reality.
- Trust is based on transparency, common procedures, rules and assurances – this is what EQF is calling for.
- It is vital for all achieved qualifications that are to be correlated to EQF to be quality assured (QA). But smaller steps could smooth the progress of trust building, for example if QA achieved competences will be mutually recognised in their relation to a reference level of EQF. Thus, mobility organised either by European Community Programmes or through bilateral agreements would be appropriate to be associated with references to EQF.
- A European network of institutions acting as Qualifications Authorities might be helpful for informed cooperation and enhancing mutual trust.
- This is a long term change so commitment and persistence are needed.

*MoER - Romania, December 2005*
Dear Mr. Figel,

Due to your invitation, you made at the informal ministerial meeting held in London, aiming at contributing to European Qualifications Framework, consultation process in Turkey was launched.

In this respect Mr. Vincent Mc Bride, representative of European Training Foundation, informed the staff of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) at the meeting held on 8 November 2005 here in Ankara and the activities to be carried out on the matter were tackled as well. In addition some related parties were informed on the EQF proposal in several events such as meetings, seminars and conferences mentioned below:

- 18th Vocational Education Council, 2-23 November, Ankara
  Vocational Education Council is a senior council in which related Ministries, Higher Education Council, employers’ and employees’ unions, trade unions and NGOs are represented and which makes decisions in order to plan, develop and assess VET in Turkey. Its decisions are carried out by the Ministry of National Education and related profession institutions.

- Strengthening Vocational Education and Training Project (SVET) Regional Advisory Council Meeting, 22 November 2005, Antalya

- Employment Problems of the Tradesman and Craftsmen in the EU Accession Process and Vocational Education Conference, 23 November 2005, İzmir

- National Production Surveys Symposium, 25 November 2005, organised by University of Commerce, İstanbul

- Meeting of İstanbul Textile Importers’ Union, 12 December 2005, İstanbul

Following these events, contributing to raise national awareness on EQF, consultation response forms were sent to 22 universities; formal and non-formal vocational education institutions through 81 National Education Directorates located in provinces; 12 Directorates General and Directorates affiliated with MoNE; Directorates General of Education of 4 Ministries and to16 social partners including employers’ and employees’ unions, trade unions and NGOs. These institutions were asked to evaluate EQF proposal and submit their points of view and suggestions. The responds received were assessed and Turkey’s report was prepared with kind support of ETF and the consultation process was concluded.

Please find enclosed a copy of our report on EQF and the list of the institutions involved in the consultation process in Turkey.

Yours faithfully,

(The original is duly signed)
Associate Professor Hüseyin ÇELİK
Minister of National Education

ANNEXES
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Annex-2 The List of Institutions Giving Response to Consultation Response Form
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1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2000 Lisbon European Council set strategic goal to;

- become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world and,

- be capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better job opportunities and greater social cohesion by 2010.

The development of high quality vocational education and training is crucial to achieve the strategic goal, in particular to improve social cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness and life long learning has an important role as well.

In the Copenhagen Declaration dated November 2002 developing a voluntary and bottom-up cooperation involving EU Member States, candidate countries and EEA countries, as well as social partners, in vocational education and training at all levels was adopted as an objective. Vocational education and training will play an active role in developing life long learning policies and achieving Lisbon goals by 2010.

The progress made in the scope of Lisbon and Copenhagen strategies were assessed and new priorities and strategies oriented to "An Enhanced Cooperation in VET" which take place in Copenhagen Process were determined by Maastricht Communiqué.

One of these priorities is to develop an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework for Life Long Learning based on transparency and mutual trust and supported by a set of common reference levels.

Life long learning has become a necessity in Europe characterized by rapid social, technologic and economic changes. The realisation of life long learning however complicated by the lack of communication and cooperation 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 that allow citizens to transfer qualifications from one setting to another.

EQF is foreseen to be a meta-framework supporting mutual trust in the field of qualifications and increasing transparency. It would 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.

Consultation process related to EQF proposal has been launched by Jan Figel, member of European Commission (the Commissioner). By consulting all related parties at national and sectoral levels, the countries have been invited to give their views on what the content, aims and structure of the proposed EQF should be.

1 Present Situation in Turkey

a. National Qualifications System (NQS)
NQS is a transparent and reliable system covering valid occupational standards, education and training standards, curricula, testing and assessment, institutional accreditation and qualifications at international level, facilitating free movement of labour force, changing rapidly in line with the needs of the labour market, supporting life long learning principles, setting up infrastructure required for the international comparability and accreditation, increasing competitiveness and employment, enabling easy access of the employers to well qualified manpower.

NQS not only enables labour market function properly, but also aims at facilitating international mobility via transparent, reliable and coherent qualifications. Strengthening Vocational and Technical Education and Training Project (SVET), financed by the EU and coordinated and carried out by the Ministry of National education (MoNE) supports the development of a modern, qualified and flexible vocational education system which is based on the principles of life long learning and harmonised with the other educational systems in general and responds to the needs of
the labour market. In this respect, SVET carried out its activities towards setting up a NQF, which has an assessment and certification system at all levels, on the basis of vocational standards agreed on by related stakeholders. This system also supports development of a national equivalence system which facilitates learning at all levels and progress in education and carrier pathways.

NQS activities aims at establishing a National Vocational Standards and its database, developing curricula, setting up levels and assessment and certification system based on vocational qualifications.

