

Workpackage 2 *Description of learning outcomes in EQF terms*

Report on EQF Assignability

1. General remarks

Following the description of WP 2 within the accepted project proposal which defines the usability of [mature@eu](#) for the purposes of the learner,

“It is an instrument of enhancing her/his abilities which should help to go further steps on a career path which possibly leads beyond the borders of the country where he/she is currently working.”¹

This makes it sensible

“to describe the learning outcomes of MATURE@EU on the basis of a Europe-wide recognized learning outcome oriented standard, understandable independently from national educational traditions, and useable as a grid for describing all kinds of qualifications: the European Qualification Framework (EQF).”²

It is understood that a Europe-wide understandable description of learning outcomes achieved by using [mature@eu](#) will enhance the motivation of possible [mature@eu](#) users to get qualified by using the learning platform, thereby at the same time advancing the age diversity initiative, which is the actual concern of the [mature@eu](#) project. This is in principle a legitimate expectation as it can be assumed that every qualification which has been described in EQF terms will create benefits for those who possess a certificate confirming it: They can use it beyond the national context where they have achieved the qualification. The official EQF document of the European Commission refers to this benefit:

“The EQF will support greater mobility of learners and workers. It will make it easier for learners to describe their broad level of competence to recruiters in other countries. This will help employers interpret the qualifications of applicants and so support labour market mobility in Europe.”³

Nevertheless, it should be considered that there are some issues which could at first glance reduce the value of assigning [mature@eu](#) to the EQF:

1. Learning outcomes achieved with the help of [mature@eu](#) are not part of a qualification acquired within a specific national educational system. They are based on tools which have already been developed in a European context. These tools have been adapted to national contexts, but only with regard to language and relevant information at national level. Therefore it cannot be argued that these learning outcomes refer to a qualification which is already recognised in one country and that the EQF will help to make this qualification transparent in other European countries. If one gets recognition for this kind of “qualification”, depends first and foremost on whether relevant stakeholders (i.e. those who decide on recruiting HRD management personnel) accept its *content* i.e. whether they agree that age diversity management is necessary for their organisation.
2. The “[MATURE@EU](#) qualification” does not cover a whole occupational profile or a corresponding curriculum. It could not even be claimed that it represents an *additional* qualification since the learning units available at the [mature@eu](#) learning platform

¹ See project proposal

² I.c.

³ The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08_en.pdf, p.4

shall enable to *modify* already existing HRD tools (as writing job advertisements, design of application forms, guidelines for carrying out initial interviews, etc.). This is, of course, more sensible than to try to provide for some modules which can be considered tools for age diversity management *besides* traditional HRD: The success of the age diversity initiative is dependent upon *integrating it as an attitude into HRD* which thereby will lose its traditional age bias character.

But this does not deliver real arguments for giving up the idea to assign [mature@eu](#) to the EQF. On the contrary, this legitimates to *extend the scope of EQF assignment* originally foreseen within this project: It is sensible *to relate to the EQF whole HRD professions* (e.g. *HRD manager, or assistant in the HRD department*) in which age diversity orientation already plays a crucial role.

Occupational profiles of this kind, of course, do not yet exist, and therefore it makes sense to set up *European core profiles of HRD professions which include age diversity orientation, and to describe them in EQF terms*. This could help to set up or update comparable profiles at national level, and if those are publicly recognised ones, it would *anchor the [mature@eu](#) objectives in the area of educational systems* which would be a strong support for making age diversity management an obligatory part of daily HRD work.

Work of HRD people does, in principle, not differ from country to country. It should therefore also not be too difficult to set up European HRD core profiles in terms of *content* to be considered. HRD experts from various countries, supported by the [mature@eu](#) team, would certainly come to agreements without big difficulties. But this does not say anything about the (political) efforts necessary for the transfer of core profile features into national standards which would have to be based on a sound partnership of relevant stakeholders (as social partners, public institutions, etc.), and it remains unconsidered that there are only few personal resources available within the [mature@eu](#) project to fulfill the envisaged tasks.

Nevertheless, in order to remain realistic in the widest sense of the word i.e. to think in terms of *sustainability*, it would not be a good decision to give up the above described holistic profiling approach in favour of a short term solution which does not really cover the real needs. Therefore a solution should be found which abides by the above described objective as a *long term perspective*⁴, but at the same time limits work within WP 2 according to the scope of the project.

This can be achieved if the intended description of HRD profiles contains necessary elements *in a nutshell, and is detailed only with regard to the elements to which the [mature@eu](#) learning outcomes are related to*. As a first step, therefore the elements should be identified which allow for more precise description on the basis of age diversity requirements described within [mature@eu](#) learning units.

