

Why is EQF so attractive for International Sectoral Qualifications (ISQ)?

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Main issues of the presentation

- Why was the sub-group on ISQ started?
- Crucial elements of the EQF Recommendation
- Main reasons for ISQ bodies to use EQF
- Proposal for a common definition of ISQ
- Some examples of International Sectoral Bodies
- National procedures already in place for aligning ISQ to National Qualifications Frameworks – lessons learnt
- The “Welding case”
- Challenges and further work of the sub-group

Why was the sub-group started ?

- **Base = EQF Recommendation (paragraph 12)**

“(...) The European Qualifications Framework should, moreover, enable *international sectoral organisations* to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between the international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems.” [my underlining]

- Concrete trigger was the “Welding case”
- Many technical issues to be discussed – should be done by a small group of experts
- Output: 3 main deliverables by the beginning of 2015 (see A – B – C)

Crucial elements of EQF

- The EQF levels
- The EQF level descriptors (knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility / competence)
- The “learning outcomes approach”
- The common Quality Assurance principles for VET and HE (mentioned in Annex III)

! This is one package !

Main reasons for aligning to EQF

- EU-funding: using EQF within EU projects
- Levelling: the EQF is considered as a “metric” or an instrument for measuring the complexity of learning or tasks and duties
- Promotion/dissemination: making the ISQ and the results of common work visible in the EU
- Quality label: the EQF is referring to underlying Quality Assurance arrangements
- Main entrance door to the many NQFs in EU: aligning to the EQF once (eventually by one NQF) instead of more than 30 alignments to NQFs
- Harmonization of occupational standards, training and education programmes by using the EQF as “minimum levels” + the learning outcomes approach

Why is harmonisation wanted?

[Normalisation of products or procedures]

Common occupational profiles / activities

Common qualifications framework

Common education or training curricula (minimum)

Common assessment criteria

EQF - levels

“Learning outcomes”



[Via NQF or directly]

National education and training standards

National education and training programmes

Proposal of a common definition of ISQ (A)

The sub-group on ISQ proposes the following:

An “International Sectoral Qualification” is a certificate, diploma, degree or title awarded by a competent body in more than one country and recognised in more than one country for achieved learning outcomes of relevance to a sector of economic activity.

Consequently, in the work on ISQ the sub-group excludes international qualifications not linked to economic sectors (for example the International Baccalaureate).

The competent body for awarding the ISQ can be either an international body, a private company or a multinational company.

Some examples of International Sectoral Bodies

- **International body installed by or recognised by national authorities:** International Maritime Organisation (Agency of the United Nations Organisation)
- **European Agency** installed by the European Council: FRONTEX for cooperation at external borders of the EU
- **International body or platform installed by national sectoral representatives** (f.e. employers' federations): European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE); European Welding Federation (EWF) with General Assembly of representatives from national bodies
- **Consortia or partnerships of national sectoral bodies:** f.e. in the context of EU-funded projects
- **Private companies with branches in other countries**
- **Multinational companies:** Microsoft, CISCO ...

An example of harmonisation exercise: FRONTEX

Normalisation of procedures for border guarding

Common occupational profiles / activities

Common qualifications / competence framework

Common education or training curricula (minimum)

Common assessment criteria

EQF - levels

“Learning outcomes”



[Via NQF or directly]

National education and training standards

National education and training programmes

Overview of existing national procedures for aligning ISQ to a NQF (B)

Experts from **France, Ireland, Scotland** and **The Netherlands** presented their national procedures to the sub-group. The following lessons were learnt:

- ❖ The 4 national procedures presented are all **embedded** in or strongly linked with national procedures for aligning national qualifications to NQF;
- ❖ In most countries the ISQ are **part of the category of “non-formal” qualifications** and consequently there is no specific procedure dedicated to ISQ in those countries, although the ISQ create specific issues
- ❖ These 4 countries have all a NQF that is open to qualifications awarded outside education; **these NQFs were explicitly designed to be open**
- ❖ Basic knowledge of national context, national education and training system, the NQF and linked quality assurance arrangements is needed to fully understand the national procedures; **it is very important to understand the national culture and the purpose of the NQF;**
- ❖ Even in the 4 countries specific procedures are **still “work in progress”**;
- ❖ The French approach shows that levelling of international sectoral qualifications is not always wanted or needed. They can also be part of a national register and, by this way **be visible for the wider public without having a NQF level.**

Investigation of the “Welding case” (C)

The “Welding case”: why are International / European Welding Certificates aligned, indirectly by NQFs, to different EQF-levels?

- The table with the diverging EQF levels that was shown to the EQF AG, by EWF, in 2013 is based on an informal survey done by EWF to its national members. These members didn't contact the national bodies responsible for aligning qualifications to the NQF.
- From the information received by the members of the EQF Advisory Group until today, the sub-group concludes that **there is no example of any formal attempt to link directly the international welding certificates (EWF/IWA) to a NQF** neither in the countries mentioned in the EWF table, neither in other countries having a formal NQF in place.

Lesson learnt: both parties (national authorities and sectoral representatives) **should cooperate at national level** during the referencing process of welding qualifications. The representatives of welding organizations should provide specific know how on the sector to national qualification authorities.

Challenges in the near future

International Sectoral Qualifications are also important in other EU contexts:

1. The **ESCO project**: the ISQ are part of the Qualifications pillar;
2. The **Directive on professional qualifications** 2005/36/EC (amended by 2013/55/EU): the **new art, 49 (b)** foresees the use of EQF levels for defining *common training frameworks* in the EU that will lead to professional qualifications automatically giving access to regulated professions; requirement: consensus between min. 9 Member States
3. Work done in the context of the **European Committee for Standardisation (CEN)** on a voluntary basis;
4. Several **European sectoral Qualifications or Competence Frameworks** linked to EQF levels (in most cases as a result of EQF / ECVET projects): IT sector, sport and fitness sector, bank sector ...;
5. **Specific European Directives in specific sectors** like transport, “radiation protection” ... with specific references to EQF levels.

Further work of the sub-group in 2014

1. **Discussion about the possible establishment of an “information exchange network” between EQF NCPs.** The specific cases mentioned above and the Welding case led to the conclusion that a European “information network” is urgently needed for monitoring these new developments and uses of EQF-levels outside NQFs.
2. This network or EU platform could also function as an “alert network” for the EQF NCPs in case that an European or International Sectoral body wants to align its ISQ to the EQF levels (by on NQF). Therefor **one central contact address** should be foreseen. This way the International Sectoral body doesn't need to contact more than 30 NCPs.
3. **Preparation of a second round of mapping of national procedures (in place or in the making) for aligning ISQ to NQFs.** The first mapping took place in Summer 2013. The European Commission will carry out this mapping (with contractor).

More information

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Thank you very much for your attention.