In EU Member States, NQS is being carried out by autonomous institutions comprised of mostly private sector considering demands of economy. Thus an education system having quality assurance and is capable of meeting the needs and demands of the labour market will be developed.

NQS will include all qualifications covering general, vocational and technical and higher education. The qualification levels will be composed of at eight levels similar with those in EQF.

National Vocational Qualifications Institution (NVQI) will be established and be responsible for making national legislation required for qualifications; developing vocational qualifications taking into account social partners’ demands and ensuring their full participation in the process; determining educational standards based on these qualifications in close cooperation with all related parties; ensuring accreditation of educational institutions and increasing transparency and quality assurance.

Once NVQI is established, SVET Project will carry out its activities in cooperation with NVQI for the purpose of developing national vocational standards; developing national educational standards depending on national vocational standards accreditation of education institutions; developing and applying theoretical and practical exams by 30 September 2007.
b. National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

In Turkey studies are being pursued in order to set up NQS parallel with EQF. In this respect all parties and institutions including MoNE have been dealing with issues concerning legal framework of NVQI.

Within the scope of SVET Project new vocational and technical education and training curricula are being developed in line with EQF.

Qualification levels proposed by EQF are adopted. Learning outputs, indicators, qualification forms and descriptions have been determined by NQF studies according to EQF levels.

The first four levels among these levels have been taken into consideration in the training program developed by SVET. These training programs have been started to be implemented by secondary education institutions (leading diploma) and by non formal education institutions providing adult education (leading certificate).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Education Program</th>
<th>Certificates and Diplomas</th>
<th>Learning outputs/ qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Diploma and Certificate Program</td>
<td>Diploma and Certificate (Master)</td>
<td>Vocational knowledge and skills and comprehensive and complex qualifications relating a specific vocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Certificate Program</td>
<td>Certificate (journeyman)</td>
<td>Basic and common vocational skills and comprehensive vocational qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certificate Program</td>
<td>Certificate (Apprentice)</td>
<td>Basic and common vocational skills and common qualifications in a certain field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic Education</td>
<td>Diploma-Course Certificate</td>
<td>Common knowledge, basic and key skills, literacy qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VET curricula, developed by the help of all related parties, have been prepared to enable all VET providers operate in accordance with common standards. In this scope “educational standards” and “program standards” parallel with vocational standards and labour market analyses have been developed.

Curricula have been envisaged in a flexible structure oriented to individuals at all ages and levels considering national and international standards, LLL principles and sector expectations. These programs could be altered according to regional needs, gives possibility to horizontal and vertical transitions, meet the demands of social parts and aims at evaluating all achievements of individuals.

In these programmes vocational qualifications are organised as modules. The modules are designed as coherent learning courses enabling individuals to get vocational qualifications (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). Learning by modules can be obtained irrespective of individual differences or learning environments.

Curricula and modules are parallel with the sectoral qualifications. Since the curricula are flexible and modular, its structure can be updated regularly. Besides, sectoral cooperation and participation helps continuously developing sectoral qualifications to be reflected on education and training activities.

As a result, by orienting and introducing occupations in formal and informal education institutions in Vocational and Technical Education and Training System and SVET, modular training has been implemented considering learning outcomes. These practices support the common principles and opinions proposed in EQF.

In Turkey, it is expected to establish NQS and NVQI for accreditation of educational institutions, certification of qualifications and making the necessary law for legislation at national and international level.
2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

At the meeting in which the representatives of Ministry of National Education and European Training Foundation (ETF) participated in on 8 November 2005, the studies to be carried out on the issue of EQF in Turkey were handled. In order to prepare a national report on EQF it is decided to get the opinions of the related parties by means of a consultation response form. In this meeting the representatives of the MoNE were informed about EQF by the representative of ETF and the deadline for the consultation response form, the institutions, units and the content of the consultation response form were decided.

It is decided to send the consultation response form to 22 universities, 81 national education directorates and informal and formal vocational education institutions, twelve MoNE central units and directorates and directorates general, directorates general of educations of four ministries, sixteen labours’ and employers’ unions and social partners.

In addition to these studies, related parties were informed about EQF through conferences, meetings and seminars.

- 18th Vocational Education Council, 2-23 November, Ankara
  Vocational Education Council is a senior council in which related Ministries, Higher Education Council, employers’ and employees’ unions, trade unions and NGOs are represented and which makes decisions in order to plan, develop and assess VET in Turkey. Its decisions are carried out by the Ministry of National Education and related profession institutions.

- Strengthening Vocational Education and Training Project (SVET) Regional Advisory Council Meeting, 22 November 2005, Antalya

- Employment Problems of the Tradesman and Craftsmen in the EU Accession Process and Vocational Education Conference, 23 November 2005, İzmir

- National Production Surveys Symposium, 25 November 2005, organised by University of Commerce, Istanbul

- Meeting of İstanbul Textile Importers’ Union and NGOs, 12 December 2005, İstanbul
2.1 Application of Consultation Response Form

The consultation response form prepared by England was chosen as a sample form in order to be used in preparing EQF national report. The form was sent to MoNE central units, national education directorates, vocational high schools, vocational training centres, universities and social partners on 29 November, 2005. The list of the related parties to whom the consultation response form was sent is attached (see annex 1). The deadline for the participants to reply the form was decided to be 12 December, 2005. The replies were evaluated to form a national report on 16-17 December, 2005 in the meeting which ETF representative participated.

