

PIN

WP3: Guidelines and questionnaire for the focus groups

The expected **outcome** of workpackage 3 is an overview of the impact of the EQF and its accompanying measures on the VET system and the consequences for employees. Special attention is asked for identifying good practices and approaches.

The core partners organise **focus groups** for analysing the impact of the EQF on **three specific levels**:

- trade union point of view
- in-company point of view
- educational providers point of view

Issues addressed by the focus groups:

1. collective bargaining
2. Impact of the learning outcome-approach for initial and further training
3. assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning
4. data protection vs. transparency
5. Increase flexibility in training programmes (e.g. EC VET)
6. Permeability between general, vocational and tertiary education and training
7. Quality assurance within vocational education and training (EQARF)
8. Guidance and individual career development
9. Standards for developing new skill profiles due to future skill needs
10. Mismatching (low and over qualification)

Introduction

The objective of PIN is to organize a transnational learning of organizations and people who share key questions regarding the consequences of the implementation of the EQF for the interests and rights of employees.

Although only two of the issues are not related to the educational system in general and to lifelong learning issues specifically, the chairman of the focus group should be aware that the impact on individual rights as represented by trade unions are the central issue of all issues to be addressed.

In the partner-countries the position, the role and the impact of trade unions when implementing the EQF in national learning systems are quite different, especially considering the diversity in the sectors in which the trade unions have a say when it comes to set sectoral standards for learning.

The primary focus in the focus groups is:

1. Identification of good practices in the partner-countries of implementation of the EQF,
2. Creating an overview of the knowledge needs of the stakeholders when 'working' with the EQF.

The **questionnaire** aims at the bird-eye view of the focus group-members for the sake of retrieving good practices. In this questionnaire general questions are asked about the nature of learning and the types of standards used at the moment. If possible, this questionnaire will open up information on actual use of EQF or EQF-related aspects. The questionnaire will also focus on the responsibilities of the stakeholders. In this questionnaire the diversity of roles in applying EQF and EQF-related aspects will be highlighted.

The **guidelines** are:

1. **Variety of stakeholders**
Make sure there is a variety of stakeholders represented in the focus group: trade-unions staff and members, VET-policy-makers and teachers, negotiators of sectoral standards, etc
2. **Diversity**
Keep in mind that the EQF has been designed to give the huge variety of European systems a place. So there is no need for unifying the different systems but more finding out how to manage the diversity of national/sectoral learning systems or approaches.
3. **Information of the EQF**
You might want to introduce the EQF to your focus group. For this you can either use national information, or the brochure the European Commission has available in almost any language: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm
4. **Chairman**
Make sure that the **chairman** acts as an independent mediator of the debate in the focus group.
5. **Documentation**
Make careful notes of the outcomes of the debate; these notes will provide the information needed for WP3 and will also be used to do further research into good practices.
6. **National solutions**
In explaining the EQF, make clear that there might be different views of the impact of the EQF in the different partner-countries and amongst the different stakeholders. Articulate these differences in the debate with the focus group.
7. **National and sectoral standards**

Prepare for explaining to the focus group the diversity of national and sectoral standards used in your country. This entails making a short analysis of the information delivered by the focus group-members in the preparing questionnaire on good practices and their respective responsibilities.

What we expect from the work of the focus groups:

1. A written and detailed report answering questions 1 to 8 of the questionnaire.
2. Please use the structure of the questionnaire for your report. This makes it easier for us to compare the national reports.
3. The report of the first focus group meeting (National impact analysis) should be submitted to IGM and Cofora until September 15th. The report of the second meeting until November 30th.
4. Prepare on the basis of the existing information from the questionnaires a kind of format for the debate(s) in the focus group. It is recommended to use the order of the questions in the questionnaires as an agenda for the focus groups.
5. Make sure that you ask feedback after the focus group to the individual members. This is to make sure that the information you got out of the focus group will be transparent and concrete in naming good practices and stakeholders' responsibilities in your country.

Questionnaire on national policy and good practices

This questionnaire will be issued to the focus group-members before the focus group is organized. It will be used as a guide for debate.

1. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

1a. What are the main characteristics of the national qualifications system?

(Describe levels, types of official qualifications, system, organization, structure of the qualifications)

National Qualifications Framework - Level descriptors

1. Introduction

These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level. They are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every unit and qualification should have all of the characteristics.

As the term ‘generic’ implies, the descriptors are intended to integrate vocational, academic and professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts; classwork, practical work, and work-based learning. They have been developed with the intention that unit and qualification developers will use their professional expertise to translate them into their own subject areas and they will be kept under review in the light of feedback on their use¹.

The level descriptors can be used as a guide to the writing of learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria for units, to assign level to units and qualifications. The descriptors should be seen as a developmental continuum, i.e. each level subsumes the characteristics of lower levels.

2. Definition and scope of Categories²

Intellectual Skills and Attributes

This category reflects knowledge and understanding, application, analysis, synthesis/creativity and evaluation. This category also encapsulates psychomotor skills, self-appraisal/reflection of practice, planning and management of learning, problem solving, communication and presentation, interactive and group skills. Transferable skills overlap with the Key Skills and therefore Northern Ireland descriptors reflect their development.

Processes

Processes refer to the operational contexts within which the learner performs and include the tasks and procedures required.

Accountability

The term accountability is understood as a broad concept embracing the underpinning attributes of autonomy, responsibility and ethical understanding. While accepting that increasing autonomy is an essential feature of a learner’s progression through the levels continuum, it is constrained by ethical considerations.

¹ These descriptors consist of the NICATS descriptors, also used in Wales, together with

additional material, commissioned by QCA, which has been included as a result of consultation.

2The categories used are NICATS categories, and thus these definitions are those used by NICATS.

Level	Intellectual Skills and Attributes	Processes	Accountability
Entry	Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others Exercise basic skills Receive and pass on information	Operate mainly in closely defined and highly structured contexts Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable Undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks Assume a limited range of roles	Carry out directed activity under close supervision Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality
1	Employ a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension Demonstrate a narrow range of skills Apply known solutions familiar problems Present and record information from readily available sources	Show basic competence in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts Utilise a clear choice of routine responses Co-operate with others	Exercise a very limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible actions Carry restricted responsibility for quantity and quality of output Operate under direct supervision and quality control
2	Apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas Make comparisons Interpret available Information Demonstrate a range of skills	Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, some of which may be non-routine Co-ordinate with others	Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy Achieve outcomes within time constraints Accept increased responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking

1b. Do you have a National Qualifications Framework, in which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is integrated?

As you will see above, there is no clear reference to RNFIL within this framework , although informal learning tends to be embedded into other more formal learning.

There is reference to non formal learning in a government document, “Learning through life – conceptual overview” on the www.bis.gov.uk website.

If yes, describe the NQF and the reasons for establishing an NQF. If not, what actions are undertaken towards establishing a national qualifications framework?

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Focus on actions like:

- *reasons for shifting to national standard*
- *reasons accepting a focus on learning outcomes*
- *Coordination and governance issues*
- *Quality assurance issues*
- *Transferability, progression, access and permeability*

1c. Does the qualification system in your country include assessing learning outcomes from the education sector, the labour market and the voluntary sector (non-profit organizations, sports associations, associations for voluntary social work etc., ICT courses, creative courses, liberal adult education for personal development etc.)?

If possible, can you describe examples?

There are various bodies that assess and accredit learning taking place in all sectors. These however are for non-formal learning. The UK NVQ system is well known but there are other awarding bodies such as City & Guilds, Open College Network, OCR and BTECH.

1d. What impact does the implementation and use of EQF have on your field of work:

I think that the lack of knowledge of EQF among trade unions and also employers in the UK means that at the moment it is having little impact on collective bargaining. This therefore limits the employee's position.

- **Does it influence (and in what respect) your policy of collective bargaining?**
- **Does it influence the legal position of the employee?**
- **How do you value the problem of data protection vs. transparency?**

1e. What kind of offers are in your country with regard to guidance and individual career development and the assessment of competences? Please name organisations and conditions (fees, costs...)!

