

Psychotherapists and Counsellors Professional Liaison Group (PLG)
26 and 27 May 2009

Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

This paper invites the PLG to discuss and make recommendations about the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register.

The attached paper incorporates content included in the paper on education and training considered by the PLG at its meeting in March 2009.

Decision

The PLG is invited to discuss and make recommendations about the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register for psychotherapists and counsellors.

The PLG is additionally reminded to bear in mind the potential equality and diversity implications of any recommendations it may make. This includes considering the extent to which any recommendations would have an adverse impact on some groups compared to others.

Background information

- Paper considered by the PLG on 3 and 4 March 2009 – Education and training
http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/100026E0psychotherapists_and_counsellors_professional_liaison_group_2009030304_enclosure03educationandtraining.pdf
- Paper considered by the PLG on 4 December 2008 – Overview of responses to the Call for Ideas.
http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/100025ACpsychotherapists_and_counsellors_professional_liaison_group_20081204_enclosure01.pdf

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None

Appendices

- QCA National Qualifications Framework
- QAA qualification descriptors
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

Date of paper

15 May 2009

Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

This paper is divided into three sections: information about the threshold level; responses to the Call for Ideas on this topic; and a summary and discussion of some potential areas for discussion.

1.1 About the Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

Standard one of the standards of education and training sets out the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

1.1.1 HPC's legislative powers

The Health Professions Order 2001 ('the Order') does not provide the HPC with the power to set the qualifications required for entry, but enables it to approve qualifications which meet the standards it has set for entry to the register.

Article 12(1)(a) of the Order provides that:

“ For the purposes of this Order a person is to be regarded as having an approved qualification if he has a qualification... which has been approved by the Council as attesting to the standard of proficiency it requires for admission to the... register ...”

The power to determine that standard of proficiency is set out in Article 5(2)(a), which requires the HPC to:

“... establish the standards of proficiency necessary to be admitted to the different parts of the register being the standards it considers necessary for safe and effective practice under that part of the register...”

This is supplemented by Article 15(1)(a), which requires it to:

“... establish... the standards of education and training necessary to achieve the standards of proficiency it has established...”

Thus HPC's obligation is to set threshold standards of entry to its register - that is the minimum standards of proficiency which a newly qualified applicant needs to meet in order to be able to practise safely and effectively. The HPC may then approve a qualification which delivers those standards, but it cannot insist that **only** a specified form of academic award will do so. Setting the standards of proficiency is an outcomes-based process and there is no power in the Order to enable the HPC to specify that the standards can only be met by a particular level of academic award.

1.1.2 About SET 1: Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

The purpose of the Standards of Education and Training is to identify the means by which the standards of proficiency can be delivered by a programme of education and training.

SET 1 provides the threshold levels of qualification “normally” expected to meet the remainder of the standards of education and training (and thus the standards of proficiency). The term “normally” is included in SET 1 as a safeguard against the unlawful fettering of the HPC's discretion. Given the terms of the Order, it

would be an improper exercise of its powers for the HPC to refuse to approve a programme which delivered the standards of proficiency and the remainder of the standards of education and training solely on the basis that it did not lead to the award of a qualification specified in SET 1.

Every time we open a new part of the Register, we consult on the threshold level of qualification for entry to that profession and add this to the standards.

The standard currently reads:

1.1 The Council normally expects that the **threshold** entry routes to the Register will be the following:

1.1.1 Bachelor degree with honours for the following professions:

- chiropody or podiatry;
- dietetics;
- occupational therapy;
- orthoptics;
- physiotherapy;
- prosthetics and orthotics;
- radiography;
- speech and language therapy;
- biomedical science (with the Certificate of Competence awarded by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), or equivalent if appropriate); and

1.1.2 Masters degree for the arts therapies.

1.1.3 Masters degree for the clinical sciences (with the award of the Association of Clinical Scientists' Certificate of Attainment, or equivalent).

1.1.4 Equivalent to Certificate of Higher Education for paramedics.

1.1.5 Diploma of Higher Education in Operating Department Practice for Operating Department Practitioners.

We need to set the threshold level at the level necessary for people who successfully complete a pre-registration education and training programme to meet all of the standards of proficiency.

In setting the threshold level of qualification for entry, the HPC is setting the threshold academic level of qualification which it would normally accept for the purposes of an approved programme which leads to registration. As the threshold is the 'minimum', programmes above the threshold academic level may be approved.

The threshold level might change over time to reflect changes in the delivery of education and training. This has happened in a number of the existing professions we regulate – as professions have developed the threshold academic level has increased. Any change in the threshold academic level is one that is normally led by the profession and/or by education providers and employers and which occurs over time. At an appropriate time, consideration might be given to changing SET 1, having regard to the level at which the majority of education and training is delivered.

Our primary consideration in approving a programme, whether at or substantially above the threshold, is that the programme meets the standards of education

and training and will allow students to meet the standards of proficiency on completion.

The threshold academic level of qualification for entry to the Register applies to pre-registration education and training programmes seeking approval rather than to individuals. Therefore, it would not affect individuals who might have followed education and training programmes delivered at levels below the threshold in the past.

1.1.3 Illustrations of the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

The following examples illustrate how the current threshold level functions for some of the existing professions regulated by the HPC.

- Speech and Language Therapists

The threshold level of qualification for the profession is set at a bachelors degree with honours in speech and language therapy.

We also approve pre-registration post-graduate diplomas and masters degrees in speech and language therapy, above the threshold.

