



Challenges and solutions  
for the horizontal comparison of  
the European qualifications

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Conference

Latvian qualifications in the European Virtual Network  
Riga, 11 May, 2018





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The Horizontal Comparison working team composition:

- ❑ Cedefop, Commission and EQF/AG experts
- ❑ and experts from the following countries:
  - ❑ Hungary
  - ❑ Italy
  - ❑ Latvia
  - ❑ Norway
  - ❑ Poland (coordinator)
  - ❑ Sweden
  - ❑ Scotland





### The horizontal comparison working team:

- Hungary
  - Erzsebet Szlamka
  - András Derényi
- Italy
  - Gabrielle di Francesco
  - Diana Macri
- Latvia
  - Baiba Ramina
  - Indra Gara
- Norway
  - Kari Berg
- Poland (project coordinator)
  - Ewa Chmielecka
  - Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak
  - Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador
  - Andrzej Żurawski
- Scotland
  - Aileen Ponton
  - Sheila Dunn
- Sweden
  - Sven-Owe Eriksson
  - Carina Lindén
  
- Business Europe
  - Anja Trier Wang
- UEAPME
  - Thomas Mayr
- And
  - Jens Bjornavald
  - Koen Nomden
  - Slava Pevec



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**European Union**  
European Social Fund





# Horizontal comparison (HC) objectives (AG32-3 note)

- The general aim of the pilot was to further improve the way EQF levelling takes place, building on national experiences;
- The specific aim of the pilot was to fine-tune and test a methodology for the comparison of levelling decisions and sharing experiences on existing strengths and weaknesses;
- The results should inform and support future levelling decisions at national level, and remain the property of these countries.
- The experiences from the pilot should inform and orient future ‘horizontal comparisons’;
- ‘Horizontal comparisons’ addressed the consistency of the referencing of national qualifications;
- HC also provided information on detail and way of describing learning outcomes across different countries.



# The EQF Recommendation of 23 April 2008

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 will establish a common European reference **which will link the various national qualifications systems together** and so facilitate greater communication between them.

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 HC project main goals – challenges:

- to develop a common methodology – the horizontal comparison tool for levelled qualifications across countries,
- to address the consistency of the linking of national qualifications, seeking how to:
  - improve the way NQF levelling takes place,
  - understand and explain if seemingly comparable qualifications assigned to the same level are indeed comparable,
  - understand and explain why seemingly similar qualifications have been assigned to different levels in different countries,
  - deliver a methodology for horizontal comparisons, including a “technical comparison fiche”.
- In general:
  - to ensure/improve the way national qualifications are linked to the NQF for achieving and supporting better transparency, understanding and trust within and between countries.
  - and/but to protect of the variety and diversity of education and qualifications systems against any form of unifying and standardisation



## The HC project main goals – solution (?):

The participation in the exercise was voluntary. The comparison of levelled qualifications was not treated as a tool for controlling submitted reports but to prepare effective tools for the comparison of the data provided by common work, the sharing of experiences, and a better understanding of the national approaches to methods of qualifications levelling.





## The HC project working agenda:

### 2016:

- February – preliminary discussion on method and agenda of work
- March - April – qualifications chosen and methodology / fiche accepted
- May – delivery of LO descriptions etc. by countries, first part of comparative analysis; need for additional questions - working meeting in Brussels.
- June – presentation of the HC first results at the AG36
- July – answers for additional questions – additional analysis done
- September 9 – working meeting in Warsaw
- October 3 - 4 – working meeting in Brussels and presentation of the HC results at the 37 AG
- November 14 – working meeting in Warsaw on the deliverables/ draft of the final report
- December 8/9 - presentation of the draft final report at the 38 AG meeting

### 2017

- January – June : corrections, additional analysis and final version of the report.
- May - PLA in Warsaw: “Horizontal comparison of levelled qualifications: practical exercise”



Choice of qualifications:

The two qualifications were chosen  
for analysis:

- \* CNC operator
- \* Mechanical engineer





# Fiche for horizontal comparisons (p.14)

Country:	Country A	Country B	Country ...	Results of the horizontal comparison of qualifications and their levelling – similarities and differences
Group members:				
Title of qualification (bilingual) <sup>1</sup> :				
Scope of qualification <sup>2</sup> :				
<b>Context information<sup>3</sup>.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access rights;</li> <li>• Purpose of the qualification in education;</li> <li>• Purpose of the qualification at the labour market;</li> <li>• Reference to occupational context;</li> <li>• International standards;</li> <li>• Recognition practice;</li> <li>• Validation practices;</li> <li>• Validation of informal and non-formal learning;</li> <li>• Quality assurance;</li> <li>• Other relevant.</li> </ul>				
Organization of learning outcomes <sup>4</sup>				
Learning outcomes <sup>5</sup> :				
Analysis of learning outcomes <sup>6</sup> :				
Basis of levelling <sup>7</sup>				
Level of NQF/EQF <sup>8</sup>				
Conclusions of the qualification horizontal comparison between countries				
Recommendations (overall, per country, to EQF AG)				



