



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung



**Second specialist conference on the
“German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning”**

held in Berlin on 19 October 2010

Conference report and summaries of forums

Conference report

The purpose of the second specialist conference on the German Qualifications Framework (DQR), which was staged in Berlin on 19 October 2010 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK), was to provide information and facilitate an exchange of views on the current status of development of the DQR at a national and international level. Since 2006, the Federal Government and the federal states have been working in conjunction with a broad circle of stakeholders from all educational areas to develop the DQR. An initial DQR discussion proposal has been in place since February 2009, and this has been subjected to practical evaluation by expert groups in the fields of metal/electrical, trade and commerce, health and IT sector within the scope of a one-year pilot phase.

At the conference, the results of this pilot phase were presented and assessed by leading representatives from the various educational areas. Expectations with regard to the future development of the DQR were formulated, and discussions took place with experts from Germany and other EU countries on the forthcoming matching process to the European Qualifications Framework. Four parallel specialist forums were also provided in order to afford an opportunity to exchange views on the DQR with regard to its function as an instrument of transparency, mobility and lifelong learning in Europe and with regard to the contribution it makes towards permeability within the educational system and to discuss the role of learning outcomes oriented quality assurance as a prerequisite for acceptance of the DQR.

Speaking in front of over 200 participants, Federal Minister of Education **Prof. Dr. Annette Schavan** gave an opening address in which she emphasised that the DQR would break new ground in a variety of aspects. She stressed that the alignment of the DQR towards competences identified meant that the crucial aspect in future would only be what someone could do rather than how long and where something had been learned. The aims of the DQR were to provide a vehicle for integrating the particular characteristics of the German educational system into the European framework, to achieve a greater degree of transparency and mobility by presenting the equivalence of general, vocational and academic education and to strengthen lifelong learning in overall terms. Minister Schavan announced that a law for the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad would be soon be instigated and that this process would run parallel to the development of the DQR.

In his capacity as representative of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK), Bavarian State Secretary **Josef Erhard** used his address to underline the function of the DQR as a guide and translation aid within a national and European context. He thanked all those involved for the good degree of cooperation within the DQR development process thus far. State Secretary Erhard stated that the issues still outstanding were legal provisions with regard to the implementation of the DQR, the development of procedures for the validation of qualifications acquired in an informal or non-formal manner and achieving the matching of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the DQR.

The speech given by **Jan Truszczyński**, European Commission Director General for Education and Culture, praised the activities which had previously taken place in the

development of the DQR and singled out the fact that all stakeholders had been involved as setting a good example for other member states. He announced that all European educational initiatives such as basic skills, ECVET and the Europass would be more closely inter-linked in the wake of the “Europe 2020” strategy and that the key initiative “Youth on the Move” already represented a step in this direction.

The stakeholders involved in the DQR process were represented in the persons of Dr. Regina Görner from the German Confederation of Trade Unions, Dr. Günter Lambertz from the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) and Prof. Dr. Wilfried Müller from the German Rectors’ Conference, all of whom stated their positions with regard to the results and experiences of the development process thus far whilst also expressing their expectations of the DQR.

Although Prof. Müller welcomed the development of the German Qualifications Framework as a vehicle for facilitating transparency of qualifications at a cross-border level, he indicated that work still needed to be undertaken to improve the regulatory instruments governing vocational education and training in the interests of learning outcome orientation. This paradigm shift had already been completed in the higher education sector. Although the DQR was capable of making a valuable contribution towards permeability and mobility, Mr. Müller also pointed out the need for the descriptors to be revised.

Speaking from the trade union point of view, Dr. Görner felt that the inclusion of all forms of learning and the equivalence of vocational and higher education were of particular significance. She believed that work still remained to be done in Germany on the international recognition of German vocational qualifications and on affording access to higher education for those who had completed vocational qualifications. Dr. Görner also felt that the DQR could act as vehicle for bringing greater clarity to the continuing training sector and concluded by appealing for the ongoing work process to be conducted in a careful and sustainable manner.