Besides, Consultation response form and the consultation paper prepared by European Commission staff about EQF were put on MoNE web site (http://earged.meb.gov.tr) and SVET web site (http://www.megep.meb.gov.tr).
3. OPINIONS AND PROPOSALS SUGGESTED IN THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

3.1 Respondents’ Points of View on the EQF Proposal

1. Rational of EQF

   a). Are the most important objectives and functions to be fulfilled by the EQF those that are set out in the consultation document?

Respondents in Turkey found that the objectives and functions of the EQF were clearly set out in the consultation document. The objectives and functions of the EQF appear to be well understood and appreciated across the stakeholders that responded. There were no substantial differences of opinion between the educational sectors, including the higher education and the vocational education sectors, and the representatives of the social partners on the approaches being adopted in the document.

The EQF was seen as offering a mechanism that could support the further development and implementation of Lifelong Learning in an international context and that this could contribute to greater international recognition and mobility of skills.

The EQF contains many of the elements that are currently being incorporated in the modernisation strategies for vocational education and training and higher education in Turkey, respectively through the Ministry of National Education’s Secondary Vocational Education and Training Reform project and through Turkey’s engagement in the Bologna process.

The document was regarded as being consistent and supportive of the goals of Education and Training 2010. In this respect, the role of the EQF as a ‘Meta’-Framework that could facilitate transparency of skills and qualifications between national education and training system, while respecting subsidiary of national education and training systems was valued. The possibility of the use of the EQF as an instrument that could be used to facilitate reform was also appreciated. The development of a national qualifications authority to monitor a national qualification
framework is currently under discussion at present and will be able to be informed by the development of a ‘Meta-framework’ at the European level.

The key elements of the EQF, such as its emphasis on quality assurance, the use of learning outcomes appear to be well understood by respondents and were regarded as being in line with reform directions being followed in Turkey. The emphasis in the EQF on the need to include sector qualification development and processes for accommodating non formal and informal learning were recognised as opportunities both to provide greater access to qualification for non qualified workers and to provide pathways for individuals that are already qualified.

b). What is needed to make the EQF work in practical terms (for individual citizens, education and training systems, the labour market)?

Respondents and stakeholders identified that a key element in making the EQF a success will be its practical relevance to users in different areas where it may be relevant – vocational education providers, the Ministries of Education and Labour, as well as by non government providers and by social parties represented in national and sectoral organisation and by higher education. Higher education developments will be seen to be most directly affected by the activities underway in the Bologna process. Outside of the higher education, most of the practical application of the EQF will fall within the vocational education sector. In this respect the need to communicate the main purposes and messages of the EQF were seen as critical.

In the context of Turkey’s present reform strategies the successful use of the EQF requires that there is on going co-operation between different stakeholders at different levels of the national qualification system, involving co-operation in the development the content of learning programmes and in the approval of qualifications for vocational education.

Underpinning the application of the EQF both at a national and at a European-wide level will be the need to ensure the widest possible dissemination of information about the EQF and the development of new capacities amongst users or those likely to have responsibilities with respect to the development and implementation of
vocational qualifications in Turkey. The need for supporting information and the raising of awareness about the EQF was seen as critical and in this case, there is a strong view among respondents in Turkey that the language used to describe the EQF is clear and concrete and is easily understandable by non technical personnel. This will not only assist with the achievement of transparency goals of the EQF but it will also be more attractive to social partners and assist them in their engagement in sectoral qualifications. In this respect the broadening use of Europass instruments such as the certificate supplement, were identified by respondents as relevant.

The principles and approaches contained in the EQF would seem to require the development of additional capacities for teachers and developers of content in the use of learning outcomes. For Turkey, the EQF would appear to require the continuation of the elaboration of national vocational standards and learning outcomes. At an institutional level, the implementation would also, appear to suggest that there is a need in Turkey for the ongoing decentralisation of responsibilities in education and training to local administration. The need for flexibility in development and management activities were highlighted by many respondents.

At the broader international level, the viability of the EQF will rely on its acceptance and use by EU member states.

The development of national qualification framework in Turkey would significantly enhance the potential mobility and transparency objectives of the EQF.

2. Reference Levels and Descriptors

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

The vast majority of respondents to this question (75%) believed that the 8 levels and accompanying descriptors appropriately covered the range of knowledge and skills covered in learning throughout life and drawing knowledge and skills from a wide diversity of experiences and sources. There were some concerns on the need to have greater detail in the descriptors, but responses also recognised that the descriptors
would need to be made more refined to fit the needs of specific sectors or disciplines. It was also stated that the descriptors are likely to be dynamic and perhaps need to change over time in relation to changes in the labour market and the needs of the economy.

b)  
- Do the level descriptors, in table 1 of the consultation document, adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in levels?

There were no major concerns with the content of the descriptors in terms of their coverage of knowledge, skill and wider competence. The majority of respondents from the University sector felt that they were unable to comment on the applicability of the descriptors to qualifications falling below level 5.

While the majority of respondents were satisfied with the content of Table 1 in the consultation document, respondents were also highly supportive of the need for any information that would guide the alignment of qualifications against the EQF levels. In particular, information that clarified levels of achievement was considered to be vital. If this was not contained in the documents supporting the EQF, then it could be contained in programme documents in each country.

- What should be the content and role of the ‘supporting and indicative information’ on education, training and learning structures and input (in table 2 of the consultation document)?

