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Coordinating Diversity

Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

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List of Abbreviations

BIBB	Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung/ Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Germany
BEPG	Broad Economic Policy Guidelines
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CQAF	Common Quality Assurance Framework
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EC	European Community
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PLOTEUS	Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1. <u>Introduction</u>

Since the Lisbon summit in March 2000 few sentences have been repeated so fervently like the EU's declaration to become "*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with better and more jobs and greater social cohesion*" by 2010. With this 10-year vision the EU has set itself an ambitious goal, which to achieve will require intense European exertion in several policy fields.

In the face of globalisation, demographic change and technological advancement concomitant with a rapidly changing world of work, education has been defined as a key field of European cooperation since it became increasingly recognized as a contributing factor for development. Lifelong learning has become the guiding principle for the development of education and training policies, having been identified as a key pillar of the knowledge-based society. The creation of a 'European area of lifelong learning' is a central element of the Lisbon strategy.

Because "people, their knowledge and competences are the key to Europe's future"[1], a consensus has arisen that citizens need to have better access to learning opportunities throughout life.

The EU is characterised by a large diversity of educational systems, of which each forms an integral part of each member states' identity. The recognition that a harmonisation of education and training systems is neither imperative nor preferable has led to a new emphasis on transparency and comparability. As Ján Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism points out: "People in Europe too often face obstacles when they try to move from one country to another to learn or work, or when they want to build upon previous education or training".[2] Increasing the transparency and enhancing the cross-recognition of national qualifications is widely regarded as pivotal for both occupational and geographic mobility in Europe. Now Europe faces the challenge to "turn policy consensus into effective education and training practice"[3].

On 5 September 2006 the Commission adopted the proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

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[1] European Commission (2001): COM(2001) 678 final, p.3
[2] European Commission (2006): IP/06/1148
[3] Cedefop (2003): Lifelong learning: citizens' views, Preface by Viviane Reding.

The EQF is intended to increase the transparency and comparability of qualifications across Europe by providing a common reference point based on learning outcomes. As a translation device it further aims to enable European citizens to navigate within and between complex education systems and "to combine and build on qualifications acquired in different settings, systems and countries"[4].

Since the EQF will thus enhance the access to learning opportunities it is seen as an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning.

The central research question this thesis seeks to address is: "Can the proposed EQF live up to the expectations that have been placed upon it?"

This central question leads to the first subquestion, identifying "what are the actual expectations of an EQF and the rationales for its development"? Based on the EQF proposal and a number of earlier EU documents, a look at Europe's education and training policies and the goals that have been set out both at EU and at national level will provide relevant information to address this subquestion.

Addressing the question of whether the proposed European Qualifications Framework can be successful in what it tries to achieve requires a two-dimensional approach: One regards the realisation of the EQF, i.e. its implementation requirements – both those that are explicitly set out in the EQF draft and those that are not. Thus, the analysis needs to focus on the sub-question "which challenges will arise regarding the implementation of the proposed EQF?" The other dimension concerns the design of the EQF itself: its rationales and objectives. This involves the question of whether the proposed design is likely to promote what has been set out as the goals of the EQF: "how adequate is the proposed EQF design, its levels and descriptors?" Naturally, both questions can not be viewed and answered completely separate from one another.

Addressing these two subquestions, both primary and secondary data will be used. Owing to the fact that the topic is relatively new, the Commission's EQF proposal forms one of the main sources for the analysis and will be complemented by several related publications and surveys, for example from the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Furthermore, the responses from various international stakeholders, formulated in the course of the EQF consultation process, will provide an important basis for the discussion of the EQF design and its implementation. Though, due to the large number of countries and stakeholders involved, it will not be possible to present the whole range of perspectives on the

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[4] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final, p. 3

topic. In order to analyse the implementation process of the EQF, it will be taken a closer look at the national qualifications systems in Europe.

The last subquestion will deal with the EQF as an instrument for the promotion of the political vision of learning throughout life: "To what extent does the EQF contribute to the realisation of the European Area of lifelong learning?" The question will be addressed by an analysis of the lifelong learning concept, primarily based on a selection of the vast literature that has emerged on the subject. Time constraints do not allow for "own" qualitative research in terms of interviews or surveys. Instead, the argumentation will be further based on existing data, like for instance a Eurobarometer survey published by Cedefop in 2003, which will provide information about what European citizens think about lifelong learning.[5]

Following these questions, the structure will be as follows: In order to address the first subquestion, chapter 2 will start by giving an overview of education policy in Europe and the existing instruments in this field, followed by a short presentation of the concept of lifelong learning. These parts will thus provide a basis for embedding the subsequent detailed information on the final EQF proposal, section 2.3., in the broader context of European education policies.

Chapter 3 will explore the design and the implementation process of the EQF. It will first discuss the EQF structure consisting of levels and descriptors. The following part will analyse the outcomes approach as a central characteristic of the EQF. Subsequently, part 3.3. will discuss national qualifications systems and frameworks in Europe. The analysis of chapter 3 will allow for a first conclusion, addressing the subquestions of implementation and thus the central research question in a primarily practical way.

Concluding, chapter 4 will address the last subquestion by reverting back to the vision of lifelong learning from a more holistic point of view. It will further shortly discuss the role of guidance and counselling in this context. A final conclusion will be given in chapter 6.

The descriptors defining the eight levels of the EQF are contained in annex 1 of this thesis.

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[5] Cedefop (2003): Citizens' views.

2. <u>Education in Europe: Towards an EQF for Lifelong Learning</u>

2.1. Europeanising Education

The following chapter will provide the relevant information to address the question of what has led to the development of a European Qualifications Framework, identifying the rationales and expectations.

Article 149 of the EC Treaty stipulates that "the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States (…) by supporting and supplementing their action (…)".

Regarding vocational education and training, Article 150 sets forth: "The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States". Subsequently though, both articles very clearly refer to the subsidiarity principle by indicating that all EU actions must be implemented "while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States", both for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and vocational training.

Before the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993, the community contracts contained no provisions for a common education policy. For achieving the economic goals the Community primarily banked on economic policy cooperation.

Within the last 13 years this has changed significantly. Since skills and knowledge became identified as the engines for economic growth and social development, coordination and cooperation in the field of education policies have been gaining in importance.

The very differing education and vocational training systems in Europe reflect the diversity of language and culture, which are an integral part of each country's identity. Europe's national education and vocational training systems have developed over a long period of time in a national context without much international interference. In accordance with Articles 149 and 150 EC Treaty education and training falls within the competencies of the member states. However, there has arisen a consensus that education and training systems and institutions operating in isolation from each other[6] would hamper the European progress towards the fulfilment of the Lisbon goals. Consequently, the Lisbon European Council also set the course for the needed development of education and training policies by identifying the transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning as key elements for the establishment of a competitive knowledge-based Europe.

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[6] Commission of the European Community (2006): COM(2006) 479 final.

The new emphasis on transparency derived from the recognition that a harmonization of European education and training systems is neither imperative nor preferable. Instead, increased transparency of qualifications is regarded as the decisive means for turning Europe's diversity into an asset.[7] Furthermore better comparability and transparency across Europe will facilitate occupational and geographic mobility and thus enhance access to education and training.

In 2002 the Barcelona European Council confirmed the importance of the Lisbon conclusions, calling for the corresponding instruments to support the transparency of qualifications. At the academic level, better comparability had already been initiated in 1999 through the Bologna Process, aiming at the creation of a "European Area of Higher Education". Its central element forms the Europe-wide implementation of Bachelor and Master Degrees and its corresponding structure characteristics like the integrated European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Though, it was recognised that the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge society requires cooperation in *all* education areas and has to involve both initial and continuing vocational education and training. In December 2002, the European Commission and 31 European education Ministers (of Member States, candidate countries and EEA countries) adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced cooperation in European vocational education and training (VET).

Deriving from the different processes presented above, a number of concrete sectoral and horizontal programmes and initiatives have been developed to promote efficiency, transparency, mobility and mutual trust across Europe's education systems. Many of these existing Community activities have been initiated long before the Lisbon European Council. During the last years of intensified European cooperation in the field of education and training, some new programmes have been set up and existing programmes have been steadily developed, revised or adjusted. Following, a complex system of educational schemes has arisen. Programmes that primarily aim at quality improvement and enhanced educational cooperation *within* Europe can be distinguished between those initiatives that try to promote the attractiveness of the European education area on a global scale. It can be assumed that the success of the latter to some extent depends on the success of the former.

While some programmes are well known and have attracted much attention, others are little known beyond the European elite of higher education or its bodies of experts.

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[7] ibid.

One of the best known programmes is SOCRATES, set up in 1995. The SOCRATES programme "sets out to develop a Europe of knowledge and thus better cater for the major challenges of this new century: to promote lifelong learning, to encourage access by everybody to education, to acquire qualifications and recognized skills"[8]. SOCRATES comprises of eight separate actions with different focuses. The ERASMUS action focuses on quality improvement for Europe's higher education area "by encouraging transnational cooperation between universities, boosting European mobility and improving the transparency and full academic recognition of studies and qualifications throughout the Union"[9]. More than 1.2 million students have participated in a study period abroad through the ERASMUS programme, since its creation in 1987.

In accordance with the concept of lifelong learning, the Grundtvig action seeks to enhance quality in adult education. Grundtvig therefore does not exclusively focus on vocational education but embraces formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways. Following the objective of enhancing the access to lifelong learning opportunities for Europe's citizens, it largely interacts with other actions within Socrates.

These shortly presented Socrates actions are complemented and accompanied by more actions that either work to support the Socrates programmes' effective implementation or deal with broader objectives in the context of education, like for example the promotion of information and communication technologies (MINERVA). Following the purpose of portraying the variety of EU education programmes, a more detailed description of these actions would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

Another well-known programme is Leonardo Da Vinci, which promotes mobility, innovation and quality of vocational training since 1995: "Taking companies' needs into consideration, the programme helps build a skilled European workforce in an increasingly competitive world."[10] Thus, the programme also contributes to concrete economic objectives like the reduction of unemployment in Europe.

