



© Copyright EHFA 2010

SETTING THE STANDARDS FOR THE EUROPEAN HEALTH AND FITNESS SECTOR

Introductory Statement about the Update and Evolution of the EHFA EQF Level 3 & 4 Standards



©Copyright EHFA 2010.

This publication is copyright and remains the intellectual property of EHFA. No part of it may be reproduced by any means without the prior written permission of EHFA.

This document supports the update of the original EHFA Standards that were completed in 2005. The B1 Competence Framework and the essential Skills and Knowledge have been updated as Learning Outcomes, based on job purposes, for exercise professionals working as a Fitness Instructor or as a Personal Trainer in the European Health and Fitness Industry. These are based at the European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels 3 and 4 respectively.

These updated Standards and the Education associated are purpose and outcome driven, and are aligned with the industry main goal to get: **'More People, More Active, More Often'**.



© Copyright EHFA 2010

What is the EQF and what are its benefits?

The Standards that are agreed by EHFA are based upon the European Qualification Framework (EQF) which is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable.

This will help learners and workers wishing to move between countries, or to change jobs, or to move between educational institutions at home.

Why does the EQF use learning outcomes?

The EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences). The EQF shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. By shifting the focus to learning outcomes it helps to:

- support a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provision
- facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems
- transfer units of learning outcome, based on a credit system (ECVET)

It also recognizes that Europe's Education systems are so diverse that comparisons based on inputs, such as a length of study, are impracticable.

Why an update in 2005 EHFA Standards?

The 2004-2005 EHFA Standards Project was the first of its kind for the European Fitness Industry, but now with its much expanded position and broader base of stakeholders (which includes 16 national associations, 70 separate members and represents over 9000 fitness facilities), EHFA has a central role and mandate to ensure that standards are current, forward looking, and carry the consensus of the industry.

The original work pre-dated the completion of the EQF, and when the level descriptors are applied to the original work, some re-alignment is to be expected. The emphasis from the EU is now about learning outcomes for all training programmes, rather than the more tradition input-driven approach. This means that the 2005 Standards need to be more concisely drafted, and will also allow the opportunity to remove a considerable amount of repetition in the earlier work.



© Copyright EHFA 2010

More than 30 technical experts across Europe volunteered to assist with the review and expansion of EHFA Standards, and this considerable resource needs to be focused on priorities of updating following the launch of EREPS in 2008.

The wider international position provides other referencing points that should be taken into consideration when the true question of mobility for workers and learners is taken into account. National positions are established in Australia and New Zealand and in the USA there are four VET providers who, being evidence-based, also provide good benchmarking and referencing for the European position. Many EU countries are now developing their own national standards and qualification frameworks which place a requirement on EHFA to keep the pan-European standards complete and up to date.

Some criticism has been levelled at the 2005 Standards for being too lengthy, meaning that they are costly in translation, and also that they are too proscriptive in their present way of application.

What does the EQF mean for the Fitness Industry?

Raising and developing skills for exercise professionals is more important than ever with new opportunities and responsibilities for the fitness industry to play its part in getting **more people, more active, more often**. Training organisations must adapt and develop to deliver the skills that the industry and employers want and expect. Importantly, individual exercise professionals want their achievements recognised through an independent process based on accepted European standards. If there are common standards and processes then the outcomes can be the same and transferable. As a European solution, the EQF is the backbone of this process.

The diverse start point for VET across Europe requires a central referencing point and the EQF with fully referenced EHFA standards provides the answer. All EU member states are adopting the EQF with their implementation in 2010-2011. This will bring about the end of input driven training and learning, and now EHFA needs to take the lead for the fitness industry.

As part of the review and expansion of its standards EHFA is developing its own 8-level sector framework which will be referenced to the EQF. This will make national referencing easier for VET and higher education providers, and better for national government understanding.

The fitness industry needs more openness and transparency in the content and processes used for training its workforce. At present there are wide variations so better consistency is required. With a complete sector framework it will be more transparent for the awarding of national recognition of qualifications that are in compliance with pan-European standards.



© Copyright EHFA 2010

The reality is already upon us as some member states have already referenced their national frameworks against the EQF. DG EAC (European Commission) sees this as an important principle to help improve the mobility of workers. The fitness industry is already effectively borderless. For workers and learners to move between different countries we need to understand different qualification systems – and the EQF acts as the central “leveller”. The lead in standards development being taken by EHFA opens the prospect of the fitness industry determining its own framework. This will help everyone to better understand the actual occupations in the industry and therefore the training requirements to support these roles.

The challenge for EHFA and the industry is to identify and collectively agree on what are the jobs and skills required for today and then to look into the future.

What should be the positive impact of the new Standards and the application of the EQF for our Industry in the next future?

With the ratification of the **Lisbon Treaty** comes the prospect of the European Commission agreeing to the competencies for workers in sport, and this includes the fitness industry. If we are organized as an industry in our approach and can determine our own competencies for workers we will effectively be able to self-regulate. Creating competency standards based on the structure of the EQF across all 8 levels will demonstrate to other occupations and professions that not only is the fitness industry well-regulated, but we will have used the same meta-framework of the EQF that they do for comparative levels of qualifications. This should help other occupations and professions – and consumers - to better understand the relationship of job roles and purposes.

The new standards and sector framework will help to raise the credibility and accountability of the industry. Every training provider certificate and EREPS registration information will contain the relevant EQF level making qualifications and achievement against the EHFA standards much more understandable and transferrable.

With better understanding it will be possible to provide detailed labour market intelligence, giving evidence on skills gaps and shortages, and helping to direct the industry towards trends so that the skills of the workforce can match expectations and demands. Training providers – in both VET and in HE – will be better placed to understand the needs of the industry.

More information about EU-EQF is available at: www.ec.europa.eu/eqf



© Copyright EHFA 2010

Job Purpose as the Foundation for Fitness Qualifications

In the current fitness industry, some occupational qualifications are not aligned with the industry purpose of 'more people, more active, more often'. This has happened predominantly as the result of a focus on input (amount of learning, product oriented learning) instead of output (work outcomes, customer oriented) learning.

To achieve its purpose the industry needs to become more market oriented, which means that it should listen to its users and to deliver according to their needs. It should therefore shift from an inward, product focus, to an outward, customer focus. For fitness occupations this means they should aim at delivering the experiences and results that people need, giving these jobs a real purpose. Job qualifications – that is the knowledge, skills and competencies – should enable the achievement of these job purposes.

The focus for the future should not be on qualifications, but on the outcomes of the work. Education should become more purpose or output driven instead of qualification or input driven. The learner should be central to the process.

What a person should know and be able to do in a certain fitness occupation depends on an understanding of the purpose of that role. This can only be achieved through delivering certain work outcomes and in meeting expectations of performance. In other words, learning outcomes should be determined by desired work and customer requirements delivered in a quality controlled way. A job is only performed well if it achieves what it's supposed to achieve.

Therefore, the correct way to determine the content of specific job qualification is:

1. To define the purpose of the occupation
2. To determine which work outcomes (output) lead to achieving that purpose
3. To determine which qualifications (knowledge, skills, competencies, range of application) are necessary to be able to deliver those outcomes

Any definition of occupational purpose should include the interests of the major stakeholders, which in case of the Fitness Industry are:

- for the participant: fitness results from safe, effective exercise
- for the professional: meaningful work, and recognition of achievement
- for the business/facility: more participation/members/profit
- for the Industry: 'more people, more active, more often'

These together form the desired work outcomes of an occupation.

Qualifications for fitness occupations should be solely based on the achievement of their purpose. This also applies to all other occupational content (roles, tasks, etc.).



© Copyright EHFA 2010

Consequences for Standards Development

What are the consequences of using the customer oriented job purpose as the foundation for determining the necessary qualifications and developing standards for these qualifications?

