



**2nd Cedefop workshop on
“Testing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)”
Brussels 5-6 November 2009**

Conclusions

The aim of this workshop was to build on the results of the 1st workshop (Thessaloniki 11-12 November 2008) and continue the follow up and analysis of the test and pilot projects. The ultimate goal was to strengthen our common basis for understanding learning outcomes developments and sectoral dynamics so as to offer important feedback to the ongoing work at projects level and support the Commission to face the challenges involved in the future implementation of the EQF at European, national and sectoral level.

The event, combining plenary and workshop sessions, brought together experts and project promoters of 24 selected ongoing EQF/Sectoral LdV pilot projects (2006, 2007 and 2008 calls) as well as experts from Cedefop and the Commission. These projects covered a wide range of issues and stakeholders, notably national authorities (ministries and qualifications authorities) sectors (including international trade, food, automobile, agriculture, construction industry, aquaculture and maritime, marketing and financial services, health and home care) as well as social partners, non-governmental organisations, etc. There was also a detailed focus on recent developments in the social care sector.

The sectoral dimension is substantial in the EQF test and pilot projects. This tendency reflects the fact that qualifications are not exclusively awarded by public,

national authorities, but also by industry sectors, multi-national companies, single enterprises and professions.

A first session was organised to deal with the issues of particular relevance to projects working at sector level. This session allowed project promoters and experts, based on their initial or advanced findings, to exchange information and experiences and contribute to the discussion on the following issues:

1. How can sectoral qualifications frameworks relate to the EQF or to a national qualifications system or framework? Which are the requirements, procedures and obstacles in such a process from a political and a technical point of view?
2. Which are the problems if a sectoral framework/qualifications were to be part of more than one national systems/ frameworks, how should it be included in the referencing of all relevant national frameworks?
3. For sectoral frameworks, not belonging to national systems/ frameworks, which should be the referencing procedure? Is there a credible and functional body that can play the same role for sectoral frameworks of this type that the competent public authorities play in the case of national frameworks? Which is the role of quality assurance in the sectoral approaches? Who can finally speak on behalf of the sectors and which are the prerequisites for establishing a sectoral zone of quality assurance, trust and transparency?

A second session was organised to address the way the learning outcomes approaches is being used for referencing to the EQF and for developing National Qualifications Frameworks. All stakeholders involved in the work agreed that priority has to be given to systematic exchange of experiences strengthening the basis for analytical work and for development of practical solutions. The session dealt with the following questions:

1. How can learning outcomes be used for describing qualifications levels in NQFs?

2. How can learning outcomes be used for defining and describing single, specific qualifications?
3. How can we apply the principle of 'Best fit' when referring national qualifications levels to the EQF?

The following conclusions were drawn from the parallel sessions that addressed these questions:

- The referencing exercise still raises many questions when it is applied at sectoral level. This reflects the fact that different approaches and models have been chosen, in many cases requiring further testing. There is agreement that the quality of these processes, the extent to which they are transparent and generate trust, is of critical importance for sectors or companies operating outside the formal, national education and training systems.
- We can witness a clustering of sectors sharing common problems, approaches and mechanisms. We observe sectoral frameworks based on competence (e.g. automotive and financial) and sectoral frameworks based on qualifications (e.g. construction and personal services). In the case of competence frameworks projects describe learning outcomes in terms of performance expectations on the part of the employers with regards to the employee's contextualized abilities to act (whereas qualification frameworks describe learning outcomes providing evidence of the individual's capacity to meet these expectations). Nonetheless, on one side, from a sectoral perspective the focus on competences is evident also in frameworks mostly oriented to qualifications and on the other side, competence-based frameworks also take into account learning outcomes expressed in term of knowledge, skills and competences for referencing purposes.
- In a number of projects, sectors initially develop sectoral level descriptors using the EQF levels and descriptors and then in a following step they try to

establish and strengthen relations with the national qualifications authorities/ systems. The diversity in sectoral approaches and qualifications arrangements is linked to the specificities of the sectors.

- The development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks will support the pilot's ideas, as it will provide more practical evidence and will allow more reliable conclusions on the inclusiveness of all types of qualifications, especially those that exist outside formal systems.
- Once again the need to keep building zones of mutual trust and the necessity to keep working together was emphasized. The projects experiences and sectors represented showed the gradual development of a culture of cooperation, and an increased level of maturity (due to follow up projects in many cases) that can definitely support the whole EQF/NQF implementation at sectoral level. However, it was confirmed once again that the common language is still missing in the sense that the work on terminology should be continued and taken forward based on the existing work at European level but also on the experiences from the use of terms and glossaries produced from the projects.
- The learning outcomes approach has been tested in different ways across projects and mainly when developing qualifications frameworks, qualifications profiles, curricula, accreditation and assessment procedures, quality assurance processes and for validating non formal and informal learning. Although projects confirm the need to use learning outcomes for referencing purposes we can still observe that referencing methods in some cases are based on the use of broad descriptors derived from professional tasks, duties and expectations (automotive sector) and not necessarily encompassing all the EQF categories.
- There is a need for setting out practical guidelines and methodologies to guarantee the quality and transparency of the referencing and evaluation of

learning outcomes processes as in many cases quality assurance is only superficially taken into account or does not directly pertain the referencing step. In order to raise the value and trust in sectoral qualifications it is essential that implicit quality assurance will need to be made more transparent.

The way forward

We should continue to systematically draw on the results and recommendations of the test and pilot projects as there is a clear gain in terms of transparency, comparability and mutual trust. Extensive cooperation is necessary for ensuring ownership and involvement of all stakeholders concerned in the processes especially during the process of developing inclusive NQFs.

Cedefop will continue to provide practical help to stakeholders through its role in the EQF Advisory Group and its thematic subgroups by analysing the results of EQF pilot and testing projects, by filling knowledge gaps through comparative studies and synthesis reports and by working on a common template for describing all types of qualifications.