⁴ possibly delivering the objectives of work in follow-up projects

2. [Mature@eu](#) learning outcomes and the EQF descriptors

As already mentioned above, the tools available on the [mature@eu](#) learning platform shall enable learners to *modify already existing HRD tools* in order to achieve age diversity orientation. *Dealing with these tools* could be understood as participating in various parts of a *work process* typical for specific HRD professions. This delivers the interface to the EQF descriptors.⁵: *Knowledge, skills, and competence* are described as *work-related categories*; nearly all descriptions of these terms provided in the official EQF document refer to “a work or study”.⁶

The [mature@eu](#) learning platform offers the possibility to participate in *courses* structured by learning *units* related to three *modules*. For the purpose of EQF assignment, it is very useful that a *description of abilities* to be acquired by using these modules is delivered:

Module 1: The drivers for change

When you complete this module you will be *able* to:

1. Describe and communicate Europe's key demographic trends
2. Identify EU and national laws against discrimination
3. Outline the added value of age diversity
4. Describe the benefit of older IT professionals
5. Make a convincing case for age diversity

Module 2: Making the Business Case

When you have completed this module you will be *able* to:

1. Develop a business case for age diversity
2. Convince decision makers of the need for an age diverse recruitment policy
3. Enable your organisation analyse current and future employment profiles
4. Analyse your organisation's existing recruitment policies
5. Develop and communicate a formal policy statement against age related discrimination

Module 3: Implementing age-diverse recruitment procedures

When you have completed this module you will be *able* to:

1. Outline the general principles for age diverse recruitment
2. Identify the key elements associated with training staff directly involved in the recruitment process
3. Create age neutral job descriptions
4. Create age neutral adverts
5. Design an age diverse application form
6. Recognize age bias in traditional search strategies
7. Ensure age bias free selection procedures
8. Build an age-friendly employer reputation⁷

⁵ See The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)., Annex 2

⁶ I.c., Annex 2

⁷ See <http://www.mature-project.eu>

This *list of learning outcomes* shows references to work processes belonging to HRD, but not in a way that it directly mirrors the work process structure of a HRD profession: Some abilities to be acquired shall enable people to carry out age-diversity oriented work which could be considered a *part of future HRD* which already is based on the age diversity approach (Module 3, 2-8), but there are also a lot of abilities required which refer to the *implementation* of the age diversity approach (Module 1,1-5, Module 2,2). Implementation of this approach, of course, can also belong to standard tasks within future HRD work processes even if it is understood that this approach should be obligatorily be integrated in future standardised HRD work processes (and therefore would not require separate implementation activities any more): Since thinking in age-diversity-terms is not self-evident nowadays, it will certainly remain an extra effort to orientate HRD work to this issue in the foreseeable future.

But it can be doubted if *all* activities considered necessary *today* have to be taken in account for the design of standardised HRD professions. The *extent of specified implementing abilities* reflects the current situation where we are far away from general recognition of the age-diversity approach in all relevant areas. The situation will be different if we can assume that age-diversity-orientation has become an obligatory element of publicly recognised HRD profiles: In this case an ability like “Convince decision makers of the need for an age diverse recruitment policy” (Module 2, 2) will lose its importance since this need is no longer only a need which can be neglected or accepted by managers, for this necessity will have achieved a legal character.

It is also obvious that the *kind of abilities* indicated in the list differs in terms of *knowledge, skills, and competence*: Module 1,1-4 should be considered under the category *knowledge* whereas Module 2 and in particular Module 3 refer to *skills*. This succession reflects a link between *knowledge* and *skills*: Without specific *knowledge* I am not able to develop and apply specific *skills*, and therefore it makes sense to start [mature@eu](#) learning with acquiring pure *knowledge*; further procedure shows that this *knowledge* is an *instrument* to work as people with *age-diversity-orientation skills*.

Thus the [mature@eu](#) learning modules already show that it is problematic to consider knowledge and skills isolated from each other as it might suggest the structure of the EQF. This becomes still more evident if we try to define the *EQF level of considered knowledge and skills*: If we check the wide range of material made available within the *units* of Module 1, it turns out *that knowledge is not clearly assignable only to one level*: Shall we say this material delivers

- *knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study* (level 3),
- *factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study* (level 4),
- *comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge* (level 5), or
- *advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles* (level 6)⁸?

