

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning

2006/0163(COD) - 23/04/2008 - Final act

PURPOSE: to establish a “European Qualifications Framework” for lifelong learning.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

CONTENT: having reached agreement at first reading, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework.

The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which will serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This will improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States. Each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths. The European Qualifications Framework will, moreover, enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems.

The Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners. Transparent quality assurance principles and information exchange will support its implementation, by helping to build mutual trust.

A series of non-binding recommendations are addressed to Member States, inter alia:

- they should use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems;
- relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010;
- adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and ‘Europass’ documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level;
- use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning paying particular attention to those citizens most likely to be subject to unemployment or insecure forms of employment;
- promote and apply the principles of quality assurance in education and training set out in Annex III of the Recommendation;
- designate national coordination points linked to the particular structures and requirements of the Member States in order to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the European Qualifications Framework.

Parliament and Council endorse the Commission’s intentions to:

- support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, in particular by facilitating cooperation, exchanging good practice and testing and developing support and guidance material;
- establish, by 23 April 2009, a European Qualifications Framework advisory group;
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evaluate the action taken in response to the Recommendation, including the remit and duration of the advisory group, and, by 23 April 2013, report on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, the possible revision of the Recommendation;

- promote close links between the European Qualifications Framework and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training, in order to improve citizens' mobility and facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the Recommendation includes three Annexes, the first contains useful definitions. The second contains descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Each of the levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications. The third sets out common principles for quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework.