



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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UPDATED EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND ITS RELATION TO THE BOLOGNA CYCLES AND DIRECTIVE ON PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

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

Introduction

Although all countries have their own specific qualification systems, it is recognised that there is a need of implementing reforms and instruments to better understand these differences, and above all to create tools that help to achieve more transparency and to facilitate greater “readability” of the qualifications.

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 (such as Bologna Cycles; Levels of EU Directives for Recognition of Professional Qualifications; UNESCO classification – ISCED). The table at the end of the document tries to summarize these relations.

The EQF

The EQF is a tool designed to promote the transparency and comparability of professional qualifications of different countries and different education and training systems. *(For further reading on the EQF please click on Reference - 1)*

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 (knowledge, skills and competences), 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 general 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 anticipated that Member States would 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. For further information, on the process of referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF please consult the [“European Qualifications Framework Series”](#).

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 on three 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*) irrespective of the name that a certain degree may have at national level (for example, we may have the degree title of Bachelor in UK and Licenciatura in Portugal, but as they are both referred to as “first cycle” they are expected to be at the same level).

The correspondence between the EQF levels and the Bologna Cycles

The EQF is fully compatible with the qualifications framework for Higher Education developed under the Bologna Process. The last three levels of the EQF correspond to the three cycles of Bologna: EQF level 6 to the descriptor developed for the first cycle (Bachelor level), EQF level 7 to the descriptor developed for the second cycle (Masters level) and EQF level 8 to the descriptor developed for the third cycle (Doctorate level).

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 European Ministers agreed that the Framework would include, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications.

(Please click on Reference - 3)

The Directives on Migration

In parallel work, to allow competent authorities to compare qualifications for the purpose of migration at EU level, another scale of five levels of professional qualifications has been adopted with Directive 2005/36/EC, in its article 11.

The directive consolidated a system of mutual recognition and provides for automatic recognition for a limited number of professions based on harmonised minimum training requirements (sectoral professions), a general system for the recognition of evidence of training and automatic recognition of professional experience. *(Please click on Reference - 4).*

In 2013, a new Directive 2013/55/UE amended Directive 2005/36/EC and recognized the need to introduce the possibility to express the duration of a programme also in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). That possibility should not affect the other requirements for automatic recognition. *(Please click on Reference - 5).*

The five levels of professional qualifications established in the Directives are:

- 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; which may in addition be expressed with an equivalent number of ECTS credits.
- e)** Diploma certifying successful completion of training at higher or university level of duration of at least four years; which may in addition be expressed with an equivalent number of ECTS credits.

The correspondence between the levels on the Directives on Migration and the EQF framework

The directive levels are established only for the purpose of the operation of the general system for professional mobility and should have no effect on national education and training structures or on the competence of Member States in

that field, including national policy for implementing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF system can be a useful additional source of information for the competent authorities examining professional qualifications issued in other Member States.

The correspondence between the levels on the Directives on Migration and Bologna Cycles

To ensure that the five levels outlined under Directives 2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EC are consistent with degree structure adopted by higher education institutions under the Bologna process, The directive 2013/55/UD establishes that Bachelor's degree should be classified under level "d" and Master's degree under level "e".

About ISCED

At world level, the most commonly used classification is the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), from UNESCO (*Please click on Reference - 6*).

"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). In November 2011, a revised ISCED classification has been adopted. ISCED 2011 takes into account significant changes in education systems worldwide since the last ISCED revision in 1997, and better reflect the tertiary education structure (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate) around the world, including that which was introduced across Europe following the Bologna Process in 1999. (*Please click on Reference –7*). It has four levels of tertiary education compared to two categories in the original version.

The correspondence between ISCED levels, Bologna Cycles and EQF

ISCED 97:

Level 6 corresponds to the third cycle of Bologna, and so to level 8 of the EQF.

Level 5B corresponds in some way with the first Bologna cycle (EQF 6 or 5) and level 5A with the second Bologna cycle (EQF 7).

ISCED 2011:

Level 6 corresponds to the first cycle of Bologna, and level 6 of EQF.

Level 7 corresponds to the second cycle of Bologna, and level 7 EQF.

Level 8 corresponds to the third cycle of Bologna, and level 8 EQF.

Countries will have to adapt their data collection systems to the new framework. The first data collection based on the new classification began in 2014, to map education systems to the new classification and revise collection instruments. Meanwhile data for ISCED 1997 are still available.

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 – 8*)

Conclusion

In conclusion, since the first edition of this document, significant steps have been made at international level to achieve a progressive convergence of the different systems that are used to describe and compare the educational systems both at European and world levels.

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Table: An Integrated Summary of the Various Qualification Systems

EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Bologna					“Short Cycle”	1 st Cycle	2 nd	3 rd
Directive						d) level 4	e) level 5	
ISCED 1997						5 B	5 A	6
ISCED 2011					5	6	7	8

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/122_EN.pdf

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

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

Reference - 3

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

Reference – 4

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

Reference - 5

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:354:0132:0170:en:PDF>

Reference - 6

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

Reference – 7

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-2011-en.pdf>

Reference – 8

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php