



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

Deliverable: 82, 83, 84 Version: 1.0

WP: 8 Last update: 31/08/2011

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"This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

Summary/ Abstract

The European Qualifications Frameworks (EQF) proper application in very heterogeneous national and sectoral contexts and with a clear European reference is a challenging task being currently implemented all over Europe. It has been the EQF Predict projects aim to elaborate and to define an EQF Application Consultation Service being able to support these efforts with consultation services addressing the different professions involved. The major professions investigated are personnel at education providing organisations, employers' recruitment and human resource development staff, unionists and assessors of learning. All those groups are especially concerned by the EQFs implementation and it is the drafted EQF Application Consultation Services' major aim to support proper EQF application in their daily education practice.

This paper therefore elaborates consultation needs of these education practitioners, drafts a task model for a possible EQF Application Consultation Service, proposes the concept draft for an online service portal and discusses different organisational models for such an EQF Application Consultation Service.

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(1) Introduction and basic considerations

There is a wide consensus among all stakeholders that a European Qualifications 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, already existing or to be created) should be designed or modified. Taking in account former experience with standardisation in the area of education, it is therefore not too pessimistic to be afraid of versions of EQF use where the original approach is diluted in a way which does not deliver advantages in comparison with the current situation.

The exploration of a possible EQF application consultation service that supports the different education and training professions involved in EQF implementation and application seems therefore appropriate in order to foster proper EQF application in education and training practice. It has therefore been the EQF Predict¹ projects approach to explore such different interpretation of EQF application, to draft recommendations for proper adaptation of education and training element based on successful examples of EQF application in Europe, to pilot consultation services on EQF adaptation of education and training elements such as occupational profiles, curricula and assessment procedures and to draft the model of a possible EQF application consultation service.

All these activities within EQF Predict have been implemented with a focus on possible needs and requirements on different groups of stakeholders involved in EQF implementation within education and training practice. Those stakeholders are at the same time also the consultation services major target groups due to their key role within education and training practice:

- Education and training providers (primarily vocational education and training),
- Labour unions and workers councils,
- Employers and
- Awarding bodies.

This paper summarises and further elaborates the EQF Predict project findings with regard to such a service and its possible implementation. It describes the methodical approach applied in order to elaborate consultation needs of the involved practitioners and the overall development of the service model (chapter 2). A summary of the needs analysis results and further reflections on the targeted stakeholders needs are presented in chapter 3. The following chapters draft a service task model based on the elaborated needs (chapter 4), the concept draft of an online consultation portal (chapter 5) in order to further elaborate the services' possible mode of action and different organisational models for such a service that can provide implement the elaborated tasks today and in future (chapter 6).

(2) Aims and framework of investigation

The project EQF Predict provided the organisational framework for the development of an EQF Application Consultation Service model. In this framework different approaches have been applied for the elaboration of consultation needs of education and training practitioners and of requirements on such a consultation service:

The overall methodical approach applied intended to covered different perspectives of consultation:

- a perspective of possible end users focusing on their actual consultation needs at an interaction level,
- a future perspective that integrates also possible future consultation needs (and/or measures to integrate them) and

¹ See www.project-predict for further information on the EQF Predict project.

- an organisational perspective drafting an organisational framework of consultancy work that can likewise address current consultancy needs and adapt to future changes.

The following steps have been implemented in order to elaborate these perspectives:

Step 1 – Identifying consultation needs of practitioners

In order to identify consultation needs of practitioners adapting educational elements to the EQF, different approaches have been applied to gain different perspectives and to address different elaboration levels. The approaches applied are (See chapter 3 of this paper for a summary of the different results.):

- (a) Elaboration of the consultation needs that arise in projects piloting activities (WP6)²

In order to elaborate the consultation needs identified within piloting the implementing partners LUX/VW and Fastrak have been asked to prepare a contribution from their experience during piloting on what support is needed by practitioners in order to adapt education and training to EQF requirements. (see annex one for elaboration grid)

- (b) A questionnaire survey with experts providing such consultation formally or informally

In order to implement this approach experts have been identified who already offered such consultation formally or informally to practitioners regularly or frequently. They have been presented with a questionnaire (see annex 2) about the consultation needs they were confronted with in their practical experience.

- (c) A questionnaire survey with practitioners who already adapted educational elements to the EQF

Also for this approach practitioners who did EQF application already have been presented with the same questionnaire as the experts. They have been questioned about the consultation needs they explored during their own attempt to adapt educational key elements to the EQF.

In addition further results from the other EQF Predict workpackages have been reviewed and integrated into the consultation needs analysis.

Step 2 – Transferring needs into a task model for a consulting service

The model to be developed describes the tasks such a consulting service has to fulfil in order to provide the necessary support to practitioners working on EQF application on educational key elements now and also in future. It elaborates the results from the consultation needs analysis in step 1 and further considers the results of the projects workpackage 7 on the “Future framework of change”³ that allows the integration of a view on future tasks such a consulting service might be faced with due to the predictable framework of change addressed within the EQF Predict project. The final result is a model that describes the tasks such a consulting service has to fulfil to meet the needs of practitioners not only now but also in future. (See chapter 4 of this paper.)

Step 3 – Developing a concept draft for a possible online consulting service portal

Within this step a concept draft of a possible web application that intends to provide online consultancy has been developed based on and alongside the conducted needs analysis and the developed task model. This concept draft has been developed based on the EQF adaptation support portal (www.eqf-support.eu) and represents an extension of this portal which's realisation has been limited due to restricted resources within an ambitious project such as EQF Predict. Compared with the EQF adaptation support portal it therefore remains at a conception stage. (See chapter 5 of this paper.)

² The developed guiding material for proper EQF application in education and training practice and consultation related to this process have been piloted in the framework of EQF Predict. Two pilot activities have been implemented: one by VW Service Deutschland (DE) with regard to the application of the learning outcome approach to an internal human resource development activity and a second one as an open distance learning course on web content management implemented by Fastrak (UK) with special emphasis on methods and assessment.

³ The „Future Framework of Change“ workpackage evaluated the overall project findings in order to draft scenarios how EQF application could look like in future by applying a best, worst and realistic case scenario.

Step 4 – Drafting organisational models/scenarios for an EQF application consultation service

This step intended to elaborate possible organisational structures for such a service that is supposed to provide consulting services over a longer period of time. Two possible models (tasks, organisational structure, legal status, etc.) have been drafted and analysed using SWOT analysis. (See chapter 6 of this paper.)

(3) Consultation needs of education and training practitioners

The EQF Predict results show that consultation needs differ dependent on

- the status and/or the approach of EQF application in the different countries
- the countries overall culture/history of education and training and
- the target group addressed with the consultation/support services.

Consultation needs are therefore often neither of the same importance/ relevance nor in general the same in the different European countries and between different target groups, but need to be reflected within the different national or even sectoral realities of education and training.

The following chapter summarises the results of the survey undertaken within EQF Predict with regard to consultation needs and the results of a target groups specific tasks reflection in order to identify further possible consultation needs of the EQF application consultation services' target groups.

(3.1) General consultation needs

A number of aspects have been identified that in one way or the other need to be considered within a consultation/support services that addresses the needs of different education and training practitioners within EQF application in Europe. They reflect needs that had to be dealt with, currently exist or are expected to come up in most of the countries investigated within EQF Predict. Those are:

The general information gap about the EQF and its mode of action

The overall results of the analysis and of the project review strongly confirm the widely expressed need to close the general information gap about the EQF in terms of its aims and mode of action, its status of implementation in the practitioners own countries and in other European countries and about its benefits for the different target groups concerned in order to overcome stakeholders hesitation towards the EQF that at least partially results from the information gap. This has been identified as the most important consultation need for the identified target groups of such a service because it is a huge obstacle in the overall EQF application. It hinders proper EQF implementation, a comprehensive involvement of the relevant stakeholder and its potential for innovation and improvement for the different groups involved.