This vast number of programmes, actions and measures, financed by billions of Euros, would be of no avail without functional mediums of communication processing and presenting the information to the potential users. Needless to say, the Community did not fail to set up the operative instrument: with PLOTEUS (Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space), a databank exists that gathers and provides all relevant information on jobs

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[8] European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html
[9] European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html
[10] European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html

and learning opportunities in Europe. Students, job seekers, workers, teachers and guidance counselors can obtain information on how to benefit from the programmes available in their country, including guidance about who to contact and how to apply for grants. Additionally PLOTEUS provides the sort of information that is vital for the planning and organization of moving abroad such as the cost of living, tuition fees and legal framework of each participating country.[11]

Most European education documents refer to the concept of lifelong learning and emphasize the transparency aspect. The recognised vital role of transparency of qualifications and skills has led to the establishment of one further instrument that by now became a subject of great interest. EUROPASS helps individuals to present their qualifications and competences in a common format and thus to make them easier understood throughout Europe. By encouraging and facilitating mobility, EUROPASS consists of five documents that provide information on the different sorts of qualifications, like linguistic skills (Europass Language Portfolio) or competences acquired through work or study periods abroad (Europass Mobility). The Europass Curriculum Vitae (Europass CV) constitutes the basic document of the Europass portfolio. Through the Europass Portal all European citizens can complete online their Europass CV. The amended EUROPASS design was set up in 2004. A Europe-wide network of National Europass Centers supports and coordinates all related activities.[12]

Due to the subsidiarity principle, mentioned above, that applies to the field of education and training, the success of all programmes depends on the communication and cooperation of the member states. Since 2000 educational cooperation is conducted through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The intergovernmental method, originally created as part of European employment policy, provides a new cooperation framework and is based on the assumption that different educational systems can strive for common objectives on a voluntary basis.

2.2. Lifelong Learning

Though already fundamentally formulated in the 1970s, the idea of lifelong learning (LLL) has attracted increasing attention when it was set forth by the OECD in the mid-1990s; later

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[11] European Commission: http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp
[12] European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html

the European Commission also declared the concept as vital for the European education and employment policy.

The central idea behind the concept of lifelong learning is not limited to the notion that human beings naturally continue to learn through their whole life, but that learning has to become a central part of life in an organisational sense.[13]

The year 1996 was designated the "European Year of Lifelong Leaning". The objective was to increase the public awareness of the importance of lifelong learning. In 2000 the European Commission published the staff working paper "A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning", inviting the Member States, EEA and candidate countries to present their views on the topic. One year later the Commission drew up a report based on the outcomes of this consultation process. In this communication[14] lifelong learning is defined as:

"all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective".[15]

This rather broad definition of lifelong learning can be ascribed to the 12,000 citizens that participated in the consultation and of which many had expressed concerns about the dominant employment and labor market emphasis of the former lifelong learning definition contained in the Memorandum.

Over the past few years, lifelong learning "has enjoyed a remarkable rise up the policy agenda"[16]. Facing the challenges of globalization, information technology and a rapidly changing world of work concomitant with social change has led to the conclusion that learning must not stop when entering the employment market. Achieving the Lisbon goal of becoming an advanced knowledge society requires a shift from the traditional concept of "education followed by work" to an integrating approach of "working and learning". This shift requires increasing permeability between work and education as well as facilitating the access to - high quality - learning opportunities to enable learning for anyone[17].

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[13] Gillen (2006), p.79
[14] European Commission (2001): Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, COM(2001) 678 final.
[15] European Commission (2001): COM(2001) 678 final, p.10
[16] Field (2000), p.249
[17] European Commission (2001): COM(2001) 678 final, p.4

Whilst vast literature, which has emerged on lifelong learning, discusses coherent strategies and on-going progress in this field, a consensus has arisen that lifelong learning is vital for both social and economic reasons.

Better access to learning opportunities will both combat social exclusion and help people to cope with social change and labor market demands.[18] The average time of people staying in one workplace declines steadily, whilst occupational biographies are characterized by change and non-linear career moves.[19] States are facing the challenge to enhance and reform their education and training systems in order to meet both the economy's demand for a highly skilled workforce and the population's social demand for job relevant qualifications that lead to higher employability. These struggles have put lifelong learning at the core of policy both at community and at national level.

"Lifelong learning is an essential challenge for inventing the future of our societies; it is a necessity rather than a possibility or a luxury to be considered".[20] Hence, lifelong learning is not just one aspect of European education and training policies, it became "the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts"[21]. This includes learning in different learning environments, from pre-school to post-retirement, and encompasses the full range of formal, informal and non-formal learning activities.

The realisation of the European vision of lifelong learning faces several challenges. In order to prevent 'dead ends' in education biographies and achieve genuine lifelong and lifewide learning, citizens must be able to "fully utilize the rich diversity of education, training and learning opportunities in Europe"[22]. For this purpose, the combination of qualifications from different countries and institutions has to become more flexible, which in turn once again requires increased transparency and comparability.

2.3. The proposed EQF

As set out above, in order to realise a European area of lifelong learning characterised by mobility, increasing the transparency and comparability of qualifications across Europe has been put on the top of the European agenda. The Europass and its integrated documents have already been developed for this purpose. However, these are separate documents providing information on individual qualifications. A common frame of references, putting individual

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[18] Cedefop (2003): Lifelong learning: citizens' views, p.6
[19] Gillen (2006), p.79
[20] Fischer (2000), p. 267
[21] European Commission(2000): SEC(2000) 1832.
[22] European Commission (2004);

national qualifications in relation to one another has been missing so far. To bridge this gap, in March 2005 the heads of states and heads of governments decided on the development of a European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, which had been envisioned since 2003.

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF will serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels and thus increase the transparency of qualifications, which is defined as the "degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the labour market, in education and training and in a wider social setting"[23]. In contrast to the Bologna Process, which set common standards for the university sector, the EQF will encompass all kinds of vocational education and training. On this note, vocational education comprises the initial training and all continuing vocational training somebody attends.

A set of 8 reference levels, described in terms of learning outcomes, forms the core element of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Horizontally, all learning outcomes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

Figure 1

Source: author
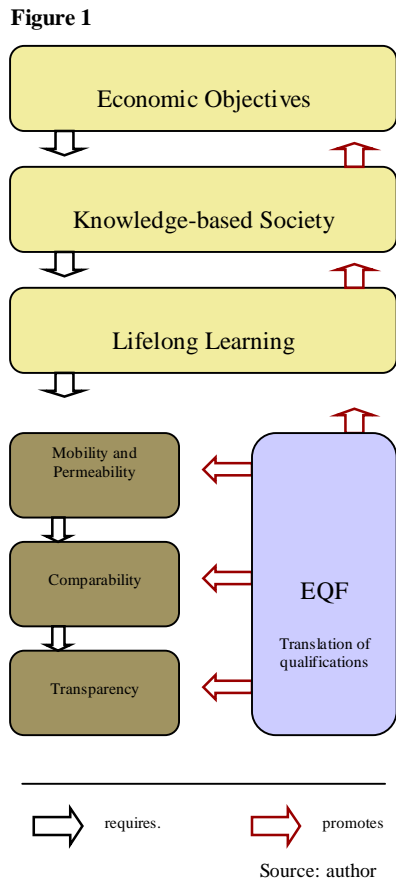
Figure 1 illustrates the broader context and purpose in which the EQF is embedded, relating the different objectives to each other.

A Europe-wide consultation process on the EQF was launched in July 2005 following the publication of a Staff Working Document by the Commission.

In the course of the consultation process the Commission has received 125 responses from 31 European countries, including Member States, candidate countries and EFTA states.

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[23] European Commission (2006): COM 2006 479 final

National and regional authorities make up the largest number of responses (35 %). Education associations and NGOs contributed 23 % of the responses, followed by the sectors (14 %) and the social partners, subdivided into employers (8 %) and trade unions (4%).[24] Taking into account the preceding national and Europe-wide consultations on which the official responses were build, it is assumed that the actual number of stakeholders having been involved in the consultation process is significantly higher than the above mentioned 125.[25]

The results of the EQF consultation process were presented and discussed at a conference held in Budapest in February 2006. Though the feedback has been mainly positive, the participants also expressed some criticism and proposed suggestions for improvement.

A separate expert group was established in order to incorporate the suggestions into the EQF proposal, particularly regarding the reference level descriptors which had been perceived as inadequate by the majority of stakeholders.

On September 5th 2006, the Commission adopted the final proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. The European Parliament and the Council will now examine the proposal. According to the Commission, adoption is expected before the end of 2007.[26]

The following definitions, formulated by the Commission, apply within the EQF proposal[27]:

Qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a component body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;

Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;

Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practises that is related to a field of study or work. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;

Skills means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative

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[24] Cedefop info 1/2006
[25] ibid.
[26] European Commission (2006): IP/06/1148
[27] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final, p. 16

thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);

Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and /or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development. In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

In its EQF Staff Working Document from 2005 the Commission pointed out that "the success of a European Qualifications Framework depends on its <u>relevance</u> and <u>credibility</u> for education and training institutions, employers and policy-makers and ultimately for individual learners."[28] In the meantime, the consultation process responses have been analyzed and presented in a report. Concluding, the Commission states that there has been a confirmed broad support for the EQF.

In accordance with Article 149 and 150 EC Treaty, the EQF will be entirely voluntary. The majority of consultation process replies underlined the importance of that aspect for both the implementation and use of the EQF.

Though the EQF is not entailing any legal obligations, it involves active cooperation from the Member States. National education programmes will not have to be assigned directly to an EQF level but to a national structure of qualifications levels, which in turn relate to a particular EQF level, defined in learning outcomes. For this reason the EQF is also called a meta qualifications framework. By shifting the focus away from learning pathways, the EQF allows for comparability and permeability without equalizing national education structures.