- Biomedical Scientists

The threshold level of qualification for the profession is set at a bachelors degree with honours in biomedical science (with the Certificate of Competence awarded by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), or equivalent).

In biomedical science, some entrants to the profession undertake a first degree, followed by the Certificate of Competence awarded by the IBMS. The Certificate of Competence is an approved qualification which leads directly to eligibility to apply for registration.

However, 'or equivalent' allows the flexibility for the HPC to approve pre-registration programmes that meet the standards of education and training and successfully deliver the standards of proficiency, but do not result in an award of the IBMS. We approve a number of programmes delivered at honours degree level or above which do this and therefore lead directly to eligibility to apply for registration.

The HPC does not approve undergraduate bachelor degrees in biomedical science unless they meet all the requisite standards and therefore lead directly to the eligibility to apply for registration.

- Clinical Scientists

The threshold level of qualification for the profession is set at a masters degree (with the award of the Association of Clinical Scientists' Certificate of Attainment, or equivalent).

In clinical science, entrants to the profession undertake a masters degree in a science based subject before undertaking the Certificate of Attainment awarded

by the Association of Clinical Scientists. The Certificate of Attainment is an approved qualification which leads directly to the eligibility to apply for registration.

The wording 'or equivalent' allows the flexibility for the HPC to approve programmes which integrate the masters programme with the content of the award of the Certificate of Attainment, if the programme meets the standards of education and training and successfully delivers the standards of proficiency. The Certificate of Attainment is currently the only approved qualification leading to registration as a clinical scientist.

- Paramedics

The threshold level of entry for the profession is set at equivalent to a Certificate of Higher Education.

In the past, all pre-registration education and training was via the IHCD paramedic award qualification delivered by ambulance training centres. The IHCD is part of the examining body, Edexcel. The IHCD paramedic award is an approved qualification leading directly to the eligibility to apply for registration. The outcome of an IHCD paramedic award is, however, not the formal award of a Certificate of Higher Education, but an IHCD award.

There has been a move to develop paramedic pre-registration education and training delivered by HEIs, and the Council approves a number of HEI delivered programmes at academic levels up to honours degree level.

2. Responses to the Call for Ideas

This section provides an outline of the responses received to the Call for Ideas about the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register.

2.1 What issues should the PLG consider in determining the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register?

The views advanced in response to this question are difficult to categorise in terms of arguments for and against specific thresholds; some respondents did not give a rationale for their preferred threshold level or discussed the more general issues around setting the threshold level.

This section provides a summary of the responses received, giving an overall indication of the thresholds suggested and outlining specific thresholds suggested where appropriate. The section is divided into the areas that emerged as themes from the responses.

2.1.1 Overall

Amongst those respondents who suggested specific threshold levels, the most frequently suggested were a masters degree threshold level for psychotherapists (equivalent to level 7 on the NQF) and a diploma level threshold for counsellors (levels 4/5 on the NQF). The UKCP and UKAPC suggested a level 6 threshold for psychotherapeutic counselling.

There was broad agreement amongst respondents in the threshold level suggested for psychotherapists – with a masters degree or equivalent suggested by almost all of those who suggested a threshold level. The British Psychoanalytic Council said that a ‘useful benchmark’ would be the ‘newly established IAPT training for high intensity psychological therapists’. They said that this training was ‘regarded as being at post-graduate diploma level or equivalent’. Otherwise they said that the threshold entry level ‘should be a masters degree or equivalent’.

Much of the debate in responses about the threshold level was focused on the appropriate level for counselling, where suggestions for the threshold level for counsellors varied from level 3 on the NQF up to first degree level (level 6 on the NQF). The CPCAB said that their level 4 diploma provided an ‘entry level’ qualification in counselling and said that there was no clear rationale for raising this level to an honours degree. They argued that an honours degree level threshold would be detrimental to service delivery because of an adverse impact on counselling services. The Association of Christian Counsellors said that they recognised level 4 diplomas which included a minimum of 420 guided learning hours and also 100 hours of practice. They said that this constituted a ‘...knowledgeable practitioner who has developed considerable experience’. We were urged by a number of respondents not to set the threshold level too high and to ensure that the level was set in order to reflect current provision.

The BACP said that they avoided the issue of academic qualification in their accreditation criteria. They said that the threshold should be set at the level at which ‘graduates are capable of independent, ethical and effective practice, not necessarily the lowest common qualification’.

Some respondents expressed their suggestions for the threshold in terms of the content and structure of education and training programmes. The Metanoia Institute said: 'The level of education and training should cover all aspects of minimum curriculum including the integration of personal development, theoretical knowledge and supervised clinical practice.' In response to this question The Tavistock Centre for Couples Therapists reiterated their belief that personal therapy requirements should form an integral part of training programmes, a point echoed by some other respondents. An individual said we should keep in mind in setting the threshold that some organisations were invested in making training 'long and convoluted'.

A number of respondents commented on the strength of the existing accreditation systems run by professional bodies. The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling suggested that the threshold level might be linked to the accreditation criteria of the BACP rather than to any particular academic level. The Minister Centre commented: 'The main issue for [the] threshold level of qualification should be those as established by the BACP and UKCP, which are not approach specific criteria but are based on adherence to a clear ethical code, demonstrated competence, and a system of being monitored and guided by senior practitioners through required clinical supervision and regular CPD.' The Centre for Freudian Analysis said that the existing system should be maintained.