The process of identifying, defining and phrasing learning outcomes referring to a specific profession or professional field

The shift to learning outcomes and its necessity to express qualifications or titles in terms of learning outcomes is a major challenge especially for so far rather input oriented education and training systems. Although this shift seems rather natural for those used to work with similar approaches, it appears to be a major effort with numerous obstacles that need to be overcome. This process can therefore be considered to be another important need to be addressed by such a consultation service.

The "learning outcome oriented" way of training and teaching within formal learning

Originally the EQF is not meant to require changes in education and training practice. But not only the EQF Predict results show that an approach such as the EQF does have influence on education and training practice if a proper

implementation is aspired. CEDEFOP (2010) raises in this context a learner-centred approach with regard to the implementation of outcome-oriented curricula and requirements on education and training practice. Although related research and best practice are widely available today from education and cognitive research in the past 20 years, the EQF Predict results indicate a consultation need in this area in order to facilitate such a shift to a learner-centred/ outcome oriented way of training and teaching within formal learning.

The assessment of learning outcomes in line with the EQFs requirements such as orientation on the EQF descriptors and recognition of in- and non-formal learning

The assessment of learning outcomes is a crucial aspect within the overall EQF implementation and major determinant in terms of enabling the recognition of non- and informal learning but also in terms of establishing mutual trust into different education systems and across national and institutional borders. The CEDEFOP is currently investigating the assessment of learning outcomes and also a number of European projects deal/dealt with this topic. This emphasis on assessment of learning outcomes has been confirmed within the EQF Predict project to be an aspect of EQF application that requires special guidance and support because it often requires a change within education and training practice.

The process of referencing qualification/certificates and qualifications frameworks levels to EQF levels

Proper referencing is a key issue in the overall EQF implementation because the level assignment is a crucial factor in facilitating lifelong learning and learners and workers mobility from one to another European country. The currently ongoing discussion at European level as well as the results and experiences gained within EQF Predict highlight the relevance and the concerns of this topic. Several projects⁴ have been or are currently implemented in order to explore proper referencing from different angles and to provide support and guidance within this process.

Links to other European instruments and their application in VET practice

The EQF is only one European instrument in order to foster learner and worker mobility in Europe but it has very close links to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training⁵ as well as to the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training⁶. Both tools and their application in education and training practice in relation to the EQF are therefore important aspects when supporting and counselling education and training practitioners regarding EQF application in VET practice.

Cross-cutting aspects to be considered within consultation/support services

The importance of labour market and work process orientation and the necessity to emphasise the European dimension of EQF application have been confirmed as being crucial elements of any kind of consultation/ support services to be offered in this regard in order to facilitate the EQFs aims. It is therefore crucial to equally consider national/ sectoral approaches of EQF application and the European dimension of EQF as well as other national/sectoral approaches applied throughout Europe within consultation settings and in order to apply the EQFs overall approach.

(3.2) Task elaboration of the services' target groups

As outlined above the needs and therefore the aspects to be addressed with such a consultation service, strongly differ from country to country dependent on the factors outlined above. It therefore seems to be very obvious to focus a consultation services on EQF application on specific countries and maybe sectors and specify its tasks on this basis separately for each country. This approach would be supported by the very individual EQF/NQF-application approaches applied in the different European countries that need to play a crucial role within such a

⁴ e.g. EQF Ref (www.eqf-ref.eu/) and NQF-SQF (www.project-nqf-sqf.eu/)

⁵ See www.eqavet.eu

⁶ See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm

consultation service for education and training practitioners. The choice of such a national approach nevertheless contains the risk of underemphasising or disregarding the very important and crucial European dimension of EQF application in Europe in favour of the national perspective. But the European dimension and European considerations are the start and the end for all these aspects outlined in the previous section and also the added value such a service can provide complementary to national efforts to implement the European Qualifications Framework in terms of the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks and to the expertise the target groups of such a service already have with regard to their own area of work within their national context.

What appears to be rather similar and comparable across borders and sectors and therefore can serve as an alternative to elaborate such a task model of consultation services are the different roles, tasks and needs of the addressed target groups. Those can be considered to be similar across borders and sectors and also rather stable with regard to the tasks to be enquired from an EQF application consultation service. This task model therefore distinguishes its tasks based on the tasks and needs of its different target groups.

The target groups specified in chapter one and to be closer examined within this task model are:

- Education and training providers (primarily vocational education and training),
- Labour unions and workers councils,
- Employers and
- Awarding bodies.

In order to draw conclusions for the aspired task model of the EQF application consultation service, different areas of work and related positions within these organisations and concerned by the EQF and its implementation have been further elaborated. Please note, these areas of work/ positions can be arranged and interpreted differently, the roles assigned to them are also not the same in all countries and not all areas of work/ positions specified below and the tasks assigned to them are relevant and applicable for all kind of the related target groups and vary strongly in practice. However, these aspects will be disregarded in this context because they are exclusively used as intermediary in order to define the services' task model and will not be further amplified or applied. They should therefore only be considered exemplary but certainly not normative.

The following sections intend to further identify and elaborate the tasks to be potentially assigned to an EQF application consultation service in order to support the different groups of education and training professions in the best way possible when implementing the EQF in education and training practice.

Education and training providers (primarily vocational education and training)

Four areas of work can be distinguished within education and training providing organisations and with regard to EQF application in education and training practice. There is the micro-didactical field of activity primarily assigned to trainers, teachers and other educational personal. The macro-didactical field of operation within education and training providers often carried out by education managers and educational counselling that equally needs to consider counselling of learners as well as of enterprises seeking council with regard to their human resources development and in-company training.

- Macro-didactics
The task to be further considered within macro-didactics and related to personnel working in this field such as education managers are especially those related to reviewing and adapting education and training programmes offered by a provider. This can include the description of training programmes in terms of learning outcomes, EQF and ECVET compatible segmenting and sequencing of training programmes, choice of general methodology such as e-learning, class-room learning, practical work experience, selection of educational personnel such as trainers and teachers, if applicable, assignment of training programmes to formal qualifications and/or their referencing to a qualifications frameworks level. But also the introduction and application of EQF-compatible quality assurance measures within the

organisation is of relevance here. Another task especially relevant within adult education is the support and guidance but also multiplication about micro-didactical aspects to trainers and teachers in terms of pedagogical abilities required from them when applying the EQF.

- **Micro-didactics**
The educational personnel actually carrying out the training differs strongly between the different education and training providers and the different areas of education. Sometimes they are experts in their field but without pedagogical training, others are trained educators with deficits in the practical field, others combine both. However they are all facilitating learning processes and the EQF has special requirements on this facilitation in terms of designing and implementing them in a learner centred and outcome/transfer oriented way. This component should therefore be further considered as a potential field of activity for an EQF application consultation service.
- **Educational counselling for learners**
A task often assigned to education and training providers is counselling for learners who want to decide what kind of training is suitable for them. This includes on the one hand the handling of existing national qualifications and such from abroad but also the recognition of non- and informal learning. At this place it plays a crucial role that personnel in education and training providing organisations is able to include also European instruments such as EQF and ECVET into such educational counselling activities because they are in this moment important intermediators between European aims such as lifelong learning, cross-border mobility of workers and learners and the learner on the spot and the recognition of non- and informal learning.
- **Educational consultation with regard to company-based training and human resources development**
Vocational education and training providers often take on the task of providing support and guidance for industry clients in terms of in-company training and human resource management especially with regard to small and medium size companies. This brings them (just as within learner counselling) into an important intermediary role between European goals and companies human resource development and they should be competent to provide consultation also with regard to European education and training aspects such as recognition of qualifications from and in other European countries, recognition of non- and informal learning and learning outcome oriented training.

Employers

Within employer organisations the areas of work primarily concerned by the EQF are recruitment, human resource development/ training and on a more generic policy oriented level also management.