Following the shift to learning outcomes, the EQF is intended to:

- support a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provision

- facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning

- facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems[29]

The EQF will therefore serve employers, policy makers, education and training providers and individual citizens. The latter will be enabled to navigate within complex education systems and prove his/her competences in other European countries. Employers will use the EQF as a

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[28] European Commission (2005): SEC (2005) 957, p. 6
[29] European Commission (2006): IP/06/1148

reference point that provides information about applicant's actual competences. Education and training providers will be able to assess their own programmes in a European context, comparing the large variety of offers in Europe on the basis of learning outcomes.

In order to create a basis for long-term educational cooperation within Europe, the EQF further aims to increase the mutual trust between the different national stakeholders.

The information presented in this chapter show how the expectations that have been placed upon the EQF correspond to the goals that have been set out for Europe's education policies. With its full name the EQF explicitly seeks to promote lifelong learning, which is the guiding principle of EU education and training policies.

The following chapter will analyse the main features and characteristics of the EQF, including its implementation requirements.

3. <u>Design and Implementation</u>

3.1. Structure: Levels and Descriptors

Since the 8-level structure forms the core element of the EQF, it provides an appropriate starting point for the examination of the EQF design. The question is whether the proposed design forms an adequate means to give information about what qualifications an individual possesses.

As outlined above, the EQF structure is characterised by two dimensions: Vertically, the EQF consists of 8 reference levels. Horizontally, each of the 8 levels is defined by the descriptors 'skills', 'knowledge' and 'competences', "indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications"[30]. According to what a person knows and is able to do, he/she will be allocated to a certain EQF level.

The development of adequate outcome-based descriptors turned out to be challenging. To what extent the proposed EQF descriptors capture the complexity of lifelong leaning has been appraised very differently through the consultation process. 27 % of the respondents regarded the descriptors as adequate, while 44 % agreed only to some extent and 5.5 % entirely disagreed with this statement.[31] The third category of descriptors, "wider professional and personal competences", has been subject of particular criticism. The category comprised 4 sub-categories and thus has been regarded as overly complex. Having taken into account these

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[30] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final
[31] cedefop info 1/2006

concerns, the descriptors have been simplified in the final proposal. The third category is now named just 'competences'.

The specification of competences is directly linked with the question of how to measure them. To identify and evaluate competences is one of the central challenges of a framework like the EQF. Following, the specification is a balancing act: "The narrower and more specific the definitions of individual competences are, the better these competences can be identified and evaluated. The more general and unspecific definitions are, the harder it is to ascertain them empirically".[32]

In order to make transparency more than a principle and to make the EQF fulfil its function, the "descriptions of learning outcomes must be unambiguous, systematic and neutral"[33]. This necessity applies to all key definitions. Terms like *outcomes*, *level* or *competence* do not necessarily have the same meaning in different countries or even in different sections within a country. This raises the question how it can be ensured that all terms are understood in the same way in the various national systems between which the EQF translates.[34]

Given that qualifications are closely intertwined with each other, a classification of qualifications will always be an 'artificial separation'. However, for the purpose of the EQF and for analytical reasons such a separation seemed necessary.

The question what number of levels is most adequate for the EQF has been a further subject of discussion. Some of the countries that have already developed national qualification frameworks naturally preferred a structure that is similar to their own. However, given that national qualifications frameworks reflect the existing national hierarchy of degrees and thus vary considerably throughout Europe, this can not become decisive for the number of EQF levels. Instead, the number of levels must be determined with the help of qualitative criteria that include complexity, lack of transparency, comprehensibility and speed of change.[35]
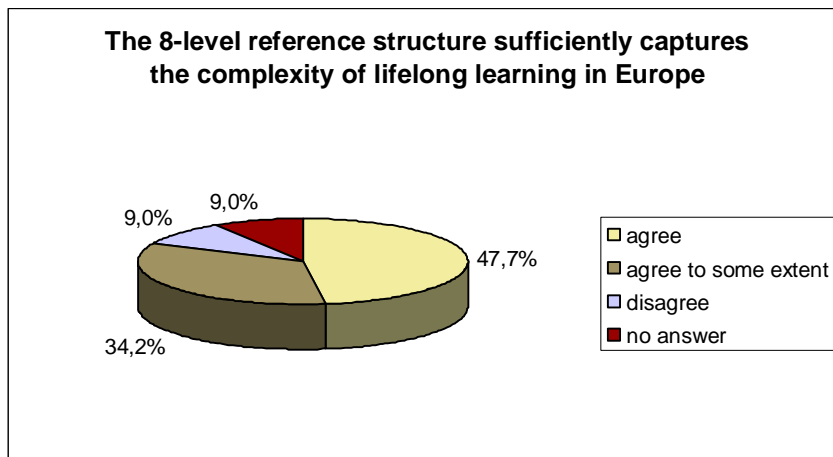
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[32] Weiß (1999), as quoted by Fahle and Hanf (2005)
[33] Fahle and Hanf (2005).
[34] Raffe (2005), p. 28.
[35] Hanf (2005), p. 5

Figure 2

The 8-level reference structure sufficiently captures the complexity of lifelong learning in Europe

9,0%
9,0%
47,7%
34,2%

- agree
- agree to some extent
- disagree
- no answer

Source: Own graphic based on European Commission

All in all the number of 8 levels seems acceptable for most stakeholders, providing for enough differentiation while much more levels would create unnecessary complexity[36]. A smaller number of levels could tend to result in ambiguity and lead to more leeway regarding the allocation to levels. It should be noted that there is no real qualitative differentiation for some qualifications above a certain level. For instance 4 or 5 levels would be sufficient for the differentiation of learning competences. It has to be further discussed how this reality can be reflected by the EQF.

The German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) emphasises the importance of an uneven number of levels in order to allow for a middle qualifications level[37]. The actual benefit of such a level, apart from its neutral function as dividing "upper" and "lower" levels, has not been outlined.

Irrespective of the number of levels, there are some aspects that require further discussion and have also been raised by many consultation process respondents.

The concern has been raised that the levels are too linear and hierarchical, i.e. they lack flexibility. The qualifications a person possesses are not necessarily equal on all levels. A young researcher might easily reach level 8 in the categories *skills* and *knowledge*. Whether this always involves the personal-vocational competence of "substantial authority" or "scholarly and professional integrity" may be questioned. This problem applies to all levels and may lead to distortions. Since the third category poses most problems in terms of identification, competences might become simply the product of skills and knowledge.

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[36] ESIB (2005).

In that case people with relatively high knowledge and skills levels will automatically be assigned to the correspondingly higher competence level. The other way around, people with lower *knowledge* and *skills* levels could wrongly be assigned to a too low competence level. In order to neither down - nor upgrade certain qualifications but to reflect a precise and realistic profile, it should be possible for a person to have competences, skills and knowledge from different levels.

The relationship of the EQF with other mobility and transparency instruments in Europe has been raised by many stakeholders. Given that the Bologna Process has already made headway in the concerning field, it has been argued that the EQF should build on those achievements.
The EQF will not replace the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), thus both will exist in parallel. Therefore compatibility seems vital. In the EQF proposal it is stated that the three EHEA – framework cycles correspond to the learning outcomes for EQF levels 6-8. Therefore, one who graduates from a Bachelor's programme should have attained the qualifications formulated at EQF level 6.
When linking the EQF to the Bologna Process or to higher education in general, it is important to bear in mind the central characteristic of the EQF: its focus on learning *outcomes*, irrespective of the learning pathways. During the consultation process a large number of respondents expressed concerns that the higher levels were too academic. Though the levels have been revised for the final proposal, this aspect deserves particular attention. Too much emphasis on learning outcomes that are associated with higher education would contradict the approach of the EQF since it encompasses *all* kind of education and training and validates informal and non-formal learning, including practical experience.
Given that the EQF aims to improve employers' ability to assess the competences of applicants, the highest EQF level should correspond to the highest level of vocational proficiency in any given profession. For example, a doctor and a hospital nurse possess very different qualifications. Even if their education and training pathways are different in terms of content and duration, both can reach the highest level of excellence in their domain. The doctor is by no means the better nurse.
Hence, many respondents underlined that the EQF must give consideration to this circumstance by ensuring that higher education does not offer the only route to qualifications

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[37] BIBB (2006), p. 4

at the higher levels.[38] Otherwise people in non-academic professions will be disadvantaged and the benefits of an EQF could become completely undermined.

The National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) even stress the need to open alternative ways of access to higher education and thus call for a level which serves as a common entry point for undergraduate higher education programmes.[39] People from the VET sector would have the possibility to have their competences recognised – where- and however acquired – and become allocated to this entry level.

3.2. Learning Outcomes

The focus on learning outcomes forms a central characteristic of the EQF and has been welcomed by a large number of stakeholders. In contrast to the traditional input-based approach which focused on education in terms of length of learning experience, type of institution or teaching methods, the outcomes approach does not ask where, when or how qualifications have been acquired. Instead, it focuses on what a person knows, understands and is able to do. The Commission points out that the shift to learning outcomes "introduces a common language making it possible to compare qualifications according to their content and profile and not according to methods and processes of delivery"[40].

This section seeks to outline the expectations placed upon outcomes-orientation, the purposes and character of learning outcomes as well as their further implications, particularly in the context of the EQF implementation process.

The outcomes-approach is not a new concept. Especially in higher education it has been gaining in importance during the last decade. In the course of the Bologna Process the merits and demerits of outcomes-approaches have been increasingly discussed.

While many proponents of the outcomes movement stress its benefit of increased effectiveness of education, opponents express scepticism about the emerging tendency to measure all and everything and to view education from a perspective that is widely associated with business or manufacturing.

One of the most frequently mentioned benefits of outcomes-based structures in education is the increased value of information for the learner: On the basis of statements indicating the learning outcomes of a programme, learners know what they can expect to achieve. This enables individuals to deliberately choose and compare education offers, which, like it is

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[38] Haffe (2005), p. 15
[39] ESIB (2005), p. 4
[40] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final

further argued, in turn will lead to greater accountability of education and training providers being judged on the basis of their learning outcomes. While some regard quality improvement as the corollary of this development, others utter concerns that education providers could tend to overload certain time-restricted learning programmes in order to attract students. This leads to the frequently raised question of who will be responsible for the assignment of teaching programmes to qualifications levels.

