



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



The changing roles of qualifications in governing the labour market

Thessaloniki, 27-28 September 2012



Working Group 2

International qualifications





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Chair & introductory speech, *Loukas Zahilas, Cedefop*

- **International qualifications and the EQF developments**, *Jeff Bridgford, King's College London, UK*
- **International qualifications and ESCO**, *Tormod Skjerve, Norway*
- Sector 1: **Welding**, *Luisa Coutinho, EWF, Portugal*
- Sector 3: **Agriculture**, *Andre Huigens, Wellantcollege, The Netherlands*

Open discussion

Rapporteur: *Vidmantas Tutlys, Lithuania*



Analysing qualifications

By the term qualification we refer to learning outcomes which have been assessed and validated and found to comply (recognised) to agreed standards by an authorised body (use the exact wording of the definition).

The definition is important as it helps to identify the key building blocks of a qualification

- Learning outcomes
- Assessment
- Standards
- Recognition by an authorised body

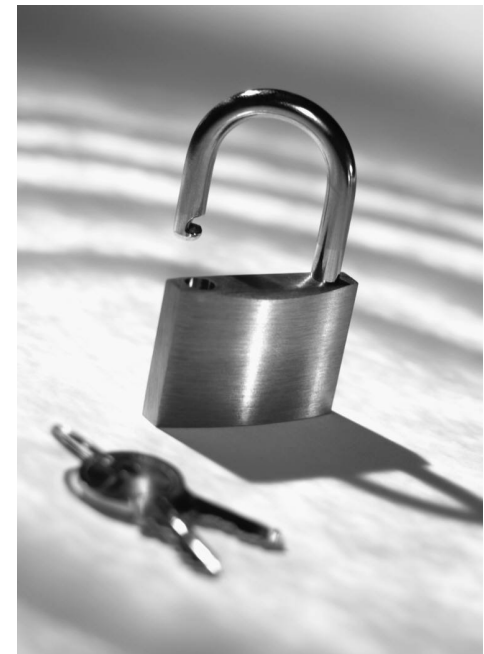




Keeping it open

This combination of elements gives a certificate or diploma its 'exchange value' and currency in the labour market or in education and training systems (and of course in society at large).

The EQF definition deliberately keeps the term 'authorised body' open. This reflects that even in existing national systems a wide variety of bodies may award a qualification on behalf of state authorities. The openness of the definition also reflects the existence of qualification awarded outside the state, by private bodies and/or at national level.



Challenges

- Able to signal their profile and level precisely to be understood across national and sectoral borders;
- Demonstrate that assessment procedures applied are reliable and valid. Quality standards in this area (see ISO 17024) reflect this need for transparent and trustworthy procedures and processes;
- They must be based on standards reflecting relevant stakeholders' needs;
- Formal recognition will potentially draw various sources of legitimacy (international law, market position and power);
- A wide range of public and private bodies, international organisations, sectoral bodies and associations as well as private companies.

Objective of the analysis

The purpose of the work on international qualifications is to:

- To develop a conceptual framework which can help us to identify and classify non-state and international qualifications
- To establish a basis for a better understanding the function and value of these qualifications
- To provide concrete examples (cases) of international and non-state qualifications



EQF - ESCO

Supports two European initiatives:

- EQF; While the link to international qualifications is indicated in the 2008 recommendation, these qualifications have still to be covered in a systematic way.
- ESCO; The qualifications-part of this work will have to cover international and non-state qualifications types and terms.

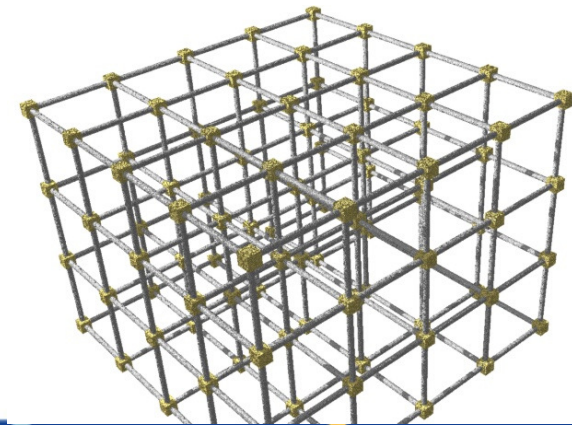
National education and training systems are being transformed by internationalisation and globalisation. International qualifications do not respond to a single set of standards and quality assurance mechanisms; their diversity means that their exchange value varies dramatically and can in some cases be difficult to judge for individuals and employers. Cedefop's efforts to clarify concepts and initiate a mapping can help to strengthen transparency in this field.