2.1.2 Parity with other professions

A small number of respondents suggested thresholds on the basis that it was important to ensure that psychotherapy and counselling was on the same level as other professions, including those other professions regulated by the HPC.

One individual argued that the threshold level should put counselling 'on a par' with professions such as teaching, social work and medicine. The Association for Person Centred Therapy Scotland agreed and said that the purpose of registering psychotherapy and counselling was so that the professions could be recognised as equal to these professions. They added: 'These professions all require a combination of theoretical and practice based teaching/study and the successful graduate has to pass both aspects of the training. I think the same benchmark should be used for counselling/ psychotherapy.'

One individual argued that psychotherapy should be a doctorate level entry profession to bring it into line with medicine and psychology.

2.1.3 Existing standards and levels

A number of respondents argued that the threshold level should not lower the existing education and training entry requirements of the existing self-regulatory systems. Those respondents who made this argument mainly did so in relation to psychotherapy.

The United Kingdom Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners said: '...it will be impossible to sustain a case for state regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists if HPC registration standards are lower than the present accreditation / registration standards of voluntary organisations such as UKAHPP.' They expressed concern that reference to threshold levels might indicate that 'provisional decisions have been made on lower levels'.

The Increasing Access to Psychological Therapy Workforce Team and New Ways of Working for Psychological Therapists said that the threshold level of qualification should 'reflect the existing standards of qualification used by the professional bodies'. They acknowledged that trainings did vary between masters and diploma level and said the threshold should be 'consistent with the training required to achieve clinically effective therapists with the competences as laid down by the SfH NOS project'. They suggested that Skills for Health work to develop a qualifications framework for psychological therapists might prove useful here.

2.1.4 Academic qualifications, levels and awards

A number of respondents said that academic qualifications, levels and awards were far less important than the ability to develop a therapeutic relationship with a client.

One individual concluded that academic levels were essentially 'meaningless'. The Counselling Society said '...trainers recognise that a common issue in academically well qualified trainees is the need not to confuse academic growth and potential with counselling ability'.

The Psychoanalytic Consortium said that it was 'traditional in psychoanalysis that the analysis itself is the fundamental training component rather than a particular academic qualification'. They added: 'Training in psychoanalysis is retroactive: one cannot set out to train, then train, then qualify. Rather, one suffers, enters analysis, then realises later on that this is something one wants to do.'

2.1.5 Inclusivity and diversity

Many respondents argued that it was important to ensure an inclusive approach to existing education and training routes and that it was important to recognise and maintain the diverse backgrounds of practitioners. These arguments were particularly advanced in relation to counselling and any suggestion that the threshold might be set at degree level or linked to qualifications awarded by HEIs.

One individual, a student on a counselling programme, argued: '...the profession risks losing diversity and essentially the creativity that brings, as traditionally those of more working class backgrounds and from ethnic minority or socially disadvantaged groups are less likely to engage with education at degree level.' Both the CPCAB and Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA) made similar arguments in their responses. COSCA said: 'An over emphasis on academic qualifications would be likely to narrow the social mix of people practising as counsellors / psychotherapists...' The British Association for the Person Centred Approach made similar comments in their response but said that a balance was needed between ensuring the profession is accessible to people from backgrounds normally under-represented in Higher Education and the profession having parity with other HPC regulated professions. They concluded that the threshold should be set at degree level.

Respondents also commented more broadly on the undesirability of any move towards formal academic qualifications and the importance of being inclusive of existing education and training providers outside of the University sector. COSCA

said that few psychotherapy and counselling courses lead to a formal academic qualification and said that: 'We do not believe it necessary or, for the foreseeable future, practical to require any training courses to lead to academic qualification.' They said that the threshold should not be aspirational and should instead be reached through a benchmarking process, taking account of qualifications and trainings that are currently acceptable to professional bodies. The entry to the Register should be at the 'fit to practise' level, they argued, and the routes to registration should meet the 'HPC's stated intention not to exclude anyone who works as a counsellor and psychotherapist'. They said that the threshold level of qualification for counsellors working independently should be the same as their Practitioner membership – 300 hours of training in counselling/psychotherapy including at least 3 blocks of 75 hours over a five year period. They said their accredited diplomas exceed these requirements.

An individual expressed concern about the continuing existence of in-house courses run by voluntary organisations and said that it was important that the level set did not discriminate against charities and voluntary organisations that deliver counselling. The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling said that the HPC should encourage diversity, and acknowledge courses outside higher education where they can demonstrate that they have been benchmarked to the stated level via external moderation of training standards. They said that any arrangements should support APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) procedures to widen access.

2.1.6 A stepped approach

In the Call for Ideas, we said that given the wide range of different training programmes in psychotherapy and counselling, one possible option for the threshold level might be a 'stepped approach' which would see the threshold raised over a period of time. We said that this might ensure that the level of public protection develops over time, providing education and training providers with a lead-in period to make any necessary changes to their programmes.

We received few comments in relation to this suggestion. Relate said that they have been consistently 'raising the bar' of qualification over recent years, and outlined their current and historic qualifications. They said: 'We suggest that consideration should be given to building in an escalator clause at the outset of the statutory register that provides for a stepped increase in qualification thresholds over time.' The College of Psychoanalysts said that they were in agreement, supporting the idea that the threshold that might change over time, and the idea of a lead-in period to allow existing education and training providers to make any necessary changes to their programmes. The British Psychological Society said that they recognised that some pragmatism might be necessary initially.

