



EQF Predict

Final Report

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Project information

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Executive Summary

In most European countries, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the instruments related to them, national and sectoral frameworks, are still discussed controversially and from country to country differently which, of course, mirrors differing situations with regard to the EQF (some countries dispose already of a national qualification framework, some are going to set up one), but also different “landscapes” of stakeholders who pin very different expectations on the EQF.

It is up to the member countries to determine the way how their national educational systems shall be linked to the EQF. This has led to considerably differing referencing approaches, and this implies a lot of uncertainties concerning the impact this will have on these national systems in the future. There is a danger that the relationship to the EQF and the implementation/revision of national qualification frameworks related to it will strongly change national situations, but in a way that dilutes the EQF approach to get a clear picture of the *outcomes* of qualification processes in favour of national positioning interests.

How far these apprehensions are justified, can only be said after the above mentioned processes have really come to an end, but it can already now be stated that they will concern *educational key elements* (as occupational profiles, curricula, assessment and certification procedures) . These elements are assignable to the EQF beyond all intermediations by national frameworks which delivered the starting point for the project EQF Predict: *This project should exemplarily show how these elements can be assigned to the EQF ensuring that the real outcomes of learning processes become visible.*

Chapter 1. describe in more detail the objectives of this project.

Chapter 2 shows the methodological approach which was used for project development. It is based on *six key activities* further subdivided into workpacakges.

Chapter 3 describes the project results achieved which have been elaborated within *Workpackage 2 Current Framework of Change* and the three “assignment workpackages” (Workpackage 3 *Legal Regulations*, Workpackage 4 *Educational Content*, Workpackage 5 *Interfaces of Transnational Educational Collaboration*)

Chapter 4 describes the consortium of partners; they differ considerably in terms of origin and function within their national environments. It will be shown how the specific work backgrounds of partners helped to achieve the project objectives.

Chapter 5 describes the plans for the future work beyond the project duration period, based on insights acquired during project work.

Chapter 6 describes the contribution of the project to EU policies which must be targeted to insist on the original aims of the EQF.

Table of Contents

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES	5
2. PROJECT APPROACH	7
3. PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS	10
4. PARTNERSHIPS	11
5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE	13
6. CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLICIES	15

1. Project Objectives

Starting points of the project *EQF Predict* were the following basic assumptions:

- There is a wide consensus among all stakeholders that a European Qualification Framework should be used in order to identify learning outcomes wherever they have been acquired, but a lot of differing point of views exist with regard to the question *how the EQF should be properly used* resp. how educational instruments to be related to the EQF in the future (as legal rules, curricula, sectoral and national frameworks, assessment procedures already existing or to be developed) should be designed or modified according to the requirements of the EQF.
- In spite of all different views on the subject, some essentials appeared as unchangeable (as learning outcome orientation, level structure of frameworks, basic subdivision of descriptors), and it was also obvious that this will have a certain impact on various elements of educational systems which *as such* will not become superfluous after the implementation of frameworks, whatever their scope and form might be: There are some *educational key elements* (as occupational profiles, curricula, assessment and certification procedures) which have up to now existed and will also exist in the future, but in a way which has to reflect the needs of frameworks, at the very end and at any rate the requirements of the EQF.

These assumptions delivered the basis for setting up a project within a *framework of change* that was *predictable* due to the above mentioned invariants, but also because in the EU member states certain efforts to create links of educational systems to the EQF could be observed that allowed for cautious assumptions how the overall environment of EQF use could look like in the near future. The *general project approach* referred to this *framework of a change* in a way that those educational elements which do not need the intermediation of national frameworks in order to be assignable to the EQF (the above mentioned educational key elements) *shall be assigned to the EQF* without ignoring the national environments in which educational key elements have to be used at the very end: Reference to these environments has been realized by *contrasting practical examples of EQF assignment* elaborated within the project to developments more devoted to specific national needs, thereby initiating a debate which could prevent that the original EQF approach is diluted by country-focussed approaches.