The respondents stated that the supportive information should be updated continuously by means of providing feedback. Since EQF is envisaged as a tool which will give possibility to validate all types of learning its content should be comprehensive. On the other hand as these supportive information assist with trainers, national institutions providing qualification and sectoral stakeholders it should also be as possible as easily understandable. They should be flexible and restructured in order to cope with the challenges emerging in the sectors due to rapid technological changes.
- How can your national and sectoral qualifications be matched to the proposed EQF levels and descriptors of learning outcomes?

There were no suggestions for additional levels either at the top or the bottom of the framework. To date, Turkey has not undertaken an official alignment of its series of qualifications against the EQF levels. Higher education qualifications in Turkey fit within the cycle of levels developed as the Dublin Descriptors under in the Bologna process. Turkey’s higher education qualifications fall within levels 6, 7 and 8. Preliminary indicative alignment of the EQF reference levels against of a range of main vocational and higher education qualifications were developed by a many respondents. This remains indicative until a comprehensive analysis of the relationship of the descriptors in the EQF and the content of these qualifications can be completed. The description of Turkey’s existing vocational qualifications in terms of learning outcomes is an ongoing element in the reform process of vocational education.

Below table is showing qualifications of VET and higher education corresponding to EQF levels on which most of the participants agreed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th level</td>
<td>Ph.D. Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th level</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd level</td>
<td>Non-Formal Education Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st level</td>
<td>Primary Education Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. National Qualifications Framework

- How can a National Qualification Framework for lifelong learning—reflecting the principles of the EQF—be developed in your region.

The modernisation of its vocational education and training system that integrates learning opportunities for participants at all stages of their life is a major priority of the Government of Turkey and has been pursued through a series of steps over several years. The main ingredients of a national qualifications framework are in place in Turkey; its development will involve drawing the various elements together and continuation of Turkey’s modernisation process.

Processes and have included the development of new vocational education and training curricula for upper secondary schools and the decentralisation of governance processes to enable greater flexibility for vocational training institutions at the local level. The introduction of learning outcomes into the curricula development process has been underway for several years as is a part of the secondary education and training reform project in Turkey (MGEP).

Partly NQF activities will emerge from participation in the Bologna Process, within which as a signatory to the Bergen Declaration, Turkey supports the development of a qualification framework for Higher Education. In addition to this, respondents to the consultation process in Turkey emphasised a range of instruments and conditions that will facilitate the development of a NQF. These include macro measures such the creation of legislation to provide statutory support to the process and micro measures such as the ongoing implementation of modular based forms of learning to encourage greater flexibility in learning participation. The legislative basis for a NQF in the VET sector has been under discussion periodically. A draft law has been prepared with the support from relevant stakeholder groups and Government Departments and is expected to be progressed in the coming year. The development of the law has drawn on Turkey’s institutional framework for education and training and from is assessment of international practices.

As with other issues in the consultation process, respondents highlighted the need for stakeholder leadership and increasing co-operation with vocational education and
training institutions. The various principles contained in the document to support the EQF are coherent with the directions of reform in Turkey, e.g., the validation of non and informal learning, quality assurance processes, and the use of career guidance. Future developments in these areas will draw on closer co-operation and the sharing of information with EU Member States.

- **How, and within what timescale, can your national qualifications systems be developed towards a learning outcomes approach?**

Learning outcomes are being introduced as an approach to defining the content of learning programmes. The elaboration of agreed outcome based reference levels that could serve as benchmarks for qualifications is expected to take some time. The use of the Dublin Descriptors for Higher Education qualifications will accelerate the development of levels for the upper ranges of the European Qualifications Framework. Finalisation is expected to take some time. Estimates received during the consultation process varied from three to five years.

**4. Sectoral Qualifications**

- **To what extent can the EQF become a catalyst for developments at sector level?**

Responses recognised the EQF as a catalyst and potentially an important mechanism for linking national and sectoral qualification developments. In this regard, the use of the EQF as a reference point for sectoral qualifications and for institutions. Stakeholder involvement was strongly emphasised particularly in relation to schools and enterprises. The EQF was seen as also providing objective criteria for the level of skills and knowledge and a basis for strengthening sector qualifications through the use of common quality assurance.

- **How can the EQF be used to pursue a more systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at sector level?**

Views expressed by respondents emphasised the need for good dissemination processes about the EQF among stakeholders in order that the dynamics of the
framework would be understood, specifically as a way of enabling international comparisons between sector qualifications. For sectors in particular the EQF was seen as a way of recognising the assessment competencies of employees.

- **How can stakeholders at sector level be involved in supporting the implementation of the EQF?**

The role of stakeholders was emphasised in the decision-making, e.g., through the National VET council and in the development process. However, the implementation of the EQF was seen as requiring the development of some new structures. Sector developments could be enhanced through memorandum of understanding between sectors on the EQF or NQF.

- **How can the link between sectors development and national qualifications be improved?**

Sectors need to be presented in the National Vocational Qualifications Institution in order to set up a strong linkage between sectors and national qualifications. They also should play an active role in preparing modules and determining their contents. Thus further requirements of the sectors occurring in line with new emerging vocations and technological changes could be met. National qualifications should be updated regularly reflecting sectoral changes, hence their competitiveness could be improved and their contribution to the economy could be increased. The employees of the sectors should be offered regular in-service training for the purpose of meeting the qualified manpower need.

