

Ján Figel'—Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth

Valuing Learning through the European Qualifications Framework

Presidency conference "Valuing Learning"

Lisbon, 26 November 2007

Check against delivery

Dear Minister Lurdes Rodrigues,
Members of the European Parliament,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should first express my thanks to the Portuguese Presidency for offering us the opportunity to launch the European Qualifications Framework today. The EQF responds to a demand which dates back to the European Council Lisbon in 2000. So it is appropriate that we are back in Lisbon to see the EQF actually see the light of day.

The EQF is part of our lifelong learning framework, so "valuing learning" - however and wherever it is acquired - is one of its key objectives. Today's conference will provide useful input to the implementation of the EQF, as it explores the various issues related to validation.

1 Wider significance of EQF

There are two main reasons why I think that the launch of the EQF is a landmark event for education and training in Europe:

- The first is the special nature of the EQF itself, and of the ways it is designed to work;
- The second is the wider changes in the world of learning that are signalled by its acceptance across Europe.

The EQF is unique in being the first international framework which covers the entire scope of qualifications: higher education, vocational training, adult education, as well as general education. It frames together results of the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes.

2 Thanks

But before I go on, I would like to recognise all the people and organisations whose work and commitment made the EQF possible. It's a long list and I can see that some of them are here today.

The development of the EQF began only three years ago with the establishment of an expert group which also included social partners and stakeholders. I would like to thank the members of the group for their expertise, hard work and commitment. It was this group which really got the ball rolling. The group helped us to draw up a blueprint for the EQF which was the basis for our consultation stage.

This first draft was refined by a group of national experts who developed the core component of the EQF, the reference level descriptors. This particular piece of work was done in a very short period of time. I know this was an intensive and intellectually very demanding experience.

And of course, I am grateful to the European Parliament for the constructive and proactive engagement shown throughout the negotiations on the EQF. I believe that the Parliament, in concert with the Council, improved our original text; for example, by strengthening the text on quality assurance and credits. I am delighted that we have representatives from the Parliament here today. I would like to thank Mr Mantovani - the Parliament's rapporteur for the EQF - and Ms Castex, for their dedication in guiding the EQF to adoption.

Last but not least, I also wish to acknowledge the active support of the various Presidencies; most recently Portugal, but also the UK, Austria, Finland and Germany. They have all put the EQF high in their priorities, for which we are grateful.

3 Aims and functions of EQF

Ladies and Gentlemen:

What do we hope to achieve with the EQF?

This Recommendation goes to the heart of what the EU is about: mobility, cooperation between countries, promoting prosperity and helping individual citizens fulfil their potential through learning.

Beyond education and training, the framework is also consistent with efforts to build a genuine European labour market and to help Europe's citizens cope with change. Europeans are not mobile enough—geographically or occupationally. This is not very good news for the economic performance of Europe and its Member States. And it is not very good news for Europeans who

may deny the best opportunities open to them. The EQF is designed to make mobility easier and to promote lifelong learning. It will make qualifications more transparent and understandable between and within countries.

