

## The Employability Grid

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Prepared by: Gerald Thiel (DEKRA Akademie GmbH, DE)

With contributions from: ./.

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

For further information on the paper please contact: [EU-project.akademie@dekra.com](mailto:EU-project.akademie@dekra.com) or [gerald.thiel@t-online.de](mailto:gerald.thiel@t-online.de)

## Introduction

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### *A promise and its destiny*

The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This will improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States. Each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths. The European Qualifications Framework should, moreover, enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners. Transparent quality assurance principles and information exchange will support its implementation, by helping to build mutual trust. <sup>1</sup>

Four years after this recommendation has passed the European Parliament, the vision of this text is far away from reality. One of the reasons is the still missing mutual trust between responsible bodies in the member states, and this, on the other hand, can at least partially be explained by the ambiguity of EQF level descriptions that leave a lot of space for understandings according to the interests of stakeholders playing a role in national environments.

This ambiguity should not surprise in the light of the way how this framework was set up. It was strongly influenced by political reflections; this implies always that diverging interests are considered which is rarely accordable with systematic approaches.

However, the EQF was established and it has become the reference framework for national and sectoral educational frameworks/systems though its weaknesses have been early discovered from various sides. Although the EQF is not binding in a legal sense, it is based on declarations of willingness of governments of all EU member countries. It can therefore not be expected that it will be replaced in the near future by a more homogeneous system.

There are basically two positions that can be taken in this situation:

- Qualifications are assigned to EQF levels which are understood in a way that sounds reasonable according to national traditions and interests.
- The EQF is basically criticised and as far as possible ignored.

Both positions do not appear very promising:

- Within a national environment, it might be helpful to interpret the EQF level descriptions in a way that "own" qualifications get a "good standing" compared to those

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament

from abroad, but this is not a good way to achieve *mutual trust* which is the only way that some of the objectives of the EQF can be reached.

- It might be sensible to analyse the EQF and to come to the conclusion that it has to be totally rejected, but this is under the above described conditions the same as to give up any attempt to improve the current situation by Europe-wide “promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners” as it was quoted at the beginning of the document at hand.

### *The methodological approach of the employability grid*

Referring to the deficiencies of the above mentioned positions, the project consortium chose a third way which is *pragmatic*, but at the same time does not practically give up the conviction that a mere *technical* dealing with EQF level descriptions at the very end leads to arbitrary assignments of qualifications.<sup>2</sup> : It was tried to *reveal the implicit logic of the EQF as far as it exists*, thereby to get a tool to narrow the space of interpretation, and to provide for higher plausibility of referencing NQFs and qualifications to the EQF.<sup>3</sup>

This idea developed from the impression that there are two terms that have not by chance been mentioned several times within the descriptions of EQF levels: *work or study*. It seemed that they could deliver a reference point for comparison since it could be assumed that the other contents of the level descriptions would at least implicitly indicate level differences by their specific relationship to *work*.<sup>4</sup>

This assumption is crucial for the intention pursued by the development of the *employability grid*: It is understood that this grid can help to make explicit what is implied in the level description where the “hard core” is often surrounded with words in a flowery language, and that the differing reference to *work* is significant for the differences between EQF levels.

This implies that the hierarchy of EQF levels has an equivalent in hierarchical structures of work, and this creates a challenge: *How can the relationship to these structures properly be described if the EQF levels refer to work in all imaginable areas?*

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<sup>2</sup> Examples are numerous. Based on overall estimations, national responsible bodies have in many cases decided that whole groups of qualifications, related to a certain level of the educational system (expressed in terms of certificates delivered by institutions) are assigned to a certain level, without any consideration of learning outcomes.

<sup>3</sup> At the very end, of course, decisions on level assignments are made by responsible bodies. It might therefore be naive to expect that our approach to change the situation by suggesting to the EQF Advisory Group an EQF based, but at the same systematic way of referencing could be successful. Hence our solution is certainly no silver bullet, however, it could be that the defects of the current situation are felt also by those who are used to follow mainly political reflections, and in this case solutions that are embedded in already existing structures have a bigger chance to be considered.