5. **Mutual Trust**

- **How can the EQF contribute to the development of mutual trust (e.g. based on common principles for quality assurance) between stakeholders involved in lifelong learning - at European, national, sectoral and local levels?**
The key element of the EQF was seen as its use as a transparency instrument for the exchange of information between countries. In this respect, the need for common means of describing qualifications, including promoting understanding of different quality assurance and assessment approaches was highlighted. The EQF was understood as being able to provide a means for developing mutual trust and was seen as growing from understanding different systems – both at the international level and at the sector level. The development of mutual trust was understood as leading to the acceptance of different approaches.

- **How can the EQF become a reference to improve the quality of all levels of lifelong learning?**

The EQF could contribute to the development of mutual trust partly by encouraging new expectations of how and when people participate in education and training.

However, the EQF was seen as perhaps requiring some form of international co-ordination or clear principles of operation. A major element in the EQF’s success was the level of adoption of its principles by EU member states, ie, by the willingness of EU member states to implement it in their own systems. Compulsory approaches were not favoured.

### 3.2 Conclusions

One of the important and common points of the responses is that the EQF’s objectives and functions are well understood by all parties. In this context, it is clear that the proposed EQF will be accepted and supported by stakeholders.

The respondents consider EQF as a mechanism based on learning outputs, guaranteeing quality assurance and supporting lifelong learning. These points of view support the secondary education projects, which could be esteemed as reforms, designed and carried by the Ministry of National Education, and they also support the approaches related to Bologna Process.
The majority of the respondents believe that the internationally recognition of skills and qualification regardless how they were acquired will be achieved and mobility will be increased by means of EQF.

Vocational education is the field which will probably be most affected sector by EQF application. On the other hand higher education will be affected by the studies to be carried out in Bologna Process. The achievement of EQF depends on the stakeholders’ applications at all levels. In this respect, it is needed to set up close cooperation between related parties in order to validate qualifications and promote content of the curricula. It is emphasised by the respondents that an increased and comprehensive communication is needed in order to provide an active and effective cooperation.

Approaches and principles of EQF entail the promotion of the capacities of teachers and programme developers in order to make them capable of using learning outputs’ contents. In addition, individuals to be responsible for developing vocational qualifications should meet the optimal requirements of the task.
The eight levels of the EQF and their descriptors are considered as satisfying by the majority of the respondents. According to some respondents, these descriptors however should be more detailed or specified in order to meet the needs of different sectors and fields. It is stated that every sector should make detailed descriptions in line with their respective needs in order to achieve this.

The content of the level descriptors concerning their capacity of including knowledge, skills and qualifications is seen as satisfying. The academicians did not put forward any idea for the levels under the fifth one. The other point concerning level descriptors is the necessity for the alignment of them with EQF levels.

Respondents consider that information supporting EQF should be as possible as easily understandable as they can be used as a model in establishing National Qualifications Framework. In addition supporting information should be flexible in order to meet the changing needs of sectors and be restructured by means of feedback.
The majority of the respondents have matched national and sectoral qualifications with EQF levels. The eight level structure of EQF is seen as satisfying. But this should be considered as the respondents’ opinions until a detailed analysis was completed concerning relationship between EQF descriptors and concerning content of qualifications as well.

The table matching different types (general/vocational, formal/non-formal) and levels (primary/secondary/higher) of education qualifications with EQF level is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a part of Strengthening Vocational Education and Training Project (SVET) learning outputs have been considered in developing curricula for some years. One could say that national qualifications framework studies has initiated simultaneously with the participation in the Bologna Process. Turkey also supports the development of a qualifications framework for higher education.

In addition to these, negotiations about legislating a national qualifications framework in vocational and technical educational sector are on process. A low proposal has been made by cooperation and support of related stakeholders and Ministries and the proposal is expected to be put into force in 2006.

The respondents emphasized the importance of cooperation with vocational and technical education institutions led by the stakeholders. Most of the principles in the Commission Working Document concerning EQF are in line with the reform studies
(validation of non formal and informal learning, quality assurance and carrier guidance) in Turkey.

The respondents believe that deciding on the details of the learning outcomes will take some time. They also believe that, the NQS that is parallel with EQF will be put into practice in the following 3 - 5 years.

The EQF is expected to be a mechanism which strengthens sectoral qualifications through common quality assurance and to be a tool providing objective criteria in deciding skill and knowledge levels. Resulting from this, stakeholders at sectoral level are expected to take part in all levels of EQF actively.

In order to assure the relationship between sectoral and national qualifications, the majority of the respondents stated that the sectoral representatives should participate in NVQI. Sectoral representatives are also required to get involved effectively in preparing modules and deciding on the content of the modules.

The success of EQF depends on the level of adoption of EQF principles by EU member states, by the enthusiasm of EU member states to implement it in their own systems. However, compulsory approaches are not considered favourable choices.
4. ANNEXES

ANNEX-1 INSTITUTIONS RECEIVING EQF CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING BODIES AFFILIATED WITH THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION (MoNE)
1. Board of Education
2. Board of Research Planning and Coordination
3. Directorate General of Technical Education for Boys
4. Directorate General of Technical Education for Girls
5. Directorate General of Commerce and Tourism
6. Directorate General of Religious Education
7. Directorate General of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education
8. Directorate General of Higher Education
9. Directorate General of Foreign Relations
10. Directorate General of Special Education Guidance and Counselling Services
11. Health Affairs Directorate
12. Projects Coordination Centre

