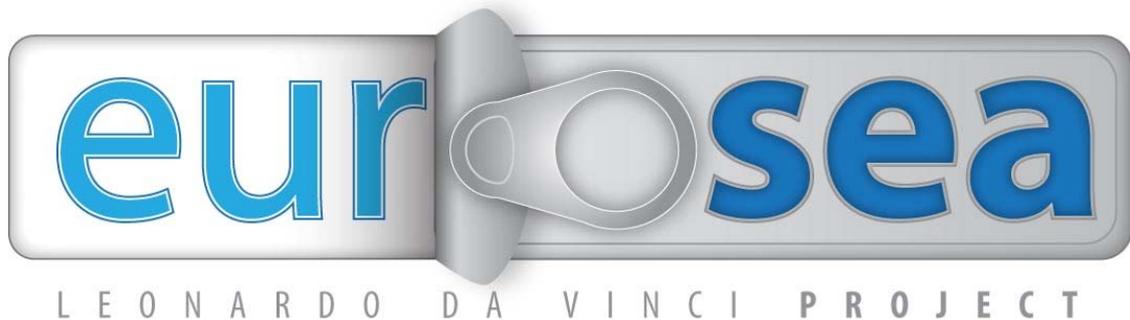


## WP5

# External validation of the European Reference Tool for Professional Qualifications in the fish and seafood cannery sector General Report



## EUROPEAN REFERENCE OF QUALIFICATIONS IN FISH AND SEAFOOD CANNERY SECTOR

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## INTRODUCTION

After the development of the European Reference Tool for Professional Qualifications in the fish and seafood cannery sector – whose purpose has been to define the qualifications of the sector, corresponding to two key professional profiles (*fish canning operator* and *seamer mechanic*), and their relative references in VET systems and EQF - the following step has been represented by an external validation of the Tool, carried out by groups of experts (“Validation Groups”) who represent its final users.

According with the project’s directives and guidelines indications, each partner’s Validation Group should have gathered all the potential stakeholders of Fish and Seafood Cannery Sector, such as:

- training providers and professionals of the vocational and educational training system;
- representatives of entrepreneurs associations;
- representatives of Trade Unions;
- members of qualifications bodies;
- representatives of public authorities/bodies;
- managers and human resources technicians of companies of the sector.

These Groups should have made by 6 to 8 experts with the aim of working and meeting to give their opinions, comments and suggestions toward the European Reference Tool.

To better analyse and evaluate the Tool, each member of the Validation Group could have been in charge of the assessment and validation of one or more sections of it, with the support of a pre-defined form where to indicate their comments, opinions and suggestions.

After having received a copy of the Tool, or a translation of it, each expert should have assess his/her part of the Tool, giving precise answers and opinions to each section and proper comments or suggestions to eventually change something in the Tool.

Finally, at least one meeting of the whole Validation Group should have been held in each partner country: at the end of the single experts' interventions the local coordinator should have resumed the principal comments and suggestions and started a debate on the conclusions.

The plenary session would allow the experts to discuss together and to be confronted with each others about the main aspects and elements of the Tool, the qualifications assets and the learning paths and outcomes defined.

At the end, from the general discussion and comparison of ideas of the Validation Groups – which represent an added value to the evaluation work - it was possible to extract and draw out important recommendations on the Tool that were reported in each WP5 National Report and now are included in this WP5 European Report.

The following and final step foresees the communication of these proposals and recommendations to the WP4 coordinator to eventually modify the European Reference Tool (ERT).

The differences, and sometimes the contradictions, existent among all the experts must be brought back to the different national and local contexts and to the different reality of the companies.

## **1. Methodology used**

In Italy, Finland and Spain, the external validation has been carried out, in a quite similar way, by Validation Groups whose participants had the profile requested by the project: representatives of education (University) and training sector, of entrepreneurs associations and Trade Unions, members of qualification or certification bodies, entrepreneurs.

