

EQF and ECVET – an introduction paper for the project “Car_EasyVET”

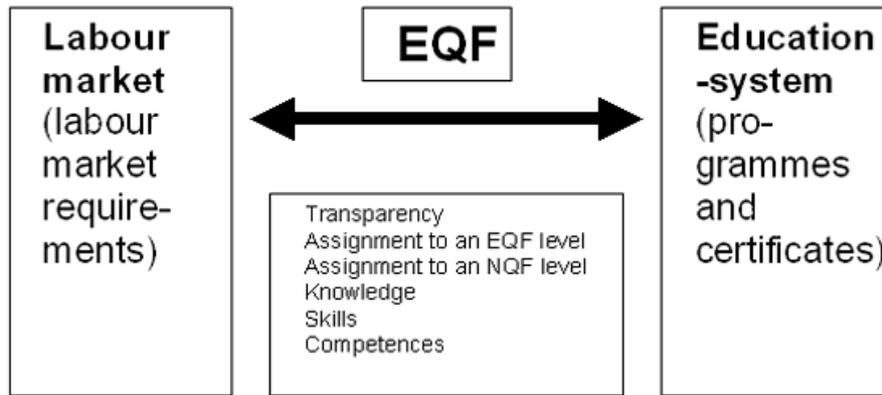
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The Lisbon strategy aims to create by 2010 a highly dynamic and complete knowledge economy in Europe that will deliver sustainable growth, generate more and better jobs and create greater social cohesion. Implementing lifelong learning has a great role in achieving. There the European Council acknowledged in all clarity that the systems of the vocational education are an authoritative factor for the economic and social development and the future of the union. The first step to the conversion was the establishment of three strategic goals (and 13 concrete goals) on the conference in March 2001 in Stockholm to be reached by the year 2010: the systems of the general and vocational education should be combined within quality, accessibility and opening against the rest of the world.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

On 14th December 2004, in Maastricht, the ministers responsible for vocational education and training (VET) of 32 European countries agreed to develop a European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Among other points, this document essentially contains an agreement on developing a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and a European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET). On 8th July 2005, the European Commission issued a document that outlines the fundamental features of the structure of an EQF. A functioning EQF could foster the convergence of vocational education and training systems and labour markets in Europe.

The aim of the EQF is to create a European system to translate individual qualification levels and the training that leads to them. The idea behind is that this system could help to increase the mobility on the European labour market, between education systems and within the individual education systems. It could improve transparency and makes it easier for employers and educational institutions to assess the competences an individual has acquired. The framework intends to promote lifelong learning by, for example, making it easier for people to move between different types of education and training institution, for example between higher education and vocational education and training. It also facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning.



The EQF's relationship to the labour market and the education system (Source: Fahle, Hanf (BIBB))

The EQF should enable the classification of training certificates and qualifications on the basis of defined European levels.

The structure of the EQF is based on eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. This means it focuses on their “learning outcomes” - regardless of where a particular competency, skill or knowledge was acquired (school, independent educational institution, company [training] etc.), how it was gained (apprenticeship, training on the job, school-based training) or the duration of the program. The EQF reference levels therefore shift the focus away from the traditional approach, which emphasises learning inputs (length of a learning experience, type of institution).

It applies to all types of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training.

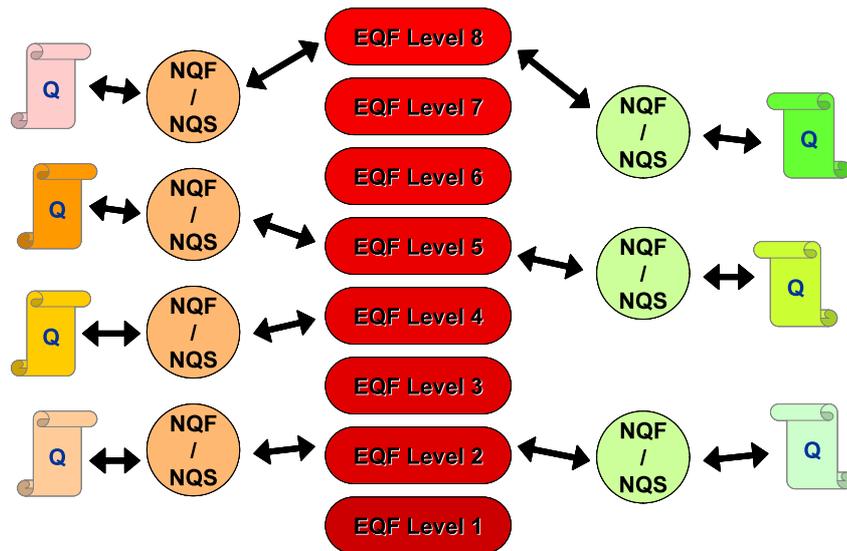
	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy

Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	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 5* The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	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 required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	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 6** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	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 7*** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8**** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (Source: ANNEX II of the European Parliament legislative resolution of 24 October 2007¹)

The EQF will help to inject greater transparency into qualifications in Europe and improve permeability between and within different education systems.

