

Recommendation of the Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) regarding future action in connection with the development of the German Qualifications Framework (GQF)

1. Preliminary remarks

The BIBB Board welcomes the fact that work on the development of the German Qualifications Framework (GQF) will be continued in 2011 on the basis of the results issued by the GQF Working Group on 11 November 2010. The stakeholders in the vocational education and training field will continue to take an active part in the development process. The aim is to list the respective EQF/GQF level on all new qualification certificates starting 2012.

In view of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the referencing proposals developed by other EU Member States, it must be avoided that qualifications from the German vocational training system are assigned to a lower level than comparable qualifications that are acquired in other countries. This is particularly the case when comparable qualifications are acquired in the higher education sector in other Member States. It is important to make the equivalence of the respective occupational competences clear.

The EQF and GQF will gain wide acceptance only when the work to be done by the GQF Working Group in the future is continued in consensus with relevant representatives of the education sectors and when the results of their work are acknowledged in political decisions.

2. Development phase

The development phase that was carried out in four working groups last year particularly served the purpose of verifying the suitability of the GQF. This also included proposals of examples for referencing the individual qualifications.

This work showed in particular that:

- Qualifications from the formal education system can, in principle, be referenced to individual levels on the basis of the GQF matrix;

- The orientation toward learning outcomes/competences is still somewhat unfamiliar in many cases and not yet sufficiently manifest in the relevant regulations, courses of study, curricula, syllabuses et cetera;
- The trial classification of qualifications was also influenced by political and institutional interests as well as purely input-oriented criteria (such as qualification to enter certain levels of education, the duration of training).

The referencing proposals developed by the working groups foresee:

- GQF levels 1 - 2 for the vocational preparation segment, depending on the basic features of the respective vocational preparation scheme
- GQF levels 3 - 5 for recognised training occupations that fall under the Vocational Training Act or Crafts Code. The vast majority of training occupations were assigned to level 4 in the GQF
- GQF levels 2 - 4 for basic and initial vocational training qualifications earned in vocational schools
- GQF levels 5 - 7 for continuing training qualifications earned in specialised technical schools
- GQF levels 5 - 7 for advanced vocational training (technical/trade consultants, specialists, middle-level commercial clerks whose training falls under the Crafts Code - level 5; middle-level commercial clerks whose training falls under the Vocational Training Act, operational specialists at middle-management level, master craftsman, technicians, operative professionals - level 6; management experts, strategic professionals - level 7)
- GQF levels 6 - 8 for university qualifications (bachelor's degree - level 6 and master's degree - level 7).

The primary purpose of the trial referencing during the development phase in 2010 was, first of all, to test the internal consistency of the matrix. Correspondingly, the referencing proposals resulting from this work are to be viewed only as guideposts for future classifications. The final and therefore binding procedure which has yet to be agreed upon will be definitive.

3. How the GQF works, instruments, the referencing of qualifications

It will be possible to foster transparency, lateral mobility and equivalence in the German education system and strengthen trust between the individual education sectors only when

enterprises, employees, instructors and learners as well as the players in the education policy field as potential users of the GQF accept the GQF and recognise its benefits.

The implementation of the GQF is aimed at transparency, lateral mobility and equivalence. At the same time, the GQF is an important source of impetus for possible reforms. It does not aim to change collective bargaining provisions or regulations governing pay. The process of implementing the GQF and the effects the GQF will have on the education system must be monitored and accompanied by a comprehensive evaluation. It must be examined whether and to what extent adjustments in existing legislation are necessary and would be practical for fostering the implementation of the GQF.

The GQF will offer benefits only when qualifications in the various education sectors are referenced according to uniform principles, criteria and methods on the basis of the GQF descriptors. This will be done independently of all systems that regulate qualification for access to specific levels of education.

4. Evaluation, monitoring and communication

The evaluation and referencing of qualifications is the responsibility of the relevant institutions and organisations in the individual education sectors. The competent bodies in the respective education sector reference qualifications to the respective GQF level on the basis of guidelines that have been developed on a consensual basis. This is also done on the basis of the GQF descriptors.

