



QF2TEACH – Qualified to TEACH

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

Project acronym:	QF2TEACH
Project title:	Qualified to Teach
Project number:	504172-LLP-1-2009-1-DE-LEONARDO-LMP
Sub-programme or KA:	Leonardo da Vinci – Multilateral projects
Project website:	www.qf2teach.eu
Reporting period:	From 01/10/2010 To 30/09/2011
Report version:	Final Report 1
Date of preparation:	03/11/2011
Beneficiary organisation:	DIE - Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung e.V. - Leibniz-Zentrum für Lebenslanges Lernen, Germany
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the course and the outcomes of the QF2TEACH project in accordance to its aims and approaches. The report addresses adult education experts and stakeholders, namely practitioners, researchers and policy makers in the field of adult education and lifelong learning.

The QF2TEACH project dealt with competencies and qualifications of learning facilitators working with adults: By this term we understand adult education course teachers, trainers in companies and in general all people, whose professional activity takes place in direct contact with adult learners and mainly consists in initiating, supporting and monitoring learning processes of adults.

During the course of QF2TEACH, a research-based concept for a transnational qualification framework for this professional group has been developed. The concept has been linked to the existing overarching European qualification framework (EQF). This provides the opportunity to make the existing qualification levels of adult learning facilitators visible and comparable throughout Europe. The proposed concept for a transnational qualification framework provides the opportunity to increase the visibility and profile of this professional group as such.

The project consortium covered eight European countries and consisted of university departments and non-university research and development institutes who are all specialised in adult education. Project coordinator was the German Institute for Adult Education - Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE).

Starting point of QF2TEACH was a literature review and an analysis of existing competence profile descriptions in the partner countries. On this basis an expert-panel research was designed and conducted. The applied methodology (Delphi survey in two waves) was particular as it was aimed at building consensus among the surveyed experts. The first wave of the Delphi study produced a preliminary catalogue of core competencies for adult learning facilitators. This preliminary catalogue was tested and validated in the second wave. Thus the survey eventually resulted in a catalogue of core competencies whose outstanding importance has been commonly acknowledged by the involved experts.

In the second part of the project the catalogue of core competencies was translated into a concept for a transnational qualification framework for adult learning facilitators. In addition each partner country produced its own national qualification framework for this group. These national frameworks are more detailed and specific as they reflect national particularities of the sector. In the final phase of the project a series of expert workshops was conducted at national and transnational level, where the qualification frameworks were presented and discussed with adult learning experts. On the basis of these discussions the qualification frameworks were then revised and the final versions were disseminated in the field. In order to increase the level of awareness and ensure sustainability of the project outcomes the project partners disseminated the (interim) results widely to an expert public throughout the whole project process, mainly through publications and presentations.

The main characteristic of QF2TEACH was the involvement of stakeholders and potential users of the qualification frameworks nearly through the whole project process. Their interest in the project results and a sense of ownership was raised and maintained through involving them in the two waves of the study and through their involvement in the expert workshops.

The purposes, for which the qualification frameworks developed in the QF2TEACH project can be used, are the following:

- The development of different practical tools on the basis of the QF-concepts which are applicable in different national and/or domain-specific contexts of ACE Learning

Facilitators (e.g. formal and non-formal education or consulting, online-education etc....);

- the documentation and validation of competencies that have been acquired by adult learning facilitators at work or in informal contexts;
- the design of training programmes, including higher education curricula, for adult educators;
- the determination of minimum professional standards for specific job positions in the adult learning sector.

Future plans focus on developing tailored modifications of the QF concept for different specific contexts. This is seen as an important precondition for raising the acceptance and the chances of exploitation of a sectoral qualification framework in such a heterogeneous field as adult learning.

