

## SWOT analysis

### Recommendations on how SQFs could be refined to make work processes transparent

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For further information on the project please consult: [www.project-nqf-sqf.eu](http://www.project-nqf-sqf.eu)

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Short summary:

The objective of WP4 is to describe the way of referencing SQFs to the EQF.

SQFs are available in various aggregate states: sometimes there is only a draft available, sometimes “isolated” sectoral qualifications neither to be considered a part of a sectoral nor NQF, sometimes already elaborated systems exist which could work like full-fledged NQFs.

Although their relationship to the work process seems obvious according to their sector-orientation, it is not self-evident that this relationship is properly expressed in a way that the sectoral qualification becomes comparable with similar qualifications embedded in NQFs.

In order to decide how sectoral qualification approaches could best be referenced to the EQF – directly or over NQFs – it is also important to know what the relationship of sectoral systems to national systems is.

It has therefore to be investigated which stakeholders are supporting a SQF and if they are able and willing to fulfill quality assurance issues comparable to those mentioned in the list of referencing criteria provided by the EQF Advisory Group.

The aim of deliverable 15 is to develop a SWOT analysis to draft recommendations on how the selected SQFs could be enhanced and refined in order to make work processes transparent.

## (1) Working methodology

Information collected and analyzed in deliverables 12, 13 and 14 (see table below) is used to develop a SWOT analysis to draft recommendations on how the selected SQFs could be enhanced and refined in order to make work processes transparent.

Sectors
ICT
Logistics
Public services
Construction
Construction
Retail

## (2) SWOT analysis

Although the relationship between SQFs and work processes seems obvious according to their sector-orientation, it is not self-evident that this relationship is properly expressed in a way that the sectoral qualification becomes comparable with similar qualifications embedded in the NQFs and in the EQF.

In order to decide how sectoral qualification approaches could best be referenced to the EQF – directly or over the NQFs – it is also important to know what the relationship of sectoral systems to national systems is, if their existence mirrors a critical position of sectoral stakeholders against NQFs, or if they can – in a wider sense – be considered supplements of the national systems.

For this purpose, a SWOT analysis was carried out in order to draft recommendations on how the SQFs analyzed could be enhanced and refined to make work processes transparent. In other words, the results of the SWOT analysis performed on individual sectors have been joined yielding to the following table which can be considered the coherent synthesis of all collected data.

SWOT analysis	
<b>STRENGTHS</b>	Referencing SQFs to the EQF is useful to enable and increase permeability, transparency and comparability of Qualifications.
	Referencing SQFs to the EQF is useful to enable mobility of workers.
	SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs. It is the political correct way, because it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability. Furthermore, this guarantees a direct link between the National Agencies for the Qualification Frameworks and the European Commission.
	Referencing SQF to NQF and than to EQF is useful to make a Qualification aligned with local, national and transnational perspective.
	Referencing SQFs to the EQF is useful to implement a target-setting and quality-assurance tool for training providers.
	Referencing SQFs to the EQF through NQFs is useful to develop EU-regulated sectors Qualifications.
	SQFs are work oriented and work orientation is also implicitly formulated in the Employability grid.
	SQFs are work oriented and work orientation is also implicitly formulated in the EQF.
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	Promote mobility in the European Countries is not so easy, because a Level 4 in a Country must not mean Level 4 in another European Country. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of European Qualifications is not working well and the reason for this often is the protection of the own labour market.
	The link SQF-NQF (and than EQF) could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages. For this reason, and for the fact that NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour world, industries prefer a direct link SQF-EQF.
	A key point that should be considered when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the difference between competences and performance needs. Usually, qualifications are described in terms of competences, while wages are linked to performance. These two points of view are not related to each other.

