

Conclusions for follow-up from the Irish Presidency Conference on quality assurance in qualifications frameworks

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European qualifications frameworks can facilitate the comparison and recognition of qualifications across Europe on the basis of mutual trust. Qualifications frameworks make credible contributions to mutual trust when they are supported by strong quality assurance systems. Only in this way can we have confidence that the qualifications are fit for purpose and that those holding qualifications can perform the tasks that society proposes to them, including participating in lifelong learning and working for others or creating new employment for themselves and others.

Over 150 delegates from over 35 countries discussed a wide range of issues over two days. The following conclusions were identified for follow-up. The proceedings will later be published in full.

1. We encourage the Commission, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group and the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) to look at ways of facilitating greater dialogue between the main actors in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) on the topic of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. The EQF Advisory Group and the BFUG working group on structural reforms, in co-operation with ENQA and EQAVET, should review and make proposals to strengthen the common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET, such as found in Annexe 3 to the EQF Recommendation.
2. Providers in the VET and HE sectors and their respective public authorities are urged to make their quality assurance arrangements mutually intelligible, to share good practices across sectors and to learn about each other's approaches to implementing learning outcomes.
3. Those charged with the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should incorporate reference to NQFs based on learning outcomes.
4. Similarly, the current evaluation of EQAVET should be a launchpad to reinforce the implementation of learning outcomes and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to improve programmes and generate more widespread trust in VET qualifications. The Commission should explore how to give greater international transparency and comparability to diverse quality assurance systems used in VET throughout Europe.
5. We call on national authorities to communicate more effectively the quality assurance and qualifications instruments developed at a European level to education and training providers in order to change the cultures of pedagogy and practice in their systems. The authorities should also evaluate the effectiveness of such communications efforts.
6. Member states should ensure that the initial and continuing formation of teachers, trainers and lecturers should develop the competence of educators in the use of the learning outcomes paradigm to promote student-centred learning. The Commission, working with the Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe, should examine

how best to promote the implementation of this recommendation.

7. Employers, especially through their intermediate bodies, should express their skills needs and assist the bodies responsible for qualifications and NQFs to ensure that these needs are reflected in qualifications.
8. Feedback from employers and other social partners, as well as from learners, is critical to ensuring that the quality assurance systems function effectively. We call on employers, individually and through their intermediate bodies, to participate in local internal quality assurance of education and training providers and in the external quality assurance systems organised at national or other levels. We consider however that providers of education and training must in turn match the commitment of employers by responding to the feedback received.
9. Member states should design or extend their NQFs to accommodate quality assured qualifications arising from outside current formal systems. The Commission, with the EQF Advisory Group, should explore methods to ensure coherent alignment of international qualifications with NQFs and EQF.
10. Empowerment of various stakeholders in the education and training systems in framework development and implementation is an essential feature of the European model. Public authorities, providers, and social partners in member states are encouraged to support similar developments in other regions through taking part in bilateral and multilateral projects and initiatives. The Commission, with EQF Advisory Group and European Training Foundation, is asked to consider how best to respond to requests from countries outside the Education and Training 2020 Policy Cooperation to demonstrate the affinity of their NQFs to the EQF. National qualifications authorities and their European counterparts are urged to support measures that enhance mutual recognition of qualifications between Europe and the rest of the world. We support the proposal that a bridging declaration on the recognition of qualifications between Europe and Asia be brought to the Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers of Education in May 2013.
11. We look forward to the Commission follow-up to the communication *Rethinking Education* in particular the European Area of Skills and Qualifications which aims to increase synergies between transparency tools. We encourage member states and other stakeholders to participate in this debate.