

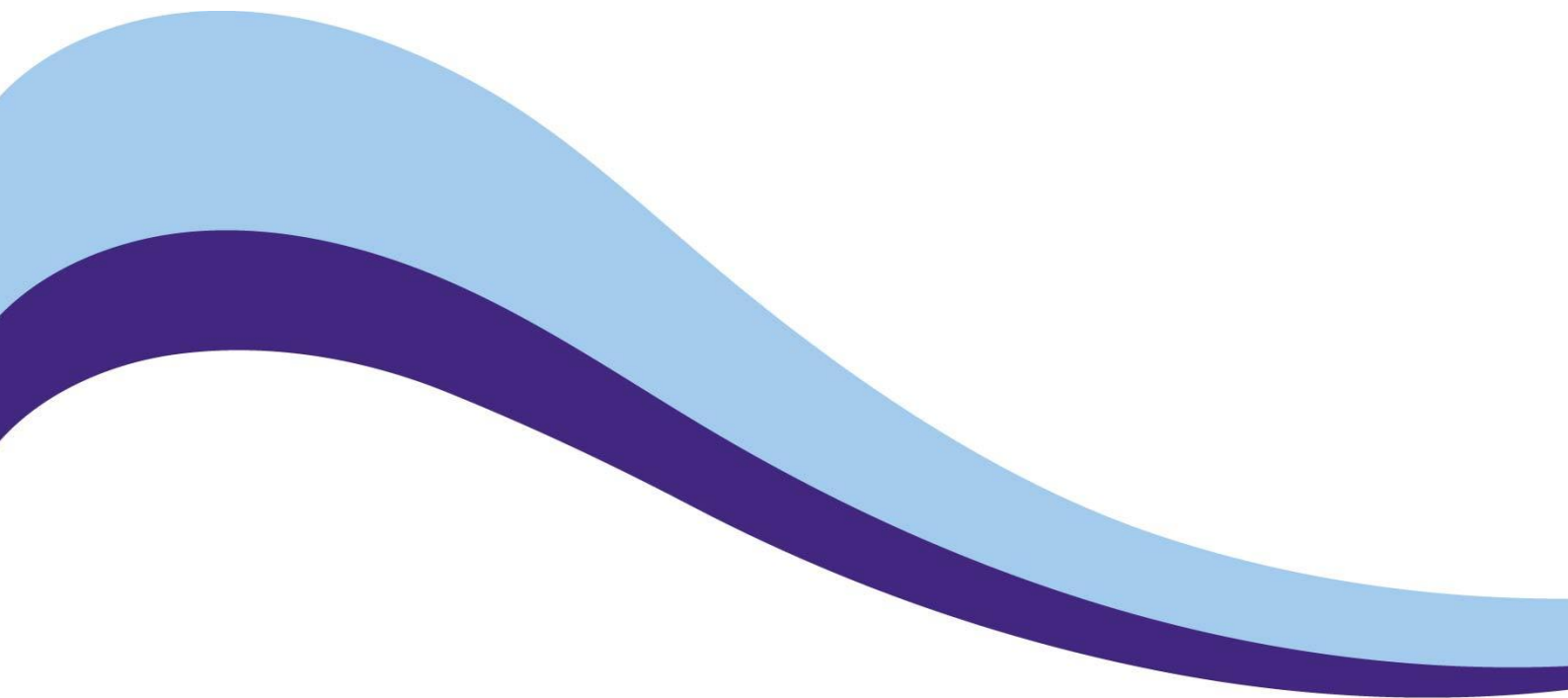


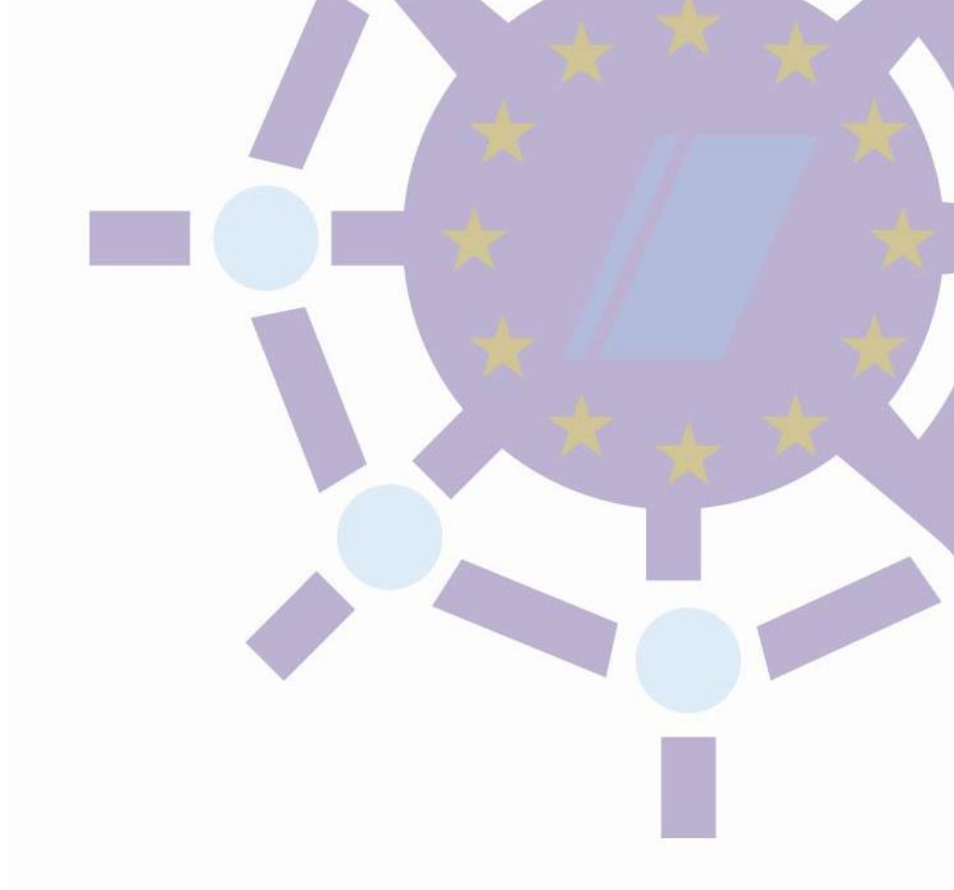
Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualification Frameworks

Basic elements, key recommendations and methodology

European Coast Guard Functions Academies Network Project

Work Package 4





WP4 Report

Work Package Coordinator: Italian Coast Guard

External Expert: CIMEA – Italian ENIC-NARIC centre

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ITALIAN COAST GUARD

Centro Informazioni
Mobilità Equivalenze Accademiche **CIMEA**
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Introduction

This document is the final report of WP4 within the ECGFA NET project aimed to provide basic elements and key recommendations for the future development of the Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (CGFSQF).

It has been developed through work done by the Italian Coast Guard with the external consultancy of CIMEA, which is expert in the implementation of Qualifications Frameworks and with the analysis of two questionnaires, four study visits to Training Institutes (Finland, Germany, Italy and Spain) and five working meetings, useful for sharing the updating results.

The document starts giving a background of the Project (origin and how it is linked to the European Coast Guard Functions Forum) providing a global view on qualification framework processes.

The work is organized in five chapters. The first three chapters are generically dedicated to the explanation of the Qualifications Framework, taking into account the existing implementations and the main applications in the European Union. The last two chapters are focused on the Coast Guard Functions Sector, in order to give a strategic device with specific tools in order to implement and manage an efficient Sectoral Framework in the Coast Guard Functions area.

In detail, the first chapter of the document starts with the description of what is a Qualification Framework and of its various typologies. It is followed by an analysis of the lessons learned gathered since the development of the European Qualifications Framework in the context of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes (Chapter 2). Important attention is given on quality assurance aspects and the governance of the European Qualifications Framework.

Chapter 3 explains the development of a qualification framework in general and the stages and steps of its construction while the following chapters explain this process in our project.

The fourth chapter is the core part of the paper and it contains the provision of basic elements and key recommendations for the future development of the Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (CGFSQF). The fifth chapter is a concrete examination of the previous chapter and it is dedicated to the methodology and criteria for the development of the Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks.

Background

The Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) of the European Commission launched in November 2014 a Grant agreement for an action to establish a European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network. The purpose of this Network was to network Coast Guard training and Education in Europe.

The 'Blue Paper' on an EU Maritime Policy adopted by the European Commission in October 2007 - and supported by numerous conclusions of the Council of the European Union and resolutions of the European Parliament - promotes enhanced cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation between all actors involved in maritime activities. Integrating maritime surveillance, one of the key strands of the integrated maritime policy, does not only serve that purpose but is also considered a necessity with a view to ensuring safer, more secure and cleaner seas.

The European Maritime Security Strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers in June 2014 on the basis of a proposal put forward by the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in March 2014, foresees the need for deeper cooperation between the European Coast Guard Functions in many areas, including education and training.

Coast Guard Functional activities as defined by the European Coast Guard Functions Forum (ECGFF), cover maritime safety (including vessel traffic management); maritime security; maritime customs activities; prevention and suppression of trafficking and smuggling and connected maritime law enforcement; maritime border control; maritime surveillance; protection of marine environment and response; search and rescue; accident and disaster response; fisheries control; and other activities related to the above Coast Guard Functions.

The European Union and its Member States are developing the future policy on integrated and cooperative maritime surveillance with all the above-mentioned sectors. One single authority can in fact not handle increasing information flows and manage the needs for multiple actions at sea. Therefore sectors need to work closer together in order to make maritime safety and security activities more coherent, and cost efficient. Such co-operation will improve co-ordination, maritime governance and a wider co-use of scattered multiple surveillance systems.

In addition, more aligned requirements should be developed for educational institutions of the different coast guard functions and actors in the maritime domain in order to create a joint 'European CG approach'.

Such cross sectorial approach includes academic, educational and training functions in order to increase knowledge based capability building, effectiveness and efficiency of operations at sea. The intention is in other words to do more with less, and to fully exploit the potential of the Integrated Maritime Policy.

The current Coast Guard education systems are custom made for national professional organizational purposes, and they do not include Bologna Process post-graduates and post-doctoral levels of education, thus leaving a loop hole in the system.

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) has recommended that organisations working at EU level should use the reference levels and principles of the EQF in order to design coordinated training and qualification standards.

EQF has indicated that such harmonisation should take place through the development of sectoral qualification frameworks (SQFs) such as Coast Guard Functions cooperation.

This will increase the employability, mobility and social integration and lifelong learning of Coast Guard officials. In particular, the EQF recommended that SQFs should be developed by *'facilitating cooperation, exchanging good practice and testing – inter alia through voluntary peer review and pilot projects under Community programmes, by launching information and consultation exercises with social dialogue committees - and developing support and guidance material'*.¹

The Sectoral Qualification Framework for Coast Guard Functions (CGFSQF) would constitute an added value for sectorial authorities working towards a safer and more secure maritime domain.

Cross sectorial and regional research and development will improve the communication between these authorities, which in turn will open up new forms of cooperation, thus leading towards better co-operation in areas such as common awareness, risk and threat management, preparation against disasters, joint capacity building, resource pooling etc. In other words, the framework has the potential to increase the levels of interoperability, which is needed to face maritime related risks and threats in a more coherent manner. Implementing such co-operation will require an open study and common mechanisms, which the Framework can provide.

According to the Terms of Reference drafted by the Commission², the CGFSQF should:

- encompass all qualification levels acquired in general, vocational and academic education and training in the field of Coast Guard activities;
- be developed on the basis of an extensive job mapping (identification of the competence profiles/job profiles) for all Coast Guard tasks at all levels, with the ultimate aim to close the gap between theory and practice and ensure that all training courses developed are operationally relevant;
- include all national requirements and is, therefore, inclusive and not prescriptive - the intention of the CGFSQF is not to dictate national training requirements;
- support the review and accreditation of programmes;
- facilitate the formal recognition of other types of learning, such as 'on the job' learning;
- assist in the development or updating of national occupational standards for Coast Guards;

¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, OJ C 111, 6.5.2008

² TERMS OF REFERENCE – MARE/2014/36 - ECGFA NET, European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network for European Sectorial Qualification's Framework for Coast Guarding, available on line: http://www.ecgff.eu/images/ECGFANET_docs/ToR.pdf

- support the dissemination within Member States (MS) of best training practices and/or provide key recommendations.

The ECGFA NET project

The Finnish Border Guard submitted a project in the framework of the Grant agreement for an action to establish a European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network with the support of different EU countries and bodies³: the ECGFA NET project (<http://www.ecgff.eu>).

The ECGFA NET project aims at strengthening international collaboration on training and at building a network of academies and training institutions for Coast Guard functions on ECGFF level. The network of academies would later contribute to the establishment of Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Coast guard functions.

Objectives of the project are to:

- support the establishment of a Coast Guard Functions Academies Network that would strengthen cooperation between CGF authorities;
- increase students and experts exchange between CG authorities and academies;
- design and construct a Training Portal under ECGFF websites;
- plan and design the basis for a voluntary Sectoral Qualification Framework for Coast Guard Functions (CGFSQF);
- follow the specifications of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for harmonising and improving educational collaboration and student/expert mobility.

A specific Work Package (WP4) was foreseen to design minimum requirements and provide key recommendations for the future development of voluntary Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualification Frameworks (CGFSQF), consistent with the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. The work of the WP4 is led by the Italian Coast Guard.

The present document represents the main output of the WP4, drafted by CIMEA - the centre selected as external expert under the leadership and supervision of the Italian Coast Guard - that contains principles, objectives and the methodology to be followed in order to develop the future Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualification Frameworks (CGFSQF).

