



Australian Government



Comparative Analysis of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning: Joint Technical Report

2016



ISBN 978-1-76028-955-3

European Union:

ISBN: 978-92-79-63855-8

doi: 10.2767/899976

Catalogue number: KE-06-16-305-EN-N



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The document must be attributed as the *Comparative Analysis of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning: Joint Technical Report*.

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| AQF | Australian Qualifications Framework |
| ASQA | Australian Skills Quality Authority |
| CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training |
| COAG | Council of Australian Governments |
| ECTS | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System |
| ECVET | European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training |
| EHEA | European Higher Education Area |
| ELICOS | English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students |
| ENQA | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| EQAR | European Quality Assurance Register |
| EQAVET | European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESG | European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| EU | European Union |
| HE | Higher Education |
| IVET | Initial Vocational Education and Training |
| LLL | Lifelong Learning |
| NCP | National Coordination Point (for EQF implementation at national level), also known as EQF-NCP |
| NQF(s) | National Qualifications Framework(s) |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| QF-EHEA | Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area |
| RTOs | Registered Training Organisations |
| SCHE | Short-cycle Higher Education |
| TEQSA | Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| VNFIL | Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning |
| VRQA | Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority |
| WATAC | Western Australia Training Accrediting Council |

1. Introduction – context, scope and purpose

This report presents the findings of the joint Australia – Europe working group on a comparative analysis of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This activity occurred in the context of the longstanding education and training policy dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Australia, where an enhanced relationship between the AQF and the EQF has been an important theme. The Group carried out its activities in 2014 and 2015, further to an agreement from early 2014 to compare the characteristics of the EQF as a regional framework for European countries and the AQF as a national framework.

The purpose of this joint activity is to analyse and document the technical and conceptual characteristics of the respective frameworks in their operational contexts, and systematically identify key elements of their comparability, similarities and differences, in a mutually beneficial way. The comparison of the AQF and EQF will create a ‘zone of mutual trust’, leading to a better functional understanding and appreciation of AQF qualifications and respective learning outcomes in Europe, and a better understanding of the EQF in Australia, and the respective European national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) that are referenced to it. By broadening and deepening the functional knowledge and understanding of respective frameworks, transparency in the frameworks can be further elevated which, in turn, can enhance opportunities for future cooperation between Australia and Europe.

International comparability of qualifications is important in Australia and Europe, and is articulated through the objectives and policies of both qualifications frameworks. One of the objectives for putting in place qualifications frameworks is to facilitate recognition of qualifications to support mobility of learners and workers – both within and between countries. Qualifications frameworks are rapidly emerging around the world, with the UNESCO, Cedefop¹ and the European Training Foundation (ETF) showing that in 2014, there were more than 150 countries and territories involved in the development and implementation of qualifications framework². International cooperation in using NQFs via transnational frameworks and for recognition purposes is a growing trend. The same is true for regional qualifications frameworks to which NQFs of that region are referenced³.

¹ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

² <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/2213>.

³ EQF, ASEAN qualifications reference framework, the Caribbean Qualifications Framework, the Gulf Qualifications Framework, the Pacific Qualifications Framework, the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Frameworks and the Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth.

A comparison of the AQF and the EQF can provide the grounds for improved mobility between EU member states and Australia. Qualifications frameworks form part of a country or region's overall quality assurance framework and can improve stakeholder confidence and trust in education systems. Deepening knowledge and understanding of the complex quality assurance mechanisms underpinning both frameworks gained through this comparative analysis provides a sound basis for strengthening mutual trust and understanding of qualifications frameworks and qualifications, and more importantly, their applications in the real world. This also extends to empowering decision-makers to recognise qualifications in the context of their frameworks to better support learner and worker mobility.

Within this context it is important to stress there are different parameters within each framework that must be considered and understood as the differences explain the limitations of this activity. The EQF was established in 2008 as a regional common reference framework with the purpose of improving the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications in Europe. As a regional framework it does not contain any qualifications. European NQFs, which do encompass qualifications types, are referenced to the EQF. However, referencing a qualification to the EQF does not give any rights to individuals. Conversely, the AQF was established in 1995 as the national policy for regulated qualifications with the purpose of improving national consistency in Australian education and training and enhancing the recognition and portability of Australian qualifications.

This joint activity is concerned with a comparison of the EQF as a regional framework with the AQF which is a national qualifications framework. This project does not reference the AQF with European NQFs. Within the EU, member states are fully responsible for their education and training systems and through EU treaties, member states have assigned certain powers to the EU. The current recommendation of the EU Council and the European Parliament in relation to the EQF does not contain the mandate to engage in international formal agreements.

The relative simplicity of the EQF can mask the extensive diversity of the European qualifications landscape. The EQF is based on independent national qualifications systems and foresees no harmonisation or 'merger' of diverse European qualifications systems. National diversity is seen as a strength and the comparison of the AQF and the EQF must not overlook this essential aspect. The role of the EQF as a central 'hub' or reference point will facilitate direct dialogue between Australia and European NQFs and will also make it easier for education and training institutions, employers and recognition bodies in EQF countries to develop understanding of the frameworks and build links with their Australian counterparts.

The AQF similarly supports the comparison of the EQF and the AQF to deliver a richer understanding about broad comparability without seeking adjustments to either of the frameworks. This joint activity will assist and support the development of bilateral cooperation and trust between Australia and the EU and has the potential to support more global linkages. The relative success of the EQF so far is based on the gradual development of trust between the countries involved in the development and implementation of the framework in the region. To generate trust, analysis of the AQF and the EQF requires an equivalent level of transparency and documentation, particularly in relation to key features such as the use of learning outcomes and quality assurance.

The AQF and international engagement

Australia's international engagement aims to promote greater student, academic and provider mobility across regions.

Through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Australia is supporting the development of policy solutions that harness national and regional qualifications frameworks to fully realise mobility objectives by better integrating qualifications frameworks, qualifications recognition and quality assurance policy.

Australia supports the development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF). The AQRF is a regional qualifications framework that will enable mobility between ASEAN member states through the development and strengthening of NQFs and systems in the region. Australia is working with ASEAN member states to share expertise on the development, implementation and governance of NQFs based on experiences with the AQF, in advance of these member states referencing their NQFs to the AQRF. As a well-established national qualifications framework, the AQF has been used in the region as a tool for capacity building and as a model to promote the benefits of connectivity and compatibility of education systems.

In December 2015, a project to compare the AQF and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) was completed. The outcomes of the project complement existing mobility arrangements between Australia and New Zealand, which supports student and worker mobility for Australian graduates.

The EQF and the European Region

Supporting cross-border mobility of learners and workers and facilitating recognition of qualifications and lifelong learning across Europe is a major aim of the EU. This means that qualifications need to be understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. The EQF is one of the core European instruments for supporting mobility and lifelong learning and has been the main catalyst in the development of NQFs for lifelong learning in Europe. The EQF has been a pioneer for the development of regional reference frameworks. Qualifications frameworks, as powerful descriptions of qualifications systems, are also outward looking and are attractive to people in other countries as a quick reference to qualifications in countries with NQFs. They act as bridges for understanding qualifications between countries.

The EQF has been designed to act as a reference for different qualifications systems and frameworks in Europe. It takes into account the diversity of national systems and facilitates the translation and comparison of qualifications between countries. It does not concern itself with the ways in which countries structure and prioritise their education and training policies, structures and institutions nor does it directly include qualifications. It is a meta-framework that is a reference point for these national systems. This regional framework enables qualifications systems with their implicit levels or/and national and sectoral qualifications frameworks in which qualifications are classified to relate to each other. Qualifications are not directly allocated to EQF levels, as they are only linked to EQF levels via the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF levels. By acting as a translation device, the EQF aids in the understanding of qualifications allocated to national levels across the different countries and education systems in Europe.

As of 2016, 28 countries have referenced their national qualifications levels to the EQF. These countries were Austria, Belgium (FL, FR), Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The remaining countries are expected to present their reports in 2016-17.

The development of NQFs in Europe reflects the Bologna process and the agreement to implement qualifications frameworks in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA4). All countries involved in EQF implementation are participating in the Bologna process. 25 countries have 'self-certified' their higher education qualifications to the QF-EHEA by June 2016. Countries are increasingly combining referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA5; Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia have all produced joint reports on both processes, reflecting the priority given to the development and adoption of comprehensive NQFs covering all levels and types of qualifications. It is expected that this approach will be chosen by most countries preparing to reference to the EQF in 2016-17. This development reflects the increasingly close cooperation between the two European framework initiatives, also illustrated by regular meetings between EQF national coordination points (EQF-NCPs) and 'Bologna' framework coordinators.

Australia-European Union Bilateral Relations

Australia and the EU enjoy a constructive and substantial bilateral relationship built on a shared commitment to freedom and democratic values and a like-minded approach to a broad range of international issues. The bilateral relationship between Australia and the European Union is rich and deep and is becoming stronger over time. In 2012, Australia and the EU celebrated 50 years of formal diplomatic relations. The Australia-EU Partnership Framework was developed in 2008 and sets out the direction of bilateral cooperation. The Framework focusses on practical cooperation in the following areas:

- shared foreign policy and global security interests
- the multilateral rules-based trading system and the bilateral trade and investment relationship
- the Asia-Pacific region
- energy issues, climate change, fisheries and forestry
- science, research, technology and innovation, education and culture and facilitating the movement of people.

The Australian Government and European Union (EU) recently negotiated a renewed agreement at treaty level known as the EU-Australia Framework Agreement. Once ratified it will provide the overarching guidance to the bilateral Australian-EU relationship. The agreement includes chapters that cover cooperation in education and culture, research, innovation and information society which set the foundation for future cooperation with Europe.

⁴ <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=65>.

⁵ Self-certification reports verify the compatibility of the national framework for higher education with the QF-EHEA. Self-certification is done on basis of the 'Dublin Descriptors', which are fully compatible with the descriptors of EQF levels 5-8. – cf. <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf>.

On 15 November 2015, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Council Donald Tusk and the Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Turnbull announced that they had agreed to commence work toward the launch of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the European Union.

Australia's Education and Training Strategy with Europe and the EU will focus largely on engagement with the European Commission, and the key western European countries of the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy. Regular policy dialogues and government-to-government bilateral memoranda of understanding provide a foundation for qualifications recognition, student and researcher exchanges and for our people and institutions to develop and foster cooperation, linkages and partnerships.

Annual EU-Australia Education and Training Policy Dialogues take place under the Australia-European Union Partnership Framework. Since the inaugural dialogue in 2009, these meetings have strengthened the bilateral relationship, focusing on topics that have included reforms in higher education, qualifications recognition, academic and student exchanges, early childhood education and care, quality of provision and the wellbeing of students.

Lisbon Recognition Convention

The *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (Lisbon Recognition Convention) is a legal instrument developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO which binds over 50 countries, including European countries and Australia, to adopt fair practices in the recognition of higher education qualifications. The Lisbon Recognition Convention enhances internationalisation and mobility by introducing and improving qualifications recognition policies and processes, fostering mutual trust, and building capacity for qualifications recognition. This relies on information and transparency tools, including national and regional qualifications frameworks.

A comparative analysis of the AQF and EQF can serve as a source of information to inform recognition decisions made by competent recognition authorities in Europe and Australia, but will not result in automatic or guaranteed recognition. A foreign qualification's context in a national or regional qualifications framework may be taken into consideration, but this is a matter for the competent recognition authorities in each country to determine.

Asia-Europe Meeting

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) links Asia and Europe by facilitating discussion on political, economic and cultural relations. A particular focus is increasing education dialogue between Asia and Europe. The four priorities of the ASEM education dialogue are: quality assurance and recognition; engaging business and industry in education; balanced mobility; and lifelong learning.

Australia-Europe mobility

Australia and Europe have a long history of education engagement through bilateral relations with individual nations and with the EU. A memorandum of understanding in education is in place between Australia and the EU. Australia also has memoranda of understanding with France, Germany and Spain. Australia has also engaged with the Bologna Process reforms.

Australian and EU country institutions collaborate to enhance the quality of their education both onshore and offshore, cooperate on qualifications recognition and educational reform, and participate in two-way mobility programmes. Universities Australia's 2014 International Links Report indicates that there are 2866 international agreements between Australian

universities and European institutions and there were around 70 offshore programmes being delivered by Australian universities with European institutions⁶.

In 2013, almost 29,500 Australian university students reported a short term or exchange study experience overseas. Of these, 9,900 (34 per cent) went to Europe, second in number only to Asia (10,200 or 35 per cent). The UK (2,637), Germany (1,168) and France (1,134) were the most popular countries for Australians studying in Europe. Since 2007, Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships have been awarded to over 280 Europeans and 60 Australians, to undertake study, research and professional development.

The Department of Education and Training also supports three Australian Study Centres in Europe, providing financial assistance for the Distinguished Visiting Chair in Australian Studies at the University of Copenhagen, the teaching and research activities of the Keith Cameron Chair of Australian History at University College Dublin and the promotion of Australian studies through the Menzies Centre of Australian Studies, King's College London.

The flow of students between Australia and Europe is small⁷ but nonetheless not insignificant. UNESCO 2013 data indicates that the UK, Germany and France were the three most popular European destinations for Australian higher education students wishing to study either a full or part qualification abroad.

Table 1 below shows the number of European students in Australia in 2012-13⁸. The source countries with the most visas granted were Germany, Italy, UK, Spain and France.

Table 1. European student visas granted in 2012-13

| | ELICOS/ Non award | Schools | VET | Higher education (including postgraduate) | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------|------|--|--------|
| EU countries | 20 782 | 2148 | 8851 | 5038 | 36 819 |
| Other European countries | 1063 | 130 | 486 | 1085 | 2764 |
| Total | 21 845 | 2278 | 9337 | 6123 | 39 583 |

Australia's participation in the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes

Australia's participation in Erasmus+

There are three opportunities for Australia to be engaged in Erasmus+: credit mobility; joint master's degrees and European studies through the Jean Monnet scheme. In all three opportunities the EU pays for the Australian institution to be part of the project.