- **Human resources development and in-company training**
The human resource development and training tasks within employer organisations affected by the EQF are very similar to those already considered in the context of education and training providing organisations, they will therefore not be further elaborated at this place.
- **Recruitment**
Recruiters in companies are more and more confronted with labour shortages when trying to fill open positions within their companies. Often the national labour market is not able to provide the necessary skilled workforce. In this situation the EQF can, properly applied, support recruiters in their attempts to recruit the necessary workforce from other European countries. But in order to do this they need to understand and need to know how to handle the EQF properly. This includes knowledge about the EQFs general mode of action in order to apply it properly within recruitment and about the implementation of qualifications frameworks and their referencing in other countries in order to build trust in the EQF and the way how the different countries implement it.

In this context also public and private employment and career counselling services, temporary employment companies as well as online career portals should be strongly considered and addressed as relevant target groups for such EQF application consultation services. Nowadays they play a crucial role within recruitment as well as within outplacement of companies, when topics such as understanding and recognition of foreign qualifications and of in- and non-formal learning need to be considered. At the same time they build a very interesting channel in order to promote and implement the EQF Europe-wide due to their strategic position.

- Management

The management has rather a strategic role in this regard but needs to be aware of the EQF and its overall mode of action. Especially the relation or non-relation between wages and qualification levels is a crucial aspect that requires management involvement and information. Also the strategic role of the EQF in order to ensure the necessary skilled labour is a topic of relevance within management of companies.

Labour unions and worker councils

Labour unions and workers council represent the interests of employees and some of their core tasks have a direct reference to the EQF and its implications. This includes e.g. their involvement in recruitment and outplacement processes, the integration of foreigners into the workforce and in this context the recognition of (foreign) qualifications/titles, the recognition of workplace learning and of non- and informal learning in general especially in the case of low-skilled workers, in-company IVET and CVET and human resources management, but also the negotiation of wage levels for workers.

All these tasks are in one way or the other affected by the EQF and its national implementation and require very comprehensive knowledge about the EQF and its mode of action. A general distinction that should be considered for an EQF consultation service with regard to unions should be made between EQF application within strategic and operational settings. Operational settings such as recruitment, outplacement or in-company training rather require operational knowledge about practical EQF application. A rather strategic orientation is necessary e.g. with regard to union involvement into the overall referencing process.

Awarding bodies

An awarding body is "a body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure." (CEDEFOP, 2008) Their field of work is therefore a core part of EQF appliance and at the same time as the implemented analysis suggests a field with major need of consultation to apply the EQF properly within practical assessment. At the same time the implementation of related quality assurance measures can be a major field of consultation with regard to proper EQF application in the process of assessing and validating knowledge, skills and/or competences.

(3.3) Changing needs based on the EQF implementation stage

The stakeholder interviews implemented throughout EQF Predict and general observations confirm and strongly underline that the different target groups' consultation needs differ dependent on the stage of N/SQF development and implementation within a country or a sector. Such a distinction is of special importance for the introduction of consultation services because consultation services not adequate for the actual implementation phase might cause discrepancies with regard to individual national/sectoral implementation approaches or are redundant.

Although it has been determined already earlier that such a services' focus should be a European one, it may not neglect national EQF implementation approaches and schedules what has implications on the services content and structure. It makes little sense to offer consultation to employers and VET providers how they should properly

adapt their own training programmes to the EQF as long as they do not have sufficient knowledge about the EQF and its general mode of action and are not aware of their benefits. However, once the benefits are clear and actual EQF application into practice takes place, such general introductory information will not be sufficient and needs to be replaced by reliable and thorough support services that accompany the different actors involved in their adaptation process.

(4) A consultation service task model

Based on the findings and considerations in the previous chapter and within the overall EQF Predict project, this chapter drafts a task model for a possible EQF application consultation service. It distinguishes between the overall aims such a service should have, its core tasks and services (distinguished by "EQF utilisation in practice", "Adapting education and training to the EQF" and "Contribution to the EQFs strategic development") and its potential strategic role within EQF implementation.

Furthermore this task model also revises and further defines the target groups of the possible service with regard to the elaboration results of the different target groups' tasks related to EQF implementation above. In this regard and based on the elaborated needs, the task model addresses such a services' possible tasks at micro, meso and macro level in order to take the different areas of work outlined above into consideration. At last the determined tasks are assigned to different stages of EQF implementation.

(4.1) Extended target groups

The task elaboration of the original target groups suggests employment and career counselling services (incl. temporary employment companies and online career portals) as additional user groups of the EQF with relevance for the overall EQF implementation and whose involvement into EQF implementation could benefit from an EQF application consultation service in terms of quality and quantity. Their EQF related tasks correspond strongly to the tasks defined in section 3.2 for educational counselling within education and training providing organisations and with the recruitment activities of employers. However, they need to be differently referred to as an individual target group in order to be reached, therefore this group has been added as an additional target group to be considered and approached by an EQF application consultation service and its offers. Furthermore the target group public authorities has been added, due to their role within education and training and EQF implementation.

The service should therefore integrate the following extended group of targeted EQF users, appliers and stakeholders into its services and activities:

- Education and training providers, with regard to their adaptation of education and training programmes to the EQF and to their educational counselling activities,
- Employers, in the course of their recruitment activities and related to their in-company vocational training and human resource development,
- Awarding bodies, in their efforts to adapt assessment procedures to the EQF and its requirements,
- Unions/ workers councils, among others with their role within vocational education and training and related to workers interest and the recognition of their formal, non- and informal learning,
- Public authorities, with regard to their general efforts to implement the EQF in the national context and
- Employment and career counselling services (incl. temporary employment companies and online career portals), with their role to support employers and job-seekers to find suitable jobs and employees all over Europe.

In addition there has been a distinction made between EQF user, appliers and stakeholders within the target groups. This distinction is expedient for the elaboration of the EQF application consultation service because it offers indicators for different kind of tasks to be considered (see table 1). Please note that a target group can belong to more than one or even all of these groups due to its different tasks that are touched by the EQF.

Table 1: EQF users, appliers and stakeholders

Group	EQF Users	EQF appliers	EQF stakeholders
Characteristics	EQF users use the EQF within their activities, such as educational/career counselling or recruitment. They are not adapting education elements themselves but work with and based on these elements in a national and European context	EQF appliers adapt education and training elements to the EQF. This can be education and training programmes, in-company training, assessment or quality assurance procedures.	EQF stakeholders play a major role within the overall process of EQF further development and implementation at European, national and sectoral level. They are therefore key players at a strategic and conceptual level of EQF implementation.
Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (recruitment) • Education providers (educational counselling) • Unions/ worker councils • Employment and career counselling services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (in-company training) • Education providers (own programmes, QA, etc.) • Awarding bodies • Public authorities • Unions/ worker councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (associations) • Education providers • Awarding bodies • Public authorities • Unions/ worker councils • (Employment and career counselling services)
Level	operational	Operation	strategic and conceptual

(4.2) Major aims

The EQF application consultation services' major aim should be the support, facilitation and promotion of proper EQF application and use in the related actors' daily practice in Europe. It should offer consultation and training on proper EQF application in practice, strategic and conceptual consultation on EQF implementation in a national and sectoral context and it can – due to its position between policy and practice – serve as an interface and mediator between strategic/conceptual and practical EQF application and development.

The services' major focus should be the European dimension of the EQFs implementation in order to take on a complementary position to national efforts and activities and in order to put an emphasis on the EQF as a European tool to support transparency, lifelong learning and mobility across borders in Europe. At the same time it needs to integrate and work with the EQF implementation approaches developed and applied in the different national and sectoral contexts but without losing its clear European orientation within EQF use and application in practice. Employability and labour market orientation should be the services' leading concepts within its activities, but the service should address not only vocational but also higher, general and adult education in order to pave way for permeability and comparability not only across borders but also across these education areas. The emphasis should nevertheless remain at vocational education and training.

In order to use the services' full potential its activities may not be limited to the EQFs implementation, but need to integrate related tools such as ECVET and EQAVET, as well, in order to provide a coherent and comprehensive service to EQF users, appliers and stakeholders.

