Future general scenario of EQF application

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Short summary:

Deliverable 79 "Future general Scenario of EQF application" is based on an evaluation of whole project work, thereby modifying the General EQF application scenario delivered within WP 2. In particular, it will be considered which interplay between various EQF-adapted educational key elements is possible, and how far this can be supported by an EQF Application Consultancy Service to be drafted within WP 8.

(1)   Current Framework of Change

(1.1)   Context information about workpackage 2 and its results

The objective of workpackage 2 "Current Framework of Change" in the context of the project EQF Predict, which is the basis for deliverable 79, was to identify key education and training elements which appear basically as unchangeable – despite of all specifications of use which at the very end of national and sectoral debates about EQF applications will have been introduced. On the other hand, EQF application essentials have to be determined which do not lose their nature in spite of various ways of applying this reference tool via national or sectoral frameworks (e.g. learning outcome orientation). Both issues deliver checkpoints for the description of a predictable framework of change in which innovation initiated by the introduction of the EQF can take place.

With regard to EQF application essentials it has to be admitted that they can be easily determined by considering the EQF itself which has been accepted by the European Parliament in April 2008 and is now valid as a reference tool for comparing learning outcomes all over Europe. But there are some issues which exceed the actual EQF features: It was analysed how far already defined interfaces between national/sectoral systems of education and the EQF (as national/sectoral frameworks) show some common features which could be used to classify differing approaches, thereby delivering a basic typology of expectable EQF application.

The deliverable "Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms" comprises a collection of educational key elements considered basically as invariants of education (as legal regulations, curricula, assessment procedures, etc.) but with regard to scope, granularity, participation of stakeholders appearing in different forms in the EU member states. The partners participating in this workpackage identified the above mentioned elements for all countries involved in the project (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain and UK) and described them in the form of a synopsis, based on common denominators of the educational key elements.

The description focuses on a general overview of educational key elements available in the participating countries and is not limited to certain EQF levels or a specific sector. Therefore country overviews describing existing

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educational key elements were set up and summarised in a synopsis based on common criteria of description (deliverable 12) which had to be identified in a first step.

The target was to describe the basic typology of existing educational key elements in the partner countries. "Educational key elements" were defined as all subjects which are affected by future EQF implementation such as:

- legal regulations of professions (professional profiles etc.)
- educational content (curricula, study programmes etc.)
- assessment and certification procedures
- quality management approaches
- stakeholders & institutions: competent bodies dealing with setting up legal regulations, people designing and organizing training, education and HRD activities, competent bodies responsible for assessment and certification, students participating in virtual trans-national training and HRD activities.

The description of those key elements takes the different segments of the educational system in the partner countries into account. Also the question was taken into regard, if there are there any short term, mid term or long term changes, which already happened or which are expected (by the implementation of the EQF or the introduction of NQF), e.g. in the setting up of study programs and curricula, in responsibilities, in defining qualifications, in quality assurance …

The partner countries were asked to describe, in case of already having an NQF or plan to introduce an NQF, the levels, kind of descriptors, the typology and planned revisions of the NQF. Further questions were related to the segments of the educational systems, responsibilities for qualifications (e.g. qualifications agency or something similar), legal regulations (e.g. responsible bodies for setting up legal regulations for educations), curricula and study programs (e.g. responsibilities for setting up curricula and study programs, involvement of stakeholders, boards and committees), assessment and certification (e.g. responsible bodies, assessment of learning outcomes), interfaces / permeability and accreditation of qualifications as well as quality management / quality assurance (e.g. responsible bodies, existing forms).

Besides a "synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms" (deliverable 12) workpackage 2 also focussed on providing a basic typology of expectable EQF application, provided by ACPART (deliverable 13), and a general EQF application scenario, provided by DEKRA (deliverable 14).

Deliverable 13 included a description of EQF application essentials which all national/sectoral ways of application have to refer to, and a classification of approaches to link sectoral/national educational systems/frameworks to the EQF. For this purpose, an analysis of debates about EQF application at European and national level was carried out.

Deliverable 14 "General EQF application scenario" included a synthesis of deliverable 12 "Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms" and deliverable 13 "Typology of expectable EQF application": It describes the predictable general framework in which adaptation of educational key elements will take place in terms of probable invariants and possible variants, thereby delivering starting points for the work of WP 3 – 6.