Various offers are available in the field of information and careers guidance from different bodies. These being; Job Centre Plus, Information Advice & Guidance (IAG), Connections. There are normally no fees involved.

2. LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY AND LEGISLATION
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2a. What is the nature of lifelong learning policy in your country? What are the goals? Which problems is it expected to solve?

Focus on responsible actors/stakeholders, who takes initiatives, what are the reasons for these actors to act?

The Learning Revolution

The boom in book clubs, on-line research and blogging, together with the continuing popularity of museums, public lectures and adult education classes, all demonstrate that people in this country have a passion for learning. They may not call it education, but this informal adult learning makes a huge contribution to the well-being of the nation. It is a revolution this Government is proud to foster and encourage.

Informal adult learning is taken up for its own intrinsic value. It encompasses a huge variety of activities: it could be a dance class at a church hall, a book group at a local library, cookery skills learnt in a community centre, a guided visit to a nature reserve or

stately home, researching the National Gallery collection on-line, writing a Wikipedia entry or taking part in a volunteer project to record the living history of particular community.

Although informal learning can support the development of work-related skills, this movement is made up of a kaleidoscope of part-time, non-vocational learning where the primary purpose isn't to gain a qualification. People participate for enjoyment and are driven by their desire for personal fulfilment or intellectual, creative and physical stimulation.

Such activity also contributes to the health and well-being of communities by building the confidence and resilience of the individuals involved. The social relationships that develop as a result of this informal learning can provide networks of support and solidarity. For the low-skilled and under-confident, informal learning can be an important stepping stone to further learning and a more skilled future.

(Statement from previous Labour Government)

The current government of the UK has continued its support of Lifelong Learning. The emphasis in the UK is still on the funding of learning with many employers still reluctant to fund training programmes. The English TUC is a firm supporter of lifelong learning and informal learning in particular. For more detail on policy see the links to documents below.

www.tuc.org.uk - (Trade union policy on Lifelong Learning)

www.unionlearn.org.uk - (Trade union policy on Lifelong Learning)

www.niace.org.uk – (Lifelong Learning in Challenging times – An agenda for a new government)

www.bis.gov.uk - (Skills for Sustainable Growth Government policy document)

www.education.gov.uk

2b. Is there a policy on recognition of non-formal and informal learning practiced as an element in the lifelong learning policy?

For instance as a means for motivating adults for lifelong learning?

Public funding for informal learning

BIS supports informal adult and community learning in England, mainly through the £210 million per year Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) budget. Historically, the budget has funded four broad categories of learning:

- Personal and Community Development Learning
- Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy
- Wider Family Learning
- Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities.

From 2011-12, Adult Safeguarded Learning providers will receive a single ASL funding allocation to enable them to use this budget more flexibly to meet local needs.

BIS also supports ten Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) – colleges with a particularly long and rich tradition of attracting disadvantaged adults to informal adult learning, and other kinds of learning, in order to transform individual lives and benefit local communities. Many SDIs deliver informal adult and community learning.

Other Government departments and local government also support this kind of activity, though it may not always be described as 'learning'. They support museums, libraries, archives, sports activities, arts, culture, healthy living and volunteering, much of which involves grassroots learning activity. Local services, including activity to support citizenship, build stronger families, improve mental and physical wellbeing and raise environmental awareness, all contribute to a rich and diverse tapestry of informal learning.

Reviewing informal adult and community learning

This Government is committed to building a Big Society in which individuals, families and communities have the power and information they need to come together, solve problems and build the Britain they want. In November 2010, Skills for Sustainable Growth announced that the £210m Adult Safeguarded Learning budget would be protected, and reviewed to maximise its role in:

- supporting relevant Government policy objectives, such as building the Big Society
- engaging and motivating people from disadvantaged groups to learn and progress, including to skills-focused learning and employment.

2c. Are all education sectors cooperating in creating lifelong learning programmes?