For these purposes, the following project activities were carried out:

- Identify and describe the predictable framework of change caused by the introduction of the EQF and deliver recommendations for future developments

based on project work experiences (*WP 2 Current framework of change and WP 7 Future framework of change*)

- Deliver EQF-assigned optimum models of legal regulations/occupational profiles and examples of good *WP 3 Legal regulations*)
- Deliver EQF-assigned optimum models of curricula/ human resources development measures and examples of good practice (*WP 4 Educational Content*)
- Describe EQF-assigned optimum models of assessment and other quality assurance approaches, deliver examples of , (*WP 5 Interfaces of Trans-national Educational Collaboration*)

The elaborated models of EQF assignment were piloted, (*WP 6 Piloting*). Results of piloting are usable for guaranteeing *project sustainability*. Grounds have been laid by drafting EQF consultancy services, in the future supporting interested parties (e.g. training providers) during the process of EQF adaptation (*WP 8 Model of EQF Application Consulting Service*)

2. Project Approach

Preliminary Considerations

A project like EQF Predict is not in a position to change the world; project work can only support sensible solutions, but not create them. Considered from the point of view of a project consortium, this impact of project work is dependent upon a *balance between the realism of suggestions and its innovative character*: These suggestions should *exceed current practice, but not ignore it*.

With regard to the project *EQF Predict*, this rule was obeyed the following way:

1. Suggestions were embedded in a *predictable framework of change* encompassing expectable developments all over Europe. It should thereby be ensured that suggestions imply a relationship to ongoing discussions and are not placed beyond ongoing debates.
2. Suggestions dealt with *references of educational key elements* (as occupational profiles, qualifications, assessment procedures) *to the EQF*. It was understood that these educational key elements as such will play their specific role in national educational systems also in the future, but are affected by EQF implementation.
3. In order to give suggestions the perspective of usability, the *embedding of partners in networks with involvement of stakeholders* (competent bodies, social partners, etc.) was used: Partners are either themselves competent bodies/social partners or have collaborated with them for a long time.
4. Suggestions encompassed *optimum models of EQF assigned educational key elements*, and these were based on an analysis of *existing approaches to identify learning outcomes*.
5. *Stakeholders* were asked to *comment the suggested optimum models* which should help to refine them and to adapt them to not yet considered specific needs having arisen in national environments.
6. Optimum models were tested within *piloting activities* linked to already available training measures that were redesigned according to EQF requirements.
7. An *EQF Predict portal* was provided to guarantee a continuous link between the strategic world of basic EQF discussions and the (more) operational world of EQF adaptation, thereby enabling transfer of information to appliers as well as their feedback to strategically working organisations.

Key Activities

There are six kinds of *key activities* carried out in the framework of the project :

- Activities to describe the *predictable framework of change* and to deliver perspectives for future development by drafting recommendations for proper EQF adaptation. This was realized by work of WP 2 where the assumed framework of change was basically determined, in order to enable EQF-adaptation of educational key elements in the framework of project work, and by work of WP 7 where EQF adaptation of educational key elements was evaluated, and where guidelines for EQF adaptation were derived from the results of evaluation.
- Activities to *adapt* key educational elements to the EQF. They took place within WP 3, WP 4, and WP 5.
- Activities to *pilot* the use of EQF-adapted key educational elements. There are some activities foreseen which are oriented to the simulation of scenarios, fulfilling the criteria of piloting in a wider sense of the word (under WP 3 and WP 4), actual piloting takes place within WP 6 where virtual trans-national training and human resources development measures shall be carried out.
- Activities to provide for a *sustainable basis of use* beyond the lifetime of the project. This was the core of WP 8.
- Activities to provide for dissemination of project results. They are described under WP 9.
- Activities to *manage* the project and to *ensure quality* by specific monitoring, risk management and quality assurance. They were carried out within WP 1 and WP 10.

Milestones

In terms of *milestones*, project work can be described as follows:

- Description of a predictable framework of change, 1st phase: Results of WP 2 work
- Models of EQF-adapted educational key elements. Results of work within WP 3, WP 4, and WP 5
- Description of a predictable framework of change, 2nd phase: Results of WP 7 work
- Model of a EQF application consulting service: Results of WP 6 and WP 8

Basic Approach

The *basic approach* to develop the main products of the planned project was a *More-step-methodology*:

Get an overview of available educational key elements

- Extract provisional model from the overview
- Enrich model with contributions from all countries

- Test validity of the model
 - by stakeholder inquiries
 - if possible, by pilots

- Develop revised descriptions

- Include final comments of stakeholders

- Deliver overview of enriched descriptions

The *degree of elaboration* at the respective stage had to be oriented to the objective of the project to deliver *practically useable educational key elements* which can be considered models for further development in the field, in a framework of predictable change *where educational elements of various kinds are related to each other*.