Even if we go more into details and talk, for example, about the EU and national laws against discrimination, the decision becomes not easier: The definitions of *knowledge* at various levels concern *whole sets of knowledge elements* which *as such* mostly do not show a specific character allowing to assign them to EQF levels. It is dependent upon the context in which these elements appear how they have to be judged, and this context is determined by the *purpose* for which this knowledge is necessary i.e. for carrying out *activities*. This leads us to *skills*: *Skills* describe the abilities of carrying into effect activities.

⁸ The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), Annex 2

It can therefore be said that *skills steer the use of knowledge*, and this perception does at least not contradict the descriptions of *skills* at corresponding EQF levels provided in the annex of the official EQF document:

- *a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information* (level 3)
- *a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study* (level 4)
- *a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems* (level 5)
- *advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study* (level 6)⁹

Level-distinctive features of descriptions of *skills* (highlighted in red) can obviously be related without difficulties to the features of *knowledge* descriptions at the same levels (where the level-distinctive features are highlighted in green); it can be understood that the *solutions of problems* to which the above mentioned *skills* refer can be acquired with the help of corresponding *knowledge* situated at the same level.

But what was said for *knowledge*, is also true for *skills*: There is no simple assignment solution available. If we have a closer look at the *distinctive features of skills levels*, we discover that the terms used for description are *relative*: What has to be considered a *basic method*, a *specific problem*, a *creative solution*, or an *unpredictable problem in a specialized field*, depends upon the *state of the art* for carrying out activities *in a professional environment*.

With regard to HRD we have to consider that we are going to *change this state of the art* since we want to become age-diversity-orientation an attribute of HRD. The *status of the skills* acquired with the help of [mature@eu](#) learning can only be determined in terms of EQF levels if we make a decision about *future HRD professions*: With regard to age-diversity orientation, what shall be self-evident for such a profession in the near future, and what is considered a subject of implementation even if we assume that age-diversity orientation has to be integrated into a legal standard of *HRD profiles* which shall be valid for all HRD (thus not requiring extra implementation of age-diversity orientation as a whole)?

It turns out that also the *assignment of skills to EQF levels has to take in account issues beyond the actual list of level descriptions*. It becomes visible that *knowledge* as well as *skills* achieved as [mature@eu](#) learning outcomes cannot sensibly be described in EQF terms if we try to assign them directly to EQF levels. Only if we apply a holistic approach which situates the application of required *knowledge* and *skills* in the framework of *real work processes* (not yet taking place as a rule in our case, but describable in concrete terms) we will get a stable basis for determining the levels.

As already alluded to above, this is possible on the basis of an *occupational profile* which links required abilities systematically to the work process. If we succeed in creating an interface between the EQF and the profile representing a totality of abilities related to the work process, we will have set up the decisive condition for assigning the [mature@eu](#) learning outcomes to the EQF.

The way to set up this link leads over an interpretation of the EQF category *competence* in terms of the profession(s) at hand. The list of *competences*¹⁰ differentiated according to the levels referred to in the above quoted lists of *knowledge* and *skills* shows why this is possible:

⁹ The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), Annex II

¹⁰ It shall not be concealed that the author of this paper is not happy with this term in this context since it is normally used in a wider sense, as a term overarching all kinds of abilities. But since *competence* has been defined in the official EQF document as a term with a specific meaning, related to *responsibility* and *autonomy*, *competence* is used in the same sense within this paper. As a term for the overarching category, *ability* is used.

- *take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems (level 3)*
- *exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities (level 4)*
- *exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others (level 5)*
- *manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups (level 6).¹¹*

Work or study is the reference point for level distinction as in the lists of descriptions related to *knowledge* and *skills*. But it is important that the corresponding categories *responsibility* and *autonomy* deliver criteria for the distinction of levels; it can therefore be claimed that descriptions in the column *competence* mirror the all-over *organisation of work* which is at the very end relevant for determining the activities to be carried out and the abilities assigned to them: It can be seen that a *model of relationships among individuals working on the same subject* is behind the above listed descriptions of *competence*, defining tasks on the basis of a structure of work distribution from which *competences* can be derived in terms of levels. They are related to *roles* in the work process which in the past mostly have been considered by defining *occupational profiles*.

This allows, in principle, for making decisions with regard to the level of abilities required for carrying out a “work or study”. Looking at the above indicated descriptions of *competences* in detail, we can see, for example, that the manager of a big enterprise HRD department will certainly need *competences* situated at level 6; following the arguments indicated above, this will imply decisions about the level of *knowledge* and *skills* related to them.