¹ European Parliament legislative resolution of 24 October 2007 on the proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (COM(2006)0479 – C6-0294/2006 – 2006/0163(COD))



How EQF works (Source:

The European Qualifications Framework works more like a “translation tool” for qualifications. This means that the competences are not directly assigned to an EQF level but to (a) level(s) in national qualifications framework which in turn corresponds to a particular EQF level. So the EQF does not replace national systems or describe specific qualification and qualifications placed via national systems. That means that the specifics of the national education systems can be considered. At present only a few European countries have developed comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (e.g. Ireland, Scotland and England). The EQF foresees that member states relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and that their qualifications contain a reference to the EQF by 2012. But the EQF is a voluntary framework, so there are no formal legal obligations on the countries. But the Commission is naturally pleased that most countries are already developing a national qualifications framework (NQF). But countries can also relate their systems to the EQF where they do not intend to establish a framework per se.

So the main aspects of the EQF are:

- Eight levels that cover both vocational training and university-level training
- An orientation toward learning outcomes
- Descriptions of learning outcomes, based on the terminology: knowledge, skills and competences and
- Inclusion of informally acquired competences.

First steps for an integrated European education area have been done in the higher education sector. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was established to provide a binding foundation for these agreements and created a set of rules for transferring credits which all European universities have committed themselves. The structures in the vocational education and training sector are considerably more heterogeneous. As a result, transferring credits above and beyond just individual

cases is far more difficult. The Copenhagen Declaration² put the vocational education and training on the same track. The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is intended to work according to the same principles as the ECTS. In that context the European Qualifications Framework is to provide the common framework or the umbrella for the Credit (Transfer) Systems (ETS and ECVET).

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

“ECVET is an European system of accumulation (capitalisation) and transfer of credits designed for vocational education and training in Europe. It enables the attesting and recording of the learning achievement/learning outcomes of an individual engaged in a learning pathway leading to a qualification, a vocational diploma or certificate. ECVET is a system designed to operate at the European level, interfacing with national systems and arrangements for credit accumulation and transfer.”³

One of the main obstacles in vocational training is the difficulty to identify and validate learning outcomes. So the ECVET aims to facilitate mobility in Vocational Education and Training allowing people to transfer learning results from one country to another in concordance with national regulations. ECVET therefore proposes a system that will enable learning outcomes (whether through formal, non-formal or informal learning) that are acquired in one country to be taken into consideration when issuing a qualification in another country. The proposed ECVET system is intended for individuals who, throughout their learning pathways, want to accumulate the benefit of the learning outcomes they achieve over time to obtain a qualification and/or to transfer their learning achievements between qualifications, between vocational education or training systems and between countries. It proposes a common approach to describe qualifications, in order to make them easier to understand from one system to another. Under the ECVET system, qualifications will be described in terms of learning outcomes, and will be organised into units of learning outcomes which can be accumulated and transferred. The system will be underpinned by partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding (MoU) between VET providers.

² Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training “The Copenhagen Declaration”
http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenahagen_declaration_en.pdf

³ European Credit System for VET (ECVET): Technical Specifications. Report of the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group, 1.3 Brussels, 28/06/2005, Eac/A3/Mar., p. 6

It enables the documentation, validation and recognition of achieved learning outcomes acquired abroad, in both formal VET or in non-formal contexts. It is centred on the individual, based on the validation and the accumulation of his/her learning outcomes, defined in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences necessary for achieving a qualification.

The European Commission implemented therefore a Technical Working Group, which started working in December 2002. Based on preliminary work of this group a proposal of an ECVET-model was presented to the general directors for general and vocational education in Brussels in July 2005 (see below).