(1.2)   General EQF application scenario[1]

In the predictable general framework adaptation of educational key elements can take place in terms of probable invariants and possible variants, thereby delivering advice how work of WP 3 – 6 could be carried out sensibly.

The description is based on Deliverable 12 "Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms" comprising a collection of educational key elements considered basically as such invariants of education (as legal

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[1] Text from 1.2 mainly is identical with text from deliverable 14 v.1 provided by DEKRA.

regulations, curricula, assessment procedures, etc.) but with regard to scope, granularity, participation of stakeholders appearing in different forms in the EU member states, and Deliverable 13 "Typology of expectable EQF application" including a description of EQF application essentials which all national/sectoral ways of application have to refer to, and a classification of approaches to link sectoral/national educational systems/frameworks to the EQF.

Within the above mentioned synopsis of educational key elements, the following information could be collected with regard to the project partners' countries:

1) Information about professional profiles

2) Information about curricula and study programmes

3) Information about assessment and certification procedures

4) Information about quality management approaches

5) Information about responsibilities of stakeholders in education and training

Information about the current status of national qualification frameworks (resp. the status of their implementation) delivers the interface to the Typology of expectable EQF application described within Deliverable 13. Within this document, the following crucial issues have been pointed out:

Descriptors play a crucial role for the EQF as well as for national qualification framework. Categories they are described by differ considerably from country to country.

The number of levels defined by these descriptors also varies from country to country (although it can be seen that NQFs which have been set up after the introduction of the EQF mostly use the same number of levels as the EQF).

Eight countries have been selected for consideration. Although comparison has only been carried out at a very generic level, differences are considerable: There is not a single description which is totally identical with another one.

But these differences are, with regard to the objective of the general scenario to be described within Deliverable 14, only meaningful in a negative sense: There is no easily visible common dominator which would allow for relating to it the strongly differing definitions of national descriptors, thus delivering something like a map of European qualification frameworks showing the conditions under which the educational key elements selected for WP 3 – 5 can be assigned to the EQF.

The most "natural" common denominator is, of course, the relationship to the EQF which should be describable for all national and sectoral frameworks. At the moment, however, there are no "translations" available; for all national framework approaches it can only be identified who will be responsible for referencing NQFs to the EQF, but not how this is planned to be done. In order to get information about the current framework of change which is more than a well arranged collection of data, but is valuable for identifying the "hard issues" with which work of WP 2 – 6 has to be contrasted in national environments, it has therefore to be analysed what the reasons are which led to the specific framework status in every country.

This means actually that all information collected within Deliverable 12 "Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms" has to be used in order to get real profiles of national framework environments which should show how the features of a national educational environment determine the specific status of a national qualification framework. But this analytical work would obviously exceed the limitations of a project like EQF Predict. It is therefore suggested, instead of this comprehensive study, to use the collected material for answering questions which are important for assessing the value of significant features of national (draft) frameworks; only if

these questions are answered, it can be found the right way to contrast EQF assignment solutions found in our workpackages with positions of national stakeholders.

The next step to be gone in order to further develop this deliverable, thus making it more usable for further project work, should therefore be to set up a catalogue of relevant questions based on the inspection of material collected within this and the other workpackages.

Those questions could be: What is the reason for extending the EQF descriptors in the German NQF? What is the reason that France simply considers the pre existing RNCP a national qualification framework? Why is it Austria felt that descriptors should be complemented by specific explanations? What are the reasons for involving specific stakeholders?, etc.

(2)   Occupational profiles, curricula and assessment

On the basis of the general EQF application scenario, described in chapter 1.2, a future general scenario of EQF application in the context of the project EQF predict takes the main results of workpackage 3 "Legal Regulations", profiles", workpackage 4 "Educational Content" and workpackage 5 "Interfaces of Trans-national Educational Collaboration" into account. The project results were evaluated via expert interviews focussing on occupational profiles (workpackage 3), curricula (workpackage 4) and assessment (workpackage 5), also including a typology of various kinds of occupational profiles in the partner countries and the suggested optimum model for proper adaptation of occupational profiles, curricula and assessment to the European Qualifications Framework. The interviews were conducted in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Romania and Spain. The following summaries of the evaluation results are based on the summary reports of the interviews.

