

Discussion proposal for a
German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
Prepared by the “German Qualifications Framework Working Group”

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I. Introduction to the German Qualifications Framework (known by its German abbreviation of DQR)

In October 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) agreed to work together on the development of a German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (known by its German abbreviation of DQR). The DQR represents the first comprehensive matrix for the alignment of qualifications. It extends across educational areas and acts as a considerable aid to navigation within the German educational system. For this purpose the DQR describes on eight reference levels professional and personal competences which direct the alignment of qualifications obtained in general education, higher education and vocational education and training.

The starting point for the present decision is the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which entered into force on 23 April 2008. This Recommendation encourages the member states:

- to use the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualifications systems;
- to relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010;
- to develop national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice where appropriate and
- to adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates contain a clear reference to the EQF.

In embracing this recommendation, the primary objective of the BMBF and the KMK is to achieve appropriate alignment of qualifications acquired in Germany and to use this as a vehicle for enhancing the opportunities for our citizens on the European labour market. The BMBF and the KMK have established a joint “Federal Government/Federal States Coordination Group” for the German Qualifications Framework” (known by its German abbreviation of B-L-KG DQR), which has been commissioned with the task of managing the process of drawing up a DQR. This process involves a large number of stakeholders from general education, higher education and vocational education and training, the social partners and other experts from

research and practice. Together with the B-L-KG DQR, these stakeholders make up the “German Qualifications Framework Working Group” (known by its German abbreviation of AK DQR). Feedback on results has been sent to delegates’ home institutions and committees on an ongoing basis.

The B-L-KG and AK DQR are now able to present an initial draft of a DQR. The plan is for the next stage of the development process to investigate functionality by conducting sample qualification alignments. The aim is for this process also to involve monitoring of the structures of the DQR matrix and for any possible conclusions to be drawn with regard to the weightage of the descriptive categories. The objective is to make equivalences and differences between qualifications more transparent for educational establishments, companies and employees and to use this as a vehicle for supporting permeability. The important aspect here is to achieve reliability via quality assurance and development and to promote the idea that qualifications processes should be based on learning outcomes (“outcome orientation”).

In its capacity as a national implementation of the EQF, the aims are for the DQR to accord due consideration to the specific characteristics of the German educational system and to assist in achieving appropriate evaluation and comparability for German qualifications in Europe. The DQR will act in the interests of affording the best possible level of opportunity by helping promote the mobility of learners and employees between Germany and other European countries. The objective is to foster and enhance access to and participation in lifelong learning and use of qualifications for everyone, including those who are disadvantaged or affected by unemployment.

The eight reference levels contained within the draft DQR each describe the competences required to obtain a qualification. The term competence constituting the heart of the DQR depicts the ability and readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and for occupational and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as action skills.

Since the DQR maps qualifications rather than individual learning and occupational biographies, there are some areas where it is not able adequately to record abilities and attitudes acquired within educational and qualifications processes. For this reason, the DQR matrix does not encompass individual characteristics such as reliability, precision, stamina and attentiveness,

normative and ethical character building aspects, personality traits such as intercultural competence, active tolerance and democratic patterns of behaviour despite the high degree of significance accorded to all the above. In the same way as the EQF, the DQR draft focuses on selected characteristics which are relevant to successful action within a field of work or study. Methodological competence is understood as a transversal competence and for this reason is not separately stated within the DQR matrix.

The draft DQR differentiates between two categories of competence. These are “Professional competence”, subdivided into “Knowledge” and “Skills” and “Personal competence”, subdivided into “Social competence” and “Self-competence”. These analytical differentiations have been actioned in the full knowledge of the interdependence which exists between the various aspects of competence. Given the fact that the DQR consistently makes mention of competence, any use of the modal verb “can” has been avoided throughout the DQR matrix.

<i>Level indicator</i>			
Structure of requirements			
<i>Professional competence</i>		<i>Personal competence</i>	
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Social competence</i>	<i>Self-competence</i>
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, judgement	Team/leadership skills, involvement and communication	Autonomy/responsibility, reflectiveness and learning competence

Standardised structure for the description of the eight reference levels within the DQR

The attached glossary contains explanatory definitions of the key terms used.

When using the DQR matrix, consideration needs to be accorded to the fact that each reference level maps *equivalent* qualifications rather than *homogeneous* qualifications. Formulations are in strict accordance with the principle of inclusion. This means that characteristics already described at a lower level are not mentioned again at the subsequent higher levels unless enhancement takes place. Notwithstanding this, the knowledge and skills contained within the description of professional competence at each higher reference level do not necessarily in every case include the knowledge and skills encompassed within the respective level below.