³ Partners: Italian Coast Guard, Armed Forces of Malta, DGDDI - French Customs, Romanian Naval Academy of Constanta, Guardia Civil (Spain), Portugal - Guarda Nacional Republicana, German Federal Police, UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Hellenic Coast Guard, Spanish Customs and Excises, SASEMAR (Spain), Cyprus Police Academy, Spanish Navy. Observers: European Space Agency, Guardia di Finanza (Italy), European Fisheries Control Agency, Frontex, European Union Satellite Centre, Swedish Coast Guard, The European Police College (CEPOL).

Acronyms

List of abbreviations and acronyms commonly used within the document:

CARICOM TVET: Caribbean Community and Common Market for Technical and Vocational Education and Training

CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CG: Coast Guard

CGF: Coast Guard Functions

CGFSQF: Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Coast Guard Functions

CIMEA: Centro Informazioni Mobilità Equivalenze Accademiche

DG MARE: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

ECGFA NET: European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network for European Sectoral Qualification's Framework for Coast Guarding

ECGFF: European Coast Guard Functions Forum

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

ECTS: European Credit Transfer System

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

ENIC: European Network for National Information Centres

EQF: European Qualification Framework

EU: European Union

ILO: International Labour Organisation

MS: Member States

NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres

NCP: National Contact Point

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

OECD: Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development

QF: Qualifications Framework

SQF: Sectoral Qualifications Framework

VET: Vocational Education and Training

WP4: Work Package four

Chapter 1 – What is a Qualification Framework?

1.1 Different typologies of qualifications frameworks

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications, which relates and compares qualifications using a hierarchy of levels of learning outcomes, usually of increasing complexity as a learner progresses up the levels.⁴

There are different typologies of qualifications frameworks. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular subsector of the education and training system – for example, initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area.⁵

Some frameworks may have more features or dimensions e.g. credit or quality assurance criteria and a tighter structure, that is, they are more prescriptive. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally (adapted from OECD, 2007).⁶

When we approach the question related to a qualifications framework, we can consider at least three main typologies:

Typologies of Qualifications Frameworks

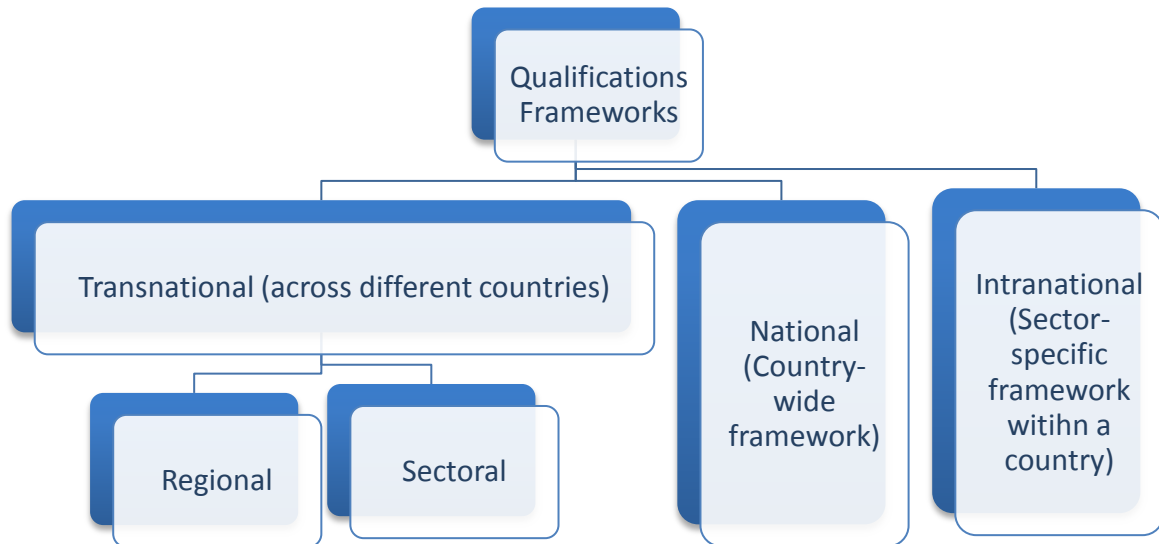
- *Intranational frameworks*: those within specific sectors within a country;
- *National frameworks*: those that are national;
- *Transnational frameworks*: those that exist across different countries divided in two main categories:
 - Regional frameworks: among National qualifications frameworks;
 - Sectoral frameworks: limited to a particular sector.⁷

⁴ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.



1.2 Transnational Qualifications Frameworks

During the early years of the 21st century the increased development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks acted as a catalyst for more countries to follow suit, often in geographical proximity to countries with more developed NQFs. At this stage the possibilities of developing qualifications frameworks beyond the limitations of specific countries became obvious and the idea of a *Transnational Qualifications Framework* emerged.⁸

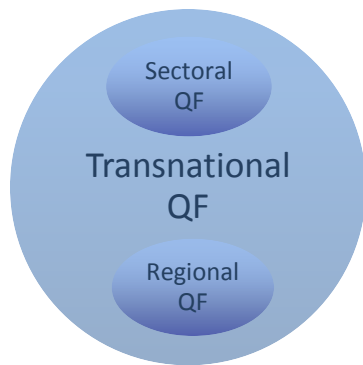
Starting from the experience of different regions and sectors, different variations of transnational qualifications frameworks were created:

- *Regional Qualifications Frameworks*, i.e. recognition of qualifications across countries that are in geographical proximity, often, but not necessarily organised within a regional association or body (e.g the European Qualifications Framework);
- *Transnational Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks*, i.e. recognition of qualifications across countries within or beyond the same region, but limited to a specific sector (e.g. the CARICOM TVET qualifications framework for the Caribbean Community).⁹

**Transnational
Qualifications
Frameworks**

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ *Ibidem.*



One of the key purposes of Transnational qualifications frameworks, in the form of a Regional or a Sectoral one, is communicative and attempts to find commonalities between countries.¹⁰

In general terms, a Transnational Qualifications Framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved between countries. Importantly though, and this differs from most NQFs, transnational qualifications frameworks usually:

**Elements of
Transnational
Qualifications
Framework**

- a) have less regulatory and more communicative purposes;
- b) include a wide range of sectors of education and training, if not all;
- c) have a range of national and regional policies, accords, conventions and protocols supporting them, but are not underpinned by enforceable legislation;
- d) have limited, often voluntary, institutional arrangements for governance and management.¹¹

The purpose of a Transnational framework is to be a regional/sectoral mechanism to increase:

**Aim of a
Transnational
Qualifications
Framework**

- comparability of qualifications;
- mutual recognition of qualifications;
- credit transfer and mobility periods;
- development of regional/sectoral standards;
- reviewing and strengthening national assessment and accreditation systems;
- facilitating agreement on entrance requirements to courses and programmes;
- joint courses and programmes.¹²

It is important to learn from lessons well-founded drawn from international practice in order to create a Transnational, Regional and a Sectoral QFs.

1.3 National Qualifications Frameworks

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) encompass all education qualifications – or all higher education qualifications, depending on the policy of the country concerned – in an education system. They show what learners may be expected to know, understand and be able to do on the

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

basis of a given qualification (learning outcomes) as well as how qualifications within a system articulate, that is how learners may move between qualifications in an education system.¹³

National qualifications frameworks are developed by the competent public authorities in the country concerned. While this is ultimately the competence and responsibility of the public authorities responsible for the country's (higher) education system, however, the participation of a broad range of stakeholders – including higher education institutions, students, staff and employers – is necessary for the framework to be successful. The development of national qualifications frameworks should therefore include broad consultations.¹⁴

Starting from the experience of NQFs developed within the Bologna Process, the procedure of developing national qualifications frameworks may be summarized in 10 essential steps:

- 1) Decision to start: Taken by the national body responsible for (higher) education (e.g. Ministry);
- 2) Setting the agenda: The purpose of our NQF;
- 3) Organising the process: Identifying stakeholders; setting up a committee/working group;
- 4) Design Profile: Level structure, Level descriptors (learning outcomes), Credit ranges;
- 5) Consultation: National discussion and acceptance of design by stakeholders;
- 6) Approval according to national tradition by Minister/Government/legislation;
- 7) Administrative set-up: Division of tasks of implementation between HEI, Quality Assurance Agency and other bodies;
- 8) Implementation at institutional/programme level: Reformulation of individual study programmes to learning outcome based approach;
- 9) Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF: Accreditation or similar;
- 10) Self-certification of compatibility with the meta-framework concerned.¹⁵

**10 steps to
develop an
NQF**

Once the national qualifications framework has been developed, it should be tested and then self-certified. The self certification is a process by which the competent authorities of the country concerned verify that the national qualifications framework is compatible with the overarching Framework (the Regional/Sectoral framework of reference).¹⁶

The self certification process should also include input from foreign experts. Once the self certification process has been completed, self certification reports should be published so other

¹³ Report by the Bologna Working Party on Qualifications Frameworks submitted to the conference of Ministers of Education of the Bologna Process, London, 2007.

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

countries may access them.¹⁷

It is now important to be clear about the meaning of three essential terms:

- a) Qualification
- b) Qualifications framework
- c) Qualifications system

a) By a 'qualification' we mean:

A qualification is ...

A package of standards or units judged to be worthy of formal recognition in a certificate.

This means that a qualification may be a single module or unit, if that is deemed to be worthy of formal recognition. However, it should be noted that sometimes the term 'qualification' is used to refer only to substantial programmes leading to a well-recognised and historically grounded form of certification – such as a degree – or to a form of certification associated with the capacity to undertake a defined occupational role, in some cases associated with regulations for entry to employment – i.e. a qualification to practice / meeting the requirements for practice.¹⁸

b) to define a 'qualifications framework' we use the definition proposed by OECD:

What is a Qualifications Framework?

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways, or may be confined to a particular sector for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.¹⁹

Other definitions are, of course, possible, but it is important to underline two points: first, that an NQF must have levels based on some kind of criteria and, second, that it must employ some means of ensuring that qualifications registered on the framework meet criteria related to matters

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ International Labour Office, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Geneva, 2007.

¹⁹ OECD (Coles and Werquin), *Moving mountains – the role of qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning*, OECD, Paris, 2006.

such as quality and accessibility.

c) The OECD report also draws a helpful distinction between a qualifications “framework” and a qualifications “system”.

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalizing national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society...One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.²⁰

**Definition of
qualifications
systems**

The distinction is important because the goals that countries sometimes seek to achieve through the introduction of an NQF, often require complementary and supportive reforms in the qualifications system.

Other distinctive features of NQFs are:

- a single system of levels for all qualifications
- qualifications based on standards or outcomes
- modular/unitised qualifications
- assessment based on explicit criteria
- a national system of credit accumulation and transfer
- a common approach to describing qualifications
- a common classification system for subjects and occupational sectors.²¹

**Distinctive
features of
NQFs**

Some people would argue that by definition an NQF must display certain characteristics e.g. being standards-based. A little background explanation is necessary here. In some countries, the terms ‘outcome-based’ and ‘standards-based’ have the same meaning, i.e. a system in which there is clear information about the outcomes of learning against which learners’ performance can be judged in an assessment process. However, ‘outcome-based’ tends to be interpreted broadly (i.e. encompassing a variety of different ways of specifying outcomes and assessing them) while ‘standards-based’ is often associated with a particular approach used in New Zealand, United Kingdom National Vocational Qualifications, and many qualifications in South Africa.²²

It is important to be open minded about the nature of NQFs, because it is the policy goal that determines the nature and design of NQFs, not the other way around.

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ International Labour Office, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Geneva, 2007.

²² *Ibidem.*

Chapter 2 - Lessons learned from the development of the European Qualifications Framework

Framework

2.1 The EQF in the context of the Bologna & Copenhagen processes

Why an EQF was created

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was developed in response to requests from the member states, the social partners and other stakeholders for a common reference to increase the transparency of qualifications.

In 2002 the European ministers in charge of lifelong learning invited the European Commission in cooperation with the member states to develop a framework for the recognition of qualifications for both education and training building on the achievements of the Bologna Process and promoting a similar action in vocational training. In 2004 the ministers met in Maastricht where they stressed the priority for developing an open and flexible EQF as a common reference for both education and training. In March 2005, following work undertaken by the European Commission, the EU Heads of Government formally requested the development of an EQF. The EQF was envisaged as a framework that would bring together three significant areas of policy development: the Lisbon strategy, the Copenhagen process and the Bologna Process, initiated in 2000, 2002 and 1999 respectively.²³

The Lisbon strategy

The Lisbon strategy was intended to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The lifelong learning strand of the Lisbon strategy requires a challenging reform and modernisation of education systems of the member countries, with the aim that, by 2010, Europe should be the world leader in terms of the quality of its education and training systems. To achieve this, European countries need to ensure that there is continuous updating and renewal of knowledge, skills and wider competences in the workforce and that there are as few barriers as possible to accessing education and training and to building on previously acquired knowledge and skills, either within or between countries. The EQF is seen as supporting all these aims.²⁴

²³ Halden A. Morris, *Issues in Career, Technical and Vocational Education and Training : Lessons for the Caribbean*, Morris 2015.

²⁴ *Lisbon Strategy evaluation document*, Brussels SEC(2010) 114 final.

The Lisbon strategy is currently under revision and a new strategy for 2020 has been adopted.²⁵ As part of the Lisbon strategy, enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training is being carried forward by the Copenhagen Process, which is currently focusing on quality assurance, transparency and recognition of qualifications; the development of a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass - European Commission, 2004); the development of a credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET - European Commission, 2004); common criteria and principles for quality in VET (European Commission, 2004); common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (European Commission, 2002); and lifelong guidance with a European dimension for learners (European Commission, 2004). All of these features are relevant to some extent in the proposals for the EQF.