The Counselling Society and Chrysalis said that they agreed that the threshold 'should start low and be raised over time'. They said that the threshold should be set at Level 3 (with 120 hours of face to face interpersonal tuition and 250 hours total study time) and then be raised to level 4 after three years. They said: 'A recommendation of 240 hours total study time would be achievable by 80% of current trainers.'

2.1.7 Existing practitioners

A small number of respondents expressed concern about the impact of the threshold level upon existing practitioners in the field who may have not achieved a qualification to the level which is set. These arguments were made in relation to counselling.

The International Society of Professional Counsellors (ISPC) said that if we decided on a degree level threshold for counselling: ‘...many good and qualified therapists will be placed out of work and many clients without their therapy before their therapy is completed.’ Relationships Scotland said: ‘To enable existing counsellors to make a reasonable transition, it is important to approach the issue of qualifications from a minimum standard approach. Should the qualification bar be set too high, significant numbers of our counsellors will be prevented from practising in the future.’ Another respondent raised the issue of trainees who will be part way through their training when the Register opens who qualify with a qualification below the threshold level set.

3. Summary and discussion

This section provides a summary of some of the main points outlined in this paper, in order help guide the Group's discussion. This is not intended to be an exhaustive summary of all the potential discussion points in this area and there may be other areas that the Group will wish to discuss.

3.1 Overall decision

The Group is invited to discuss and recommend for consultation the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register for psychotherapists and counsellors.

The Group is reminded that in its current approach of differentiating between psychotherapists and counsellors it would be possible (subject to the context outlined in section 1 and below) for the Group to recommend different threshold levels for entry to the Register for psychotherapists and for counsellors. This would rely upon being able to differentiate in standards of proficiency the proficiencies required for each.

In the alternative model that psychotherapists and counsellors were not differentiated in the Register, this would mean that there would be a single set of standards of proficiency for psychotherapists and counsellors and therefore only one threshold level could be set for the part of the Register.

In both models, the threshold level is the 'minimum'; programmes at levels above the threshold could be approved.

3.2 Practitioner psychologists

At previous meeting, members of the Group have asked about the decision to set the threshold level for entry to the Register for practitioner psychologists.

The HPC consulted on the threshold level for practitioner psychologists in 2007/2008, with the outcomes delayed subject to the publication of the necessary legislation. The HPC did not make any recommendations about the threshold level at the consultation stage, in recognition that there were differing views on this topic, but sought the views of stakeholders on the broad options available. The HPC Education and Training Committee and Council will consider a paper on this topic at its meeting on 20 May 2009 and make a final decision about the threshold level.

3.3 Some broad considerations

As the standards of education and training specify the standards necessary to deliver the standards of proficiency, the starting point for setting the threshold level is the standards of proficiency.

Typically, a programme provided at the level specified by SET 1 will deliver education and training which exceeds the threshold required by the standards of proficiency. This is because SET 1 is concerned with the level of students' outcomes and typical abilities and does not prescribe content. Programmes which are delivered at the appropriate level will often include content which may not be strictly necessary for the purpose of meeting the standards.

In determining the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register the Group is invited to take into account:

- The level / awards of existing pre-registration education and training that confer the ability to practice as a psychotherapist and/ or counsellor.
- Relevant qualifications frameworks, such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) National Qualifications Framework, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (and related descriptors), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. These are included as appendices to this paper.

In reaching its eventual recommendation to the HPC Council, the Group must be satisfied that, as part of the standards of education and training, the threshold specified in SET 1 is not more than is **necessary** to achieve the standards of proficiency which it establishes for psychotherapists and counsellors and, in turn, those standards of proficiency must not be more than is **necessary** for safe and effective practice.

3.4 Existing entry routes - psychotherapists

As outlined in section 2.1.1, in the responses to the Call for Ideas, there was broad agreement in the threshold level suggested for psychotherapists – masters degree/masters level or equivalent or Level 7 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is worth noting here that Level 7 on the NQF includes the awards of postgraduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas and masters degrees.

There was little debate in Call for Ideas responses about the threshold for psychotherapists. However, it was noted more generally by some respondents that a significant proportion of qualifications in both psychotherapy and counselling do not lead to a formal award that is explicitly linked to a qualifications framework (i.e. the award was not the award of a qualifications body or a HEI). Therefore some qualifications are not subject to the quality assurance processes of a HEI or awarding body (although may be subject to the quality assurance of a professional body and internal processes). Some said that this was an historic situation and said that they were working towards greater university validation of programmes.

In their response, the British Psychoanalytic Council referred to training programmes established to produce high intensity psychological therapists as part of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. These programmes are mainly entered by individuals who have a background in another profession, some of who may already be statutorily registered in that profession (e.g. nurses, psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors). Our understanding is that the majority of this training takes place in the workplace via partnered HEI provision. We understand further that the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) is working towards accrediting these trainings.

The IAPT Workforce Team argues that those who successfully complete such high intensity training at a level equivalent to postgraduate diploma should be able to register with the HPC as psychotherapists. They therefore argue that a level should be set which encompasses postgraduate level training more broadly.

The Group may wish to consider these arguments in its discussion about the threshold level for entry to the Register.

3.5 Existing entry routes – counsellors

As outlined in 2.1.1, in the responses to the Call for Ideas, a variety of different views were advanced about the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register for counsellors. These varied from level 3 to level 6 (equivalent to first degree level) on the NQF.

In responses to a request for information about qualifications in the field more generally, some respondents noted that there is a variety of training in counselling, varying in the level of programmes and in the sector in which it is delivered – in the private, further education and higher education sectors.