All formal qualifications within the German educational system, including general, and higher education and vocational education and training, are included in the alignment of qualifications to the DQR. A further objective is to accord due consideration to the results of informal learning. The Federal Government-Federal State Coordination Group and the DQR Working Group are in agreement that the alignment of the qualifications within the German educational system to the reference levels of the DQR should not replace the existing system of access qualifications. Alignment takes place in accordance with the principle that each qualifications level may be accessible via various educational and training pathways. Achieving a certain reference level of the DQR does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level. The achievement of a reference level has also not been considered in conjunction with the implications for collective wage agreements and laws relating to remuneration. Legal aspects will be investigated within the scope of the next phase of development.

The implementation of the DQR provides Germany with an opportunity to further embrace the principle that the important thing is what someone can do, not where he or she has learned to do it. The overall effect of the DQR will be to strengthen lifelong learning.

II. DQR matrix

Level 1			
Be in possession of competences for the fulfilment of simple requirements within a clear and stably structured field of study or work. Fulfilment of tasks takes place under supervision.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of elementary general knowledge. Have an initial insight into a field of study or work.	Be in possession of cognitive and practical skills required to carry out simple tasks in accordance with pre-stipulated rules and to evaluate the results of such tasks. Establish elementary correlations.	Learn or work together with others, obtain and exchange information verbally and in writing.	Learn or work under supervision. Appraise own actions and the actions of others and accept learning guidance.

Level 2			
Be in possession of competences for the professional fulfilment of basic requirements within a clear and stably structured field of study or work. Fulfilment of tasks takes place largely under supervision.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of basic general knowledge and basic professional knowledge with a field of study or work.	Be in possession of basic cognitive and practical skills required to carry out tasks within a field of study or work, evaluate the results of such tasks in accordance with pre-stipulated criteria and establish correlations.	Work within a group. Accept and express general feedback and criticism. Act and react in accordance with the given situation with regard to verbal and written communication.	Learn or work in a responsible manner and largely under supervision within familiar and stable contexts. Appraise own actions and the actions of others. Use pre-stipulated learning guides and request learning guidance.

Level 3			
Be in possession of competences for the autonomous fulfilment of technical requirements within a field of study or field of occupational activity which remains clear whilst being openly structured in some areas.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of extended general knowledge or extended professional knowledge within a field of study or field of occupational activity.	Be in possession of a spectrum of cognitive and practical skills for the planning and processing of technical tasks within a field of study or field of occupational activity. Evaluate results in accordance with criteria which are largely pre-stipulated, provide simple transfers of methods and results.	Work within a group and occasionally offer support. Help shape the learning or working environment, present processes and results to the appropriate recipients of such information.	Learn or work autonomously and responsibly including within contexts which are less familiar. Appraise own actions and the actions of others. Request learning guidance and select various learning aids.

Level 4			
Be in possession of competences for the autonomous planning and processing of technical tasks assigned within a comprehensive field of study or field of occupational activity subject to change.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of deeper general knowledge or theoretical professional knowledge within a field of study or field of occupational activity.	Be in possession of a broad spectrum of cognitive and practical skills which facilitate autonomous preparation of tasks and problem solving and the evaluation of work results and processes according consideration to alternative courses of action and reciprocal effects with neighbouring areas. Provide transfers of methods and solutions.	Help shape the work within a group and the learning or working environment of such a group and offer ongoing support. Justify processes and results. Provide comprehensive communication on facts and circumstances.	Set own learning and work objectives, reflect on and assess such objectives and take responsibility for them.

Level 5			
Be in possession of competences for the autonomous planning and processing of comprehensive technical tasks assigned within a complex and specialised field of study or field of occupational activity subject to change.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of integrated professional knowledge within a learning area or integrated occupational knowledge within a field of activity. This also includes deeper, theoretical professional knowledge. Be familiar with the scope and limitations of the field of study or field of occupational activity.	Be in possession of an extremely broad spectrum of specialised, cognitive and practical skills. Plan work processes across work areas and evaluate such processes according comprehensive consideration to alternative courses of action and reciprocal effects with neighbouring areas. Provide comprehensive transfers of methods and solutions.	Plan and structure work processes in a cooperative manner, including within heterogeneous groups, instruct others and provide well-founded learning guidance. Present complex facts and circumstances extending across professional areas in a targeted manner to the appropriate recipients of such information.	Reflect on and assess own learning objectives and learning objectives set externally, undertake self-directed pursuit of and assume responsibility for such objectives, draw consequences for work processes within the team.

Level 6			
Be in possession of competences for the processing of comprehensive technical tasks and problems set and be in possession of competences for autonomous management of processes within subareas of a scientific subject ¹ or within a field of occupational activity. The structure of requirements is characterised by complexity and frequent changes.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of broad and integrated knowledge including knowledge of basic scientific principles and up-to-date professional knowledge in subareas of a scientific subject or be in possession of broad and integrated occupational knowledge including current technical developments. Be in possession of relevant knowledge at interfaces to other areas.	Be in possession of an extremely broad spectrum of methods for the processing of complex problems within a field of study or field of occupational activity. Draw up new solutions and evaluate such solutions including according consideration to various criteria even in circumstances where requirements are subject to frequent change.	Assume responsibility in working within expert teams or show responsibility in leading ² groups or organisations. Instruct the technical development of others and act in an anticipatory manner in dealing with problems within the team. Present experts with arguments for and solutions to complex professionally related problems and work in conjunction with such experts on further development.	Define, reflect on and assess objectives for learning and work processes and structure learning and work processes autonomously and sustainably.