(2.1)   Occupational profiles (workpackage 3)

In workpackage 3 no correlation between the type of system and the ease of EQF adaptation could be proven. The following criteria which have an influence on the success of EQF adaptation were identified:
- more regulated systems: identification and involvement of stakeholders as advantage; less flexibility of higher rigidity of the system as disadvantage
- more market-driven system: history of developing systems of structuring qualifications as advantage; harder adaptation processes of qualification frameworks because of less authority of the state as disadvantage
- degree of openness to prior learning
- degree of outcome-orientation in occupational profiles

The shift towards outcome-orientation seems to be conducted with more ease and more successfully than the shift towards better recognition of prior learning.

(2.2)   Curricula (workpackage 4)

The following key elements for curricula design and implementation in order to EQF-adaptation were confirmed by the expert interviewees:
- a description of learning outcomes (to be derived from work processes) and a clear explanation on how learning sequences foreseen in the curriculum contribute to achieve these learning outcomes
- description of assessment procedures and how these refer to the specific quality of abilities to be assessed
- information about alternative education and training pathways
- modularisation enabling learners to combine learning units according to their career objectives

- teaching and training methods and practices applied in VET curricula and learning programmes
- organisations involved in curricula design and updating

The following key concepts and features characterizing an optimum model of outcome-oriented curricula were defined within workpackage 4:

- involvement of experts from different background in the analysis of work requirements, training needs and skills gaps and in their formalisation in occupational standards which serve as a basis for developing the curricula based on work requirements ("backward mapping": deducing of contents, learning processes and the length of a course on the basis of the outcomes)

- use of scientific and pedagogic methodologies and theory-based instruments to define learning outcomes and to determine the progression in curricula and learning programmes

- modularisation as key element in increasing the learner's autonomy and opportunity to select learning pathways and programmes according to its preference and specific needs

- more holistic understanding of competence

- shift from an input-based to and outcome-based curricula defines new objectives that may be met only through new forms of learning; new ways of learning require dynamic learning environments enabling an higher involvement of students in the learning process as active learners

- learning outcome-oriented curricula require higher and real autonomy and responsibility of teachers and training providers in defining learning programmes and in adapting them to learners' individual needs

- teaching and learning methods aimed at a combination of theoretical and practical learning and a combination between theoretical knowledge and practical skills; learning activities and learning environment need to enable the learner to create and control the development of his/her own learning; the teacher becomes a facilitator of the learning process; the learner is asked to manage his/her learning

- the shift to learning outcomes in curricula has many implications for learners assessment methods (with levels of student achievement, equity of student outcomes, and "learning to learn skills")

(2.3)   Assessment (workpackage 5)

Assessment procedures are the interface between the world of work and the world of education and training, they are based on mutual trust of stakeholders all over Europe. Essentials of assessment procedures are that assessment rules should specify the learning outcomes to be achieved; these abilities should be approved on the levels of knowledge, skills and competences; they should mirror the structure of work processes and therefore should show flexibility of differing education and training paths for same learning outcomes; they should be based on collaboration of stakeholders in zones of mutual trust; they should refer to European quality assurance standards as defined by EQAVET and EQAR.

Descriptions of assessment procedures should cover the following issues:
- title and definition of assessment measure
- reference to work processes via occupational profiles or equivalent instruments
- learning outcomes derived from the requirements of work processes, described in terms of abilities expressed by the EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and competences
- education and training pathways to which the assessment procedure(s) refer
- description of the way(s) how assessment is carried out
- references to European quality assurance standards
- responsible bodies and their role in national/sectoral environments

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(3)   Future general scenario of EQF application

Deliverable 79 "Future general Scenario of EQF application" is based on an evaluation of the whole project work, thereby modifying the General EQF application scenario delivered within WP 2. In particular, it will be considered which interplay between various EQF-adapted educational key elements is possible, and how far this can be supported by an EQF Application Consultancy Service which was drafted within WP 8. The "Future general Scenario of EQF application" focuses on the question: How far can the model suggested in WP 2 be confirmed by project work, what has to be modified, how can results of work within WP 3 – 6 enrich the original draft?