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, in the level descriptions *work* appears often as an alternative to *study*. We will not care about the difference in the following since we think that *study* is a kind of *work*. This differentiation makes only sense if we assume that some levels have a special relationship to certificates of Higher Education. At least in theory, the EQF does not consider this possibility.

Some work processes have been well described on the basis of empirical research<sup>5</sup>, and this refers to sector-specified work. The results of these studies cannot be used directly for our purposes: Since the work-related EQF level descriptions are necessarily abstract, the same is true for the reference points that lie in the structure of work; hence the model of work possibly underlying the EQF is probably based on the same degree of abstraction.

As structural relationships within work are *assumed* by EQF descriptions, but not explicated, it is rather difficult to identify an underlying structural model by mere analysis of these descriptions. Therefore another way was chosen that might nevertheless appear rather adventurous in the light of the remarks made above: At the beginning of the main part of the document at hand, a necessarily generic model is presented that is intended to cover the most important issues of work, and this will then be used to check if the EQF descriptions could be considered as *derivable* from this model.

Since it will turn out that this is possible, at least to a certain degree, EQF level descriptions can then be reformulated in a way that makes *systematically* visible what the differences between the levels are.

#### *What the employability can be and what it not can be*

As described above, the methodological approach of the employability grid development is based on a balancing act between pragmatic adaptation to a situation that currently does not leave open many options and abiding systematic approaches where mere technical solutions seem to be more justified. At first glance, this seems to be a contradiction, and it should therefore not surprise that this can cause misunderstandings which also influenced the discussions of the partners' consortium: Although *ambiguity of the EQF* was accepted by all partners as the starting point of the project, a common understanding of the appropriate *ways leading to a reduction of this ambiguity* could not easily be achieved. This became visible within work of workpackages 3 – 5, dealing with referencing of national frameworks and sectoral approaches to the EQF, but, of course, also with regard to the *employability grid*, the instrument experimentally used for assessing the ways of referencing within the above mentioned workpackages. The nature of the arising difficulties was by no means only technical, and since it has to be expected that difficulties of this kind will also come up when the use of this grid will be extended crossing the borders of project work (as it is planned), discussion of these topics has to play a prominent role, also in the document at hand that is intended to evaluate the experiences made in piloting this instrument.

Therefore some clarifications are already necessary at this stage: If it is assumed that the differentiations between EQF levels have not been made arbitrarily and somehow are related to

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<sup>5</sup> See in particular the work of the University of Bremen, Institut für Technik und Bildung

hierarchical differences in the world of work, it makes sense to make this visible by revealing the *implicit logic of the EQF* in respect thereof, as far as such a logic exists. This is the intention of the *employability grid* which therefore should be understood as a *shadow grid of the EQF, and not as an alternative EQF*: It can only deliver settings that the level descriptions of the EQF already *include*.

Therefore the main criterion for discussing and criticising the employability grid at hand should be: *Does it help to clarify the above mentioned relationship or not?* If deficiencies are discovered, they should be considered against this background: *Do they reflect problems of the grid design suggested below, or do they reveal EQF-immanent weaknesses that are not visible at first glance?*

In the latter case, it cannot be expected, of course, that the shadow grid presented at hand will heal these deficiencies: If it turns out that some definitions of EQF descriptors are contradictory in themselves, that some differences between levels are smaller than differences at the same level, or that some desirable dimensions of education do not or only rarely appear in the EQF descriptions, these problems cannot be solved by a document that only can deliver suggestions for the use of the EQF on the basis of the potential which this framework really has. Reduction of ambiguity allows for clarification and structuring, but not for reinterpretation and extension.