# Tables of learning outcomes

Category	HU	NO	LV	
Preparation to work - selection of equipment		<p>select, prepare and use CNC machines and equipment suited to the production assignment</p> <p>select and use the correct protective equipment for the job at hand</p> <p>select and use materials based on the task and explain characteristics of material involved</p> <p>select cutting tools and cutting data in accordance with the job at hand</p>	<p>5. Choose appropriate technological equipment.</p> <p>6. Choose the necessary tools for installing the machine.</p> <p>7. Choose and use auxiliary materials according to technological process.</p>	<p>1) Recognizes t CNC machine too to perform techn (machining proce 5) Selects tool fastening tools us process</p>
Preparation to work - checking the machines	<p>- Perform checking operations before starting work (operability of machine systems, states of tools, technological parameters)</p> <p>- Prepare for work (tool correction-value stores, zero point store contents, tool distribution, CNC program, checking main positions)</p>		<p>15. Perform visual and technical test of the machine before starting work.</p>	<p>6) Sets and ent the driver of CNC machines before machining</p> <p>7) Downloads s processing and te machining softwa tools/machines</p>



## Levels of the NQFs for analysed LO's

	<b>Mechanical Engineer</b>	<b>CNC Operator</b>
Norway	6	4
Sweden	6	4
Latvia	6	4
Poland	6	3
Hungary	6	4
Italy	6	3



## The HC project main results (1) – problem solutions

- The technical fiche is an effective tool for the horizontal comparison of levelled qualifications.
- The comparability of levelled qualifications cannot be understood as a simple match of sets of qualifications' learning outcomes – other elements of national qualifications systems and methods of levelling should be considered. They are represented in the proposed fiche as “context information”.
- The comparability does not demand the strict standardisation of qualifications descriptions across countries. Nevertheless, for mutual understanding and trust, some core information should be provided. This is represented by the fiche sections and by additional questions developed in the project.
- The language for the description of qualifications developed by countries on the basis of the EQF Recommendation of 2008 and the referencing processes is sufficient to present and compare qualifications.



## The HC project main results(2) – problem solutions

- Comparability does not require identical national methods of levelling. Nevertheless, to safeguard the “best fit” method, two core elements should be present in any national method of levelling:
  - **the learning outcomes of a qualification should be referred to the level descriptors,**
  - **their mutual reference is evaluated / confirmed by the quality assurance systems.**
- The criteria of referencing adopted by the Advisory Group are a sufficient tool for referencing and comparing levelled qualifications.
- The outcomes of the pilot exercise indicate that the assumption of the EQF 2008 Recommendation on the comparability of qualifications using the EQF and NQFs’ level descriptors to set the levels of qualifications is met and that national practices in levelling can be trusted.



# General conclusions of the project

The national approaches to describing qualifications show great diversity of qualifications descriptions, levelling etc. ..

- Despite these differences, the analyses presented in the report show that tools which help to submit, present and organise information on similar qualifications can be developed.
- The fiche can be used as a common tool to determine the comparability of qualifications

There are three broad areas that need to be included in comparisons of qualifications.

- **Learning outcomes** - the national descriptions of learning outcomes differ as regards length, detail and conceptual approach **but** is possible to identify the common “core” of their description which allows qualifications to be compared.
- **Information on the context of qualifications** is necessary to understand the variability of information and approaches at the national level.
- The **methods of levelling** differ and build on different principles and practises **but** the core elements identified as relation between learning outcomes and level descriptors and the quality assurance of the process of levelling.





# Lessons learnt (1)

1. the national context matters.
2. there is significant diversity of national approaches to describing and levelling qualifications. This diversity is an important part of the European qualifications landscape and should be maintained.
3. The horizontal comparisons exercise confirmed that the “bottom-up”, peer work based approach adopted in the pilot project gives promising results



# Lessons learnt (2)

4. the cooperation between the countries involved in the HC developed:

- better common comprehension and understanding
- better transparency
- knowledge about methods of levelling
- mutual trust

5. which was a “side product” of common work but answering strongly the general objectives of the project



# Lessons learnt (3)

## PLA in Warsaw, May 2017

- “Horizontal comparison of levelled qualifications: practical exercise”
  - common work on comparison of “hotel receptionist” qualification by 13 countries on the basis of their national descriptions of the qualification
  - The HC pilot project working tools, methodology and conclusions confirmed in practice.
  - **Trust, transparency and comparability increased**
    - **Which is always a challenge but if achieved – solve problems.**





Thank you for your attention!

