

## THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: LINKING TO A GLOBALISED WORLD

### BACKGROUND

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was conceived as an instrument to promote internal mobility within the European single market in support of the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. The EQF is not an external relations instrument, however, it does have the potential to connect with the international community outside of the EU by being parallel to developments elsewhere in the world. The conference will explore this external dimension and provide an opportunity for exchanging views on different experiences of frameworks and to build partnerships with international stakeholders.

The conference is a collaborative activity of the European Training Foundation, Cedefop, and the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. The conference supports the work of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group established by the European Council and the European Parliament to facilitate the implementation of the EQF. The Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the Parliament, Mr. Jan Andersson, will host the conference at the European Parliament on 29-30 January 2009, and the conference is patronised by the EU Presidency of the Czech Republic.

The conference is part of the ETF's contribution to the work of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQFAG). This group comprises all EU member states as well as related stakeholders and countries. The EQF Advisory Group is the group responsible for steering the implementation of the EQF.

The EQF was created as an instrument to facilitate transparency and improved understanding of qualifications between Member States in support of greater mobility within the internal market.

The EQF not only offers a means for improved transparency of qualifications between Member States, but also, during its implementation, it will provide a means, either formally or informally, whereby national systems of qualifications from non Member States can be made more transparent within the EU.

Parallel reflections on qualification frameworks can be observed in regions and countries across the world, including India, South America, the Asia-Pacific region and South Africa. Beyond these developments approximately 18 countries in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood region of the EU are drawing on the EQF to inform and support their own policies in the area of qualifications frameworks.

A broad group of experts and experienced officials from around the world that are working on qualifications frameworks, including EU Member States and 29 Partner Countries of the EU. In addition, the conference will include participation by New Zealand, Canada, Australia, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, the United States, Japan and countries from South America as well as a range of other countries and international organisations, such as the World Bank, the ILO, UNESCO, and the OECD will be brought together by the conference.

Improving the understanding of how the EQF may relate to international developments in qualification frameworks, highlighting areas where these developments might connect together and identifying ways to promote the sharing of knowledge and understanding between different systems are some of the aims of the conference. The EQF also provides the international community with information and resources on how specific issues in lifelong learning are being put into practice by EU Member States. The conference will be an opportunity to reflect on trends and issues in qualifications frameworks and the experiences of different frameworks in an international context.

## The conference

The conference will specifically consider the role that qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes can play in improving the transparency of qualifications in the context of increasing mobility, as well as looking at the implications of the EQF and national or regional qualification frameworks as international reference points. In doing so the conference will look further at the learning outcomes approach as a 'common language' for describing and comparing qualifications internationally and the EQF as a platform for dialogue on increased co-operation between national and regional qualifications systems.

The conference is organised into a series of five plenary sessions that look at the practice and development of qualifications frameworks from the perspectives of different countries.

It will begin with an explanation of the European Qualifications Framework by the **ETF** and **Cedefop**, outlining the purposes and function of the European Qualifications Framework in terms of European co-operation and the differences between the Bologna process and the EQF.

This will be followed by reflections from an **EU Member State (Ireland)** giving its perspective of the EQF and how it adds value to its own national developments. There will also be reflections from a **Non-EU Member State (New Zealand)** that will describe its experience with its national qualifications framework and how it is relating to the developments in the EU and through these to the EQF.

The presentations will conclude with a short commentary from an **EU partner country (Croatia)**. The commentary will be followed by a plenary discussion facilitated by the ETF to draw on the expertise of participants from different national systems. This discussion will consider these different perspectives and how the use of learning outcomes by the EQF and national qualifications frameworks contribute to improving transparency between different national systems. The session will look at the criteria and procedures for referencing national systems against the EQF.

The second session extends the sharing of experiences of frameworks and regional co-operation by looking to other parts of the world. This session will hear of the experience of **South Africa** in building its framework, the connections it has established with the international community, the potential for a regional role for a framework in Southern Africa and what possibilities it sees for the EQF as part of the international landscape. Experts from the **United Arab Emirates** will outline their moves towards a qualification framework and describe how it may contribute to labour mobility in the Gulf region. The session will also consider the experience of **Australia** which has had over a decade of practice in implementing its qualifications framework. The presentations will be supported by commentary from **Austria**. The plenary discussion will be facilitated by the **OECD** and will explore ways of sharing experience between different countries, the need for flexibility and the experience of developing pathways that support lifelong learning

The third session of the conference considers the use of qualifications frameworks in a **development perspective**. The last five years have seen an expansion of qualification frameworks not only in developed economies but also increasingly as an aid to education reform in developing economies. The session chaired by **ILO-Cinterfor**, based in **Uruguay** will include reflections from the **ETF** on the potential of frameworks in a development context including their contribution to the alignment of education policies with country needs and improvements in trust and quality in national systems. The **UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning** from Hamburg will highlight the potential of qualification frameworks in a development context to support the recognition of informal learning. The session will include a commentary by Germany's international technical assistance agency **GTZ** which has been active in qualifications frameworks in developing economies. The discussion in the plenary session will be facilitated by the **World Bank** and will explore how far frameworks might narrow the knowledge gap between developed and developing economies.

The fourth session will consider the **emergence of qualifications frameworks** among partner countries of the EU and the possible interaction between the national frameworks of non-Member States and the EQF. This session will look at framework developments in **Albania** where they are contributing both to the Bologna process as well as to accession perspectives. Initiatives in qualification frameworks in the Mediterranean region will also be highlighted in a presentation from **Morocco**. The presentations will be supported by commentary from **France**. The following plenary discussion will be facilitated by the **Council of Europe** and will examine the extent to which, the EQF

although developed as an internal mobility instrument for EU Member States, can also act as an international reference point for non-Member State systems.

The concluding session of the conference will continue the dialogue between participants by combining comments from a **panel** of conference participants on the issues covered during the course of the previous sessions and an audience interview. The conference will conclude with a statement identifying processes for the sharing of information between different frameworks, opportunities for developing partnerships between international stakeholders and a follow up meeting for countries wishing to continue dialogue and share experience with the international community.