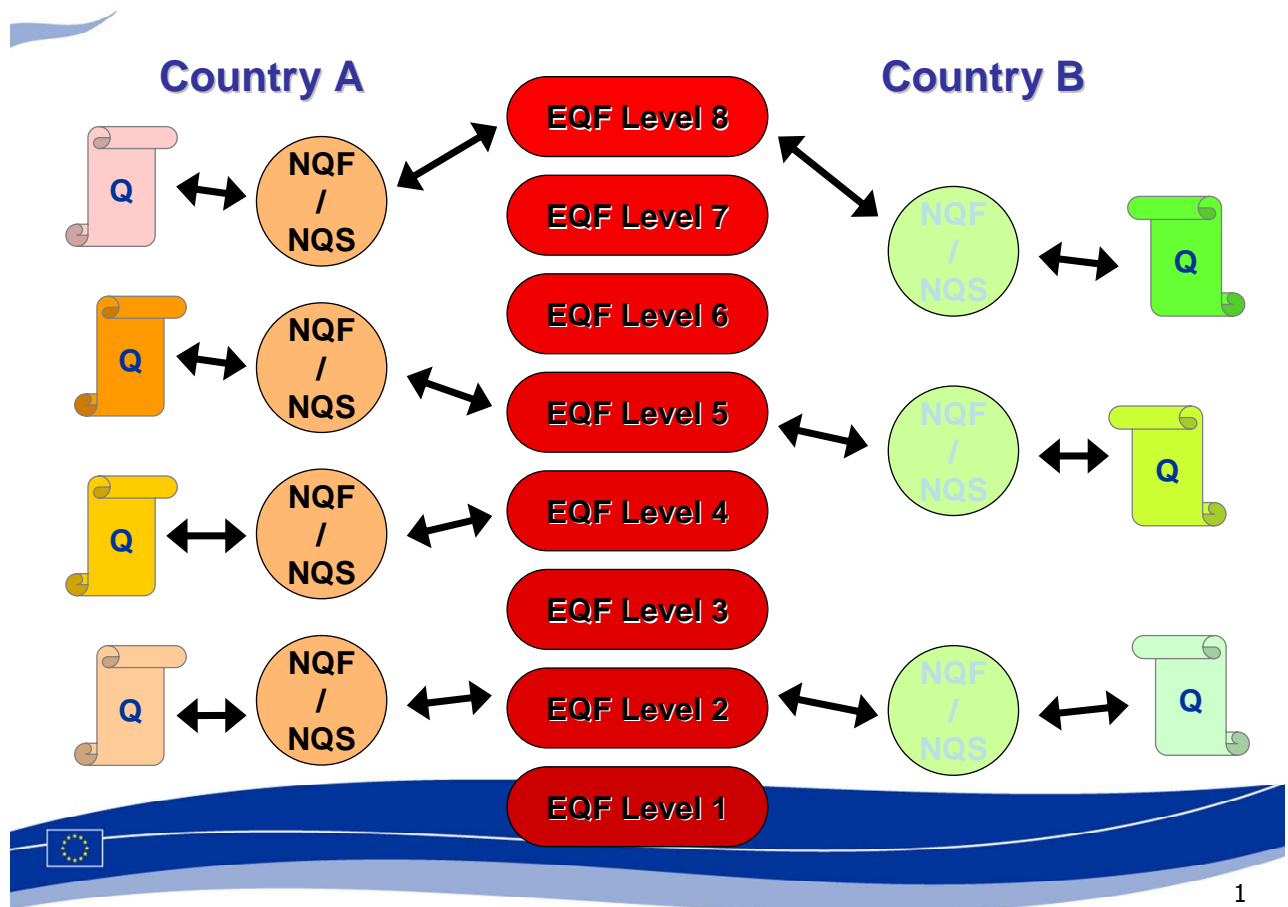
Behind the abstract translation device of the EQF lies the intention to meet an immediate need at the personal/citizen level: the need for mobility, to better equip oneself when moving to another country or undertaking further training. The EQF joins Europass, Ploteus, the Lifelong Learning programme and other instruments aimed at enhancing the transparency of systems or qualifications and the mobility of citizens.

The EQF uses a learning–outcomes approach, which is its hallmark feature. ‘Learning outcome’ means that the stress is on what people **know** and **can do** with their knowledge, rather than on where and how they got their diplomas. Only a learning–outcomes basis can enable an international framework to be a neutral reference. This principle allows countries to relate their levels of qualifications to the EQF with no reference to inputs such as duration of study.

A learning–outcomes basis is also important in comparing qualifications between the different sub–systems of education and training, such as higher education and vocational training. As a consequence, the EQF can promote integration and build pathways between these different sectors or learning systems.