Internationally, learning outcomes are seen as a means for transparency purposes. Thus, they contribute to the mobility of workers and learners by facilitating the recognition of their qualifications.[41] Being able to assess people's actual competences, employers might be more likely to employ applicants from other countries.

As learning outcomes do not take into account the conditions under which qualifications are acquired, they are regarded to have significant capacity to link VET and higher education, assisting "the creation of multiple progression routes through and between different educational systems".[42]

A central characteristic of the outcomes approach is the paradigm shift from teaching to learning. The focus lies on the active, independent learner, whose learning process will be supported and managed by teachers. This learner-centred approach includes the recognition that a learning process goes beyond the time spent in a class room. In this spirit, the adoption of a learning outcomes approach inevitably involves the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, taking place in various learning environments and settings outside of formal education and training institutions.

Though learning outcomes have appeared to become an important part of twenty-first century approaches[43] to education, there is still less clarity across Europe about their precise meaning and their implementation. This can be attributed to the fact that the focus on learning outcomes requires a fundamental shift in education and training policies. Since most qualifications systems are organised "around the principles of equivalence and inputs"[44], which is reflected by formalised programmes and certificates, the outcomes approach will challenge conventional hierarchies[45].

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[41] Adam (2004), p. 8
[42] Adam (2004), p. 8
[43] Adam (2004), p. 3
[44] Young (2004), p. 2
[45] Raffe (2005), p. 11

So far the assumption that "different qualifications relate to fundamentally different types of learning and the acquisition of different types of knowledge"[46] has shaped education and training organisation. An outcomes-oriented qualifications framework like the EQF is based on the assumption "that outcomes can be separated from the way in which they are achieved"[47].

Thus it appears that the implementation of learning outcomes can not be reduced to practical questions but will certainly require a fundamental rethink. The EQF Staff Working Document had contained a table with "supporting and explanatory information". This Table 2 linked the qualifications levels with possible education pathways, for example the Bachelor Degree has been allocated to level 6.

The table has been severely criticized by a large number of consultation process respondents, arguing that what is disguised as "supporting information" fundamentally contradicts the philosophy and the objective of the EQF. For the final EQF proposal the table has been removed without substitution. However, this incident shows how easily even the promoters of outcomes-based approaches fall back into the old input-oriented method of thinking.

3.2.1. *Informal and Non-formal learning*

Personally, I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.

Winston Churchill

"The use of learning outcomes (…) will facilitate the validation of learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, which is in general seen as a key element of lifelong learning"[48]. So set forth by the Commission in the context of proposing the European Qualifications Framework.

In discussions related to learning situations and processes it is distinguished between two different categories besides the formal learning: non-formal and informal. There are still many uncertainties concerning the precise distinction of the formats, some arguing that they are too

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[46] Young (2004), p. 2
[47] Young (2004), p. 2

interwoven with each other for a categorisation.[49] The Commission has defined the three categories of learning activities as follows.

Categories of learning activities

- **Formal learning**
Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

- **Non-formal learning**
Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. It is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

- **Informal learning**
Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning is in most cases non-intentional (or „incidental"/random) from the learner's perspective.

A survey on lifelong learning launched by Cedefop in 2003 provides information on where people think they learn. Asked in which of 14 different settings they have learned something in the preceding twelve months, EU-15 citizens opted for much more informal than formal settings.[50] The former include a variety of learning contexts ranging from "being at home" to "travelling" or "political work".

39 % of respondents said they have learned in all three settings, i.e. formally, informally and non-formally. Less than 1 % of respondents think they have learned something exclusively in formal settings[51].

Even though there lacks information on what people have specified for themselves as learning, the provided data allow for the conclusion by Cedefop "that informal learning settings are an important component of the variety of learning contexts"[52].
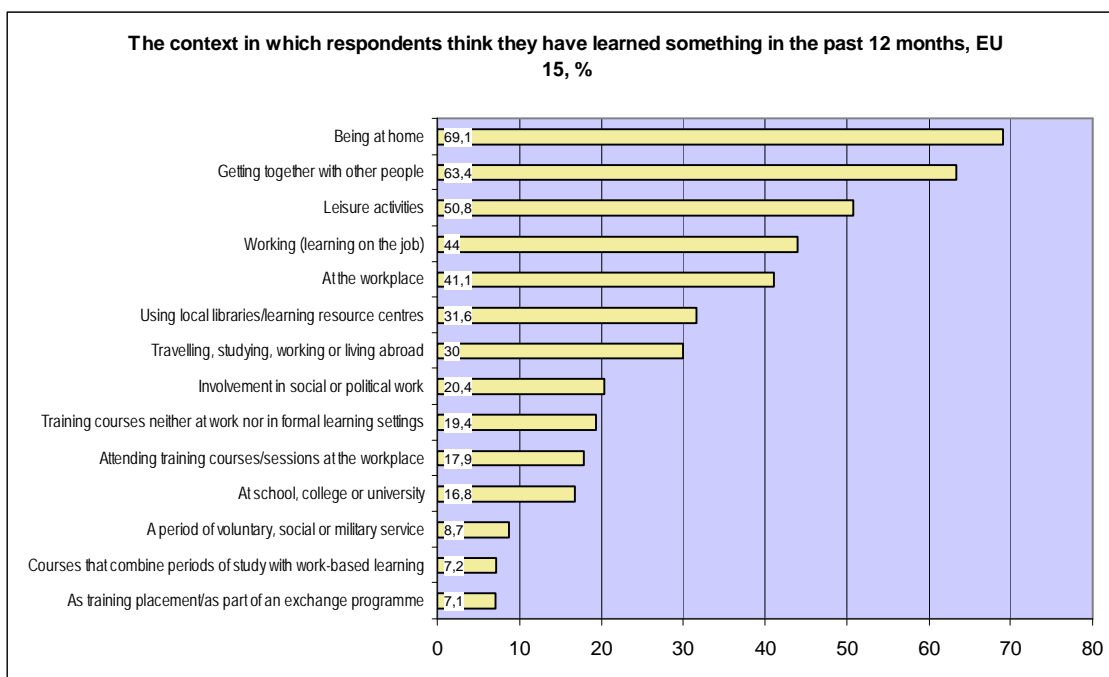
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[48] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final, p. 11
[49] Rogers, Alan (2006), p. 7
[50] Cedefop (2003), p. 13
[51] Cedefop (2004), p. 44

Figure 3

The context in which respondents think they have learned something in the past 12 months, EU 15, %

Context	%
Being at home	69,1
Getting together with other people	63,4
Leisure activities	50,8
Working (learning on the job)	44
At the workplace	41,1
Using local libraries/learning resource centres	31,6
Travelling, studying, working or living abroad	30
Involvement in social or political work	20,4
Training courses neither at work nor in formal learning settings	19,4
Attending training courses/sessions at the workplace	17,9
At school, college or university	16,8
A period of voluntary, social or military service	8,7
Courses that combine periods of study with work-based learning	7,2
As training placement/as part of an exchange programme	7,1

Source: Cedefop , 2003, p. 14

The finding that people do learn simply by active 'living' is not too illuminating. Let us imagine a person who has received well-structured high-quality education programmes from birth on, but has been totally isolated for this purpose from the rest of the world. No one would doubt that this person will lack fundamental skills and competences.

What has placed informal and non-formal learning at the centre of education and lifelong learning discourses is the notion that its outcomes do matter also in an employment- or continuing training-related context and thus must become validated. One example is the famous soft skills. For most EU employers certificates documenting formal education processes are important for the assessment of applicants. On the other hand, employers tend to rely less on such certificates since their information value on specifically required skills and soft skills is often regarded as insufficient.[53] It is argued that approaches that integrate all formats of learning could address this information shortcoming.

In May 2004 the Council published an introductory note on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, setting out that "in the context of the principle of learning throughout life, the identification and validation of non-

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[52] Cedefop (2003), p. 14
[53] Gillen (2006), p. 85

formal and informal learning aim to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, (…)."[54]

In a similar vein, Coffield states that "informal learning should no longer be regarded as an inferior form of learning whose main purpose is to act as the precursor of formal learning; it needs to be seen as fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right, at times directly relevant to employment and at other times not relevant at all"[55].

This statement includes an interesting aspect of informal learning considerations. Which learning is relevant and which is not? And how can it become identified and measured? Recognising that "learning is more than being taught"[56], the assumption "that common criteria can be identified for recognising both formal and informal learning creates a number of problems"[57].

Figure 2, based on data from the Eurobarometer published by Cedefop, has illustrated the large variety of contexts in which people say they learn. Though, the data provide no information on what people have specified as learning, nor on the content of their learning experience. Of those 69 % ticking 'being at home', some might think of the computer handbook that they have worked through, while others remember a documentary film about migratory birds or a new meal they have managed to cook.

While all three learning experiences certainly contain a valuable moment, it seems very difficult to express them in learning outcomes.

Given that the recognition of informal and non-formal learning has been raised in the course of the lifelong learning concept, which is in turn a consequence of the challenges posed by globalisation and the knowledge-based society, it can be questioned whether there is a real interest in validating the cooking experience from an economic point of view.

What is the fervently promoted idea of recognising informal and non-formal learning really about?

Is there really an intention to recognise the existing natural learning taking place in daily life or is there an imperative of learning outcomes that must be achieved through informal and non-formal learning?

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[54] Council of the European Union (2004): 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253
[55] Coffield (2000)
[56] Illich (1971), as quoted by Fischer
[57] Young (2004), p. 2

The data illustrated in Figure 2 do not reflect that people think they are do not learn in formal contexts. According to Cedefop, the result can rather be attributed to the fact that the proportion of middle-aged adults taking part in formal education and training is comparatively small. Following, their learning experiences take place primarily in work-related situations or leisure time contexts. Given that Cedefop refers to this reality, the conclusion that the Cedefop survey draws on the basis of the data provided in Figure 2 is surprising: "the majority of citizens think they learn best in informal settings"[58].