The Lisbon strategy

The Bologna Process, which could be said to have led the way in terms of pan-European cooperation on education matters, is concerned with the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).²⁶ This includes adoption of a three-cycle system of qualifications, the establishment of a credit system based on the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); the promotion of the European dimension in higher education (especially in the areas of quality assurance and learner mobility); and the establishment of the framework for qualifications of the EHEA (adopted in Bergen in 2005). As indicated above, signatories to the Bologna agreement include countries, which are not members of the EU, which adds an important dimension of ownership or authorisation to the negotiations that will be required to align EHEA and aspects of the Bologna process to the EQF.

The Bologna Process

²⁵ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), Brussels 2009/C 119/02.

²⁶ It should be emphasised that Bologna is not an EU initiative, instead it is coordinated by the Council of Europe which includes all the EU member states but also many non-EU countries.

**The EU
Directive on
professional
recognition**

Another important but separate development is the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications²⁷ that brought together several regulations on professional qualifications that are regulated at national or European level. The purpose of the Directive is to facilitate mobility for individuals holding a qualification for these regulated professions, which are de jure a license to practise. The Directive builds on a number of directives from the 70s and early 80s to harmonise the training in some key professions and leads to automatic recognition of seven professions, mainly in the health sector. It also proposes a procedure for dealing with professions that are regulated in specific member states. The Directive prescribes strict criteria, covering for example the duration, location and content of the training as a condition for recognition. As the system is based on a prescriptive approach to the training and certification requirements based on required input criteria, it only facilitates the mobility of those qualified professionals who meet the largely harmonised input criteria.

This system of recognition is very different from the EQF, which aims to facilitate the comparison of levels of learning outcomes from qualifications that could have been obtained in different ways. Whereas the EQF seeks to facilitate the comparison of the results of the learning in terms of competences, the Directive establishes criteria to ensure matching training programmes. The regulated system ensures automatic recognition of individuals with the strictly corresponding professional qualifications, but does not allow partial recognition of the qualifications and skills of individuals coming from outside the matching systems. This means that skills shortages in these regulated professions cannot be filled flexibly by requalifying individuals with a relevant background through e.g. recognition of prior learning or any other shorter route than the full training programmes.

The Directive is an inherited system which goes back to the seventies when the six original member states of the European Community tried to harmonise professional qualifications through harmonised training programmes. The principles promoted by the EQF are fundamentally different, and take account of the diversity of education and training systems in 28 member states and the realities of lifelong learning. They have moved away from the hard compliance of matching training programmes to the transparency and comparability of learning outcomes.

²⁷ Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, OJ L 255, 30.9.2005.

The declaration of the Ministers of Education of the European Union in Copenhagen in 2002²⁸ contains the following passage that was at the basis of the EQF: *“The Ministers recommend investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, can be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training”*.

EQF and the Copenhagen Declaration

This statement is quite significant as it provided a basis for both the EQF and the work on a European credit system for vocational education and training. Initially both developments were part of a single initiative. A technical working group on credit transfer in VET was established in 2002. The credit transfer technical working group to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority had commissioned the initial work on reference levels. Long before this work was published it started to lead a life on its own.²⁹ The main message from the study, which looked at different approaches to levels, was that the levels should be based on learning outcomes if they were going to bridge learning from different contexts and that eight levels seemed to be the optimum number for a European framework.

The scope of the EQF work was to develop reference levels for lifelong learning and aimed to cover all forms of learning including more academic types of learning and general secondary education. Two years after the meeting in Copenhagen, ministers met again in Maastricht in 2004 to discuss progress in cooperation in vocational education and training. The ministers asked that priority should be given *‘to the development of an open and flexible EQF that would cover both VET and general (secondary and higher) education and would be based on learning outcomes’* (Maastricht Communiqué, 14 December 2004). This was reconfirmed by the meeting of the Heads of Government (the Council) in March 2005.

Many experts in qualifications and qualifications systems were involved in developing the EQF. They included a large group of representatives from higher education, in particular the Bologna Follow-Up Working Group. Moreover, the expert working group included representatives from EU member states, social partners, sectors and European organisations and was led by the European Commission. The EQF descriptors for higher levels aimed to adapt the Dublin descriptors that were at the basis of the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, opening them up for a wider set of qualifications. When the higher education ministers met in Bergen in May 2005 to announce the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area, the development of the EQF was already well advanced³⁰.

²⁸ Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training – “The Copenhagen Declaration” [Not published in the Official Journal].

²⁹ Coles, M. and Oates, T. (Cedefop), *European Reference Levels for Education and Training: promoting credit transfer and mutual trust*, Study commissioned to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2005.

³⁰ *“We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts,*

2.2 The EQF consultation and the final Recommendation

The consultation process

The European Commission's consultation paper on the proposed EQF was published in July 2005³¹, two months after Bergen, and went through an extensive EU-wide consultation process. The blueprint, prepared on the basis of the Expert Group's work, proposed an eight-level framework based on learning outcomes aiming to facilitate the transparency of qualifications and to support lifelong learning. The EQF was proposed as a common European reference framework, which would link countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It was presented as a meta-framework that enables different qualifications frameworks to be related to each other and subsequently to allow comparisons of individual qualifications. Such comparisons would form the basis of greater recognition and transfer of the learning outcomes (in the form of qualifications) acquired by individual citizens to facilitate the mobility of learners and workers. The paper made clear that such a meta-framework would not replace national or sectoral frameworks – indeed its viability would rest on building links with such frameworks. The EQF would be entirely voluntary, that is EU member states could choose whether or not to relate their systems to it.

The responses to the consultation demonstrated widespread support among European stakeholders for the Commission's proposal but also requested greater simplification, in particular of the reference levels. In response, the European Commission amended the original proposal, drawing on the input of experts from all the 32 countries involved as well as the European social partners. The revised text was then adopted by the Commission as a proposal on 6 September 2006. The European Parliament and the Council successfully negotiated the proposal during 2007, resulting in the EQF's formal adoption in February 2008.

The EQF was finally adopted in 2008 in a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 23 April 2008³². The Recommendation has a non-binding nature and thus conforms to the principle of subsidiarity. It is an example of 'soft' *acquis* of European law.

the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. We commit ourselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to having started work on this by 2007". Bergen Communiqué, May 2005.

³¹ European Commission Staff Working Paper, *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, SEC (2005) 957.

³² Official Journal of the European Union, 2008/C 111.

The actual EQF consists of four core elements:

- vision and objectives,
- a set of common descriptors, defined in terms of learning outcomes, and located in a structure of eight levels,
- definitions of key concepts,
- a set of common principles and procedures on quality assurance.³³

**4 core
elements of
the EQF**

According to the Recommendation, the EQF has two interrelated objectives: the promotion and facilitation of regional (intra-European) mobility by increasing the transparency of qualifications throughout Europe, as well as increased portability and recognition of qualifications. Mobility is encouraged not only on a geographical level, but also between different sectors within the labour market; and to encourage implementation of lifelong learning within member states through flexible learning pathways, promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and breaking down barriers between different sectors within education and training systems.

The Recommendation provided a condensed explanation of the purpose and mechanisms of the EQF with very concrete steps for implementation. Formally, member states were asked to reference the levels of their qualifications systems or frameworks in a transparent way to the EQF. Where appropriate, level comparison could be facilitated by developing NQFs in accordance with national legislation and practice. By 2012 new qualifications certificates should mention the EQF levels. Countries were also asked to use learning outcomes in describing qualifications and to designate national coordination points to oversee the relationship between their respective national systems and the EQF, in particular to ensure the referencing of the national system or framework to the EQF³⁴.

The key to the EQF is its eight reference levels. The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together using this common European reference point. The levels span the full range of qualifications from the upper levels of compulsory schooling to the most advanced qualifications for senior professionals. The EQF, crucially, is a lifelong learning framework, so that all its eight levels encompass qualifications gained in any setting, whether general education, higher education or VET for example. They are also intended to include qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning and lifelong learning opportunities as well as through formal learning. The levels are said to have been decided on after analysis of evidence from published research and from the main national qualifications structures and the structures of work practice in companies in many countries.³⁵

**Eight
Reference
Levels**

³³ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ European Communities, *Explaining the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, Luxembourg, 2008.

**Eight
Reference
Levels**

The eight reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes. The philosophical basis of the EQF is that Europe's education and training systems are so diverse that a shift to learning outcomes is necessary to make comparison and cooperation between countries and institutions possible. As indicated above, the Recommendation therefore requests that member states use learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications.³⁶

2.3 The implementation of the EQF

The successful development and implementation of an EQF will require a shared understanding of key terms such as learning outcomes, qualifications, competences, and the framework itself. In using these terms, the 2005 consultation paper drew on the work of the OECD, the ETF, Cedefop and other international organisations and attempts to take developments under both the Bologna and Copenhagen processes into account, making adjustments to meet the specific context of the European meta-framework. It is not always clear, however, how far the issues associated with these terms are terminological and how far they are deeper, related more to fundamental beliefs about the processes which underlay the terms. For example, the Recommendation defines qualifications as *'formal outcomes of an assessment or validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual learning outcome is to a given standard'* and states clearly that the details of specific qualifications will not be described by the EQF, for which instead the national qualifications systems are the appropriate reference. But it does state that the EQF should enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems.

**National
coordination
points**

In order to facilitate the national coordination of referencing processes, the 2005 consultation paper had also pointed out that all current agencies for making comparisons between qualifications – networks such as the European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC), the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), the national reference points for vocational qualifications, and the National Europass Centres – will need to be involved. The Recommendation itself formally takes account of Europass. These are examples of an area where the EQF seems to prompt, if not create, issues about existing structures and the need for structural changes in the wake of the EQF. As stated above, the Recommendation asks member states to designate national coordination points in order to support and guide the relationship between the national qualifications systems and the EQF. One of their tasks is to promote the participation of all relevant stakeholders including higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors, and experts in the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

The European Commission's view seems to be that the development of a single NQF, based on learning outcomes, and overseen by a national authority (whether agency or ministry) is the ideal approach to support national linking to the EQF. In this and other ways, it seems unlikely that the EQF will not require or result in some degree of convergence between national and (possibly to a lesser extent) sectoral systems and this raises two questions: how far down the national or sectoral systems will it be necessary to pursue measures of commonality and will the EQF turn out to be an instrument of change, in the control of those who choose to use it, or an agent for change, of its very nature requiring specific kinds of change.³⁷

While the EQF aims to make systems throughout Europe more comparable, there is strong resistance to uniformity. However, convergence is likely to take place. On the one hand, maintaining longstanding national traditions in education and training, for example, the dual model approach in Germany, Denmark and Austria, is seen as essential in responding to national challenges. On the other hand, in higher education within the Bologna Process some form of harmonisation of higher education models has been promoted. Some degree of convergence in VET to the apprenticeship model seems to be gaining ground as well. International pressure for uniformity in European and international certificates and the pressure towards more compatible qualifications systems within NQFs are all factors that cannot be disregarded.³⁸

However, there is a clear distinction between the Bologna Process and the EQF here. Although not mentioned explicitly in the official declarations, in Bologna circles the word harmonisation is frequently used. The official Bologna website³⁹ mentions that provisions of the Bologna Declaration were set as measures of a voluntary harmonisation process. The introduction of common degree structures (the three-cycle degree system) has actually changed higher education provision in most of the 48 countries that participate in the Bologna Process. Here, a degree of harmonisation is evident.

The EQF, on the other hand, is not an instrument for harmonising qualifications or parts of qualifications systems but is intended to function as a type of translation device to make relationships between qualifications and different systems clearer. The articles on education and vocational training on the EU's governing treaty explicitly exclude any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the member states. But this does not mean that the EQF could not lead to a convergence of systems, as a number of countries now seem to be adopting eight levels for their national frameworks. But behind these levels an enormous diversity of systems and qualifications continues to exist⁴⁰.

³⁷ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ <http://www.ehea.info/>

⁴⁰ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

Learning outcomes

The level descriptors are the core of the EQF. They are stated in terms of learning outcomes under three headings: knowledge, skills, and wider competences described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. Learning outcomes are defined in Annex 1 of the Recommendation as *'the statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do on completion of a learning process which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence'*. These are set out at eight levels, with changes in the levels reflecting increased ability to deal with complexity, unpredictability and change.

EQF as a political/prag matic tool

The development of the EQF as a meta-framework is a new enterprise and raises a number of issues as it breaks new ground. An important example here is the development of the EQF descriptors and levels which represents a compromise between 28 countries and is not necessarily a product of purely technical procedures; this notion of a 'social construction' – that is, agreed between partners – which extends far beyond the technical has in recent years proven to be a fundamental conceptual shift that has directly contributed to the successful development and implementation of qualifications frameworks internationally. This conclusion is well formulated by Markowitsch and Luomi-Messerer when discussing the development and interpretation of descriptors of the EQF: *'The EQF is very much a political/pragmatic tool and not a scientific/empirical tool'*.⁴¹

The reference points have been designed and written to support the work of policy-makers and experts at national and sectoral levels and to make comparisons and cooperation easier to achieve and manage. It is intended that national and sectoral bodies will add amplification and exemplification to the EQF that will make it easier for national and sectoral experts to use the levels with their own qualifications. There is no intention that all qualifications should equally match all three types of outcome, and where they do, it is acknowledged that they may relate to different types of outcome at different levels. Thus the reference table of EQF outcomes will have to be used to achieve a 'best fit' match of national and sectoral qualifications to a level. According to the EQF Advisory Group note (European Commission, 2010), 'best fit' is a decision that is based on collective professional judgments of stakeholders. The best-fit principle (i.e. the referencing to the level that best matches the qualification) is thought to be a feasible method for classification. Precisely because education and training tracks impart knowledge, skills and competence to varying degrees and therefore qualifications cannot always be characterised unambiguously with one set of descriptors, experts see the best-fit principle as a welcome approach to referencing. On the other hand, the process of 'best fit' includes deciding on the weighting given to the technical and social dimensions in the final referencing decision. One of the main technical issues here is how to compare fairly distinct domains of learning outcomes used by different countries. In the

⁴¹ Markowitsch, K. Luomi-Messerer, *Development and interpretation of descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework*, European journal of vocational training – No 42/43 – 2007/3 • 2008/1.

case of the English and Northern Irish report (QF, 2009) the social dimension was given a strong weighting in matching level 4 of the national framework to the EQF.