(4.3) Core tasks and services

Based on the aims specified above different kind of core tasks can be deduced from the consideration in chapter 3 of this paper. Those core tasks are divided into "Tasks with regard to adapting education and training to the EQF", "Tasks with regard to EQF utilisation in practice" and "Contribution to the EQFs further strategic and conceptual development". This division follows the target group specification in EQF user, appliers and stakeholders as it has been proposed and further explained in section 4.1. It intends to support an expedient differentiation between possible consultation and support services to be offered by the EQF application consultation service.

Tasks with regard to adapting education and training to the EQF

The needs elaborated within the EQF predict project and described in chapter 3 clearly show that there is a major working area for an EQF application consultation service with regard to the actual adaptation of education elements such as occupational profiles, curricula, assessment and quality assurance procedures to the requirements of the EQF. This adaptation process includes three different areas of activity:

- (1) 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,
- (2) support and guidance within the actual adaptation process of education and training practice (incl. occupational profiles, assessment, implementation of training, training of trainers and assessors, etc. – see chapter 3 for further details) to the related National and/or Sectoral Qualifications Framework and in coherence with European tools such as ECVET and EQAVET and
- (3) support and guidance within the process of referencing qualifications to qualifications frameworks with a special emphasis on the EQFs Europeans dimension.

Within this working area of the service, special attention should be paid to the right balance between the emphasised European perspective and the applicable national/sectoral approaches. Especially in terms of area (2) it needs to be well-defined that the service can only offer consultation and other services such as training on top of and supplementary to the existing expertise and abilities of the involved education and training professions but should not intend to replace it.

Tasks with regard to EQF utilisation in practice

Although the EQF Predict project focused on EQF adaptation and therefore the previous part of this task model, it is proposed to go a step further with the here proposed EQF application consultation service by adding EQF utilisation as an additional area of work. This task area proposes to offer support services to among others employers, employment services, career guidance, educational counselling but also education providers in actually using the EQF as a tool to make qualifications comparable and transparent and to facilitate in this way lifelong learning and learners and workers mobility across borders. Some examples of possible tasks are:

- Consultation on the integration and proper use of the EQF within recruitment (processes and procedures) of new employees,
- Consultation on using the EQF as a reference when defining entry requirements to education and training programmes and
- Consultation on how to make use of the EQF and related tools such as ECVET within career guidance and educational counselling.

These are just some examples, each containing many different facets and tasks to be carried out/ offered by the EQF application consultation service. How far these aspects go have been illustrated on the determined necessity to extend the services' target group to employment services, etc.. This immediately opened up not only a whole

area of work for the service but also an opportunity for the further promotion of the EQF and its integration into daily practice.

Just as in the previous area also this task area needs to contain a strong information, awareness raising and promotion component in addition to these already very content-related tasks in order to be effectively implemented. So far the EQFs implementation and the users awareness is only in a few countries at the necessary stage in order to focus on these defined tasks already⁷. Therefore also this area needs to build on offering comprehensive and target group specific information about the EQF, its benefits, its mode of action and its implementation in the users own and the other European countries.

Contribution to the EQFs further strategic and conceptual implementation

Stakeholder involvement into the debate about the implementation of the EQF at European, national and sectoral level is still very limited and especially the involvement of the employers' side appears to be challenging for most of the EQF implementation processes. But the involvement of all stakeholders into the strategic and conceptual implementation of the EQF is of crucial importance for the future use and application and therefore the success of the EQF in practice. It is therefore a further field of activity to encourage and support the different stakeholders with the necessary expertise to get involved and continuously participate in the ongoing conceptual debate about the EQFs implementation. This includes the debate about the establishment of National and Sectoral Qualifications Framework, the referencing of qualifications to frameworks and frameworks to the EQF, the recognition of prior/ in-/non-formal learning and the overall proper implementation of the EQF within education and training practice in Europe in order to establish the necessary mutual trust between the parties involved.

Just as the other areas of work, also this area can only be implemented effectively if it is accompanied or even prefaced by intensive information, awareness raising and promotion activities, that highlight the EQFs aims and benefits for the different targeted groups of stakeholders. However, it also contains a follow up component in terms of regular updates and up-to-date information about EQF implementation and debate in different contexts in Europe.

(4.4) Strategic role within EQF implementation

Based on the aims and tasks described so far, the EQF application consultation service can due to its strategic position between EQF implementation practice, national EQF implementation concepts and European EQF strategy play a valuable intermediary role for the different key players involved in EQF implementation in Europe at a strategic and conceptual level. This e.g. can be expressed by a feedback function that provides the relevant bodies at national, sectoral and European level with encountered challenges, opportunities but also threats for the practical application and use of the EQF in education and training practice. In this way the EQF application consultation service could be used as a communication channel and intermediary between micro, meso and macro level that continuously supports proper implementation and improvement of the EQF and its implementation approaches in Europe.

For this purpose the service needs, of course, to be an independent structure that interacts between these different stakeholders with an objective and neutral approach and looks at EQF implementation with a critical view, that only refers to the EQF as a tool to enable transparency and comparability of qualifications and to foster lifelong learning as well as learners and workers mobility across borders in Europe.

⁷ This does equally apply to "Tasks with regard to adapting education and training to the EQF".

(4.5) Tasks within different phases of EQF consultation

In between the start of the EQF Predict project and the projects end in 2011 (about 3 years) the European and the different national debates on the EQF and its implementation changed fundamentally alongside the changes of the EQFs implementation status throughout Europe and in the individual investigated countries. Together with the EQFs implementation status also the observable stakeholder needs changed in terms of information and support needed to understand and apply the EQF. If one would have implemented webinars or workshops on EQF adaptation in education and training practice at the projects beginning as it has been done at the EQF predict projects end, practitioners questions would certainly have differed strongly.

But it would not be true to claim that this change is only dependent on the implementation status of the EQF in the different countries, it strongly differs among the stakeholders addressed by the service due to very heterogeneous levels of information and involvement. A service such as the EQF application consultation service therefore needs to provide the whole set of support measures described above but needs to distinguish very precisely and on a case-by-case decision what kind of measures are appropriate in which consultation case and related to the relevant and ongoing national, sectoral and European discussion.⁸

However, the different tasks can be roughly assigned to the following consultation phases:

- Information and awareness raising phase, this phase refers to a very basic stage of EQF application and requires rather general and basic information about the EQF and its mode of action that highlights the EQFs benefits for the target group in question. A very target group specific approach should be chosen here in order to attract them to the EQF. This phase focuses on the explanation how one can get involved in the debate and provides introductory information about the discussions current status in the relevant context.⁹ It therefore has a clear information and awareness raising focus and aims to get stakeholders interested and involved into EQF implementation and application.¹⁰
- Introduction and involvement phase, as soon as interest about the EQF is raised and the benefits of the EQF have been recognised tasks related to remaining aspects described in section 4.3 can be implemented by offering related support services and consultation on aspects such the adaptation of training and education programmes to the EQF or the use of the EQF as a tool within recruitment activities. At the same time also the strategic involvement of stakeholders into the EQF related debates can be fostered with appropriate consultation services. However, this phase still focuses on introducing and exploring rather than on really integrating the EQF and related instruments into education and training practice on a daily base.
- Stabilisation phase and ongoing implementation, once the EQF and its use and application have been successfully tested within the previous phase, the integration into education and training practice can be addressed. The tasks to be performed by the EQF application consultation service are very similar in terms of content to the ones offered in the previous phase, but need to be wider spread and multiplied in order to be implemented within the target organisations. At the same time two more tasks specific for this phase need to be added in terms of regular update about EQF application in Europe in order to foster the European dimension of EQF application and a monitoring approach that critically reflects and, if necessary, corrects EQF application in education and training practice in order to ensure that EQF use and application remains in line with the EQFs original purpose and requirements.

⁸ See also section 3.3 for further explanation.