	<p>In some cases Qualifications are as diverse as the cultures they represent. In fact, some NQFs are not oriented only on work processes, but also on values. These orientations lead to conflicts in daily life work practice, e.g. if the interests of clients and employers are not identical.</p> <p>It is preferable an indirect link between SQFs and the EQF through the NQFs. Depending on the point of view this could be a strength or a weakness. It is a strength if we think in terms of decrease the complexity of the overall system of referenceability and it is a weakness if we think in terms of opportunities of valorisation of the sectoral international visibilities and interaction.</p> <p>Referencing the SQFs directly to the NQFs is the political correct way, but for industries it is a big problem to apply their qualifications to the NQFs. In particular, companies fear that the levels could change and/or influence the salary of their employees. As an example, if companies make use of NQFs, it could come to some conflicts (power or policy), e.g. Labour Union says somebody has a Level 3 and companies decide it is a Level 2.</p> <p>The work-orientation criterion (explicit in the Employability grid) is not so easy to consider in practice. In fact, SQFs could be "real" work-objective oriented (like in the EQF), if SQFs levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry or "in theory" work-objective oriented, if SQFs levels fit only in part to the needs of the labour market. Furthermore, only in some cases the relation among "knowledge", "skills" and "competences" of the SQFs is aligned with the logic of the EQF.</p> <p>Enterprises very often change their work requirement. However, curricula often change only every 5 years. This means that the learner needs learning-competence to keep up-to-date with work requirements. Therefore, it is important to consider in how far a successful implementation of SQFs/NQFs/EQF is based on the right environment, which delivers the right possibilities.</p> <p>For some stakeholders if national systems are well structured and established, doesn't exist a purpose to move to EQF.</p> <p>Relevance of language barrier.</p>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<p>The main opportunity is to overcome not only the gap between the different European VET and qualification systems, but also the differences in the content and interpretation of occupations on the European labour market.</p> <p>One opportunity to correctly link SQFs to EQF is harmonise sectoral Qualifications across Europe.</p> <p>Another opportunity is identify employability features and attract employees with a clear education framework.</p> <p>EU demands of homogenising education frameworks and improve mobility added by the lack of workforce in many sectors in Europe may help companies to get on board on the qualification subject (SQF-NQF-EQF).</p> <p>If a SQF is related to the NQF, it will be automatically linked to the EQF.</p>
<b>THREATS</b>	<p>Political implications: change professional categories of a current SQF is a big issue.</p> <p>Poor knowledge of the EQF principles.</p> <p>Lose cultural differences as consequence of progressive homogenization of qualification frameworks.</p> <p>Need of having a sectoral qualification: in the sector most of the time the only element searched by employers is motivation, since abilities are gained through learning on the job.</p> <p>Language and semantic barrier.</p> <p>Structure of the sector being considered: sectors characterized by small companies, mainly working on the territory, will probably have less interest in the internationalization process.</p> <p>Work orientation must be valid for NQFs, but not suitable for companies because companies fear that the levels could change and influence the salaries of their employees.</p> <p>Levelling polyvalent jobs (which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels) could be a problem.</p> <p>The mutual recognition of European Qualifications is not working well and the major reason for this often is the protection of the own labour market.</p> <p>Collective Agreements and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour market are old. Change the very fundamental pillars of these structures and the way professional profiles and categories are describe, requires a political decision and a consensus among Labour Unions, Companies and Government. This can be translated in: LOT of time ahead.</p> <p>The EQF offers the possibility for Member States to compare their education systems. In this sense, it is nothing more or less than an instrument. EQF will not replace a NQF; it is sufficient that the EQF is matched with the NQF. The role of the EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries. Quality assurance, principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should not be integrated in an EQF.</p>

Taking care of the results achieved, the following scenario for the SWOT analysis can be drawn up. Referencing SQFs to the EQF is commonly recognised like a useful tool to enable and increase permeability, transparency and comparability of qualifications. This also means enable mobility of employees.

Furthermore, SQFs are obviously work oriented and the EQF is also implicitly work oriented. As you know work orientation is one of the main objectives of the Employability grid.

In the study it is emerged that SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs. It is the political correct way, in fact it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability because this guarantees a direct link between the National Agencies for the Qualification Frameworks and the European Commission.

Referencing SQFs to the NQF is also useful to make a qualification aligned with local, national and transnational perspectives and to implement a target setting and a quality-assurance tool for training providers.

In other words, the main opportunity is to overcome the gap between the different European qualification systems and the differences in the content and interpretation of occupations on the European labour market. This means harmonise sectoral qualifications across Europe; identify employability features and attract employees with a clear education framework; help companies to get on board on the qualification subject.

Link SQFs to the NQF and than to the EQF could also be seen as a weakness. In fact it could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages. For industries it is a big problem to apply their qualifications to the NQFs. In particular, industries fear that the levels could change and influence the salary of their employees. For these reasons, and for the fact that the NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour word (e.g. Enterprises very often change their work requirement. However, curricula often change only every 5 years. This means that the learner needs learning-competence to keep up-to-date with work requirements. Therefore, it is important to consider in how far a successful implementation of SQFs/NQFs/EQF is based on the right environment, which delivers the right possibilities.), industries prefer a direct link SQFs-EQF.

Furthermore, in some cases qualifications are as diverse as the cultures they represent, because some NQFs are not only oriented on work processes but also on values. These orientations lead to conflicts in daily life work practice, e.g. if the interest of clients and employers are not identical.

So, the assumption “it is preferable an indirect link between the SQFs and the EQF through the NQFs” could be seen as a strength or as a weakness. It is a strength if we think in terms of decrease the complexity of the overall referenceability system and it is a weakness if we think in terms of opportunities of valorisation of the sectoral international visibility and interaction.

Promote mobility in the European countries is not so easy, because – for example – a qualification recognised like a “level 4” in a country must not mean “level 4” in another European country. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of European qualifications is not working well, and the reason for this is often the concept of “protection” of the own labour market.

Furthermore, a key point that should be considered when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the difference between competences and performance needs. Usually, qualifications are described in terms of competences, while wages are linked to performance. These two point of view are not related to each other.

At last, another weakness is that the work-orientation criterion (explicit in the Employability grid and in the EQF) is not so easy to consider in practice. SQFs could be “real” work-objective oriented if its levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry, or only “in theory” work-objective oriented if the relation among “knowledge”, “skills” and “competences” of the SQFs is not aligned to the logic of the EQF.