Additionally, a learning–outcomes approach, implemented at the national level through national qualifications frameworks, allows education and training systems to capture skills and knowledge acquired outside the classroom or training centre - and thereby truly "value learning". If this validation of non–formal and informal learning is properly integrated into a qualifications system, it will open up qualifications to a broader range of users. For example, by certifying learners’ work experience and voluntary activities, EQF will enable them to gain acknowledgement for their prior learning. This will help people to progress smoothly within and between systems. In a truly lifelong learning system, individuals should be able to pursue their learning careers on the basis of their actual learning outcomes, not on the basis of the duration or location of their formal studies.

The learning–outcomes basis has been accepted as the basic principle of most national qualifications frameworks that are being developed across Europe. In my opinion, this represents a sea change for education and training. We can expect to see a fundamental transformation in our ideas about teaching and learning over the next few years.



4 Implementation

As a European tool, the EQF is already having an impact at the national level, where national qualifications are being developed with remarkable speed.

When we started work on the EQF in 2004, only 3 countries had national qualifications frameworks— the UK, Ireland and France. Malta has joined since then. And the hosting country – Portugal makes important decision this year. Now most of the EU countries are actively developing NQFs.

Countries' situation in relation to development of qualifications frameworks

This map represents the situation as of November 2007, which is in constant evolution. Most of the countries in red are considering the option of having a National Qualifications Framework but have not yet taken a decision.

Countries	NQF
AT	D
BE FR	D
BE NL	D
BG	D
CY	N
CZ	D
DE	D
DK	D
EE	D
EL	N
ES	D
FI	D
FR	Y
HR	D
HU	D
IE	Y



Countries	NQF
IS	N
IT	D
LI	N
LT	D
LU	D
LV	D
MT	Y
NL	D
NO	N
PL	N
PT	D
RO	N
SE	N
SI	D
SK	D
TR	D
UK	Y

Y	Country has framework
D	Country is developing framework
N	Country which has not yet taken a decision to have a framework

As we move to the formal implementation of the EQF, the Commission will play its part in supporting countries efforts. We are setting up the EQF Advisory Group and we already have pilot projects, with almost all Member States represented, to test the detailed technical issues.

The Commission will organise an operational launch conference in spring 2008, which will address the challenges of implementation and promote solutions and ideas in response to them, at both EU and national levels. We will invite national representatives, experts and the project promoters from the 2006 and 2007 Calls.

We are also preparing a communication strategy to promote the EQF. In spring next year we will make this material available to the countries and social partners to boost the profile of the EQF. Again, I ask for your co-operation in promoting the EQF and your own qualification frameworks in your countries to reach the standing they need to be really effective.

Ultimately, the success of the EQF will be determined by its take-up and use. It is really the Member States, the social partners and stakeholders who can make it a success. This emphasises my earlier point about the EQF being a common European reference developed in co-operation with the countries for their use. So because the EQF is voluntary, it requires the commitment of all to make it work.

And this is the best time to act. There is now a momentum behind the EQF. The great majority of countries recognise its potential for mobility and as a lifelong learning instrument. So I would ask you to ensure that everyone - officials, experts and stakeholders - work towards the 2010 deadline for linking the national frameworks to the European one. As people directly involved in the development of the EQF, you are well-placed to champion the European and national frameworks at home.

National coordination points in each country - referred to in the Recommendation - will guide these processes. I hope national authorities will ensure that they are set up as quickly as possible to carry out their functions and tasks.

In particular, the linking process has to be conducted in such a way that it is transparent, understandable to other countries, and readily accepted by them.

Mutual trust is at the core of the European Union. It is ultimately what makes it work. That trust is based on a history of honouring commitments to one other. The same is trust of the EQF. So we have to implement our Recommendation together by building strong national links to the EQF and so I know we can rely on you establishing the trust which is essential to its success and its impact on the citizens.

This will represent an important contribution to Europe of knowledge and Europe of citizens in order to value more our human potential. We should continue this road in the spirit of the Portuguese Presidency motto *Unidos aprendemos* (United we learn).

Thank you.