SOCIAL PARTNERS
1. Ministry of Industry and Commerce-Small and Medium Industry Development Organization
2. Ministry of Labour and Social security- Turkish Employment Organization-National Observatory
3. Ministry of Culture and Tourism-Directorate General of Research and Education
4. Separate Industrialist’s and Businessmen’s Association
5. Turkish Confederation of Craftsmen and Artisans
6. Turkish Confederation of Employers Association
7. The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey
8. Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association
9. Confederation of Progressive Labours Union of Turkey
10. The Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions
11. Ministry of Health-Education Directorate
12. Ankara Chamber of Industry
13. Ankara Chamber of Commerce
14. Istanbul Chamber of Industry
15. Istanbul Chamber of Commerce
16. MEKSA Foundation
17. Trainers Union
18. Trainers and Scientists Union
19. Turkish Training Union
20. Istanbul Metal Importers’ Union and

UNIVERSITIES
1. Akdeniz University
2. Anadolu University
3. Ankara University
4. Bogazici University
5. Cukurova University
6. Ege University
7. Erciyes University
8. Firat University
9. Gazi University
10. Hacettepe University
11. Harran University
12. Istanbul University
13. Karadeniz Technical University
14. Marmara University
15. Middle East Technical University
16. Selcuk University
17. 100.Yıl University
18. Baskent University
19. Fatih University
20. Kadir Has University
21. Koc University
22. Sabanci University

81 MoNE PROVINCIAL DIRECTORATES
1. Adana Provincial Directorate
2. Adiyaman Provincial Directorate
3. Afyon Provincial Directorate
4. Agri Provincial Directorate
5. Amasya Provincial Directorate
6. Ankara Provincial Directorate
7. Antalya Provincial Directorate
8. Artvin Provincial Directorate
9. Aydin Provincial Directorate
10. Balikesir Provincial Directorate
11. Bilecik Provincial Directorate
12. Bingol Provincial Directorate
13. Bitlis Provincial Directorate
14. Bolu Provincial Directorate
15. Burdur Provincial Directorate
16. Bursa Provincial Directorate
17. Canakkale Provincial Directorate
18. Cankiri Provincial Directorate
19. Corum Provincial Directorate
20. Denizli Provincial Directorate
21. Diyarbakir Provincial Directorate
22. Edirne Provincial Directorate
23. Elazig Provincial Directorate
24. Erzincan Provincial Directorate
25. Erzurum Provincial Directorate
26. Eskisehir Provincial Directorate
27. Gaziantep Provincial Directorate
28. Giresun Provincial Directorate
29. Gumushane Provincial Directorate
30. Hakkari Provincial Directorate
31. Hatay Provincial Directorate
32. Isparta Provincial Directorate
33. Icel Provincial Directorate
34. Istanbul Provincial Directorate
35. Izmir Provincial Directorate
36. Kars Provincial Directorate
37. Kastamonu Provincial Directorate
38. Kayseri Provincial Directorate
39. Kırklareli Provincial Directorate
40. Kırşehir Provincial Directorate
41. Kocaeli Provincial Directorate
42. Konya Provincial Directorate
43. Kutahya Provincial Directorate
44. Malatya Provincial Directorate
45. Manisa Provincial Directorate
46. Maras Provincial Directorate
47. Mardin Provincial Directorate
48. Mugla Provincial Directorate
49. Mus Provincial Directorate
50. Nevşehir Provincial Directorate
51. Nigde Provincial Directorate
52. Ordu Provincial Directorate
53. Rize Provincial Directorate
54. Sakarya Provincial Directorate
55. Samsun Provincial Directorate
56. Siirt Provincial Directorate
57. Sinop Provincial Directorate
58. Sivas Provincial Directorate
59. Tokat Provincial Directorate
60. Trabzon Provincial Directorate
61. Tunceli Provincial Directorate
62. Sanlıurfa Provincial Directorate
63. Usak Provincial Directorate
64. Van Provincial Directorate
65. Yozgat Provincial Directorate
66. Zonguldak Provincial Directorate
67. Aksaray Provincial Directorate
68. Bayburt Provincial Directorate
69. Karaman Provincial Directorate
70. Kirikkale Provincial Directorate
71. Batman Provincial Directorate
72. Sıırınak Provincial Directorate
73. Bartın Provincial Directorate
74. Ardahan Provincial Directorate
75. Iğdır Provincial Directorate
76. Karabük Provincial Directorate
77. Yalova Provincial Directorate
78. Kilis Provincial Directorate
79. Osmaniye Provincial Directorate
80. Duzce Provincial Directorate
ANNEX-2 INSTITUTIONS GIVING RESPONSE TO EQF CONSULTATION FORM

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING BODIES AFFILIATED WITH THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION (MoNE)
1. Board of Education
2. Board of Research Planning and Coordination
3. Directorate General of Technical Education for Boys
4. Directorate General of Technical Education for Girls
5. Directorate General of Commerce and Tourism
6. Directorate General of Religious Education
7. Directorate General of Apprenticeship and Non-formal Education
8. Health Affairs Directorate
9. Projects Coordination Centre

SOCIAL PARTNERS
1. Ministry of Industry and Commerce-Small and Medium Industry Development Organization
2. Ministry of Culture and Tourism-Directorate General of Research and Education
3. Ministry of Health-Education Directorate
4. Turkish Confederation of Craftsmen and Artisans
5. Turkish Confederation of Employers Association
6. Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association
7. Confederation of Progressive Labours Union of Turkey
8. The Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions
9. Ankara Chamber of Industry
10. Ankara Chamber of Commerce
11. Istanbul Chamber of Industry
12. MEKSA Foundation
13. Turkish Training Union