Dr. Lambertz from the DIHK spoke out in favour of aligning descriptors towards employability skills, stating that such an approach constituted added value. He also welcomed the fact that qualifications could be aligned to all reference levels regardless of learning venue whilst also calling for further revision to take place. Dr. Lambertz also argued that the general higher education entrance qualification should not be aligned above three to three-and-a-half training.

Representatives from France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria and the European Commission also joined experts from Germany to take part in the four specialist forums. Results achieved during the one-year sample piloting of the DQR compared to experiences in other EU member states formed a particular object of debate.

Forum 1 discussed the DQR as an instrument of transparency and mobility and came to the conclusion that other instruments such as ECVET and EQARF should also be integrated. Forum 2 explored the contribution of the DQR in terms of achieving more permeability, a particular emphasis being placed on learning outcome orientation as a common “currency” for all educational areas. Learning outcome orientation as a prerequisite for the acceptance of the DQR was discussed in Forum 3. Cooperation across educational sectors is of considerable significance for the further process to be adopted in respect of this topic. Forum 4 focused on the contribution of the DQR towards lifelong learning. Given the fact that Germany is still in the initial stages in terms of addressing this theme, the forum felt that the first step should be the establishment of an infrastructure for recording the learning outcomes of informal and non-formal learning processes.

The conference ended with contributions from the DQR Working Group chairs **Dr. Susanna Schmidt** (BMBF) and **Lothar Herstix** (KMK), who lent expression to their hope that the further process involving participants from all educational areas would lead to an agreed result and ultimately to a good conclusion. Once the pilot phase has finished, the DQR committees will draw their conclusions from the results achieved by the working groups and consult on further steps to be undertaken. Decisions particularly need to be taken with regard to alignment structures and the inclusion of results of informal and non-formal learning.

Irene Kurz/Susanne Weber, DQR Office

Summaries of forums

Forum 1 “The DQR – an instrument of transparency and mobility”

Contributors

Prof. Dr. Georg Spöttl, University of Bremen

Slava Pevec Grm, EQF Advisory Group and Cedefop

Dr. Jim Murray, National Qualification Authority and National Coordination Point of Ireland, Dublin

Steffen Gunnar Bayer, Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, Berlin

Hermann Nehls, German Confederation of Trade Unions, Berlin

Chair

Eva Nourney, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin

Introduction

The aim of learning outcome orientation within the educational system is to make qualifications more transparent in order to achieve an increase in mobility.

How can a system of European qualifications frameworks act as a vehicle for increasing mobility? Which support measures may be required? How are joint qualification criteria established across Europe and how is and “mutual trust” established?

Against this background, the aim was for the following topics to be discussed in Forum 1:

- The DQR as a translation instrument: referencing to the EQF
- Linking the DQR to other instruments such as the Europass
- Competence related curricula: to what extent is it necessary to rewrite curricula and regulatory instruments in a learning outcome oriented manner?
- Linking with educational standards
- Relationship of the existing EU Directive on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications to the DQR/EQF alignments

The specific issues which contributors were requested to address were as follows.

1. What is the relationship between the DQR or a national qualifications framework and the EQF?
2. Which criteria need to be fulfilled in order to secure transparent and easily understandable referencing?
3. What is the nature of the inter-relationship between the variously selected definitions of competence included in the DQF, the NQF and the EQF?
4. Which core points need to be secured in order to establish “mutual trust” with regard to the comparability of qualifications? Are descriptions of anchor qualifications necessary, for example?
5. How must qualifications be described (learning outcome oriented?) in order to make them comparable via the EQF?
6. Which supporting measures may be necessary (other European transparency instruments, quality assurance etc.) in order to secure mobility via the EQF?

7. How can the DQR/EQF be “promoted”? How can the added value of the instrument be imparted to companies and citizens?

Brief summary of the discussion

The alignment of vocational and higher education qualifications to the same DQR reference level did not mean that the existing educational schism would be overcome. During the debate, the question was posed whether the DQR actually represented an instrument for the pursuit of this goal or the extent to which it could contribute towards its achievement. The result of the discussion was that the DQR and the clear commitment to the equivalence of qualifications from various educational areas was at least capable of opening up a new basis and of having a positive impact on the debate surrounding newly structured (practically oriented) educational courses at institutes of higher education.