- For *Credit Mobility*, a total of 229 movements involving Australia are to be funded. For those coming from Europe to Australia there are 58 learners and 53 staff; for Australians going to Europe there will be 67 learners and 51 staff.
- For *Joint Masters* though there are no new courses with an Australian partner and as far as Australian nationals taking advantage of the scholarships available to participate in an existing joint masters or PhD course, there were some 10 scholarships selected in 2015 with a further 25 on the reserve list.
- For *Jean Monnet* actions there is one project in Australia, a Module on Comparative Regional Governance.

⁶ <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/global-engagement/international-collaboration/international-links>.

⁷ Approximately 3,000 students at ISCED 5 and 6 in 2010 (UNESCO Global Education Digest table 10).

⁸ Department of Immigration and Citizenship *Offshore and onshore (visa) grants for 2012-13 program year 2013*.

Australia's participation in Horizon 2020

Australia can fully participate in Horizon 2020, although normally at its own cost (there are exceptions, including European Research Council (ERC) grants and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows). Australia's engagement in Horizon 2020 is quite significant:

- 27 large collaborative research and innovation actions and coordination and support actions have been signed or are in preparation involving 31 Australian contracted partners and a total research investment of €173 (\$A270) million
- 22 Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) projects have been signed or are in preparation involving 28 Australian partners
- 8 Innovative Training Networks (ITN) have been signed or are in preparation involving 9 Australian partners
- 8 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows have been selected to come to Australia
- 6 Australian principal investigators have been selected for ERC grants.

Intended audience

The intended audience for this report is policy makers in Australia, Europe and beyond who wish to gain further understanding of the commonalities and differences between the AQF and EQF. Equally, it is intended that the report be used as a resource to inform policy decision-making for future education and training cooperation and engagement, particularly in key policy areas of strategic importance to Australia and Europe, some of which have been identified during the process of collaboration in this joint activity.

It is not intended that this report be used by individuals or organisations to assess individual qualifications from one framework to another. This is the responsibility of the appropriate competent recognition authorities in Europe and Australia. Holders of Australian and European qualifications will not, on the basis of this report, be entitled to claim automatic recognition.

2. Methodology

The annual policy dialogue between Australia and the EU in 2010 focused on the exchange of information on the AQF and the implementation of the EQF. In 2010, a joint peer learning activity on qualifications frameworks was undertaken, followed by a joint EU-Australia study in 2011 which examined how qualifications frameworks can serve as instruments for pursuing closer international cooperation to improve qualification transparency. In particular, it examined how the AQF and the EQF might relate and how this might affect learner and worker mobility⁹. The study concluded that exchange of experiences would be beneficial to better understand the dynamics of qualifications frameworks in a global context. This would enable confidence around EQF referencing and cooperation to be potentially widened to countries beyond the EU.

Technical working group

The joint AQF-EQF technical working group comprised representatives from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, members of the EQF Advisory Group and representatives from the European Commission and Cedefop. This working group had responsibility for an exchange of information on key aspects which relate to qualifications frameworks by ensuring:

- a much clearer understanding of the different systems supporting qualifications
- an understanding of the key drivers relating to qualifications frameworks and how these are implemented in Australia and Europe
- analysis of the comparability of the two frameworks and their levels
- open and in-depth analysis and discussion on opportunities, challenges, benefits and risks
- development of a joint set of technical criteria as a basis for comparability
- reporting back to the EQF Advisory Group and the country national bodies at key stages
- recommending the final report for consideration.

Members of the EQF Advisory Group (France, Austria, the United Kingdom), Cedefop and the European Commission visited Australia between 2-4 March 2015 to work on further

⁹ Joint EU-Australia “Study on the (potential) role of qualifications frameworks in supporting mobility of workers and learners”, European Commission and Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2011/australia_en.pdf.

building a shared understanding of education and qualifications systems, developing principles for the comparison of the respective frameworks, developing a structure for reporting and to systematically work through the comparison of the AQF and the EQF. This visit also provided the EQF Advisory Group the opportunity to gain further understanding of the Australian education and training system through presentations, including from the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency – Australia’s independent national regulator for higher education – and a visit to an Australian dual sector university (a university that offers both higher education and VET qualifications) as well as providing Australia with detailed and up-to-date information regarding implementation of the EQF.

The joint technical group met on 2 April and 29-30 September 2014 in Brussels. In addition to email communications, teleconferences were held on 9 July and 9 September 2014.

Principles for comparison

The AQF and the EQF were compared using the following set of principles, which are based on an adaptation of the referencing criteria for European NQFs to the EQF.

The principles for comparison allow for in-depth comparative discussion of key elements with a focus on quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, and were agreed by the joint AQF-EQF technical working group during the visit to Australia in March 2015:

- **Principle 1:** The roles of the responsible bodies for the AQF and the corresponding bodies for the EQF are clear and transparent.
- **Principle 2:** Comparability of AQF and EQF and their levels.
- **Principle 3:** The AQF and the EQF are based on learning outcomes.
- **Principle 4:** Policies for qualifications and the scope of the framework, which qualifications are covered by framework, and non-formal and informal learning.
- **Principle 5:** Both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance principles.

The specific methodology used for Principle 2 in the comparison of AQF and EQF level descriptors include:

- comparison of the domains of learning used in the level descriptors
- linguistic/textual comparison of the level descriptors and their meaning and intent
- use of the concept of ‘best-fit’
- use of typical examples of qualification types linked to levels to enrich context.

Best fit approach

Due to the different nature of the frameworks, AQF level descriptors are more detailed than those of the EQF. Therefore, it is unlikely that there will ever be an exact correlation between the AQF and the EQF descriptors, which are by necessity defined in a broader and more general way. The EQF descriptors are understood as ‘bands’ or ‘corridors’; some sets of national levels might better fit to the upper end of one ‘corridor’ whereas another one might rather fit the lower end. AQF level descriptors refer to the complexity, breadth and depth of learning outcomes required for qualifications at the respective level. To manage these differences, a comparative analysis requires the use of a ‘best-fit’ approach. Applying the ‘best fit principle’ requires judgement on balance of the weight of information. Furthermore, the decision on ‘best-fit’ is usually based on collective professional judgements of stakeholders.

Stakeholder consultation

The procedure for comparison of the frameworks agreed by the technical working group included consultation on the outcomes of the comparison with key stakeholders. Australian stakeholders were consulted on the project and preliminary outcomes in September 2014. Preliminary investigation indicated that stakeholders strongly supported comparative analysis of the two frameworks. As a result, a short consultation paper was developed, widely distributed amongst stakeholder groups and posted on the AQF website for public comment. Stakeholders were invited to respond to issues and make any other relevant comments. Stakeholders included universities and network bodies, higher education and vocational education and training (VET) providers and their representative bodies, Industry Skills Councils, professional agencies including professional accrediting bodies, student organisations, government agencies and peak business, employer and industry bodies, and trade unions.

While a comparatively small number of responses were received, the respondents were representative of the broad range of AQF stakeholders. All responses strongly supported the comparative analysis of the AQF with the EQF and were encouraging of further activities to be undertaken in the future.

On the European side the main stakeholder forum is the EQF Advisory Group, composed by government representatives as well as European level education and labour market stakeholders.

3. Principles for comparison

Principle 1: The roles of the responsible bodies for the AQF and the corresponding bodies for the EQF are clear and transparent

Summary

This principle looks at the key bodies or entities that are responsible for AQF and EQF governance.

Responsibility for the AQF and the EQF is clearly defined, transparent and accessible. The Australian Government Department of Education and Training is the responsible body for governance of the AQF, in conjunction with state and territory governments and the education sector, with a clear mandate to develop and maintain the AQF. The EQF Advisory Group, chaired by the European Commission, oversees EQF implementation. It comprises representatives of all 39 participating countries, the Council of Europe, EU social partners, Cedefop, ETF and other important EU stakeholders such as public employment services, student unions, and lifelong learning stakeholders. With regards to the EQF, National Coordination Points (EQF-NCPs) have been established in all participating countries and are charged with the coordination and promotion of their own National Qualifications Frameworks which are referenced to the EQF.

AQF

The AQF is an agreed joint policy of Australian Government, and state and territory Ministers with responsibility for education. The AQF was introduced in 1995 and fully implemented in 2000.

The AQF Council was established by Ministers in 2008 (replacing the former AQF Advisory Board) to monitor and maintain the AQF and provide strategic advice to Ministers to ensure it remained current and robust. The AQF Council remained the governing body from 2008-2014. Over 2009-10, the AQF Council undertook a major review of the AQF and in 2011 the strengthened AQF was agreed by Ministers, with implementation completed in 2015. Following completion of this work, with agreement of all Ministers, the Department of Education and Training, working in consultation with state and territory governments, now has primary responsibility for the development, maintenance and monitoring of the AQF.

The Minister for Education and Training has portfolio responsibility and administers legislation for school education, vocational education and training, higher education, international education and youth. The Department of Education and Training deals with matters relating to school education policy and programmes, skills and vocational education and training and higher education policy regulation and programmes and international education and research engagement. The Minister and the department consult state and territory colleagues through the relevant Council of Australian Government (COAG) Councils — currently, the COAG Education Council and the COAG Industry and Skills Council — as required.

The operation of the AQF is through legislation at the VET and higher education levels. The AQF is referenced in legislation in vocational education and training through inclusion as part of the VET Quality Framework under the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* and in higher education through inclusion in the Higher Education Standards Framework, a legislative instrument under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*. As such, all education and training providers, in both the VET and higher education systems, must comply with the requirements of the AQF.

Compliance with the AQF is regulated by the national higher education regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the national VET regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), and two state VET regulators¹⁰.

Stakeholder involvement is critical to ensuring the ongoing acceptance and success of the AQF. The AQF engages with individuals and organisations from all education sectors, as well as assessing authorities and institutions, employers, and other government agencies.

Since its introduction the Australian Government has conducted numerous reviews and revisions to ensure the AQF remains fit for purpose. Activities such as ‘Strengthening the AQF’ draw on the expertise from across a wide range of stakeholder groups. This project delivered the second edition of the AQF and helped establish Australia’s two national regulators, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

TEQSA and the ASQA continue to be key AQF stakeholders. TEQSA regulates all higher education providers and ensures that providers and their courses meet the *Higher Education Standards Framework 2015* requirements, including assessing learning outcomes and descriptors for levels 5-10 in the AQF. ASQA regulates VET institutions and Registered Training Organisations in the majority of states in Australia. ASQA’s legislative power resides in the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* which requires providers to comply with all components of the VET Quality Framework including the AQF.

EQF

The EQF Recommendation

The development and implementation of the EQF is based on the “Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning”¹¹. The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for VET. The EQF

¹⁰ The Western Australia Training Accreditation Council and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

¹¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), 2008/C 111/01.

Recommendation was adopted in 2008. The EQF recommendation calls on member states particularly to:

- link their national qualification systems/frameworks to the EQF ('EQF referencing')
- indicate the EQF level on all newly issued certificates, diplomas or Europass documents
- designate National Coordination Point (EQF-NCPs) to support and guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the EQF.

Governance of the EQF at European level

At the EU level, the **EQF Advisory Group**, chaired by the European Commission, oversees EQF implementation. It comprises representatives of all participating countries, Council of Europe, EU social partners, Cedefop, ETF and other important EU stakeholders (e.g. public employment services, student unions, lifelong learning stakeholders). The work is organised in the form of regular meetings (4-5 per year), peer learning activities¹² and working groups. Cedefop supports the work by providing analytical and progress reports for discussion.

The EQF Advisory Group has adopted 10 criteria and procedures¹³ to ensure that NQFs are referenced to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way. Transparent procedures for including qualifications into the NQF, underpinning quality assurance arrangements and the requirement to demonstrate a clear and demonstrable link between the national qualifications levels and the EQF are among the most important ones. The criteria also help structure the referencing reports¹⁴ that countries present to the EQF Advisory Group. The EQF Advisory Group discusses these reports and provides feedback to the presenting countries. The presentation and discussion of the reports are intended to improve understanding of qualification systems among countries.

The second important network at European level consists of the EQF-NCPs. The 2008 EQF Recommendation invites countries to set up NCPs to be able to 'speak with one voice' on behalf of complex national qualifications systems. This was considered necessary to succeed in consistent referencing to the EQF. NCP have been established in all participating countries. They support the referencing to the EQF and in some countries they are also in charge of overall NQF coordination and promotion. The institutional basis of the NCPs varies largely between countries and includes NCPs operating under the remit of ministries of education or labour, NCPs situated within the same organisation as the ENIC/NARIC Centre¹⁵, independent organisations, NCPs operating as joint initiatives of several government bodies.

¹² Topics recently addressed include international qualifications, levelling qualifications, writing learning outcomes, EQF level 5 qualifications and master craftsperson qualifications.

¹³ See Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF, <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/criteriaen.pdf>.

¹⁴ Already presented referencing reports are available on <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/documentation>.

¹⁵ Networks of academic recognition centres (the European network of information centres (ENIC) and the National academic recognition information centres (NARIC), <http://www.enic-naric.net/>).

EQF implementation at national level in European countries

The EQF has been the main catalyst for the rapid developments and implementation of learning outcomes-based NQFs in Europe¹⁶. All countries¹⁷ see national frameworks as necessary for relating national qualifications levels to the EQF in a transparent and trustful manner. The NQFs developed in the European countries may be different in format and function. The EQF referencing reports are supposed to provide transparency and evidence on how the 10 referencing criteria are met.

The development of NQFs and the referencing to the EQF is organised at national levels according to the structures and requirements of the respective countries. The national authorities responsible for these processes are usually ministries responsible for education and training and/or qualification authorities. These processes are usually carried out in cooperation with key stakeholders (e.g. other ministries, social partners, quality assurance bodies etc).

