



Status of development of the German Qualifications Framework (DQR)

June 2012

In October 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) agreed to work together on the development of a German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (known by its German abbreviation of DQR). The starting point was the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which entered into force on 23 April 2008. The aims of the Recommendation are for national qualification systems to be linked to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) by 2010 and for all new qualification certificates to contain a clear reference to the appropriate level within the EQF by the year 2012. A further objective is for a national coordination point to link the qualification levels within the national systems to the reference levels of the EQF.

The EQF acts as a reference framework for lifelong learning by mapping the achievements of the respective national educational systems at a European level in eight reference levels. The aim is to provide a translation instrument between the educational and qualifications systems of the member states which makes learning outcomes more comprehensible and more comparable in international terms and thus promotes the mobility of employees in Europe. In order for the outcomes of the German educational system to be accorded recognition across the EU, they need to be aligned to the EQF in an appropriate manner via a national qualifications framework.

The Federal Government and the federal states agree that the alignment of qualifications and certificates to reference levels is a task for the individual states. The aim of such an alignment is not to replace the existing system of access qualifications, and alignment takes place in strict accordance with the proviso that each qualifications level should be accessible via various educational pathways. Achievement of a certain reference level does not provide automatic entitlement to access the next level and has not been considered in conjunction with the implications of collective wage agreements and laws relating to remuneration. Recognition guidelines are not affected by the EU Recommendation for the EQF.

The BMBF and the KMK embraced the EU Recommendation by establishing a joint "Federal Government-Federal State Coordination Group for the German Qualifications Framework" (known by its German abbreviation of B-L-KG), which was commissioned with the task of managing the process of drawing up a DQR. This process involves a large number of stakeholders from general education, higher education and vocational training, the social partners and other experts from research and practice. Together with the B-L-KG DQR, these stakeholders make up the "German Qualifications Framework Working Group" (known by its German abbreviation of AK DQR). Feedback on results is sent to delegates' home institutions and committees on an ongoing basis.

In February 2009, the B-L-KG DQR and the AK DQR presented the initial draft for a DQR discussion proposal comprising an introductory text, the DQR matrix and a glossary and facilitating the alignment of all qualifications acquired in Germany in terms of content. Like the EQF, the DQR matrix contains eight reference levels which describe learning outcomes (bundled into competences) independently of the qualifications. The DQR differs from the EQF by differentiating between two categories of competences. These are "Professional competence", subdivided into "Knowledge" and "Skills", and "Personal competence", subdivided into "Social competence" and "Autonomy". The draft defines level 1 as an entry level (for qualifications from schools for pupils with learning difficulties and entry levels from vocational preparation schemes). The principle is that all reference levels should be achievable via various educational pathways. In the case of reference levels 5 to 8, parallel descriptions permitting an alignment of academic and vocational qualifications have been selected in each case. Compatibility with the German Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HQR), which was enacted in 2005, is secured for DQR reference levels 6 to 8.

Piloting phase of the DQR draft

The functionality of the DQR discussion proposal was tested via a sample alignment of qualifications in a development stage begun in May 2009. The sample alignment of qualifications took place for all reference levels in four selected occupational fields and areas of activity in order to achieve a greater degree of validity across the various VET areas. The thematic occupational areas were metal/electrical, the IT sector, trade and commerce and health. The working groups comprised approximately 16-20 members who were either appointed directly as proven experts across all areas of education (e.g. academic researchers from institutes of higher education or practitioners from the field of continuing vocational training) or else were recruited indirectly via institutions and associations.

The aims of this piloting phase were to scrutinise the structures of the DQR matrix and to draw possible conclusions with regard to the validity of the description categories. The tasks of the working groups were to state the arguments for the alignments undertaken in explicit terms and to describe the alignment difficulties indicating a requirement for revision of the matrix formulations.

The reports produced by the four working groups have been made available to members of the general public interested in the development of the DQR in the form of expert assessments on the DQR homepage (www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de, German language resource).

Further approach to be adopted

Once the expert evaluations had been submitted, the members of the "Federal Government-Federal State Coordination Group for the German Qualifications Framework" (B-L-KG DQR) and the "German Qualifications Framework Working Group" (AK DQR) discussed how results should be assessed and whether amendments to the matrix would be required.

The expert public was informed about the working status on the second DQR conference of experts in October 2010. In March 2011 the AK DQR agreed on a draft of the DQR also consented by the KMK.

On 31 January 2012, in a summit talk the federal government, federal states, social partners and economic organisations came to an understanding about the basic procedure concerning the implementation of the DQR. They agreed on abstaining from the alignment of general education degrees for the time being.

After a period of five years, all alignments will be jointly discussed and decided once again on the basis of competence-oriented training regulations of vocational education and

competence-oriented scholastic standards for the general education degrees in accordance with the equivalence of general education and vocational education.

In doing so, it is expected to take into account further developments on the European level and survey of upgrading.

Involving all participants of the process a manual is compiled explaining the alignment of qualifications present within the broadness of the German education system.

In June 2011, two working groups had been established to develop recommendations on the criteria via which non-formal and informal learning can be connected to the DQR. The objective is to involve the main stakeholders in continuing and advanced training and the social partners in particular in drawing up possible procedural pathways and strategies for the integration of non-formal and informal learning and for scrutinising the applicability of such pathways and strategies.

Two surveys relating to this thematic area have already been prepared in advance. Currently the recommendations of the working groups are discussed by the DQR committees.

Also at the moment, the DQR committee discusses the legal implementation of the DQR and the establishment of the national coordination point of the federal government and the federal states.

The third expert conference aiming at the information of the expert public will be held on 11 September 2012.

Parallel to these activities the German referencing report is drawn up.

Since the beginning of 2011, various expert workshops are taking place in which experiences of the development of national qualifications frameworks are being exchanged with representatives of neighbouring European states and issues of referencing are being addressed.

A transmission of the German report to the European Commission is envisaged for the fourth quarter of 2012.

Status of development in other European states

EU-targets:

The development of the DQR is part of an European process. With the Recommendation 2008/C 111/01 of the European Parliament and of the Council the European states argued in favour of the development of a common qualifications framework system and agreed upon baselines. The implementation process is closely accompanied by the European Commission. The implementation of the Recommendation is voluntary; however general allegiance obligation is in effect (freedom of choosing "if" but not absolutely "how"). Guiding principles are thereby the implementation in mutual trust and aiming at an overall coherence.

Meanwhile, 23 states entered into force qualifications frameworks. All 28 states will finalize their national development processes at the end of 2012.

In the implementation process many different scopes for design are in use: Revision in the near future (e. g. MT, PT, BE(v), IE), excluding specific fields of education (e.g. FR with general education), temporary allocation of university degrees to levels 6-8 (e. g. PT, DK). It is important that all states put transparency, outcome orientation, frameworks spanning all fields of education and orientation towards reforms in the centre.

Scheme of EQF implementation in member states and accession countries (May 2012):

NQF with reference to EQF	BE(v), CZ, DK, EE, FR, HR, IE, LT, LV, MT, NL, PT, UK
Referencing scheduled in 2012	AT, BG, CRO, DE, EL, ES, IS, IT, KY, LU, NO, PL, RO, SI, SK
Referencing scheduled in 2013	BE(f), FI, HU, SE,

The surveys mentioned and further information may be accessed at www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de.