The Validation Groups were made by 6 (Italy and Finland) and 7 (Spain) persons: all the experts invited to the meeting had previously received a translation of the ERT together with the form to fulfill. In all the cases each expert was responsible of the assessment and validation of all the sections of the Tool and during the plenary meeting - held respectively in Palermo,

Seinajoki and Madrid – answered in common to all the questions. Finally a debate was opened about the different way of disseminations of the ERT and the possibility of production of the training path. In Finland the experts who were absent to the meeting were interviewed.

In Portugal and in Greece it was not possible to gather the experts together in a plenary meeting in order to share comments and opinions because of their dislocation.

Greek partner used a contact list - elaborated since the beginning of the project - with 115 representatives of the project's target group (training entities, chambers of industry, entrepreneurship centres, and canning seafood industries): the ERT and the evaluation questionnaire were sent to the experts and some of them provided their precious feedback.

Totally, six questionnaires were gathered from representatives of local entrepreneurs organization, Trade Unions, enterprises and training sector: all the questionnaires have been resumed in a unique document. More other experts contacted them by phone and told them that they appreciate the product and believe it could be a useful tool they would like to use.

A similar situation was for the Portuguese partner. They involved representatives from national entrepreneurial organizations, private companies, University, training sector, and organized – for the experts of the region – a plenary meeting, while had single or phone contacts for the others from other part of the nation. The results obtained through the fulfillment of the 7 questionnaires were resumed within a unique one.

## **2. Usefulness of the Tool**

According with the comments of the experts in each country, it emerges that the ERT has been considered as an extremely precious and important instrument, precise, detailed, well structured, easy to use and useful as a common reference of qualification recognized in a European Framework.

When in the future the National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) and European Qualification Framework (EQF) will be implemented all over the European Union, the ERT could allow:

- a standardization and an official acknowledgment of the qualifications;
- a better definition of each professional profile and relative competences;
- a clarification of the activities to be developed, in a common language between different countries;
- an increase of the mobility of workers, inside and outside the European Union (e.g. from Finland to Norway);
- a good intersection between supply and demand in the labour market;
- a good example for the implementation of the Tool also in other sectors.

However, the Portuguese Validation Group emphasized also some disadvantages that were pointed out: the utilization of the Tool could probably contribute to highlight the discrepancy of benefits within comparable functions along the different countries in Europe, thus limiting its use, as promoter of mobility, in areas where salaries and benefits are low.

The Spanish Validation Group discussed on the opportunity to include a legal framework in the introduction, which means a reference to the European Qualification Framework, because the structure used is according the structure that the EQF gives. Moreover, it was also proposed to include the name of the companies representing the sector, the associations, bodies and organizations which participated in the project, in order to provide more reliability and solvency to the Tool.

The ***structure identified for the professional qualifications*** was considered correct, clear, complete, appropriate and useful to identify mansions and capacities the profile should have and create the general picture of qualifications: it provides the possibility of an accurate segmentation of all the Key activities and of the all knowledge, skills and competences required by the professional profiles. This kind of structure could help also those ones who do not work in the fish cannery sector (for example careers advisers, officers in employment offices, etc.) to better understand qualification in the sector.

Again, the Spanish Validation Group proposed to include the training in the scheme in order to clarify even more the structure of the ERT, and also to fill the structure with the names of the units of competences and key activities at the beginning of the definition of each qualification.

### 3. Fish canning operator

As for the *Fish canning operator* the experts agreed on its definition and on the possible final occupations he could lead. The only occupation not compatible – in according to the Italian Validation Group - with the figure of the canning operator could be the "***Quality controller***": his competences and knowledge should be more specific and detailed than the ones identified for the canning operator.

The Spanish validation Group suggested to give - in the general description of the qualification - references to the European Regulation concerning HACCP, food safety, traceability, food handling, labour risk prevention, etc., as the European regulation is the base of the national regulations.

Certainly we have to remember that in most company (in Finland, Greece and Italy) the operators are multitasking and that it could be very difficult to address them to only one qualification.

