

Exploring the Challenges of Permeability: EQF-5 and Higher Levels (Higher Education and Higher VET)

9 –10 December 2019, MCAST, MALTA



This interactive conference will focus on constructing flexible learning pathways through Levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)



SUB-THEMES

As input for the conference in Malta, in this memo more attention for the role of the world of work and the impact of having the EQF, the international framework for qualifications.

'THE WORLD OF WORK' AND THE EQF

The EQF is central to the schedule that we want to discuss during the conference, amongst other issues. The qualifications in the three sectors ('pillars of the system') are linked to the EQF in a certain way. This does not happen in a direct procedure. In a country there may be an NQF, a national framework. The levels of the NQF are 'translated' to the levels of the EQF.

But it is in Malta about the international approach, which is why the EQF is used in the system to make it clear at what level a (national) qualification can be positioned.

This naturally raises a few questions, partly in combination with the way in which the business world should be taken into account when setting up such a system. They can be discussed in Malta with each other and then to determine their 'answers'. Here those questions, with brief explanations.

1. The EQF is therefore required. Is that useful?

It seems that in various situations both the person (student, learner) and the organisation that must 'value' this person on the basis of the training, see the need to know at what level a qualification has been achieved. That must be able to be determined independently.

Of course the provider is also important, but it is so - to cite an extreme example - that if an University offers in the private setting a course about basic IT competences, this qualification can't be placed at a minimum level of 5. And it is therefore not automatically 'higher education'. That is why a generally recognized framework is certainly useful.

The question is therefore whether the use of the EQF as a starting point contributes to the transparency of the entire international system, across all sectors?

2. Does it mean that each country must have an NQF?

Because the EQF is included in the proposed system, it is indirectly assumed that a country has an NQF, compatible with the EQF. This allows qualifications to be compared with each other, and not only in the international context within the same sector. But that is also possible throughout the sectors.

It can in any case be noted that agreements are being made by various countries in Europe about the mutual recognition of qualifications. Especially in higher education, given the system that applies to it. But in time it may be possible for the entire system.

The question is therefore whether each country has an NQF operating in this way and, if not, what can be done to encourage it?

3. An important stakeholder of the entire system is the business world, the labour market, the world of work. Do employers consider the level of a qualification important and, in which situations, is that the case?

It can be said that ultimately every qualification plays a role in finding, retaining and developing a job, a profession. That is possible as an independent entrepreneur, but often there is an employment contract involved, being an employee. Someone who obtains a qualification within the system as outlined for the conference can indicate the level at which the training is completed. That is useful for a company, as a starting point.

But it is also about training people, employees and others who play a role in an organization or company. This is a different situation, derived from the position that is already being performed. The training is tailored to this.

The question is therefore whether, in addition to a relevant programme with the required competence, the employer is increasingly asking for an interpretation of the level and, if so, what is the reason for this?

4. Work-Based Learning is a format that is growing in importance. It requires combining learning and working, to be further established in the cooperation between the business community and educational institutions. Is the EQF also important for this, so is the level relevant?

There are various formats for WBL in which the formal programme includes business courses, small programmes and training courses offered by professional bodies and other employers' organisations. This means that in this way qualifications that fall under BPT have been given a place in a formal programme.

On the one hand, this is a possibility to include current competences in such a study programme, but on the other hand, it may also be important to demonstrate that the entire programme has the required level. In other words, combinations are made of qualifications from different sectors.

The question is whether this is a situation that fits in with collaboration between employers and educational institutions and, if so, what is the benefit for both partners?

KEY-ISSUES FOR THIS CONFERENCE

- How can qualifications be linked to each other for permeability between the two sectors, at the levels 5 and higher of the EQF (and the national frameworks):
 - Higher Education
 - Vocational Education (Vocational and Professional Education - also known as Higher VET)?
- How can we promote cooperation for learning pathways where institutions from those different sectors are involved, and how can they be filled in correctly?
- What is the role of the business community in promoting flexible learning pathways that are making use of both sectors?
- Is there a strong need for 'international common names' for qualifications in both sectors, to make the whole system for level 5 and higher levels more transparent for the stakeholders?
- Can common guidelines be drawn up for a strong approach to permeability procedures between the two sectors, to the benefit of students and adult learners?
- What can be the role in all this of the international associations and networks for both sectors, to initiate a process for this, and who can contribute to such an initiative?