The "Future general Scenario of EQF application" is developed in the context of workpackage 7 "Future Framework of Change". Within this workpackage the NQFs/EQF relationship is explored on the basis of three scenarios: a pessimistic, a realistic and an optimistic scenario, focussing on three levels (with regard to the focus of evaluation of project results via expert interviews in workpackage 3, 4 and 5):

- occupational profiles / professional profiles

- curricula and study programmes

- assessment and certification procedures

(3.1)   Future general scenario of EQF application with focus on occupational profiles / professional profiles

In an **optimistic scenario** the adaptation of qualifications frameworks to the EQF is enabled easily in both – more regulated and more market-driven systems. More regulated systems have more established legislation processes, because actors are traditionally identified or involved. More market-driven systems are characterized by a more pronounced history of developing systems of structuring qualifications because of the high degree of fragmentation which also enables an easier adaptation to the European Qualifications Framework. In the future general optimistic scenario of EQF application the countries are characterized by a high degree of learning outcome orientation in their occupational or professional profiles and a high degree of openness to prior (formal, informal or nonformal) learning.

In a **pessimistic scenario** the adaptation of qualifications frameworks to the EQF is limited in both – more regulated and more market-driven systems. In more regulated systems it might be harder to adopt a qualifications framework because of the higher degree of rigidity, because a strongly-regulated system is less flexible. In a more market-driven system it might be harder to adopt a qualifications framework because the state as a motor of legislation would have less authority to get involved / less history of playing a role in this system. The countries are characterized by a lower degree of learning outcome orientation in their occupational or professional profiles and a lower degree of openness to prior (formal, informal or nonformal) learning.

In a **realistic scenario** the adaptation of qualifications frameworks to the EQF is enabled in both systems, regulated and market-driven systems, but it is an ongoing process which has to take the challenges of both systems into regard. All countries show a clear shift towards learning outcome orientation. The need for this shift is recognised, the countries are in the process of pursuing it. The degree of openness to the recognition of prior learning in the countries is not developed that far. Constraints of social, historical and cultural nature cannot be removed so easily, this is a long-term process of developing mutual trust.

The **EQF Application Service** could provide support and guidance within the adaptation process of occupational or professional profiles to the EQF by providing general information about the EQF and its mode of action, about the EQF application in Europe and by providing suggestions and guidelines for proper EQF application of occupational or professional profiles to the EQF. It provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions on EQF

application with focus on occupational or professional profiles in practices. Via the EQF adaptation support forum it supports dialogue and discussion among relevant stakeholders and provides support in the adaptation process.

(3.2)   Future general scenario of EQF application with focus on curricula and study programmes

In an **optimistic scenario** of adapting curricula and study programmes to the European Qualifications Framework all key elements for curricula design and implementation are taken into regard, such as: a description of learning outcomes (to be derived from work processes) and a clear explanation on how learning sequences foreseen in the curriculum contribute to achieve these learning outcomes, description of assessment procedures and how these refer to the specific quality of abilities to be assessed, information about alternative education and training pathways, modularisation enabling learners to combine learning units according to their career objectives, teaching and training methods and practices applied in VET curricula and learning programmes, organisations involved in curricula design and updating. New curricula and study programmes are learning outcome-oriented and developed by the use of scientific and pedagogic methodologies and on the basis of occupational standards, which were developed with involvement of experts from different background. The learning outcome orientation is not only realized in curricula but also in adequate teaching and learning methods, assessment methods and methods to adapt learning programs to learner's individual needs. This is based on a clear and common understanding of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competencies) and precise qualification classifications and levels in different countries. There is a clear and common understanding of EQF definitions, concepts, descriptors and levels in the different countries. There are clear links between EQF and other transparency instruments such as ECVET and ECTS.

In a **pessimistic scenario** of adapting curricula and study programmes to the European Qualifications Framework the limitations of the EQF application can not be overcome, because there is no clear and common understanding of EQF definitions, concepts, descriptors and levels in the different countries, what leads to mistrust regarding the referencing of national qualification frameworks to the EQF and its real value in other countries. The learning outcome orientation is only realized partly in curricula, but not reflected in other elements of the education system, such as adequate teaching and learning methods, assessment methods and methods to adapt learning programs to learner's individual needs.

