

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning

2006/0163(COD) - 05/09/2006 - Legislative proposal

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

PROPOSED ACT: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: the need for a continuous renewal of skills and knowledge is crucial for the EU to remain competitive. Lifelong learning is, however, complicated by a lack of co-operation between education and training providers. This lack of communication between the various educational authorities makes it hard to move within the European labour market. It also makes it difficult for those working in the EU to pursue genuine lifelong learning. Yet, lifelong learning is essential to transforming Europe into the most competitive and knowledge based society by the year 2010.

The purpose of this Recommendation is the establishment of a “European Qualifications Framework” (EQF). Its primary objective is to act as a neutral reference point for comparing qualifications across different education and training systems. It will act as a tool to strengthen co-operation and mutual trust between the various educational authorities. Ultimately, it will facilitate translation between, and comparison of, qualifications awarded by national authorities.

Concretely speaking, “transparency of qualifications” can be defined as: the degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the labour market, in education and training and in a wider social setting. The EQF will allow individuals to judge the relative value of qualifications; allow them to pursue lifelong learning; facilitate employers’ ability to judge the profile and relevance of qualifications and allow education and training providers to compare the content of their own offers to those of other providers. As such it can help act as a quality assurance for both education and training.

There are eight proposed reference levels. These cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education and training to those awarded at the highest level of academic, professional and vocational education and training. The proposed levels, listed in Annex, are as follows:

- **Level 1:** basic general knowledge; basic skills for completing simple tasks.
- **Level 2:** basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study; basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to solve tasks and routine problems.
- **Level 3:** knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts; a range of cognitive and practical skills to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, material and information.
- **Level 4:** factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study; a range of cognitive and practical skills needed to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.
- **Level 5:** comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge; a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills needed to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.

- **Level 6:** advanced knowledge, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles; advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovations, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.
- **Level 7:** highly specialised knowledge, being at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study; critical awareness of knowledge; specialised problem-solving skills needed in research and /or innovation and ability to integrate knowledge from different fields.
- **Level 8:** knowledge at the most advance frontier; the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques; knowledge of techniques to solve critical problems in research and innovation – ability to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.

The Recommendation also states that Member States should use the EQF as a reference tool to compare qualification levels used in different qualifications systems, relate their qualifications systems to the EQF by linking qualifications levels to the corresponding EQF levels and, where appropriate, develop a national qualifications framework. Any new qualifications and “Europass” documents should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. However, in situations covered by Directive 2005/36/EC *on the recognition of professional qualifications* (for a summary of the Directive see COD/2002/0061), the reference levels will not apply.

In other provisions, the Recommendation suggests that Member States use a learning outcomes based approach to defining qualifications. Learner-outcome meaning what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. It is also recommended that Member States designate a national EQF centre to support and co-ordinate the relationship between the national qualifications system and the EQF; to establish an EQF advisory group ensuring overall coherence and to monitor the implementation of the EQF.

Decisions on whether or not to use the EQF must be based on a commitment to quality assurance. Introducing systems for quality assurance at all relevant levels of education and training – and in relation to the co-operation process itself, is crucial to developing mutual trust. The implementation of the EQF must therefore take account of the European Parliament and Council Recommendation *on further European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education*.

On a final point, the proposal recommends that national qualifications systems be related to the EQF by 2009 and that new qualifications and Europass documents contain a reference to the EQF level by 2011.