UNIVERSITIES
1. Anadolu University
2. Ankara University
3. Cukurova University
4. Erciyes University
5. Hacettepe University
6. Harran University
7. Istanbul University
8. Karadeniz Technical University
9. Middle East Technical University
10. Baskent University
11. Koc University

MoNE PROVINCIAL DIRECTORATES

1. Adana Provincial Directorate
2. Afyon Provincial Directorate
3. Agri Provincial Directorate
4. Amasya Provincial Directorate
5. Ankara Provincial Directorate
6. Antalya Provincial Directorate
7. Artvin Provincial Directorate
8. Aydın Provincial Directorate
9. Balıkesir Provincial Directorate
10. Bilecik Provincial Directorate
11. Bolu Provincial Directorate
12. Burdur Provincial Directorate
13. Cankiri Provincial Directorate
14. Corum Provincial Directorate
15. Denizli Provincial Directorate
16. Diyarbakır Provincial Directorate
17. Edirne Provincial Directorate
18. Elazığ Provincial Directorate
19. Erzincan Provincial Directorate
20. Gaziantep Provincial Directorate
21. Giresun Provincial Directorate
22. Hatay Provincial Directorate
23. Isparta Provincial Directorate
24. Istanbul Provincial Directorate
25. Izmir Provincial Directorate
26. Kars Provincial Directorate
27. Kastamonu Provincial Directorate
28. Kayseri Provincial Directorate
29. Kirsehir Provincial Directorate
30. Kocaeli Provincial Directorate
31. Malatya Provincial Directorate
32. Manisa Provincial Directorate
33. Maras Provincial Directorate
34. Mardin Provincial Directorate
35. Mugla Provincial Directorate
36. Nevsehir Provincial Directorate
37. Nigde Provincial Directorate
38. Ordu Provincial Directorate
39. Rize Provincial Directorate
40. Sakarya Provincial Directorate
41. Samsun Provincial Directorate
42. Siirt Provincial Directorate
43. Sinop Provincial Directorate
44. Tekirdag Provincial Directorate
45. Tokat Provincial Directorate
46. Trabzon Provincial Directorate
47. Sanliurfa Provincial Directorate
48. Usak Provincial Directorate
49. Van Provincial Directorate
50. Yozgat Provincial Directorate
51. Zonguldak Provincial Directorate
52. Aksaray Provincial Directorate
53. Bayburt Provincial Directorate
54. Karaman Provincial Directorate
55. Kirikkale Provincial Directorate
56. Sirnak Provincial Directorate
57. Bartin Provincial Directorate
58. Ardahan Provincial Directorate
59. Igdir Provincial Directorate
60. Karabuk Provincial Directorate
61. Yalova Provincial Directorate
62. Osmaniye Provincial Directorate
63. Duzce Provincial Directorate
European Qualifications Framework

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 10.12.2005

Your comments must reach us by that date.

Ministry of National Education
EARGED
Education Research and Development Department
Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa Bulvarı, 109/1
Maltepe, Ankara 06570
Please find attached a copy of Consultation document prepared by the European Commission on the EQF and a short summary of the document prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education.

In preparing responses to question 2, respondents are requested to refer to tables 1 and 2 of the document from the European Commission.
The European Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a framework to enable qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral levels to relate and communicate with each other thus developing transparency at the European level. The framework will facilitate the transfer, transparency and recognition of qualifications. The EQF is a voluntary instrument between national systems of qualifications. It aims to strengthen mutual trust and cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in lifelong learning.

Its role would also be to enable and promote mobility of learners and labour market mobility across borders. It will foster change by supporting and informing reform at national and sector level.

Consultation over the EQF.

Consultation over the EQF is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of December 2005. The consultation process involves the 32 countries involved in the Education and Training 2010 process, the Bologna follow up group, European social partner organisations, industry sector groups as well as NGOs and educational organisations. This will provide input to the drafting of Council and European Parliament Recommendation in Spring 2006.

Attached is a questionnaire and the full copy of the European Commission’s EQF consultation document.

The EQF contains a number of key features. These are

- Reference Levels for Qualifications
- The Use of Learning Outcomes to identify the content of learning in Education and Training
- A series of broad voluntary principles at the European Level covering Quality Assurance, Key competencies, Career Guidance, and the validation of non formal and informal learning
- The recognition of sector based qualifications
- The use of clarification instruments to to make the content of qualifications more transparent across national borders

EQF Reference levels for qualifications
The European Qualification Framework has as its central feature a hierarchy of 8 reference levels for qualifications.

Each reference level corresponds to a combination of skill, knowledge and wider competency. The levels range from a basic level of learning (at level 1) to the most advanced level of learning (at level 8).

Each level of the hierarchy contains **skill, knowledge and wider competence** to a certain extent. Generally the higher the level the more of these qualities a person is expected to have, e.g., a person at level 6 will have more skills, knowledge and competence than someone at level 5. Levels 5, 6, 7, and 8 have been prepared to be consistent and compatible with the Bologna cycles developed for qualifications at the higher education level.

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**In the EQF reference levels:**

- **Skill** is understood as the ‘The knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job’

- **Knowledge** is understood as the ‘The facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people’

- **Wider Competence** is understood as ‘Personal and professional competence involving
  (i) Autonomy and responsibility
  (ii) Learning competence
  (iii) Communication and social competence
  (iv) Professional and vocational competence

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Learning Outcomes

The EQF uses the concept of learning outcomes. A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit, or qualification. Learning outcomes can be applied to all forms of learning, covering arts and science, the social sciences and vocational areas of learning.