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All useful informations about units

Qualification and units						
- Qualification: Vocational qualification in Hotel and Restaurant service						
- Occupational field : Hôtel and catering						
Level		Units	Title/Description ¹³	Caractéristiques ¹⁴		
EQF	Nal	7 units				
3	Upper secondary	Qualification	Restaurant cook	Nature	Validity	
3		Unit 1	Basic hotel and restaurant service	Compulsory	5 years	
3		- Sub unit	Hotel service	Compulsory	5 years	
3		- Sub unit	Restaurant service	Compulsory	5 years	
2		Unit 2	Restaurant kitchen functions	Compulsory	5 years	
3		Unit 3	Preparation of restaurant dishes	Compulsory	5 years	
3		Unit 4	Staff restaurant services	Optional	5 years	
3		Unit 5	Native language	Optional	3 years	
3		Unit 6	Physics and chemistry	Compulsory	5 years	
3		Unit 7	Foreign language	Compulsory	3 years	

Example for the ECVET (Source: European Credit System for VET (ECVET) Technical Specifications (Report of the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group)⁴

In the annex the questions regarding ECVET are answered as well as the main terms are defined. Because the raised questions and answers are already all-embracing, in the following page is just a quotation of this annex^{5,6} where the aspect of units is focussed.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 12

⁵ *ibid*, p. 4-8

⁶ The entire annex is available under:

[http://www.ecvetconnexion.com/cr2i/cr2i.nsf/viewfiles/D5650FBCA359A99AC125710700705EBA/\\$file/ECVET_64_TECHNICAL_SPECIFICATION_TWG_EC_2005_06_28_REPORT_2_ANNEX_en.pdf](http://www.ecvetconnexion.com/cr2i/cr2i.nsf/viewfiles/D5650FBCA359A99AC125710700705EBA/$file/ECVET_64_TECHNICAL_SPECIFICATION_TWG_EC_2005_06_28_REPORT_2_ANNEX_en.pdf)

“Are units and credit points both indispensable for implementation of ECVET?”

Yes. ECVET is based on the description of qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills and wider competences, organised into units and on the allocation of credit points to the qualifications and units depending on their relative weight.

- Units (which can be called also “learning units” or “assessment units”) are parts of a qualification and are based on description of knowledge, skills and wider competences;
- Credit points are a quantified expression of the volume of learning outcomes involved in each unit and also give information on the relative weight of the units which make up a qualification. So, units and credit points give complementary information in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Is there an ideal number of units for a qualification and an ideal size of a unit?

No. This is up to the competent body responsible for the qualification and/or its implementation. However it is recommended not to build units too small to avoid extreme fragmentation of a qualification. It is also advised not to build the units too large, to avoid creating potential stumbling blocks in the learning and assessment processes.

12 - Is content of units dependant on the learning process?

No. The content of units is independent of training methods, learning approaches...

14 - Is it possible to allocate credit points for a part of a unit?

Yes, regarding knowledge, skills and wider competences which are concerned.

15 - Can units be of a different nature or in different categories?

Yes. Units can have specific characteristics that are different from one another (e.g. ordinates, hierarchical, progressive ...)

...

26 - Can a learner obtain credits for units and credit points without any assessment?

No. Credits for units and credit points are awarded after appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes or any other “acquis” achieved by the learner. The results of evaluation must be in conformity with the requirements of the qualification.”

Open and discussable questions on ECVET

Understanding/Definition of competences and the principle of a “vocation”

Even if the Technical Working Group defines qualification and competences in the annex of the report, the given definition is very open and not related on work processes and vocations. The understanding of vocational competence (berufliche Handlungskompetenz – in German a well defined and fixed term), as the ability to master (complex) work processes with functional (technical), methodical (procedural), social (communicative) and individual skill and knowledge is not included. Also in deficit is the definition of Learning Outcomes.

“Learning Outcomes” are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do, or able to demonstrate, after completion of any learning process or at the end of a period of learning”

Therefore Learning Outcomes are mainly related to the learning process and less or even not to the work process, were the Learning Outcomes becomes (at the end) relevant. So the training and the learning process ate in the centre – which is against the intention of the declaration. This also can be shown by the importance and the central role of Units in the development of Credit Points (see first question of the quotation)

The establishment of Units as a basis leads to a granulate understanding of competences. Competences in that understanding are singular capacities to mastering - at best – small steps of entire work process. But the concept of the vocational competence is an integrated and holistic construct and expresses that situations of professional action are mastered comprehensively and that they are related always on the working context and on work process (e.g. the communication competence of an office clerk differs from the communication competence of an industrial mechanic). Therefore the main task in the formation of the ECVET is to reflect this work-process related and vocation related understanding of competence (vocational competence; berufliche Handlungskompetenz).

In the present arrangement the ECVET design prioritise - as already mentioned - singulars competences, which are or can be composed to solve professional challenges. So the perspective is just the opposite way, from learning and not from work process side and the occupation principle does not have any effect. But practical knowledge out of the professional context must be the base for the definition of the ECVET.