First of all, fitness occupations should be categorised based on their purpose or what they are trying to achieve for their customers. The current practice is to categorise occupations in a product oriented way, which means that more and more 'professions' are being added as they deal with new exercise options or even equipment. From a consumer's perspective however, it's the fulfilment of their need that counts, not the chosen exercise option. Therefore in the new thinking the purpose of a fitness instructor is *To build fitness participation of new and existing members through fitness experiences that meet the participants' needs*. Note that this purpose contains the interests of all industry stakeholders involved. To achieve this purpose a fitness instructor needs to deliver certain outcomes, and these are independent of the chosen exercise type.

As in the case of personal training consumers have different needs and expectations, so a personal trainer will have a different purpose than that of a fitness instructor, even though the applied exercise types can be the same. For a certain exercise option, such as for Pilates, this may can be offered by a fitness instructor, or a group fitness instructor, or a personal trainer. They will all have different job purposes, but they can use the same exercise type, although some specific product knowledge and skills may be required to deliver the specific exercise option.

However, depending on the occupation the professional still needs to meet the qualifications for that occupation. But, these qualifications are determined by the **occupational purpose**, and not by the chosen exercise modus.

In purpose-oriented thinking however, these are not substantial enough to require a separate occupation, qualifications or qualification level. It is also important to note that qualifications should be about the minimum that professionals need to master, not the maximum.

Following the same logic, music is not necessarily a component of group exercise and so "Group Exercise to Music" should be a subcategory of Group Fitness Instruction. Teaching to music does require specific skills as does teaching to a group, but as these skills do not influence the purpose of the occupation there is no need for a separate occupation.

As another example, Aqua Fitness Instruction refers to an exercise *modus* and should therefore not be considered as a separate fitness occupation. Although some specific knowledge or skills may be required, again these skills do not determine the occupational purpose. As it's an exercise modus, Aqua Fitness can be also be offered through a PT session, in which case the professional should meet the qualifications of being a PT, plus the specific knowledge and skills required.



© Copyright EHFA 2010

More Job Purpose Thinking

The quality of a professional's work is determined by its outcomes, not by whether they meet the qualifications. So when we say someone is "good at their job", we should not mean they meet all the qualifications for the job, but that they deliver the desired outcomes. Certificates and diplomas are not a measure of quality but of a standard for the *minimum* quality required. It is just like having a driver license. By itself it doesn't make you a good driver, it merely allows you to drive and to possibly develop and practice to become one. So, for example, delivering safe and effective exercise is not only about a qualification that needs to be met, but are the purpose of the fitness job.

Occupational purpose can strongly impact the growth of businesses and the industry by providing a new context and impetus to fitness professionals and to help them achieve the desired outcomes of their work. These purpose-driven professionals in turn will better lead customers to achieve the desired experiences and results that they seek. Occupational purpose should drive occupational standards and help recruit people with the right motivation and skills, who can help us to create value and acquire and retain more members or customers.

Qualifications should be based on the everyday practice in which people visit fitness centres and want to participate in activities to achieve their desired fitness results.

We need people that love their work if we want to attract and retain members.

For any facility or club the number one purpose of a fitness occupation should be in contributing to the success and profitability of the business. This applies to commercial as well as not-for-profit facilities and operations.

Based on this new thinking and with agreement from the technical experts contributing to the review of the original 2005t EHFA Standards an "evolution" has begun. The original Standards have not been raised further in content areas (that were possibly overrated in some technical areas), but will have been referenced in a detailed way to the EQF level descriptors.

The focus for the future of the Industry should not be on qualifications, but on the outcomes or results of work.

Wherever new people are recruited into the Industry, this should be based on their motivation and people skills instead of only on their technical qualifications and exercise related knowledge. The change is that education and the new Standards should be purpose and outcome driven, and not qualification or input driven.

Brussels, March 2010

EHFA Standards Council