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1. Project Objectives

The qualifications of Learning Facilitators in Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) are considered to be of vital importance for the future development of competing societies. The term ACE Learning Facilitators refers to a variety of professional roles such as teachers, trainers, coaches, guidance and counselling staff and others. What these roles have in common is that a major part of the professional activity takes place in direct contact with the adult learner(s) and consists in initiating, supporting and monitoring the learning processes of these adults. The activities of Learning Facilitators can be considered as classical aspects of the work of most ACE professionals working in different domains of ACE, such as vocational education, corporate and functional education, social and moral education or cultural and arts education.

adult learning facilitators need an increasingly complex profile of competencies for their work. For example: As a result of developments in educational technologies and new media, adult learning facilitators are increasingly required to have a certain degree of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) competence with regard to educational purposes; or another example: Since large sections of the population are increasingly asked to engage in lifelong learning activities, adult learning facilitators need to have counselling skills to be able to support adult learners in making informed choices. These changing competence demands posed on adult learning facilitators have not been sufficiently reflected in current training schemes, nor have they been systematically researched.

According to these requirements the QF2TEACH project pursued the objectives:

- to research what core competencies are needed by adult learning facilitators today and in the near future;
- to produce a concept of a transnational qualification framework for adult learning facilitators which is linked to the EQF;
- to produce concepts of national qualification frameworks for adult learning facilitators in the respective partner countries, which are linked to the respective national qualification framework.

Through these empirical research findings and these tools (the standardized and empirically derived concepts for qualification frameworks) the project aimed to contribute to the following:

- to enhance the profile, visibility and attractiveness of the adult learning sector.
- to enhance the transparency of the adult learning sector both at national and transnational level;
- to address the need for the realization of a European area for lifelong learning through facilitating job mobility of adult learning facilitators – both freelancers and employees - within Europe;
- to enhance the development of training schemes and thus of the competence level of adult learning facilitators. The project thus aims to contribute to raising the quality of lifelong learning provision, because Learning Facilitators play a key role in imparting knowledge and skills and in promoting the personal development of adults;

The QF2TEACH project reached these aims through developing its main deliverables (see Part 3: Outcomes and Results):

An additional value is given by the chosen Delphi method. The Delphi method adopted in the project includes explicitly a future-oriented dimension and is used for prognostic purposes. So the outcomes of the project will also provide a basis for policy decision making (e.g. formulation of minimum competence standards for access to the adult learning profession).

2. Project Approach

In the first step, the QF2TEACH project determined through research activities the core competencies needed by adult learning facilitators in Europe. On the basis of the research results, concepts for a transnational as well as for national qualification frameworks for adult learning facilitators were developed.

The core competencies were researched and determined using the methodology of a Delphi study. A Delphi study is an expert panel research which is aimed at gradually building consensus among the surveyed experts on a given issue, in this case: the core competencies. Experts in our case were mainly the adult learning facilitators themselves – who are in the best position to know what competencies are actually required in their work. But to ensure a broader range of perspectives the expert group included also other types of experts, such as training managers, researchers or policy makers. The experts were surveyed in two waves using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire for the first wave was constructed on the basis of an extensive literature review in the partner countries. It could also build on findings from earlier research and analysis activities of the partners and on the discussions conducted within a previous European project (Q-Act - Qualifying the Actors in Adult and Continuing Education, 2007), coordinated by the DIE. The questionnaire of the second wave was redesigned on the basis of the outcomes of the first wave and with a view to enabling consensus among the experts on a set of core competencies in the end. For this purpose, the questionnaire in the second wave included only those items that had proven to be significant for the experts during the first wave. At the same time, the items were grouped in a different way in the second wave, according to what the analysis of the first wave data (a factor analysis was applied) suggests.

After the second wave of the Delphi study the second part of the project was dedicated to the development of a transnational qualification framework and national sectoral qualification frameworks linked to the EQF. Draft qualification frameworks were prepared by the partner consortium on the basis of the research outcomes. These drafts were presented and discussed with experts at a series of workshops. The final versions of the qualification frameworks were completed after the workshops taking into consideration the outcomes of the workshops.

