



**EQF-Ref**

**Wp3: EQF Referencing Process – Exchange of Experience**

**National case study**

**FINLAND**

The EQF-Ref project has been funded with support from the European. The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission, nor does it involve any responsibility on their part.



## **1. Introduction**

In August 2009, a committee report including proposal e.g. for the national qualifications framework and links between national and EQF levels, as well as learning outcomes for each national level was published. As of October 2009, there have been several information meetings, seminars etc. about the proposal. The written consultation process is underway and the feedback is expected by the end of October.

The committee report includes description of the referencing process and it was also discussed in the committee. In the committee report it is proposed that the referencing will take place in 2010, but so far no decisions have been taken about this.

## **2. NQF Development and Implementation**

In August 2008, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to prepare a national framework based on the description of competence produced by qualifications and other competence. The task of the committee was to make a proposal on a national framework and to describe its levels in terms of competence, and to present the principles according to which qualifications should be placed in the levels of the national framework and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and to make a proposal on the placement of various qualifications within the frameworks. In addition, the committee was required to make a proposal on how the national framework is to be maintained, updated and developed as well as to describe how quality assurance will be organized and to make a further proposal on whether the national framework could be expanded from a qualifications framework towards a competence framework. The committee also had to make a proposal on the required amendments to the legislation.

The report of the committee was published in August 2009. In its report, the committee describes the European Qualifications Framework and its relationship to other classifications of qualifications, as well as competence and learning results as they are described in various national legislations. In addition, the committee describes the quality assurance procedures of Finnish qualifications and education, the current state of validation of prior learning and the measures taken in various administrative sectors to promote it.

The key proposals of the committee include the following:

- The national framework for qualifications and other competence is based on the EQF in that it has eight levels. The framework describes the learning outcomes provided by Finnish qualifications according to jointly accepted European criteria in terms of knowledge, skills and competence based on the level descriptions in the EQF. However, the various dimensions of competence are not separated from each other, and the EQF level descriptions are complemented from a national perspective.
- The qualifications will be placed in the national framework on the basis of learning outcomes provided by the qualification in question so that even if a qualification includes elements from various requirement levels of the framework, the qualification is placed at the level that suits it the best. Different dimensions of competence may be emphasized in qualifications placed at the same level. As a rule, qualifications will be placed in the framework so that the qualifications included in the same qualification type are at the same level in the national framework.

- Finnish higher education qualifications are placed in the national framework in accordance with the three cycle approach established in the Bologna Process: the first-cycle includes university and polytechnic bachelor's degrees (level 6). The second-cycle includes university and polytechnic master's degrees (level 7). The third cycle includes scientific and artistic postgraduate qualifications, such as licentiate and doctoral degrees (level 8).
- Vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications are at level 4 and specialist vocational qualifications at level 5. However, in special cases, individual vocational qualifications may be placed one level higher than the basic qualification, if the requirement level of the qualification clearly differs from other qualifications of the same type.
- Matriculation examination and the completion of the general upper secondary school syllabus are placed at the same level as vocational upper secondary qualifications (level 4).
- Other qualifications at level 4 include qualifications in other administrative sectors that correspond in terms of their competence requirements to vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications, and level 5 includes those qualifications in other administrative sectors that correspond in terms of their competence requirements to specialist vocational qualifications.
- The competence created by the completion of the basic education syllabus is placed at level 2.
- The Committee proposes that a law will be enacted on the framework which will bring together all the qualifications as they have been provided in the various decrees and acts. The law would also include the special competences in higher education. The law will enable the description of requirement levels and provisions on the placement of qualifications and special competences at the various requirement levels will be issued by Government decree. The legislation, provisions and guidelines pertaining to degree and other certificates must also be reviewed.
- The Finnish qualifications are placed in the European Qualifications Framework through the national framework in such a way that the levels in the national framework correspond to the ones in the EQF.
- The maintenance of the framework will be organized in the same way as the maintenance of equivalent legislation in general. The Ministry of Education will present the statutes pertaining to the national framework and, in the role of the reporting Ministry, will also be responsible for drafting the legislative amendments and reporting on them as well as consulting other ministries and stakeholders during the drafting of the legislation. Assessing the need to update and develop the framework in cooperation with stakeholders is linked to existing forms of stakeholder cooperation and the drafting of degree structure proposals. The assessment will take advantage of the competence in education and qualification committees.
- As a rule, the validation of prior learning is to be included in existing qualifications in the national qualifications system and the national framework.
- The qualifications framework should be developed into a competence framework. First and foremost, a review should be conducted of those comprehensive competence areas outside the qualifications system, which are completed by many and for which some competent authority has determined competence requirements. These competence areas include competence areas pertaining to qualification and competence requirements as well as those pertaining to the development of competence and the improvement of vocational proficiency.