Discussions continued as to whether the DQR was more than an instrument of mobility and transparency. Because of its objective of fostering mobility and transparency on the labour market, the DQR had its foundations in a competence-based approach which was strongly oriented towards employability skills. In a certain way, this ran contrary to the traditional Humboldtian ideal of education and gave rise to the question of whether the educational system would continue to alter as a result of the DQR and of whether the DQR would exert a further effect on the structuring of regulatory instruments or on the general profile of educational providers.

Debate also centred on the issue of the connection between the various instruments of transparency.

In order to secure mobility, the forum ascertained that it would be necessary to inter-relate various European instruments such as ECVET, EQARF and EQF to a much greater extent than previously.

The contributors felt that the DQR could move beyond its mobility and transparency function to serve as an important instrument for company applicant selection and as a vehicle to highlight career pathways. This could increase the level of acceptance it enjoyed. “Mutual trust” was a key factor within this process both nationally and internationally.

Natalie Morawietz, Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (f-bb), Nuremberg

Forum 2 “The DQR – a contribution towards permeability within the educational system”

Contributors

Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences

Jos Noesen, Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle du Luxembourg

Brigitte-Véronique Bouquet, Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle, France

Prof. Dr. Friedrich H. Esser, German Confederation of Skilled Crafts

Dr. Achim Hopbach, Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany.
Accreditation Council
Julia Jaspers, Deutsche Bahn AG
Prof. Dr. Michael Hoffmann, University of Ulm, Faculty Association of Electrotechnology
and Information Technology (FTEI) and 4ING

Chair

Michael Schopf, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of
the Länder, Hamburg

Introduction

As elements of the European Education Area, the initial function of the EQR and DQR is to serve as instruments of transparency not conferring any entitlements. The adoption of the EQF Recommendation in 2008 and the drawing up of the DQR discussion proposal in 2009 have, however, greatly increased the significance of the political objective of “promoting the permeability of the educational” system. This is a source of hope for some whilst being viewed with some trepidation by others.

The DQR states in modest terms that “the objective is to make equivalences and differences between qualifications more transparent for educational establishments, companies and employees and to use this as a vehicle for supporting permeability”. The EQF, with which the DQR is to be rendered compatible, adopts a clearer formulation. “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 ... (Consideration 13)“.

Because of the absence of a uniform qualifications framework with standardised reference level alignments and different curricular structures, existing national and European regulations for the recognition of qualifications or the credit transfer and transferability of partial qualifications tended to be based on educational policy goodwill and considerations of plausibility.

Against this background, the objective pursued in Forum 2 was to clarify:

- the extent to which promotion of permeability is viewed as a worthwhile goal;
- which opportunities already exist today and where the benefits and drawbacks of these lie;
- the foundations of the hope (or trepidation) that the DQR could provide a basis for the derivation of measures to alter the entitlement system;
- whether the qualifications frameworks will prove sufficient for the fostering of permeability or whether European and national standardised credit point, quality assurance and documentation systems will need to be added and
- which regulations already exist in other European states and how the German positions are evaluated from the point of view of such states.

The specific issues which contributors were requested to address were as follows.