On the other hand, the employability grid should not be misunderstood as a mere *technical* tool to be used in order to carry out referencing properly.<sup>6</sup> The *Employability Grid* cannot be understood in a way that a mere checklist is expected, useable as a foil which allows for easily discovering aberrations from an ideal model. There are various ways to relate vocational/educational standards to the requirements of work which differ considerably not only with regard to terminology and focus of interest, but also with regard to the *systematic context* in which the considered issues get their specific meaning. It is therefore not appropriate to assess the elements of a qualification/profile from the point of a view of a predefined model which in the first instance delivers a perspective *from outside*.

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<sup>6</sup> This misunderstanding is supported by the title *employability grid* that promises easier applicability than can be provided for.

## The Possible Reference Point for Relating the EQF to Work: The Core Work Objective

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Work can be described in various ways. For our purpose which is to set up a generic framework for determining relationships between work processes and abilities to carry them out, it is crucial that the reference point for vocational standards in the world of work delivers access to *all dimensions* which are relevant for the specific character of work processes.

This excludes to set up a model which is based on mere assembling of partial work processes. It is obvious that work processes are related to each other, and it is not a secret that these relationships are determined by a common goal which, as a rule, can be determined for all work processes: *to create a specific product or to deliver a specific service*.

This *work objective* which steers all work processes, also in terms of the organisational structure in which work takes place, should be the ideal reference point for determining the abilities to be developed in a vocational context. Every organisation who wants to survive will try to orient all elements and features of the whole work process to this goal in a way that they appear – at an abstract level – as *tools used to achieve this aim*, and as work is carried out by individuals, they have to be *enabled* to contribute to the achievement of the work objective by their specific use this as work.

It could be argued that the objectives of work differ from organisation to organisation which makes it impossible to use this as a reference point for vocational *standards* which have to be independent from the specific interests of organisations. Considerable differences can be observed if we have, for example, a look at the products of automotive enterprises even in the same class, and it has also to be noted that, according to differing products, initial training in these enterprises is different though basically related to public standards.

It should, however, be considered that the above mentioned differences do not exist by chance, but have evolved since enterprises competing at the market always intend to deliver products and services which differ from those of competitors and exceed the current *state of the art* in the field, thereby initiating the development of a new state of the art<sup>7</sup>.

This implies that work objectives of these enterprises do not differ so extremely that they would not allow for finding a *common denominator*. This common denominator is related to the state of the art to which all organisations have to orient their work at any rate, leave alone that organisations who have to defend their status by competition will always try to exceed it sometimes even are not able to reach it, and this allows for defining a *core work objective*, a

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<sup>7</sup> This *state of the art* does not necessarily represent the optimum possibilities in technical terms. *State of the art* is a category which refers to results of competition on the market for which mere economic factors play a role as well.

term which should be considered an analogy to the already widely used term *core work process*.

## The Basic Issues for Describing Work Objectives

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If we agree that a *core work objective* can deliver the starting point for defining *abilities standardised within systems of vocational training and education*, we have to ask *which basic issues have to be considered if the core work objectives shall be achieved*:

1. *The specific character of the work subject*. This seems trivial, but it has, nevertheless, some consequences which have to be considered: It is not the same if you cultivate tomatoes or if you produce clothes-pins; dependent from the work subject, technical requirements differ obviously.
2. *The scope of the work subject in relationship to other ones*. This is especially important since it might be asked: Do the overall work objectives of an organisation always determine the way how every section of the organisation works, or are there some departments, work units, etc. whose work is nearly independent from overall work objectives although their work can be considered a contribution to achieve these overall goals? This does not only concern departments where this seems evident as their relationship to the work objective is only an extrinsic one<sup>8</sup>, it concerns also parts of an organisation whose work is clearly linked to an overall work objective in terms of *content*, but could also be related to another work objective since the outcomes of their activities will be useable for various work objectives.<sup>9</sup> As we have to have in mind that *abilities* should be derivable from work objectives ruling work processes, we have to consider work objectives at a level where they really steer the work of people which might imply that a *core work objective* exceeds the level of an organisation or is only related to a part of it.<sup>10</sup>
3. *The needs of those who use products or services*. It was not always common sense that this issue has to be taken in account in all areas of work.<sup>11</sup> Therefore it is important to formulate this issue as a part of the work objective.
4. *The needs of the organisation which arise from her specific character as an enterprise or a public institution*. This can concern economic reflections, but also necessities