¹⁶ Cedefop. 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014. Overview and analysis of NQF developments in Europe. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-frameworks>.

¹⁷ Italy has referenced its major national qualifications from formal education and training directly to the EQF. The Czech Republic has developed an NQF for vocational qualifications and one for higher education and referenced on the basis of national classifications of educational qualifications types and the NQF for vocational qualifications.

Principle 2: Comparability of the AQF and EQF and their levels

The underlying principle for the comparability of both the AQF and the EQF is that the processes and outcomes themselves are transparent, relevant and generate trust, enabling the comparison of the frameworks and the levels within each framework.

There are conceptual and functional differences between the AQF and the EQF that need to be considered in determining the comparability of the levels of the two frameworks. The EQF was established as a regional common reference framework and acts as a translation grid for qualifications across European countries in Europe. It has eight levels and does not contain qualifications. European NQFs, which do encompass qualifications, are referenced to the EQF.

Table 2

| EQF Level | |
|-----------|--|
| Level 1 | <p>To fully understand each EQF level, the following principles have to be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level descriptors refer to both work and study contexts and reflect specialisations as well as generalisations • To distinguish between levels and express the increased complexity of learning outcomes, key words are used as indicators of threshold levels e.g. EQF level 1: ‘basic general knowledge’ and EQF level 7: ‘highly specialised knowledge...’; EQF level 1: ‘structured context’ and EQF level 5: ‘context... where there is unpredictable change’ • Each level builds on and subsumes the levels beneath • A full understanding of one particular level therefore requires a ‘horizontal’ – across the three columns (knowledge, skills and competence) - as well as ‘vertical’ reading where lower and higher levels are taken into account. <p>The AQF is the national policy for regulated and quality assured qualifications across all Australian education and training sectors. It has 10 levels and encompasses 14 qualification types. Each level and each qualification type in the AQF is defined by increasingly complex learning outcomes in the form of level criteria and qualifications type descriptors.</p> |
| Level 2 | |
| Level 3 | |
| Level 4 | |
| Level 5 | |
| Level 6 | |
| Level 7 | |
| Level 8 | |

Diagram 1



The levels on both the AQF and EQF are defined by descriptors in terms of learning outcomes (see Principle 3). These learning outcomes broadly reflect what is acquired when a learner completes a qualification type that is situated on or referenced to the framework. The eight EQF levels are described using learning outcomes in terms of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competence'. The AQF level descriptors are described in terms of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'application of knowledge and skills'.

A comparison of key definitions for the AQF and EQF can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Comparison of key definitions and learning outcome level descriptors

| AQF Definitions | EQF Definitions |
|---|---|
| <p>AQF QUALIFICATION is the result of an accredited complete program of learning that leads to formal certification that a graduate has achieved learning outcomes as described in the AQF.</p> | <p>QUALIFICATION means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.</p> |
| <p>LEARNING OUTCOMES are the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and application of knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning.</p> | <p>LEARNING OUTCOMES means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.</p> |
| <p>KNOWLEDGE refers to what a graduate knows and understands and it can be describes in terms of depth, breadth, kinds of knowledge and complexity as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depth of knowledge can be general or specialised • breadth of knowledge can range from a single topic to multi-disciplinary area of knowledge • kinds of knowledge range from concrete to abstract, from segmented to cumulative • complexity of knowledge refers to the combination of kinds, depth and breadth of knowledge. | <p>KNOWLEDGE means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, is described as theoretical and/or factual.</p> |
| <p>SKILLS refer to what a graduate can do. They can be described in terms of kinds and complexity and include cognitive skills, technical skills, communication skills, creative skills, interpersonal skills and generic skills. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cognitive and creative skills involving the use of intuitive, logical and critical thinking • technical skills involving dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments • communication skills involving written, oral, literacy and numeracy skills. | <p>SKILLS means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).</p> |
| <p>APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS refers to how a graduate applies knowledge and skills in context and in terms of autonomy, responsibility and accountability. The context may range from the predictable to the unpredictable, and the known to the unknown, while tasks may range from routine to non-routine.</p> | <p>COMPETENCE means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

The definitions used for AQF and EQF key terms, including the domains of learning, can be considered comparable. The intentions expressed by 'knowledge' and 'skills' in the two frameworks are very similar. The meaning of 'application of knowledge and skills' and of 'competence' can also be considered comparable because both refer to the use of knowledge and skill in specific contexts and to autonomy and responsibility.

Tabulated information outlining the comparability of the AQF and the EQF and their levels is at **Appendix 1**. The table provides for a linguistic/textual comparison of level descriptors and the separate elements of each level of the frameworks. The focus of this comparison was not on the individual descriptors for each domain of learning but on the combination of the level descriptors for each level and their progression from one level to the next level.

To illustrate the correspondence between AQF levels and EQF levels, examples of qualifications are used¹⁸. They illustrate the requirements related to levels and provide contextual information about how the levels operate in practice. However, since the EQF does not define qualification types, the illustration is based on national qualification types.

The approach of 'best-fit' was taken when comparing levels of the AQF and the EQF. When applying the best-fit principle, levels should be understood as corridors and not as exact lines. Qualifications might include learning outcomes related to different levels. Different dimensions or categories of learning outcomes may be emphasised in qualifications placed at the same level. Therefore, qualifications allocated to the same level are not necessarily similar, but can be considered as comparable in terms of level of learning outcomes achieved. It does not mean that the qualifications are equivalent or interchangeable¹⁹.

The textual comparison revealed that there are many linguistic similarities between the AQF and the EQF level descriptors but also some differences. However, in cases where different wording is used, the same meaning or connotation may be implied. For example, AQF level 1 refers to 'knowledge of everyday life' which is understood as having the same meaning as 'general knowledge' referred to in EQF level 1.

It was found that the levels of the AQF compared well to the levels of the EQF. There was a high level of correlation identified for AQF and EQF levels 1-4 as well as AQF levels 7, 9 and 10 with EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively. As the AQF has 10 levels, and the EQF has eight levels, there were some circumstances where EQF levels were compared to more than one AQF level based on the principle of 'best fit'. For example, EQF level 6 was comparable to both AQF levels 7 and 8, with the qualifier that AQF level 8 is situated at the upper range of the EQF level 6 band. The descriptors of AQF level 5 and 6 were most comparable to the EQF level 5 'band' or 'corridor'. Figure 2 below provides a summary of the correspondence between the AQF and EQF levels.

¹⁸ Information on AQF qualification types is available here: <http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/in-detail/aqf-qualifications/>.

¹⁹ European Commission, *Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF Update 2013*, http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/EQF%20131119-web_0.pdf.

Figure 2. Correspondence between AQF levels and EQF levels

Examples of national qualification types
See Appendix 1 for more information on how the levels compare
(linked to the EQF via NQFs referenced to the EQF)

| AQF | EQF | EQF |
|---|-----|---|
| 10 Doctoral Degree | 8 | Third cycle degrees (Doctorate) Higher professional qualifications EE: occ. qual. 'chartered engineer' |
| 9 Masters Degree | 7 | Second cycle degrees (Master) Higher professional qualifications CZ: 'Chemical engineer product 'manager' |
| 8 Bachelor Honours Degree Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma | 6 | First cycle degrees (Bachelor) IE: Honours Bachelor Degree Higher professional qualifications DE: 'Master Craftsman (certified)' |
| 7 Bachelor Degree | | |
| 6 Associate Degree Advanced Diploma | 5 | SCHE qualifications Higher professional qualifications |
| 5 Diploma | | |
| 4 Certificate IV | 4 | Upper secondary general education certificates; VET qualifications |
| 3 Certificate III | 3 | Secondary education certificates; VET qualifications |
| 2 Certificate II | 2 | Lower-secondary education Basic VET qualifications |
| 1 Certificate | 1 | Primary education certificates Basic VET qualifications |

Principle 3: The AQF and EQF are based on learning outcomes

Summary

Learning outcomes are statements of knowledge and skills, for example, what a graduate is expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. Learning outcomes are used to describe both the levels and qualifications which are part of the qualifications framework. They ensure that qualifications are transparent and standard across the education and training sectors and that users of the frameworks and qualifications understand qualification outcomes.

Although the AQF is a national qualifications framework and the EQF is a regional framework, both the AQF and EQF are based on learning outcomes. Framework levels of both the AQF and EQF are described in terms of learning outcomes or 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'application of knowledge' (AQF) or 'competence' (EQF). 'Application of knowledge', used in the AQF, and 'competence', used in the EQF, are broadly comparable descriptors that recognise how knowledge and skills are applied.

AQF

Each level and each qualification type in the AQF is defined by a taxonomy of learning outcomes. This requirement is within the AQF. The standards for higher education and VET institutions require that qualifications may only be awarded to students that meet the learning outcomes for that AQF level and qualification type. The AQF is structured in terms of increasing complexity in learning outcomes. This enables consistency in the way qualifications are described as well as clarity about the differences and relationships between qualifications types, and ensures a strong focus on learning outcomes.

The learning outcomes are defined in terms of what a graduate is expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. They are expressed in terms of the dimensions of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills.

Knowledge is what a graduate knows and understands. It is described in terms of depth, breadth, kinds of knowledge and complexity, as follows:

- depth of knowledge can be general or specialised
- breadth of knowledge can range from a single topic to multi-disciplinary area of knowledge
- kinds of knowledge range from concrete to abstract, from segmented to cumulative
- complexity of knowledge refers to the combination of kinds, depth and breadth of knowledge.

Skills are what a graduate can do. Skills are described in terms of the kinds and complexity of skills and include:

- cognitive and creative skills involving the use of intuitive, logical and critical thinking
- technical skills involving dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments
- communication skills involving written, oral, literacy and numeracy skills
- interpersonal skills and generic skills.

Application of knowledge and skills is the context in which a graduate applies knowledge and skills. Specifically:

- application is expressed in terms of autonomy, responsibility and accountability
- the context may range from the predictable to the unpredictable, and the known to the unknown, while tasks may range from routine to non-routine.

Generic learning outcomes are incorporated into qualifications in the development process and their application is specific to the education or training sector. Generic learning outcomes are the transferrable, non-discipline specific skills a graduate may achieve through learning that have application in study, work and life contexts. The four broad categories of generic learning outcomes recognised in the AQF are:

- basic fundamental skills, such as literacy and numeracy appropriate to the level and qualification type
- people skills, such as working with others and communication skills
- thinking skills, such as learning to learn, decision making and problem solving
- personal skills, such as self-direction and acting with integrity.

A full description of the learning outcomes for the levels and qualification types is available in the *AQF Second Edition 2013* at www.aqf.edu.au.

EQF

EQF learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The eight EQF levels are described using learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual; **skills** are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and **competence** is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. Nevertheless, these three categories (KSC) should not be read in isolation from each other.

To grasp the characteristics of one level requires also 'horizontal reading'. The descriptors cover the full range of learning outcomes, irrespective of the learning or institutional context from basic education, through school and unskilled worker levels up to doctoral or senior professional levels. Each level (from 1 to 8) builds on and subsumes the levels beneath and shows increased complexity of learning outcomes and distinct progress in dimensions of change (e.g. complexity and depth of knowledge, the range of complexity of application/practice etc.). Level descriptors cover both work and study situations, academic as well as vocational settings, and initial as well as continuing education or training, i.e. all forms of learning formal, non-formal and informal.

The requirements for learning outcomes in national frameworks and qualifications referenced to the EQF are set out in EQF referencing Criterion 3. The respective NQFs consist of learning-outcomes-based levels. The NQF level descriptors reflect the EQF level descriptors; however, they are parts of national systems and are thus reflecting national contexts, values, traditions and objectives. This is especially evident in the way in which countries have designed, adapted and further developed national level descriptors – now adopted by most countries. The learning outcomes approach is implemented widely but not yet comprehensively in European education and training systems. The emergence and introduction of comprehensive frameworks made it possible (at least to a certain degree) to approach a shift to learning outcomes in a more systematic and – to some extent – more consistent way.

Principle 4: Policies for qualifications and the scope of the framework, which qualifications are covered by framework, and non-formal and informal learning

Summary

The AQF and EQF are both comprehensive qualifications frameworks that span school/general education, vocational education and training and higher education and qualifications acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Both frameworks include policies regarding credit transfer and the recognition of informal learning. The AQF and EQF are both designed to support mobility and the provision and recognition of lifelong learning.

AQF

The AQF structure has the following qualifications types at each level. The AQF has descriptors for 14 qualification types, designated by education sector. With the exception of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, each qualification type is located at an AQF level. Each level and each qualification type is described in terms of the knowledge, skills, and application of knowledge and skills that are expected of graduates. The taxonomic approach is designed to enable consistency in the way in which qualifications are described as well as clarity about the differences and relationships between qualification types.

Table 4

| Level | Qualification Types | Sector |
|-------|---|------------------------|
| 10 | Doctoral Degree | HE |
| 9 | Masters Degree | HE |
| 8 | Bachelor Honours Degree Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma | HE VET/HE VET/HE |
| 7 | Bachelor Degree | HE |
| 6 | Associate Degree Advanced Diploma | HE VET/HE |
| 5 | Diploma | VET/HE |
| 4 | Certificate IV | VET |
| 3 | Certificate III | VET |
| 2 | Certificate II | VET |
| 1 | Certificate I | VET |
| | Senior Secondary Certificate of Education | Schools |

Scope of the AQF

The AQF is a cross-sectoral qualifications framework that encompasses higher education, VET and school education. As the integrated national policy for nationally-recognised post-compulsory education the AQF provides the specifications for Australian qualifications and therefore also contributes to the regulation of Australian education and training. It provides guidance to framework users (i.e. course designers, awarding bodies and accrediting authorities) on:

- the learning outcomes for each AQF level and qualification type
- the specifications for the application of the AQF in the accreditation and development of qualifications
- policy guidance for qualification linkages and student pathways
- the policy requirements for issuing and registering AQF qualifications
- the policy requirements for the addition or removal of qualification types in the AQF.

