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European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning**European Parliament resolution of 17 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2016/2798(RSP))**

(2018/C 307/10)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal for a Council recommendation on the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (COM(2016)0383),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 10 June 2016 on a New Skills Agenda for Europe (COM(2016)0381),
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to 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) ⁽²⁾, through which people can present their skills and qualifications,
- having regard to the new priorities for European cooperation in education and training through to 2020, as established by the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the Eurydice Overview on Recognition of Prior Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Higher Education,
- having regard to the multilingual European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), which, together with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), will use a common format for the electronic publication of information on qualifications, as set out in Annex VI to the proposal,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training ⁽⁵⁾ (EQAVET),
- having regard to the independent European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education ⁽⁶⁾, a list of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated their substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG),

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.eqar.eu>

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- having regard to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) ⁽¹⁾ developed in the context of the European Higher Education Area and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) established through the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Bologna Process for Higher Education, the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué and the ‘European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna process implementation report’,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education training, youth and sport ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) and the Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications, which refers explicitly to the EQF as a tool to be used in academic recognition,
 - having regard to the strategy ‘Widening Participation for Equity and Growth: A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020’, which covers all countries participating in the EQF,
 - having regard to the 2015 UNESCO report on Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in UNESCO Member States,
 - having regard to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications ⁽⁴⁾, as amended by Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 ⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (O-000038/2017 — B8-0218/2017),
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas a proper recognition, understanding and evaluation of skills extends beyond the realms of what is sought after by the labour market; whereas the skills that are available and in demand on the labour market would benefit from an EQF which can identify and match those skills and thus provide social and economic benefits; whereas it is fundamental to help individuals to acquire and refresh competencies and skills throughout the course of their lives;
- B. whereas greater comparability of qualifications increases the possibility of employment and professional growth for all migrant workers;
- C. whereas focus should be placed on ICT skills, and structural measures should be introduced to help people acquire and validate these skills;
- D. whereas, by taking account of the new challenges that society poses and of technological and demographic change, the EQF, through the process of its further development, can support lifelong learning in both supporting equal opportunities and educational justice, and improving the permeability between the education and training systems; whereas education and training should help people to adapt to whatever circumstances they may face by upskilling and educating them holistically, so that they become critical, confident and independent, and also acquire the skills that are needed for the 21st century;

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

⁽²⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 11.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 132.

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- E. whereas the continuous development of knowledge, skills and competences — also known as lifelong learning — can contribute to improving people's individual work and life choices and help people achieve personal development and reach their full potential, thus bringing benefits for society, as well as improving people's chances of finding a job and safeguarding their careers;
 - F. whereas one of the goals of the EQF is to facilitate comparison between education systems and thus provide an impetus for change and reforms at national and sectoral level, with a view to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the ET 2020 framework;
 - G. whereas owing to Member States' lack of ambition, and despite the engagement demonstrated so far, a lack of transparency of qualifications and a low foreign qualification recognition rate still persist; whereas adjustments to the EQF are required in order to make qualifications even more transparent and comparable;
 - H. whereas the EQF should provide a meta-framework for users and facilitate cooperation between Member States' authorities, social partners, education and training providers, trade unions, civil society, and other stakeholders at international level;
 - I. whereas only the Netherlands and Sweden have specific procedures in place in their NQFs for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications; whereas no Member State has specific procedures for informal learning within its NQF;
 - J. whereas Member States should, as soon as possible but no later than 2018, put in place arrangements, in line with the EQF, for validating non-formal and informal learning linked to NQFs, including skills gained during volunteering activities;
 - K. whereas Member States specifically committed, in the 2015 Yerevan communiqué, to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and to review their NQFs with a view to ensuring that learning paths within a given framework adequately provide for the recognition of prior learning;
 - L. whereas it is the responsibility and exclusive competence of Member States to guarantee the quality of teaching content and to organise education systems; whereas the EQF has no bearing on this responsibility;
 - M. whereas there are currently disparities between regions, particularly cross-border regions, in the recognition of certificates, and this is giving rise to differences in employability;
 - N. whereas libraries, both public and private, make a significant contribution to lifelong learning and improvement of literacy and digital skills;
 - O. whereas currently a total of 39 countries participate in the EQF, comprising: the EU Member States, EEA countries, EU candidate countries, potential candidate countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) and Switzerland;
- 1. Acknowledges the Commission's initiative on revising the EQF and further supporting the modernisation of the European education and training systems, while still respecting national competencies and guaranteeing that the distinctive traits of Member States' education systems are safeguarded;
 - 2. Points out that the promotion of critical thinking and thinking outside the box is crucial for developing new skills that will be needed in the future;
 - 3. Recommends safeguarding the rich set of not only technical but also manual skills that have been handed down and have enabled the development and growth of artisan production sectors, which must be preserved as a way of safeguarding the individual identity of each Member State;