1. Why, in contrast to the Bologna Process, has “permeability” become such a major topic for the EQF and the DQR?
2. Is the present DQR draft, which has essentially been largely derived from the “EQF Meta-Framework”, suitable for the fostering of permeability?
3. What is the significance of the promotion of permeability in the educational policy of countries such as Luxembourg?
4. How should national qualifications frameworks be designed (and standardised?) in order to achieve the objective of “promoting permeability”?
5. How would the DQR need to be designed in order for the institutes of higher education to accept the DQR alignments of vocational qualifications?
6. Do the experiences of the institutes of higher education with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) mean that a credit transfer system for the vocational qualifications system (ECVET) and for the general educational sector will also be required in order to realise the objective of achieving “permeability between educational areas”?
7. What hopes does a major company such as German Railways, which in its capacity as a corporate group is itself capable of generating sufficiently variable career pathways independent of formal qualifications, invest in the prospect of greater permeability within the educational system?
8. Is it not the case that from the point of view of trade and industry debate is too confined to the topic of “permeability from vocational education towards higher education study”? Should the focus not also be on permeability and credit transfer opportunities in such areas as between vocational qualifications and between vocational training and general education (acquisition of entitlements associated with general educational qualifications via vocational qualifications)?
9. Why have previously existing possibilities with regard to the recognition or credit transfer of vocational qualifications been insufficient?
10. In light of the very small proportion of persons with academic qualifications in the craft trades sector, is there not a danger that this branch of trade and industry could lose its highest performing members if they are able to use vocational qualifications as a means of accessing higher education study?
11. Is the wish to use an NQF (national qualifications framework) which relates to the EQF to promote permeability within the educational system a typically German problem which does not arise in such countries as France where the aim is for practically every school leaver to acquire a higher education entrance qualification?
12. How do countries such as France evaluate the opportunities to use recognition of informally acquired competences to promote lifelong learning and the permeability of educational areas? What methods are suitable for promoting this?
13. Which robust study results exist with regard to the higher education study success of those with vocational qualifications?
14. Which requirements need to be made of a functional and new entitlement system based on the DQR in the light of previous national and European experiences with recognition and credit transfers in the Bachelor/Masters area?

Brief summary of the discussion

The following questions initially emerged.

- Is it not the case that the learning outcomes of the 350 or so occupations included within the dual system are very different, and does this not make it more difficult to align these to the DQR?
- How can “soft skills”, which in the DQR are expressed via personal competences, be measured at all?

Within this context, Prof. Dr. Friedrich H. Esser explained that although the wish was for alignment profiles to be the same, differences needed to be made in the light of the complexity of the training occupations. He stated that the learning fields contained within the training occupations exhibited varying degrees of complexity depending on the different duration of training and that the expectation was that regulatory instruments would be aligned to the systematology deployed within the DQR in accordance with these differing degrees of complexity when occupations were updated. Such an approach corresponded to the typisation adopted for the alignment of qualifications in the higher education sector.

Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich said that qualifications needed to be described in order to be able to respond to the first question. A relevant additional delta would need to be contrasted with the regulatory instruments for the purpose of carrying out adequate alignment to the corresponding level. In the case of the “soft skills”, the question arose as to whether such skills could be measured at all. The ultimate aim of training was the acquisition of employability skills, and this was something which could not be measured until training had been concluded.

A further question addressed was as follows. If, as depicted by Prof. Dr. Hoffmann, no higher degree of permeability can be achieved via the DQR and the attempt to use the descriptors to describe competences across educational areas has also failed, should sectoral descriptors not then be developed?

Prof. Dr. Michael Hoffmann expressed the view that the discussion on alternative proposed solutions should be re-instigated.

Prof. Dr. Friedrich H. Esser observed in this regard that the higher education sector had been involved in the development of the DQR (introductory text, matrix, glossary) from the very outset via the vehicles of the “Federal Government-Federal State Coordination Group for the German Qualifications Framework” (B-L-KG), the Working Group and the EQF/DQR Working Group set up by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK). The German Higher Education Qualifications Framework was in harmony with the DQR. Prof. Esser raised the question of whether the model developed by 4ING may have been based on a misunderstanding. The model functioned in the same way as an access entitlement system in focusing on reaching the respective next higher reference level. This, however, was not the point of the DQR. The DQR needed to be viewed as the result of a rational policy discourse, the development of which was committed to a bottom-up approach. New reflection and evaluation was constantly required.

Dr. Achim Hopbach observed that the DQR should not be used to pursue an aim not in accordance with its goals. The DQR could not be deployed to solve all the problems which had existed within the educational system for decades. Formulating the descriptors in further detail would not serve the purpose at hand. The point was to place qualification

levels in relative terms. It might be possible in future to improve the formulation of the descriptors and thus remove the “or” formulations currently included in the matrix.