⁹ For this purpose the EQF Predict and the NQF-SQF project already provide/ are currently developing target group specific introductions into the EQF and summaries of European debate also with a special focus on the needs and interests of the different target groups.

¹⁰ The general information gap about the EQF in Europe strongly suggests putting a focus on this phase for the time being.

The transitions between the different phases are fluent and depend on the individual circumstances of each consultation case. Especially the National Qualifications Frameworks (or Sectoral) need to be strongly considered in this context (see also 3.3) because phase 2 and 3 require strong links to the national/ sectoral EQF application approaches. At the same time the phases and their transitions are dependent on the specific group of stakeholders. The way how they have been described primarily relates to employers, education and training providers and partially unions but is not necessarily representative to all of these or the other stakeholders because of other mechanisms that result e.g. from national policies or national education and training practice. However, it can be expected that in one way or another, this kind of phases are applicable for the majority of stakeholders within EQF implementation and that they can therefore serve as a reference within EQF application consultation.

The services' intermediary role described in section 4.4 has not been directly referred to within the phases' descriptions above. But it is applicable within all these consultation phases because the stakeholders' feedback from a very grass-root and practical level of EQF application provides valuable feedback for EQF implementation at a conceptual and strategic level within all consultation phases. This role is therefore not related to a certain phase and it is possible to draw conclusion and provide feedback to the European and national debates and considerations based on consultation activities in all three phases.

Within EQF Predict consultation has been primarily tested on the information and involvement phase and the two pilots can be considered as examples for consultation at this stage of EQF application by practitioners. These two pilots concerned the case of an EQF-adapted human resource development training implemented by VW Service Deutschland (DE) (with a focus on defining learning outcomes) and an open distance learning course implemented by Fastrak (UK) (with a focus on adequate training methods, assessment and partially trainer abilities to implement such training). Consultation that refers to strategic aspects and EQF utilization has not been piloted within EQF Predict, but would be beneficial in order to further elaborate practitioners needs and to draw conclusions for the adequate support services. The project NQF-SQF¹¹ currently tries to establish a model of collaboration with regard to referencing as it could be a measure related to such a services' strategic role within EQF implementation as outlined in section 4.4. A similar approach has been applied within the VETAS¹² project with regard to the establishment of a vocational education and training network for the automotive sector. Both projects findings can be used for the further elaboration of this task model.

(5) A concept draft of an online consultation service portal

This concept draft seeks to allow for a further operationalisation of the task model described above. For that purpose it uses the EQF adaptation support portal¹³ developed within EQF Predict as a basis and further develops this portal by incorporating additional elements and tools that have been suggested with the different questionnaires and investigations outlined in chapter 2.

The following sections give a short introduction into the EQF adaptation support portal, propose an extended structure for an online EQF application consultation service and further elaborate the proposed additional features of such an extended online facility. Requirements on an actual implementation in terms of maintenance and running of the online service will be discussed in the next chapter "Organisational models for an EQF Application Consultation Service".

¹¹ See also www.project-nqf-sqf.eu.

¹² See also www.project-vetas.eu or www.vetas.eu.

¹³ The EQF adaptation support portal can be reached at www.eqf-support.eu.

(5.1) The EQF adaptation support portal and its features

The EQF adaptation support portal (see figures 1) applies the structure summarised in table 2.

Table 2: EQF support portal structure

Portal element	Content	Sub-elements
Introduction (Home)	Target groups specific introductions into the portal highlighting the benefits for the different target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry/ Employers • Education providers • Unions/ workers councils
About EQF	Introductory and target groups specific information on the EQF and its mode of action incl. a glossary and FAQs; downloadable info sheets with target group specific (providers, employers, unions) EQF introductions highlighting the EQFs benefits for each target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EQF introduction • Glossary • FAQs
News	General news about EQF and EQF application in Europe	None
EQF adaptation support	Suggestions and guidelines for proper EQF application on educational elements; downloadable examples from different European countries; links to best practice examples of EQF-assigned education elements such as curricula, profiles and assessment procedures, FAQs on EQF application in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of EQF assignment • Occupational standards • Course implementation • Assessment procedures • National examples • Best practice • FAQs
EQF links and resources	European and country specific link to relevant websites and information; Links to EQF related projects and publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European • National (specified by country) • EQF related projects • Publications • Other
Forum	Link to the EQF adaptation support forum that allows asynchronous dialogue and discussion among European education and training practitioners and with experts on EQF application in education practice	(divided into different subject related sub-forums)
About the portal/ Sitemap	n.a.	n.a.

Some of the elements that have been identified as crucial for an EQF consultation service already have been integrated into the EQF adaptation support portal. Those elements are primarily:

- The application of a target group specific approach especially with regard to EQF introduction that highlights the benefits of the EQF and of the portal for the different target groups
- The provision of short and very straight forward target group specific introductions into the EQF and its mode of action
- The provision of examples of EQF applied education elements from different European countries
- Links to basic information about EQF application in different countries
- General resources and regular update about the EQF and its implementation in Europe
- A forum for practitioners to share with and receive support from peers and experts on EQF
- The possibility to ask questions on EQF adaptation of education elements
- Possibility to receive basic translation of all portal elements via "google translate"

The EQF adaptation support portal as it currently exists provides support and consultation services only to a very limited extend and in a very basic version due to the limited resources and capacity of the EQF Predict project. The next section therefore describes how the previously described tasks model could be translated into an online consultation service.

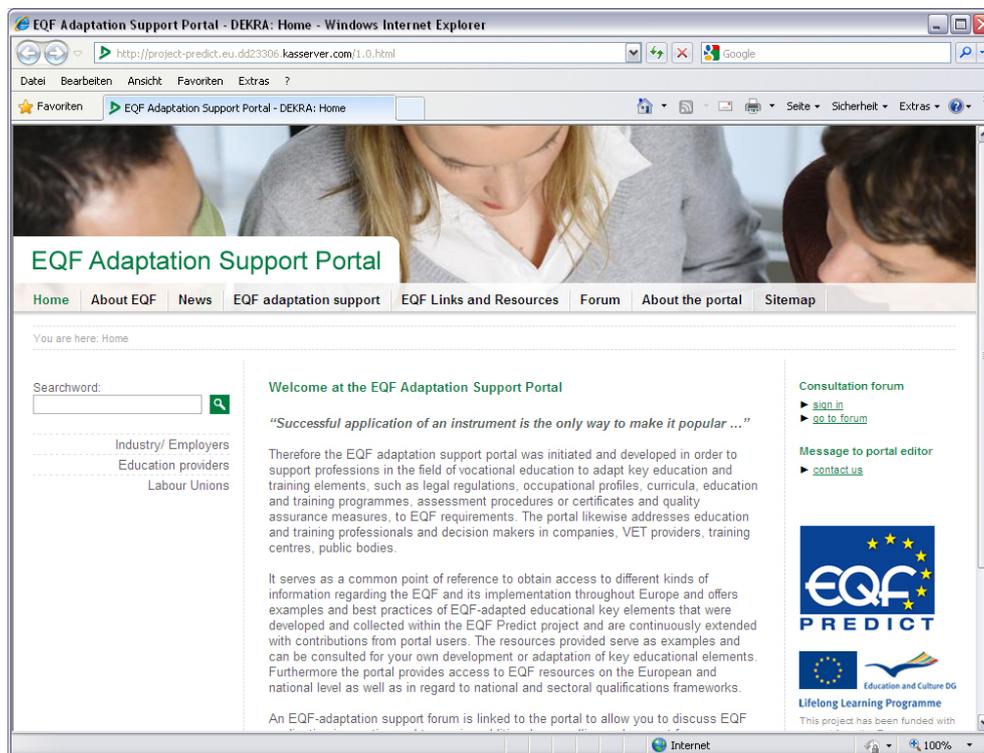


Figure 1: EQF Adaptation Support Portal at www.eqf-support.eu

(5.2) Concept draft of an online consultation service

As outlined above the EQF adaptation support portal already includes some of the key features that also have been identified as important for such a service in the previous chapters. However, there is a lot of room and necessity for further extension in order to develop an online consultation service portal. The elaborated additional features and extensions are described in this section.