There is some cooperation between education sectors in lifelong learning programmes.

2d. Is there national legislation for lifelong learning? Or is lifelong learning regulated on a sectoral level?

Adult learning in the United Kingdom is a responsibility of each national administration (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales have got different managements in this field).

2e. On the national level: What are your experiences with regard to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning?

In my experience the recognition of non formal education, as in the English model of NVQ's is recognised nationally as are other forms of non-formal learning. The position of informal learning is somewhat different and is often not given any recognition.

2f. On the companies/trade unions/training organisations level: Are there any examples for good practice? Please describe!

There are many good examples; below I have set out a few;

The Courtauld Institute of Art

The Public Programmes department aims to make the knowledge, resources and unique collections of The Courtauld Institute of Art available to those outside the formal education sector. The department delivers an exceptional range of activities that offer opportunities for

members of the public to develop their understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of art and art history, whatever their age or background.

As well as offering access to the Courtauld's world renowned collection, one of the key aims of the programme is to help participants understand the role of art historical research in the transmission of ideas and cultural knowledge between generations and cultures.

"The site visits were a real treat! Very useful to be able to put things into context and be allowed access to manuscripts and photos."

"I have the bug now! The study visit was great and it was really interesting to see what I had heard about in the course."

The WEA

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) works in the heart of local communities with adults from very diverse backgrounds – particularly those who have previously missed out. Its membership scheme enables its 20,000 members to engage with WEA's democratic process. Members can play a key role in organising local courses where no other provision exists and where it would not be viable without their input. Members can be elected to governance roles locally, regionally and nationally – right up to Trustee level. The significant contribution of volunteers to the work of the WEA was identified as a strength in the recent Ofsted inspection report.

Unite the Union, supported by Unionlearn have set up a number of learning centres in partnerships with colleges of further education. Along with trade union members the centres are used by members of the community and unemployed people. Many of the people accessing the centres are lacking in confidence and they welcome the support they get from professional staff that help them identify the learning that is right for them. The staff are able to advise learners on computer courses, managing money and helping them to know exactly what is available.

3. ROLES IN THE LEARNING-PROCESS

3a. Which kind of lifelong learning-practices are functioning in your country? Do they include summative (aiming at qualification/certification) and/or formative (aiming at career-perspectives) approaches?

The lifelong learning practices functioning in the UK are varied. Some are aimed, as in the case of informal learning, at bringing non traditional learners back into learning. Others such as non-formal learning are aimed at qualifications. Both are seen as enhancing peoples career chances.

3b. What is the responsibility of the adult learner in designing his/her learning process?

Individuals are encouraged to think about their learning process, but it would not be accurate to say that it is their responsibility.

3c. What is the role of social partners (employers and trade unions) in the learning process to build up competencies sustainably?

There is involvement of all social partners in the structuring of vocational qualifications. The main thrust of ensuring competencies sustainability comes mainly from the trade unions who attempt to encourage employers to invest in the development of their workforce.

3d. What are your strategies concerning Life long learning with regard to target groups

(young, old, low-qualified, men and women...)?

The trade union strategy is to encourage “hard to reach” adults and “vulnerable” adults; for example, ethnic minorities, women (particularly those returning to work), and young adult apprentices.

3e. What runs good or not?

The role of trade unions in the learning process has been particularly successful. Since the introduction of government funding to trade unions for the development of learning and the statutory recognition of trade union learning representatives, thousands of workers have returned to some form of learning. *(The emerging role of trade unions in the vocational education and training system. B Cough TUC 2007)*

4. NON-FORMAL AND FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4a. In how far are people supported in non-formal learning? What are the instruments and kinds of support?

Non formal learning is a government led initiative that is regionalised depending on the social indices’ of region in the UK with reference to social deprivation.

4b. Is there a praxis in your country to assign EC VET credit points?

4c. In how far does EC VET increase flexibility of training programs?

EC VET does increase the flexibility of training programmes, but often this is a means of increasing flexibility of labour.

4d. How do you identify (what methods do you use?) skill profiles due to future skill needs?