Higher education

Higher education qualifications sit at levels 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 and comprise the following qualifications:

- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Bachelor Honours Degree
- Graduate Certificate
- Graduate Diploma
- Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Vocational education and training

VET qualifications sit at levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 and comprise the following qualifications:

- Certificate I
- Certificate II
- Certificate III
- Certificate IV
- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma
- Graduate Certificate
- Graduate Diploma

General education

Australia's final school-leaving qualification is known generically across Australia as the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (Year 12 award). The Year 12 award is an AQF qualification. It has learning outcomes expressed in terms of the knowledge, skills, and application of knowledge and skills, but it does not have a level on the AQF.

Dual-sector education and training

The Diploma (AQF level 5), Advanced Diploma (AQF level 6), Graduate Certificate (AQF level 7) and Graduate Diploma (AQF level 8) are qualification types awarded in both the higher education and VET sectors. This reflects the flexibility and sector-neutral nature of the AQF and the diversity of qualifications offered in the Australian system.

To allow for multiple qualification types to sit at the same AQF level, qualifications must meet both the AQF level criteria and the qualification type descriptors. Both the level criteria and the qualification type descriptors are described in terms of the knowledge, skills, and application of knowledge and skills that are expected of graduates.

AQF policies

The AQF provides policies to assist framework users, particularly those responsible for the design, award and regulation of qualifications. These policies aim to enhance transparency, confidence and flexibility in Australia's education and training in addition to promoting mobility and supporting lifelong learning.

AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

The AQF recognises that learning can be formal, non-formal or informal. The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy ensures that AQF stakeholders maximise credit for learning already undertaken while maintaining the integrity of qualification outcomes. The policy requires providers to ensure that they have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes, such as credit transfer or recognition of prior learning, to provide flexible pathways to students. The policy also supports the development of pathways in qualification design, to enhance lifelong learning.

AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy

The AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy ensures that graduates receive the certification documentation to which they are entitled. This policy delivers stakeholder confidence in the AQF status of an Australian qualification. The policy ensures nationally consistent documentation for AQF qualification in addition to nationally consistent AQF qualification titles.

AQF Qualifications Register Policy

The AQF Qualifications Register Policy requires that Australian education regulators and/or education providers maintain publicly available registers of accredited AQF qualifications. This aims to support transparency and confidence in the AQF and enhance recognition of AQF qualifications. The AQF itself is not a register of AQF qualifications as it covers qualification types rather than individual accredited AQF qualifications. This policy is therefore integral to the public identification, verification and protection of AQF qualifications.

AQF Qualification Type Addition and Removal Policy

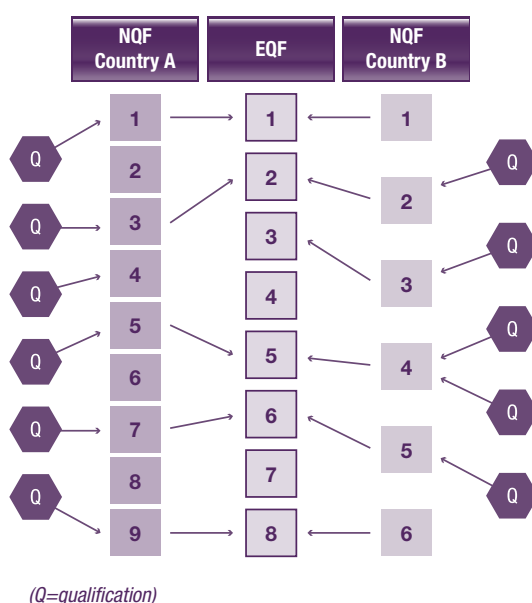
The AQF provides policy on the addition and removal of qualification types from the framework. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that the AQF has the flexibility to respond to Australia's changing education and training needs and also to maintain integrity in the AQF if and when its scope changes. The policy notes qualification types can be added or removed where there is a clear industry, professional or community need and sound educational rationale.

EQF

Allocating qualifications to levels of European NQFs

The EQF is a regional framework which can, in principle, be used as a reference point for all qualifications and all forms of learning whatever route the learning takes. Qualifications are not directly allocated to EQF levels, as they are only linked to EQF levels via the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF levels.

Diagram 3



In most countries, the inclusion of qualifications is regulated and defined by national acts or regulations. NQFs are a 'gatekeeper' for approved (quality assured) qualifications. In many countries, national registers, catalogues or databases of qualifications are in use. They store information on qualifications, qualifications standards, certificates, degrees, diplomas, titles and/or awards available in a country or a region²⁰. In the future, these national qualifications registers will be linked to the European portal. Through this European database, access to detailed information on qualifications in NQFs related to the EQF will be possible.

The EQF referencing Criterion 4 asks for transparent procedures for the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system. The allocation of qualifications to NQF levels is based on two fundamental underlying principles:

- the principle and objective of learning outcomes: Qualifications are allocated to a level based on the level of learning outcomes related to this qualification
- the principle of 'best-fit': Qualifications can focus on different dimensions or categories of learning outcomes and can also include learning outcomes related to different levels. Therefore, usually a 'perfect-fit' is probably not possible and some judgement or approximation is necessary for classifying qualifications in an NQF. This decision is based on the collective professional judgement of stakeholders and on the relationship with other qualifications in the national qualification system.

²⁰ Portal for 'Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe' - [http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#](http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#).

For establishing the relationship between qualification types and NQF levels, most countries use a combination of technical/linguistic matching and social/political principles (similar to the approach used for matching levels – see EQF referencing Criterion 2):

- technical/linguistic matching: qualifications descriptors are compared with level descriptors
- social/political principles: take into consideration how this qualification (or qualification type) is currently regarded nationally, how its social standing is understood (such as the importance of the qualification in the labour market, its traditional status and position in society and among citizens) and how it is related to other qualifications. Such judgement is made based on empirical research, on analyses of available data or by directly consulting stakeholders.

Qualification types linked to EQF levels

The purpose of the EQF is to act as a benchmark for the level of any learning recognised in a qualification in an NQF that has been referenced to the EQF. Since there is a wide variety of qualifications across Europe, the qualifications (or qualification types) linked to the eight EQF levels are quite different. Each individual EQF level also accommodates various qualification types; they differ, for example, in terms of educational sector, institutional context, content, volume, scope, and purpose (e.g. progression to further learning or labour market access). However, they are considered as equivalent in terms of their level of learning outcomes achieved. By 'equivalent' it is understood, for example, that the learning outcomes portray a similar level of autonomy among holders of a qualification by which they are able to make use of the knowledge and skills obtained. However, this does not necessarily mean that such qualifications are similar in terms of content, learning objectives and volume or that they are interchangeable.

The following paragraphs provide some information on qualification types from different educational sectors and their referencing to EQF levels²¹.

Higher education

Qualifications from higher education are linked to the EQF levels 5 to 8.

- Short-cycle higher education (SCHE) qualifications are allocated to EQF level 5²²
- Qualifications awarded to students that certify completion of one of the three sequential cycles identified by the Bologna Process²³ are linked to EQF levels 6 to 8²⁴: EQF level 6: first cycle (Bachelor), EQF level 7: second cycle (Master) and EQF level 8: third cycle (Doctorate); Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland)
- 'Pre-Bologna' qualifications (i.e. they are not part of the three cycles of the QF-EHEA) are also sometimes linked to EQF levels 6 to 8 (for example, in Slovenia and Italy).

²¹ However, it has to be noted that there are many 'zones of overlap' and particularly the borderlines between VET and higher education are partially blurring.

²² SCHE are programmes of study within the Bologna first cycle, but which do not represent the full extent of this cycle. Such awards may prepare the student for employment, while also providing preparation for, and access to, studies to completion of the first cycle.

²³ <http://www.ehea.info/>.

²⁴ In some countries, a distinction is made between 'academic' and 'professional' degrees; however, these different types are usually linked to the same level.

Vocational education and training

VET qualifications are linked to EQF levels 1 to 8, depending on the country.

- Some countries have linked basic VET qualifications to EQF levels 1 and 2 (for example, UK - England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Malta)
- Some countries have linked qualifications related to positions of 'assistants' to EQF level 3 (for example, Croatia and Slovenia)
- EQF level 4 is often used for upper secondary leaving certificates (school-based VET and dual VET) leading to skilled work
- Many VET qualifications linked to EQF level 5 have a clear hybrid character: they have a 'hub function' since they are valued as labour market entry qualifications by employers and at the same time have currency for entry to higher education. They are often considered as higher professional qualifications (post-secondary VET or 'higher VET'). This qualification type can also be found on EQF levels 6 and 7
- In few cases, VET qualifications are linked to EQF level 8 (for example, in Estonia: the occupational qualifications 'chartered civil engineer' or 'chartered architect').

General education

General education qualifications are mainly linked to EQF levels 1 to 5.

- Some countries have also defined 'entry levels' in their NQFs which are linked to EQF level 1 (for example, in the UK-England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or are not linked to the EQF at all (for example, in the Netherlands) but are seen as a ladder into the qualifications system in their context and thus play a role for social inclusion
- EQF level 1 is used for basic education certificates or for classifying primary education (for example, in Belgium-Flanders)
- So far, most countries have linked their lower secondary education to EQF level 2. A minority of countries have linked it to both levels 2 and 3, making the level dependent on the final grade (for example, Malta and the UK-England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- A few countries, notably Austria and Germany, have yet to include general education qualifications in their frameworks
- General education upper secondary school-leaving certificates (providing access to higher education) would normally be linked to EQF level 4
- In some cases, general education qualifications are also linked to EQF level 5 (such as the Advanced Higher or the Scottish Baccalaureate in UK-Scotland).

Scope of European NQFs referenced to the EQF

The EQF is designed as a comprehensive qualifications framework for lifelong learning and, thus, to capture all types and levels of qualifications across Europe (such as general education, VET, higher education). EQF level 5 is compatible with the descriptors of the higher education short cycle qualifications (SCHE) and EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 are compatible with the three cycles of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)²⁵. However, these levels are also open to qualifications achieved outside higher education.

Most countries are following a comprehensive approach in the design of their NQFs. The majority of NQFs (in 35 out of 39 countries) have been designed as comprehensive frameworks and cover all levels and qualifications types from all educational sectors (VET, higher education and general education). The remaining countries (the Czech Republic, Italy, France and Switzerland²⁶) have developed frameworks with a limited scope or chosen to develop and implement separate frameworks for vocational and higher education. Some countries, such as Germany and Austria, have agreed on comprehensive NQFs but are taking a step-by-step approach where some qualifications (for example school leaving certificates of general education at upper secondary level) have yet to be included.

The EQF is constructed as a reference point for all qualifications in Europe regardless of which body awards them; however, the main requirement is that they are allocated to the national levels referenced to the EQF levels. Up to now, most NQFs have covered qualifications awarded by public institutions of education and training (national authorities or other bodies accredited by these authorities). However, countries increasingly consider or have taken steps (e.g France, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK-Scotland) to include qualifications which are awarded outside formal education and training systems, for example in the non-formal and private sector, which are often of high relevance in the labour market.

The EQF should also facilitate the relationship between international sectoral qualifications (awarded by international bodies and multinational companies) and national qualifications systems. Some countries have already included them in their NQFs, while others are in the process of developing strategies to do so.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

According to the EQF Recommendation, each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable through a variety of educational and career paths (including non-formal and informal learning). The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning²⁷ confirms the link between qualifications frameworks and validation arrangements: NQFs provide a common reference point for learning acquired inside as well as outside formal education and training systems. A pre-condition for linking NQFs and validation is the use of the same or equivalent learning outcomes-based standards and to apply the same quality requirements as for any other assessment and certification process.

In order to coordinate the linkage between NQFs and validation, the mandate of the EQF Advisory Group was extended to include also the monitoring of the implementation of the Council recommendation on validation.

²⁵ <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/qualification/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf>.

²⁶ In the UK, the frameworks of Scotland and Wales are comprehensive; the qualifications and credit framework in England/Northern Ireland includes only vocational/professional qualifications.

²⁷ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN).

A few countries have already integrated validation into their NQF, and in several countries this work is progressing with the further development and implementation of their NQFs. The 2014 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning²⁸ also confirms that many countries give priority to the linking of frameworks and validation arrangements. Since countries have different traditions and regulations for validation, there are also different levels of developments regarding the link between NQFs and validation. However, in more than half of the countries, learning outcomes acquired in non-formal or informal learning contexts can be used to acquire a qualification classified in the NQF and/or can be used to access formal education included in the NQF. In a few countries, these links are established in a comprehensive and systematic way and qualifications at all levels can by and large be obtained through validation (for example, in France). In other countries such links may only apply in relation to some qualifications or validation only leads to exemptions from part(s) of specific programmes classified in the NQF.

ECVET, ECTS

The EQF referencing criteria state that NQFs (or qualifications systems) referenced to the EQF and the qualifications allocated to national levels are linked to credit systems (where they exist).

The European systems for credit transfer and accumulation, namely the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS²⁹) used in higher education and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET³⁰), both follow the learning outcomes approach. They are considered as tools for describing programmes or qualifications in a transparent way, support the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes, and allow for flexible pathways to obtain qualifications.

- ECTS: ECTS credits are allocated to study programmes leading to a qualification as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course components, work placements etc.). They are allocated based on the estimated workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes (i.e. time needed for lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations). 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the workload and associated learning outcomes of a full-time academic year. Credits are awarded to individual students after completion of the respective learning activities. They may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications and may be transferred into another programme. The ECTS key documents are: Course Catalogue, Student Application Form, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records. The updated ECTS User's Guide³¹, which offers guidelines for implementing ECTS and links to useful supporting documents, is subject to approval by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015
- ECVET: The description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes that can be assessed and validated separately is one of the main elements of ECVET. ECVET points are a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification or unit. ECVET points are allocated on the basis of 60 points per year of formal full time VET. The total number of points is assigned to that qualification. Assessed learning outcomes can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications. The ECVET key documents are: Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement and Personal Transcript.