For the construction of the national sectoral qualification frameworks, in each partner country one national expert workshop was arranged. Furthermore an international Workshop was organised in order to discuss and enhance the proposed transnational qualification framework.

The quality and the sustainability of the project outcomes were ensured through the project evaluation and through the dissemination/ exploitation strategy. The evaluation was conducted both as an internal and an external formative evaluation.

The dissemination/ exploitation strategy focused mainly on the learning facilitators in ACE as the short term target group. The learning facilitators were those who contributed to our project as well as those who were targeted by the project and who should benefit from the results. The project achieved this mainly through the two waves of the Delphi study and through the national and transnational expert workshops. The workshops were another important building brick of the dissemination/ exploitation strategy. Selected stakeholders and decision makers were invited to participate in the workshops, in addition to adult learning practitioners. The results of the workshops were distributed widely in the adult learning community so as to pave the way for a possible mainstreaming of the sectoral qualification frameworks in the partner countries' qualification strategies in the adult learning sector.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project conducted its research activities (literature review, Delphi survey) as foreseen. The expert workshops were organised in the partner countries, and in addition a transnational expert workshop was organised in Germany in September 2011. A concept for a transnational qualification framework for adult learning facilitators was produced as well as concepts for five national qualification frameworks for the same group in the partner countries.

- a) The main results from the project's research and development activities are:
- a transnational catalogue of core competencies of adult learning facilitators, derived from a Delphi survey in seven countries
 - a concept for a transnational qualification framework for adult learning facilitators, based on the results of the Delphi survey
 - five concepts for a national qualification framework for adult learning facilitators, based on the results of the Delphi survey
- b) The main products produced by the project are the following:
- national research reports for each country as well as a transnational research report
 - papers presenting the concepts for qualification frameworks at national and transnational level
 - a dissemination/exploitation strategy and a series of dissemination papers and presentations
 - a project website
- c) Further outcomes of the project include:
- 200 practitioners and stakeholders in Europe directly involved in a research (Delphi survey) on core competencies of adult learning facilitators
 - 96 practitioners and stakeholders in Europe directly involved in a series of national and transnational workshops and in the development of QF concepts for the professional group of adult learning facilitators
 - open online access to all products of the project through the project website (www.qf2teach.eu/)
 - increased awareness in the field of the QF2TEACH project and interest in its results through a variety of dissemination activities (publications, presentations, information included in newsletters, on websites etc.)
 - plans for further research and development activities building on the results of QF2TEACH

Brief presentation of the most important results and products

(accessible through the project website (www.qf2teach.eu/):

The *transnational catalogue of core competencies* is derived from a Delphi survey involving approx. 200 adult learning practitioners and stakeholders in seven European countries (six EU partner countries plus Switzerland). The competencies are structured in nine domains which were gained by applying a factor analysis to the survey results:

- group management and communication
- efficient teaching
- personal professional development (and reflection)
- learning process support

- learning process analyses
- subject knowledge and didactical competence
- learner oriented needs/aspects
- learner supporting aspects
- context related aspects
- create safe learning atmosphere (not intimidating)
- personal attributes.

The results of the first wave will now be translated into a redesigned questionnaire for the second wave in order to validate the results and come to a final agreed transnational catalogue of core competencies.

The concept for a transnational qualification framework follows the structure of the EQF. It includes descriptors in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, relating to EQF levels five and six and relating to three thematic domains:

- (specific-)contents and didactics
- „professional self“
- assistance for learners

For the development of the concept, the catalogue of core competencies resulting from the Delphi research was taken as a starting point. The three thematic domains were gained by grouping the nine domains featuring in the catalogue according to the main three elements of pedagogic setting as defined by the didactic triangle (subject, teacher, learner).