Since people have not been asked about where they learn *best* but where they think they have actually learned *something*, this interpretation may create a wrong basis for further analysis.

When people were asked which kind of future activities they would undertake to improve or upgrade professional skills, half mentioned formally organised settings.[59] While Cedefop primarily attributes these findings to the traditional longstanding ideas about where 'real' learning has to take place, they should allow for a further conclusion: many people might prefer formal settings for a number of reasons including structure, a specifically learning-oriented designed environment or social aspects like learning in groups, communication and meeting people with similar interests. Additionally, they might feel unable to acquire the requested professional qualifications in an informal way.

At this point it becomes clear that to strictly distinguish the three learning categories falls indeed short of some elemental aspects. All formal learning inherently includes some non-formal and informal learning. Since many respondents defined the lack of time as the main obstacle for taking part in formal education and training, it could be assumed that they would increasingly do so if formal learning offers became more flexible.

Though, it is further assumed that the recognition of informal and non-formal learning could have some motivational value. If citizens feel that informal learning efforts will benefit them not only personally but also in a professional sense, they might be encouraged to engage in non-formal and informal learning. For some critics this is a contradiction in itself since especially informal learning is naturally unpurposeful.

The paradigm shift from teaching to learning has caused some concerns regarding its implications. Recognizing the possibility of acquiring knowledge and skills outside of formal institutions does not absolve the state from its responsibility to provide the necessary resources for education and training. The concern that the state could retreat from its

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[58] Cedefop (2003), p. 13
[59] Cedefop (2003), p. 16

responsibility is further aided in the face of stagnating public expenditures on education and training.

In light of the above it can be noted that the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning raises many questions of which many are yet unsettled. As the recognition and the transfer of qualifications are always inevitably linked with the question of measurement, the next part will give an outline of the credit system that is designed for this purpose.

3.2.2. *A Credit System for VET*

More than half of respondents did not answer the Commission's question whether the EQF has to be linked to a credit system. Of those who did answer the question, 74 % considered a credit system essential for an operational EQF.[60] These data appear to express the prevailing uncertainty among stakeholders when it comes to the wider implications of an EQF. Since only 0.9 % explicitly disagreed with an EQF-linked credit system, the vast majority seems to feel that measurement is somehow necessary but lacks clear ideas regarding its realisation. This may be due to the lack of experience with outcomes approaches.

Credit systems require concerted criteria and measuring units. In the field of higher education two comparatively simple instruments have been developed: credit points work as a quantitative measure for learning accomplishments. One credit point corresponds with 30 hours of study workload and is thus process-oriented. The introduction of EU-wide Bachelor and Master Degrees provides for qualitative comparability.

The Copenhagen Declaration from 2002 set out the importance to develop a European credit transfer system for VET that, in contrast to the ECTS, encompasses all kinds of vocational education and training. In June 2005 the Commission published a report about the technical specifications of the European Credit System for VET (ECVET). A consultation process was commenced by the Commission in November 2006. A draft recommendation on ECVET could be adopted by the end of 2007. This section will just outline the main features of the planned credit system for VET.

The Commission points out that ECVET "enables the documentation, validation and recognition of achieved learning outcomes acquired abroad, in both formal VET or in non-formal contexts. It is centred on the individual and based on the validation and the accumulation of his/her learning outcomes, defined in terms of the knowledge, skills and

competences necessary for achieving a qualification"[61]. Having a look at the terminology, the close conceptual relations with the EQF become obvious.

The overall aim of ECVET is to facilitate the geographic and professional mobility of individuals, enabling them to follow their own pathway within and between different systems. Thus, ECVET is clearly embedded in the strategies for lifelong learning.

ECVET divides qualifications into units, which specify the expected learning outcomes. A unit is valued in terms of credits. Users will receive credits for their learning carried out in various situations, whether in college, exchange programmes or in work-related situations.

One practical example: It is suggested in the report that there are at least two or three parties involved in the organisation of an exchange programme or internship – a sending and/or receiving institution and the individual going abroad. In the run-up to the exchange, all parties will come to an agreement (about) which qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills and competences the learner or intern will acquire during his stay abroad. The written statement in which these qualification agreements, including units or credits, are settled is called the "Memorandum of Understanding" (MoU). The MoU forms a key element of ECVET, regarded to create a "climate of trust in which credit transfer can operate"[62]

Like the EQF, ECVET is based on voluntary participation of member states and their stakeholders. Though, the Commission clearly tries to encourage implementation: Institutions and VET providers, which provably apply the principles of ECVET correctly and completely, will be awarded with an ECVET label. Thus it will be transparent for VET users which institutions are meeting the criteria of ECVET, i.e. for instance recognise their units already achieved in an ECVET context. An ECVET label is therefore intended to "raise the fame of the provider as a transparent and reliable partner in European and international cooperation"[63]

In the face of the different timing of the EQF and the ECVET consultation processes – the latter having been initiated more than a year after that of the EQF - concerns have been expressed that both processes could develop in different directions, arguing that the EQF and ECVET should be linked right from the start. A later integration has been regarded as difficult in terms of conformity. However, the BIBB regards a consecutive development of the EQF and ECVET as reasonable. The report of the technical specifications introduces a complex set of principles larded with numerous new terms. Member States as well as stakeholders will

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[60] cedefop info 1/2006
[61] European Commission (2005): EAC/A3/MAR, p. 2
[62] ibid., p. 18
[63] European Commission (2005): EAC/A3/MAR, p. 20

need time to get into the subject, especially as "the definition and the description of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and the organisation of the unit have to be done at national level (…)"[64].

3.3. National Qualifications Frameworks

As stated above, the EQF does not entail legal obligations for the Member States. Though, the Commission states that "the EQF will only be relevant to individual citizens, employers and education and training providers after the referencing process has been carried out at national and/or sectoral level"[65].

Explicitly stated, this does not necessarily require the development of qualifications *frameworks*, it is rather decisive that the respective qualifications *system* will be linked to the EQF. Though, the Commission further points out that "from the perspective of the EQF, the development of national qualifications frameworks would increase the potential for success"[66].

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) are not a new invention at all, they just became a subject of particular interest in the course of the EQF debate.

Usually, NQFs follow the same principles like set out in the EQF, i.e. they are structured in a set of levels and qualifications described in learning outcomes. An NQF "takes all of a country's formally recognized qualifications and arranges them in a clearly defined structure"[67]. The EQF will form an overarching meta framework, providing a neutral reference to which the national levels will be related. Figure 3 depicts the functioning of this system.
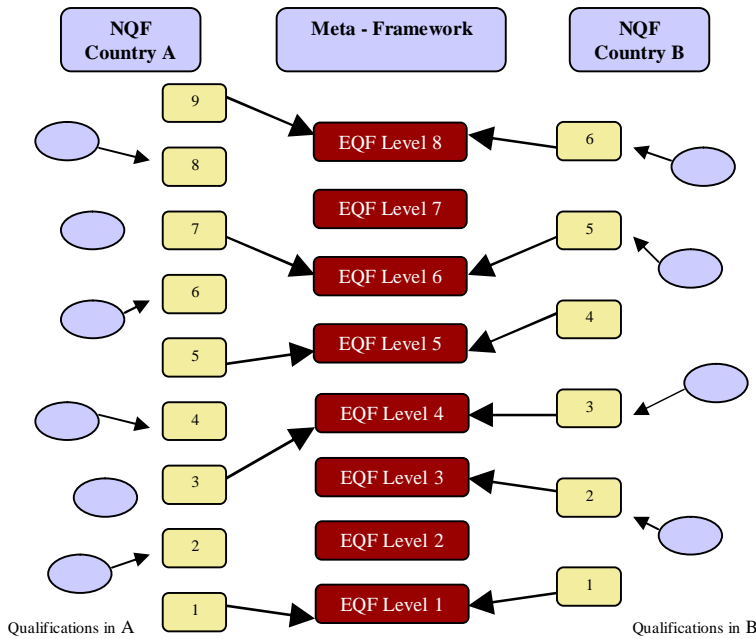
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[64] European Commission (2005): EAC/A3/MAR, p. 9
[65] European Commission (2006): COM (2006) 479 final, p. 11
[66] ibid. , p. 11
[67] BIBB

Figure 4

Source: own graphic based on European Commission

Particularly members of the Commonwealth do have a long tradition of outcome-based national qualifications frameworks. Other countries, like Germany or Poland, will have to build an NQF from scratch. The yet existing NQFs in Europe vary considerably in design and not all follow the above mentioned principles. While some encompass all national education sub-systems, others distinguish between vocational and general qualifications or vocational training and higher education.[68] In some countries the NQF entails legal obligations for certain parties, in others it is used on a voluntary basis. Very few states have integrated a credit system in their qualifications framework like done by Scotland.[69] Finally, not all states have based their frameworks on learning outcomes.

Mainly based on information by Cedefop, some examples of national frameworks below will give evidence of the existing diversity of designs within Europe.

Compared with most European countries, England's qualifications framework is particularly advanced. The framework includes all national qualifications from the certificate of compulsory school to university degrees. Every qualification is assigned to one of the qualifications fields *general*, *vocationally-related* or *occupational*.[70] In 2001 Ireland established the National Qualifications Authority (NQAI), which became concerned with the

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[68] Hanf and Hippach-Schneider (2005), p. 2
[69] ibid., p. 2

process of developing a national qualifications framework. All relevant players in the education sector were involved in the intensive consultation process. The result is a framework that consists of ten levels, defining the learning outcomes the learner can achieve in any way, i.e. informally and non-formally. Spain has developed its NQF in the mid-70s. The framework includes exclusively vocational qualifications, is subdivided in only five levels and not based on learning outcomes. While the Netherlands set up a national qualifications structure for vocational education in 1997, Croatia and the Czech Republic have recently taken first steps towards the development of a NQF.