The Group is reminded that the threshold is the ‘minimum’ level which can be exceeded and that the level set must not be more than is necessary to achieve the standards of proficiency which it establishes for psychotherapists and counsellors. Considering existing provision and how far such provision would be able to meet the standards the Group sets will be important in this regard. If the Group considers setting a threshold above the level of some provision in the field this will need to be capable of objective justification on the basis that this is necessary to meet the standards of proficiency, which in turn are necessary for public protection.

3.6 Inclusivity and diversity

A consistent theme in the Call for Ideas was inclusivity and diversity. In relation to this particular topic, the following points were made:

- Existing practitioners should not be excluded by the threshold set.
- The diversity of approaches to education and training should be recognised and maintained, particularly the continued provision of education and training outside of higher education, in the further education and private sectors.
- There should be no move towards requiring formal academic qualifications for entry to the Register.
- Setting the threshold too high, especially for counsellors, would adversely affect the diversity of entrants to the field and the skills and qualities they were able to bring to practice.

Please note that the threshold level relates to education and training programmes seeking approval and not to individuals. Therefore individuals who had followed programmes below the threshold in the past would not be affected.

However, the normative level set could have longer term implications for future supply of practitioners to the field.

The Group is reminded to bear in mind the wider equality and diversity implications of the decisions it makes in this area.

3.7 A stepped approach

In the Call for Ideas we suggested that one possible option for setting the threshold would be a stepped approach which would see the threshold raised over a period of time. We suggested that, if feasible, such an approach might balance the need to ensure that as many practitioners as possible can register, in order to protect the public, with the need to ensure that the threshold level of publication protection develops over time.

In the Call for Ideas, few respondents commented on this idea, though those that did responded positively. As outlined in 3.5, any threshold set or approach to the threshold must be linked to what is necessary for safe and effective practice. In its discussions so far, the idea of a 'stepped approach' has not emerged as a potential issue. However, the Group may wish to consider the merits of such an approach as part of its discussion on this topic.

Some respondents commented on the need for pragmatism in this area, in particular, a lead in period for education and training providers to make any necessary changes to their programmes. Even if a 'stepped approach' to the threshold was not adopted, there would be a lead-in period for education and training providers.

Firstly, once recommendations have been made by the HPC, and assuming a final decision to regulate is taken by Government, the Register would not open for a period of time, which would allow time for education and training providers to make any necessary changes to their programmes. It is currently anticipated that the Register for psychotherapists and counsellors might open in 2011.

Secondly, on the day the Register opens, the HPC will approve all those programmes, historic and current, that led or lead to membership of one of the voluntary registers that transfers. The HPC will then need to develop operational arrangements for visiting those programmes to approve them against its standards. There is therefore likely to be a further 'lead in period' before programmes are visited and reapproved against the HPC's standards.

3.8 Differentiation and programme approval

Responses to the Call for Ideas and discussion to date has focused on existing postgraduate level training in psychotherapy (whether or not that training has a formal link to a qualifications framework; section 3.4 refers), and a variety of training in counselling ranging from around level 4 on the NQF up to level 7 or above (section 3.5 refers). The variety of programmes at different levels in counselling has posed a challenge for the Group in thinking about differentiation and putting together differentiated threshold standards of proficiency.

In putting together the standards of proficiency, the Group has to focus on the threshold or minimum standards necessary to enter the Register – as a psychotherapist, or counsellor. The threshold level or levels has to be the minimum level necessary to achieve those standards. For example, if the Group can identify differentiation at a threshold level between psychotherapists and counsellors, taking into account existing provision, the threshold levels set might equate to level 4 on the NQF for counsellors, and level 7 on the NQF for psychotherapists. Please note, however, that **this is an indicative example for illustrative purposes only and not a recommendation from the HPC Executive** as to the levels that should be recommended by the Group; this is entirely a matter for the Group.

In its deliberations, and if the Group were to consider such a distinction in threshold levels, the Group may wish to consider whether ‘counselling’ programmes delivered at postgraduate level, would in fact meet the standards for psychotherapists as well. There might be some debate as to whether there are substantive differences in terms of threshold proficiencies between programmes termed ‘counselling’ and those termed ‘psychotherapy’ (or, indeed, those that use both terms), which are delivered at the same level. In addition, there may be some discussion about whether those that successfully complete ‘counselling’ programmes at postgraduate level also call themselves psychotherapists.

Therefore the Group could consider whether such programmes might be recognised and approved from the opening date of the Register to confer eligibility to use both the titles – ‘psychotherapist’ and ‘counsellor’.

The following scenario provides an example:

(1) A level 7 threshold level is set for psychotherapists. Level 7 programmes in ‘psychotherapy’ and ‘counselling’ at that level are approved and confer eligibility for someone to register and use both protected titles. Individual practitioners could choose whether they wished to call themselves a counsellor, a psychotherapist, or both.

(2) A level 4 threshold level is set for counsellors, conferring eligibility to register and use the protected title ‘counsellor’.

However, as stated above, the examples given here are for **illustrative purposes only and intended for consideration as part of the Group’s discussion; no recommendations are made in this area.**

3.8 Recommendations from the HPC Executive

The HPC Executive makes no recommendations to the PLG as to the threshold level that should be set. The Group is invited to discuss this paper in order to make recommendations on this topic.

