



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

# Referencing to the EQF - Lessons learnt

**Jens Bjornavold**

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## September 2009- January 2015

- 27 countries have presented referencing reports, 3 of these are still being discussed
- 11 countries have still to present their report to the EQF AG
- The first stage of the EQF referencing process is reaching its final stage
- The first stage provides a starting point for a continuous strengthening of the referencing





## EQF referencing- the overall experience

### Achievements

- Countries are actively seeking to meet the EQF objectives
- Triggered development of NQFs
- Referencing provides a comprehensive overview of Education and training
- The peer review approach contributes to create mutual trust

### Challenges

- Reports are work in progress and information is incomplete
- Some essential information linked (in particular) to criteria 2, 3 and 4 is (too often) missing
- Not clear which qualifications are included or not
- Not clear how different referencing criteria link and influence each other





## National qualifications frameworks – a pre-condition for referencing

- Almost all countries (Italy is the exception) referencing to the EQF has done this on the basis of a NQF;
- Apart from Ireland, France and the UK, all countries have developed and introduced NQFs after the introduction of the EQF
- The influence of the EQF on the terminological and conceptual basis of the NQF is strong and visible
- The close relationship between EQF and NQF developments is a strength as well as a weakness





## National qualifications frameworks – level descriptors

- The starting point:

### EQF level descriptor elements

Knowledge

- Factual
- Theoretical

Skills

- Cognitive
- Practical

Competence

- Autonomy
- Responsibility

- All the ‘new’ NQFs have related to this basic approach introduced by the EQF.
- This has been done in different ways, reflecting national systems and traditions, creating diversity





## National qualifications frameworks – the ‘horizontal’ dimension of level-descriptors

Level descriptors need to clearly express the different dimensions of learning:

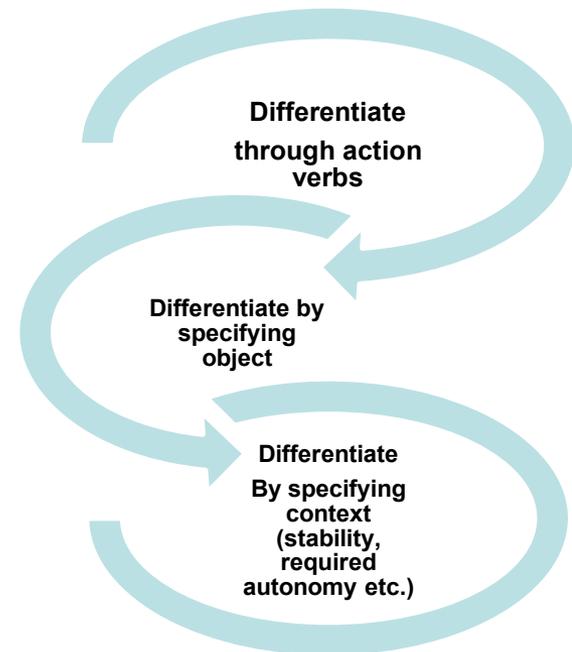
- A first group of countries use EQF descriptors directly in their NQFs (for example Estonia and Portugal). These countries have prepared explanatory tables/guidelines helping national use and interpretation
- A second group of countries is inspired by EQF but has broadened skills and (in particular) competence descriptors (Iceland, Norway, Poland, the Netherlands etc.). A few countries (for example Hungary) have introduced the term attitude
- A third group of countries have challenged the EQF approach and uses ‘competence’ as an overarching term (Belgium, Germany, Lithuania etc.)



## National qualifications frameworks – the ‘vertical’ dimension of level-descriptors

Level descriptors must describe and capture learning progression:

- The differentiation found in NQFs is inspired by EQF
- Countries are using action verbs to differentiate, but not in a systematic way
- The expression of growing complexity and distinction between levels not has been systematically compared





**Criterion 2** - *There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework*

- Countries have focussed on a number of aspects,
  - structure
  - the conceptual basis
  - linguistic/terminological similarities between descriptors
- However, countries have given priority to demonstrate the linguistic/terminological links between EQF and NQF descriptors
- Are terms used by the EQF repeated, missing or extended by the NQF descriptors?