Quality assurance forms the basis for mutual trust within the EQF and emphasis is placed on simplicity through the development of guidelines that support quality assurance development within NQFs. Quality assurance is also part of the referencing criteria. The Recommendation provides a set of common principles for quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training.⁴²

2.4 Quality assurance aspects and the governance of the EQF

The risk of a potential over-dependence of the EQF on national quality assurance processes is further mitigated through several pan-European arrangements, such as the European Quality Assurance Framework for VET (EQA VET), the work of Cedefop on the examination of EU experiences on the relationship between quality assurance and VET certification (Cedefop, 2009) and other exchange experiences. A sub-group of the EQF Advisory Group also focuses on the relationships between national and regional quality assurance processes. The short-term integration of national and regional (trans-Europe) processes is however not foreseen.

Implementation of the EQF is based on an open method of coordination, which includes three key implementation structures.⁴³

a. The *EQF Advisory Group* is the main coordination body that oversees the implementation of the EQF and provides coherence to the various processes. It consists of representatives from the member states, candidate countries, and countries from the European Economic Area outside the EU, the Council of Europe (which oversees the Bologna Process), European social partners and various other stakeholders, such as chambers of commerce and industry, public employment services, and the voluntary sector.

The Advisory Group meets between three to four times per year and has been responsible for the development of guidelines and procedures to be followed by member states when referencing their education levels in various attempts to develop mutual trust between them.

**3 key
implementa-
tion
structures**

**The EQF
Advisory
Group**

**The EQF
Advisory**

⁴² International Labour Office, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Geneva, 2007.

⁴³ European Communities, *Explaining the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, Luxembourg, 2008.

**National
coordination
points (NCPs)**

b. National coordination points (NCPs) are responsible for more practical issues and ensure that country-specific issues are raised. In particular the tasks of the NCPs include: (i) referencing levels of qualifications within national qualifications systems to the EQF levels; (ii) ensuring that a transparent methodology is used to reference national qualifications levels to the EQF; (iii) providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through national qualifications systems; and (iv) promoting the participation of all relevant stakeholders. To date these coordination points have been funded by the countries, but there has been a recent shift (following the global economic crisis) to provide specific funding in this area from 2010. Strong links exist between country representatives who sit on the Advisory Group and the EQF national coordination points. In 2010 the first network meetings of NCPs took place.

**Support /
working
groups**

c. Support/working groups are thematically based. Examples include sector qualifications, resources for the EQF, website development, quality assurance, and the learning outcomes approach. The support groups are very active and ensure systematic exchange of experiences within the EQF environment. For example, the work of the group on learning outcomes, involving representatives from more than 20 European countries, culminated in the preparation of European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2009). This group has also been a peer learning forum for exchanging experience on the development of NQFs in the countries that participate in the EQF process.

**The role of
the European
Commission**

The role of the European Commission is central to the EQF implementation process as it is responsible for implementation at the European level; the Commission takes political initiatives on the transnational level, while the education and training function remains national. Despite the recognition of the importance of the Commission and other EU agencies, capacity and resources have remained limited according to stakeholders, and used mainly to pay contractors for specific projects, support to the working groups, and increasingly, to improve communication in the qualifications community. A small team in the Directorate General for Education and Culture coordinates the implementation of the EQF, supported by a locally-based expert from Cedefop.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*

The coordinating role of the EQF Advisory Group is seen as equally important, the more so because the EQF is a voluntary instrument that remains dependent on member states and other stakeholders' willingness to implement it. The need for a semi-autonomous regional agency is not high on the agenda within the EU as education and training is regarded as a national competence. The European Commission's services and the EQF Advisory Group are regarded as sufficient governance structures. Continuity of key staff is noted as an important factor for the relatively quick development of the EQF to date, although it is also noted that continuity and consistency has to be balanced with new thinking. The improvement of communication about qualifications and competences is increasingly being prioritised within the EQF context.⁴⁵

**The
coordinating
role of the
EQF Advisory
Group**

The work of the EU bodies in particular is viewed as important. Examples include the support from agencies such as Cedefop and the ETF, the availability of resources for testing and piloting mainly through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, and engaging with external experts. National coordinating mechanisms (like national qualifications agencies) are viewed as essential by the European Commission and member states.⁴⁶

**EU bodies
and
instruments**

In a wider context, the EQF implementation is also supported by important EU instruments for mobility and innovation in VET – the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the European Social Fund. It is also supported by stakeholders' platforms such as the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT) and the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training, and other forums of European social dialogue.⁴⁷

Today the EQF represents an important shift towards outcomes-based qualifications, through a focus on transparency within a diverse context. Cooperation takes place on the basis of recognised differences and not in an attempt to harmonise national systems.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

2.5 Influences and impact of the EQF

Approach

The learning outcome approach is seen as essential to the EQF. Even so, there are also some cautionary notes as the learning outcomes used to describe some qualifications are criticised for not sufficiently connecting to the labour market and the needs of employers; this issue has been identified as a key challenge by the European Commission and attempts are underway to connect referencing at national level with the labour market and employers. The need to go beyond learning outcomes, and also address curricula, teaching and assessment is often noted. Here also, the inclusion of learning outcomes in the Bologna higher education process has laid an important foundation for the EQF process.⁴⁸

Recent studies have shown that qualifications are changing in form but not necessarily in function, and as a result, a huge change in recognition of qualifications nationally or internationally is not expected (see ILO, 2010; and Cedefop, 2009). Even so there is no doubt that learning outcomes are clearly having an impact on the way in which the recognition of qualifications is understood and are contributing directly to the development of new methodologies for recognition. The extent to which the learning outcomes approach contributes to recognition of qualifications in practice is however less certain at this stage of the EQF's development.

The Bologna Process influence

The relationship between the EQF and the Bologna higher education framework is acknowledged as critically important.⁴⁹ The fact that EU member states are now developing comprehensive NQFs (i.e. which include higher education, VET and other training sectors) is regarded as a direct result of the coordination between the EQF and the Bologna Process, which pioneered development in the higher education sector. The Bologna Process has been an important point of inspiration for the EQF. In particular the Dublin descriptors developed for the three cycles of higher education defined by Bologna were adapted to fit within levels 5 to 8 of the EQF, the EQF descriptors taking account additionally of skills and autonomy alongside the more knowledge-oriented focus of the Dublin descriptors.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

⁴⁹ European Communities, *Explaining the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, Luxembourg, 2008.

⁵⁰ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

Nevertheless, the main criticism against the EQF is that it does not sufficiently tackle the barriers between VET and higher education.⁵¹ The extent to which the EQF (and learning outcomes) may encourage modularisation and the development of qualifications is also of concern to some stakeholders. While it is not evident that the EQF is hindered in its implementation by the varying levels of application of quality assurance. Systems in member states, it is recognised that some member states still have much to do in developing robust national quality assurance systems.

The development and establishment of the EQF is a condition for the introduction of the credit accumulation and transfer scheme in all vocational qualifications across the EU, known as the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). It is also an important driver for using learning outcomes for defining and describing qualifications. In this regard, qualification frameworks in general are criticised by some actors for having ‘taken the pedagogy out of education and training’. In some contexts this influence is welcomed and seen as contributing to the opening of access and improvement of parity of esteem; this view is however severely contested. The assumption that much of the experience gained in the process of building NQFs can be translated to transnational qualifications frameworks, particularly regional qualifications frameworks such as the EQF, is questioned as it is argued that such broader applicability has not been verified in practice.

There is an issue about unintended and potentially negative impacts of the EQF. These presumed effects are varied but include the potential devaluing of traditional offerings of vocational education, additional bureaucracy, dangers in adapting to an extreme form of outcomes (that overlook teaching inputs and learning conditions), and ensuring that a critical mass of countries remains involved. The potential convergence of education and training systems, as mentioned above, may undermine the positive diversity of education systems – a hidden kind of harmonisation is feared.⁵²

Criticisms

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

⁵² *Ibidem.*

Chapter 3 - How to develop a Qualifications Framework

3.1 Preliminary elements to consider⁵³

As we already described, a **Qualifications Framework** - considering all the typologies already presented - **is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes**, i.e. clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do whether learned in a classroom, on-the-job, or less formally. The Qualifications Framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another, within and across occupations or industrial sectors (and even across vocational and academic fields if the NQF is designed to include both vocational and academic qualifications in a single framework).

The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. **All qualifications frameworks, however, provide a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.** The variation in the definition of QFs is often a source of confusion.

The goals

(i) The important point is that the nature and design of the QF should be based on the goals that policy makers and decision makers seek to achieve by introducing a QF.

The value of a QF, or a NQF, lies in its potential to contribute to policy goals such as lifelong learning, recognition of skills, or improving the quality of education and training. Therefore its design should relate to the goals which it is intended to support and to the context in which it will operate. It is unhelpful to think of the NQF as an entity with fixed or universal characteristics – other than the need to establish a set of levels and criteria for registering and allocating qualifications to these levels.⁵⁴

Policy aims

(ii) The most effective approach to building a QF is to start with clear policy aims, rather than with a set idea about the particular characteristics it should have.

A NQF, or a Sectoral one, can help to address a number of the skills challenges; however, a framework is not a quick solution to the many skills challenges faced by a country or a sector. Without clear objectives and an understanding

⁵³ International Labour Office, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Geneva, 2007.

of how a QF can best be developed, implementation can be a lengthy and costly endeavour.

Policy aims

(iii) Conducting a preliminary analysis to be clear about rationales for the development of a QF is vital.

It should enable policy makers to get beyond general QF rhetoric and focus on the specific needs of the country or sector and lay the foundation for a needs-led approach to NQF design and implementation. It is important to be sure that there is a real problem or need to be addressed. Obviously, it is highly counter-productive to impose 'solutions' where a problem does not exist. It is also important to be clear about priorities, especially where there are significant resource constraints. For example, revising all VET qualifications to create a fully outcome-based modular system is an expensive undertaking and the benefits may not immediately justify the investment. It may suggest focusing efforts on one sector of education and training rather than a comprehensive NQF which includes all sectors of education and training. The final goal may be to build a comprehensive NQF, but it does not need to be a one-stage process.

**Preliminary
analysis**

(iv) The approach to QF construction should also be decided on the basis of fit-for-purpose.

The most important thing is to develop genuine support and trust for the NQF among stakeholders. Employers' and workers' organizations have a key role to play in this process.

**Fit-for-
purpose**

(v) A National Qualifications Framework or a Sectoral Qualifications Framework is only a framework and it is based on 'qualifications'.

The key to successful QF implementation is to develop a broad strategy that takes account of all factors influencing success. These include: policy coherence across different ministries; an enabling funding regime; support to education and training institutions including the development of learning materials and professional development.

**A broad
strategy**

As for the governance and management of the NQF, it is normal international practice for the management of the NQF to be assigned to an apex body⁵⁵, such as a national qualifications authority, that is independent of the government but accountable to it.

⁵⁵ **Apex body** consist of a range of national entities within national governments, inter-agency task forces. The aim of such body is the co-ordination between different organisations involved in the implementation and management of the NQF.

Apex body

(vi) This is also valid during the development of a Regional or a Sectoral QF: it is fundamental to indicate a supranational apex body within the specific region or sector concerned.

Two key issues of governance are: co-ordination of policy across government ministries and ensuring adequate involvement of stakeholders. It is recommended, however, that one body (e.g. ministry) be chosen to take the lead role so as to create an effective internal policy coordination mechanism.

Levels and qualifications

(vii) The first essential element of QF development is to develop a set of 'levels' of learning to be achieved (i.e. learning outcomes, competencies, functions, etc.) and assign qualifications to the levels.

The starting point in deciding on the number of levels is the current understanding among stakeholders about key qualifications and their relationship to each other. A QF is unlikely to be accepted or even understood by citizens, stakeholders and learners if it does not correspond to 'common sense' within a certain sector.

(viii) Learning outcomes, competencies, functions or any other useful elements are used to create different levels and they do not change the nature of the framework that is composed by different qualifications and only 'based' on those elements: it is a 'qualifications framework', not a 'learning outcomes framework'.

The number of levels in a QF varies and depends on the real situation and the real organisation of different systems and sectors.

Quality assurance

(ix) The second essential element of any QF is quality assurance.

This is vital if stakeholders within a country, a sector and the international community are to have confidence in the QF. Three important measures of quality assurance are:

- validation⁵⁶ of qualifications and/or standards;
- accreditation⁵⁷ and audit⁵⁸ of education and training institutions;
- quality assurance of assessment leading to the award of qualifications.

⁵⁶ **Validation** is the confirmation by an officially approved body that learning outcomes or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed against reference points or standards through pre-defined assessment methodologies.

⁵⁷ **Accreditation** is a process by which an officially approved body, on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes and/or competences according to different purposes and methods, awards qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles), or grants equivalences, credit units or exemptions, or issues documents such as portfolios of competences. In some cases, the term accreditation applies to the evaluation of the quality of an institution or a programme as a whole.

⁵⁸ An **audit** is an objective examination and evaluation of an organization to make sure that the activities are a fair and accurate representation of their role. It can be done internally by employees of the organization, or externally by an outside firm.

The process of developing a framework of qualifications must take into account the need to foster trust among the various stakeholders so that they can have confidence in the integrity of the resultant framework.

Quality
assurance

(x) It is vital to identify the national and international stakeholders and advance consensus-building mechanisms in framework development through dialogue.

An important way to build trust and acceptance is to ensure that any top-down approach is fused with a bottom-up process. It is possible to design different ways to consult but, in general, the approach should be as transparent as possible.