²⁸ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>.

²⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm.

³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet_en.htm.

³¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf.

Although these credit systems are not directly designed as part of the EQF³², they complement the EQF in its aim to increase transparency and to support mobility and lifelong learning.

While ECTS is already used in around 75 per cent of higher education courses, ECVET is at an earlier stage of implementation. This was confirmed by the 2014 evaluation of ECVET³³ which also highlighted that ECVET points are perceived critically and that in general there would be no particular relevance or demand for credit points due to their unclear technical specifications. However, several countries are planning to implement ECVET alongside NQF developments. Credit systems (ECVET or national ones) are already an integral part of NQFs in a few countries, for instance in Croatia, Malta and the UK frameworks.

³² However, ECTS credits are used in formulating national qualifications frameworks for higher education.

³³ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/ecvet14_en.pdf.

Principle 5: Quality Assurance – both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance principles

Summary

This principle deals with the quality assurance arrangements underpinning each qualifications framework.

Australia operates a quality assurance system that is robust and affords public confidence in its qualifications. From the outset, quality assurance has been a fundamental underlying principle of the EQF.

Australia

The Australian education system is underpinned by internationally accepted principles of quality assurance. The quality assurance of higher education (universities and nonuniversities), vocational education and training and schools is a multi-layered, interrelated structure across bodies under both Australian Government and state government responsibility. Fundamental components across international quality assurance frameworks³⁴ are the registration of education and training providers and the accreditation of qualifications.

In Australia, the registration of education and training providers involves the approval of providers to deliver AQF qualifications, the ongoing self-assessment of providers and the monitoring of compliance by the relevant regulators against national standards. As explored in Principle 4, the accreditation of a course of a particular qualification is the process by which the complexity, achievement standards and volume of learning of the course is endorsed as appropriate for the type of qualification, thus allowing the course to gain national recognition within the AQF.

Further to these fundamental components is the notion that institutional and programme quality is primarily the responsibility of education providers, and that a quality assurance agency's primary responsibility should be providing a policy framework within which providers can implement and manage their own ongoing self-assessment and monitor compliance to nationally agreed quality assurance principles and processes, with external registration, assessment and validation.

Quality assurance in higher education

Registration of higher education institutions

Australia has national registration of higher education institutions.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia's national quality assurance agency for higher education. TEQSA is responsible for ensuring that providers that wish to operate within Australia's higher education system meet the Higher Education Standards Framework, which is established as a legislative instrument under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011*. TEQSA is an independent

³⁴ Coles M & Bateman E 2014, *Qualifications frameworks and Quality assurance systems: Briefing paper*, pp.13-15.

statutory authority, governed by Commissioners appointed by the Minister for Education and Training.

Higher education providers are required to adhere to the *Provider Registration Standards*, which set the bar that providers must meet with regards to:

- financial viability and sustainability
- corporate and academic governance
- primacy of academic quality and integrity
- management and human resources
- responsibilities to students
- physical and electronic resources and infrastructure.

In registering providers, TEQSA also assesses that providers meet the following Standards:

Course Accreditation Standards

- course design is appropriate and meets the Qualification Standards
- course resourcing and information is adequate
- admission criteria are appropriate
- teaching and learning are of high quality
- assessment is effective and expected student learning outcomes are achieved
- course monitoring, review, updating and termination are appropriately managed
- institutions that wish to apply for self-accrediting authority meet established criteria

Qualification Standards

- higher education awards delivered meet the appropriate criteria
- certification documentation issued is accurate and protects against fraudulent use
- articulation, recognition of prior learning and credit arrangements meet the appropriate criteria.

Institution Categories

TEQSA will register higher education providers for a period of up to seven years. Higher Education Providers are able to seek approval from TEQSA to be registered in a particular Provider Category that uses the word 'university', if they meet the additional criteria. The Provider Category Standards set out criteria for each category. There are five university categories as follows:

- Australian University
- Australian University College
- Australian University of Specialisation
- Overseas University
- Overseas University of Specialisation.

TEQSA also has the ability to impose conditions on an institution's registration or course accreditation, such as reporting to TEQSA regularly on particular issues. TEQSA uses annual Provider Information Requests (PIR) and its annual provider risk assessments to monitor key

aspects of providers' operations during registration periods, which supports TEQSA's risk based approach to regulation of the sector.

For renewal of registration processes, TEQSA employs its risk based approach by taking into account a provider's regulatory history, track record of delivering higher education and risk assessments to determine the scope of assessment and the information a provider must submit to TEQSA.

Under the TEQSA Act, TEQSA maintains the National Register of Higher Education Providers, which is publicly available on the internet. The National Register lists registered higher education providers and, for non-self-accrediting institutions, each course they are accredited to deliver.

Accreditation of higher education qualifications

In Australia's higher education sector, qualifications are required to comply with the Higher Education Standards Framework under the TEQSA Act. The Standards require that awards leading to a higher education qualification at levels 5–10 of the AQF must comply with the corresponding specifications in the AQF.

The Standards also set robust requirements in relation to internal quality assurance processes, corporate and academic governance, and admission processes. The Standards require institutions to have robust internal processes for design and approval of courses of study. These processes must take account of external standards and requirements, such as published discipline standards, input from relevant external stakeholders and external professional accreditation. Institutions must act on comparative data on the performance of students, and undertake systematic monitoring, review and improvement of courses of study, for example through benchmarking and peer review. Institutions are also required to protect academic integrity through effective policies and measures to ensure the integrity of student assessment. When accrediting courses, TEQSA examines whether design of the course of study meets the requirements of the Standards.

In Australia, universities and a small number of higher education providers maintain self-accrediting authority. Self-accrediting authority is a significant responsibility and providers that self-accredit some or all of their higher education courses are accountable for meeting the Standards. TEQSA has the authority to audit the courses of a self-accrediting institution to ensure that the provider is properly exercising its self-accrediting authority in line with the Standards. When undertaking a renewal of registration process for a self-accrediting institution, TEQSA will take a sample of evidence relating to courses to assess that they meet the requirements of the Standards relating to course accreditation and the AQF.

Institutions that do not have self-accrediting authority must apply to TEQSA for accreditation (and re-accreditation) of each of the courses they offer. A course may be granted accreditation for up to seven years.

In assessing all institutions against the standards, TEQSA may choose to conduct site visits, and/or engage expert consultants, in addition to evidence provided by the institution.

Australian Government funding is also provided to higher education providers that have separate approval under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA). Further monitoring occurs in connection with funding responsibilities pertinent to HESA, including a range of financial viability and students and staff reporting responsibilities.

Vocational education and training

Australia's VET system features the skills requirements of different occupations within the labour market and builds the content of VET qualifications around this. This system of qualification design built on industry requirements for skills rather than theoretical curriculum driven prescription by training organisations is an important strength of Australian VET provision. Registered training organisations deliver industry-developed qualifications in compliance with the Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015, to offer the highest possible quality training now and into the future.

Registration of VET institutions

Vocational education and training (VET) is a shared Australian Government and state/territory government responsibility.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is Australia's national VET regulator. ASQA is an independent statutory authority, comprising three Commissioners appointed by the Minister for Education and Training.

ASQA regulates VET institutions, or Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), operating in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland or Tasmania. ASQA is also the regulatory body for RTOs in Victoria and Western Australia that offer courses to overseas students and/or offer courses to students in a state or territory that has referred powers to the Australian Government.

RTOs that deliver solely to domestic students within Victoria and Western Australia are regulated by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Western Australian Training Accreditation Council (WATAC) respectively.

ASQA registration requires providers to comply with all components of the VET Quality Framework, established in legislation under the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* (NVR Act) which includes the:

- Standards for Registered Training Organisations
- Fit and Proper Person Requirements
- Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements
- Data Provision Requirements
- Australian Qualifications Framework.

From 1 January 2015, a single set of Standards for Registered Training Organisations took effect, applying to all RTOs regardless of the regulator. The standards for RTOs include requirements that:

- the RTO's training and assessment strategies and practices are responsive to industry and learner needs and meet the requirements of training packages and VET accredited courses
- the operations of the RTO are quality assured, including that the RTO is responsible for delivery through any third party arrangements
- the RTO issues, maintains and accepts AQF certification documentation
- accurate and accessible information about an RTO, its services and performance is available to inform current and prospective learners and clients, and each learner is properly informed and protected
- the RTO has effective governance and administration arrangements in place.

Prior to 1 January 2015, the VRQA and the WATAC required the small number of RTOs registered for domestic delivery in Victoria and Western Australia respectively to meet the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). The AQTF had the same requirements as the VET Quality Framework, ensuring consistent standards to RTOs in the VET sector. The National Standards for VET Regulators, which were established in legislation and apply to all three regulators, further ensure regulation of the VET sector is consistent, effective, proportional, responsive and transparent.

RTOs can be registered for a period up to seven years. ASQA and the two state regulators are also able to impose conditions on a RTO's registration, such as shorter registration periods or requirements to report to the regulator on particular issues.

ASQA employs a risk assessment framework to apply a risk based, proportionate approach to regulation of the VET sector. This ensures regulatory action is targeted appropriately and informs the scope of assessment undertaken by ASQA in assessing registration and accreditation applications.

All RTOs registered to operate in Australia are listed on the publicly available National Register of VET, available at training.gov.au. Training.gov.au is maintained by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, on behalf of state and territory governments.

Accreditation of VET qualifications

The importance of employer and industry participation, contribution and effort is a mainstay of the development of VET AQF qualifications either within Training Packages or Accredited Courses. An important feature of Australia's VET system is employer representation and industry involvement regarding the design, development and redevelopment of vocational qualifications to meet the needs of industry, individuals, skills requirements and the economy. Industry plays a critical role in ensuring Australian training products are available to meet the current and future growth needs of Australia's economy and society, and to identify labour market economics and trends to forecast needs and the appropriate investment in training products and supporting VET resources. As a result, Australian VET is characterised by standards for competency requirements for occupations, underpinned by quality principles.

Industry-led VET qualifications in Australia are developed either as part of a Training Package (which comprise the majority of Australian VET qualifications, skill sets and units of competency) or as a VET Accredited Course (for niche and emerging skills requirements). Both the *Standards for Training Packages* and the *Standards for VET Accredited Courses* require that qualifications comply with the AQF, provide appropriate competency outcomes, and meet industry-established training needs.

In January 2016, the Australian Government introduced new arrangements to give industry a formal, expanded role in the development and approval of training packages. The new arrangements for training package development are being led by the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC). The AISC was established in May 2015 by the Council of Australian Governments Industry and Skills Council and includes industry leaders from across Australia. The AISC makes decisions about the content of training packages, based on grass roots industry intelligence from Industry Reference Committees (IRCs).

IRCs are the primary channel for industry advice and the formal point through which industry requirements for skills are considered and defined in training packages. IRCs are made up of

people with experience, skills and knowledge of their particular industry sector. Their advice ensures training packages meet the needs of employers and the modern economy.

IRCs are supported by professional Skills Service Organisations. These organisations are contracted by the Australian Government and provide professional enabling activities to IRCs to support engagement with industry and guide the development of training packages.

ASQA and the two state regulators are responsible for accrediting VET Accredited Courses which also include short courses that do not have an AQF level. Once a course has been accredited, it is listed on the National Register of VET.

RTOs may only deliver nationally recognised training such as a training package qualification or units of competency, or a VET Accredited Course if the regulator has approved it to be on their scope of registration. RTOs must apply to ASQA or the state regulator if they wish to change their scope of registration. When assessing an application to change a RTO's scope of registration, ASQA considers:

- the RTO's ability to provide the recognised training in accordance with the VET Quality Framework and if the applicant is currently complying with the VET Quality Framework and its conditions of registration
- the other recognised training offered by the RTO.

VET funding is the primary responsibility of state governments, although the Australian Government provides income contingent loans to students in higher level VET qualifications. The Australian Government provides funding to states and territories, and states and territories. In providing funding to RTOs, develop and maintain additional standards as a basis for continued access to state funding programs.

EQF

From the outset, quality assurance has been a fundamental underlying principle of the EQF. It is considered as the very basis of mutual trust between countries and systems, which in turn is a decisive factor for the success of the EQF referencing process. Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms must work together in a systematic and transparent way to guarantee confidence in qualifications, for NQFs to be considered as a tool to guarantee and maintain quality.

Quality assurance systems and processes differ considerably across European countries and also across sub-sectors of education and training. Most countries have several quality assurance bodies in place which manage quality assurance processes over a specific sector or sub-system. This diversity of quality assurance systems and processes reflects the diversity of governance systems, of education and training systems, as well as cultural traditions that shape and characterise the European region.

The EQF, in its role as a meta-framework, does not set standards for quality, nor does it prescribe how national quality assurance processes are to be implemented.

Transparency through qualifications registers and databases and the indication of EQF levels on certificates and diplomas

Transparency of information plays a pivotal role in quality assurance and is a major pre-requisite for enhanced trust and confidence in European qualifications. Many countries have thus developed or are developing web-based and freely accessible national registers or databases of qualifications. Work is currently ongoing to link them to the Learning

Opportunities and Qualifications portal³⁵ in Europe (see Criterion 4 for more information). All EQF referencing reports, once presented to the EQF Advisory Group and finalised, are made available through this portal.

Countries are also working towards including a reference to the relevant EQF level in newly awarded qualifications certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements. So far, 15 countries already indicate EQF levels on newly issued certificates, diplomas or Europass documents.