¹ The designation “scientific subject” also encompasses creative and artistic subjects.

² This encompasses companies, government authorities or non-profit making organisations.

Level 7			
Be in possession of competences for the processing of new and complex professional tasks and problems set and be in possession of competences for autonomous management of processes within a scientific subject or within a strategically oriented field of occupational activity. The structure of requirements is characterised by frequent and unpredictable changes.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of comprehensive, detailed, specialist and state-of-the art knowledge in a scientific subject or be in possession of comprehensive occupational knowledge in a strategically oriented field of occupational activity. Be in possession of extended knowledge in adjoining areas.	Be in possession of specialised technical or design concept skills relating to the solution of strategic problems in a scientific subject or in a field of occupational activity. Consider alternatives even in circumstances where information is incomplete. Develop and use new ideas or procedures and assess such ideas and procedures according consideration to various evaluation criteria.	Assume responsibility for leading groups or organisations within the scope of complex tasks set and present the results of the work of such groups or organisations. Promote the technical development of others in a targeted manner. Lead divisionally specific and cross-divisional debates.	Define objectives for new applications or research oriented tasks reflecting on possible societal, economic and cultural implications, deploy appropriate means and tap autonomously into own knowledge for the purpose.

Level 8			
Be in possession of competences for the obtaining of research findings in a scientific subject or for the development of innovative solutions and procedures within a field of occupational activity. The structure of requirements is characterised by novel and unclear problem situations.			
Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Be in possession of comprehensive, specialised, systematic state-of-the art knowledge in one or more areas within a scientific subject or be in possession of comprehensive occupational knowledge in a strategically and innovation oriented field of occupational activity. Be in possession of appropriate knowledge at the interfaces to adjoining areas.	Be in possession of comprehensively developed skills relating to the identification and solution of novel problems set in the areas of research, development or innovation within a specialised scientific subject or in a field of occupational activity. Also design, implement, manage, reflect on and evaluate innovative processes including in cross-activity areas. Evaluate new ideas and procedures.	Lead groups or organisations from a position of particular responsibility whilst activating the areas of potential within such groups or organisations. Promote the professional development of others in a targeted and sustained manner. Lead cross-specialist debates and introduce innovative contributions to specialist professional discussions.	Define objectives for new complex applications or research oriented tasks reflecting on possible societal, economic and cultural implications, select appropriate means and develop new ideas and processes.

III. DQR glossary

DQR level descriptors within the competence areas

- (a) **Competence** within the DQR describes the ability and readiness to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological competences in work or study situations and for professional and personal development. Competence is understood in this sense as action skills.

The DQR presents competence within the dimensions of professional competence and personal competence. Methodological competence constitutes an integral part of these dimensions.

(By way of contrast, the EQF describes competence only in terms of the assumption of responsibility and autonomy.)

- (b) **Field of occupational activity** describes a work area in which a person is in gainful employment.
- (c) **Knowledge** describes the body of facts, principles, theories and practice within a field of study or work deriving from the assimilation and processing of information via learning.
- (d) **Learning outcomes** describe what learners know, understand and are able and ready to do on completion of a learning process. The DQR describes learning outcomes which have been bundled to form competences.
- (e) **Methodological competence** describes the ability to be guided by rules when acting. This may also include the considered selection and development of methods. Professional competence and personal competence each incorporate methodological competence.
- (f) **Occupational knowledge** is a combination of knowledge of facts, basic principles and theories and practical knowledge within a field of activity of relevance to the labour market and particularly refers to knowledge of possible procedures and approaches to be adopted.
- (g) **Personal Competence** is also referred to as human competence and encompasses social competence and self competence. It describes a person's ability and readiness to develop further and to shape his or her own life in an autonomous and responsible manner within the respective social, cultural or occupational context.

- (h) **Professional competence** encompasses knowledge and skills. It constitutes the ability and readiness to process tasks and problems in an autonomous, professionally appropriate and methodical manner and to evaluate the result.
- (i) **Professional knowledge** describes knowledge of facts, rules and/or justifications.
- (j) **Qualification** describes a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.
- (k) **Self-competence** describes a person's ability and readiness to act in an independent and responsible manner, reflect on the own actions and on the actions of others and to develop his or her own action skills further.
- (l) **Social competence** describes a person's ability and readiness to work together with others in a target oriented manner, understand the interests and social situations of others, deal with and communicate with others in a rational and responsible way and be involved in shaping the world of work and the lifeworld.
- (m) **Skills** describe the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. As in the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
- (n) **Theoretical professional knowledge** describes professional knowledge with a depth of theoretical understanding.