### 3.1 Competence Units

Generally speaking the two Competence Units recognized for this figure seemed to be well-structured, appropriate and complete to identify the occupations and relative qualifications to be get by the profile, according to the production process, and to meet the needs of the labour market. They do not consider to add some other CU because they would make the training program confuse and heavier.

The Spanish Validation Group suggested to include a description of each competence unit before listing all the key activities. Competence unit should be described according to all stages or tasks which are covered by it.

It was also recommended to name them in a way that fully represents all the key activities included in it and that summarize all their contents.

For example, Competence Unit 1 was suggested to be called as "*Preparation of fish and seafood for industrial use according to the quality and food safety rules*".

Moreover, the Portuguese Validation Group and in particular some experts from companies, pointed that the knowledge required in CU2 could be complemented with information about allergens and legal issues.

### 3.2 Key activities

Generally speaking also the Key activities defined in the ERT were considered realistic, adequate, clear and well structured and correspondent to the actual activities developed – or that should be developed - by the *Fish canning operator*.

Only some comments were made:

**K1:** it should be more logical to describe cleaning and maintenance of work equipments (1.1c) and personal hygienic practices (1.1a, 1.1b, 1.2a, 1.2b, 1.4a) in their own parts – VG Finland;

**K5:** name should be changed from “Prepare fish and seafood for cooking and subsequent cooling” to “Conditioning fish and seafood for cooking and subsequent cooling” – VG Spain;

**K6:** name should be changed from “Perform the collection, treatment and disposal of wastes” to “Perform the collection and the delivery of wastes”: according to the opinion of the experts, *treatment and disposal* of wastes do not pertain to this kind of operator – VG Italy.

Moreover it was pointed out – by the Spanish VG - the need of including in the ERT the **K7** of the Spanish WP4 report “Take protective measures to ensure safety in work situations of their competence”. Safety at work issues should be included in this professional qualification.

### **3.3 Knowledge, skills and competences**

Apart from the Greek VG which defined knowledge, skills and competences sufficient, appropriate, well analyzed, although in their opinion it would be necessary to complete them with practical matters and work placement – the discussion on this item took different comments and suggestions, sometimes contradictory.

The Portuguese VG examined knowledge, skills and competences considering them in a different way, according to the size of the cannery company considered: if the company is small, the same person will be in charge of many tasks, and therefore the degree of knowledge in each one of them will be lower than the one of a person who is responsible for a smaller amount of task. Therefore, bigger companies pointed out that some learning outcomes could be more detailed, whereas others claimed they were too much detailed.

An example is the performing of pre-treatments, namely the preparation of sauces: some answers reported that, since the value of the final product is strongly dependent on the originality of the product, this item requires a

large knowledge on different types of recipes and therefore the learning outcomes for this key activity could go deep and be more detailed.

Moreover, having in mind that the domain “Skills” is described in EOF as the capacity to apply knowledge and use acquired resources to conclude tasks and solve problems (Recommendation 2008/C111/01/CE from the European Parliament), some skills, such as **1.4.a** in **CU1** were considered as not being correctly adopted.

The Italian and Spanish VGs agree to the fact that the operator should not act in an “autonomous way” but according to rules, regulations, instructions, avoiding subjective concepts, mostly when the knowledge or competences are too much complex and specific.

Spanish VG also suggested that all the qualitative adjectives should be avoided, such as “appropriate”, “correctly”, etc. (some examples are: “Apply the *appropriate* techniques of personal hygiene, daily and whenever necessary”, “Run manually or monitor the automated process of size grading of fish products, checking that it is done *correctly* and using suitable machinery”).

In particular the Italian VG experts suggested some possible changes in:

**UC1 - Competence 1.5:** they affirm it is not really correct that the operator “review compliance with existing legislation on food hygiene” in an “*autonomous way*” but according to the regulation.

**UC1 - Competence 2.2:** delete the last sentence “...collecting samples for laboratory analysis”: it seems too much for an operator.

**UC1 – Skill 4.2.a:** not “*Elaboration* of dried salting, pickles, liquid medium, oil, according to the established formulation” – too much specific - but maybe “*Execution of the procedure for...*”.

