



EUROPE REGION

World Confederation
for Physical Therapy

European Qualifications Framework and its relations to the Bologna Cycles and Directives on Professional Qualifications

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EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND ITS RELATIONS TO THE BOLOGNA CYCLES AND DIRECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy
(WCPT)
Education Matters WG

Introduction

All countries have a qualification system that can have its own particularities, and it has been recognised the need to implement reforms and instruments to achieve a better understanding of these differences and above all to create tools that help to achieve more transparency and to facilitate a greater “readability” of the qualifications.

A major problem at European and/or World levels remains with the fact that different authors have developed new tools in a parallel way and so at the same time we may experience some confusion when for instance we see references to levels of education.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and explain the relation of its 8 levels of classification to other common systems used in Europe for similar objectives (Bologna Cycles; Levels of EU Directives for Recognition of Professional Qualifications; UNESCO classification – ISCED).

About EQF

“At the core of the EQF are its **eight reference levels**, covering basic to most advanced qualifications. These describe what a learner knows, understands and is able to do, regardless of the system in which the learner's qualification was acquired.

As an instrument for promoting lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, as well as higher education. **The eight EQF levels cover the entire span of qualifications** from those achieved at the end of compulsory education, up to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training.

The [Recommendation](#) approved by the European Parliament foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF **by 2010**, and that **individual certificates or diplomas should bear an EQF reference by 2012**.

The political agreement reached in the European Parliament followed three years of intensive preparation, in close co-operation with Member States and stakeholders. The EQF has influenced the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in many Member States, where NQFs are often themselves part of the wider national reform process. To have a closer view of the process of referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF please consult the [“European Qualifications Framework Series”](#)

In brief terms, individuals and employers may use the EQF as a **reference tool** to compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.” *(For further reading on the EQF please click on Reference - 1)*

The Bologna Cycles

(Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area)

The Bologna Process was developed as part of a strategy to achieve a European Higher Education Area, and is based in 3 cycles (1st cycle = Bachelor; 2nd Cycle = Master; 3rd Cycle = doctorate)

A set of descriptors have been adopted (initially known as “Dublin Descriptors”) that help us to understand the meaning of each of the 3 cycles *(Please click on Reference - 2)* in disregard to the name that a certain degree may have at national level (E.g. we may have the degree title of Bachelor in UK and Licenciatura in Portugal, but as they are referred as “first cycle” we know that they are expected to be at the same level).

How EQF levels correspond to Bologna Cycles?

It has been assumed that the last three levels correspond to the three cycles of Bologna, and so we can say that these two tools are consistent. *(Please click on Reference - 3)*

Please note that * EQF level 5 is linked with Dublin Descriptor Short Cycle Qualification (within or linked to the first cycle). This is not formally part of the Bologna Framework – In adopting the Bologna Framework; Ministers agreed that the Framework would include, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications.

(For this particular aspect please consult:

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qualifications/documents/Bologna_Framework_and_Certification_revised_29_02_08.pdf

About the Directives on Migration

In another parallel work, in order to allow competent authorities to compare qualifications for the purpose of migration at EU level, another scale of five levels has been adopted with Directive 2005/36/EC. *(Please click on Reference - 4)*

This Directive (see article eleven) distinguishes five levels of professional qualifications:

- a) Attestation of competence which corresponds to general primary or secondary education, attesting that the holder has acquired general knowledge, or an attestation of competence issued by a competent authority in the home Member State on the basis of a training course not forming part of a certificate or diploma, or of three years professional experience;**
- b) Certificate which corresponds to training at secondary level, of a technical or professional nature or general in character, supplemented by a professional course;**
- c) Diploma certifying successful completion of training at post-secondary level of duration of at least one year, or professional training which is comparable in terms of responsibilities and functions;**
- d) Diploma certifying successful completion of training at higher or university level of duration of at least three years and less than four years;**
- e) Diploma certifying successful completion of training at higher or university level of duration of at least four years.**

How the levels of the Directive are related with the ones from EQF and Bologna?

This time there is no direct correspondence with the EQF, what can raise some confusion, but we can say that level four of the Directive (please see bullet d) of article 11) corresponds to the first cycle of Bologna and so to level 6 of EQF.

Please note that for the purpose of the recognition of professional qualifications under the Directive there is no doubt that EQF levels do not apply.

All cases falling under the Directive have to be handled according to the rules of the Directive.

Please note also that after consultation with stakeholders, the European Commission is seeking to modernize the Professional Qualifications Directive. To know more about this process please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/news/index_en.htm

About ISCED

At world level the most used classification is ISCED, the International Standard Classification of Education, from UNESCO (Please click on Reference - 5).

“ISCED is the framework used to compare statistics on the education systems of countries worldwide. It is also an important tool used to produce accurate data that reflect today’s education priorities and policies. The classification was first developed by UNESCO in 1976 and was then revised in 1997.”

ISCED 97 comprises 6 levels (with very detailed criteria for inclusion in each level, which may lead to sub categories recognised with letters, e.g. 5A and 5B).

The level 6 of ISCED 97 corresponds to the third Cycle of Bologna, and so to level 8 of the EQF.

The ISCED 5B corresponds in some way to the first cycle of Bologna (EQF 6 or 5) and ISCED 5 A corresponds in some extent to the second cycle of Bologna (EQF 7).

As an example, **Eurydice**, which is an institutional network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating reliable and readily comparable information on education systems and policies throughout Europe, uses ISCED levels. *(Please click on Reference – 6)*

A new ISCED classification has been adopted in November 2011. (ISCED 2011) For details please see

http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/UNESCO_GC_36C-19_ISCED_EN.pdf.

The revised ISCED has four levels of tertiary education compared to two categories in the version. A major reason behind this change was to better reflect the tertiary education structure (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate) that is found around the world but also has been more recently introduced across Europe following the Bologna Process in 1999.

Countries will have to adapt their data collection systems to the new framework.

The first international data collection based on the new ISCED will occur in 2014.

Table I: For an integrated view

EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EQF
Bologna					“Short Cycle”	1 st Cycle	2 nd	3 rd	Bologna
Directive						d) level 4	e) level 5		Directive
ISCED						5 B	5 A	6	ISCED 97
					5	6	7	8	ISCED 2011

Final note / Note of progress

As it has been underlined, we can conclude that, since the first edition of this document, significant steps have been made at international level in order to achieve a progressive convergence of the systems that are used to describe and compare the educational systems at European and world levels.

Acknowledgements

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References:

Reference - 1

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0463+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

You may also find useful to read the FAQ's on:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/427&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Reference – 2

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf

For all documents and updated information about the Bologna Process please go to:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

Reference - 3

Please read - 12. What is the relationship with the Bologna process in higher education? In:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/427&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Reference – 4

[Directive 2005/36/EC](#)

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/news/index_en.htm

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=COM%282011%290367&l=en>

Reference - 5

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx>

Reference – 6

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf
<http://www.eurydice.org>