In order to be a structure that is independent from but also connectible to a legal body¹⁴, this online service should build equally on stand-alone support measures through the delivery of concrete support material, training and consultation but also on expert and peer support through offering a forum for dialogue and exchange on the application of European tools in education and training praxis and among education and training practitioners working on the practical implementation of education and training in Europe. The online service should furthermore provide the virtual environment for the different support services to be offered to education and training practitioners regarding the application of EQF and related tools such as ECVET in their daily practice. For this purpose the already existing elements of the EQF application support portal should be extended with the tools and facilities displayed in table 3.

A topic of major relevance is the language obstacle. The EQF Predict results clearly show that such an online service needs to be provided in the different European languages. It cannot be expected that the services target groups English language level is high enough to make use of such an online service only provided in English. This issue has been addressed in the EQF adaptation support portal by referring to "google translate". However, the

¹⁴ See chapter 6 for further considerations on this.

quality of translations is not sufficient for a real online service and another language solution needs to be developed. This is especially challenging and has high demands in terms of online service parts that require regular update and maintenance.

Table 3: Elements to extend the EQF adaptation support portal to an online EQF application consultation service

Portal element	Extension and changes to the current portal approach	Additional tools
Introduction (Home)	Revision of the portal introductions based on the overall changes and modifications Adding of target group specific information for the additional target groups public authorities, employment and career services etc.	
About EQF	Extending this section to ECVET and EQAVET incl. short target group specific information sheets and maybe video clips on these topics Adding of target group specific EQF introductions for the employment and career guidance services	Target group specific information sheets for ECVET and EQAVET, maybe extended by introductory video clips ¹⁵ Additional EQF information sheets for the additional target group(s) ¹⁶
News	Differentiation of the news section by different news-categories such as events, national news, European news, etc. that contain a search function in order to provide user specific news Extension and connection of the news section with social media elements such as Facebook, Twitter or News-feeds ¹⁷	Searchable News-database Connection of news to social media
EQF adaptation support	<i>Please see next section for information on the further elaboration needs of this portal section in order to meet the tasks of an online EQF consultation service.</i>	
EQF links and resources	Needs to be extend to ECVET and EQAVET (if possible through references to other similar support structures at European or national level) and to further countries National information needs to be further elaborated and regularly updated in order to provide easily accessible and up-to-date information about EQF, ECVET and EQAVET implementation in the different European countries "Publications", "EQF related projects" and "Other" should be organised in one searchable database for European resources ¹⁸	A searchable database on European resources
Forum	Extension to ECVET and EQAVET (if necessary, adaptation of sub-forums and categories)	

The portal element "EQF adaptation support" requires the biggest modification in order to establish a real online consultation service. An implementation proposal is presented in section "Additional support measures to be integrated into the online consultation service".

¹⁵ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOY0U179DQk> for an example developed in order to explain the referencing of Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications (NFO) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

¹⁶ It needs to be examined if one general or individual information sheets need to be developed in order to address employment and career guidance services and related actors.

¹⁷ Social media are so far only very rarely used in order to inform about the EQF and to connect to EQF users. Searching for EQF and ECVET on Facebook and Twitter lead to only very little search results. The potential of such social media are therefore not yet used.

¹⁸ See European resources database of the VETAS portal at www.vetas.eu

(5.3) Additional support measures to be integrated into the online consultation service

The section “EQF adaptation support” – to be renamed into “Application support” – of the EQF Adaptation Support Portal needs to be redefined, restructured and extended in order to fulfil the tasks of an online consultation service as described in the previous chapters. This is necessary because the current structure limits its support services to recommendations and examples that have been developed within EQF Predict and other European projects but does not consider the findings and considerations presented in chapter 3 and 4 of this paper.

Just as already started at the portal the overall support part of the online service should strongly follow a target group specific approach in order to meet the needs of the different target groups instead of focusing on the different European tools (EQF, ECVET, EQAVET) or on country perspectives. The overall service structure is proposed to follow the approach displayed in figure 2.

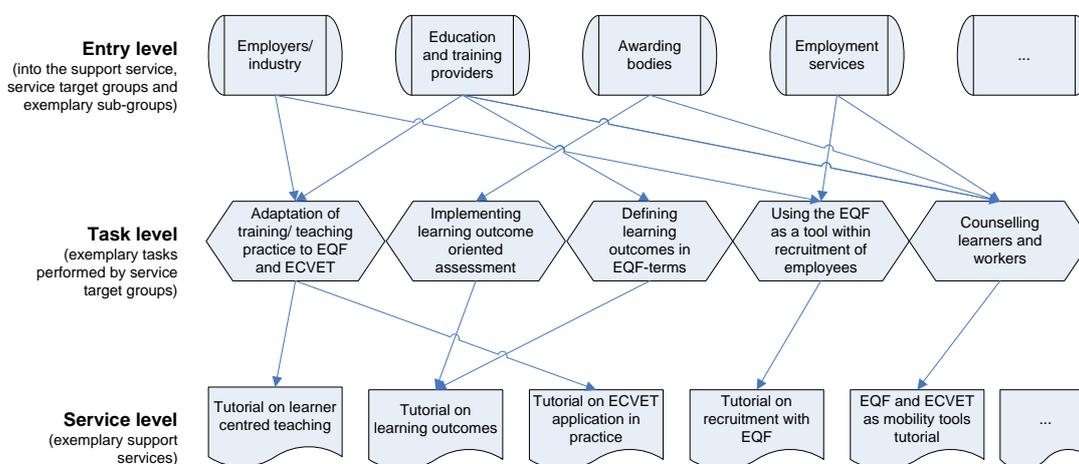


Figure 2: Exemplary service structure draft (not fully elaborated)

Figure 2 distinguishes between three layers used in order to direct service users to the right service. The tasks they are implementing with regard to EQF (ECVET or EQAVET) implementation act as intermediators in order to bring the different target groups implementing the same or closely related tasks together to the same subject specific service. The exemplary assignments in figure 2 are not yet fully elaborated but display the overall proposed approach. In order to implement such a structure further considerations will be necessary in terms of the final definition of target groups (especially with regard to the treatment of employment and educational counselling services, see 4.1), the task assignment to target groups and the final list of services that can differ in terms of topics and means. The service examples only refer to tutorials but it might also be that a topic can be better addressed with a handbook, examples, FAQs or other tools, but this should be subject to further considerations and will not be further elaborated at this place.

Furthermore it needs to be identified which services need to be specified in a national/sectoral context and which ones can remain in a European context. As mentioned earlier the consultation services' major area of activity should be the European elements complementary to national support activities. A sound combination of both dimensions under consideration of the services' tasks in chapter 4 should be one of the criteria when defining the final services offered by such an online consultation service. Another criteria is the definition and development of services that strongly build on users previous abilities. This means e.g. it makes no sense to start a whole training for trainers when talking about a “Tutorial on learner centred teaching”, instead the offered services should build on knowledge, skills and competences that can already be expected from the services' users in terms of their professional competence.

The final list of services should in any case allow users to select a concrete service that corresponds as much as possible to the users needs and therefore to the tasks and needs elaborated within chapter 3. In terms of tools the following shall be further elaborated at this place:

Support tools already included into the other online portal parts (see 5.2 for further information)

- Basic introductory and target groups specific information about the different European tools,
- Databases on resources such as project results, publications, etc. about the application of European tools,
- Regular update about the implementation of European tools in Europe (searchable News-database),
- Country specific information about the implementation of European tools in the different national contexts and
- A discussion forum that allows asynchronous dialogue and discussion among European education and training practitioners and experts on the application of European tools in education practice

Support tools to be integrated into "EQF adaptation support" (topics to be specified)

- Online tutorials on different topics related to the European tools and the tasks implemented by the services' target groups, applying an interactive and client centred approach
- Virtual workshops on the practical application of European tools, ideally offered within national and/or language specific groups in order to address the language issue properly¹⁹
- Video introductions into the application of the different European tools²⁰
- Handbooks and practical guides for the application of European tools in education and training practice
- Best practice examples, as an additional interactive feature that allows users to share (and discuss) their own examples in a best practice database (searchable based on kind of education element adapted)
- Frequently Asked Questions elements

The strategic task dimension described in section 4.4 and individual customised consultation services can only indirectly be addressed through such an online (part of a) consultation service e.g. through following and participating in the forum discussion.