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<sup>8</sup> as security services or bookkeeping departments, they can normally easily be outsourced

<sup>9</sup>This concerns, for example, departments, but also whole enterprises producing technical tools for various enterprises and adapting them to the specific needs of the end seller (as supply industry in the automotive sector)

<sup>10</sup>At the level of *vocational standards*, it is obvious that people of the same profession can work in various work environments steered by different overall work objectives. Nevertheless, there should also be *partial work objectives* considerable as *core work objectives* to which work within these professions is related to.

<sup>11</sup> This concerns especially some public institutions in some countries that have not always been famous for their user-friendliness.

arising from the legally defined tasks of organisations (according to their specific character, they play a minor or major role). It is not for sure that these issues are always in line with the needs of the above mentioned users. They can even contradict them<sup>12</sup>. Also these needs should be explicitly defined as a part of the work objective description.

5. The needs of *individuals who work for the organisations* intending to deliver a product or service. It is no secret that they are often enough not identical with the needs of organisations,
6. *Needs which arise from the environment within which the work objective has to be achieved*. This concerns work conditions which have a static character (as security regulations, etc.) Referring only to specific parts of the work process, they need not omnipresent as the first three kinds of issues and have therefore not to be formulated as a part of the work objective description.
7. *The way how work within an organisation is organised*. This issue is cross-cutting with regard to the above mentioned issues since it can be considered a *tool to relate work processes best to the work objective* which implies that the specific character of the above mentioned issues 1 – 6 has to be taken in account for this purpose. The organisation of work is crucial for the ways how individuals contribute to achieve the overall work objectives, *and it relates work processes to each other via hierarchical relationships between individuals*.

## Work Description in Terms of the Organisation and of the Individual

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Remembering that we have to check if reference points for the derivation of *abilities of individuals* can be found in the world of work, we can see that an *organisational structure* which is related to the work objective delivers the field in which these abilities have to be applied, and they have thus to be *specified according to the roles individuals play in the above mentioned hierarchies*.

This requires more than a reproduction of traditional roles oriented to an *institutional structure* (like *senior manager, department director, etc.*) The orientation of organisational structures to the work objective has to be made *visible in the way how an individual's work is described*.

It is important to consider that this kind of work description is multidimensional: It is on the one hand *individual-centred* since it describes *what an individual does*, on the other hand it refers to the overall organisation of work which shall be used as a *tool to achieve the work objectives of*

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<sup>12</sup> For example, users normally are interested to get a long-life product or a sustainable service. This is not the natural interest of those who want to sell their products and services again as soon as possible.

*the organisation*: Thus the work of an individual is defined as *a contribution to achieve the work objective according to the individual's position in the organisational structure*.

Following this argumentation, we are not far away from a reasonable *interface between work and vocational standards*, in our case the EQF.

## The EQF as a Possible Mirror of the World of Work

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It is obvious that above described model of work structure does not cover all relevant dimensions of work since it ignores that not everybody who is involved in work processes considers his work first and utmost a contribution to achieve a common work objective. It could be argued that the suggested model reflects only the position of an entrepreneur, and for others might other issues be more important.

This is certainly true, but the fact has to be accepted that this objective orientation of work remains the principle that underlies the division of labour as long as competition steers business processes. There is no description of work that can integrate the above mentioned work objective relativizing issues into a general model where all elements are linked to each other, and it exceeds also the capacity of the project NQF-SQF to suggest an overall model of this kind.

The main reason is that these "competing goals" have been *anyway* been ignored by the EQF as the following chapters will show; this justifies *within the document at hand* to give up the intention to consider *all* relevant work issues in the framework of a model that takes them in account as parts of a system which probably includes contradictions of elements.<sup>13</sup>

It turned out that the structure of work is considered as far as this only comprises the elements relevant for the *value-added chain* which was described above. The following chapters should show this.