The existing standard is articulated in terms of the name of an academic award (or its equivalent). The HPC Executive suggests, however, that any threshold level recommended by the Group is articulated with reference to the external reference frameworks appended to this paper. This is suggested for the purposes of clarity, and in recognition that a substantial proportion of education and training in the field is not delivered in the higher education sector.



Qualifications and Curriculum Authority



AWDURDOD
CYMWYSTERAU,
CWRICWLLWM AC ASESU
CYMRU
QUALIFICATIONS,
CURRICULUM &
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
FOR WALES



Rewarding Learning

For learners, parents, teachers, tutors, trainers, careers advisers and employers

The National Qualifications Framework

Helping learners make informed decisions

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out the levels against which a qualification can be recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It helps learners make informed decisions about the qualifications they want to pursue, by comparing the levels of different qualifications and identifying different progression routes.



The accreditation of qualifications makes sure they are of a high quality and that they meet the needs of learners and employers.

Changes to the NQF

In 2004 we started the process of revising the NQF so that it could recognise qualifications more precisely. To achieve this, we increased the number of levels in the NQF from five to nine.

The current levels 4 to 8 (previously levels 4 and 5) broadly compare to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), which covers qualifications provided by universities and other higher education institutions.

The increase in levels does not change the number of qualifications available or a qualification's content.

From January 2006 qualifications will be awarded against the new NQF levels. (Higher-level NVQs and related qualifications will continue to be awarded against the previous NQF levels.)

The NQF today

All accredited qualifications are awarded an NQF level. If a qualification shares the

same level as another qualification, they are broadly similar in terms of the demand they place on the learner. However, qualifications at the same level can still be very different in terms of content and duration.

The NQF now comprises nine levels (entry level to level 8). Entry level and levels 1 to 3 did not change. Levels 4 and 5 were divided into five levels.

The table over the page shows a selection of individual qualifications and how they appear in the current NQF. It also highlights how the current levels broadly compare to the FHEQ levels.

More information

Visit *openQUALS* – a website comprising all accredited qualifications in the NQF:
www.qca.org.uk/openquals

In 2006-8 the regulatory authorities will trial arrangements for a unit and qualifications system underpinned by credit. The outcomes of the trial will inform future developments.

See below for contact information.

Contact information

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
83 Piccadilly
London W1J 8QA

Telephone 020 7509 5555
Minicom 020 7509 6546
Email info@qca.org.uk
www.qca.org.uk

Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
Castle Buildings
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1SX

Telephone 029 2037 5400
Email info@accac.org.uk
www.accac.org.uk

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
29 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG

Telephone 028 9026 1200
Email info@ccea.org.uk
www.ccea.org.uk

The NQF and the FHEQ

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	
Previous levels (and examples)	Current levels (and examples)
5 Level 5 NVQ in Construction Management † Level 5 Diploma in Translation	8 Specialist awards
	7 Level 7 Diploma in Translation
4 Level 4 NVQ in Advice and Guidance † Level 4 National Diploma in Professional Production Skills Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design Level 4 Certificate in Early Years	6 Level 6 National Diploma in Professional Production Skills
	5 Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design
	4 Level 4 Certificate in Early Years
3 Level 3 Certificate in Small Animal Care Level 3 NVQ in Aeronautical Engineering A levels	
2 Level 2 Diploma for Beauty Specialists Level 2 NVQ in Agricultural Crop Production GCSEs Grades A*-C	
1 Level 1 Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies Level 1 NVQ in Bakery GCSEs Grades D-G	
Entry Entry Level Certificate in Adult Literacy	

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
D (doctoral) Doctorates
M (masters) Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas
H (honours) Bachelor degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas
I (intermediate) Diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees and higher national diplomas
C (certificate) Certificates of higher education

† Revised levels are not currently being implemented for NVQs at levels 4 and 5

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Qualification descriptors

The framework for Higher Education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Descriptor for a qualification at Certificate (C) level: Certificate of Higher Education

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study;
- an ability to present, evaluate, and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work;
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments;
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment; and will have:
- qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

Descriptor for a qualification at Intermediate (I) level: Degree (non-Honours)

Non-Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed;
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context;
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in their subject(s), and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study;
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis;
- effectively communicate information, arguments, and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively;
- undertake further training, develop existing skills, and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations; and will have:
- qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

Descriptor for a qualification at Honours (H) level: Bachelors degree with Honours

Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and
 - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;
 - an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge;
 - the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (eg refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;
- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;
- communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; and will have:
 - qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
 - the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Descriptor for a qualification at Masters (M) level: Masters degree

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline;
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations;
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Descriptor for a qualification at Doctoral (D) level: Doctoral degree

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches; and holders will have:
- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK



scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12				DOCTORATES	
11				MASTERS POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10				HONOURS DEGREES GRADUATE DIPLOMA	
9			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARDS	ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ4
8		HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA		DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION	
7	ADVANCED HIGHER	HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE		CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER				
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE				SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE	NATIONAL CERTIFICATES	NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARDS		SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE				
2	ACCESS 2				
1	ACCESS 1				

NOTES

- i. The new Skills for Work courses are National Courses available as Access, Intermediate and Higher Qualifications (SCQF levels 3 – 6).
- ii. Ongoing work to credit rate SVQs shows that SVQ units range from SCQF level 4 to level 12. SVQs at 3 and 4 can be placed at different SCQF levels.



The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

**Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers
to your questions about the European Union**

Freephone number (*):

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11

(*). Certain mobile telephone operators do not allow access to 00 800 numbers or these calls may be billed.