(6) Organisational models for an EQF Application Consultation Service

The tasks and also the online service described and drafted above require some kind of organisational structure in order to be implemented and maintained. One may argue that this would be a task of the different national governments in the implementing countries instead of being the task of a separate consultation service, but as outlined in section 3.2, the consultation service as drafted within this paper has another complementary role to such governmental support structures by emphasising the European dimension within the application of the EQF and related European tools. This chapter therefore proposes two exemplary organisational models that could be applied in order to implement these consultation services and discusses them with regard to different dimensions such as sustainability, scope of activity and financing.

(6.1) A consultation network maintained and run by its members

The first organisational model to be proposed is a consultation services maintained and run by its members who represent the different target groups of the service as they have been outlined before in a kind of network structure. The starting point for such a structure could be the EQF Predict consortium as the initiators of the EQF adaptation

¹⁹ First very promising experiences on such a format have been made within the EQF Predict project. The virtual workshop had been implemented by DEKRA (DE) and 3srl (AT) as a „webinar“ on EQF application in training providing organisations with the working language being German. Although it took place during the holiday period, more than 30 participants registered for the „webinar“.

²⁰ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQY0U179DQk> for an example developed in order to explain the referencing of Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

support portal. This group of stakeholders would need to be extended in any case in order to develop a sustainable consultation network that has a certain impact at national and European level. For this purpose it should be considered to found a non-profit association that allows individuals and organisations to become members and to benefit from the services offered within the network.

The overall model builds on a peer support approach that builds on the initiative and on the expertise of its members and provides an organisational framework for such a peer support. The different services to be offered within the consultation network can be implemented by the networks members and with regard to their specific area of expertise while the consultation network has a rather intermediary role and provides a common platform. In terms of the consultation activities that need to be connected to national EQF implementation, this model is limited to the countries represented by core members who actually implement related support services in the networks framework and needs to rely on their individual initiative. Otherwise the different support services are not limited in their geographical scope, but they also build strongly on the interests of and aspects emphasised by the actual membership rather than on applying a systematic and comprehensive approach as outlined before.

In terms of finances this model can be partially financed by membership fees and partially by participation fees for services such as participation in online tutorials, conferences or workshops. Furthermore, specific facilities and projects could be developed and implemented using European and national public funding opportunities. Table 4 further analyses this model by using a SWOT-analysis approach.

Table 4: SWOT analysis of a consultation service maintained and run by its members

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to the grass-root level of EQF implementation in a national context • Strong consideration of and high expertise on national EQF implementation approaches • Strategic role of members in their national context can be used in order to implement nationally oriented services, incl. the feedback function described in section 4.4 • Peer support has a high level of practicability for support seekers • Members can assure links to related European tools such as ECVET through their involvement into related activities and can make use of synergies with similar networks • Direct access to and possibility to react quickly to the continuously changing environment of EQF application in the network members countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk to neglect the European dimension and overestimation of national approaches (can lead to low quality services at a European level and contradicts with the tasks outlined above) • Limitation of the services to those of relevance for the network members and therefore also limitations with regard to not yet represented target groups • Limited applicability within information and introduction phase of consultation service because participation in such a network presumes awareness of the EQF and interest to get involved • Limitations with regard to the spectrum of services offered/ tasks implemented • Little benefits for core members running the services for other network members • Geographical scope limited to represented countries 	Weaknesses
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible platform in order to implement further activities in a funded project format (such as awareness raising activities for the EQF and the development of further support services) • Members can open doors into the European and national discussion due to their already existing involvement and reputation • Possibility to tie up to related initiatives to support education stakeholders to apply European instruments in education practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstable funding due to necessity to rely on project funding, membership and participation fees • Limited access to funding that allows the day-to-day running of such a network • Strong reliance on voluntary engagement and contribution of members (especially core members) • No neutral position because driven by member interests and therefore risk of missing acceptance of the network with regard to strategical discussion • Highly dependent on extending membership 	Threats

(6.2) An independent group of European experts providing consultation services

This second organisational model proposes an independent group of European education experts²¹ in order to implement the outlined consultation service tasks. This group of experts is meant to implement the consultation services independently from education and training stakeholders but nevertheless in close connection with them in order to ensure strong links to the actual EQF implementation in education and training practice. The group of experts should be composed of experts with expertise in the different working areas of the service. Also such a group of independent experts should be accompanied by the establishment of a legal body that provides the legal framework. Different kind of legal statuses are conceivable including profit and non-profit structures. However, this would need to be further explored in another context under consideration of legal and financing aspects.

The group of experts should be composed based on the experts' different areas of expertise in order to cover the different consultation tasks as they have been outlined above. This does of course also apply to the further development and modification of the different tasks as they have been outlined above in order to keep up with the changing European environment with regard to the application of European tools in the member states. A major criteria for the involvement of an expert should be a strong European expertise and perspective with regard to the European dimension of EQF implementation in order to stress this dimension as suggested for the service.

In terms of finances this model needs to rely strongly on commercialisation of the offered consultation services. Specific facilities and projects could be developed and implemented using European and national public funding opportunities. The online consultation service elements that are publicly available are nevertheless difficult to fund and need to be financed with the incomes generated through the commercialised services. Table 5 further analyses this model by using a SWOT-analysis approach.

Table 5: SWOT analysis of an independent group of European experts providing consultation services

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong consideration of and high expertise on the European dimension of EQF implementation as proposed for this consultation service • Neutral position due to independency from stakeholders and their individual interests • Experts can assure links to related European tools such as ECVET through their involvement into related activities and can make use of synergies with similar networks • Possibility to implement all necessary services independent from own interests and areas of work as a real customer consultation service • Easy collaboration between experts in order to customise consultation services to users/clients individual needs • Possibility to cover a wide range of countries and target groups also those not represented among the experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited direct access to the grass-root level of EQF implementation in a national context • Limited number of (independent) experts that have the required European expertise in connection with subject related expertise in order to implement the whole spectrum of services • Risk to underemphasise the national approaches within the service implementation • Limited applicability within information and introduction phase of consultation service because the acceptance and use of such a service requires awareness and a certain level of involvement already 	Weaknesses
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible platform in order to implement further activities in a funded project format (such as awareness raising activities for the EQF and the development of further support services) • Experts can open doors into the European and national discussion due to their already existing involvement and reputation • Possibility to tie up to related initiatives to support education stakeholders to apply European instruments in education practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstable funding due to necessity to rely on project funding and incomes from different consultation services • Limited access to funding that allows the day-to-day running of such a consultation service • Access to public funding might be difficult during the first years and dependent on the chosen legal status, therefore dependence on stakeholder organisations in order to access public project funds • Necessity to commercialise the services in order to finance the consultation service 	Threats

²¹ Such an approach has already been drafted by Gerald Thiel (DE) in the framework of the project proposal EEE „European Education Experts“ submitted to the LLL-programme by Politecnico di Torino (IT) in 2010, but has unfortunately not been granted. Further information can be requested from Gerald Thiel (gerald.thiel@t-online.de).

(6.3) Discussion of the organisational models

The two organisational models described above propose different kind of approaches to implement and maintain the elaborated consultation service tasks. The major difference between both models is the reliance on stakeholder organisations involvement in the first model and on independent European experts in the second model. Both approaches contain a number of differences and commonalities and the SWOT analysis shows that both cases contain different and similar strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that need to be used and/or dealt with.