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<sup>13</sup> This does not at all mean that issues not in accordance with those directly linked to work objectives (as societal and ethical ones) should generally be ignored. They refer to work reality as well as all issues that oriented to economical success. However, up to now they carve out a miserable existence in the framework of programmes of general education or vocational schools where these issues are dealt with in a general way, not related to real work situations, and hence with doubtful value. A model that would integrate these issues into a systemic model, thereby avoiding the moralising tendency that is likely to appear if this issue is not discussed in terms of day-to-day situations, is more than welcome..

## *The EQF Category Competence as Interface to the World of Work<sup>14</sup>*

If we describe work processes in the above mentioned multidimensional way, then the *abilities* to carry out these work processes should mirror this, and as work processes are linked to the work objective via hierarchical structures implicitly formulated within work process descriptions, this should also deliver a possibility to relate abilities to *levels*. For there is no other reason for the establishment of levels than to make sure that the abilities to be developed by individuals are sufficient for working properly at a certain position defined in the structure of an organisation.

The EQF is ambiguous with regard to categories usable to describe the thus determined abilities adequately. If *knowledge*, *skills*, and *competence* are considered separate columns which independently from each other have been described for eight levels, then the EQF is not a good tool for this purpose. The way how the EQF table is designed supports this understanding, and thus many debates of the EQF have dealt with the issue how it is possible to determine the level of a qualification which refers to level 4 with regard to knowledge, but to level 3 with regard to skills. However, if we have a look at the definitions of *knowledge*, *skills*, and *competence* to be found in the Annex of the legal EQF text, we discover that these categories by no means are to be understood as descriptors standing equally side by side, but are related to each other in a hierarchical sequence:

“‘knowledge’ means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, 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 context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or 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 personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This header deals with the EQF as a „quasi-natural, reference point of work process oriented standardisation in education. Who believes that this has to do with the high conceptional value of this framework, has to be disappointed, for there is only a *pragmatic* reason for not discussing other possibilities: The EQF has got this quality by *political reasons* which cannot be ignored: More than 30 governments all over Europe have meanwhile declared their commitment to the EQF, and the number is increasing. Unfortunately this is not a sign of high quality: some people even argue the converse: Political compromise has prevented uniformity of the EQF model.

The following chapters should show how heterogeneous and ambiguous the EQF is. If *logical sequences* are discovered, this does not necessarily mean that the whole EQF has been structured in a way that follows these sequences, and it does not at all exclude inconsequences. Nevertheless it is worth the effort to identify such “logical chains” because it allows for trying to refer them to structures which might underlie (ensembles of partial) work processes.

<sup>15</sup> See Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council from 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, Annex I. This inconsequence has among others also been criticised by the authors of Building the eCF, A combination of sound methodology and expert contribution, p.

It should be visible that *competence* steers *skills* and *knowledge*, and *skills* steer *knowledge* which implies that *competence* is the overarching category that should rule *the assignment to levels*. If we want to find criteria for differentiating abilities in a hierarchical sense, we have therefore primarily to check how far the category *competence* delivers those.

### The Implicit Logic of Levelling Competence<sup>16</sup>

The above mentioned definition of *competence* allows for comparison of levels on the basis of a criterion which is related to a couple of complementary concepts relevant for the position of an individual's work in an organisational structure: *responsibility and autonomy*.<sup>17</sup>

The table below should show how these categories are applied in order to describe the levels of competence in the EQF:

Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	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	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	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

<sup>16</sup> As mentioned above in a footnote with regard to the header of this chapter, this implicit logic should not be understood as the leading principle of EQF structuring. The EQF is a result of politically motivated negotiations which led to an *eclectic* allowance of interests. If logical structures can be discovered, then these sequences have mostly already been designed before they became elements of the EQF. But an analysis of these origins lies beyond the scope of the document at hand.