A panel will monitor consensually-developed standards. This panel must be comprised of representatives from all education sectors and must work toward consensual solutions to questions and problems that arise in the implementation of these standards. This particularly applies to guidelines which provide the basis for organising and administering the GQF process.

Examples of the focus of these guidelines include:

- The referencing of qualifications
- The referencing of non-formal and informal learning
- Quality assurance
- Connection to the EQF
- The resolution of conflicts that arise in connection with referencing
- Adjusting the GQF in the wake of the implementation process.

Furthermore, the panel that is comprised of representatives from all education sectors will have the task of developing suggestions for the requisite accompanying research.

5. Implementation of the GQF

The following procedure is suggested for the implementation of the GQF:

The principle: The GQF has been designed to span all education sectors. Each level can be reached via different education pathways. Making distinctions within the individual levels would go against the aim of a qualifications framework that spans all education sectors.

An upper level secondary school leaving certificate that entitles the holder to admission to any institution of higher education including university [*allgemeine Hochschulreife*] should not be referenced to a higher level than 3-year and 3.5-year training programmes for occupations that fall under the Vocational Training Act or Crafts Code. The referencing results in other Member States must be taken into account in the final referencing in the German Qualifications Framework. In this connection, vocational education and training in Germany should not be ranked too low. In light of the GQF descriptors, it would be appropriate to reference the *allgemeine Hochschulreife* to the GQF level 4.

Referencing will be conducted on the basis of general criteria, in other words: according to the type of qualification, in order to make the implementation of the GQF practicable and reduce the amount of effort required to reference all qualifications for the first time.

When the *allgemeine Hochschulreife* is referenced to level 4, the area of vocational education and training that falls under the Vocational Training Act or Crafts Code exhibits the following symmetry:

- Training occupations that require two years of training: GQF level 3
- Training occupations that require three or 3.5 years of training: GQF level 4
- First level of upgrading training (for occupations such as technical/trade consultants, multilingual secretaries, service technicians, specialists, middle-level commercial clerks whose training falls under the Crafts Code): GQF level 5
- Second level of upgrading training (for occupations such as master craftsmen, middle-level commercial clerks in middle management levels, operative professionals): GQF level 6
- Third level of upgrading training (for occupations such as certified management experts whose training falls under the Vocational Training Act or Crafts Code, certified technical management experts, strategic professionals): GQF level 7
- Advanced vocational training: GQF level 8

6. The continued development of the GQF

Outcome-oriented referencing will be conducted during the modernisation or reorganisation of training programmes. Since the first phase of the referencing will be geared strongly to formal qualifications and certificates and not to the GQF classification system, it can be assumed that there will be more distinctions or changes made in the references when all qualifications are systematically evaluated on an outcome-oriented basis in future. This applies to all qualification types.

When necessitated by the relationship between comparable qualifications, there is the option in individual cases to have, upon application, the designated classification reviewed by the bodies that were responsible for referencing the particular qualification when, following the introduction of the GQF, there are no plans to modernise or reorganise the training programmes in the foreseeable future. The application and review must be based on the GQF descriptors and the guidelines that have been developed on a consensual basis.

In addition, there is a particular need for action in connection with the following points:

- Relevant regulations, descriptions of the study modules, and curricula should be organised and designed on the basis of the GQF descriptors to be more competence-oriented.
- Thinking in terms of learning-outcome-based categories must be communicated and promoted.
- The GQF does not reflect individual education biographies or career paths; it shows only qualifications. Since qualifications can be referenced to the GQF independently of one another, it is possible at any time to skip DQF levels, as compared to the individual's initial qualification, when the appropriate qualification has been acquired. This also applies to the area of non-formal and informal learning.
- Methods for classifying non-formally and informally acquired competences must be developed quickly.
- A publicly-accessible database covering all EQF and NQF classifications is needed.