**UC1 - Competence 6.1:** delete the last paragraph: “Verify that the different stages of handling of waste follow the provisions of procedure manuals”.

**UC2 – Skill 1.1:** (last paragraph) “Notify the maintenance service or correct *any* detected breakdown...”: it is almost impossible that the operator could correct “any” detected breakdown.

**UC2 – Skill 1.3.d:** “Check that the cleaning process is performed in the manner and with the promptness required”: delete it because the check of the cleaning process do not pertain to the operator but to a HACCP operator.

### **3.4 The training path**

The training path recommended for the fish canning operator was considered complete, sufficient to cover all the important issues and efficient: the contents specified include all the matters and information the operator should have to carry out his job.

- ***Hours, modules, contents***

While Spain and Greece agree with the number of hours foreseen and with the necessary previous education to access to the training, Italy and Portugal consider hours, modules and contents adequate as long as either the previous necessary conditions, or the qualification level are modified.

Italian experts think that the previous education necessary to access to this kind of training is, at least, the secondary school (someone suggested also the compulsory school – 10 years of school).

According to Portuguese VG experts, the qualification for fish canning operator, as described, should not correspond to a 3<sup>rd</sup> level, because this level of qualification obliges to possess 12 years of school. Since the general report mentions “Primary school” as the necessary previous education, the qualification should be of 2<sup>nd</sup> level (corresponding to 9 years of obligatory school): otherwise the previous necessary conditions should be modified.

As for modules and contents Spain suggest to include a reference to the EU regulations, which affect the agro-food industry, and to show the summary of

the modules in the same way as in the seamer mechanic: with a table. Contents could be more disaggregated and described in a deeper way to make the training more readable and more understandable. In particular, in **LM2**, they propose to include contents related to the packaging machines (description) and how to operate them, and the first line maintenance of these specific machines. It is proposed also to include the traceability in the training contents.

Greek experts suggested to add the use of ICT and to give more emphasis on practical training – also raising the number of hours - while the Italian VG ask for specifying if the practical subjects will be treated inside a cannery firm – with a sort of work placement – or in a laboratory room.

- ***Independence of modules***

Even if all the experts from the VGs agree on the possibility of achieving recognition of Competence Units (also of only one of them) through labour training, they gave different comments and suggestions on the way of recognize them and on the duration of the labour training.

Italian experts think it is possible to recognize also one of the CU but only if relative knowledge, skills and competences are proved and certified: for example by an entrance test. On the contrary, they consider the minimal duration of 6 months, foreseen to obtain Competence Units through labour training, not sufficient: also on the base of the comments and results of the discussion group of the last WP, they suggested at least 1 year and half.

The Spanish experts agree on the duration of the labour experience to have a possibility of recognition of competence units, but nevertheless mentioned that in Spain there is a Royal Decree that establishes that the minimum duration of the labour experience required for the accreditation of qualifications is three years or 2.000 hours.

Also Portuguese VG think it is possible and important to recognize CU through a process of recognition of professional skills (RVC-PRO): it will be important to also consider the training acquired in the workplace, so that a

candidate with relevant work experience (it was not determined an exact period of time) could see its competences recognized without the necessity to go through a process of formal training. However, according to company experts, the large majority of the operators has knowledge in some parts of a CU, but not in all of its aspects.

Greek experts consider this recognition absolutely possible, first of all because the division of work in the industries is highly specialized. Of course the recognition should depend on the level of experience, on the kind of work and job position and the level of knowledge, skills and competences must be proved and assessed.

- ***Qualification level***

As for the qualification level the opinions of the experts are completely different: if the Spanish experts declared that it is adequate, the Portuguese ones affirmed it should be raised, according to what declared before, while the Italian ones thought it seems too low<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4. Seamer Mechanic**

Not particular comments were made about the general profile and occupation of the *Seamer mechanic*, apart from the Finnish experts who declared it was difficult to evaluate this qualification reference because in Finland this kind of occupation lacks.