Werner Erlewein, Secretariat of the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

Forum 3 “The DQR – learning outcomes oriented quality assurance as a prerequisite for acceptance of the DQR”

Contributors

Karin Küßner, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin

Bruno Curvale, Centre international d'études pédagogiques, Sèvres Cedex

Dr. Franz Gramlinger, Austrian National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Training, Vienna

Susanne Müller, Federal Association of German Employer Associations, Berlin

Chair

Ludger Pieper, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder and Senate Department of Education, Science and Research, Berlin

Introduction

The aim of Forum 3 was to clarify the aims and functions of quality assurance in the various educational areas within the context of qualifications frameworks at a European and national level. What is the structure of the complementary interplay with European/national instruments for the promotion of quality assurance in lifelong learning? Which forms of cooperation with the European level are conceivable in the field of quality assurance?

Against this background, the focus was on clarifying:

- the nature of the relationship between the DQR and the EQF on one hand and EQARF/ECVET/ECTS/Europass on the other;
- which forms of quality assurance, quality indicators and evaluations currently exist and
- the way in which the DQR and the EQF relate to existing competence assessment procedures (such as PISA).

The specific issues which contributors were requested to address were as follows.

1. Does learning outcome oriented quality assurance still require consideration of processes, inputs and contexts?
2. Which quality assurance instruments can be used to secure the equivalence of the learning outcomes of informal and non-formal learning?
3. Are standardised quality assurance instruments for all reference levels of the DQR – from certificates awarded by schools for pupils with learning difficulties to doctorates – necessary, possible and useful?
4. What is the current status of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (EQARF) and the German National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Training (DEQA-VET)? How can both processes (DQR/development of a NQF and

DEQA-VET/EQARF) be related to one another? What is the nature of the relationship to other procedures, e.g. PISA?

5. What are the (minimum) requirements to be made of quality assurance systems which seek to secure learning outcomes for a reference level of the DQR?
6. Can sufficient trust be placed in existing quality assurance systems in general, vocational and higher education in order to be able to localise the learning outcomes of such systems in the DQR in a quality assured manner?
7. How could learning outcome oriented quality assurance systems be structured, or which forms already exist within the individual educational areas or states?
8. Do quality assurance measures relating to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes need to be systematically differentiated from measures relating to learning outcomes acquired in a formal manner?

Brief summary of the discussion

In his introductory remarks, Chair Ludger Pieper drew the forum's attention to the difference between the specific nature of quality assurance and certification of services, and educational services in particular, and quality assurance for material goods. He emphasised that the establishment of trust was a central issue and an essential prerequisite if the DQR was to function correctly. How could mutual trust and reliability be achieved in respect of the results of educational processes? How could trustworthy description and a credible assurance be provided that outcomes confirmed and certified had actually been achieved? This meant that educational quality assurance systems were receiving a new degree of significance within the context of the DQR, including in educational policy terms.

An initial series of discussions focused on the issue of whether it was useful to develop and apply a uniform quality assurance system across educational areas which was able to deliver the necessary establishment of trust as well as encompassing the informal and non-formal learning processes.

Karin Küßner was of the view that the specific characteristics of the educational courses meant that the focus could not be on the creation of a standardised national quality assurance system. It was much more a case of further developing, improving and harmonising existing systems. Bruno Curvale added that an important part of the process was to act in the interest of the establishment of trust by structuring the aims and criteria of quality assurance in an equal and transparent manner across educational areas and across all educational courses. In order to achieve this, it would be useful to have agreements in place between those involved (these agreements could be for a limited term if appropriate). Within this context, he also drew attention to the certification of educational courses.

Within the course of further discussion, the question arose as to the extent of consideration which needed to be accorded within this process to European quality indicators (from the EQF and from the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training). The participants took a sceptical view of the practical applicability and effectiveness of such indicators.

Karin Küßner countered by saying that the European indicators did not constitute benchmarks for the evaluation of countries. The focus was on translating these indicators

into the national quality assurance systems whilst according due consideration to general prevailing national conditions.

Following the first round of discussions, the Chair came to an interim conclusion and summarised the initial results as follows.