Stakeholders

3.2 Categorisation of the stages of Regional / Sectoral QF development⁵⁹

Qualifications frameworks can be categorised according to various stages of development. While such a categorisation is always subjective and a simplification of reality, the categorisation does at least offer a lens through which to compare different qualifications frameworks with each other.

Stages of
development

The following table describes the categorisation of the stages of Regional and Sectoral qualifications frameworks development. Importantly the stages are not presented as mutually exclusive as it may be possible that a qualifications framework can be at more than one stage at the same time.

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	TYPES OF EVIDENCE
Exploration / Orientation	Growing awareness and interest in a Regional / Sectoral qualifications framework on a regional / sectoral level	Inclusion of the vision of a qualifications framework in regional / sectoral / international documents (such as strategic plans)
	Understanding of the value of a Regional / Sectoral qualifications framework for cross-border provisioning	

⁵⁹ European Training Foundation, *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	TYPES OF EVIDENCE
Exploration / Orientation	Discussions on a Regional / Sectoral qualifications framework in regional / sectoral forums	Inclusion of the vision of a qualifications framework in regional / sectoral / international documents (such as strategic plans)
Conceptual	Decision in principle in favour of a Regional / Sectoral qualifications framework	Regional / Sectoral qualifications framework concept and discussion document(s) developed
	Expectations discussed	
	Focus is on legislation and/or regional / sectoral consensus	
	Roles of stakeholders	Regional / international / sectoral working group/committee established
	Resourcing	
	Compromises take place	
Testing	Pilot projects initiated (often sector specific)	Sectoral projects
	Some qualifications registered on the qualifications framework	Initial qualifications registered on qualifications framework
Implementation	Regional / international / sectoral body responsible to oversee the qualifications framework established (or identified if it is an existing body)	Regional / international / sectoral body
	Regional or sectoral legislation / policy / protocol finalized / agreed	Legislation
	Regional / sectoral funding secured	Funding
Review	Re-conceptualisation	Formal review process
	Review of impact and progress	Review report
	Re-design	

3.3 Steps of qualifications framework development⁶⁰

There is no single best approach to QF development: it depends on the typology of the framework (national, regional, sectoral). However, thanks to international and national experiences, it is possible to identify a linear process to help decision makers think through the issues in a structured way. In reality, of course, the process is not a simple linear one. QF development tends to be iterative, i.e. decisions made or problems arising at particular stages can necessitate reviewing decisions or views reached at an earlier stage.

Step 1 - What are the goals you want to achieve through developing a QF?

The crucial first step in QF policy formation is being clear about the purposes and goals that the QF is expected to contribute to achieving. These vary across different countries, regions and sectors.

It is important to be sure that there is a real problem or need to be addressed and to be clear whether the problem affects all sectors of education and training or just one and in which context (one, some or all countries).

There are different main sets of reasons for developing a QF:

a) Promoting lifelong learning:

- improving understanding of learning routes and qualifications and how they relate to each other;
- improving access to education and training opportunities;
- creating incentives for participation in education and training;
- making progression routes easier and clearer;
- improving learner and career mobility.

b) Improving quality assurance and recognition:

- increasing and improving credit transfer between qualifications;
- ensuring that education and training standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and applied consistently;
- ensuring that education and training providers meet certain quality standards;
- securing international recognition for national qualifications.

Conducting a preliminary and clear analysis on real problems and needs will create a working rationale for the development of a QF.

The goals

⁶⁰ International Labour Office, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Geneva, 2007.

The goals

It should enable decision makers to get beyond general QF rhetoric and focus on the specific needs of their country or sector. It may lead to the identification of the need for further research. It may lead to concentration on one or two objectives that are of paramount importance. It may suggest focussing efforts on one sector of education and training rather than another. Above all, it should lay the foundation for a needs-led approach to QF design and implementation.

Step 2 - Which sector of education and training do you want to include in the QF?

The relevant sector

There are three main sectors of education and training with interests in a QF: secondary schools, vocational education and training (VET) including work-based learning and higher education.

The boundaries between these sectors vary across countries and are difficult to define. In some countries, the secondary school sector includes vocational schools; in others, VET is delivered almost entirely through post-secondary institutions. Some countries regard aspects of VET (e.g. higher technician level qualifications) as part of the higher education sector, others would not, some countries make a clear distinction between formal and informal VET, others regard these types of VET as a single sector.

In the case of Regional and Sectoral QFs it is important to consider that each country has a specific educational and training system influenced by different legislative and cultural elements.

An educational system identical to another does not exist: the nature and the 'value' of qualifications that exist in each national context and that are referred to the same educational sector, as well as the nature and the status of education and training providers are very different. Also the way to get a qualification is influenced by the national legislation (formal programmes, recognition of prior learning

A general and clear picture of each national education and training system of the sector concerned is fundamental to create a QF and to give the possibility to develop future NQFs.

Step 3 - How should the QF be governed and managed?

At this stage, it is important to consider how the QF will be governed and managed. The governance role is the setting of strategic direction and determination of policy. This will normally be carried out by a Board, although the nature of the arrangements for governance will depend on the organisational structure of the QF. The management role is the implementation of agreed policy, carried out by executive officers in the main organisations with responsibilities for the QF. The officers will be accountable to the governing Board.

It is normal international practice for the management of the QF to be assigned to an apex body, such as a national qualifications authority for NQFs or international organisations for RQFs or SQFs.

There are two key issues of governance:

- co-ordination of policy across government ministries or different countries;
- ensuring adequate involvement of stakeholders at national and international level.

Starting on the assumption that a QF is a process and not a fixed instrument, for a QF to operate effectively, some sets of functions must be carried out:

- management of the framework;
- standards and qualifications development;
- developing, implementing and reviewing QF procedures;
- consulting with stakeholders on QF development and implementation;
- disseminating public information and advice on the NQF.

Step 4 - How should a system of levels be developed?

In respect of many aspects of QF design and implementation, policy and decision makers do not require a detailed grasp of the technicalities involved; it is sufficient to be clear about the principles. The development of the QF levels may be something of an exception to this rule, because of the importance and sensitivity of some of the issues at stake.

Assigning qualifications to levels involves judgements about the relative 'worth' or 'value' of different qualifications. It is quite normal for the

representatives of academic and vocational education to hold different views on these matters and to defend such views vigorously. The process leading to

**The
Governing
Board**

**Design and
implementa-
tion of the
framework**

agreement on levels may therefore need to be managed skilfully.

Where qualification levels are associated with national regulations or agreements on pay and promotion, the definition of these levels will be particularly sensitive.

In addition, the levels system adopted is a key aspect of defining the relationships and equivalences between the qualifications of one country and those in the rest of the world. It may therefore assume a high political significance.

It is important that stakeholders understand that qualifications at the same level are deemed to be equivalent in certain respects, and not the same.

Qualifications at the same level may be quite different in size and scope and have quite different purposes. One may prepare learners for study of an academic subject at a higher level; another may indicate competence in an occupation. Equivalence means that the qualifications concerned match certain criteria for a particular level as set out in level descriptors. However, as you will see below, level descriptors may consist of a number of types of outcome, such as knowledge, skills, communicative competence etc. Different types of qualification do not necessarily place an equal emphasis on each of the outcomes. For example, one may be relatively knowledge-oriented and another relatively skills-oriented. Nevertheless, looking at the level descriptor overall, it may be deemed to be broadly equivalent in terms of progression – i.e. requiring a similar level of capability for entry and offering similar capabilities for progression to employment or for further education and training. Specific judgments about entry or progression will, of course, also have to take account of the nature of the areas of skill and knowledge acquired by the learner. Returning to the notion of size, it should be noted that qualifications at the same level may require quite different periods of learning. Measuring and recognising the size or weight of learning is generally achieved through credit systems.

The stages in developing the system of levels are normally as follows:

- decide on the scope of the framework;
- determine the number of levels;
- develop level descriptors;
- develop practical guidance on any processes in which the descriptors are central.

The number of levels in a QF varies.

The starting point in deciding on the number of levels is the current

understanding among stakeholders about key qualifications and their relationship to each other – what might be called ‘the relativities’ in the national system or among national systems involved.

A QF is unlikely to be accepted or even understood by citizens if it does not correspond to ‘common sense’, certainly in respect of the most significant qualifications.

In almost all countries, there will be a clear progression route from lower secondary qualifications (typically at the end of compulsory schooling) to upper secondary school qualifications and on to higher education qualifications. It may also be clear how a learner progresses from lower secondary qualifications into the VET qualifications structure.

These key qualifications and the relationship between them are important benchmarks that will help stakeholders to relate to and understand the system of levels being proposed.

Over the last two decades there have been examples of frameworks with as many as twelve or as few as five levels, but most frameworks today seem to have around eight or ten levels.

The table below shows the eight levels that are common to most NQFs. It also takes account of the eight levels adopted by for the European Qualifications Framework.

**Design and
implementa-
tion of the
framework**

LEVEL	EXAMPLES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND RELATED COMPETENCES
8	Doctoral degree; Senior Manager VQ-jobs requiring the knowledge, creativity and leadership skills to deal with complex and unpredictable situations
7	Masters degree; Specialist Professional Qualifications; Senior Manager VQ-specialist knowledge-based professional work; high-level management responsibilities
6	Bachelors degree/Honours degree; Professional Qualifications; Middle Manager VQ-knowledge-based professional work; management responsibilities
5	Higher Education Certificate and Diploma; Technician/Specialist VQ; Para-professional Qualification; Advanced Vocational Qualification–highly skilled employment; management training
4	Senior School Exit Qualification; Advanced Craft VQ; Supervisory VQ-fully skilled employment; independent operative; supervisory responsibilities
3	Junior School Exit Qualification; Intermediate VQ–skilled/semi-skilled employment
2	Basic VQ-skills required to function in the workplace
1	Literacy and Numeracy Qualification-skills required to enter the workplace and undertake vocational training

Each country and also each sector should adopt the number of levels that makes most sense in relation to its own education and training system and policy goals.

Taking into account the example of the European Qualifications Framework, Member countries may have varying numbers of levels for their NQFs, but will use the EQF reference levels as a common point of comparison.

Step 5 - Must QFs be based on outcomes?

**The benefits
in using
learning
outcomes**

The question is sometimes asked: must QFs be based on outcomes? The answer is that it depends what you mean by 'outcomes'. In the consultation paper on an EQF, the European Commission defines learning outcomes as:

The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.

The consultation document goes on:

Learning outcomes can be formulated for a number of purposes; in relation to individual courses, units, modules and programmes. They may furthermore be used by national authorities to define entire qualifications – sometimes structured within or linked to qualifications frameworks and systems. International bodies may, finally, use learning outcomes for the purposes of transparency, comparability, credit transfer and recognition.

Following these definitions, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to have a QF that was not outcome-based. Without some explicit statements about the general outcomes of qualifications, it would be hard to compare different types of qualifications or to decide how to place new qualifications on different NQFs.

It is not absolutely essential for the qualifications themselves to be defined in terms of learning outcomes. However, there are many reasons why it is valuable to have the contents of the framework described in at least broad outcome terms.

In some sectors different level descriptors already exist that are useful to create QF levels: our attention has to be focused on level descriptors, a fundamental part of any QF, but the contents of those could be very different.

It is important to be aware of the purposes of level descriptors and their limitations. Level descriptors have two main purposes.

a. They make explicit the tacit understandings of providers and stakeholders about the nature of qualification levels and educational progression.

The process of developing level descriptors compels those engaged in it to make clear statements about the characteristics and outcomes of qualifications and how qualifications at adjacent levels differ from each other. This can often highlight ambiguities and inconsistencies and lead to clearer and better-grounded understandings.

b. They provide a means of making comparisons across different types of qualification.

This is important in the development of progression routes and vital in the implementation of credit transfer systems.

There is more than one dimension of 'level'. Some qualifications are more concerned with development of knowledge; others with skills or personal and professional competences. The use of broadly defined level descriptors provides the basis for agreeing that qualifications belong at the same level notwithstanding different relative emphases on knowledge, skills etc. Note: it is generally the case in existing frameworks that qualifications do not have to meet all aspects of a level descriptor to be deemed to meet the level requirements.

Step 6 - How should the QF be quality assured?

One of the essential elements of a QF is quality assurance. If stakeholders within the country and the international community are to have confidence in the QF, there is a need to put in place some appropriate procedures for ensuring that QF qualifications are fit for purpose and well-designed, that programmes leading to these qualifications are being delivered by competent providers and that assessment leading to the award of the qualifications can be trusted.

Thus, there are three important elements of quality assurance: validation of qualifications and/or standards; accreditation and audit of education and training institutions; and quality assurance of assessment leading to the award of qualifications.

All frameworks require providers to be recognised in some way, although the extent to which there are formal processes varies.

Quality assurance systems are set up to ensure improvement and accountability of education and training. They aim at increasing the effectiveness and transparency of provision at all levels and thereby promoting mutual trust, recognition and mobility, within and across countries.

A culture of quality improvement is only created when there is a sense of responsibility for quality at grass roots level. The aim of policy makers should be to encourage institutions and countries to

**The benefits
in using
learning
outcomes**

**Instruments
for quality
assurance**

take responsibility for quality in collaboration with the stakeholders.

The different sectors of education and training have traditionally adopted different approaches to quality assurance. It is recommended therefore that the approach should be to agree the general principles of quality assurance, then allow each sector to develop quality assurance procedures based on these principles but reflecting the needs and traditions of the sector. The body managing the QF should avoid creating elaborate and bureaucratic quality assurance machinery.

QF quality assurance should focus on the essentials – sometimes ‘less is more’.

Step 7 - How should consultation processes be conducted?

