



EUCIS-LLL, November 2009

**EUCIS-LLL gathers 19
European networks active in
education and training:**

AEGEE: European Students' Forum

EAEA: European Association for Education of Adults

EAICY: European Association of Institutions of Non-Formal Education for Children and Young People

ECSWE: European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

EFFE: European Forum for Freedom in Education

EfVET: European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

EPA: European Parents Association

ETDF: European Training and Development Federation

EUCEN: European University Continuing Education Network

EUROCLIO European Association of History Educators

EURO-WEA: European Workers Education Association

EVTA/AEFP: European Vocational Training Association

FEECA: European Federation For Catholic Adult Education

FEEC: European Federation for Education and Culture

FICEMEA: International Federation of Training Centres for the Promotion of New Education

IAEC/AIVE: International Association of Educating Cities

ISCA: International Sport and Culture Association

SOLIDAR: European Platform on Social Affairs, International Solidarity and Lifelong Learning

EQF AND NQF: TOOLS FOR LEARNING CONTINUITY?

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) works as a translation device between different national qualifications systems (NQF). The core of the EQF are eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. Countries are invited to relate their NQFs to the EQF by 2010 and to introduce a reference to EQF levels in certificates and diploma supplements by 2012.

EUCIS-LLL supports this initiative that contributes to the implementation of lifelong learning strategies in Europe. It encourages Member States to rethink their education and training systems in a more global perspective. Indeed, the EQF applies to all types of education and training including non formal and informal learning. It thus implies that the systems make possible articulations between different educational sectors.

EUCIS-LLL regrets that currently the debate remains more on a technical level instead of being part of a more reflexive process. The way we define qualifications means a lot about how our societies value education and training, which are a key element of the European social model.

EUCIS-LLL would thus like to raise a few concerns; we need:

- a definition of qualifications based on learning outcomes;
- to take into account non formal and informal learning;
- to develop the validation of non formal and informal learning;
- to promote continuity and progression;
- to enhance comparability and recognition;
- to involve civil society stakeholders;
- to define the next steps and priorities for after 2012.

1. We need a definition of qualifications based on learning outcomes

EUCIS-LLL supports the transition from traditional education and training systems to learner-centred systems. Few national qualification frameworks are now based on learning outcomes. There is a strong belief, notably in higher education, that certifications must be based on programmes, contents, etc.

A major challenge is for all the Member States - and for their national qualifications authorities and their stakeholders - to concretely adopt the learning outcomes approach when describing and placing their national qualifications. We need to put into practice this common goal of shifting our systems to learner-centred systems.

2. NQF should take into account non formal and informal learning

EUCIS regrets that non formal and informal learning are not enough taken into account in most NQFs whereas it is an important source of individual learning in our societies. NQFs include certifications and diplomas; they should also include learning outcomes that are not or cannot be validated by a diploma. For example, there is no forms of recognition for teacher's continuing education or for learning to be a parent...

NQF should be part of a global lifelong learning strategy. It is important to relate this process to others such as the validation of non-formal or informal learning.

3. The validation of informal and non formal learning should be developed

Today, there is a lack of tools and methods for recognising competences acquired outside of the formal system. The validation of informal and non formal learning should be developed in Europe and existing tools should be applied. *What do we do for those citizens that do not have qualifications but may have the competences?*

This is particularly important for persons with fewer opportunities and notably for migrants. For instance, in their response to the consultation on the education of children from a migrant background, many stakeholders emphasized the need for improve the recognition and validation of prior learning, including diplomas and qualifications obtained abroad.

EUCIS-LLL thus wishes that the process of cooperation, which led to the publication of the European guidelines¹ for validating non-formal and informal learning by the CEDEFOP, be strengthened in the coming years.

¹ European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, CEDEFOP, 2009.

4. NQF should promote continuity and progression

The EQF was implemented at the request of the Member States in order to promote mobility and lifelong learning. In order to reach these goals, EQF-NQF should promote continuity and progression. This means removing barriers between education and training systems. Indeed, if the EQF helps the comparison of qualifications from different sectors or systems, obstacles remain at national level. For example, in the formal sector, the transition from level 5 (outside higher education) to level 6 (in higher education) is problematic². The notion of permeability should thus be introduced: we need some bridges to move from one system to the other.

What about the transition from the non formal sector to the formal sector? Here again, EUCIS-LLL outlines the importance of developing the recognition and validation of prior learning. It still represents a serious challenge in many countries.

Finally, it also concerns the relations between European countries and the rest of the world. The EQF cannot be understood as a system only for Europe. *How will other countries relate to it?*

5. EQF-NQF should enhance comparability and recognition

Each of the eight levels of the EQF is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications. These descriptors, that relate to very complex and diverse contexts, are very general. EUCIS-LLL would like to encourage Member States, in partnership with all the relevant stakeholders, to agree on the interpretations of level descriptors. In this process, we need to take into account the practical effects: *who* will use the EQF to do *what*, and *how* will it *really* help them?

Today, there is not a common understanding on the content and definition of the concepts “knowledge, skills, competence”. In some countries, for example, the three are gathered into the concept “competence”. If the Member States agreed on a terminology, there are still different understandings at national level. An important effort should be made in order to reach a common understanding.

Finally, there is an important problem of articulation between the framework developed in the Directive 2008/36/EC³ of the European Parliament and the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications of 2005 and the EQF Recommendation.

² Indeed, the continuity between level 5 and 6 is possible in a limited number of countries, most of the time individuals have to take supplementary courses / exams while in some countries they have to start all over again.

³ This directive establishes rules according to which a Member State which makes access to or pursuit of a regulated profession in its territory contingent upon possession of specific professional qualifications shall recognise professional qualifications obtained in one or more other Member States and which allow the holder of the said qualifications to pursue the same profession there, for access to and pursuit of that profession.

6. Civil society stakeholders in education and training should be involved

The Member States agreed that national coordination points should be set up for the implementation of the EQF recommendation. EUCIS-LLL regrets that in many countries, the third sector is under-represented or not represented at all in the committees. In Ireland, public authorities managed to involve diverse stakeholders which explains part of their success in implementing the EQF recommendation. The 'easier' approach could be seen as allowing something to be established quicker, but will it be *respected*, and *used*...? Generally, the more the stakeholders are involved along the way, the fewer problems there are later.

It is also important to remember the importance of involving international experts in this process. European and international cooperation opens new ways of thinking and fosters innovation in Europe.

7. Defining the next steps and priorities - after 2012

By 23 April 2013, the implementation of the recommendation is planned to be assessed. The EQF-NQF is part of an ongoing process that needs to be linked to the post Lisbon strategy.

New priorities should be defined in this next period. First of all, there is a severe lack of information about the EQF at national level. As we already mentioned, this process can only be successful if actors in education and training understand and consider the process as useful for them. Information, communication but also participation should become a priority in the next period. We thus invite the Member States to strengthen their consultation and coordination processes in order to better involve third sector representatives.

EUCIS-LLL will communicate and raise debates around the EQF-NQF process as a tool to promote lifelong learning, in the limits of its possibilities. Since its creation, it has been proposing to co-organise "Lifelong Learning Weeks" with the European Commission and the Member States. These weeks could be a useful tool in order to promote a better appropriation of European cooperation in education and training and to promote new transectoral partnerships at national and local levels.

In order to build flexible learning paths, we need guidance systems to accompany the learner and allow him/her such progression. We also need quality insurance bodies to ensure mutual trust between countries and actors. But the greatest obstacle remains changing mentalities! A parity of esteem between different forms of education and training should be achieved notably through enhanced cooperation at all levels.

Gina Ebner,
President of EUCIS-LLL