- Standardised quality assurance measures extending across educational areas did not seem to fit the required purpose. A better possibility was to apply different instruments for the various educational courses resulting in particular from the cultural traditions and specific individual characteristics of the participating institutions. Notwithstanding this, the instruments should be “harmonised” with one another. A standardised system could, however, not yet be said to be in place today. It was important to structure such a system in a future oriented way.
- Consideration of input and context was still required for learning outcome oriented quality assurance simply due to the fact that the focus is on learning outcome orientation quality assurance rather than on fixed learning outcome quality assurance.
- It seemed too early at the present juncture to raise the question of the integration of non-formal and informal learning into the quality assurance process. Debate was currently focusing on quality assurance in the formal system.

The second part of the workshop concentrated on the practically oriented evaluation of (existing) quality assurance systems and concepts in the various educational courses.

Following the participant contributions, the forum once again addressed the issue of the suitability of quality assurance instruments or systems extending across educational areas. Practical experiences gleaned from (possible) “bridging” processes between the different instruments/systems formed a particular object of scrutiny.

Karin Küßner began by stating that quality assurance was not an end in itself and that the aim was the transparent visibility of the possible quality assurance goals, criteria and instruments. She described the use of a “common language” – i.e. the deployment of standardised terminology, especially with regard to the description of qualifications in the various educational courses – as an essential bridging prerequisite.

Against this background of practical experience, Wilfried Malcher also underlined the necessity for dialogue between educational areas and explicitly stressed the contribution made in this regard by the DQR development processes.

Debate continued to embrace the issue of the extent to which the DQR could and needed to exert an influence on regulatory instruments.

Susanne Müller and Wilfried Malcher emphasised that the regulatory instruments needed to be more closely aligned to the DQR descriptors. There was also agreement that responsibility for the formulation of training regulations and for alignment on the basis of uniform criteria should be linked in future. Relevant regulations should be contained within the DQR guide which was to be drawn up.

A further point of debate centred on the issue of the establishment of mutual trust initially addressed by the chair.

Dr. Franz Gramlinger underlined the unanimous view expressed in the discussion that trust and quality assurance belonged together, even though trust was not an official “term” used within quality assurance. Quality assurance was based on clear and transparent criteria which established a foundation of trust. For this reason, quality assurance needed to be more closely integrated within the culture of teaching and learning processes. This was another area in which an exchange of experiences at European level including a process of mutual learning from one another was useful by dint of the varying development standards.

There was a unanimous view that the aspect of the establishment of trust should be accorded particular consideration in the current DQR development process due to the fact that the DQR could only “function” if trust existed in respect of the alignments undertaken. This needed to prove itself in practice.

The chair summarised by making the following observations.

- Regarding the requirements of the quality assurance system, the necessity of a clear statement of objectives and a learning outcome oriented description of results was emphasised. This also needed to be reflected in examination requirements. Although existing quality assurance systems – vocational training having been taken as a particular descriptive example within the forum – were positively evaluated in overall terms, there was a need for further development. Standardised language was required for a solution extending across educational areas.
- The practical examples addressed had also made it clear that quality assurance systems may vary for individual educational areas. Any attempt to develop *a single* quality assurance system would fail. Instead of undertaking any further endeavours in this regard, an attempt should be made to achieve comparability and “bridging” between the various quality assurance systems.
- The most outstanding current issue, including in terms of quality assurance aspects, was the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning. Consideration of all forms of learning would not be the least of the criteria against which the success of the DQR development was measured.

In his concluding remarks, Ludger Pieper used the results of the discussion as a basis for confirming the thesis initially formulated that quality management and quality assurance needed to be viewed as essential instruments for the establishment of trust. The development of quality awareness on the part of all those involved and exchange and debate between such participants were a significant prerequisite for further work to be undertaken.

At the same time, he also stressed the progress which has been made in the development of the DQR over the course of the past two years. This had led to the emergence of a considerable amount of expertise, and teams of experts had cooperated across educational areas whilst representing points of view which had today largely converged. The process had been successful in overall terms, and the procedure adopted had enabled the parallel and opposing approaches within the various educational areas to be broken down and had resulted in constructive collaboration.