Examples of learning Outcomes

1. From Literature

At the end of the period of learning a person will be able to:

“Demonstrate a detailed understanding of the influences of the historical and social context within which the chosen text is set, both from the study of the text itself and from the study of other contemporary literature”.

2. From Engineering Science

At the end of the period of learning a person will be able to:

“Develop a function that can be used to calculate the rate of gas through an enclosed medium and the volume of flow in specified periods”

3. Road Transport (Lorry Driver)

At the end of the period of learning a person will be able to:

“To reverse an articulated truck in busy and quiet environments repeatedly without causing a hazard or congestion in surrounding traffic.”

4. Radio Broadcasting

At the end of the period of learning a person will be able to:

“To present sequences of ‘live’ broadcast items under a variety of conditions without the presence of ‘dead air’ (on air silence).”

Using learning outcomes provides for more precision as to what exactly a learner acquires in terms of knowledge and/or skills when they successfully complete some learning.
Learning outcomes can be formulated for a number of purposes; in relation to individual courses, units, modules and programmes.

Training programmes and educational courses leading to a qualification will usually have multiple learning outcomes. The precise number will depend on the nature of the course and qualification.

**Common European Principles**

The EQF includes a series of common principles that are intended to support its implementation. These common principles cover:

- The Validation of Non formal and informal learning
- Quality Assurance
- Career Guidance and Counselling
- Key Competencies.

*Validation of non formal and informal* learning provides opportunities for individuals to obtain recognition for skills and knowledge that they have gained outside of formal education or training.

The *quality assurance principles* provide a general framework of guidance on quality assurance in qualifications covering:

- Planning for Quality Assurance
- Implementation of Quality assurance arrangements
- Evaluation and Assessment of Quality in learning and training programmes leading to qualifications
- The review of processes; and
- The methodologies used in ensuring Quality in Qualifications and learning programmes

The principles for *career guidance* cover a set of aims designed to support national policy development.
Key competencies cover a set of skills that are intended to be achieved by the end of compulsory education and training. There are 8 key competencies comprising

- 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
- Cultural expression

The development of sector based qualifications

The EQF consultation document refers to sectoral qualifications. The term sector is used either to define a category of companies on the basis of their main economic activity, product or technology (chemistry, tourism) or as a transversal/horizontal occupational category (ICT, Marketing, Human resources, Financial Services).

A sectoral qualification is a qualification implemented by a group of companies belonging to the same sector in order to meet common training needs. These qualifications have often been developed outside the formal qualification system and are often implemented outside of it. However, such qualifications can be highly valued by employers and can be frequently desired by individuals. In the context of greater European mobility in learning and employment, such qualifications are becoming increasing important.

The EQF will be supported by

- A website portal containing descriptions of learning programmes and courses in different countries. The portal will target students, job seekers, workers, parents, guidance counsellors, teachers
- A credit transfer system based on learning outcomes.
- The Europass instruments, including the Diploma supplement and the Certificate supplement.

Further information can be obtained from the web site of the EU at and from

http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp

We invite you to take the time to read the attached Consultation document and to complete the attached questionnaire.

Thank You
Please check one of the boxes that best describes you as a respondent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Vocational Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult and Community Education</td>
<td>Trade Union or Employer</td>
<td>National Sector Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary or Community organisation</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please Specify:
1 a) The rationale of an EQF
Are the most important objectives and functions to be fulfilled by an EQF those set out in the consultation document?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No  [ ] Not Sure

Comments:

1 b) What is needed to make the EQF work in practical terms (for individual citizens, education and training systems, the labour market)?

Comments:
The reference levels and descriptors:
2 a) Does the 8-level reference structure sufficiently capture the complexity of lifelong learning in Europe?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Not Sure

Comments:

2 b)
- Do the level descriptors, in table 1 of the consultation document, adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in levels?
- What should be the content and role of the ‘supporting and indicative information’ on education, training and learning structures and input (in table 2 of the consultation document)?
- How can your national and sectoral qualifications be matched to the proposed EQF levels and descriptors of learning outcomes?

Comments:
3 National Qualifications Frameworks

- How can a National Qualification Framework for lifelong learning – reflecting the principles of the EQF- be developed in your region?

- How, and within what timescale, can your national qualifications systems be developed towards a learning outcomes approach?

4 Sectoral Qualifications

- To what 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 the link between sectors development and national qualifications be improved?
Comments:

5 Mutual Trust

- How can the EQF contribute to the development of mutual trust (e.g. based on common principles for quality assurance) between stakeholders involved in lifelong learning - at European, national, sectoral and local levels?

- How can the EQF become a reference to improve the quality of all levels of lifelong learning?

Comments:

6 Any other comments on the EQF proposal:
Comments:
ANNEX 2 - EXPERT WORKSHOP “TOWARDS A EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING” - VIENNA, OCTOBER 21st AND 22nd 2006 - 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 competences is not possible without efficient communication and co-operation between education sectors, authorities, institutions and between countries\(^1\).

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 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.\(^2\)

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\(^{st}\) and 22\(^{nd}\) 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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2 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\(^3\). 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
- 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

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

Learning outcomes are an approach which are 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 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 be become the basis for curriculum development and the content of teaching and learning processes.

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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. 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 stakeholders 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.

- **Funding/Financial Assistance**
  As EQF/NQF refers to all sectors of education, financial recourses 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.