**The
identification
of the
stakeholders**

The process of developing a framework of qualifications must take into account the need to foster trust among the various stakeholders so that they can have confidence in the integrity of the resultant framework. It is vital to identify the stakeholders and advance consensus-building mechanisms in framework development. An important way to build trust and acceptance is to ensure that any top-down approach is fused with a bottom-up process. It is possible to design different ways to consult but in general, the approach should be as transparent as possible. As well as positively targeting some more obvious stakeholders to request their participation, it is also useful to invite open public participation. Even if most of the effective contributions come from core stakeholders, the legitimacy is enhanced by public processes. One can also find helpful ideas from unexpected places.

The stakeholders may include:

- learners/students;
- government departments;
- appropriate government agencies including those responsible for employment, economic development, competition and immigration;
- providers of education and training;
- awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies;
- teachers and trainers staff associations;
- employers’ and workers’ organizations, or more broadly representatives of employers and workers;
- community and voluntary organisations;
- professional bodies;
- academic researchers working on education and labour force policy questions;
- educators of teachers and trainers.

Any person or organisation who contributes via the open consultation process should be considered to have self-identified as a stakeholder. Some

stakeholders are more difficult to access than others. They may not have a representative organisation or there may be more than one such organisation, perhaps in competition with each other. Those who do have representative structures may need appropriate time to consult in turn with their membership. The value of the views of stakeholder organisations to consensus development depends on the extent to which they are indeed representative. It also depends on how much they are aware about how their members perceive the usefulness of the framework.

**The
identification
of the
stakeholders**

Consensus-building mechanisms in the development of QFs may include a number of measures such as:

- broad composition of any formal body and its executive staff;
- a publicly advertised consultation phase;
- publication of papers and submissions on the internet;
- international research and consultation;
- formal survey work with learners and employers;
- a broadly-based consultative group that meets regularly to produce extensive, supporting documentation;
- an open approach by all to questioning the purposes of qualifications and standards;
- sector meetings (e.g., to consider employment, community, and voluntary sector perspectives);
- bilateral meetings with stakeholder organisations;
- the securing of on-going political support for the initiative;
- consultation outside each country and at international level, particularly with jurisdictions where there is high labour and/or learner mobility;
- participation in international organisations and meetings.

**Consensus-
building
measures**

While it is useful to have an indicative timeline and work-plan, it is also important to be flexible.

If consultation reveals profound tensions, it is important to attempt to resolve these as they arise, rather than bury them to re-emerge later. If necessary the time for

consultation should be extended. The lead body should take the role of facilitating direct dialogue among stakeholders rather than mediating stakeholders' views to each other. Let each group hear or read each other's hopes and fears and respond to these directly rather than project them all onto some framework development expert group.

At the same time it is important that consultation should not be allowed to become a delaying mechanism. One tactic to avoid this is to differentiate stages of the development and 'bank' consensus as it is achieved. These stages might include initial agreement on broad principles and responsibilities, followed by policies and criteria for the framework, followed by technical details, followed by an implementation plan, followed by a communications plan. When agreement has

been reached on a stage, publish the outcome and refer to it explicitly in the work that follows. Some stakeholders will find it difficult to engage with all stages; this is only to be expected. Some may have broad policy interest and little concern for details. Some others may be less interested in the abstract principles or technical details but participate more enthusiastically when they see the prospect of implementation. Information should be provided in a way that stakeholders can identify whether the particular stage is one on which they have a contribution to make.

As a principle, any framework will have to be subject to possible review and revision and stakeholders will want reassurance that this is the case.

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that a change can be expensive and should not be undertaken lightly. Some features of frameworks are more difficult to change than others. A change which has a knock-on effect on all qualifications in the framework such as changing levels or level descriptors, will have implications right down to curricular development and assessment.

The point here is that any change is possible but that it is essential to understand the implications of future change. Therefore, certain key decisions such as on levels should be made carefully, in the knowledge that subsequent change could be difficult and expensive.

Chapter 4 – Basic elements and key recommendations for the CGFSQF

In this chapter, the content of each paragraph is organised in three parts: the first one, named “Basic Element” shows the main pillar of the subject, the narrative part is an explanation of the pillar in the framework coast guard field. The third one, named “Key Recommendations”, has the objective of underlining some specific advice, in order to give some crucial elements, useful to construct an efficient instrument.

The previous chapter (*Chapter 3*) presented necessary steps to develop a Qualifications Framework: these elements are taken into account to formulise basic elements and to suggest key recommendations to develop the CGFSQF. The next chapter (*Chapter 5*) analyses those elements considering methodological aspects to concretely implement the CGFSQF.

4.1 Aim and objectives of the CGFSQF

BASIC ELEMENT

To clearly define the structure and each element of the SQF, it is necessary to start from the aim and objectives for which this framework has been defined, in terms of the needs and purposes it will have to answer to. Obviously, a tool that is structured without taking into consideration the scope or purposes for which it has been created has no reason to exist.

**The starting
point: aims
and
objectives**

General objectives of transnational frameworks

As already described in chapter 3, the principal needs that the different qualifications frameworks will have to answer to are:

- comparability of qualifications;
- mutual recognition of qualifications;
- credit transfer and mobility periods;
- development of regional/sectoral standards;
- reviewing and strengthening national assessment and accreditation systems;
- facilitating agreement on entrance requirements to courses and programmes;
- joint courses and programmes.

**General
objectives**

European policy goals

European Union goals

The Terms of Reference⁶¹ drafted by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) illustrates the main goals that the European Commission is expecting to reach with the development of a sectoral framework, also in line with the EU policy in the sector. In particular the European Commission identified how the framework has the potential to increase the levels of interoperability which is needed to face maritime related risks and threats in a more coherent manner.

In addition, the Non-Paper of the European Commission on Coast Guard Functions in the EU⁶², defines the CGFSQF as an **instrument “to provide common training standards”**. In this framework, “training” is a key action to improve co-operation between the bodies performing Coast Guard functions, with a view to moving towards a European Coast Guard Capacity/System.

Furthermore, analysing the ECGFA-NET Terms of Reference, the following objectives can be identified:

- to encompass all qualifications acquired in the field of Coast Guard activities within a unique and comprehensive instrument;
- to include all national requirements needed to obtain Coast Guard qualifications;
- to support the review and accreditation of programmes;
- to facilitate the formal recognition of other types of learning, such as ‘on the job’ learning;
- to assist in the development or updating of national occupational standards for Coast Guards;
- to support the dissemination within Member States (MS) of best training practices and/or provide key recommendations.

ECGFA NET objectives

Project objectives

The objectives contained in the ECGFA-NET Project are in line with the general objectives of transnational frameworks and those expressed by the Commission. They are defined as follows:

- to support the establishment of a Coast Guard Functions Academies Network to improve cooperation channels among the Coast Guard bodies under the European Coast Guards Functions Forum;
- to increase student and expert exchange between the academies - providing training for coast guard functions;
- to plan a voluntary Sectoral Qualification Framework (SQF), consistent with the Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

⁶¹ MARE/2014/36 - ECGFA NET, Ref. Ares(2014)3752322 - 12/11/2014

⁶² Non Paper “Towards a European Coastguard Capacity” (17 September 2015) presented during the 7th ECGFF conference (Helsinki, 22-24 September 2015) - http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/mare/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=26080

Identified current aim, needs and objectives to build the CGFSQF

The activities of the ECGFA-NET project (questionnaires, study visits, working meetings) gave the chance to elaborate the general aim of the SQF and its specific needs and objectives, on the basis of the identified priorities, which will constitute the starting point for the construction of the Qualifications Framework.

**Peculiar
actual needs**

Considering all the objectives of the project and the needs of each CG body, as well as the policy of the European Commission already explained, the main aim of the CGFSQF is to support the process of internationalisation⁶³ of the Coast Guard educational and training sector and, consequently, to facilitate the interoperability among bodies carrying out Coast Guard functions.

This general aim is based on the following concrete needs identified by ECGFA NET partners:

- to develop a common identity between the bodies performing Coast Guard functions;
- to increase the levels of interoperability which are needed to face maritime-related risks and threats;
- to increase the mobility and interchange of experts and students among the various bodies and training centres;
- to support the constitution of the Coast Guard Functions Academies Network;
- to assist at national level the development or updating of CG occupational standards and training itineraries.

Starting from those identified needs, which will constitute the starting point for the construction of the Qualifications Framework, the objectives of the CGFSQF can be listed as follows (priority order):

- to facilitate the implementation of experts and students exchange programmes among the various bodies and training centres;
- to support the development of joint training courses and programmes;
- to assist in the constitution of the Coast Guard Functions Training Network, with a view to understanding the training possibilities present at a national level;
- to support better understanding of the levels of qualifications present in the different training systems, also in the light of future accreditation procedures;
- to support the harmonization of training itineraries at a national level.

⁶³ One of the most commonly used definitions of internationalisation was initially elaborated for the higher education sector by Jane Knight and Hans de Wit: *“the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the goals, functions (teaching/learning, research, services) and delivery of higher education”*.

This is the most broad and all-encompassing concept that integrates many different activities such as all forms of academic mobility, research collaboration, international development projects in higher education, curricular aspects in terms of the scope of programs and courses (area studies) offered or changes in curriculum of specific disciplines.

According to OECD, it is *“the complex of processes whose combined effect, whether planned or not, is to enhance the international dimension of the experience of higher education in universities and similar educational institutions”*.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Objectives & needs of the SQF: definite, explicit & shared	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The objectives and needs that the Sectoral Qualification Framework will have to answer to, as well as being <u>definite</u> and <u>explicit</u>, will also have to be <u>shared</u> with all the actors involved in the specific sector of Coast Guard Functions education and training.</i> 2. <i>It is advisable to point out the priority of the objectives according to the specific needs of each National Authority.</i>
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4.2 Nature of the future CGFSQF

BASIC ELEMENT

The nature of the SQF Coast Guard Functions: area of interest and	<p><i>Before focusing in detail on the specific characteristics of a Qualification Framework, which are determined by the sector of education and training of interest, it is worthwhile to concentrate on the nature of the Qualification Framework. As known, there are different typologies of qualifications frameworks. The typology – and the related main characteristics - of the Qualification Framework have to be identified on the basis the area of interest and on the geographical boundaries.</i></p>
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The typology we are interested in is the Sectoral Qualifications Framework. The QF which interests us should be considered as “transnational”, that is to say it refers to different countries, and in our specific case to the maritime Member States of the European Union and Schengen Associated Countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, Sweden).

A Transnational Framework	<p>The SQF we are going to develop therefore will be “transnational”, that is to say not exclusively related to a specific sector inside a single system of education and training, but a reference point for several foreign systems linked to the same formative sector.</p>
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The typology of reference in our case is that of a Transnational Sectoral Qualifications Framework.

A *Transnational Sectoral Qualifications Framework* is an **instrument** for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved between countries: as a primary and fundamental characteristic, our QF should always be considered as an instrument, that is to say as a support tool at national and international level.

Our Qualification Framework will be an **instrument of transparency**, not of a legal architecture or binding for the countries and systems of reference.

Obviously the framework will be able to function as an **instrument of improvement** of the various national education systems which, through a dialogue between themselves generated by their respective positioning within the framework, will benefit from exposure to the different experiences and best practice developed abroad.

A transparent
instrument
on voluntary
basis

Our *Transnational Sectoral Qualifications Framework*, being a frame of reference for several national systems, should be able to internally collate all the national frames that will be produced by the countries of reference.

We must, therefore, create an “overarching framework”, in exactly the same way as was achieved in the case of the EQF or the EHEA-QF.

An
overarching
framework

From the beginning, we should remember that, as the name suggests, we are dealing with a frame of “qualifications”: the intent shall therefore be to reference “qualifications” present at national level, and not just competencies, knowledge, abilities or functions, which will on the other hand be useful to build the structure of the framework.

As already stated, a qualification is defined as *a package of standards or units judged to be worthy of formal recognition in a certificate*.

Therefore, when using such a term it refers to every typology of formal certification of competencies, knowledge and abilities (results of learning) awarded at national level on the part of institutions or certified structures and/or recognised by the various education systems.

Given the above, the main characteristics of our International Sectoral Qualifications Framework are:

1. **be general (but not generic)**: it must be as general as possible, with a view to allowing the national systems to link up for the creation of their specific sectoral NQF;
2. **be inclusive**: it must consider certain peculiarities of the national systems of reference with a view to not excluding the possibility of self-reference on the part of certain countries;
3. **have less regulatory and more communicative purposes**: it must be a tool useful for communication between different systems of education and training which have specific national characteristics;
4. **be based on a voluntary process (not a legally binding instrument)**: have limited, often voluntary, institutional arrangements for governance and management, above all to allow all the national systems to adhere to the constitution of such a tool;
5. **be based on real international needs**: have a range of national and regional policies, accords, conventions and protocols supporting them, but not underpinned by enforceable legislation;

6. be a flexible tool: both as far as structure is concerned, but above all as far as national fulfilment is concerned, taking into account that these countries already have their own national legislation in place as regards education and training.

Key words for the CGFSQF:



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Some clear characteristics for an inclusive and useful meta-framework

1. *The identified six main characteristics should be the key elements for the construction of our QF;*
2. *The SQF we are going to create will have the form of a meta-framework, that is to say a reference point for the development of later national qualifications frameworks, inside of which the national qualifications of the different systems will be presented and classified. Its architecture, therefore, must be structured, from the beginning, to take into consideration all the peculiarities of the national systems of reference, with an inclusive view that does not limit – or exclude – elements of the national qualifications.*
3. *If we do not keep in mind that our SQF serves the purpose of creating single SQFs, we run the risk of creating a tool that is useless and devoid of significance.*

4.3 Governance aspects of the CGFSQF

BASIC ELEMENT

A formal body - or at least a formal venue - for dialogue among the various bodies participating in the initiative must be established in order to adopt, manage and maintain a SQF.

Using the different national and international experiences as a starting point, such a formal venue should always be identified with a “body” (ministry/national or international organisation, other bodies) which has the responsibility for coordinating the activities of formalisation of the framework of qualifications and to formalise them, with a view to instituting an efficient and credible instrument.