The committee report has been sent for a written consultation to stakeholders and the feedback is expected by the end of October. After this, the proposal and comments

received will be discussed in a national seminar. Later, necessary changes will be made. The Ministry of Education will coordinate the work.

### **3. EQF Implementation**

#### **3.1. General information**

According to the committee report, the Finnish qualifications are placed in the European Qualifications Framework through the national framework in such a way that the levels in the national framework correspond to the ones in the EQF.

The committee report has been sent for a written consultation to stakeholders and the feedback was expected by the end of October. In fall 2009 several seminars, discussion forums, information meetings etc. have been organized. The committee report includes the proposal that the referencing will take place in 2010.

#### **3.2. “Experiences and available results**

See previous answer.

There have been no national pilot projects.

#### **3.3. Information related to the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF developed by the EQF Advisory Group**

One of the tasks of the Committee was to make a proposal on the referencing of national qualifications in the European Qualifications Framework. For this, also the referencing criteria and procedures were discussed in the committee meetings.

Following comments are based on those discussions as well as on the email correspondence after the committee report had been published. For email questionnaire we had only two responses, one from the Ministry of Education and one from the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland. This was probably because the criteria and procedures had been discussed already in the committee meetings.

In the first phase of discussions, it was a bit difficult for some participants to understand how the criteria and process actually will be implemented. There was no disagreement with the criteria but some of them were considered quite complicated to realize (e.g. criterion 5 was considered a very demanding one and something which needs a lot of background information). Also, it was considered that the criteria cannot be measured or judged by the same standard. Again, criterion number 4 was taken as an example, when compared e.g. to criteria 8-10.

Below, after each criterion, a short description about the discussion as well email feedback is given. The points presented are described shortly. It is noteworthy, that some comments are already consideration of “how we will do this” rather than assessing the criteria themselves (which was requested).

1. The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point (NCP), are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

This criterion was considered as useful from both national and international point of view. In Finland, the responsibilities are clear, e.g. concerning the Ministry of Education (coordinates the process and makes all final decisions), Finnish National Board of Education (National Coordination Point for the EQF/NQF).

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

This criterion is important from the point of view of comparability, openness, transparency and mutual trust. Referencing has to be transparent, so that it is reliable also outside the country in question. If the link between the national framework and the EQF is vague, it is difficult to prove the correspondence between national and EQF levels. When it comes to the Finnish framework, referencing should not be problematic, since level descriptors are directly based on the EQF descriptors, even if they have been specified from national point of view.

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

In Finland, the framework is based on learning outcomes, which have been used in vocational education for a long time. Learning outcomes -based approach has been developed also in higher education for a few years. In Finland many stakeholders in the Committee considered that link to credit systems in the framework is not necessary, since learning outcomes are the true basis for the framework, and introducing credits in the framework would add to thinking in terms of input. Credits are described in other part of the Committee report.

In Finland, credits have been used also in vocational education for years and in higher education decades, so credits do not create problems. The Finnish Committee on the National Qualifications Framework wants to emphasize the learning outcomes based approach.

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

See previous answers. Transparency is important especially to create trust and comparability internationally. It is important to have as transparent procedures as possible, to avoid possible doubts about referencing internationally.

5. The national quality assurance system for education and training refer to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation).

This criterion was probably considered as the most challenging one. In the Finnish committee report, the overarching quality assurance system in education was thoroughly described. The committee considers that it would be important that this description is included in the referencing report and is as such a good description of the quality assurance of the national qualifications system.

Also, if there will be new legislation about the National Qualifications Framework, our national quality assurance system refers to the National Qualifications Framework, since in Finland the basis for quality assurance is in legislation.

6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

The statement from the quality assurance agencies is considered to fill the criterion.

7. The referencing process shall involve international experts.

It was discussed when and how international experts participate in the work. Generally, it was felt that the international experts do not participate in the actual referencing but contribute to the referencing report and comment it. The language is an issue, since not all background information is readily available in English.

8. The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.

This criterion is seen as a relatively straightforward one. All competent national bodies have been involved in the preparatory work. If there will be new legislation, it is normal administrative practice that all stakeholders and competent bodies express their views. The original committee will also continue to discuss the feedback received, probably also the referencing report.

9. The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.

The criterion was seen as a relatively straightforward one.

10. Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of

national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

Attention was paid to the fact that this requirement exists already in the original EQF Recommendation.

### **3.4. Referencing Report**

So far no final decisions have been taken concerning the referencing report.

### **3.5. Organisation of the process for preparing the referencing report**

See previous. The Ministry of Education has the overall responsibility of the process for developing the EQF referencing report on national level.