Following the specific purpose of respective workpackages, the number of methodological steps can be reduced.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The main project results are:

- **"The Project EQF Predict – A Contribution to Overcome the Fragmentation of EQF Implementation"**, overall project summary and general recommendations for further procedures, prepared by DEKRA (DE)
- Brochure on project findings: **"EQF from theory to practice: adapting education and training elements to the requirements of the European Qualifications Framework"**
- The **"EQF Adaptation Support Portal"**, developed by the EQF Predict project consortium, it contains among other the developed **EQF Predict optimum models of EQF assignment**
- **"Draft EQF application consultation service: a task model, an online consultation service concept draft and an organisational model"**, prepared by DEKRA (DE)
- **"Future general Scenario of EQF Application"**, prepared by 3s research laboratory (AT)
- **"Work required for a typology of EQF application"**, prepared by ACPART (RO)
- Summary report on **"Piloting the optimum models of EQF assignment within a virtual training course on web content management"**, prepared by Frastrak (UK) and DEKRA (DE)
- Summary report on **"Piloting the optimum models of EQF assignment within VW Service Deutschland"**, prepared by VW Service Deutschland (DE) and LUX (DE)
- Comprehensive report on **"EQF assignment of occupational profiles"**, prepared by IG Metall (DE) and DEKRA (DE)
- Comprehensive report on **"EQF assignment of curricula"**, prepared by CPV (IT) and DEKRA (DE)
- Comprehensive report on **"EQF assignment of assessment procedures"**, prepared by CREDIJ (FR) and DEKRA (DE)
- Synopsis of **"Quality assurance measures"**, compiled by CREDIJ (FR)
- **"General EQF application scenario"**, prepared by DEKRA (DE)
- **"Basic typology of expectable EQF application"**, prepared by ACPART (RO)
- **"Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms"**, compiled by 3s research laboratory (AT)

4. Partnership

Setting up the partnership, it was reflected that the consortium should dispose of a pool of expertise which enables it

- To cover a relevant number of EU countries in terms of the various types of ongoing national framework debates
- To refer to both prominent educational areas relatable to EQF levels: Higher Education and VET
- To deliver meaningful EQF assignments of educational key elements as legal regulations (occupational profiles), curricula, assessment procedures, and quality assurance approaches
- To pilot the developed models as far this is possible within the framework of the project
- To deliver perspectives for sustainable work in the future

The result of these reflections was a consortium of public-private collaboration, including partners experienced in setting up and maintaining educational key elements in national environments, as well as those who are able to test their use properly, and those who can design plans for the future after the project will have been finished.

The table below shows the specific features of the partners in terms of links to project requirements:

Name	Kind of organisation, expertise	Country	Status of national qualification system
<i>DEKRA Akademie GmbH</i>	Training provider with experience in participating in various EQF related projects in the ICT and the automotive sector	Germany	National qualification framework: Work of experts' group finalised
<i>3 s research laboratory</i>	Research institute involved in various EQF related projects, working also as a consultant for the European Commission	Austria	National framework under construction
<i>Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (IBW)</i>	Research institute founded by organisations of Austrian employers, involved in educational activities of social partners	Austria	National framework under construction
<i>Industriegewerkschaft Metall (IG Metall)</i>	Biggest German trade union, involved in standardisation activities of social partners at national and European level	Germany	National qualification framework: Work of experts' group finalised