EQF referencing: The quality assurance requirements for national qualifications frameworks or systems are referred to in EQF referencing criteria 5 and 6

When countries relate their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF, EQF referencing criteria require them to illustrate that their quality assurance arrangements are consistent with relevant European principles and guidelines.

EQF referencing Criterion 5 specifically refers to quality assurance and requires that ‘The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex III of the EQF Recommendation).’

Referencing Criterion 5 thus requires countries to demonstrate the links between their national quality assurance systems, the NQF and the overarching regulations and agreements in this field. According to referencing Criterion 6³⁶, EQF referencing reports should also include a written statement from the relevant national quality assurance bodies that they agree with the documentation provided in the referencing process.

Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training are defined in Annex III of the 2008 EQF Recommendation³⁷

Annex III of the EQF Recommendation provides a set of guiding principles for countries’ quality assurance arrangements for higher education and VET to underpin the implementation of the framework. The criteria presented in Annex III are broadly consistent with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET)³⁸ and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for higher education³⁹. These principles state that quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions and that they should be regularly evaluated, as should the agencies that carry out quality assurance. The quality assurance procedures should include reference to context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving particular emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes. Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, including learners.

³⁵ [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f\[0\]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#).

³⁶ Criterion 6: ‘The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.’

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/journal_en.pdf.

³⁸ <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-quality-assurance-reference-framework.aspx>.

³⁹ <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>.

VET: Implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and its link to NQFs

EQAVET is the European reference framework for quality assurance in VET. It was formally established through the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)⁴⁰.

EQAVET is not a quality assurance system, but rather a meta-framework for quality assurance. It invites countries to promote and monitor continuous improvement in their VET systems, through the use of a quality assurance and improvement cycle based on four phases (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review), which are linked to quality criteria and indicative descriptors. It provides a systematic approach to quality assurance and emphasises the importance of monitoring and improving quality by combining internal and external evaluation with qualitative analysis. EQAVET can be applied at the system, provider and qualification awarding levels. EQAVET also promotes European cooperation in developing and improving quality assurance in VET through the EQAVET network, which is a community of practice bringing together countries and social partners, supported by scientific advisers and the European Commission. The EQAVET network plays an important role in promoting a culture of quality assurance across countries, by supporting implementation at national level and by strengthening synergies and cooperation at the European level. In addition, implementation at the national level is supported by Quality Assurance National Reference Points (NRP), which were set up in the individual countries.

As a tool, EQAVET is of non-binding nature. It adopts a flexible approach, allowing countries and VET providers to select tools and elements from a wider array and to adjust them for their purposes and needs. Since its adoption in 2009, EQAVET has contributed to advancing a quality culture in VET across European countries, and to its practical implementation. The European Commission's recent report on the evaluation of EQAVET acknowledges the achievements made so far, however also highlights two important aspects for the further improvement of EQAVET. First, its very flexible tool-based approach has somewhat reduced its potential to create a common language and conceptual framework for quality assurance in VET across countries. Second, a closer relationship with NQFs and the EQF (but also with other European tools such as ECVET or Europass) will be needed to allow EQAVET unfold its full potential. EQAVET specifically aims to support the implementation of the EQF, however does not sufficiently address the quality assurance of learning outcomes, in particular the quality assurance of qualification design, assessment and certification. Efforts are currently ongoing, both at European and national level, to more coherently exploit the synergies between the EQF and EQAVET⁴¹.

Although EQAVET generally addresses all forms of VET, it is currently predominantly being implemented in initial VET.

⁴⁰ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF>.

⁴¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf.

Higher Education: Implementation of the ESG and their link to NQFs

The 1999 Bologna Declaration⁴², which defines the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), has encouraged European cooperation in higher education quality assurance, with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. In 2005, national Ministers responsible for higher education adopted the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)'. These standards and guidelines, which are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, aim to promote mutual trust while respecting the diversity of national and institutional contexts. The ESG provide guidance and reference points for internal and external quality assurance in higher education; they are not to be understood as standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented. The revised ESG were approved by the Ministers at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2015⁴³.

The ESG are based on the following four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture
- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

The ESG thus recognise the primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional and agency autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

ENQA was set up in 2000, with the aim to disseminate information, experiences and good practices in the field of quality assurance in higher education. ENQA membership is open to quality assurance agencies in the EHEA member states, and requires compliance with the ESG. This compliance is checked every five years through independent review. External reviews of ENQA member agencies are considered to play an important role for assuring quality and trustworthiness of quality assurance agencies for higher education in Europe. By the end of 2014, ENQA had 44 full members in 25 countries of the EHEA⁴⁴.

European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)⁴⁵

Set up in 2008, EQAR maintains a register of those higher education quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with the ESG. Compliance must be demonstrated through an external review by independent experts. The main objective of EQAR is to provide the public with clear and reliable information on quality assurance agencies operating in Europe; the register is thus web-based and freely accessible. As of 2015, 36 agencies in 19 countries were listed on the register.

⁴² http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/about/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf.

⁴³ http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf.

⁴⁴ <http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ENQA-2014-Annual-Report.pdf>.

⁴⁵ <http://www.eqar.eu/>; direct link to the register: <http://www.eqar.eu/register/map.html>. EQAR was set up by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

The Bologna Process has led to a significant transformation of quality assurance of higher Education in Europe, making the establishment of quality assurance systems and the general improvement of quality in higher education a priority in many countries. The majority of countries have clear external quality assurance systems in place. Also, most countries have set up national agencies for quality assurance. Many of these developments can be directly attributed to the implementation of the Bologna Process, along with the increased recognition of the importance of stakeholder participation, in particular of students.

Practically all EHEA countries have established some form of external quality assurance system, although there are significant differences in the philosophy and approach behind systems. These can be traced back to the wide diversity of political systems, higher education systems and socio-cultural traditions across countries, which also substantiates the non-prescriptive nature of the ESG. One important distinction that can be drawn across countries is whether the main focus of quality assurance is on institutions or programmes, or both. The vast majority of quality assurance systems now focus both on institutions and programmes. This suggests that while in the early stages of developing external QA systems the focus tends to be on programme evaluation, over time this often evolves to an institutional focus. Countries also increasingly extend their focus in quality assurance to the quality of teaching and learning⁴⁶.

Quality assurance in general education

The common principles for quality assurance laid out in Annex III of the EQF Recommendation do not explicitly cover general education.

General education is typically subject to strong national regulation in practically all countries. Very often, countries apply a combination of external and internal school evaluation as key methods of quality assurance. In many countries, school inspection models applied and often play an important role for quality assurance in general education⁴⁷.

Quality assurance arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning⁴⁸

The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning asks that transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks are in place that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools.

Quality assurance is a key aspect in establishing the link between NQFs and validation (see Criterion 4). For the quality assurance of validation arrangements, the majority of countries use (or intend to use) the general quality assurance mechanisms already in place for the educational system and the NQF, signalling that validation of non-formal and informal learning is subject to the same quality requirements as any other assessment and certification process.

⁴⁶ <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf>.

⁴⁷ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/178EN.pdf.

⁴⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222%2801%29>.

4. Conclusions

This joint report examined key elements of comparability, similarity and difference between the AQF as a national qualifications framework and the EQF as a regional qualifications framework. Although there are conceptual and contextual differences between the AQF and EQF, the Technical Joint Working Group finds that there are compelling similarities between the AQF and EQF based on analysis across the five principles used as the basis for the comparison.

Establishing a relationship between qualifications frameworks is a technical and complex policy area which has emerged in the international landscape in recent years where only a few countries/regions having significant experience. Europe has built significant expertise in this area through the implementation of the EQF and the process of referencing to the EQF.

At the policy level, this joint project built on collective past Australian and European experiences in comparing qualifications frameworks to help develop a more mature and sophisticated understanding of what it means to compare qualifications frameworks, and importantly, what it does not mean. The comparison of the AQF and EQF attests to the robustness of the EQF as a reference framework beyond its regional borders and the international robustness of the AQF.

The success of this joint activity was premised on a number of critical factors. Firstly, there were compatible and mutually beneficial policy drivers on both sides to enable a comparison of the two frameworks using a congruous frame of reference. The information on policy drivers enabled the Technical Working Group to hold productive discussions in terms of what useful and meaningful outcomes could be achieved within the Group's remit. Respective governance arrangements and scope of authority for the frameworks in Australia and Europe were established up-front. Explicit discussions were held to identify the benefits and risks of the joint activity. How the outcomes could be used and by who were agreed upon early in the process. As such, the joint activity facilitated a much deeper understanding of the role of governments in promoting recognition and mobility for students and workers, as well as similarities and differences in policy approaches. This also provided the avenue for exchanging information on significant reform agendas and the progress of existing reforms and new challenges that have arisen since their implementation.

Secondly, both the AQF and EQF are well established frameworks, based on learning outcomes and supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms. The project facilitated a more functional understanding of the meanings of governance, regulation and quality assurance in the local context and through an international lens.

Thirdly, Australia and the countries of the EU practice robust qualifications recognition policies and processes guided under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. A level of trust has already been established under this multilateral instrument. The Technical Working Group agreed that the inclusion of qualifications recognition technical experts adds a significant and valuable policy dimension to framework comparison activities.

Lastly, on both the Australian and European sides, there existed a strong will and commitment of time to undertake the project. Comparing qualifications frameworks is not a straightforward, paper-based exercise. It requires time to listen, understand and hold in-depth, complex and technical policy analysis and the willingness to be open to and appreciate differences through robust and productive discussions. It is only through such discussions where government policies can be more fulsomely understood. This functional understanding and appreciation validates the findings of the comparison of the AQF and EQF.

Despite the challenges of comparing an operational NQF with a regional referencing framework (the EQF), which is different in nature and purpose, it has been possible to establish comparability between the two frameworks and their levels. In this context an important lesson from an EQF perspective is that the nature, purpose and the governance of the EQF and the relationships between the EQF and the European NQFs need careful explanation when engaging into a technical comparison project.

This asymmetry between an NQF and a regional QF is also reflected in the different consultative processes followed by the two parties to this project. While in Australia relevant stakeholders were consulted, the more limited consultation on the EU level is the consequence of the absence of provisions on external policy in the current EQF Recommendation. The EQF Recommendation was adopted in 2008 as a framework to enhance the mobility of workers and learners and lifelong learning through transparency and comparability of qualifications within Europe.

The process used for the technical exchange in itself was invaluable to those directly involved in the project. This joint activity, by virtue of its international nature, has helped to develop an enriched understanding of respective qualifications frameworks, and why they developed in a certain way, making policy drivers explicit. The identification, tabling and comparative analysis of the assumptions and nuances within each framework further improves the validity of the exercise and adds value to the international robustness of both frameworks.

Through this technical information exchange, a deeper and functional understanding of the relationship of the AQF and the EQF by Australian and European policy-makers has been developed. This joint process has raised the level of transparency to achieve a 'zone of mutual trust' where positive people-to-people and organisation-to-organisation relationships have been established. In practice, this zone of mutual trust represents opportunities for greater educational exchange and research collaboration between Australia and the EU, and recognition of such productive endeavours to facilitate student and worker mobility outcomes. Australia and the countries of the EU have many areas of common interest and face many similar challenges in the education and training sectors. A number of key policy areas of mutual benefit were identified for future engagement including transnational education, trade qualifications, logistics and transport education and training, and improved policy linkages across the three areas of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and qualifications recognition.

Through this joint activity, there was full acknowledgement by the Technical Working Group that qualifications frameworks are in a constant dynamic state, that are increasingly outward looking in a globalised economy. The positive outcomes of in-depth international exchanges such as this project, attest to the value of the findings in this report and the usefulness of the information herein to inform future policy work on qualifications framework comparisons and other related policy areas.

Glossary

AQF

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| Best fit | On balance of the relevant factors, a determination of where a qualifications framework level from one qualifications framework most appropriately sits in reference to a level on another qualifications framework. |
| Informal learning | Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective. Examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child). |
| Non-formal learning | Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships). It may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, structured online learning and courses organised by civil society organisations. |
| Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) | <p>In Australia vocational education and training is offered by RTOs who must comply with the requirements and standards of either the VET Quality Framework or the Australian Quality Training Framework.</p> <p>There are almost 5000 RTOs, including TAFE institutes, other government providers, and private providers. RTOs offer programs leading to AQF qualifications. Some RTOs are also higher education institutions that are accredited to offer higher education qualifications such as Associate Degrees and Bachelor Degrees.</p> |
| Self-accrediting authority | In Australia, universities and a small number of private higher education providers maintain self-accrediting authority, meaning they can accredit their own courses of study without the need for individual course approval from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). |

EQF

Bologna Process

The Bologna Process was initiated by the 1999 Bologna Declaration, by 30 countries, as an agreement to engage in a voluntary process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The process today includes no fewer than 47 participating countries. At its inception, the Bologna Process was meant to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education and to foster student mobility and employability through the introduction of a system based on undergraduate and postgraduate studies with easily readable programmes and degrees. Quality assurance has played an important role from the outset, too. However, the various ministerial meetings since 1999 have broadened this agenda and have given greater precision to the tools that have been developed. The undergraduate/postgraduate degree structure has been modified into a three-cycle system (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate), which now includes the concept of qualifications frameworks, with an emphasis on learning outcomes.

Between 1999 - 2010, all the efforts of the Bologna Process members were targeted to creating the European Higher Education Area, that became reality with the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of March, 2010. (Cf. EHEA).

www.ehea.info.

Council Recommendation on VNFIL

The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) calls on Member States to put arrangements in place by 2018 to allow individuals a) to have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, and b) to obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences. The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning confirms the link between qualifications frameworks and validation arrangements. The EQF Advisory Group has been put in charge of following up on this process. (Cf. Validation).

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>.

ECTS

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the transparency of learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and learner mobility through the recognition of qualifications and periods of learning. It is a system that helps to design, describe and deliver study programmes and award higher education qualifications.

