



European  
Qualifications  
Framework



# THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

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## DESCRIPTORS DEFINING LEVELS IN THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)

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 context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
LEVEL 1	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 1</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>basic general knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>basic skills required to carry out simple tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work or study under direct supervision in a structured context</li> </ul>
LEVEL 2	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 2</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work or study under supervision with some autonomy</li> </ul>
LEVEL 3	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 3</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study</li> <li>adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</li> </ul>
LEVEL 4	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 4</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change</li> <li>supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</li> </ul>

LEVEL 5*	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 5</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change</li> <li>➤ review and develop performance of self and others</li> </ul>
LEVEL 6**	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 6</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts</li> <li>➤ take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</li> </ul>
LEVEL 7***	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 7</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 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 and/or research</li> <li>➤ critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches</li> <li>➤ take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</li> </ul>
LEVEL 8****	The learning outcomes relevant to <b>Level 8</b> are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 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</li> </ul>

## 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 agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process 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 agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process cor-

responds 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 agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

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## What is the EQF and what are its benefits?

The EQF is a common European reference system which will link different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together. In practice, it will function as a translation device making qualifications more readable. This will help learners and workers wishing to move between countries or change jobs or move between educational institutions at home.

## Who is the EQF for?

The primary users of the EQF will be bodies in charge of national and/or sectoral qualification systems and frameworks. Once they have related their respective systems to the EQF, the EQF will help individuals, employers and education and training providers compare individual qualifications from different countries and education and training systems.

## What levels and what types of education does the EQF cover?

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. Each level should in principle be attainable by way of a variety of education and career paths.

## Why does the EQF use learning outcomes?

The EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences). The EQF shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. Shifting the focus to learning outcomes

- supports a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provision
- facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.

It also recognises that Europe's education systems are so diverse that comparisons based on inputs, say length of study, are impracticable.

## Does the EQF award qualifications?

No, the EQF describes levels of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. The awarding of qualifications will remain a matter for national qualifications bodies.

## What do countries have to do? What are the deadlines for implementation?

It's a voluntary framework, so there are no formal legal obligations on the countries. 2010 is the recommended target date for countries to relate their qualifications systems to the EQF, 2012 for them to ensure that individual qualification certificates bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

## What is the relationship with "Europass"?

Europass introduced a portfolio of documents to be used by individuals to describe their qualifications and competences. Europass does not, however, compare *levels* of qualifications. In the future, all relevant Europass documents, in particular the Europass diploma supplement and the Europass certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

## What is the relationship with the Bologna process in higher education?

The EQF is fully compatible with the qualifica-

tions framework for Higher Education developed under the Bologna Process. Specifically, the EQF descriptors at levels 5-8 refer to the higher education descriptors agreed under the Bologna Process. However, the formulation of the EQF level descriptors differs from the Bologna level descriptors developed specifically for higher education needs because, as a *lifelong learning* framework the EQF also encompasses vocational education and training (VET) and work contexts, including at the highest levels.

**More information is available at:**

[ec.europa.eu/eqf](http://ec.europa.eu/eqf)

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