In a similar way, the concepts for national qualification frameworks were developed. The structure of the proposed concept is linked to the respective national qualification frameworks (where they exist). The national concepts are compatible with the EQF in that they can be linked to it. However, they do not necessarily follow exactly the EQF structure, since the theoretical concepts and ideas prevailing at national level may be different from the EQF.

Possible usages of the qualification frameworks after the end of the QF2TEACH project will be the following ones:

- the development of different practical tools on the basis of the QF-concepts which are applicable in different national and/or domain-specific contexts of ACE Learning Facilitators (e.g. formal and non-formal education or consulting, online-education etc....);
- the documentation and validation of competencies that have been acquired by adult learning facilitators at work or in informal contexts;
- the design of training programmes, including higher education curricula, for adult educators;
- the determination of minimum professional standards for specific job positions in the adult learning sector.

The national research reports provide background information on the state of the art and the debate on professionalisation in the respective countries. They give an account on how the Delphi survey was conducted in the respective country and discuss the outcomes of the Delphi study with respect to the national situation. Finally, they give an outlook on how the results of the Delphi survey can feed into qualification frameworks or other tools and activities to enhance the professional development of adult learning facilitators in the country.

The transnational research report summarises the main issues from the national background situations and debates in the partner countries. It presents the methodology of the Delphi survey and gives an account of how the survey was conducted in the partner consortium. It presents and discusses the findings from a transnational perspective. It concentrates on the common core that can be derived from the answers of the overall expert sample, but it also points to major divergences at the national levels and points to the issues which are discussed in greater details in the respective national reports. It concludes by giving an outlook on how the results of the Delphi survey can feed into qualification frameworks or other tools and activities to enhance the professional development of adult learning facilitators at European level. In particular, it proposes a way of deriving a transnational qualification framework from the research results and presents a concept for such a qualification framework as an example.

The papers presenting the concept for the transnational qualification framework contain the concept as such plus an introductory part. In this introduction the background of the project as well as the target groups and the aims and purposes of the QF concept are concisely presented. Furthermore, the methodology of deriving the concept from the Delphi research results is explained in details, and the implications of this methodology (its potential as well as its limitations) are discussed. Similarly the papers presenting the concepts for national qualification frameworks contain the concepts themselves plus introductory parts explaining background, aims and purposes as well the methodology applied for developing the concept. Where applicable, national specificities with regard to the transnational outcome are highlighted and discussed.

4. Partnerships

The project brought together a partnership which covers six EU countries from all regions (south, nord, west, east) of Europe. In addition a Swiss organisation joined the projects as an associated partner. The broad geographical coverage ensured that different “models” of and views towards adult education were covered in the project.

The partner consortium involves both universities (Sweden, Poland, Netherland, Italy) and institutions acting as national (non-governmental) organisations for adult learning in their respective countries (Germany, UK, Switzerland). All partners are highly networked with wide ranging contacts to experts, researchers, stakeholders and practitioners in the field of adult learning. Furthermore, all partners have extensive research experience. Both these characteristics constitute vital preconditions for the successful implementation of the project.

The project partners’ networks ensured that competent experts to be involved in the project were easily found. They also ensured that the project and its results could be disseminated to appropriate audiences and that interest in follow up activities was raised..

An important aspect in the project is the active involvement of the group to which the final outcome of the project – the qualification framework(s) for adult learning facilitators - refers. We consider that they have a particular important stake in defining what are the core competencies needed for their professional activity and how a relevant qualification framework should look like. Therefore experienced adult learning facilitators form a large part of the expert group which was surveyed during the Delphi study. Some of them were also involved in the expert workshops at transnational and national level, where the concepts for sectoral qualification frameworks were discussed and further developed.

The involvement of a large number of practitioners in the research is a key feature of the QF2TEACH project. During the project it appeared that these practitioners - adult learning facilitators from different contexts as well as other adult learning stakeholders - were very interested in the project and its topic and were eager to work further on it. Thus, for follow-up activities (see point 5), a substantial network of experts to be potentially involved has already been created.