EHEA

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched along with the Bologna Process' decade anniversary, in March 2010, during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. As the main objective of the Bologna Process since its inception in 1999, the EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. (Cf. QF-EHEA; Cf. Self-certification; Cf. Bologna Process).

<http://www.ehea.info/>.

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| EQAVET | <p>The European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training is a reference tool for policy-makers based on a four-stage quality cycle that includes goal setting and planning, implementation, evaluation and review. It respects the autonomy of national governments and is a voluntary system to be used by public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance.</p> <p>http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx.</p> |
| EQF Advisory Group | <p>The European level governance body for the EQF, set up based on the 2008 EQF Recommendation. The EQF AG is the body responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF. It comprises representatives of all participating countries, Council of Europe, EU social partners, Cedefop, ETF and other important EU stakeholders. The work is organised in form of regular meetings (4-5 a year), peer learning activities and working groups.</p> <p>[Definition: mix between what is written in the report, Note 3 and http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2107].</p> |
| EQF Recommendation | <p>Refers to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. It is the official document which constitutes the EQF.</p> <p>Recommendations are official EU documents without legal force but are negotiated and voted on according to appropriate legislative EU procedures. Although not legally binding to the Member States, all of them have chosen to implement the Recommendation. The total number of countries currently implementing the EQF is 38.</p> <p>Further examples of Recommendations include the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training.</p> <p>http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF.</p> |
| EQF Referencing Criteria | <p>The 'Criteria and procedures for the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF' is a list of 10 criteria, which guide the referencing process of participating countries and bring some conformity to it in the interests of mutual trust. They help to ensure that national qualifications frameworks (or systems) are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way.</p> <p>The criteria have provided a structure for the process of referencing and for the report of the process. (Cf. Referencing).</p> <p>http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/criteria_en.pdf.</p> |

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| EQF Referencing Report | EQF Referencing Reports are an important element of the EQF Referencing Process (cf. Referencing). A Referencing Report is a statement of the relationship between a country's national qualifications system or framework and the EQF, at a specific point of time. The ten EQF Referencing Criteria (see above) provide a basis for the preparation of these reports. Countries then present their report to the EQF Advisory Group. The EQF Advisory Group discusses them and provides feedback on the reports. The presentation and discussion of the reports improve understanding of qualification systems among EQF countries. |
| Erasmus+ | EU programme for Education, Training, Youth, and Sport for 2014-2020, http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm . |
| Europass | A portfolio of five different documents and an electronic folder aiming to contain descriptions of the entire holder's learning achievements, official qualifications, work experience, skills and competences, acquired over time. These documents are: the Europass CV, the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement, the Europass Mobility and the Language Passport. https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home. |
| Formal learning | Learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN. |
| Horizon 2020 | EU Research and Innovation programme for the period 2014 to 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/ . |
| Informal learning | Informal learning means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child). http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN. |
| International Sectoral Qualification (ISQ) | 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. |

Learning outcomes Are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence:

- *'knowledge'* is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- *'skills'* means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- *'competence'* means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/journal_en.pdf.

National Coordination Point National Coordination Points, also known as EQF-NCP, are contact points, which are set up in all participating countries, to support and coordinate the EQF Referencing Process at national level.

National Qualifications Framework An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/journal_en.pdf.

National Qualifications System All aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework.

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/journal_en.pdf.

Non-formal learning Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.

[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN).

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| Principle of best-fit | Refers to the approach applied when referencing national qualifications levels to EQF levels, or when allocating qualifications (or qualifications types) to NQF levels. Due to the diversity of qualifications at national and sector level there will never be a perfect or absolute fit between qualifications (types) and NQF levels, or between NQF levels and EQF levels. Thus the procedures for linking or referencing are likely to be imperfect and require the use of 'best-fit'. ie usually some judgement or approximation is necessary to decide on the relation between qualifications (types) and NQF levels, or between NQF and EQF levels. |
| QF-EHEA | Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area: an overarching framework that makes transparent the relationship between European national higher education frameworks of qualifications and the qualifications they contain. (Cf. EHEA; Cf. Self-certification) |
| Qualification | In the context of the EQF, qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf . |
| Referencing of qualifications levels (EQF Referencing Process) | Referencing in the EQF is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of national qualifications, usually defined in terms of a national qualifications framework, and the levels of the EQF. Through this process, national authorities responsible for qualifications systems, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between the national qualifications system and the eight levels of the EQF. |
| SCHE | SCHE (short-cycle higher education) are higher education degree programmes of less than 180 ECTS (typically 120 ECTS) in volume, leading to a degree that is recognised at a lower level than a qualification at the end of the first cycle. Such programmes may prepare learners for employment, while also providing preparation for, and access to studies for the completion of the first cycle. The descriptors of the short cycle correspond to the learning outcomes of EQF level 5. |
| Self-certification | The self-certification is a process by which the competent authorities of a given country verify that the national qualifications framework is compatible with the overarching QF-EHEA Framework. Once the self-certification process has been completed, self-certification reports should be published so that partners in the European Higher Education Area may access them. Many countries prepare these reports as a joint report with their EQF referencing report (Cf. EHEA; Cf. QF-EHEA) http://www.ehea.info/ . |
| Validation (of learning outcomes) | Validation refers to the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification. (Cf. Council Recommendation on VNFIL) (Cedefop Glossary) |

Attachments

Appendix 1

Technical comparison of the AQF and EQF

| AQF Definitions | EQF Definitions | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| <p>AQF qualification is the result of an accredited complete program of learning that leads to formal certification that a graduate has achieved learning outcomes as described in the AQF.</p> | <p>Qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.</p> | <p>Definitions Intent is the same.</p> |
| <p>Not defined in the AQF</p> | <p>National qualifications system means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework.</p> | |
| <p>Not defined in the AQF</p> | <p>National qualifications framework means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.</p> | |
| <p>Not defined in the AQF; generally used to refer to an education and training 'sector'.</p> | <p>Sector means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology.</p> | <p>EQF definition is close to what Australia defines as an 'industry sector'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Definitions | EQF Definitions | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Learning outcomes are the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and application of knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of the learning process</p> | <p>Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence</p> | <p>Intent is the same.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge refers to what a graduate knows and understands and it can be described in terms of depth, breadth, kinds of knowledge and complexity as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depth of knowledge can be general or specialised • breadth of knowledge can range from a single topic to multi-disciplinary area of knowledge • kinds of knowledge range from concrete to abstract, from segmented to cumulative • complexity of knowledge refers to the combination of kinds, depth and breadth of knowledge. | <p>Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, it is described as theoretical and/or factual.</p> | <p>Best fit – intent is the same Use of ‘work or study’ fits with AQF summary.</p> |
| <p>Skills refer to what a graduate can do. They can be described in terms of kinds and complexity and include cognitive skills, technical skills, creative skills, interpersonal skills and generic skills. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cognitive and creative skills involving the use of intuitive, logical and critical thinking • technical skills involving dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments • communication skills involving written, oral, literacy and numeracy skills. | <p>Skills means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).</p> | <p>Best fit – intent is the same.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Definitions | EQF Definitions | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills refers to how a graduate applies knowledge and skills in context and in terms of autonomy, responsibility and accountability. The context may range from the predictable to the unpredictable, and the known to the unknown, while tasks may range from routine to non-routine.</p> | <p>Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.</p> | <p>Exact Use of 'work or study' fits with AQF summary.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 1 | EQF Level 1 | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have knowledge and skills for initial work, community involvement and/or further learning.</p> <p>Qualifications at this level are typically pathway qualifications that may lead to a VET in schools qualification, career clarification and/or for use as a pre-vocational qualification.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate I in Animal Studies • Certificate I in Local Government. | <p>Summary</p> <p>Qualification types linked to EQF level 1 are often considered as basic certificates for general education (for example, the “Certificate of completing primary school” in Poland (6 years) or second cycle of basic education (6 years) in Portugal or 6th grade of primary education¹ in Hungary and primary education certificate (4th grade) in Lithuania.</p> <p>In some countries the Primary education certificate linked to the EQF level 1 includes eight years (ISCED 1 and 2] as in in Croatia or Lower secondary school-leaving certificates as in Italy.</p> <p>Examples of VET qualifications linked to the EQF level 1 are “VET level 1” in Malta or “Vocational training preparation” in Germany.</p> <p>Sometimes also certificates in basis skills are referenced to the EQF level 1 as for instance level 1 certificate in communication in Ireland or functional skills at entry level in England.</p> | <p>Overall – Good match</p> <p>There are some minor differences in language of the learning outcomes but it is clear that the levels align when considering the outcomes of an analysis of a range of AQF Certificate I qualifications. Qualifications at this level are pathway qualifications that may lead to a VET in schools qualification, career clarification and/or for use as a pre-vocational qualification. This compares with qualification types referenced to the EQF level 1 through NQFs. European qualifications at this level relate to basic/primary certificates for general education or basic VET qualifications and are considered as first steps on the path for achieving basic skills and key competences. Like the AQF qualifications at this level, EQF Level 1 referenced qualifications have little value in the labour market.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

¹ Primary education is a term commonly used in European countries for basic education