Name	Kind of organisation, expertise	Country	Status of national qualification system
<i>Lux Personal & Kommunikation, Germany</i>	Consultancy with specific experience in VET related to the automotive sector	Germany	National qualification framework: Work of experts' group finalised
<i>Universität Bremen, Institut Technik und Bildung (ITB)</i>	Research institute with strong experience in standardisation activities of the automotive sector, involved in various relevant national and international initiatives	Germany	National qualification framework: Work of experts' group finalised
<i>Volkswagen Service Deutschland</i>	Service company of one of the biggest enterprises in Europe	Germany	National qualification framework: Work of experts' group finalised
Οργανισμός Επαγγελματικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης (OEEK)	Public body in VET	Greece	National framework under construction
<i>Fundación Laboral de Metal</i>	Foundation of trade union, involved in sector oriented VET debates in Spain	Spain	National framework under construction
<i>Centre Regional pour le Développement, la Formation et l'Insertion des Jeunes (CREDIJ)</i>	Private body, closely collaborating with the French Ministry of Education as well as with the Ministry of Labour	France	National framework available
<i>Fondazione Giacomo Rumor</i>	Training provider, involved in various EQF-related projects	Italy	National framework under construction
<i>Agenția Națională pentru Calificările din Învățământul Superior și Parteneriat cu Mediul Economic și Social (ACPART)</i>	National authority for qualifications in Higher Education	Romania	National framework under construction
<i>Fastrak Consulting</i>	Consultancy with specific experience in the multimedia sector, experienced in virtual training	United Kingdom	National framework available

5. Plans for the Future

1. There are various *pillars* on which *sustainability of project impact* will be built:

- *Easily understandable examples of EQF adaptation*: Educational key elements which demonstrate their usability for EQF application themselves without circuitous explanations. They should be considered *models for further developments in the same field*. Due to the variety of national educational cultures (that is also mirrored in partnership), conditions for establishing this pillar could not be created up to 100%, to work on that remains an important issue for the continuation of work beyond the project funding period.
- *Extension of project activities suggested within WP 7 “Future Framework of Change”*: This concerns mainly the further development of *guidelines for proper EQF application* which should be supplemented by *remarks concerning the proper use of national qualification frameworks*.
- *Activities intending to establish a long-term the EQF application consultancy service* who will use the portal *EQF Adaptation Support* as an instrument for remote advice, and will support interested parties (training providers, HRD departments, competent bodies in the field of legal regulations, assessment procedures, etc.) in the course of EQF adaptation. It is, of course, sensible for this purpose to collaborate with departments of competent bodies who dispose of updated information about national developments.
- *Embedding of further activities into common initiatives of projects clusters*: Project clusters can achieve a higher *impact* than single projects if they show commonalities in terms of *objectives, content, and/or methodology* and if they can use common *sources* in order to realize their ideas. This is not only true for dissemination of project results, but also for creating sustainable structures for further development and work after the actual lifetime of the project:
 - There are at least similar project objectives and complementary approaches used in the projects *EQF Predict, Common Grounds for Referencing NQFs and SQFs to the EQF, Matching Frames* as they all deal with the question *How can the EQF be properly used for the purposes of various user groups?*
 - Information useable for further development and policy recommendations addressed to relevant stakeholders could come from the VETAS network where more and more EQF relevant information is being stored, and from evaluation of the EQF Support Portal developed within the EQF Predict.

- Both delivers good conditions for intensifying contacts to national stakeholders and stakeholders working at European level, in particular to the *EQF Advisory Group* that bundles a lot of relationships to relevant public bodies, associations, and trade unions in various European countries; it would make sense to address common policy recommendations of the above mentioned projects to this group, thereby supporting the work of the EQF Advisory Group by a bottom-up approach, and at the same time proving that work of the cluster (in which the further developments of EQF Predict shall be embedded) deserves sustainability since it helps to bridge the gap between high level policy activities and interests of the actual target groups of these activities.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The starting point of the project was a reflection on the differences between the aims and promises related to the introduction of the EQF, and the different situations in countries and sectors, particularly where thinking in categories of transferability has no tradition. By identifying possibilities to overcome this contradiction, *the project tried to make EU policies feasible* which means finding ways how EQF use might be best enabled in the framework of conditions which have been created long before EQF was set up and discussed. The project should be considered an activity which was intended *to impede the dilution of the EQF approach*, a danger coming from country-focussed approaches of EQF reference, having in mind first and utmost the *position* which a national educational system could have within a network of European qualifications related to the EQF.