The diversity does not end when it comes to the commitment to develop an overarching NQF. Some countries like Romania, Slovak Republic and Portugal have already settled development plans, including a time frame of implementation. Finland does not see the need for an overarching NQF and will further concentrate on the development of separate frameworks for higher education and for VET. Cyprus seems especially cautious to the development of NQF. Denmark, Norway and Belgium among others state that the decision on development requires further discussion and consultation at national level.[71]

The new member states tend to be generally more committed to the development of NQFs. Hungary views the development as a positive challenge and opportunity for modernising and restructuring its own education system.[72]

"Frameworks are a vehicle for demonstrating differences"[73] which in turn reflect fundamental characteristics of the individual country, the starting point, the prevailing philosophy of the government, the primary purpose of the framework and the relative power of the state vis a vis the private sector.[74] Thus, what has been presented so far are the results of national processes that have taken place in specific national settings. Young points out that it has been dismissed so far to have a look at the difficulties that have been faced by countries trying to introduce NQFs. He argues that the problems that have occurred must be analysed in order to not reproduce them within the next generation of NQFs – and, thus, not within the EQF. According to Young, no fully comprehensive national framework yet exists.[75]

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[70] Hanf (2001), p. 51
[71] Cedefop (2006): Newsletter
[72] BIBB
[73] BIBB
[74] Young (2004), p.5
[75] Young (2004), p. 1

On a national level, the process of assigning the various education and training programmes to an EQF level forms a key element for the implementation of the EQF. This inevitably leads to the question of responsibility. This aspect has also been raised by many consultation process respondents, like the European Association for the Education of Adults, asking who will be responsible for relating national qualifications and competences to the EQF.[76]

The process will involve national authorities, regional and sectoral bodies as well as labour, industry and education providers. Needless to say that these stakeholders have highly diverging interests and thus very different agendas on how a NQF should be designed and implemented.

Young points out that these questions have caused considerably difficulties and inter-departmental tensions before.[77] The results are compromises that became manifested in the existing NQFs.

Suggesting that new agencies and committees will be established at a national level in order to cope with the upcoming challenges faced by assignment and implementation, does not in itself simplify matters. While the responsibility question will just become displaced, such agencies could result in increased bureaucracy. If there can be achieved real flexibility through such procedures may be questioned.

A further potential problem regarding the development of EQF-related NQFs may arise from the fact that the outcomes-approach forms a new terrain for many European countries. As presented in the learning outcomes section above, a large number of national qualifications systems are traditionally input-based and process-oriented. Syllabuses form central parts of education and training organisation. In this context also the recognition of informal and non-formal learning – in the literature alternately brought up as a consequence or a rationale of outcomes-approaches – raises further potential problems. Traditionally input-oriented countries like for instance Germany often have quiet rigid systems with a high degree of formalisation and institutionalisation, socially attaching great value to formal degrees and certificates (also in a social sense). Thus, implementing an outcomes-approach involves fundamental changes that go (even) beyond practical tasks. Young sets out that in the past those countries that forced a radical one-off break with their previous qualifications systems have faced the most acute difficulties.[78]

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[76] European Association fort he Education of Adults (2005), p. 3
[77] Young (2004), p. 3
[78] ibid., p. 4

At this point it may be recalled again that states are not obliged to develop frameworks. Some countries might look for ways to relate their education and training programmes to the EQF without creating an own NQF. However, the draft EQF recommendation foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2009.

3.4. Subconclusion

The EQF is a voluntary instrument that serves as a translation device, increasing the transparency and transferability of qualifications in a Europe characterised by diversity.

Overall, more than 90 % of consultation process respondents gave a favourable opinion about the development of an EQF. Furthermore, ministries and regional authorities gave it 100% support.[79] These answers show that there is a considerable interest in creating a Europe that enables people to combine individual qualifications throughout the European space. However, whether this vision can become realised depends on a large number of factors.

The previous sections have focused on the EQF design and its implementation requirements. It has been shown that with the EQF proposal the actual implementation process has just begun. The success of the EQF will largely depend on the reference process that has to be carried out at national level. Whether establishing an overarching national framework or not, the linkage of national qualifications to the EQF involves political, administrative and educational challenges.

Various public, quasi-governmental and private institutions are involved in the field of national vocational education and training[80]. Given the diverse interests of these stakeholders, the question of who will be entitled to link national qualifications to the EQF, i.e. who recognises and certifies knowledge, skills and competences, will cause considerable difficulties. As presented above, the existing qualifications systems in Europe vary significantly, reflecting the different national traditions and organisation of education and training policies. Due to this diversity, it is nearly impossible to develop a common approach to the development and implementation of NQFs. Every country will face individual challenges, according to its political structure (for instance federalism or centralism), educational traditions and the commitment of stakeholders involved. Thus, it is very likely that the results will be very different as well. There will be strong and weak frameworks, some putting more emphasis on regulation, others on guidance and mapping. Such varying designs may hamper the creation of a basis for mutual trust between the different countries. It

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[79] European Commission (2006), p. 16

is obvious that "the creation of a qualifications framework will give players influence over the development, range and quality of qualifications"[81].Given that being related to an overarching European framework, NQFs do no longer serve merely national purposes but will have international implications, quality assurance has to play a central role in the future, being pivotal for the creation of mutual trust.

It must further be taken into account that the development of outcomes-based national qualifications frameworks involves some radical changes. The focus on learning outcomes forms a central characteristic of the EQF. Thus, for an operational EQF the outcomes approach "must be broadly accepted and understood by all stakeholders; it must be reality at institutional level"[82].

As set out before, outcomes-based qualifications systems are far from being the rule throughout Europe. In fact, for many countries the orientation towards learning outcomes requires no less than a revolutionary rethink of prevailing education and training organisation. At a practical level, an implementation of learning outcomes is a formidable undertaking that involves all educational players. Education and training providers will have the "difficult task of converting outcomes into teaching programmes"[83]. Further, there are some implications for teaching and learning that have been viewed very critically. Focussing exclusively on the 'products' of learning suppresses the inherent value of the learning experience itself. Especially in academic study the learning process is traditionally regarded as open-ended and not necessarily linear.[84] A detailed specification of outcomes is detrimental to this notion and may therefore encounter particular resistance from certain national stakeholders that view qualifications frameworks as "part of neo-liberal and market oriented approaches; undermining some of the most basic educational goals"[85].

As the core element of the EQF, the 8-level structure plays a crucial role for its success. An operative European framework requires a structure that is understandable and reflects the qualifications an individual possesses. The current structure has diverse weaknesses in this context. There have been raised several aspects by consultation process respondents that should be taken into account. Some regard the formulation of adequate descriptors. They must

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[80] Clement (2006), p. 5
[81] Fahle/Hanf (2005), p. 8
[82] ESIB (2005), p. 5
[83] Young (2004), p. 3
[84] Adam (2004), p. 7
[85] Young (2004), p. 1

ensure that academic and practical skills are equally valued. This means that the terms used for the learning outcomes at level 6-8 must not be borrowed from the higher education terminology.

Furthermore, in the current structure people are artificially placed at the same level across the knowledge, skills and competences descriptors. This might be the case to some degree for people graduating from teaching programmes that have been designed with regard to certain level learning outcomes from the outset. However, these programmes still have to be developed. In reality people do possess qualifications from different levels, which the EQF needs to reflect in order to fulfil its function and to avoid distortions.

It is questionable in general whether it is possible to separate a person's qualifications into the categories skills, knowledge and competences. However, since some artificial separation seems necessary for the purpose of the EQF, the descriptors need to be refined. There will be more amendments necessary that are not foreseeable at this point of stage. Thus, the EQF must be based on a flexible structure that allows future changes and improvements based on practical experiences gained over time.

The successful implementation of the EQF will be complicated by another central aspect. Definitions and the review of terms are always indispensable parts of academic literature and research. In the context of international instruments that build on the cooperation of a large number of differing national stakeholders, the role of terminology gains particular importance. Albeit some qualifications systems are more outcomes-oriented than others, the EQF introduces a 'new language of learning outcomes' that most countries have yet to master and therefore still need to learn in terms of both 'vocabulary' and 'grammar'. Though the Commission provided definitions of key terms relevant in the context of an EQF, it should be recognised that these do not guarantee the same understanding in different countries, and not even within countries. Many consultation process respondents expressed concerns regarding the clarity of terms and concepts. Given that mutual understanding is a precondition for mutual trust[86], the clarification of concepts underlying the EQF plays a key role for the implementation process. It must be noted that without comprehensible and clear terms Europe's diversity, having been the reason for developing an EQF, will become its inherent weakness.

Uncertainties in this field are further reflected by very different interpretations of the purposes of certain EQF characteristics. By focussing on learning outcomes the EQF will "separate

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[86] Raffe (2005), p. 23

qualifications from educational institutions"[87]. This includes the assumption that there are flexible and thus numerous ways to acquire a qualification. In this context informal and non-formal learning become regularly mentioned. Though, it appears that what is the end and what is the mean varies according to requirements of argumentation. Whilst some argue that the recognition of informal and non-formal learning itself is imperative in times of knowledge-based societies and thus promote learning outcomes as the means to achieve this, others refer to learning outcomes in the context of translating highly differing formal national qualifications. In the latter line of argumentation, that outcomes approaches might facilitate the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is mentioned as a convenient side-effect. Such diverging argumentations show that there are different perspectives regarding the underlying concepts of the EQF. The main purposes of the EQF and thus of national qualifications frameworks are yet not very well structured which might be additionally hindering for the development of functional NQFs.

On the way towards a European Qualifications Framework there has been made substantial progress, at the same time there are still a large number of challenges regarding its implementation. In light of the above presented implementation requirements, it can be questioned whether the EQF really just forms a voluntary, neutral translation device, or a driver of change[88].

As so often is the case when discussing EU policies, it is argued that the difficulties presented above can only be overcome by new forms of cooperation, extensive consultations, increased communication and a broad commitment to common goals. In the case of the EQF, this does not only apply to the international level but to every single national system and sector.