As for the Italian VGs, soon some perplexities aroused about the profile identified. According to the experts' opinion, the possible occupations are proper and correct but the figure identified seemed to be more a maintainer inside a big enterprise or a specialized technician in charge of the maintenance in different firms than a fish cannery operator of a medium-size enterprise. As a matter of facts they affirm that, in this way, it could be

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<sup>1</sup> In Italy the National Qualification Framework (NQF) is still not implemented

possible to add among the final possible occupations, the one of the “maintainer” of different industries.

Also the Spanish experts discussed about the level of maintenance that this professional profile should do in this job position, just in order to not be confused with a general mechanic or electrician, out of the agro-food industry) and they concluded that it can be a first line maintenance.

They also highlighted the fact that the seamer mechanic is an occupation with a lot of demand in the labour market, within the agro-food industry, and that the elaboration of this qualification will be a success.

#### **4.1 Competence Units**

Generally speaking the CU indicated in the ERT for the Seamer mechanic were found adequate, exhaustively defined, appropriate and sufficient to cover the possible formal requirements of the professional qualification.

Finnish experts opinion was that the so defined CU is very general and it could be the same also in other industries even of other sectors or branches. But no other ideas or suggestions were proposed.

One of the expert of the Spanish VG proposed to identify two Competence Units and to elaborate one of them with the maintenance of the seamer equipment. Moreover it was also proposed to change the name of the existent CU in “Tuning, preparation, repair and maintenance of the seamer equipment”.

#### **4.2 Key activities**

Also in this case almost all the experts found the Key activities correct, well identified, correspondent to the actual activities and real tasks of the profile.

The Spanish VG proposed to avoid words like “correct”, “proper”, etc. according to the experience in the elaboration of the qualifications in the Spanish National Qualification System.

Some of the Greek experts suggested to introduce also the use of internet and some elements about the familiarity with technical equipment terminology in English-Greek.

### **4.3 Knowledge, skills and competences**

Although almost all the experts expressed their appreciation about the very well defined training path and its high level technical aspects, some suggestions came out from the discussions. Finnish experts pointed out that this profile seems to need a broadly-based training from the field of engineering and, besides formal training, a long work experience.

Some of them suggested to include knowledge about: ICT issues - as this kind of equipments have a part of programming with a computer; the use of Internet for a continuous updating of the workers on new technologies; the automated systems; the existence of tests of integrity; technical aspects concerning the cans.

In particular the Portuguese experts mentioned that the proposed training path seems not really adequate with regards the can: although some related items are mentioned in Key activity 1, other information is missing, such as the different can materials, safety seaming – detailed parameters/tolerances and adaptation according to can shapes.

Last, the experts from the Italian VG suggested two little changes in:

**K2 – Skill 2.d:** foresee also the “replacement” of the elements beyond the “Repair”;

**K3 – Competence 3.a:** better to consider to make to make inspections in terms not of “quality” but of “efficiency”.

#### 4.4 *The Training path*

The Training path recommended has been judged really appropriate and well structured: experts congratulated with the working team for the articulate and complete structure of it.

Moreover, some of the training providers (from Spain) mentioned the difficulty to find a trainer, for the Seamer mechanic courses, with the required qualifications: so they considered the elaboration of the qualification of this professional profile. really important and necessary

- ***Hours, modules, contents***

Modules and contents were considered appropriate and well chosen and, in general, sufficient for obtaining the qualification of Seamer Mechanic. Nevertheless comments and suggestions about the number of hours the structure and the contents of the modules were different and various: first of all concerning the indication of the previous education necessary to access to the training.

Italian and Spanish experts noticed that a definition about this aspect is missing. The Italian VG observed that this kind of training seems to be addressed to learners who have obtained a diploma of a technical high school: in this case it could be possible – in their opinion – to move 50 hours from **LM1** to **LM4**, to better treat matters such as timing, planning and re-provisioning.

If, on the contrary, the training is addressed to learners who have finished the compulsory education (15 years old), they think it could be useful to add at least 50 hours to LM1 to give a better general knowledge of the matters.