In a **realistic scenario** of adapting curricula and study programmes to the European Qualifications Framework the key elements for a learning outcome-oriented curricula and study program design are taken into account as far as possible when developing new or adapting existing curricula. There is a shift toward learning-outcome orientation, as pointed out in chapter 3.1. Links between EQF and National Qualifications Frameworks as well as Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and other transparency instruments such as ECVET and ECTS will be established. The development of mutual trust is a big challenge which only can be developed if there is a clear and common understanding of the EQF descriptors in the different countries and referencing to the EQF is based on the same clear referencing criteria.

The **EQF Application Service** could provide support and guidance within the adaptation process of education and training practice to the related NQF and/or SQF and in coherence with European tools such as ECVET and EQAVET. It supports integrating the EQF and related instruments into education and training practice. It provides suggestions and guidelines for proper EQF application on educational elements and provides examples from different European countries as well as best practice examples from EQF-assigned education elements. It provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions on EQF application in practice.

(3.3) Future general scenario of EQF application with focus on assessment and certification procedures

In an **optimistic scenario** assessment and certification procedures which are adapted to the EQF are based on mutual trust between stakeholders and a comparable common understanding among stakeholders all over Europe. Assessment and certification procedures specify the learning outcomes to be achieved; the approval of these abilities on the levels of knowledge, skills and competences; they mirror the structure of work processes and therefore show flexibility of differing education and training paths for same learning outcomes; they are based on collaboration of stakeholders in zones of mutual trust; they refer to European quality assurance standards. Assessment and certification procedures cover title and definition of assessment measure, reference to work processes via occupational profiles or equivalent instruments, learning outcomes derived from the requirements of work processes, described in terms of abilities expressed by the EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and competences, education and training pathways to which the assessment procedure(s) refer, description of the way(s) how assessment is carried out, references to European quality assurance standards, responsible bodies and their role in national/sectoral environments.

In a **pessimistic scenario** assessment and certification procedures which are adapted to the EQF are not based on mutual trust between stakeholders; there is no comparable common understanding among stakeholders all over Europe. There are differing assessment and certification procedures which enhance distrust among stakeholders from different countries.

In a **realistic scenario** assessment and certification procedures which are adapted to the EQF are the basis for building up mutual trust between many of the involved stakeholders and a common understanding among many of the involved stakeholders all over Europe. This is a long-term process built on experiences with workforce from different countries to evaluate the worthiness of national qualifications which were referenced to the EQF and to see whether the learning outcomes are comparable with the referencing level in the own country. If based on the referencing criteria of the optimum model this should be the case, it is the basis for comparable results based on the same referencing rules.

The **EQF Application Service** provides information about the EQF application in Europe and the different countries, it provides sound and thorough information of the concerned actors about the EQF and its mode of action, about the own and other national/sectoral EQF implementation approaches and their interrelation. It provides suggestions and guidelines, best practice examples of EQF-assigned education elements such asassessment procedures and answers to Frequently Asked Questions on EQF application in practice. The EQF adaptation support forum allows a dialogue and discussion among European education and training practitioners and with experts on EQF application in education practice. This should be a further basis for building up mutual trust between the related stakeholders.

List of references:

- EQF Predict, WP2: Synopsis of educational key elements and its various forms (deliverable 12)

- EQF Predict, WP2: Basic typology of expectable EQF application (deliverable 13)

- EQF Predict, WP2: General EQF Application Scenario (deliverable 14)

- EQF Predict, WP3: Occupational profiles. Summary report of the interviews. Revised optimum model. Initial thoughts for a revised typology.

- EQF Predict, WP4: Stakeholders' interviews on WP4: Curricula. Summary report.

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- EQF Predict, WP5: Assessment. The Optimum Model: Summary of the interviews

- EQF Predict, WP8: Drafting an EQF Application Consultation service: a consultation service task model, an online consultation application and possible organisational models for such services

Annexes:

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For further information on the project please consult:

www.project-predict.eu

For further information on the paper please contact:

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