In order to be able to decide about the whole range of HRD professions with regard to the EQF level of required abilities, it will be necessary to get a clearer picture of the distribution of work in this field according to best practice: Structures of work organisation should reflect the *objective of work* in an ideal way. If it is possible to describe work organisation as a system which ensures that everybody participating in a specific *work or study* contributes to a maximum extent to achieving the *objective of this work or study* on the basis of the *role* which was determined for her/him, it will be possible to define the according *specific competences* at various levels.

The *reference objective approach*¹² shows a way to proceed as described above: EQF descriptors are concretised by relating them to the *work process* to be considered an *ensemble of activities*, not carried out as separately ongoing operations, but as parts of a work structure which is determined by a common *work objective*, understood as the intention to produce specific goods or to deliver specific services. In terms of *abilities* required for fulfilling the tasks within this structure, an equivalent can be determined by a work-related interpretation of the EQF-descriptor *competence* which at all levels includes reference to a *work or study*: If this work or study is understood in the above described objective-oriented way, a *reference objective*, typical for a specific profession, can be defined as the ability to

¹¹ The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), Annex 2

¹² This approach was suggested by the author within two projects dealing with the set-up of EQF assigned sectoral frameworks in the automotive sector (*European Automotive Sector Competence Meta-Framework* and *CarEasyVET*) and presented at a CEDEFOP seminar in January 2009, see <http://www.eascmf.eu> and <http://www.careasyvet.net>; *The LEONARDO Project European Automotive Sector Competence Meta-Framework, Synthesis Report, p.8 ff*; Gerald Thiel, *Reference Objectives of Occupational Profiles, An EQF-conform functional approach of description, Presentation on behalf of DEKRA Akademie at the CEDEFOP seminar “Qualifications – from Provisions to Frameworks”, Thessalonica 23.01.2009* [The report and the presentation will be made available by the author]

fulfill tasks oriented to achieve a predefined work objective at one of the EQF levels, defined by the degree of responsibility and autonomy.

The objective orientation of the EQF category *competence* has consequences for the understanding of the other EQF categories *knowledge* and *skills*: They are no longer to be considered independently from *competence*, but related to it in a *functional* way, interpreted as *instruments to achieve the reference objective*. This determines the relationship between work and the abilities required to carry it out in a way as it is depicted in the picture below.

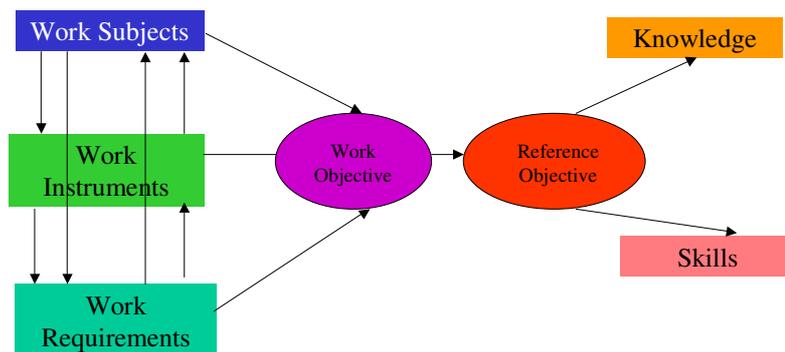


Fig.1 The work process mirrored in the required abilities

Work subjects describe that what the specific work is about, *work instruments* the tools to be used to achieve the work objective, *work requirements* the conditions under which work will take place successfully.

If we apply this approach to HRD as a specific *work or study*, we have at first to determine *the work objective of HRD*. It is suggested to define this as *the objective to continuously provide for an optimum skilled workforce for the enterprise, able to fulfill the work requirements of the enterprise to a maximum extent*. The corresponding *reference objective* would be the *competence to reach this work objective*, differentiated in terms of EQF levels, with regard to work using words like *contribute to, organise, supervise, work autonomously, etc.* which suit the EQF level descriptions of *competence* and at the same time reflect the *specific work organisation of HRD*.

Work organisation has to be considered a part of the *work requirements*. To describe them properly (as well as *work instruments*) requires to have a closer look at HRD (the *work subject*) as it is possible in the framework of this report. Therefore a list of sustainable HRD-reference-objective-related descriptions differentiated in terms of EQF levels cannot be delivered within the report at hand.

At this stage of project work, it is only possible to set up an *ad-hoc model of a HRD work objective* based on easily accessible material (descriptions of occupational profiles, descriptions of [mature@eu](#) learning units). From this provisional model *provisional HRD reference objectives* should be derived which could create the basis for the development of further project deliverables foreseen in WP 2.