<sup>17</sup> See *Recommendation, Annex II*

Level 6 (**) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	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	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	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

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It can be seen at first glance that these descriptions include *more* than mere levels of responsibility and autonomy, and do not allow for an easy differentiation of abilities in terms of levels. There is, fortunately, a reference point which should provide for commensurability: *work or study*; as a framework common to all ability-based performance this at the same time delivers the interface to the world of work.<sup>19</sup> But the differences made between levels are not self-explaining, at least it is rather difficult to understand them in a way that mirrors distinctions that are relevant for work.

There are various reasons for this difficulty:

- Sometimes a *degree* shall characterise an EQF level which is the case if “some” is used for specification<sup>20</sup>.
- Sometimes two different actions are equally used for characterisation of the same level,<sup>21</sup> sometimes two differing (even contradicting) characteristics for the conditions of work are indicated<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I.c.

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that a basic difference is made between *work* and *study*: Is a study different from work? This makes the heterogeneous origin of the EQF obvious.

<sup>20</sup> For example in the description of level 2: “work or study under supervision with *some* autonomy” (by the way, how shall somebody study *without* any autonomy?) or in the description of level 4: “taking *some* responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities”: As a rule, responsibility cannot be put into perspective: Either somebody is responsible for something or not. But even if such statements were sensible, one had to ask which extent of responsibility is meant by *some* responsibility: Is there a certain percentage which already qualifies for a higher EQF level, and the other way round: is there a degree of responsibility which does not count for assignment to a certain level?

<sup>21</sup> As in the description of level 5: “exercise management *and* supervision in contexts of work or study activities”

<sup>22</sup> As in the description of level 4: “exercise self-management within the guidelines of work and study contexts that are *usually predictable*, but are *subject to change*”. Why is it important that these contexts are “usually predictable”? Even if they are only in some cases “subject to change”, the individual whose abilities shall be qualified by EQF level 4 has to be able to deal with this change, and it does not play a role how often.

- Apart from “work or study” that delivers the framework within which competence can be applied at every level and as such does not suggest distinctions, there is no equally visible yardstick for differentiation of levels. Specific issues as solving problems, context structure, etc, appear at certain levels, but have no counterpart at other levels which leads to the question: Is it assumed that at the higher “neighbour level” a specific feature does *not* exist?<sup>23</sup> Or is it understood that the higher level *implies* some features of the lower one (and if this is the case, which ones and why)?

It is not the intention of the “employability grid” to heal the described deficiencies. If it were reasonable in a practical sense, it would be the best to come up with a suggestion that follows a clear logical principle without any consideration of situations that have nothing to do with logical reflections, but only with interests of stakeholders in the field. But this kind of approaches ignores the political reality which is – at least currently – determined by commitment to the EQF.

Taking this in account, but at the same intending not to give up the idea of coherent referencing, it shall be investigated if the EQF allows for discovering an *implicit logic* which is hidden by the copious level descriptions, referring to distinctions which play a role in the real world of professionals. This follows the assumption that differentiations between levels – although not consequently derived from a leading principle – are not all arbitrary, but represent a structure of work organisation which is practically relevant, although not always reflected.

These work related issues play certainly a role if the level of *responsibility* and *autonomy* has to be *specified*. Unfortunately the descriptions of level-relevant *competence* include a lot of *information which* only surround information about the degree of *autonomy and responsibility*, but do not in all cases clarify things *since this information is not precise enough* that it could not be assigned to other levels. This prevents easy comparison of levels.

*In order* to deal properly with the eclectic character of *these descriptions* and nevertheless to identify – as far this is possible – the implicit logic used for levelling *competence* the following procedure is applied:

- All parts of the descriptions which (at least to a certain extent) only allow for assumptions<sup>24</sup> and are not differentiated in terms of content, shall be left aside..
- The topic “development of performance” (which only appears at some higher levels and has no easily identifiable equivalent at other levels) shall for the time be ignored.

<sup>23</sup> For level 1, it is e.g. indicated that *competence* means the ability to “work or study under direct supervision in a structured context”, for level 2 this means the ability “to work or study under supervision with some autonomy”.