The study also showed some threats related to referencing the SQFs to the EQF like for example:

- poor need of having sectoral qualifications related to the EQF (most of the time the only element searched by employers is motivation, since abilities are gained through learning on the job);
- structure of the sector (sectors characterized by small companies, mainly working on the territory, will probably have less interest in the internationalization process);

- polyvalent jobs (levelling polyvalent jobs, which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels, could be a problem);
- lose cultural differences (lose cultural differences as consequence of progressive homogenization of qualification frameworks could be a problem for some countries);
- political implications (Collective Agreements and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour market are old; change the very fundamental pillars of these structures and the way professional profiles and categories are described requires a political decision and a consensus among Labour Unions, Companies and Government; this can be translated in: big issue and lot of time ahead);
- EQF like a mere instrument (the EQF offers the possibility for Member States to compare their education systems, in this sense it is nothing more or less than an instrument; EQF will not replace a NQF, it is sufficient that the EQF is matched with the NQF; so the role of the EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries).

The comprehensive SWOT representation is reported in the following.

Internal Analysis	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>SWOT Analysis</b></p> <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Referencing SQFs to the EQF is commonly recognised like a useful tool to enable and increase permeability, transparency and comparability of qualifications. This also means enable mobility of employees.</p> <p>Furthermore, SQFs are obviously work oriented and the EQF is also implicitly work oriented. For this reason work orientation is one of the main objectives of the Employability grid.</p> <p>In the study it is emerged that SQFs should not be referenced directly to the EQF, but through the NQFs. It is the political correct way, in fact it decreases the complexity of the overall system of referenceability because this guarantees a direct link between the National Agencies for the Qualification Frameworks and the European Commission.</p> <p>Referencing SQFs to the NQF is also useful to make a qualification aligned with local, national and transnational perspectives and to implement a target setting and a quality-assurance tool for training providers.</p>	<p>Link SQFs to the NQF and than to the EQF could also be seen as a weakness. In fact it could imply to reassess professional levels of workers and this could also affect wages. For industries it is a big problem to apply their qualifications to the NQFs. In particular, industries fear that the levels could change and influence the salary of their employees. For these reasons, and for the fact that the NQFs are too rigid to comply with fast changes of the labour word, industries prefer a direct link SQFs-EQF.</p> <p>Furthermore, in some cases qualifications are as diverse as the cultures they represent, because some NQFs are not only oriented on work processes but also on values. These orientations lead to conflicts in daily life work practice, e.g. if the interest of clients and employers are not identical. So, the assumption "it is preferable a direct link between SQFs and NQFs" could be seen as a strength, if we think in terms of decrease the complexity of the overall referenceability system and as a weakness, if we think in terms of opportunities of valorisation of the sectoral international visibility and interaction.</p> <p>Promote mobility in the European countries is not so easy, because – for example – a qualification recognised like a "level 4" in a country must not mean "level 4" in another European country. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of European qualifications is not working well, and the reason for this is often the concept of "protection" of the own labour market.</p> <p>Furthermore, a key point that should be considered when linking a given SQF to the EQF, is the difference between competences and performance needs. Usually, qualifications are described in terms of competences, while wages are linked to performance. These two point of view are not related to each other.</p> <p>At last, another weakness is that the work-orientation criterion (explicit in the EQF and for this reason also in the Employability grid) is not so easy to consider in practice. SQFs could be "real" work-objective oriented if its levels perfectly fit to the needs of the industry, or only "in theory" work-objective oriented if the relation among "knowledge", "skills" and "competences" of the SQFs is not aligned to the logic of the EQF.</p>
<p><b>External Analysis</b></p> <p><b>Threats</b></p> <p>The main opportunity is to overcome the gap between the different European qualification systems and the differences in the content and interpretation of occupations on the European labour market. This means harmonise sectoral qualifications across Europe; identify employability features and attract employees with a clear education framework and help companies to get on board on the qualification subject.</p>	<p>Some threats related to referencing the SQFs to the EQF are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ poor need of having sectoral qualifications related to the EQF (most of the time the only element searched by employers is motivation, since abilities are gained through learning on the job);</li> <li>_ structure of the sector (sectors characterized by small companies, mainly working on the territory, will probably have less interest in the internationalization process);</li> <li>_ polyvalent jobs (levelling polyvalent jobs, which could embrace different levels if referenced to EQF levels, could be a problem);</li> <li>_ lose cultural differences (lose cultural differences as consequence of progressive homogenization of qualification frameworks could be a problem for some countries);</li> <li>_ political implications (Collective Agreements and legal structures and procedures adopted by the labour market are old; change the very fundamental pillars of these structures and the way professional profiles and categories are described requires a political decision and a consensus among Labour Unions, Companies and Government; this can be translated in: big issue and lot of time ahead);</li> <li>_ EQF like a mere instrument (the EQF offers the possibility for Member States to compare their education systems, in this sense it is nothing more or less than an instrument; EQF will not replace a NQF, it is sufficient that the EQF is matched with the NQF; so the role of the EQF should be limited to compare education programmes of different countries).</li> </ul>