Based on the SWOT analysis results it is not possible to identify a tendency which model should be preferred in order to establish such a service. Contrary a combination of both models seems most promising in order to combine and make use of both models advantages and to compensate and/or decrease individual disadvantages. Since the EQF is a field with many different interest groups and related interests, but the consultation service needs to be neutral in terms of stakeholder specific interests in order to fulfil the defined tasks, this aspects needs to be paid special attention when combining both models into one. A possible approach to be further elaborated could be a group of independent experts within a network as it has been described in the first model. This approach would also allow the combination of both models advantages while a number of disadvantages could be compensated through appropriate organisational structures. This applies especially to a fair balance and good combination between the European and national dimension of the service as well as between the conceptual and practical level of EQF application.

The major issue both models have in common is the financial basis being a major obstacle for the overall realisation of such a consultation service. Although in both cases there have been ways identified to raise funds or earn income in order to run some of the elaborated tasks, financing the day-to-day business such as the maintenance of the online service as it has been drafted in the previous chapter appears to be rather difficult. This applies especially to the actual establishment of the service at the beginning of its implementation. It can be expected that once the service reached a certain level of recognition and acceptance, both models can ensure the day-to-day running without external financial support carried by membership fees, by incomes generated through consultation activities or by both. An initiation of such a service is therefore only possible with additional funding for the services' actual start up and establishment in order to set up and start real consultation activities as they have been described earlier. This is especially important because the EQF Predict project did not intend to actually develop the consultation services but remained at a conceptual level only. The actual development of the online consultation service as described above and of additional services such as European conferences on EQF application in practice, national workshops or the organisation of individual peer or expert support needs to be a first and important step for the services start-up and requires additional start-up funding.

Both models would obviously strongly benefit from a close collaboration with similar already existing structures such as the ECVET team²² in order to complement each other and to use each others area of expertise within their activities. At national level a close collaboration with the relevant (public) bodies and the EQF National Coordination Points should be strived for in order to fulfil the services tasks as described above. Same applies for the EQF advisory group at a European level in order to make best use of the services' special position in between conceptual and practical level of EQF implementation. Both described models have the potential to establish such links to related bodies either through their membership or through the recruitment of experts and supporters that can establish or open such interfaces. However, a combination of both models would be most promising in terms of establishing sustainable collaborations with such national and European bodies.

In terms of peers or experts implementing the different services, both models are expected to suffer from difficulties to involve a sufficient number of people having the necessary European knowledge, skills and

²² See also <http://www.ecvet-team.eu/>

competences to carry out these services at high quality. But consultation on the practical application of the European Qualifications Framework and related European tools such as ECVET requires a very high level of expertise with regard to these European tools, to European education policy and to the different European education systems, ideally combined with special expertise on one or more European education systems. A number of such experts evolved already in Europe due to their involvement into the European discussion on such tools. However, in order to implement the EQF and related tools Europe-wide additional and systematic efforts are necessary in order to fill this (future) gap in European competences with regard to education and training not only in order to set up such a consultation service but also to implement these European tools in general.²³

Both models fail with regard to the implementation of consultation service tasks that are meant to address the existing information gap about the EQF and other European instruments because the use and acceptance of such services presume awareness and some kind of involvement into the application of the EQF or ECVET already. The closing of the information (and involvement) gap is therefore in some way already a pre-condition for the successful implementation of such a consultation service that can be addressed only indirectly by the service itself. Alongside or even prior the services' establishment it is therefore indispensable to implement further and Europe-wide awareness raising and information campaigns for the EQF and its benefits for European citizens, the European labour market and economy and for Europe as a whole.

List of references:

CEDEFOP (2008). *Terminology of European education and training policy: A selection of 100 key terms*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publication of the European Communities

CEDEFOP (2010). *Learning outcomes approaches in VET curricula: A comparative analysis of nine European countries*. available at: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/16433.aspx> (01/08/2011)

Annexes:

- (1) Elaboration grid to draw conclusions from piloting work
- (2) Questionnaire presented to experts and practitioners
- (3) EQF adaptation support portal (see www.eqf-support.eu)

²³ See also the approach drafted by Gerald Thiel EEE – „European Education Experts“, see footnote 21, for further considerations in this regard.



Report about piloting experience on practical adaptation of training offers to EQF requirements

Pilot

Report prepared by

- (1) Please describe shortly the initial situation/ starting point of the piloting activity and describe the pilot partnership (if applicable)!

- (2) Which issues turned out to be especially challenging/ difficult in terms of EQF adaptation?
Please specify what made them challenging!

- (3) Which aspects were easily adaptable or did not need further adaptation to correspond with the EQF requirements?
Please specify what made them easily adaptable!

- (4) Which adaptations/changes were introduced compared to the initial/ usual approach?

- (5) Please specify what information regarding the EQF, its requirements and beyond was necessary in order to enable VET practitioners to adapt courses to the EQF! Please specify how useful the information was!

- (6) Which questions/aspects are open or need further elaboration/discussion regarding EQF adaptation?

- (7) Please specify, which supporting materials were used and/or what kind of material would have been useful in the adaptation process! Please specify how useful the materials used were!

- (8) Please specify, what facilitated and what hindered the overall EQF adaptation process!

- (9) How is the EQF adaptation process generally perceived by VET practitioners?
What doubts do they have? What opportunities do they see?

- (10) Which *unexpected* benefits and/or obstacles appeared during the pilot?

- (11) Other comments/ observations with regard to counselling VET practitioners to adapt training to the EQF



Questionnaire on consultation needs of practitioners adapting VET to EQF requirements

(to be presented to experts providing EQF adaptation support to VET practitioners
and to VET practitioners who already adapted VET to the EQF)

Institution/ Organisation	<input type="text"/>	
Country	<input type="text"/>	
What group of stakeholders do you belong to?	<input type="checkbox"/> VET provider <input type="checkbox"/> Awarding body/ authority <input type="checkbox"/> Enterprise	<input type="checkbox"/> Union/ workers' council <input type="checkbox"/> EQF/ VET expert <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Did you already adapt VET elements to the EQF?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
Did you counsel VET practitioners in applying the EQF to VET?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	

* * *

The project EQF Predict (www.project-predict.eu) explores practical EQF adaptation of education elements in VET practice such as of occupational profiles, curricula, course designs, training practice and assessment in selected European countries. As a key deliverable, the project drafts - based on the projects findings and additional sources such as this questionnaire – an EQF adaptation consultation service model that intends to support VET practitioners in adapting VET to the EQF.

You are kindly invited to provide your answers to the questions below based on your own/ organisations experience on EQF application in VET practice and/or experiences from counselling VET practitioners while adapting education elements to EQF requirements.

* * *

(1) What information/ consultation needs do VET practitioners have when adapting VET to the EQF?

(2) How is the EQF adaptation process in VET practice generally perceived by VET practitioners?
What doubts do they have? What opportunities do they see?

(3) What are crucial issues/aspects that need special attention within the overall practical EQF adaptation?

(4) What helps/ supports VET practitioners in the EQF adaptation process? What are supportive conditions?

(5) What hinders VET practitioners in the EQF adaptation process? What are challenging conditions?

(6) What information regarding the EQF, its requirements and beyond EQF specifics is necessary in order to support/enable VET practitioners to adapt VET to the EQF!

(7) What supporting materials/tools are/would be useful in the adaptation process! Please specify!

(8) What obstacles do you see in terms of supporting VET practitioners in practical EQF adaptation?
How can these obstacles be overcome?

(9) What limitations and opportunities do you see in terms of counselling VET practitioners to adapt VET practice to the EQF?

(10) What concrete tasks should an EQF adaptation consultation service carry out in order to support practical EQF application?

(11) Other comments with regard to counselling VET practitioners to adapt VET practice to the EQF

Thank you very much for your support!

For further information on the project please visit www.project-predict.eu and/or get in touch with EU-project.akademie@dekra.com or your national project contact person!

*This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This questionnaire reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