For future skills need the labour market statistics and for skills profiles within existing workforce, training need analysis along with organisational needs analysis.

4e. In how far does this influence the formulation of curricula?

As above the vocational curricula is influenced by the employers input into the framework of NVQ’s ect via the Sector Skills Councils.

4f. What are your quality assurance standards within education and training (EQARF)?

Quality assurance is regulated by OFSTED and the awarding bodies such as City & Guilds.

5. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

5a. What are the tools/instruments/methods used for the identification (e.g. portfolio, interview, demonstration, self-assessment) of competences? What kinds of proof can be submitted?

The main tools are portfolios and self assessment along with technical certificates and evidence of functional skills.

5b. How is informal learning measured and validated? To what extent can validation use the same standards and references as formal education and training? If not, what other standards are used - job, or sectoral (branch)?

There is little validation of informal learning although there appears to be moves in that direction. This is particularly a problem for young people who have had no work experience. There are various tools to support young people such as Europass CV etc but they are not often used.

5c. What kind of advice/feedback may be made by assessors or mentors, counsellors, peers examiners?

Assessors pass or fail the portfolios and feedback the strengths and weaknesses in the portfolios.

6. SWOT

6a. Which strengths are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

The mapping across of the current QCF to EQF will enhance the country's learning systems and improve transferability among sectors. The cost benefits would be a single vocational qualification system that makes it easier for all social partners to understand.

6b. Which weaknesses are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

There is currently a lack of knowledge of EQF both amongst education sectors and also employers. The danger is that it will not get the recognition that employees need to improve their employability. In the different UK countries different qualification systems have been developed that interact with each other, all based on the EQF. However they will have to be able to interact with the EQF.

6c. Which opportunities are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

The main strength is the cross border recognition of qualifications between countries. If the skills developed by workers are recognised then they will enhance their employability and improve the economy.

6d. Which threats are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects

If the EQF is to be successfully implemented in the UK there will have to be much staff development amongst education providers and complete recognition by employers.

7. Thematic outline

7a. On page 1 there are 10 issues (themes) formulated: Are these addressed issues relevant or not relevant for you?

Adressed issues	Relevant 3	Less relevant 2	Not relevant 1
Collective bargaining	At the moment in the UK we do not have statutory right to bargain over training. However to be able to include EQF in collective bargaining may help both the recognition of competences but also reward the worker for their skills. This is probably the most important issue for trade unions in the UK		
Impact of the learning outcome-approach for initial and further training	Learning outcomes as opposed to merely obtaining qualifications is very important for all sectors.		
Assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning	Very relevant since it helps workers to have their competences validated.		
Data protection vs. transparency		Not so important but data protection is important for the individual. We need to strike a balance between protection and transparency.	
Increase flexibility in training programmes (e.g. EC VET)	Increase flexibility is important for the design of training frameworks that are relevant to the skills needed in the industrial sectors.		

Permeability between general, vocational and tertiary education and training		This is an issue that the government is looking at with a view to increasing vocational training in schools.	
Quality assurance within vocational education and training (EQARF)	Quality assurance is always important. In the private training sector this can sometimes be a problem		
Guidance and individual career development		There are various bodies providing this in the UK.	
Standards for developing new skill profiles due to future skill needs	It is important to include all social partners and sectors in the development of skills profiles.		
Mismatching (low and over qualification)		Less important but it is an issue within the UK	

Please explain the reasons for your rating!

7b. On page 1 there are 10 issues (themes) formulated: From your national point of view what else issues are relevant for you in the process of implementation and use of EQF? Please give us a detailed description. Do you have any approaches (strategies or experiences) to solve these challenges?

8. Information and support by PIN

8a. What information do you expect from PIN, from a trade union, in company and educational providers point of view?

Trade unions would like to be kept up to date with developments across Europe that highlight best practice and successes.

Companies require information regarding the validation of competences.

Education providers require information on the developments in other countries education systems.

8b. What support do you need?

As much useful information as possible, that will help us to exchange ideas and experiences.