**Criterion 2** - *There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework*

- The conceptual basis for level descriptors not sufficiently clarified, makes it difficult to read the intentions of the country
  - A increasing tendency (illustrated by Germany, Norway and Hungary) to address the conceptual basis of the descriptors
- Lack of clarity as regards the vertical and horizontal dimensions of level descriptors undermine the ('best fit') placing of qualifications (criterion 4)





**Criterion 3** - *The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.*

- Actual implementation of the LO principle is difficult to judge; often references to plans and intentions
- Implementation of LO take place in separate sub-systems – not clear whether something is shared across these
- The link between LO and quality assurance is not addressed - how can the LO approach be improved and refined?
- The role of LO in facilitating permeability of systems and mobility of learners?





**Criterion 4** - *The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.*

- Many countries only refer to the legal basis for levelling, which is not sufficient
- Some reports are not clear on which qualifications have been included/not included
- The lack of a systematic presentation format need to be addressed, making it obligatory for reports to present in detail which qualifications and qualification types have been included



## Example of format (Cedefop); Estonian qualifications

NQF levels	Education qualifications	Occupational qualifications	EQF levels
8	Doctorate	Level 8 occupational qualification Example: chartered engineer, chartered architect	8
7	Master degree	Level 7 occupational qualification Example: diploma engineer, diploma architect	7
6	Bachelor degree Diploma of professional higher education	Level 6 occupational qualification Example: engineer	6
5		Level 5 occupational qualification Example: master carpenter, construction site manager	5
4	Upper secondary general education certificate Upper secondary VET certificate	Level 4 occupational qualification Example: IT specialist	4
3	VET based on upper secondary education certificate VET based on basic education certificate	Level 3 occupational qualification Example: carpenter	3
2	Basic education certificate based on simplified curriculum Basic education certificate	Level 2 qualification Example: cook assistant	2
1	VET without basic education requirement certificate Basic education certificate based on curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities		1



## Criterion 4 – continued

- Not clear whether a particular methodology has been applied
- The criteria and procedures for assigning qualifications to levels are frequently not clarified
- This creates a problem for comparability, illustrated by the discussion on the ‘school leaving certificate’ and their possible referencing to levels 4 or 5
- The balance between a learning outcomes based levelling and a levelling reflecting existing institutional structures is not always clear





## Criterion 4 –continued

- Assigning ‘blocks’ of qualifications vs. single qualifications:
  - We increasingly observe (exemplified by Belgium Flanders, Hungary, Switzerland) a tendency to level single qualifications
  - The levelling of ‘qualification blocks’ is the most common approach but also the one least transparent
  - The levelling of blocks of qualifications is only in a few cases (for example Germany) supported by pilots or research





## Criterion 4 - continued

The levelling refers to technical/conceptual, social as well as political considerations; these should be clarified

- Technical/conceptual: the learning outcomes approach; the linguistic basis etc
- Social; some qualifications may have a long tradition and enjoy a reputation which pre-determines their level
- Political: reluctance to touch political agreement (VET qualifications may differ as regards learning outcomes but the political agreement is to put all at one level)





**Criterion 5** - *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 3 of the Recommendation).*

- Overall satisfaction with the ways countries have responded
- Valuable information as it gives an overview of QA arrangements

BUT

- A key challenge is how arrangements for quality assurance influence the
  - implementation of learning outcomes (criterion 3) and
  - The assignment of qualifications to levels (criterion 4)
- To what extent can the level descriptors and the LO descriptions provide a reference point for quality improvement and for increased relevance



## Preliminary conclusions

- The referencing reports provide significant added value; an unique overview of qualifications across levels and types of qualifications
- The main weakness of the referencing reports are linked to criterion 2, 3 and 4 – and how these link into criterion 5 (quality assurance)
- The referencing process are work in progress; only by agreeing on a continuous process can we full exploit the potential of the EQF for transparency and trust





## Issues to address....

1. Absolutely necessary to indicate which qualifications have been included and present them in a common format
2. Linguistic comparison needs to be combined with structural and conceptual comparison between NQF and EQF
3. The expression of growing complexity, progress and the distinction between levels have not been sufficiently addressed at European level





## Issues to address....

4. Need to clarify how the shift to learning outcomes is influencing permeability and progression and how this principle interacts with Quality Assurance (criterion 5)
5. The methodologies linked to referencing of 'blocks' of qualifications vs. single qualifications must be developed and clarified
6. Need to exchange experiences on the mix of technical/conceptual, social and political considerations for referencing