<sup>24</sup> As “complex” or “substantial authority”

- The *actions* to which *competence* refers and their *context*, the field of work or study within which action takes place, shall be considered in order to identify *hierarchical relationships* based on a uniform principle.

For this purpose, at first *key terms* shall be identified which can be assigned to *actions* and *context*, putting them into a hierarchical order:

#### *Actions*

Work as object of supervision

Work neither as object nor as subject of supervision

Work as subject of supervision

Manage

Transform

Innovate

#### *Context*

Structured

Predictable

Changing

Unpredictable

To be changed

If we consider the column *actions*, we can see that all of them can be understood as determined by *the relationship of individuals' actions to actions of other individuals on the one hand, and to the context* on the other hand. It shall be checked if there are uniform principles which can be used to describe the above listed actions and contexts in a way that provides for comparison on the same basis which always implies that real *oppositions* can be made:

- With regard to *action* the opposition *subject/object* is suggested; in terms of the relationships to actions of other individuals this opposition can be formulated as *steering/steered*; with regard to the *context* as *determining/determined*. Some specifications of these opposition are nevertheless added; they seem to be relevant for differentiation of levels.

- With regard to *context* the category *change* is suggested which allows for the basic opposition *changing/not changing*. Specifications are added if necessary.

On this basis, the following table is suggested in order to provide less ambiguous understanding of the EQF category *competence*:

Level	Competence in EQF terms	Action with regard to action of others	Action with regard to context	Context
1	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	Steered by action of others	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Structured</i>
2	work or study under supervision with some autonomy	Steered by action of others	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Not structured</i>
3	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	neutral	Determined by context	Not changing <i>Including changing circumstances</i>
4	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	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Not changing/changing
5	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change  review and develop performance of self and others	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Changing
6	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decisionmaking in unpredictable work or study contexts  take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	Steering action of others	Determined by context	Changing
7	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	Steering action of others	Determining context <i>Transforming</i>	Changing
8	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	Steering action of others	Determining context <i>Transforming and replacing</i>	Changing

It is visible that a differentiation between Level 5 and 6 cannot be made if the EQF level descriptions are reduced to assignments to the above used categories. This could mean that the granularity of the designed grid is not high enough. A direct comparison of the competence descriptions of Level 5 and 6 does not confirm this assumption: On the one hand, a difference in *degree* that can be observed: At Level 6 you have to manage *complex* activities, at Level 5 this is not specified. On the other hand, issues which are implied in the description of Level 5, are explicitly formulated for Level 6: At Level 6 you take *responsibility for decision making*, whereas at Level 5 such strong words do not appear: Does this mean that somebody who has to be able to take over management tasks as defined for Level 5 needs not to take responsibility for his decisions?

## General Reflections on the Results of Analysis Achieved so Far

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At this stage, two results of the analysis should be abided:

1. It can be claimed with some plausibility that the descriptions of EQF levels are based on general work structures, however only taking in account those elements that play a role in the framework of directly work objective oriented activities as described above.<sup>25</sup>
2. Referring to the different *roles* of individuals within the work process described via the category *competence*, it should be possible to assign more holistic descriptions of occupational profiles to the EQF, but also those that deliver a description of competence in an additive way, referring mainly to skills that can be related to competence.

This is not satisfactory if it is expected that abilities defined by the EQF should *not only* be related to work requirements arising from necessities of added value. However, it should be considered that the EQF indeed ignores the societal and ethical dimension of work, but does not prevent that it is noted. Nevertheless, it is an issue that this dimension thus does not play a role with regard to *comparison of qualifications*.

The same should not be true for the holistic understanding of professions: It should be expectable that qualifications referring to them can be described in EQF terms without losing their specific quality, as an ensemble of abilities integrated in an overarching model.

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<sup>25</sup> This leads to the assumption that *Bloom's taxonomy* has played an important role when the EQF was drafted, no matter if EQF architects referred to it consciously or not.