**The apex
body: a
peculiar
entity to
establish and
manage the
dialogue**

In the case of the European Qualifications Framework the appointed apex body is the European Commission, whereas in the case of Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding the governing body is the EU FRONTEX Agency.

A unique European body that is in charge to coordinate all the functions of costal guarding does not exist. It is also clear that this competence is distributed among different Agencies in Europe (such as FRONTEX, EFCA, EMSA, etc....). This reflects also the situation at national level, where there are different bodies in charge of some CG functions⁶⁴.

In this context, the European Coast Guard Functions Forum represents a voluntary, independent and apolitical body created “to study, contribute to and promote understanding and development on maritime issues of importance of common interest related to CGF across borders and sectors”.

**The European
Coast Guard
Functions**

The Forum represents – at EU level - the unique body with a cross-sectoral and cross-border approach for all CGFs but, at the same time, it is not a legal entity and it is not empowered to act on behalf of the involved national authorities for CGFs.

Moreover, the Forum does not have the same power and responsibilities that the European Commission and Frontex have with regards to the EQF and Border Guard SQF.

At the same time, this factor might not matter if there will be a determination to create a SQF from the ECGFF Members.

For this reason, the Forum shall be considered as a formal venue for dialogue for the creation of the framework, which is an instrument of transparency and which is created on a voluntary basis.

⁶⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/maritime/studies/doc/2014-06-icf-coastguard.pdf>

The premise for all the above is obviously an awareness of the countries and an explicit determination for the introduction of the CGFSQF, which should be translated into a formal charter between the Members of the Forum (statement of intent, joint declaration, etc.).

Moreover, it seems necessary and advisable that EU Agencies (such as FRONTEX, EFCA, EMSA, etc..) with Coast Guard functions responsibilities should be considered as key stakeholders for the CGFSQF.

In addition, the establishment of a Governing Board aimed at managing and coordinating the activities of the “European Coast Guard Functions Training Network” is one of the expected results of the ECGFA-NET project.

This Training Network has – among others - the task to “contribute to the development of a CGFSQF”. For this reason, the abovementioned Governing Board seems to be one of the most advisable subjects for the technical coordination and management of the CGFSQF.

Finally, it should be noted how much easier it is to achieve the formalisation of a qualifications framework in the presence of already-existing agencies or supranational bodies, but this does not mean that such an instrument may not be achievable within the specific conditions of our sector of reference.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>Apex bodies for governance, technical support and consultation</p>	<p><i>In the context, the already existing and seemingly most logical location to place the governance of the CGFSQF is the European Coast Guard Functions Forum.</i></p> <p><i>The established Governing Board of the ECGFT-NET should be promoted also as technical body of the ECGFF to support the development, managing and maintaining of the SQF.</i></p> <p><i>The consultation of the mentioned agencies and initiatives (FRONTEX, EFCA, EMSA, etc..) can give a precious added value in the development and management the CGFSQF.</i></p>
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4.4 Architecture of the CGFSQF

Considering the objectives and goals of the CGFSQF and its nature, it is now fundamental to identify the structural elements of the framework.

BASIC ELEMENT

The architecture of the QF (identification of the levels, of learning results and each structural element) must be created according to the specific needs and peculiarities of the relevant sector.

**A dedicated
architecture**

Our QF must take into consideration the distinctiveness of the relevant training sector, without, initially, being based on other national or international QFs, created for other purposes. Its nature, its objectives and the final structure of the frame, being of reference to a specific sector, could vary from those already present in the European and international arenas.

If we consider the case of the European Qualifications Framework, we will immediately notice that the framework was created with wider needs than the sectoral ones, as well as being influenced by different drivers. If we construct our SQF using the EQF as our exclusive departure point, we lose the capacity of the specificity of our sector to emerge. Furthermore, if the creation of our SQF is merely functional on the identification of the levels of the EQF for the qualifications of our sector, there would be no need to create a new framework.

At a further stage, it will be useful to compare the levels of our SQF to those of the EQF, but the opposite procedure would create a tool of little use, and of difficult comprehension inside the specific education and training system.

The European Coast Guard Functions Forum has already listed and shared the Coast Guard Functions, as follows:

1. maritime safety, including vessel traffic management
2. maritime, ship and port security
3. maritime customs activities
4. the prevention and suppression of trafficking and smuggling and connected maritime law enforcement
5. maritime border control
6. maritime monitoring and surveillance
7. maritime environmental protection and response
8. maritime search and rescue
9. ship casualty and maritime assistance service
10. maritime accident and disaster response
11. fisheries inspection and control and activities related to the above Coast Guard Functions
12. activities related to the above Coast Guard Functions

**European
Coast Guard
Functions**

Taking into account the implemented Frontex SQF for Border Guard, in the framework of ECGFA-NET project, it was decided not to further investigate the “maritime border control” sector (function n. 5). With reference to the Coast Guard Function n.12 “activities related to the Coast Guard Functions”, it was excluded from the survey of the ECGFA-NET project because it is

considered a too wide and not well definable function. This list will be useful for the creation of the architecture of the future CGFSQF without functions n. 5 and n. 12 as it is clear from ECGFA-NET results and agreed by all the project partners.

For each function we can identify different levels of qualifications useful for training at national level for each specific function: the different levels of internal qualifications for each function shall on the other hand be classified on the basis of the learning outcomes.

In this field it is important to underline that the project investigated this list of Coast Guard Functions within one questionnaire in order to collect descriptions and tasks related to those functions.

The results of the questionnaire gave some feedbacks, which need to be considered in the development of the CGFSQS. These feedbacks can be summarized as follows:

- some similarities were underlined among function n. 3 (maritime customs) and 4 (trafficking and smuggling) and among function n. 7 (search and rescue) and 10 (accident and disaster response);
- function n. 6 (monitoring and surveillance) is strictly connected with most of the other functions.

The basis for the design of the framework can therefore be the single function and the different levels of competencies, knowledge and abilities reached for each of these, in the place of generic learning outcomes.

Indeed, as already outlined, the framework that will be built will be useful for classifying qualifications and not other elements, such as learning outcomes or functions, which constitute the architecture.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

The identification of the structure must adhere to its own architecture and only at a later date will it be possible to consider a comparison with other international QFs (i.e. EQF).

Considering the work done during the ECGFA-NET project concerning different questionnaires in order to identify CG functions, job competencies and job positions, and analysing those results, the CGFSQF architecture can be structured using the specific sectoral functions as a starting point.

The definition of the number of levels of the SQF must be determined starting from a consultation with all the sectoral stakeholders and the authorities of the various countries, always taking into account the concept of inclusiveness.

The later national qualifications frameworks can have a different number of levels, but they must refer to the sectoral meta-framework. In any case, there is not a pre-determined number of levels, but these will be identified according to the specific needs of the sector of reference.

The
architectural
principles for
the
Framework: a
specific
framework,
shared with
the
stakeholders,
with an
inclusive
approach

4.5 Quality assurance aspects for the development of the CGFSQF

BASIC ELEMENT

Information and awareness on the national systems of quality assurance and the definition of minimum quality requirements are important issues to foster trust among stakeholders involved in the QF.

Quality
Assurance to
foster trust

Knowledge on the quality assurance systems of each individual country is the basis upon which the different systems can reciprocate trust. In particular, information regarding accreditation by the institutions and of the courses and their quality assurance are essential to verify at an international level the trustworthiness of the final qualifications present in our framework.

National
Quality
Assurance
Systems

Within the project ECGFFT-NET four study visits were conducted in order to explore the systems of quality assurance - in the field of education and training - of some project partners. The results of these study visits underlined a different approach in this field from the interviewed organizations (see annexes).

Starting from the experience of the EQF (see Chapter 2), it is fundamental to establish a group of international experts (i.e. Advisory Group in the case of the EQF) acting as a technical coordination body that oversees the implementation of the framework and provides coherence to the various

processes. This group of experts could consist of representatives from the member states, different EU agencies, social partners and various other stakeholders, such as representatives of educational institutions in this sector. This group of experts could support and oversee national stakeholders in developing procedures to be followed when referencing their education levels to SQF minimum quality requirements in various attempts to develop mutual trust between them. They could also support the drafting of Quality Assurance Guidelines and minimum quality standards for our educational sector.

As we already said, the main measures of quality assurance are:

**Measures for
Quality
Assurance**

- validation of qualifications and/or standards;
- accreditation and audit of education and training institutions;
- quality assurance of assessment leading to the award of qualifications.

The process of developing a framework of qualifications must take into account the need to foster trust among the various stakeholders so that they can have confidence in the integrity of the resultant framework.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

**Quality
assurance
needs:
dialogue,
knowledge
sharing,
Advisory
group,
minimum
quality
standards,
stakeholders**

With a view to arriving at the creation of our SQF, we must build a consultation mechanism at the level of the operational organisations in the single participating countries, linked to a dialogue and knowledge sharing at an international level. The use of the CGFSQF and its future roll-out depends directly on this point.

Starting from the experience of the EQF, an Advisory group, acting as a technical coordination body on quality assurance measures, should be built up.

Minimum quality standards have to be identified during the implementation of the SQF.

The CGFSQF cannot be created without the participation of all the stakeholders.

Finally, it is important to underline the fact that each element described in the present chapter has to be presented and discussed with different national and international stakeholders: the national and the international community are to have confidence in the future SQF.

Chapter 5 - Methodology to develop the CGFSQF

5.1 The implementation process

Considering basic elements, key recommendations and activities already done within the ECGFA NET project, we can now identify the structural passages that should be performed with a view to creating the CGFSQF, checking moreover whether these have been achieved even partially starting from the results produced by the ECGFA NET Project. Those passages will be strongly influenced by the following three main elements:

- time required: each experience to develop a QF at national and international level shows us that we have to establish and allocate a certain period of time to conclude different stages of the framework, in order to create a useful and usable instrument.
- resources available: to develop a QF, each part involved has to allocate different resources (staff, instruments and funding). The procedure to develop our framework cannot be had for free and without a real investment of concrete resources.
- commitment and awareness of different bodies/countries involved: an instrument that will have a great impact on different national educational systems, has to be created with the support of each country and body involved in this educational sector, taking into account different stakeholders as well, in order to create a tool that will answer to real needs and that will be used by different countries.

**Three
elements
influencing
the process**

The following table shows a comprehensive strategic plan to implement the CGFSQF. These steps have been identified starting from those already presented within Chapter 3, modified and integrated considering the work already done and all the results already achieved within the ECGFA NET project. An indicative total duration of the next stages is mentioned as well.

STAGE	ACTIVITY	PHASE
ECGFA NET		
1. Define basic elements and key recommendations	1. Identify different functions, tasks, job competences and profiles	1 st phase (already done by ECGFA NET project)
	2. Sectoral analysis of needs and study visits	
	3. Define the goals and the nature of the SQF (basic elements and key recommendations)	

STAGE	ACTIVITY	PHASE
FURTHER STEPS		
2. Official bodies involved and work plan	1. Identify the international body / place for the formal discussion on the SQF	2 nd phase
	2. Identify a Working Group to define levels and learning outcomes	
	3. Define a clear work plan and different responsibilities	
	4. Identify different stakeholders at national and international level	
3. Development of the CGFSQF structure	1. Define the architecture of the SQF	
	2. Map different qualifications	
	3. Identify the number of levels	
	4. Draft learning outcomes	
	5. Draft the CGFSQF final structure	
4. Consultation process	1. Consult different stakeholders on the drafted CGFSQF	3 rd phase
	2. Receive comments and suggestions by stakeholders	
	3. Review the CGFSQF after consultation procedure	
	4. Validate the final version of the CGFSQF by WG or External assessment	
5. Quality assurance elements	1. Identify Advisory group (AG) to oversee quality assurance guidelines and minimum quality standards	
	2. Map different national quality assurance systems	
	3. Draft quality assurance guidelines	
6. Adoption of the CGFSQF	1. Draft a formal document among countries (MoU/Protocol/Statement of intent/Joint Declaration) to define management aspects	
	2. Adopt the CGFSQF by country representatives	
7. NQFs structures and recommendations	1. Define the dissemination strategy at national and international level	
	2. Draft a document with basic elements and key recommendations to develop a sectoral NQF	
	3. Organise info days and training sessions for national authorities on CGFSQF in the view of NQF development	

A further stage to test 2-3 developed NQFs can be foreseen for a supplementary period of six months approximately: this testing phase will be developed with the support of 2-3 member states.

Please note that a Qualifications Frameworks is considered as a process instead of as an unchanging instrument, therefore it is subjected to a structural reviewing process also after its implementation.

5.2 Different steps already done within the ECGFA NET project

Stage 1 – Define basic elements and key recommendations plan

Step 1.1 - Identify different functions, tasks, job competences and profiles. In order to identify the framework for the future implementation of the CGSQF, the first planned activity was the identification of the unique elements in the execution of the Coast Guard Functions according to the criteria reported in the final reports enclosed in Annexes 1 and 2.

**Functions,
tasks, job
competences
and profiles**

Thanks to the two questionnaires, different national bodies participating in the project have identified and shared different tasks related to each CG function - indicated by the Forum -, job positions and competencies. A summary table containing the final results of the collected job tasks, positions and competencies is reported in Annex 3.

Those elements are essential to building the architecture of the framework that, as already mentioned, is based mainly on different functions.

Step 1.2 - Sectoral analysis of needs and study visits. As a result of different study visits conducted at national level, we can confirm that some educational providers and stakeholders at national level are not conscious about the nature of a QF and some of those have never heard about the existence of the EQF or of other frameworks of qualifications: this is the reason why we also need an instrument that can help to disseminate detailed and focused information about QFs.