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4. Notes that one of the roles of the EQF is to increase the comparability of qualifications attained in Member States while safeguarding the specific features of national education systems;
5. Points out that the Union should make it possible, regardless of age or status, to make everyone's skills and competences, including those gained through volunteering, more visible, and better appreciated and recognised in a clear and accessible manner, in particular in cross-border areas, no matter where or how those skills and competences have been acquired; highlights the need for the Member States to make greater efforts towards the speedier and more effective recognition of qualifications and referencing of the relevant EQF level;
6. Recalls the need to emphasise implementation of the EQF in order to boost the framework's quality and potential;
7. Recommends greater flexibility as regards keeping the referencing of the national framework with the EQF up to date;
8. Recalls that one of the main tasks of the EQF is to facilitate and promote the transfer of qualifications and the validation of formal and informal training and education between different education and training systems, in order to enable transnational professional and learning mobility, to address the mismatch on the European labour market, and to better meet the personal needs of citizens and society at large;
9. Calls on the Commission to consider whether the three horizontal areas (knowledge, skills and competences) should be revised further in order to make them more comprehensible and clear; calls for the 2006 European Key Competence Framework to be used as a valuable resource and as the main reference document in order to achieve more coherence in terminology between the different EU frameworks and ultimately bring about a genuine learning outcome approach;
10. Points out the importance of analysing and developing tools for anticipating future skill needs; therefore encourages the Member States and all relevant stakeholders, such as employers, to share good practice in this regard;
11. Underlines the importance of training schemes and apprenticeships in shaping skills; stresses, therefore, the need to promote dual education systems in the Member States which combine apprenticeships at companies and education at vocational establishments; recalls that employers and entrepreneurs play a crucial role in training in the workplace and in providing apprenticeships, and takes the view that their role should be further supported and developed;
12. Recommends that the EQF be sufficiently related to the needs of society, including the demands of the labour market, in order to improve the competitiveness of the European economy and to help individuals develop their potential, with a view to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives;
13. Underlines the need to harness the possibilities of the EQF fully in order to stimulate and facilitate the mobility of students and workers within the EU, thus promoting lifelong learning and encouraging the development of a mobile and flexible workforce throughout Europe at a time of economic challenge and market globalisation;
14. Stresses the fact that a number of Member States are still in the early stages of implementing their individual NQF, based on the eight levels of the EQF; calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to ensure that this process is further implemented;
15. Highlights the importance of the ESCO initiative, which identifies and categorises, in 25 languages, skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant for the EU labour market and education and training;
16. Calls for strong support for and promotion of common European principles on providing and swiftly validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning processes, as this is especially important for the inclusion of 'atypical' learners; outlines, in this context, the increasing number of industry-based training sessions which should be included in the validation process, and stresses the need to devote particular attention to the certifications of the elderly, people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, older workers and other groups; encourages the Commission to evaluate whether ECVET credits can be used to validate and recognise informal and non-formal learning; believes that no devaluation of formal accomplishments will occur;

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17. Stresses the need for a better coordination between the EQF and other existing recognition and transparency tools such as ECVET, ECTS and Europass, with the support of quality assurance systems, to create synergies and increase efficiency of the transparency tools;
 18. Recommends that the Commission develop a self-evaluation tool for employers to ensure a more efficient use of the EQF; encourages employers to think critically about the levels of skills and qualifications needed for employment;
 19. Stresses the potential risks involved with defining learning outcomes in the EQF in terms of impact on curricula; emphasises the importance of the diversity of education systems in the EU and participating countries;
 20. Calls on the remaining Member States to swiftly link their NQFs to the EQF; urges a swifter pace in order to remove all remaining barriers to recognition;
 21. Recommends that the Commission re-evaluate the costs of improving the EQF, as no additional costs are envisaged at present; is concerned that the scope of the work for revising the EQF is underestimated;
 22. Urges the Member States to implement social dimension strategies for their education and training systems in order to boost support for equal opportunities, improve educational justice, combat inequality and ensure better permeability between the education and training systems; urges the Commission to support the Member States in doing so;
 23. Calls on the Commission to reconsider its promotion of performance-based funding in vocational education and training and higher education as well as in tuition fees within the framework of the modernisation agenda, in order to safeguard the social role of education and training systems and ensure access to qualifications;
 24. Urges the Commission to clarify the expected respective roles of ECVET and ECTS, in order to ensure increased transparency of the revision vis-à-vis stakeholders;
 25. Calls on the Commission and Member States to pay special attention to the commitment to include informal and non-formal learning methods which are currently excluded from the majority of NQFs and subsequently the EQF, especially informal learning, which is entirely excluded at present;
 26. Stresses the need for a better understanding of qualifications awarded outside the EU with a view to their validation and recognition and in order to foster the integration of migrants and refugees into European society, the EU labour market, and education and training systems in the EU; welcomes, in this context, the recommendation establishing the foundations for relationships between third-country national and regional qualification frameworks, Member State NQFs and the EQF, particularly the option of structured dialogues with EU neighbourhood countries that have an association agreement with the EU, thereby possibly serving to strengthen their NQFs with the EQF and the EU and bolster support (e.g. through development aid) to third countries for the purpose of developing NQFs;
 27. Acknowledges that it is in the interests of third countries to use the EQF as a point of reference for their own qualification systems and for the EQF to be revised in order to simplify the formal comparison of qualifications acquired in third countries with those acquired in the EU;
 28. Insists that the relevant stakeholders, such as public employment services, social partners, education and training providers and civil society, should be further involved and closely cooperate in the creation, implementation, promotion and monitoring of the EQF at EU and national level in order to ensure its broader support;
 29. Believes that an instrument such as the EQF requires constant updating and adjustment, and should thus be supported and improved by regular monitoring, in particular as regards its user-friendliness, permeability and transparency; stresses that the EQF will only be a success if Member States truly commit to implementing and using it;
 30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
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