## How to make the Employability Grid Operational

As mentioned above, the design of the employability grid shows the traces of the contradictory starting point of its development: On the one hand, it shall not be understood as a document of resignation in the light of political developments that have provided for the establishment of an EQF that does not match all expectations possibly linked to it; on the other hand, it shall provide for usability under the given conditions, thereby not totally giving up the objective of maximum non-ambiguity.

This becomes, of course, in particular visible when it is intended to make the employability *operational* i.e. to provide for its *easy applicability*. Then a certain degree of *formalisation* is helpful, but this should not exclude that all relevant issues are considered.

The steps suggested to be taken reflect this intention. They are based on the *pilot activities* having taken place within WP 3 and WP 4:

- For the preliminary classification of (national and sectoral) referencing approaches a *typology matrix* was developed that refers to the elements identified above in the chapter dealing with the issues of a generic work model:

Typology matrix – referenceability to work processes		
<b>Work Objective Oriented</b>		
Real	Theory	No
<b>Orientation on EQF descriptors (SKC)</b>		
Real	Theory	No
<b>Core Work Objective</b>		
The specific character of the work subject is described.		
Yes	Only in part	No
The scope of the work subject in relationship to other ones is described		
Yes	Only in part	No
The needs of those who use products or services are considered.		
Yes	Only in part	No
The needs of the organisation which arise from her specific character are considered.		
Yes	Only in part	No
The needs of individuals are considered.		
Yes	Only in part	No

Needs which arise from the environment are considered.		
Yes	Only in part	No
The way how work within an organisation is organised is considered		
Yes	Only in part	No
<b>Autonomy and Responsibility</b>		
Present in the qualifications		Not present in the qualifications

Reference to this matrix should already curtail the assessment of referencing attempts. As it was discussed above, not all these issues are considered in the EQF. However, the scheme might help to find an orientation with regard to the issues to be expressed by EQF descriptions.

- Based on this first assessment, a SWOT analysis should be carried out, referring to *strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, and threats*. In this context, it is important to clarify from which point of view these categories are applied: What can be a strength from one point of view, can be a weakness from another one.
- On this basis, it can be finally be determined how far referencing attempts are usable in order to mirror national/sectoral specifications in the EQF

## Perspectives of further development

Work within WP 3 – 5 has turned out that the abstract categories of the employability grid are considered not to be easily applicable to concrete cases. The case studies carried out within WP 5 had in particular to face this problem, and it was therefore suggested to enrich the suggested formalised descriptors by additional categories, especially then when it became visible that level differences turned out not to be sustainable after having been analysed with the help of the employability grid.

In this context, it was debated to use the descriptors *knowledge* and *skills* for differentiation of levels if the overarching category competence would not justify it, but this suggestion was discarded due to basic methodological reflections.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it could make sense to consider the relationship between *competence* and *skills* and *knowledge* ruled by *competence*

<sup>26</sup> If a category is identified to be decisive for differentiation, it cannot be replaced by another one which is steered by this category, only in order to receive a difference that not appears if the category is applied that has been identified as the ruling one. In our case this would mean that individuals can have the same *competence* although their abilities are generally assigned to different levels because their *knowledge* or *skills* might be different and these categories have been selected in order to find a justification for differences that otherwise is not available. However, this implies that in reality competence is not based on *knowledge* and *skills* as it is claimed in the Recommendation.

in order to check how far a certain level of *knowledge* and *skills* already delivers a hint to the level of *competence*.

To deliver a description of the relationships between *competence* on the one hand and *knowledge* and *skills* assigned to it at the same EQF level is one of the tasks to be fulfilled in the future.

A further issue will be to explain the educational activities of individuals whose education-specific competences are described at various levels of the EQF. To create a formalised approach that will integrate these descriptions into the employability grid is a further issue.

List of references:

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Annexes:

[NQF-SQF: Del 06 "Key Questions for NQF/SQF Analysis"](#)

[NQF-SQF: Del 04 "Methodological approach for a holistic and functional description of work processes"](#)