In terms of actual content, the main contribution to EU policies are delivered by the piloted optimum models of EQF assignment and the service built upon them. However, it has to be reflected that these deliverables *in themselves* cannot have a strong impact on national developments all over Europe; there are some general conditions which should be reflected if it is expected that the suggested optimum models can get some value:

The EQF is intended to be an instrument for understanding national systems abroad; a *common language based on the description of learning outcomes* shall be used for this purpose. If this shall work, ambiguities are not acceptable, otherwise *trust between stakeholders provided to use the framework* will not arise. There are only two ways how ambiguities can be avoided:

- Descriptors of the EQF do not allow for ambiguity since there is no space for differing understanding.
- Interpretation of the EQF is determined by competent bodies whose understandings are accepted everywhere.

Both ways are paved with considerable obstacles:

- The way how the levels of the EQF are described is not based on a homogeneous approach. It cannot be ignored that there are “sources” of EQF construction which traditionally have not been linked to each other – VET and Higher Education - and it is obvious that this has left traces: Unlike certificates acquired via VET qualifications, certificates of Higher Education can count to be placed at certain EQF levels: *Bachelor, Master, and PhD* are not described in learning outcomes, but for these academic degrees the levels 7 – 9 have been “reserved”. Under these circumstances, it must not surprise that there is space for various understandings of the EQF

descriptors. The process of setting up the EQF model is characterised by negotiations that led to *compromises*, and criteria for compromises are delivered by *interests*, not by necessities arising from systematic approaches. This is a good condition for the arise of *grey zones of understanding*: The necessity to bridge the gap between diverging positions is more important than to provide for well-defined descriptors.

- There is *no* competent body “automatically” accepted all over Europe as an authority entitled to determine the right way of EQF understanding. This is excluded by the way how member states work together in the area of education and training: EU treaties do not allow for establishing rules to be observed in every member state, the implementation of the EQF is based on voluntary decisions of the member states, and it is therefore consequent that it is up to national competent bodies to determine how the EQF shall be understood resp. which levels shall be assigned to national qualifications/certificates.

If non-ambiguity shall be achieved this second way, it is only possible via *actions that ensure trust in the EQF assignment of national competent bodies abroad*. How shall these actions look like? Often enough, the ways how qualifications are assigned to the EQF are subject of debates among national stakeholders that first and utmost defend their interests against others¹, and this reproduces the pattern described above: Systematic reflections do not have priority in this context. This may be irrelevant for the national stakeholders who after negotiations will be willing to deal with the achieved compromise in the near future, but it is a problem for those who have not been involved into the negotiations, look at the results from outside, and can only accept or reject them.

How to solve this problem? The first step to get out of this dilemma is to acknowledge that it exists: Stakeholders/decision makers should not already be happy if some agreement is visible at the horizon of further development; they should always ask if the envisaged agreement will really contribute to comparability of national educational systems. This is the only approach to achieve a common understanding of EQF implementation: To accept that the “normal way” to get solutions via compromises is at least not sufficient in order to provide for sustainability of the EQF i.e to guarantee that this framework is really used in order to judge certificates from abroad.

¹ e.g. Higher Education against VET

For this purpose, forums have to be found where adequate discussions on the described topic can take place. The “natural” place for debates of this kind should be the EQF Advisory Group where stakeholders of various kinds from all European countries are assembled. However, discussions should not be devoted to political correctness as it is usual when stakeholders with political responsibility meet, this would prevent openness required for developing a common understanding as described above. It would therefore be wise to provide for the consideration of *innovative approaches* within these debates that try to achieve the same goals as the policy makers from a bottom-up perspective. This can be achieved by invitation of “bottom-up representatives” to the meetings of the EQF Advisory Group, but also long-term support from further sides could be foreseen, such as:

- The portal of the network Vocational Education and Training in the Automotive Sector (<http://www.vetas.eu>) offers a collection of innovative approaches of this kind,
- The EQF Adaptation Support Portal (<http://www.eqf-support.eu>), developed within the project EQF Predict, intends to open a similar perspective in future.
- The recently launched Qualification Platform of the European Training Foundation (ETF) that is supported by DG Education and CEDEFOP