Dr. Karla Hahn, BBJ Consult AG, Berlin

Forum 4 “The DQR – an instrument for lifelong learning”

Contributors

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Jens Bjornavold, EQF Advisory Group und Cedefop, Brussels

Mag. Eduard Staudecker, Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, Vienna

Dr. Stephanie Odenwald, GEW Teachers and Lecturers Trade Union, Frankfurt/Main

Dr. Stephan Pfisterer, Federal Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media, Berlin

Chair

Kerstin Mucke, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin

Introduction

One objective of the DQR in its capacity as a non-regulatory instrument is to support lifelong learning. An issue which remains unresolved is how learning outcome orientation and the cross-educational area approach adopted by the DQR can be used to achieve better visibility of the results of non-formal and informal learning.

Against this background, the aim was for the following topics to be discussed in the forum.

- Lifelong learning – the cross-educational approach adopted in the DQR
- Opportunities within the DQR for the consideration of non-formal and informally acquired competences
- Methods for the validation of non-formal and informally acquired competences

The specific issues which contributors were requested to address were as follows.

1. Which steps are necessary in order to facilitate the consideration of non-formal and informally acquired competences in the DQR?
2. Are there differences with regard to the consideration of non-formal and informally acquired competences?
3. Should the contents of non-formal and informal learning be more closely aligned to the DQR in future?
4. Which new requirements does a consideration of non-formal and informal learning make on the formal educational system? Are learning outcome oriented curricula helpful in this regard?
5. Which forms of consideration of non-formal and informal learning have proved their worth? Which relevant experiences exist in other member states?
6. Is alignment towards reference qualifications useful? What happens with bundles of learning outcomes to which no formal qualification can be aligned?
7. Who should carry out the validation process?
8. How can institutions dealing with non-formal education adjust to validation? Will such institutions require specially trained expert staff in future?
9. How can acceptance of non-formal and informally acquired competences be achieved in formal educational institutions, how can mutual trust be established? Which quality assurance requirements need to be put in place?

Brief summary of the discussion

The keynote addresses and discussions in Forum 4 centred on issues relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The chair began by observing that although the existing paper on the “German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning” of 15 September 2010 contained only a single sentence dealing with informal learning, she still believed this to be an important issue due to the fact that all formal learning processes needed to accord due consideration to informal learning. The debate following the presentations made by Katrin Gutschow and Jens Bjornavold primarily focused on fundamental issues regarding the nature of the DQR and what it could potentially achieve and on the question of whether the DQR constituted a qualifications or a competence framework.

The forum contributors were reminded of a differentiation made between qualification and competence using a more stringent terminology and dating from a time when extensive qualifications research had been undertaken in Germany – the differentiation between personal, individual *competences* and workplace related *qualifications* exhibiting a direct reference to work and employment. Such a precise differentiation was presently no longer discernable. The presentations given in the morning of the conference had also deployed various definitions of informal and non-formal learning. The suggestion was made that the definitions introduced by CEDEFOP and the OECD should continue to be used as a guide.

The basic prerequisite for the credit transfer of qualifications acquired in an informal and non-formal manner was the ability to describe such qualifications as learning outcomes in accordance with standardised criteria. Competences emerged in bundled form and featured an interplay between professional, social and further aspects. External validation was required in order to be able to record them.

With regard to the second phase of DQR development, it was explained that (formal) educational courses rather than individual learning outcomes were to be evaluated and aligned. When dealing with the informal acquisition of competences, however, attention needed to be focused on individual learning pathways in particular. No solution was yet in place to bridge this discrepancy. Considerations were undertaken as to whether it would be useful to establish a dedicated system for the identification and evaluation of informally acquired competences to run alongside the formal system. This could benefit persons not in possession of formal qualifications. There were companies which used such systems.

One subsequent enquiry related to the formulation of “national own descriptors” in the presentation given by Jens Bjornavold. To which extent could international comparability be secured if each nation drew up its own descriptors within the field of informal and non-formal learning? Jens Bjornavold explained that the EQF provided a uniform starting point for the national descriptors.

The Scandinavian countries were already far advanced in terms of experience with the validation of informal learning. The question was posed whether these countries had succeeded in drawing up a set of instruments which was able to perform a bridging function between formal and informal learning. Jens Bjornavold reported that pathways for the

identification and documentation of non-formal competences in the form of qualifications had been developed in Norway and Denmark. This identification and documentation process had been established upstream of a possible subsequent certification procedure which enabled companies to gain a specific picture of staff.