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008

ISBN 978-92-79-08474-4

DOI 10.2766/14352

© European Communities, 2008

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Printed in Belgium

PRINTED ON WHITE CHLORINE-FREE PAPER

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (EQF)



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Education and Culture

Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies
Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies



The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)

The EQF is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

The Recommendation formally entered into force in April 2008. It sets 2010 as the recommended target date for countries to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF, and 2012 for countries to ensure that individual qualification certificates bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

The EQF will relate different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together around a common European reference – its eight reference levels. The levels span the full scale of qualifications, from basic (Level 1, for example school leaving certificates) to advanced (Level 8, for example Doctorates) levels. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses all levels of

qualifications acquired in general, vocational as well as academic education and training. Additionally, the framework addresses qualifications acquired in initial and continuing education and training.

The eight reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes. The EQF recognises that Europe's education and training systems are so diverse that a shift to learning outcomes is necessary to make comparison and cooperation between countries and institutions possible.

In the EQF a learning outcome is defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The EQF therefore emphasises the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study. Learning outcomes are specified in three categories – as knowledge, skills and competence. This signals that qualifications – in different combinations – capture a broad scope of learning outcomes, including theoretical knowledge, practical and technical skills, and social competences where the ability to work with others will be crucial.

Background to the EQF's development – where did the EQF come from?

The development of the European Qualifications Framework started in 2004 in response to requests from the Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders for a common reference to increase the transparency of qualifications.

The Commission, with the support of an EQF Expert Group, produced a blueprint proposing an 8-level framework based on learning outcomes aiming to facilitate the transparency and portability of qualifications and to support lifelong learning. The Commission published this for consultation across Europe during the second half of 2005.

The responses to the consultation demonstrated widespread support among European stakeholders for the Commission proposal but also requested a number of clarifications and simplification. In response, the Commission amended the proposal, drawing on the input of experts from all the 32 countries involved as well as the European social partners. The revised text was then adopted by the Commission as a proposal on 6 September 2006. The European Parliament and Council successfully negotiated the proposal during 2007, leading to the EQF's formal adoption in February 2008.

What benefits does the EQF provide for Europe?

The Recommendation will establish a common European reference which will link the various national qualifications systems together and so facilitate greater communication between them. A network of independent but related and mutually understandable qualifications systems will thereby be created.

Using learning outcomes as a common reference point, the Framework will facilitate comparison and transfer of qualifications between countries, systems and institutions and will therefore be relevant to a wide range of users at European as well as at national level.

Most European countries have decided to develop National Qualifications Frameworks reflecting and responding to the EQF. These developments are important to ensure that the European-level cooperation process is properly anchored at national level. The rapid development of NQFs since 2004 demonstrates the need for increased transparency and comparability of qualifications at all levels and shows that the basic principles underpinning the EQF are broadly shared.

This closer relationship between countries' qualifications systems will have many beneficiaries:

- The EQF will support greater mobility of learners and workers. It will make it easier for learners to describe their broad level of competence to recruiters in other countries. This will help employers interpret the qualifications of applicants and so support labour market mobility in Europe. At a very practical level, from 2012 all new qualifications should bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level. The EQF will thus complement and reinforce existing European mobility instruments such as Europass, Erasmus, and ECTS.
- The EQF should benefit individuals by increasing access to, and participation in, lifelong learning. By establishing a common reference point, the EQF will indicate how learning outcomes may be combined from different settings, for example formal study or work, and from different countries,

and can thus contribute to reducing barriers between education and training providers e.g. between higher education and vocational education and training, which may operate in isolation from each other. This will promote progression so that learners do not have to repeat learning for example.

- The EQF can support individuals with extensive experience from work or other fields of activity by facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning. The focus on learning outcomes will make it easier to assess whether learning outcomes acquired in these settings are equivalent in content and relevance to formal qualifications.
- The EQF will support individual users as well as providers of education and training by increasing transparency of qualifications awarded outside the national systems, for example by sectors and multinational companies. The adoption of a common reference framework based on learning outcomes will facilitate the comparison and (potential) linking together of traditional qualifications awarded by national authorities and qualifications awarded by other stakeholders. The EQF will thus help sectors and individuals take advantage of this growing internationalisation of qualifications.

The EQF is an ambitious and far-reaching instrument which has implications for education and training systems, the labour market, industry and commerce and citizens.

More information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/index_en.html

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 23 April 2008

on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions²,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty³,

¹ OJ C 175, 27.7.2007, p. 74.

² OJ C 146, 30.6.2007, p. 77.

³ Opinion of the European Parliament of 24 October 2007 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Council Decision of 14 February 2008.