Actual needs

During different study visits and during a dedicated session of the third consortium meeting as well, we have also conducted a preliminary analysis to be clear about rationales for the development of our QF, verifying in concrete terms whether:

- A system of mobility of students or professionals between training institutions of the different countries exists.
- A real need of recognition of final qualifications between the various countries effectively exists.
- Education and training programmes organised on an international level or between different systems exist.
- Which forms of international collaboration are shared by the institutions that are responsible for education and training in this area.

- Rules of quality assessment at international level are in place in this sector.
- Studies on national training sectors exist.

Those results have been summarised in Annex 4.

**Goals and
nature of the
SQF**

Step 1.3 - Define the goals and the nature of the CGFSQF. The present document is the principal instrument that gives the possibility to achieve those goals and to finalise the present step: this final report - considering right now the first three chapters - has more a pedagogical and a didactic approach instead of a purely technical purpose.

Thanks to this document we can better identify the nature, the purposes and the goals of the future CGFSQF and share those with all the institutional partners of the project.

Besides, it has been discovered that only few examples of exchange programmes exist among countries (most of those based on bilateral agreements or specific for a certain geographical area), and that there are not present challenges related to the recognition procedures of qualifications.

Even if we do not have present and urgent needs on those issues, the most important result we will achieve is that all those elements are going to be developed within this sector, and all the bodies and countries strongly agree on the fact that they intend to internationalise the educational and training sector of CG: in this sense we are going to participate directly in the beginning of the internationalisation process of an educational sector, and this is confirmed also by other actions foreseen for the ECGFA NET project.

5.3 Concrete steps to develop the CGFSQF

Next steps

The following phases are not included in the objectives of the ECGFA NET project, and therefore the associated activities must be realised at a later date. Please note that those steps could be implemented in different ways and with different degrees, depending on the time available to realise each action, on resources - both material and financial ones - available and invested in this realisation and on the commitment of different national and international bodies working in this sector.

Those further steps are connected with the three steps already presented above and realized within the ECGFA NET project.

Stage 2 – Official bodies involved and work plan

This part is dedicated to identify different players and the working plan to develop the CGFSQF. We have identified the following steps to reach those results:

Step 2.1. Identify the international body / place for the formal discussion on the SQF: as already explained, it is fundamental to formally identify a body/entity useful for the management of the final framework. The European Coast Guard Functions Forum, as indicated in our recommendations, is that of the most advisable place (in strict cooperation with the relevant EU agencies) to reach this result, but each country and body involved has to agree on that decision in a formal way. In concrete terms, it is fundamental that one point on the agenda of the Forum will be dedicated to this issue with a formal statement produced as the result of this decision: ECGFA NET project partners will be in charge of formalising a concrete proposal to the Forum and to present it to other Forum members during its next meeting.

**An apex body
for the
formal
discussion**

Step 2.2. Identify a Working Group (WG) to define levels and learning outcomes: in order to obtain more concrete results, it is important to nominate a specific working group that will be able to work on the structure of the framework, supported by external experts as well. ECGFA NET members will select this group of people taking into account different expertise at national level (i.e. different CG functions) and considering the geographical balance of members. The WG/ will work on the concrete architecture of the framework to produce a result that will be presented to other members and bodies (see *Stage 5*): we suggest selecting five or seven people as members of the WG, considering external experts as well.

**A working
group for
defining
levels and
learning
outcomes**

Step 2.3. Define a clear work plan and different responsibilities: the definition of a work plan of future activities is absolutely needed in order to clarify aspects related to the duration of each concrete action in relation with resources available. We suggest drafting a “Logical Framework Matrix” for different actions useful to create the final SQF:

**A logical
Framework
Matrix to set
up the future**

Logical Framework Matrix						
Concrete action	Members involved	Specific objectives	Activities	Outputs & outcomes	Assumptions & risks	Duration

Step 2.4. Identify different stakeholders at national and international level: it is important to draft a list with different stakeholders involved at national and international level that will be useful to validate - or to suggest changes - the structure of the CGFSQF drafted by the WG. Those institutions and bodies will play a fundamental role during the consultation phase (see *Stage 6*). The list will include all the final users of the CGFSQF at national and international institutions and bodies operating within Member States.

**Stakeholders
are essential
to validate
the
Framework**

Stage 3 - Development of the CGFSQF structure

This part is dedicated to identifying the final architecture of the framework by the working group identified in the previous phase (see *Stage 4*). Please note that the following activities described below, have to be considered as a unique action to reach this results, therefore they are connected in terms of time and single results achieved:

<p>The architecture of the framework</p>	<p><u>Step 3.1. Define the architecture of the framework:</u> members of the WG will be in charge of defining the architecture of the CGFSQF, starting with the results of the first year of the ECGFA NET project and taking into account all the suggestions proposed in the present document. We suggest creating a framework based on qualifications for different “functions” as entering points, considering results achieved thanks to the two questionnaires produced during the first phase (see <i>Annexes</i>), also in line with the final product we are going to realise: a Coast Guard “Functions” SQF (see below an example of the QF architecture).</p>
<p>Mapping on existing qualifications</p>	<p><u>Step 3.2. Map different qualifications:</u> to have an idea about the final qualifications that will be referenced to the framework by each country, the WG will conduct a mapping exercise on qualifications to analyse different educational and training systems of Member States. This activity is introductory to the definition of number of different levels. We suggest drafting a questionnaire for different educational bodies operating within each Member State, in order to obtain the official list of qualifications awarded at national level, with details about entry requirements and final educational and professional rights for each qualification awarded.</p>
<p>Quantify and identify the levels</p>	<p><u>Step 3.3. Identify the number of levels:</u> to identify the number of levels of our framework, we will start with the results achieved from the previous activity. The study visits conducted during the first phase of the ECGFA NET project, gave us an idea about the level of existing qualifications within the four different educational systems analysed (Finland, Germany, Italy and Spain) and their connections with EQF levels. In all those cases, we have qualifications that are placed from EQF level 4 to EQF level 7, considering our sectoral educational system. This means that, if those results are also confirmed for other Member States, our CGFSQF will be structured on four main levels.</p>

Step 3.4. Draft learning outcomes: the WG will draft general learning outcomes for each level identified above, starting from those already defined with the EQF structure and adapted to the specific needs of our sectoral framework. Those learning outcomes will be divided in “knowledge”, “skills” and “competences” for each level of the qualifications framework and for each function: starting from the national and international experience, this activity will be the longest one and the most challenging as well, considering that most of the national systems do not have qualifications based on learning outcomes yet. Job competences and job profiles identified during the first phase of the ECGFA NET project will be fundamental in order to draft different learning outcomes for each CG function.

Draft learning outcomes: in terms of knowledge, skills and competences

Step 3.5. Draft the CGFSQF final structure: as the final result of this stage, all the activities described below will contribute to create the final structure of our CGFSQF. As an initial suggestion, the final matrix will be composed of different CG functions as our starting point and for each function we will have different levels described in terms of learning outcomes:

Draft the grid

CGFSQF LEVELS					
CG FUNCTIONS	1 (EQF 4)	2 (EQF 5)	3 (EQF 6)	4 (EQF 7)	...
	Knowledge, Skills, Competences	Knowledge, Skills, Competences	Knowledge, Skills, Competences	Knowledge, Skills, Competences	...
1. maritime safety, including vessel traffic management	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	...
2. maritime, ship and port security	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	level descriptors considering job competences and job profiles	...
3.

Stage 4 - Consultation process

How to share and validate the Framework

This part is dedicated to presenting the architecture of the CGFSQF drafted by the WG (see *Stage 5*) to relevant stakeholders, thanks to the list produced within point 4 of Stage 4:

Step 4.1. Consult different stakeholders on the drafted CGFSQF: in order to have a useful and shared instrument, the CGFSQF structure created by the WG has to be presented to the different countries involved and to national and international stakeholders as well.

Step 4.2. Receive comments and suggestions by stakeholders: during the consultation procedure, WG members will collect different comments and suggestions from stakeholders useful to integrate, modify and improve the proposed structure.

Step 4.3. Review the CGFSQF after consultation procedure: each comment and suggestion received will be useful to integrate the architecture of the draft version of the CGFSQF, in order to integrate the first version with all the suggestions received by stakeholders.

Step 4.4. Validation of the final version of the CGFSQF: the final revised version of the CGFSQF will be drafted and validated by the WG or External assessment. The WG will draft a document with all the suggestions and changes produced by the SQF, in order to provide those details to stakeholders and Member States during the formal adoption of the framework (see *Stage 7*).

Stage 5 - Quality assurance elements

This part is dedicated to verify the feasibility of the CGFSQF elements and levels within national contexts, starting from quality assurance elements that will be able to produce a mutual trust approach for the international comparison of sectoral national qualifications:

How to produce a mutual trust among the national authorities

Step 5.1. Identify Advisory group (AG) to oversee quality assurance guidelines and minimum quality standards: it is fundamental to establish a group of international experts (i.e. Advisory Group in the case of the EQF) as a technical coordination body that oversees the implementation of the framework and provides coherence to the various processes with the aim of developing mutual trust.

Step 5.2. Map different national quality assurance systems: a fundamental point related to QFs are the QA elements of each national system and their minimum requirements, as was explained in the previous chapter. We suggest mapping each existing national quality assurance system to compare each country and to analyse the minimum requirements of each programme of studies: this element will be fundamental during comparison exercises and evaluation procedures of national qualifications.

Step 5.3. Draft Sectoral Quality Assurance Guidelines: we will suggest drafting a final document indicating minimum requirements and recommendations in relation to QA aspects to be followed at a national level in order to create and to increase mutual trust in the CGFSQF tool: the mere fact of allocating different national qualifications at one SQF level is not considered enough to create a trustworthy system of comparison among qualifications.

Stage 6 - Adoption of the CGFSQF

This part is dedicated to formal adoption of the CGFSQF made by different representatives of Member States within the selected apex body (see point 1 of *Stage 4*):

Step 6.1. Draft a formal document among countries (MoU/Protocol/Statement of intent/Joint declaration) to define management aspects: Different country representatives have to approve a document (i.e. memorandum of understanding, protocol, etc.) where all the administrative and management aspects of the framework are stated, in relation also to future changes and responsibilities. The WG will be in charge of providing a text of this document, thanks to the results achieved during the previous stages.

Step 6.2. Adopt the CGFSQF by country representatives: the WG members should present the revised version of the CGFSQF to country representatives within the indicated apex body (i.e. the Forum) and results of the consultation process as well, providing all the useful details about the methodology adopted to draft the framework. The purpose of this action will be to obtain the formal approval of the framework and the adoption of this instrument within the Coast Guarding educational sector.

Stage 7 - NQFs structures and recommendations

This part is dedicated to the development of National Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks that each Member State will draft in order to reference their national qualifications to CGFSQF levels. The concrete development of each single national framework is not part of the present action: the main purpose of this activity is to provide all the specific indications to Member States in order to develop their own framework:

**How to
produce a
mutual trust
among the
national
authorities**

**The formal
adoption of
the
framework**

**The future
impact of the
framework in
the
participating
countries**

Step 7.1. Define the dissemination strategy of the CGFSQF at national and international level: the dissemination of the CGFSQF is crucial in order to have a useful instrument at national level and to better explain all its elements to different institutions that are not familiar with this instrument. Therefore it will be useful to draft a dissemination strategy to present the framework in the view of the development of national ones.

Step 7.2. Draft a document with basic elements and key recommendations to develop a sectoral NQF: following the result of the first phase of the ECGFA NET project, we suggest drafting a document with specific indications on basic elements and key recommendations to develop a sectoral framework at national level. This document will be useful for national authorities in order to create their own SQF in this sector, considering all the specific elements and uniqueness of the CGFSQF: the document will be presented and disseminated to the different country representatives (see the previous point).

Step 7.3. Organise info days and training sessions for national authorities on CGFSQF in the view of NQF development: this activity is important in order to develop national frameworks in line with the CGFSQF and to inform national authorities about different elements, purposes and characteristics of an SQF. We suggest realising this action thanks to cascade training activities: WG members will be able to train national representatives that will be in charge of training different staff members of their national institutions. In order to reach those objectives, WG members will organise one or two training seminars for this specific purpose.

Conclusions

The present document provides an overview for the development of the Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualification Frameworks, thanks to the work done by the ECGFA NET Project. Considering the complexity of educational systems within EU countries and peculiarities of our sector, this is only the first step to develop a final and functional framework within the Coast Guard Sector.

Other experiences in the development of qualification frameworks have showed us that we need time to conclude all the relevant stages of the framework, in order to create a useful and usable instrument. The active participation of all the bodies involved and their support at national level are crucial factors to obtain a final product that will be able to facilitate the understanding and to increase the mutual trust among countries.

A further fundamental milestone to develop a concrete and useful instrument is the concept of inclusivity: it is essential to include all the stakeholders within the different stages of this development, considering all the aspects and singularities of educational systems involved.

The suggested methodology for the implementation of our CGFSQF is only one of the existing ways to develop a sectoral framework, but it contains all the aspects and steps that countries involved have to take into account to realise a final instrument that will be able to reach all the objectives of our educational sector. The methodology is also influenced by steps and results already achieved during the ECGFA NET Project, so it is influenced by a practical approach instead of a didactic one.

Our final framework will be merely an instrument for promoting internationalisation and not a goal in itself: the mere act of developing this instrument does not mean that all the aspects, problems and challenges of our national educational sectors will be solved. On the contrary, the final CGFSQF will be able to stimulate within our sector - both at national and international level - a dialogue on different aspects of our educational programmes and systems.

Finally, we have to consider that our overarching sectoral framework will be developed with the purpose to stimulate the creation of different sectoral frameworks at national level, that will be referred to our CGFSQF levels: the presence of a meta-framework implies a certain number of national frameworks with qualifications described and harmonized by our meta-framework levels. In this context both of the two technical bodies recommended in this paper to support the development of CGFSQF (Governing Board and Advisory Group) should be maintained after building the Sectoral Qualification Framework model to allow the follow up of the National Qualification Frameworks.

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