A further enquiry was made with regard to the general intentions the EU was pursuing with the EQF. Was the aim to increase labour market mobility or to establish a comparison system for the educational sector? Jens Bjornavold addressed the increasingly divergent development of qualifications in the EU member states. The harmonising Bologna Process required the installation of a comparison system for vocational and higher education. Whilst a broad range of educational providers had developed, more and more stakeholders within the educational areas and on the labour market were reliant on uniform starting points to serve as a “reference framework” for the evaluation of the contents and quality of qualifications.

During the second part of the forum, Mag. Eduard Staudecker was questioned on the recognition of partial qualifications in Austria, a topic he had addressed in his presentation. He reported on the extensive discussions which had taken place on this theme, the result of which had been a decision to use the term “qualification parts”. This means that, in contrast to modularisation concepts, the initial starting point is an overall qualification where learning outcomes are used as a basis for defining qualification parts. Not a great deal of progress had, however, been made in this direction. He also reported on the proposal to create in Austria agencies with branch responsibility for the recording of qualifications, for the implementation of pilot projects and for the validation of non-formal qualifications.

Dr. Stephanie Odenwald was asked about the reasons for her rejection of the Austrian Y Model, which both specifically documented the equivalence of the various educational areas whilst also rendering the different pathways visible. She explained that the traditional gulf between academic and vocational education in Germany made the Y Model appear to be a further symbol of separation between the two educational areas. Her trade union believed it was important to achieve more recognition for vocational education and training.

During the further course of discussions, the view was expressed that the formal qualification of an employee was not all that vital for trade and industry. The things which someone was actually able to do and the performance provided for the company were more important. For this reason, the differentiation between academic and vocational education was of little significance in practice. Level estimation via the DQR provided initial guidance in this respect. There was, of course, a high degree of correlation between a qualified higher education qualification and advancement into management. Notwithstanding this, there was no compelling link between academic education and higher achievement. For this reason, trade and industry continued to adhere to the view that vocational and academic education were equivalent. A perceived challenge for the DQR was to act as a bracket between these two areas of education.

From the Austrian point of view, the importance was emphasised that both Bachelor degrees and master craftsman qualifications should be aligned to reference level 6. An extremely carefully conducted evidence process still needed to take place to display the equivalence of these qualifications. Since both Austria and Germany traditionally had low levels of persons with academic qualifications, the EU benchmarks for levels 6 and 7 would also need to be fulfilled in this respect.

The forum addressed the problem of what was to happen to the 20 or 25 percent of young people who either had no school leaving qualifications or else possessed only a low level of vocational qualification in the form of the lower secondary school leaving certificate. The formal requirements would mean that such young people would be aligned only to level 1 and that they would thus be stigmatised. Opportunities would open up for this target group if measurement and recognition of informal learning outcomes were able to result in an increase of DQR reference level. The recognition of informal and non-formal learning could assist this group in their development and help prevent them from being ostracised.

Summing up, Chair Kerstin Mucke emphasised that activities for the recognition of informal learning had only hitherto existed to a limited extent in Europe in the form of declarations of intention, projects or initial programmes. In Germany too, the integration of informal and non-formal learning into the DQR was still in its early stages.

This thematic area was, however, also highly significant when seen outside the context of the DQR. For this reason, an infrastructure for the identification of learning outcomes resulting from informal and non-formal learning processes should be established. Validation of these learning outcomes could not take place until such a foundation had been instigated. The next stage would be the facilitation of subsequent evaluations using the DQR matrix. It remained unclear whether suitable institutions would need to be set up for this purpose or whether use could be made of existing institutional provision. The nature of the training to be given to the relevant “evaluators” also needed to be resolved. Quality assurance instruments would need to be deployed in every case.

The DQR was a suitable instrument for the evaluation of informal learning by dint of its intention to record learning outcomes across educational areas. This would also enable areas of educational potential to be tapped into for the purpose of countering current problems such as the shortage of skilled workers.

The development of new work-integrated learning settings could also be of assistance in both developing and recording competences.

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