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[87] Young (2004), p. 6
[88] Raffe (2005), p. 9

4. <u>Promoting Lifelong Learning</u>

4.1. Scrutinising Lifelong Learning

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.

Alvin Toffler[89]

When analysing the proposed EQF it has to be kept in mind that the EQF is not an end in itself. It is an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, which is explicitly emphasised through its full name. Addressing the question of to what extent the EQF actually contributes to the realisation of the European area of lifelong learning it is worth having a closer look at the concept of lifelong learning.

As highlighted by 10.500.000 google hits[90], lifelong learning has long entered the mainstream of political vocabulary[91]. Both at EU and at national level all education documents earlier or later refer to the concept of learning throughout life. The Eurobarometer survey published by Cedefop in 2003 for the first time asked European citizens for their views on lifelong learning[92]. The survey unfortunately did not include the candidate countries but was limited to the then EU-15.

In all surveyed countries, at least 73% of the respondents think that lifelong learning is important.[93] On average, 87.9% EU-15 citizens agree with this statement. With even more than 90% of respondents agreeing few countries lie clearly above average.[94]

Lifelong learning has been insistently put forward as a solution. The observation that "at the level of general commitment, policy endorsement of lifelong learning is virtually universal"[95] sounds wonderfully harmonious and could make one feel optimistic.

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[89] Though Toffler used this quote in the foreword he wrote for "Rethinking the Future" edited by Rowan Gibson in 1999, for the sake of correctness it must be noted that the original thought did appear in Toffler's book "Future Shock" published in 1970 and that Toffler attributes it to psychologist Herbert Gerjouy, citing a personal interview. The full statement of Gerjouy reads as follows: "*The new education must teach the individual how to classify and reclassify information, how to evaluate its veracity, how to change categories when necessary, how to move from the concrete to the abstract and back, how to look at problems from a new direction -how to teach himself. Tomorrow's illiterate will not be the man who can't read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn*" (p.414).
[90] Retrieved at 9 November 2006
[91] Field (2000), p.250
[92] Cedefop (2003): Lifelong learning: citizens' views.
[93] Cedefop (2003): Lifelong learning: citizens' views.
[94] Germany, Iceland.
[95] Field (2000), p. 251

It is worth noting that this broad commitment is not reflected by remarkably increased public expenditure on education at a national level. In 1997 - following the European Year of Lifelong Learning - the 15 EU Member States invested 4.86% of their GDP in education. In 2003 the expenditures totaled 5.2%. The new Member States' education expenditures tend to be slightly higher than this average.[96]
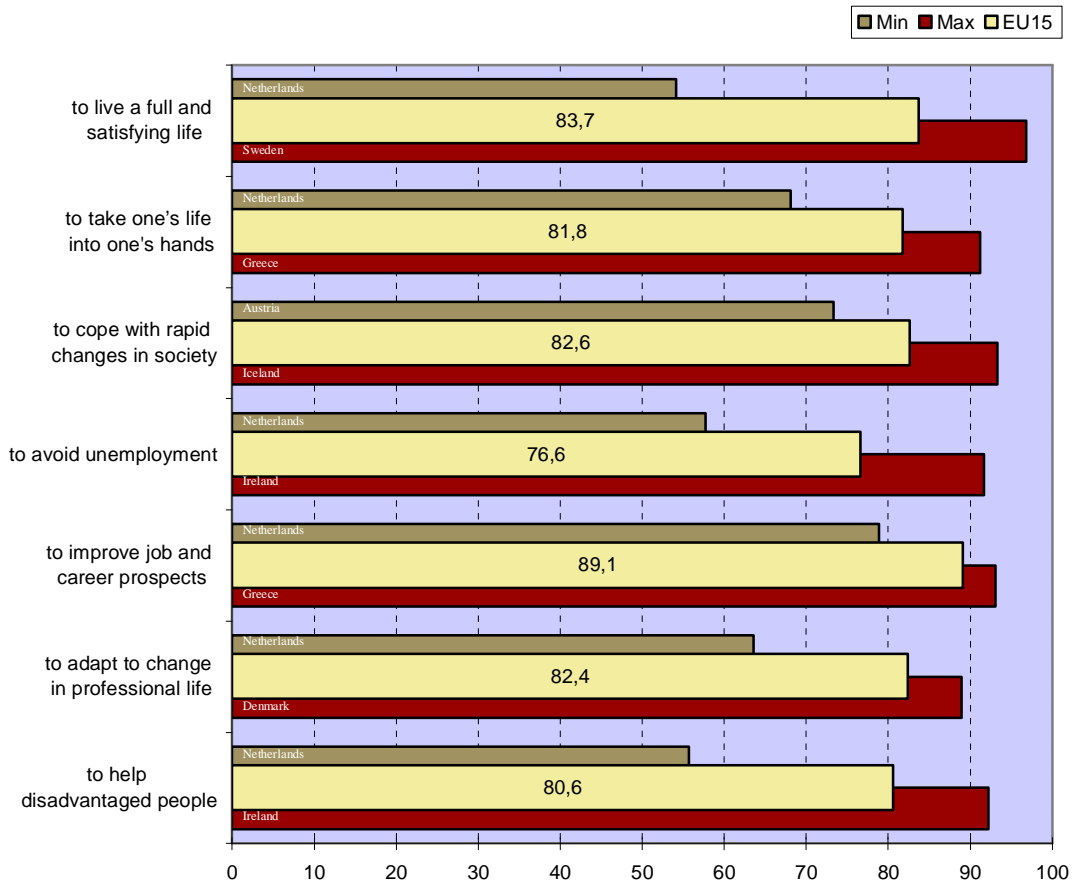
There are more reasons that should keep one from being too enthusiastic about the profuse endorsement of lifelong learning. Legitimately, it rather causes some skepticism when recalling that there is no uniformity in Europe, neither in a political nor in an economic, social, or cultural sense. This leads to the question also put forth by Wim Nijhof: "Why should there be just one coherent vision of lifelong learning within so much diversity?"[97]

The following figure, based on information by Cedefop, illustrates how European citizens are evaluating the importance of lifelong learning for certain purposes. The degree of consent to the statements differed significantly between the Member States. Thus it appears that how citizens interpret lifelong learning and the potential they attribute to it, is largely influenced by the national characteristics of their environment.

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[96] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu
[97] Nijhof (2005), p. 1

Citizens' views: Proportion of respondents agreeing with a series of statements about lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is useful and important...

Legend: ■ Min ■ Max □ EU15

Statement	Min country	EU15	Max country
to live a full and satisfying life	Netherlands	83,7	Sweden
to take one's life into one's hands	Netherlands	81,8	Greece
to cope with rapid changes in society	Austria	82,6	Iceland
to avoid unemployment	Netherlands	76,6	Ireland
to improve job and career prospects	Netherlands	89,1	Greece
to adapt to change in professional life	Netherlands	82,4	Denmark
to help disadvantaged people	Netherlands	80,6	Ireland

Source: Own graphic based on Cedefop, 2004

First of all, it must be noted that the term lifelong learning is rather ambiguous and thus allows for the attribution of all those positive aspects generally associated with education and learning.

Secondly, there are indeed quiet a few critical voices that challenge the glorification of lifelong learning, however they are just not as loud as those fervently promoting the idea.

A starting point for many critics can be found in the fact that, in contrast to the early 1970s, today it is not "lifelong education" that is promoted. A closer look at the subtle, almost imperceptible semantic shift from 'lifelong education' to 'lifelong learning' reveals that a far-reaching alteration in education and training policies has taken place.

Emancipatory and humanistic goals have been the driving force for the formulation of lifelong education in the 1970s. The holistic concept was based on the idea that education must be available for all citizens in order to create a better society through increased civic

responsibility and the "emancipation of the individual as a world citizen"[98]. In contrast to this community-oriented approach, today's lifelong learning emphasizes the role of (the citizen as a) the learner.

In 2005 the European Commission defined 8 key competences for lifelong learning. Along with communicative and language skills and mathematical and digital competences, "learning to learn" has been defined as the fifth key competency. After the acquisition of fundamental basic skills, "an individual should be able to access, gain, process and assimilate new knowledge and skills"[99]. This formulation clearly refers to a central component of lifelong learning concepts: self-directed learning. The individual citizen must become motivated and activated to adapt to rapidly changing job demands. "Unlike most policy goals that were characteristic of welfarism, lifelong learning is typical of the new policy objectives in requiring action by civil society rather than by agencies of the state."[100] This tendency is also reflected by a terminology change in several public documents dealing with education and economic objectives: practically, all European citizens become 'individual learners'. The learner's performance will – possibly - be rewarded with increased employability.

The economic imperatives set out both at national and Community level, require that "all instruments – including human resources – have to adapt to, and accommodate, this basic principle"[101]. Spare time becomes qualification time, spent on self-directed learning. Yet, self-directed is by no means the equivalent of self-determined[102].

This vision does not leave much space for unspecific learning and proves that the learning process itself, in terms of personal development and fulfilment as a human being, has receded into the background. This development has caused severe criticism, as a learning or education process cannot be equated with the mere demand-oriented accumulation of knowledge.[103]

Thus, the vision of lifelong learning is ambivalent. What sounds like the epitome of an advanced enlightened society with free access to education encouraging personal development, tends to become increasingly reduced to economic imperatives.

Hufer couches these concerns through the terms in the title of his book "Knowledge without education?". Hufer even argues that in the 21th Century alienation and exploitation will

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[98] Nijhof (2005), p. 3
[99] European Commission (2005): COM(2005)548 final
[100] Field (2000), p. 249
[101] Nijhof (2005), p. 2
[102] Hufer (2002), p. 96
[103] Hufer (2002), p. 97

come via "lifelong learning"[104] and its flanking concepts. His further argument that lifelong learning policies are a mechanism of exclusion and will increase the inequalities of those who can afford education and those who can not, is shared by many critics.

However, this does not mean that all instruments that are adorned with the appendix 'for lifelong learning' must be resisted per se. Yet it should be discerned that lifelong learning policies are not necessarily in line with some of the most basic educational goals. A closer look at the design and purposes of instruments may shed light on which aspect and which vision of lifelong learning they promote.