Elements of international qualifications

Five broad differentiating elements according to:

- purpose – what is the qualification for;
- type – how complete and which is the duration of the qualification;
- coverage – where is the qualification used (geographical dimension);
- competent body – which body awards the qualification;
- currency – what can the qualification be exchanged into.



Purpose – What the qualification is for

The work in ESCO showed that apart from traditional national qualifications, a high number of other qualifications existed with the following main purposes:

- qualifications awarded at national level but regulated at European and international levels, for example medical doctors and ship's navigators;
- qualifications linked to specific tasks and technologies, for example specifying expected learning outcomes for welders and users of ICT software;
- qualifications linked to occupations and professions, for example specifying required levels of knowledge, skills and competence for pilots and truck drivers.

Type – How complete and how durable the qualification is

The following main distinctions can be made:

- partial qualifications which can be combined as building blocks towards a full, initial qualification;
- partial qualifications building on a full, initial qualification and signalling that successful specialisation and/or renewal has taken place;
- stand-alone qualifications linked to a particular task, technology or occupation with no particular relation to any initial education or training sequence or full qualification.

Type – How complete and how durable the qualification is

We can also distinguish types of qualifications according to duration and lifespan.

In ICT, for example, lifespan of a certification varies. Some certificates provide recertification paths to allow regular updating of the latest technological developments. In this way many certificates become 'outdated'.

In most cases, upgrade paths, which allow candidates to earn certification with fewer exams, are offered to holders of previous version certificates.

Coverage – Where the qualification can be used

While many qualifications are awarded at international level, their actual coverage and validity differs substantially.

Qualifications awarded by the International Maritime Organisation have global coverage, supported by the UN.

Welding certificates have a coverage limited to member countries of the international Welding organisation.

Competent body – Who awards the qualification

We can distinguish the following main categories of awarding bodies:

- international level, such as international transport organisations or authorities;
- EU bodies, agencies and foundations promoting mainly common European standards of safety and environmental protection such as the European Aviation Safety Agency;
- European and international sectoral organisations, associations, social partners organisations, federations and institutes promoting common sectoral reference standards at European level;
- multinational companies, networks and associations focusing mainly on particular professional needs linked to international technologies and specialised markets.

Currency value – What the qualification can be exchanged into

The trust required for a strong currency depends on factors like:

- what kind of information is provided by the qualification in question; what we know about the learning process; what we know about use of learning outcomes, etc.;
- what kind of quality assurance is carried out; how explicit and transparent the processes are; whether international norms are involved (for example ISO 17024 or similar);
- what we know about the assessment process; who assesses and how transparent this process is;
- what we know of use of standards; whether these standards are explicit and visible and correspond to real needs;
- whether qualifications (standards) are updated.

Still way ahead

Future work lies at the crossroads of transparency and quality. Overall relevance of international qualifications requires that they are trusted by potential users. This can only be achieved by systematically creating an overview of what exists and emerges, and by systematically addressing the need for accountability and openness regarding the process leading to a particular qualification.

International and national qualifications are both value papers which require trust if they are to fulfil their roles in the labour market and society. Without this trust they will fail and in the worst case mislead individuals and employers.

Cedefop will continue work on international qualifications to address transparency and quality. This work will take place in the context of ESCO and EQF but will also seek to create an independent and trustworthy review and understanding of developments.



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Which are the necessary data-categories when developing an overview of what exists and emerges in the area of international qualifications?

- Which are the quality issues related to the accountability and openness of the processes leading to international qualifications?
- There is a strong relation between the type of international qualification and the sector, occupation or profession it relates to. Which can be the role of sectors in promoting the required trust and the labour market value?