| AQF Level 1 | EQF Level 1 | Comments |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have foundational knowledge for everyday life, further learning and preparation for initial work.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Basic general knowledge.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The AQF ‘foundational knowledge and skills’ learning outcomes is comparable to the EQF ‘basic knowledge and skills’ on the basis of the AQF Glossary definition of foundational knowledge and skills as</p> <p>‘. . . a starting point . . . for the development of learning and work’.</p> <p>The AQF requirement to obtain ‘knowledge for everyday life...’ is similar in meaning to the EQF requirement for ‘general knowledge’. The EQF doesn’t include context but it is implied.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have foundational cognitive, technical and communication skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake defined routine activities • identify and report simple issues and problems. | <p>Skills</p> <p>Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The skills learning outcomes are similar. The AQF skills to complete ‘defined routine activities’ and resolve ‘simple issues’ indicates parity with the EQF’s ‘simple tasks’. There are no direct problem solving learning outcomes in EQF but they are implied.</p> |
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy in highly structured and stable contexts and within narrow parameters.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills/competence</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is the same. The AQF ‘narrow parameters’ connotes the same as the EQF ‘direct supervision’.</p> <p>The AQF Glossary defines parameters as ‘boundaries that define the context of learning and/or work’.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 2 | EQF Level 2 | Comments |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have knowledge and skills for work in a defined context and/or further learning.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate II in Automotive Sales • Certificate II in Tourism. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF level 2 accommodates qualification from lower secondary education in most countries as is the case for instance in Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia or 'GCSEs at grade D-G' in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p> <p>There are also some elementary qualifications for example "VET level 2" in Malta, and vocational qualification 1 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p> | <p>Good match</p> <p>AQF and EQF Level 2 compare well. The language and intent of the learning outcomes are similar.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have basic factual, technical and procedural knowledge of a defined area of work and learning.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The knowledge learning outcomes of the AQF and the EQF are similar.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have basic cognitive, technical and communication skills to apply appropriate methods, tools, materials and readily available information to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake defined activities • provide solutions to a limited range of predictable problems. | <p>Skills</p> <p>Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The skills outcomes are similar. The AQF 'defined activities' and 'limited range of predictable problems' are similar to the EQF 'routine problems'.</p> |
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy and limited judgement in structured and stable contexts and within narrow parameters.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Work or study under supervision with some autonomy.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills/competence</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is the same as the EQF competence. The AQF 'structured and stable contexts within narrow parameters' aligns with the EQF requirement for 'some autonomy'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 3 | EQF Level 3 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for work and/or further learning.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate III in Concreting • Certificate III in Painting and Decorating. | <p>Summary</p> <p>European member states have referenced the levels in their NQFs that hold VET certificates to EQF level 3. These qualifications allow access to the labour market and open a route to further learning. (e.g. CZ 3 years VET certificate), VET (journeyman's certificate in Denmark, dual VET (two-year program) in Germany, level 3 certificate in Ireland, professional operator certificate in Italy, vocational aptitude diploma in Luxembourg or MBO-3 VET in the Netherlands.</p> <p>In some countries, secondary education certificates are referenced to the EQF level 3 as for example, "GCSE at grade A-C" in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland or secondary education certificate (grades 1-5) in Malta.</p> | <p>Good Match</p> <p>The conclusion was reached after the application of the 'best fit' principle involving also a comparison of AQF Level 3 with EQF Level 4 where the differences in application are significant. The knowledge and application of knowledge and skills/competence descriptions between the two frameworks are similar in language and intent. However, the AQF skills learning outcomes are higher and build upon those in the EQF.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have factual, technical, procedural and some theoretical knowledge of a specific area of work and learning.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The knowledge learning outcomes of the AQF and the EQF are similar. Both require factual, technical and procedural knowledge. The contexts of knowledge are similar - the AQF requirement of application in 'a specific area' compares with the EQF's 'a field of work or study.'</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 3 | EQF Level 3 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have a range of cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply a specialised range of methods, tools, materials and information to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete routine activities • provide and transmit solutions to predictable and sometimes unpredictable problems. | <p>Skills</p> <p>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>AQF higher</p> <p>The AQF skills learning outcomes are higher than the EQF. The AQF ‘routine activities’ and ‘predictable problems’ equates to the EQF ‘basic methods’ but the AQF skills to ‘apply specialised methods’ and ‘unpredictable problems’ indicates a higher level of skills than the EQF where it applies to ‘basic methods, tools, materials and information’.</p> |
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy and judgement and to take limited responsibility in known and stable contexts within established parameters.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study.</p> <p>Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills/competence</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>Although the EQF provides more minimal context for the application of knowledge and skills than the AQF, there are similar requirements in terms of application of autonomy and judgment implied by the EQF requirement to ‘adapt own behavior’ compared to the AQF.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 4 | EQF Level 4 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for specialised and/or skilled work and/or further learning.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate IV in Engineering • Certificate IV in Rail Infrastructure. | <p>Summary</p> <p>National levels linked to EQF Level 4 are often used for classifying upper secondary general education certificates and VET qualifications.</p> | <p>Good match</p> <p>Overall there is a good match at AQF and EQF Level 4. The application of knowledge and skills/competence between the AQF and EQF are similar in intent, particularly when the AQF Certificate IV descriptor is taken into account.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have broad factual, technical and some theoretical knowledge of a specific area or a broad field of work and learning.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>Taking to account the AQF definition of 'broad knowledge' as 'general or extensive areas of learning or work', the knowledge learning outcomes are comparable. The minor differences are that the AQF includes knowledge of a 'specific area' as an alternative context and circumscribes (some) theoretical knowledge. The EQF does not qualify 'knowledge' in the same way. Additionally, the AQF specifies technical knowledge, which is not specified in the EQF.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have a broad range of cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply a range of methods, tools, materials and information to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete routine and non-routine activities • provide and transmit solutions to a variety of predictable and sometimes unpredictable problems. | <p>Skills</p> <p>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The skills learning outcomes are similar to an extent. The AQF skill to solve 'predictable and sometimes unpredictable problems' is similar in meaning to the EQF skill to 'generate solutions to specific problems'. Similarly, the AQF skill to 'provide and transmit solutions' is not inconsistent with the EQF skill to 'generate solutions'. The AQF is more prescriptive, in the sense that completing routine and non-routine activities is identified and that technical and communication skills are identified.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 4 | EQF Level 4 | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, judgment and limited responsibility in known or changing contexts and within established parameters.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change.</p> <p>Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills/competence</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is the same. The AQF definition of autonomy and judgement is the same as the EQF's skill to 'exercise self-management'. The contexts are similar - the AQF requirement to apply knowledge and skills within 'established parameters' matches the EQF context of 'within guidelines'. When taking into consideration the AQF Certificate IV descriptor which includes responsibility for others and of the quality of output of others, there is considerable parity in the levels.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 5 | EQF Level 5 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have specialised knowledge and skills for skilled/ paraprofessional work and/or further learning</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diploma of Information Technology • Diploma of Veterinary Nursing (General Practice). | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF Level 5 accommodates various qualification types. Most of them belong to the VET sector and are considered as higher professional qualifications which also have currency for entry into higher education (e.g. the VET higher diploma in MT, the higher national diploma and the higher national certificate in the UK-EWNI/Sco). Also Short cycle higher education qualifications (higher education) are allocated to EQF level 5 (e.g. the Associate degree in the NL or the Higher certificate in IE or Academy profession degree in DK).</p> | <p>Comparable</p> <p>Overall AQF and EQF Level 5 are comparable. The conclusion was reached after the application of the 'best fit' principle. There is a good match between the knowledge learning outcomes, and the application of knowledge and skills/competence.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have technical and theoretical knowledge in a specific area or a broad field of work and learning.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study, and an awareness of the boundaries of knowledge.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The EQF's requirement for 'comprehensive, specialised... knowledge' is similar to the AQF's 'technical and theoretical knowledge in a specific area', and therefore the knowledge requirements can be considered comparable.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have a broad range of cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse information to complete a range of activities • provide and transmit solutions to sometimes complex problems • transmit information and skills to others. | <p>Skills</p> <p>A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>EQF higher</p> <p>The AQF includes a broader range of skills, including to 'transmit solutions, skills and information to others'. The AQF's context of 'sometimes complex problems' compares with the EQF's skill to develop solutions to 'abstract problems'. The EQF skill to provide 'creative solutions' suggests for this aspect, a higher level than the AQF.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 5 | EQF Level 5 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, judgement and defined responsibility in known or changing contexts and within broad but established parameters.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change</p> <p>Review and develop performance of self and others.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable. The AQF definition of autonomy and judgement is the same as the EQF's skill to 'exercise self-management'. The AQF Level 5 Diploma qualification descriptor includes responsibility for others, which is comparable to the EQF's context of 'management and supervision'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 6 | EQF Level 5 | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have broad knowledge and skills for paraprofessional/highly skilled work and/or further learning.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced Diploma of Agriculture • Associate Degree in Business. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF Level 5 accommodates various qualification types. Most of them belong to the VET sector and are considered as higher professional qualifications which also have currency for entry into higher education (e.g., the VET higher diploma in MT, the higher national diploma and the higher national certificate in the UK-EWNI/Sco). Also short cycle higher education qualifications (higher education) are allocated to EQF level 5 (e.g. the Associate degree in the NL or the Higher certificate in IE or Academy profession degree in DK).</p> | <p>Comparable</p> <p>The knowledge learning outcomes and the application of knowledge and skills/competence between the AQF Level 6 and EQF Level 5 are comparable.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have broad theoretical and technical knowledge of a specific area or a broad field of work and learning.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study, and an awareness of the boundaries of knowledge.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>Although the EQF's requirement for 'comprehensive knowledge' differs to the AQF's 'broad knowledge', the knowledge requirements are comparable.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have a broad range of cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse information to complete a range of activities • interpret and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems • transmit information and skills to others. | <p>Skills</p> <p>A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The AQF's requirement for skills to provide solutions to 'unpredictable and sometime complex problems' is matched by the EQF's skill to develop solutions to 'abstract problems'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 6 | EQF Level 5 | Comments |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, judgment and defined responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in contexts that are subject to change • within broad parameters to provide specialist advice and functions. | <p>Competence</p> <p>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change</p> <p>Review and develop performance of self and others.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable. The AQF definition of autonomy and judgment is the same as the EQF's ability to 'exercise self-management'. The EQF context of 'management and supervision' and requirement relating to 'performance of self and other' compares with the AQF Advanced Diploma qualification descriptor which includes responsibility for team outcomes within broad parameters'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 7 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Nursing • Bachelor of Arts. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF level 6 accommodates Bologna first cycle degrees (Bachelor) are linked to EQF level 6. This level also accommodates some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the master craftsman [certified] or the “operative IT professional [certified]” in Germany).</p> <p>Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland.</p> | <p>Good match</p> <p>AQF Level 7 aligns best with EQF Level 6. This conclusion was reached after the application of the ‘best fit’ principle which also involved a comparison of AQF Level 7 with EQF Levels 5 and 7.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one or more disciplines or areas of practice</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The intent of the different expressions of the knowledge learning outcomes is similar. The EQF requires ‘advanced knowledge’ which is matched with the AQF requirement for depth. The AQF bachelor degree qualification descriptor requires critical analysis of knowledge which compares with the EQF requirement for ‘critical understanding of theories and principles’.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 7 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have well-developed cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse and evaluate information to complete a range of activities • analyse, generate and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems • transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others. | <p>Skills</p> <p>Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The skills learning outcomes are comparable. When taken together with the AQF bachelor degree requirement for skills to undertake critical analysis and synthesis, and for ‘independent . . . learning’, the AQF requirement for ‘well developed’ skills matches with the EQF skills of ‘advanced skills, demonstrating mastery’. The learning outcomes of both frameworks indicate similar problem solving contexts. The AQF additionally includes a requirement for transmission of knowledge and skills for this outcome, however EQF competence learning outcomes below cover a similar aspect to ‘Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups’.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 7 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well developed judgement and responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in contexts that require self-directed work and learning • within broad parameters to provide specialist advice and functions. | <p>Competence</p> <p>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision-making and unpredictable work or study contexts.</p> <p>Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable. The EQF includes the context of ‘unpredictable work’ while the AQF bachelor degree qualification type descriptor specifies ‘diverse contexts’. The EQF’s ‘Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects’ have similar aspects to the AQF’s ‘provide specialist advice and functions’. The EQF requirements relating to management are similar to the AQF bachelor degree qualification descriptor which includes management of others.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 8 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have advanced knowledge and skills for professional/highly skilled work and/or further learning</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) • Graduate Certificate in Accounting • Graduate Diploma in Education. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF level 6 accommodates Bologna first cycle degrees (Bachelor) are linked to EQF level 6. This level also accommodates some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the master craftsman [certified] or the “operative IT professional [certified]” in Germany).</p> <p>Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland.</p> | <p>Comparable</p> <p>AQF Level 8 is overall comparable to the higher end of the EQF Level 6 band. Advanced knowledge and advanced skills are required by both frameworks at these levels. The application of knowledge and skills in AQF Level 8 and EQF Level 6 demonstrates a high degree of comparability, with both requiring the execution of project work in research and professional contexts.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have advanced theoretical and technical knowledge in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>Both the AQF and EQF require and understanding of ‘advanced knowledge’. The AQF Bachelor Honours Degree descriptor also includes ‘coherent and advanced’ knowledge and the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma descriptors include ‘systematic and coherent’.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 8 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have advanced cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse critically, evaluate and transform information to complete a range of activities • analyse, generate and transmit solutions to complex problems • transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others. | <p>Skills</p> <p>Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The requirement for 'advanced skills' in both frameworks demonstrates comparability. The AQF Bachelor Honours Degree descriptor also requires knowledge of research and a requirement for (in application) initiative which aligns with the EQF requirement for 'innovation'. The Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma descriptors also require cognitive skills to provide solutions to complex problems. The AQF additionally includes a requirement for transmission of knowledge and skills for this outcome, however EQF competence learning outcomes below cover a similar aspect to 'take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups'.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 8 | EQF Level 6 | Comments |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well developed judgement, adaptability and responsibility as a practitioner or learner.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision making and unpredictable work or study contexts</p> <p>Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable. The AQF requirement for autonomy and the AQF Bachelor Honours Degree descriptor relating to a requirement for planning and executing project work or research match the EQF requirement for management for complex technical or professional activities or project work. Additionally, the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma descriptors require graduates to make high level, independent judgements in a range of technical or management functions in varied specialised contexts.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 9 | EQF Level 7 | Comments |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have specialised knowledge and skills for research, and/or professional practice and/or further learning</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Urban and Regional Planning • Master of Public Policy. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF level 7 accommodates second cycle degrees (Master) as well as some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the “Senior detective” or the “Chemical engineer product manager” in the Czech Republic or strategic IT professionals (certified) in Germany).</p> | <p>Good match</p> <p>AQF Level 9 is a good match for EQF Level 7. The knowledge and skills between the two frameworks are a good match in both language and intent. There are some differences between the levels in the application of knowledge and skills.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have advanced and integrated understanding of a complex body of knowledge in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis of original thinking and/or research</p> <p>Critical awareness of knowledge is a field and at the interface between fields.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The knowledge learning outcomes are a good match. The AQF requirement for ‘specialised knowledge and skills’ (in the summary statement), ‘advanced and integrated understanding’ and research orientation is reflected in the EQF requirement for ‘highly specialised knowledge’ and ‘original thinking and research’. The AQF requirement for research implies that which is meant by the EQF reference to ‘forefront of knowledge’. The EQF requirement for ‘critical awareness’ is matched by AQF skills learning outcomes relating to critical thought and research.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 9 | EQF Level 7 | Comments |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive and technical skills in a body of knowledge or practice to independently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse critically, reflect on and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts and theories • research and apply established theories to a body of knowledge or practice • interpret and transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to specialist and non-specialist audiences. | <p>Skills</p> <p>Specialised problem solving skills required in research and/ or in innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The skills learning outcomes are a good match. The AQF skills of critical thought, analysis and synthesis imply the EQF requirement for skills to develop ‘new knowledge’ and to ‘integrate knowledge.’ This is supported by the detailed AQF Masters Degree descriptor skills requirements.</p> |
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, expert judgement, adaptability and responsibility as a practitioner or learner.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</p> <p>Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/ or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Comparable</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable. The level descriptors indicated a similar level however there are differences in language and focus. The AQF application of ‘expert judgement, adaptability and responsibility’ can be compared to the EQF specification for the capacity to review ‘strategic performance of teams’. Comparability of levels also is established when taking into account AQF Masters Degree qualification descriptors which refers to professional knowledge and practice and includes the complex and unpredictable.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 10 | EQF Level 8 | Comments |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Summary</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have a systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialised research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice.</p> <p>Examples of qualifications at this level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor of Philosophy • Doctor of Business Administration. | <p>Summary</p> <p>EQF level 8 includes third cycle degrees (Doctorate) as well as some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, in Estonia: the occupational qualifications “chartered engineer” or “chartered architect”).</p> | <p>Good match</p> <p>While there are some differences in the expression of the descriptors, these levels are a good match and are both the highest level of study in the frameworks.</p> |
| <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have systemic and critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the frontier of a discipline or area of professional practice.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>At the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields.</p> | <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The key learning outcome for knowledge at the ‘frontier’ of a discipline or field of knowledge is used in a similar context in both the AQF and EQF descriptors.</p> |
| <p>Skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive, technical and research skills in a discipline area to independently and systematically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage in critical reflection, synthesis and evaluation • develop, adapt and implement research methodologies to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice • disseminate and promote new insights to peers and the community • generate original knowledge and understanding to make a substantial contribution to a discipline or area of professional practice. | <p>Skills</p> <p>The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation required to solve critical problems in research/and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.</p> | <p>Skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The skills learning outcomes are a good match. Similarity of language and intent demonstrates similarity of level. The AQF skills to ‘generate original knowledge’ and to ‘redefine existing knowledge or professional practice’ are matched by the EQF requirement for ‘innovation’ and ‘most advanced’ skills to ‘extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice’.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

| AQF Level 10 | EQF Level 8 | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, authoritative judgement, adaptability and responsibility as an expert and leading practitioner or scholar.</p> | <p>Competence</p> <p>Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.</p> | <p>Application of knowledge and skills</p> <p>Good match</p> <p>The context of the application of knowledge and skills is comparable and similarity of language and intent is evident. The EQF's ethical requirements are implied in the AQF requirements.</p> |

Purple = Knowledge, Ochre = Skills, Blue = Application, Burgundy = Differences