Concerning the duration of the training – according to the Spanish experts - the number of hours was considered too much. It was proposed to reduce the **LM3**, in order to not give training more consistent with the profile of a

general mechanic than of a seamer mechanic. Even it was proposed to summarize some of the contents of **LM3** in the **LM2**.

Other comments made about modules and contest were about the lack of: a detailed description about the practical subjects to be trained; some training contents about the “labour risk prevention” (in correspondence with the **K4 Apply protective measures to ensure safety in workplace**); more technical skills such as the ones about the automated systems; computer contents and the use of Internet.

The Portuguese VG suggested to extend the recommended training path in order to incorporate the above mentioned issues about the technical aspects.

- ***Independence of modules***

For the possibility – for the Seamer Mechanic - to achieve recognition of the Unit of Competence through labour training, the Italian experts expressed their doubts: according with them the training foreseen is very specific and well structured and so very qualifying. In the case of a labour training, without a specific theoretical preparation, the theoretic bases and specific aspects will lack! Also in this case of course, the minimal duration of 6 months, foreseen to obtain Units of Competences through labour training, was considered not sufficient: they suggested at least 1 year and half.

The Greek experts gave different comments: some of them declared the certification as not essential or obligatory: of course knowledge, skills and competences should be proved and validated by tests, job interviews or observation on the job. Other experts expressed the same “Italian” doubt: of course work experience must be taken into consideration but, since the work is highly specialized, it can not represent a whole CU but probably a part of it.

Spanish and Portuguese experts agreed on the opportunity to be given to the ones who have large experience within this activity, although correctly evaluated, and agreed on the length of the labour training (remember the

Spanish Royal Decree that establishes the minimum duration of labour experience in three years or 2000 hours).

- ***Qualification level***

Different opinions of the experts were expressed also about the qualification level: if for Spanish experts it seemed correct and the Italian experts suggested a 5<sup>th</sup> level for this kind of qualification<sup>2</sup>, according to the Portuguese experts' opinion, the qualification of the seamer mechanic as described resulted too high.

In Portugal, a 4<sup>th</sup> level of qualification obliges to possess 12 years of school and a certificate of professional training. Since the general report does not mention this necessary previous education, the qualification should be of 2<sup>nd</sup> level (corresponding to 9 years of obligatory school). Besides, the obligatory school necessary to entry in certain training courses designed for adults is directly related with candidate's age (because of the growing number of years along time). However, if we are talking about training only for youths up to 23 years, it's assumed that they have a minimal education of 6 years (2nd cycle of basic education) and training, that will be of dual certification, will enable them the professional qualification and the respective scholar equivalence. But the seamer mechanic qualification is also intended to adult population or without compulsory schooling, that will follow different trajectories depending on whether the formation will be or not of dual certification.

## 5. Conclusions

Generally speaking, the opinions of the experts of the different partners countries about the ERT are really positive and satisfactory.

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<sup>2</sup> Remember that in Italy NOF is still not implemented

The Tool has been judged well structured, well developed and successful. The work carried out by partners and coordinators has been evaluated as very precise, interesting and remarkable in relation to the aims of the Tool and the project itself: the recognition of the European professional qualifications in the sector, the comparison and intensification of the training paths existent in the partners' countries; the promotion of mobility of workers and of competitiveness of the companies.

Just in relation to these aims, we want here to mention only few last recommendations.

Two of them, for both professional profiles, were presented by the Portuguese VG: one concerning the domain "*Knowledge*" and the other for the domain "*Competences*".

Regarding the former, it was suggested to classify the necessary knowledge as *basic, fundamental, profound and specialized*. In the later it was considered as missing the reference to the responsibility (the responsibility for its own actions and the responsibility for other persons) and the absence of the degree of autonomy.

Finally, Spanish experts suggested to include in a table information about the official training existent in each country: it would allow workers to find in the Tool the kind of information they needs to eventually follow training in another partner country, and to make it comparable with the one in the own country.

This kind of instrument would motivate and increase the mobility of workers and improve their work opportunities.