45 % of EU-15 citizens think lifelong learning is mainly for those who did not do well at school.[105] In the face of the enormous efforts that have been made to promote lifelong learning, this number is startling. It appears that lifelong learning is widely associated with formal education, qualifications and even 'catching up' to a standard.

It seems that Europe is far from being what has been called a 'culture of lifelong learning'. The term 'culture' implies that something is a natural, integrated part of the way of life. Thus, people need to perceive learning as a quality factor of life not in an exclusively material sense. Establishing a culture of lifelong learning involves more than mobility and transparency fostering instruments. The foundations for a culture of lifelong learning need to be laid in school. Instead of simply gathering knowledge people must learn how to learn and, after all, how to enjoy to learn.

In a culture of lifelong learning people will demand access to high quality education. In turn, the latter is a condition for achieving genuine lifelong learning. The current level of public expenditures on education is far from adequate and even audacious in the face of the broad commitment made to educational goals at the Lisbon European Summit. The actual efforts that have been made so far in providing access to education for *all* people are quiet poor.

The challenges faced by economic imperatives are real. The efforts to realise the vision of lifelong learning should be just as authentic.

The Eurobarometer shows that most EU citizens take up education and training for both work-related and personal motives. Comparatively few take part in education for just either of these motives. Creating incentives for learning needs to incorporate these findings and embrace both social and personal benefits.

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[104] Hufer (2002), p.101

4.2. Guidance and Counselling

There has long evolved a steadily growing, international and highly competitive market for vocational education and training. Furthermore, the EU set up a large number of programmes and initiatives that both directly and indirectly aim to create better access to learning opportunities. While instruments like the EQF focus on achieving the practical basis for increased mobility, PLOTEUS ensures that people *know* about the range of possibilities that have been created for them. Information is provided through a large number of channels. And for both opportunities and information there applies 'the more the better'.

This development runs the risk of ignoring an aspect that should be of particular importance.
The larger the variety of learning opportunities, the less clarity there will be for the individual citizen. Nowadays, people need to decide all the time in all spheres of life. While daily decisions like what to buy in the face of thousands of products in a supermarket or even the decision on where to spent the vacation are not necessarily of durable importance, deciding on education pathways may involve essential consequences. Since the needs of citizens are highly individual, pure information does not create a sufficient basis for decisions about such vital spheres.
Thus, increasing opportunities in education and training will also increase the demand for counselling and guidance. Meeting these demands requires complex international competence in conjunction with country-specific knowledge.

During the last years the EU has increasingly recognised the importance of professional guidance. In 2004 the Council published a draft resolution on "Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practises in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe". The paper sets forth that all European citizens should have access to guidance services at all life stages.
As for the most useful source of information to improve learning and career prospects, EU-15 citizens most frequently mentioned teachers and trainers (20 %). Only 6 % mentioned career advisors and employment counsellors, with Nordic respondents being more likely to select this item.[106]
Since formalised public services for guidance and counselling are much more common in Northern than in Southern Europe, these findings allow for two conclusion that what people

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[105] Cedefop (2003)

regard as helpful sources partly depends on what they are used to and what is provided to them. Teachers are obviously regarded as competent for guidance and help since they are naturally involved in the field of education. Vocational guidance and counselling is organised very differently in Europe. Though, they have a common similarity: they all focus rather directly on education, training and employment.[107]

This approach though takes a two narrow view on counselling in the face of lifelong learning strategies. Having a look at our transatlantic neighbours reveals that there have been developed quiet more advanced approaches. Canada is regarded as the leader in the field of "Career Guidance". Career – and labour market information are regarded as a public good which has to be available for all citizens.

"Career Development" is not confined to the planning of the job-related, occupational career in a classical sense but means the personal development in terms of individual 'life planning'. In this sense, life and work are regarded as unity[108]. This approach is accompanied by corresponding instruments like "The Blueprint for Life/Work Design", which enables citizens to define their individual goals and offers ways how to achieve them. Such a holistic approach, corresponding with the goal to create a culture of lifelong learning, is missing so far in Europe.

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[106] Cedefop (2004), p. 89
[107] Cedefop (2004), p. 90
[108] BIBB (2005)

5. <u>Conclusion</u>

The expectations that have been placed upon the development of a European Qualifications Framework are numerous. They correspond with the goals that have been set out at the Lisbon Summit and subsequent conferences and documents dealing with European education and training policies.

The various objectives of the EQF can be seen as chain links that are largely interdependent. It is thus necessary to identify the practical premises of a fully functional EQF. Therefore it must be noted that the EQF forms no operable instrument by itself. Its practicability and success depends not solely on a broad commitment to the wider goals but requires concrete implementation measures at national level. This thesis has presented that the member states will have to deal with a large range of challenges regarding the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks and their linkage to the EQF. The Commission's final EQF proposal does not sufficiently take into account these difficulties when setting the timeframe for the referencing process. The national implementation processes will depend on the cooperation and commitment of all national stakeholders involved. The permeability between vocational education and training and higher education within national systems can not be addressed by the EQF but has to be a subject of national qualifications frameworks. Due to the highly varying national qualifications systems in Europe it is hardly possible to forecast how many countries will be able to meet the requirements by 2009. It needs to be seen to what extent the EQF will stimulate the respective national and sectoral reform processes. The difficulties the single countries will face are as diverse as their education and training organisation and their traditions in this field.

A successful Europe-wide referencing process further depends on a broad understanding of the concepts underlying the EQF. Assuming that the definition of key terms ensures the same understanding and interpretation across highly differing countries falls short of the subject's complexity and will weaken the EQF from the outset.

In the case that the difficulties presented above can be overcome, the EQF will provide a neutral reference point, increasing the transferability and comparability of national qualifications. In the course of the euphoric promotion of an EQF there have been formulated a range of expectations that go beyond what a European framework can actually achieve.

The EQF is a translation device and therefore uses an outcomes approach in order to increase comparability. The assumption that the shift to learning outcomes itself will *facilitate* the

recognition of informal learning is a popular fallacy. Theoretically, learning outcomes allow for this possibility since it is their nature to separate qualifications from the way how they are achieved. Though, the real difficulty lies in finding assessment methods for learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Though the Commission has published a number of principles on the subject, the enormous challenge will be faced at national level. Even with an outcomes-based credit system like ECVET, real informal learning like daily life learning is nearly impossible to measure.

Further, the expectance that the EQF will create mutual trust between the different national stakeholders must be viewed with great caution. It must rather be noted that trust will be a precondition for a successful EQF and that its creation is a sensitive topic that has to be accompanied by intensive communication and further supporting policies.

However, the success of an EQF will not depend on the number of expectations that have been placed upon it but quiet the contrary. The EU and the Commission tend to overload new developed instruments. Hence they become too complex and try to embrace too many objectives and functions at the same time[109]. The EQF should not become overburdened by too many subsidiary purposes but focus on the translation function. Both structure and objectives of the EQF must be clear and understandable. Further, information and training offers to all national stakeholders involved will be vital for a successful implementation of the EQF. This must not be restricted to experts in that field but must include information to citizens, ensuring that the EQF and its flanking concepts are not becoming the "secret language of the education and training apparatus"[110].

The development of NQFs and their linking with the EQF has to be viewed as a long-term process involving a development phase which could start by testing the EQF in certain sectors. The process could be organisationally supported through the formation of groups comprising of countries with similar structures or strategies.[111] Countries with traditionally input-based qualifications systems need to follow an incremental approach when implementing learning outcomes. A radical break with prevailing education and training structures is neither necessary nor promising.

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[109] Cedefop (2006)
[110] Raffe (2005), p. 51
[111] BIBB (2006), p. 5

All EQF objectives like better comparability of qualifications and increased mobility are intended so serve one superior goal: The realisation of a European area of lifelong learning. That includes the assumption that the *fully implemented* EQF will be a powerful instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning.

A closer scrutiny of the lifelong learning concept has shown its complexity and the controversies that it has caused. In short, lifelong learning policies are about creating an environment in which individuals can learn. In this spirit, the EQF forms an instrument that will – once successfully implemented – enhance the practical preconditions for lifelong learning in Europe. Though, by increasing the transferability of qualifications the EQF tackles one of the obstacles for lifelong learning rather than contributing to the creation of what has been introduced above as a 'culture of lifelong learning'.

Europe needs to follow a more integrated approach to lifelong learning that balances personal, social and economic interests; up to now it appears that "lifelong learning is regarded primarily as a source of competitive advantage"[112]. As an elastic term, lifelong learning has become a popular buzzword in European education and training policies that is not underpinned by solid and comprehensive strategies. First of all, the stagnating public expenditures on education and training are not in line with the fervent promotion of lifelong learning.

In order to create a culture of lifelong quantitative instruments like the EQF must be accompanied by a large number of supporting policies. Quality assurance and counselling will have to play a major role in future education and training policies. European citizens are confronted with an increasingly complex offer of learning opportunities and a large number of new European instruments. Facing this mushrooming of programmes and initiatives, people will need free access to public counselling services. In order to enable European citizens to find their individually adequate learning and education pathways, counselling needs to be set in a more holistic framework of life planning. Canada provides a successful example of this approach.

It should not lost out of sight an ongoing updating of the EQF.[113] The involvement of European citizens should be a major issue in the future. Both at EU and at national level the individual end-users needs and interests must be incorporated. According to the Commission, the EQF will serve policy makers, employers, education and training providers and individual

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[112] Field (2000), p. 251

citizens. Whether the diverse interests of all these stakeholders can actually be combined and balanced, seems questionable. Genuine national consultation processes and sufficient time will be pivotal for the success of an overarching European Qualifications Framework since "consensus is the bedrock of trust and all qualifications depend on trust between providers and users that is built up over time".[114]

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[113] EAEA (2005).

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[114] Young (2004), p.4

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Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	In the EQF, 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).	In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

Level 5* The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7*** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialsed problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8**** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.

Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

* The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5

** The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6

***   The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7

**** The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8