Whereas:

- (1) The development and recognition of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence are crucial for the development of individuals, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion in the Community. Such development and recognition should facilitate transnational mobility for workers and learners and contribute to meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour market. Access to and participation in lifelong learning for all, including disadvantaged people, and the use of qualifications should therefore be promoted and improved at national and Community level.
- (2) The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications should be one of the main components necessary to adapt education and training systems in the Community to the demands of the knowledge society. Furthermore, the Barcelona European Council in 2002 called for closer cooperation in the university sector and improvement of transparency and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training.
- (3) The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning⁴ invited the Commission, in close cooperation with the Council and Member States, to develop a framework for the recognition of qualifications for both education and training, building on the achievements of the Bologna process and promoting similar action in the area of vocational training.
- (4) The joint reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, adopted in 2004 and 2006, stressed the need to develop a European Qualifications Framework.
- (5) In the context of the Copenhagen process, the conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 15 November 2004 on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training gave priority to the development of an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, which should stand as a common reference covering both education and training.
- (6) The validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council conclusions on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 28 May 2004.
- (7) The Brussels European Councils of March 2005 and March 2006 underlined the importance of adopting a European Qualifications Framework.
- (8) This Recommendation takes into account Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)⁵ and Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning⁶.
- (9) This Recommendation is compatible with the framework for the European Higher Education Area and cycle descriptors agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education in 45 European countries at their meeting in Bergen on 19 and 20 May 2005 within the framework of the Bologna process.
- (10) The Council conclusions on quality assurance in vocational education and training of 23 and 24 May 2004, Recommendation 2006/143/EC of

⁴ OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁶ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education⁷ and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen contain common principles for quality assurance which should underpin the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework.

- (11) This Recommendation is without prejudice to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications⁸, which confers rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. Reference to the European Qualifications Framework levels on qualifications should not affect access to the labour market where professional qualifications have been recognised in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC.
- (12) 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.

- (13) This Recommendation should contribute to modernising education and training systems, the interrelationship of education, training and employment and building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, leading also to the validation of learning outcomes acquired through experience.
- (14) This Recommendation does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework does not describe specific qualifications or an individual's competences and particular qualifications should be referenced to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level by way of the relevant national qualifications systems.
- (15) Given its non-binding nature, this Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity by supporting and supplementing Member States' activities by facilitating further cooperation between them to increase transparency and to promote mobility and lifelong learning. It should be implemented in accordance with national legislation and practice.
- (16) Since the objective of this Recommendation, namely the creation of a common reference framework serving as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale and effects of the action envisaged, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Recommendation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective,

⁷ OJ L 64, 4.3.2006, p. 60.

⁸ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22. Directive as amended by Council Directive 2006/100/EC (OJ L 363, 20.12.2006, p. 141).

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems and to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society, as well as the further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems;
2. relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the levels set out in Annex II, and, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice;
3. adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and “Europass” documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level;
4. use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the common European principles agreed in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004, paying particular attention to those citizens most likely to be subject to unemployment or insecure forms of employment, for whom such an approach could help increase participation in lifelong learning and access to the labour market;
5. promote and apply the principles of quality assurance in education and training set out in Annex III when relating higher education and vocational education and training qualifications within national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework;
6. designate national coordination points linked to the particular structures and requirements of the Member States, in order to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the European Qualifications Framework with a view to promoting the quality and transparency of that relationship.

The tasks of those national coordination points should include:

- (a) referencing levels of qualifications within national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework levels described in Annex II;
- (b) ensuring that a transparent methodology is used to reference national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework in order to facilitate comparisons between them on the one hand, and ensuring that the resulting decisions are published on the other;
- (c) providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through national qualifications systems;
- (d) promoting the participation of all relevant stakeholders including, in accordance with national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the above tasks and international sectoral organisations in using the reference levels and principles of the European Qualifications Framework as set out in this Recommendation, in particular by facilitating cooperation, exchanging good practice and testing – inter alia through voluntary peer review and pilot projects under Community programmes, by launching information and consultation exercises with social dialogue committees – and developing support and guidance material;
2. establish, by 23 April 2009, a European Qualifications Framework advisory group composed of representatives of Member States and involving the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate, responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework;
3. assess and evaluate, in cooperation with the Member States and after consulting the stakeholders concerned, the action taken in response to this Recommendation, including the remit and duration of the advisory group, and, by 23 April 2013, report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, the possible review and revision of this Recommendation;
4. promote close links between the European Qualifications Framework and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training, in order to improve citizens' mobility and facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes.

Done at Strasbourg, 23 April 2008.

For the European Parliament
The President
HANS-GERT PÖTTERING

For the Council
The President
JANEZ LENARČIČ

ANNEX I

Definitions

For the purposes of the Recommendation, the definitions which apply are the following:

- (a) “qualification” means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- (b) “national qualifications system” means all aspects of a Member State’s activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework;
- (c) “national qualifications framework” means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;
- (d) “sector” means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology;
- (e) “international sectoral organisation” means an association of national organisations, including, for example, employers and professional bodies, which represents the interests of national sectors;
- (f) “learning outcomes” means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- (g) “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;
- (h) “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);
- (i) “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.

ANNEX II

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
		In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.
Level 1	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic general knowledge
Level 2	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study
Level 3	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study
Level 4	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study
Level 5*	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge
Level 6**	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles
Level 7***	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields
Level 8****	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields

Skills	Competence
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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic skills required to carry out simple tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work or study under supervision with some autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study • adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change • review and develop performance of self and others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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 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 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.

Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework

When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance – which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and vocational education and training – should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

- Quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.
- Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.
- Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies.
- External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
- Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.
- Quality assurance systems should include the following elements
 - clear and measurable objectives and standards;
 - guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
 - appropriate resources;
 - consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
 - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
 - widely accessible evaluation results.
- Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.
- Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community.
- Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

European Commission

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

2008 — 15 pp. — 21 X 29,7 cm

ISBN 978-92-79-08474-4

HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

Our priced publications are available from EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>), where you can place an order with the sales agent of your choice.

The Publications Office has a worldwide network of sales agents.

You can obtain their contact details by sending a fax to (352) 29 29-42758.