5. Plans for the Future

The project completed the main activities and produced the main results and products, notably the research reports and concepts for qualification frameworks (see chapter 3) as foreseen.

Plans for the future derive from the discussions that were conducted on these results during the project, both within the partner consortium and with external experts and stakeholders. One major aspect which emerged from the discussions and which points towards further development needs is the following:

The central products of the project, the concepts for transnational and national qualification frameworks, are built on consensus. They are conceived in a way that they can apply to the whole field of adult learning. Since this field is however extremely heterogeneous, both partners and external experts felt somehow the need to go beyond the consensus-driven overarching model produced within the project. They felt that such a model was, by definition, something like the smallest common denominator and a kind of compromise. This was a logical consequence of the originally adopted project approach and methodology. However, most partners and stakeholders would feel unsatisfied if the work on sectoral QF simply stopped there.

A need that was emphatically expressed during the discussions and the workshops was to (re)contextualise the qualification framework(s). This means that specific versions should be developed for different contexts within the broad field of adult learning (e.g. citizenship education, work-based learning, personal development training etc.).

This was seen as an important precondition for enhancing the relevance and acceptance of qualification frameworks in the field and thus as a prerequisite for further exploitation (Since adult learning is a field which is hardly regulated, any tools, standards, frameworks etc. cannot be implemented or mainstreamed in a top down manner but are very dependent on the support of the field).

The project partners would like to pursue this perspective in a follow-up project. The aim of this project should be to transform the abstract and context-overarching qualification framework concept into practical tools which are applicable in different national and/or domain-specific contexts. For this purpose, a qualitative approach would be needed in order to capture the context-specific features in an adequate manner. Therefore, it is foreseen, to develop a plan for a follow-up project which uses a qualitative research design with workshops, group discussions and case studies.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The main overarching EU policy objectives to which the project contributes include:

- the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practice in the field, and
- the realisation of a European Area of Lifelong Learning.

In particular, the project contributes to the Action Plan on adult learning (2007), notably to those aspects that refer to professional staffing and competence development of adult learning teachers, which in turn are a pre-condition for improving the quality of provision in the adult learning sector.

The project has produced a catalogue of professional core competencies and concepts for sectoral qualification frameworks which can be used as European reference tools for

- developing competence development strategies and training programmes for adult learning facilitators;
- comparing existing competence levels and qualifications of adult learning facilitators throughout Europe, thus facilitating transparency and cross-border mobility of the adult learning facilitators;
- raising the visibility and profile of the adult learning sector which so far has been the most neglected compared to other education and training sectors, even though adult learning constitutes the element of lifelong learning with the longest duration (cf. Background document for the Grundtvig 10th Anniversary Conference, September 2010).

Through its dissemination activities, the project incorporated the scientifically derived catalogue of core competencies and the resulting qualification frameworks into the national and international lifelong learning policy. This contributes to raising the societal prestige of adult learning facilitators who are key persons in the realisation of any lifelong strategy.

The outcomes of the project may also provide a basis for policy decision making (e.g. formulation of minimum competence standards for access to the adult learning profession), since the Delphi method adopted in the project includes explicitly a future-oriented dimension and is used for prognostic purposes. So the empirical research conducted in the project has produced solid results even concerning future developments of core competence requirements for adult learning facilitators.

Through the dissemination activities and in the context of the expert workshops, the project has stimulated the discussion on EU policy in the field of adult learning. It has contributed to make this policy better known among practitioners. It has also prompted critical reflection on the principles underlying these policies and on what was sometimes seen by the participants as shortcomings of instruments such as the EQF. At the same time, the project has however also fostered the awareness of the importance of central EU policy aims such as enhancing transparency and mobility through the EQF and similar tools. As a consequence, the project has eventually raised the interest and willingness of stakeholders in the field of adult learning to develop practical tools which reconcile broad and abstract European policy aims with both national specificities and practice related demands.

